Jordanian Seventh- and Eleventh-Grade Students' Views on Citizenship Education

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Using a mixed methods approach, this study was conducted in Jordanian schools to determine the perceptions of seventh- and eleventh-grade students toward citizenship. Specifically, the study determined what students believe are the attributes of a good citizen, what activities they participate in that are related to good citizenship, and what citizenship activities they will perform 10 years in the future. The research used both a questionnaire and interviews to collect data from a stratified random sample of 515 students selected from three school districts in Jordan. The study findings revealed that students' views of citizenship encompass community service or what is considered civic involvement, rather than political involvement. The study also showed that the participants view voting and holding public office as belonging in the future; their focus is on the present. The researcher considers that the concept of good citizenship is related to age and maturity.

Introduction

The "Goals of 2002" document, established by Jordan's Ministry of Education and state educators, sets a national expectation of citizenship education for the public school. Specifically, Goal 3 of the document anticipated that by the beginning of the 21st Century, Jordanian students would leave grades four, eight, and twelve with demonstrated competency in core content areas, "so that they may be prepared for responsible citizenship" (Ministry of Education, 2012, p. 6).

The Jordan Ministry of Education aims to produce a citizen who is loyal to the homeland and nation; endowed with good virtues and human warmth; and physically, mentally, spiritually, and socially mature. It also endeavors to help young children comprehend facts, concepts, and relations connected with the natural environment. Both local

and globally, students' values and good traits contribute to developing an appreciation of the present through an understanding of their heritage; recognizing their civil rights; developing their abilities to collect, store, retrieve, treat, and produce information; and employing that information to explain phenomena and make decisions. The development of good citizens, therefore, constitutes knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes, which are the basic objectives of the citizenship curriculum in Jordan middle and high schools. (Ministry of Education, 2012).

The citizenship education textbook is the only resource of knowledge, values, trends, and various different skills for the students. Consequently, the citizenship textbooks are designed to provide young children with a well-formed knowledge base relating to the characteristics of the effective and good citizen (Al-Barkat & Al-Karasneh, 2005).

Schooling in all societies purports to teach students the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to function as responsible citizens. In a democratic society, schools translate these curricular goals into knowledge of the community, nation, and world. Schooling also translates to the skills required to participate competently within the larger society. It also helps promote and protect one's interests and the democratic attitudes that form the bases for decision making on one's behalf, while keeping in mind the larger context of the common good (Chiodo & Martin, 2005).

Citizenship first and foremost refers to a citizen's rights and obligations in society, but also to practices that make individuals competent members of a community. The global context of citizenship is changing as the nation-state is changing; therefore, the concept of citizenship has become the focus of both political and academic discourse (Chiodo & Martin, 2005).

Through schooling, students gain an understanding of the concept of citizenship in order to comprehend

democracy; however, conceptual understanding of citizenship is not enough. John Patrick (1999) states that "students need to move beyond conceptual understanding of citizenship to learning experiences that develop participatory skills and civic dispositions for exercising the rights and carryout the responsibilities and duties of citizenship in a democracy" (p. 2). Developing a conception of citizenship and fostering the growth of civic values are central foci of our schools today (Galston, 2001). It is important to note that the home, mosque, church, and community organizations contribute to students' knowledge of citizenship. A primary focus of public schools and social studies teachers, however, is to cultivate the concept of citizenship in children. This, therefore, would determine how Jordanian students view the concept of the citizenship as important, if curricula and teaching in the schools are to be improved.

Significance of the Study

This study was undertaken to discover how students define citizenship, perceive "good" citizen actions, and what knowledge they need to be good citizens. Such information is valuable if teachers are to fulfill their obligation to educate and instill skills and values necessary to produce responsible citizens. It is important to know how these students view good citizenship if we are to move to a civic society and develop teaching strategies to improve citizenship textbooks in the schools. With this in mind, the researcher conducted a study to discover the perceptions of seventh- and eleventh-grade Jordanian students regarding their conceptions of good citizenship.

Addressing the Problem

Because of the recent resurgence of interest in citizenship education, resulting from the Arab spring, a study was conducted to determine the perception of seventh- and

eleventh- grade male students regarding their concept of citizenship. The study sought to determine what students believe are the attributes of a good citizen. Do students currently view themselves as good citizens? Finally, what are the civic activities that students see themselves performing 10 years into the future? Citizenship, as a subject in schools, is unique in the sense that it is multi-disciplinary. Every class teaches citizenship in some way, if only by example. Students also learn citizenship in many places and experiences in addition to school. The home, mosque, and community organizations contribute to a student's knowledge of citizenship. However, it is a primary focus of public schools and social studies teachers to cultivate the concept of citizenship in our children. It is important, therefore, to determine how Jordanian students view the concept of citizenship if curricula and teaching in the schools are to be improved.

Related Research

A review of the related literature reveals little research about Jordan's citizen education and its curriculum. Most studies focus on higher education; none focus specifically on middle and high school education. A study by Kubow and Kreishan (2014) revealed that the Jordan "emphasis on teaching a conception of 'good citizenship' to young Jordanians, while also navigating a global-local interplay of economic, political, and socio-cultural factors shape Jordan's national narrative" (p. 5) O'Brien and Smith (2011) surveyed 309 pre-service elementary teachers from nine different states. The survey asked participants, "What is a good citizen?" The two main criteria for good citizenship were: "helping others/community involvement" and "following laws."

Closer to current study aims of this research, Yesilbursa (2015) surveyed 580 pre-service social studies teachers from six different universities in Turkey regarding

their perceptions of "good" citizenship. His research revealed that the Turkish pre-service social studies teachers mostly perceive good citizens as people who are honest, decent, loyal to the government, and patriotic. In 2008, Martin compared pre-service elementary teachers and pre-service secondary social studies teachers regarding their perceptions of citizenship. Her study concluded that both elementary and secondary pre-service teachers view good citizenship as assisting others.

According to Galston (2001), "Most young people characterized their volunteering as an alternative of official politics, which they see as corrupt, ineffective, and unrelated to their deeper ideals. They have confidence in personalized actions with consequences they see for themselves; they have no confidence in collective acts" (p. 220). Conover and Searing's (2000) reported that the students do not have a clear picture of themselves as active citizens in the future. Conover and Searing further contended that students will not be civic-minded in the future unless they can envision themselves doing specific activities.

Flanagan (2003) also confirmed the everyday activities of adults are significant to their understanding of civic values and political socialization as "integrally related to other aspect of human development (such as the information of identity, values, and social tie to others)" (p. 257). Youniss, McLellan, and Yates (1997) contended that the organizations that adults participate in create a "civic identity" and that these organizations "introduce youth to the basic roles and processes required for adult political engagement" (p. 624). Parker (1999) defined citizenship education as knowledge, skills, values, and dispositions related to democratic participation, including informed decision making.

Engle and Ochoa (1998) argued that a good citizen is a person who is critical of the nation and who is able and willing to participate in its improvement. The National

Council for the Social Studies (1994) stated that "effective citizenship by individuals continues to require the same four essential elements as it did in the past; knowledge, thought, commitment, and actions" (p. 47). Beyond the international research cited, few additional studies exist on the topic. A study relating to student's perceptions of citizenship education in Jordan is important for educational reforms in that country.

Research Method

Studying citizenship as a practice allowed the researcher to focus more on explanations, rather than on causal relationships, and on the students' knowledge, beliefs, and actions. Such an interpretative model relies on realism and credibility as a means of explanation (Chiodo and Martin, 2007). To meet these objectives, the researcher designed a mixed method study that surveyed and interviewed seventh- and eleventh- grade students in Jordanian schools regarding their perceptions of good citizenship. The study was designed to survey and interview seventh- and eleventh-grade students in urban, suburban, and rural schools in Jordan regarding the concept of citizenship. This design is well suited for this study topic, as it allowed for both numerical and contextual strategies to be applied in data collection and analysis. According to Stake (1995), mixed method studies are particularly appropriate because the "biases inherent in any single method could neutralize or cancel the biases of other methods" (p. 15).

A total of 515 students participated in this study. A stratified, random sample from all three school districts was used to select participants. Students in the urban setting consisted of 92 seventh-grade students and 90 eleventh-grade students. Students in the suburban setting consisted of 95 seventh-grade students and 94 eleventh-grade students. Due to the small size of rural schools, three rural schools were

used for a combined total of 74 seventh-grade students, and 1 rural school was used, consisting of 70 eleventh-grade students.

Prior to completing the survey, students did not know that they were going to be asked questions about their concept of citizenship. The surveys were administered in civic education classrooms and took approximately 20 minutes for the students to complete.

The survey was designed as a series of three open-ended questions as part of the qualitative studies, so more information, opinions, and feelings could be revealed. To gain a greater insight into the written comments made by the students, the researcher conducted interviews with a limited number of students. The researcher randomly selected 7 students from each of the 6 pools of students for a total of 42 participants. Interviews lasting approximately 20 minutes were conducted during the school day's free periods. During the interviews, the researcher asked a series of prompting questions to clarify student comments on the questionnaire. Typically, the researcher read the students' answers back to them and asked them to explain or expand about what they had written. The students' oral comments provided a greater depth of understanding compared to the responses on the survey forms.

Interviews were recorded, using audio tapes, to ensure accuracy and were later transcribed. Each transcript was verified by listening to the audiotape while reading the documentation. Notes were taken for each interview, describing nonverbal cues and posture of each student. The text of each interview was then coded, and resulting themes were noted. During the interview, Arabic was the primary language used for communication. When necessary, English was used to improve understanding. Participants were encouraged to state, explain, and describe the topic being discussed as best as they could. The use of an audio recording

was explained and agreed upon with the participants prior to the interview taking place. The interviews were translated into English and analyzed qualitatively by the researcher. In addition, two trained researchers, who are proficient in both Arabic and English, were invited to review the translations by listening to the tapes and reading the written English text to eliminate translation errors or semantic misunderstanding. The use of predetermined questions and consistent procedures in coding supported the reliability of the findings. Data findings were given special attention in order to assess previous research. Each group was compared to the other, tracing the development of students' perceptions of citizenship education through the reaction of the middle school and high school students.

Finally, the researcher identified themes, sorted them into categories, and identified patterns based on the constant comparative method (Glaser and Strauss 1967). The researcher then used two stages of the constant comparative method to analyze data. These were (1) comparing incidents applicable to each category, (2)integrating categories and their properties.

To ensure the validity of the research instrument, the questionnaire was submitted to three refereed social studies educational professors to evaluate, revise, and clarify the questionnaire. Based on their comments and recommendations, several modifications were made to make the instrument more accurate. In addition, to ensure reliability of interview, the data were reanalyzed by two social studies education professors. Their findings were compared to research findings, and each reached the same conclusion that no differences were evident among the findings.

Findings

Students' comments and the responses were conducted by key words or phrases to potentially reveal patterns in the

students' responses. Patterns were analyzed related to the specific subgroup (e.g., seventh-grade urban), as well as for the two general groups of students (seventh-grade students and eleventh-grade students).

The patterns that became evident in the student responses were somewhat similar to those in previous studies (Yesilbursa, 2015; O'Brien, & Smith, 2011; Alazzi & Chiodo, 2008; Chiodo & Martin, 2007; Branson, 1999; Conover & Searing, 2000; Martin, 2008). Four categories emerged from the student responses on the questionnaires. The categories are (1) helping others; (2) obeying rules and laws; (3) patriotism/loyalty; and (4) respect for others. These appeared in relationship to all three questions that the students were asked.

Defining Good Citizenship

The first survey question asked students what it means to be a good citizen. The category of helping others had the largest number of responses to this question. More than 50% of the seventh- and eleventh-grade students in rural, suburban, and urban areas responded that helping others is an important aspect of being a good citizen. Suburban seventh-grade students had the highest response rate with 74% indicating that being a good citizen means helping others, especially in the community. Students mentioned that they acted as good citizens by participating in activities such as cleaning up the school, helping the elderly, volunteering at special national ceremonies, assisting new comer students, and involving in community activities for boys. Typical student responses about volunteering included comments like: "helping out by volunteering or donating money to poor people" or "working in the school doing good things for students." Table 1 shows the breakdown of responses by the students to Question 1: What It Means to be a Good Citizen.

Table 1. What It Means to be a Good Citizen

Response category: Helping others						
Grade Level	**Seventh Grade**			**Eleventh Grade**		
	n	**r**	**%**	**n**	**r**	**%**
Geographic Area						
Rural	74	37	50	70	36	51
Suburban	95	70	74	94	51	54
Urban	92	61	66	90	55	61
Geographic Area						
	Response category: Follow/obey the rules/laws					
Rural	74	35	47	70	28	40
Suburban	95	25	26	94	24	26
Urban	92	30	33	90	21	23

Note. n = total number of students in the group; r = total number of responses by students in the group; % = percentage of responses of the total group.

The second category of responses related to obeying rules/laws. The highest number of responses to this category was made by rural seventh graders (47%), while the lowest number of responses came from urban eleventh graders

(23%). Many student responses related to school rules and traffic laws. Statements characteristic of student responses were: "walk safe, obey rules, and help people," "follow the rules in school," and "obey all the rules and regulations." Beyond the first two categories, the students' answers varied greatly. Generally speaking, the responses fell into the categories of patriotism/loyalty and respect for others. When asked about the qualities of a good citizen, many students responded with good characteristics, such as: "honor," "good-person," "loyal," "courteous," "integrity," "doing good things for others," "don't cause harm to people or goods," "be patriotic," "work hard," "be nice and generous to others," "be responsible," "don't intervene with other people's business," and "stay out of problems."

Demonstrating Good Citizenship

The second survey question asked students what they currently do that demonstrates good citizenship. Again, the students overwhelmingly mentioned helping others as the main way that they exhibit good citizenship. The percent of responses ranged from 35% for rural seventh graders to 58% for suburban seventh graders. Many responses mentioned helping with mosque or school programs. Several students said they do community service activities as part of the school program; an example of such was cleaning streets. Many students said they do chores around the house or take care of their siblings. As with the first question, obeying rules/laws was the second most frequent response. An interesting comment, mentioned several times, that was categorized under obeying rules/law was: "I don't do bad things." Finally, multiple student responses referred to being a "good Muslim" as a way of acting as a good citizen. Students viewed concepts such as helping others, honesty, loyalty, and self-sacrifice, all of which are often part of religious doctrine, as compatible with being a "good citizen." Table 2 provides

detail of the responses to Question 2: In your own words, can you tell me whether you do anything in your school, home, or community that demonstrates good citizenship?

Table 2. Activities That Demonstrate Good Citizenship

Response category: Helping others						
Grade Level	**Seventh Grade**			**Eleventh Grade**		
	n	**r**	**%**	**n**	**r**	**%**
Geographic Area						
Rural	**74**	**26**	**35**	**70**	**38**	**54**
Suburban	**95**	**55**	**58**	**94**	**45**	**48**
Urban	**92**	**40**	**42**	**90**	**39**	**43**
Geographic Area						
	Response category: Follow/obey the rules/laws					
Rural	**74**	**15**	**20**	**70**	**11**	**16**
Suburban	**95**	**22**	**23**	**94**	**20**	**21**
Urban	**92**	**12**	**13**	**90**	**16**	**18**

Note. n = total number of students in the group; r = total number of responses by students in the group; % = percentage of responses of the total group.

Citizenship in the Future

The third question asked students what they anticipate doing in 10 years that will demonstrate good citizenship. This

seemed to be the most difficult question for students to answer, judging from the lower number of responses and the comments made in the follow-up interviews. With regards to this question, seventh graders were more uncertain as to what they will be doing in 10 years than eleventh graders. Many students believe that being employed is an aspect of citizenship, and they responded to the question three by discussing their intended careers. Some comments the students made were: "following my job's rules and being nice to my co-workers," "I will be a respected physician and be active in my community," "I will be an engineer and work in the community," and "Ten years from now, I will open a day care center."

Of the four categories developed from the student responses, community service is the most commonly mentioned activity that students will be doing in the future. Voting, as another element of citizenship, was mentioned by all groups, except seventh grade urban students. Several students used the phrase, "I will probably be voting" as a citizenship activity. Still others made statements such as: "I will have a job and pay taxes, vote, and uphold the laws," "I will obey the laws, try to be involved, and vote," and "I will run for a political office and vote." During the follow-up interviews, the students were asked questions that probed the political side of citizenship. Other than voting for the parliament representative, major, and state officials, their comments did not demonstrate much depth. Students seemed to have a hard time relating to the political aspects of citizenship. Table 3 provides details of the responses by the students for Question 3: In your own words, can you tell me who you will be doing 10 years from now in your home, community, or nation that demonstrates citizenship.

Table 3. How Citizenship Will be Demonstrated Ten Years in the Future

Response category: Community service?						
Grade Level	Seventh Grade			Eleventh Grade		
	n	r	%	n	r	%
Geographic Area						
Rural	74	12	16	70	38	54
Suburban	95	9	9	94	45	48
Urban	92	0	0	90	40	44
Geographic Area **Response category: Voting**						
Rural	74	12	16	70	46	66
Suburban	95	9	9	94	22	23
Urban	92	0	0	90	13	14

Note. n = total number of students in the group; r = total number of responses by students in the group; % = percentage of responses of the total group.

The political aspect of citizenship seems to be separate or distant from the students' futures. Very few times

did the terms country or nation appear in their comments. Yet, the term community was evident in the vast majority of the responses to all three questions. Once again, this was reiterated during the students' interviews.

No major differences were detected in the responses between the seventh- and eleventh- grade students in all three geographic areas. Other than the fact that no seventh-grade urban students mentioned voting, the responses seemed to be fairly consistent. Eleventh-grade students tended to respond in more detail in writing their answers on the questionnaire, as well as when responding to the interviews. This caused a slightly higher percentage in the response categories when the data were tabulated. However, the more detail written and oral responses may be simply attributed to maturity.

Discussion

The most important finding in this study is what was not said. Most seventh- and eleventh-grade students did not respond to the political side of citizenship. Rather, their view of citizenship is grounded in community service and the social side of the concept. Eleventh graders were more apt to focus on the political aspect of citizenship (voting) than seventh graders; however, even so, the response was low (15 to 20%). One seventh-grade student stated that he might be Prime Minister of Jordan someday; however, a few students in either group suggested that political service is a part of citizenship. Students had a difficult time visualizing themselves as future citizens. The nebulous answers received on the third question of this survey support Conover and Searing's (2000) idea that students do not have a clear picture of themselves as active future citizens. Conover and Searing concluded that students will not be civic-minded in the future unless they can foresee themselves doing specific activities.

Several previous research studies reveal that in students' minds, the social responsibilities supersede political

responsibilities (Torney-Purta, 2001: Baldi, Perie, Skidmore, & Green, 2001; Branson, 1999; Etzioni, 1993). However, the fact that students do not embrace the political side of citizenship may not be cause for alarm. Students strongly expressed activity on the social side of citizenship. Both seventh- and eleventh-grade urban, suburban, and rural students expressed participation in the social side of citizenship in a variety of ways. Students explained how they took an active part in their school and community. Schools, through their clubs and courses, related to community service; mosques through their teen-related activities; and community organizations, such as Boy and Girl Scouts; all develop the social aspect of being a good citizen.

As educators, we must also bear in mind that middle and high school students are limited when it comes to the political side of citizenship. The reality is that they cannot vote in a political election, they cannot run for a political office, and they cannot become Prime Minister – at least not yet. All the textbook readings, all the class discussions, and all the simulations do not relate to their present world. Voting and political office are the world of their future, and students really are not focusing on these activities at the present time. Thus, we suggest that citizenship education should reflect mental maturity or age appropriateness. At ages 13 to 16, citizenship translates into activities that focus on the social aspects of the concept. When one grows older and begins to buy a house, raise a family, and pay taxes to local, state, and national government, the political side of citizenship becomes more meaningful (Morgan, 1968). It should also be noted that we are not advocating that schools discontinue the political aspects of citizenship. The knowledge and skills related to the political side of citizenship are important to our students' future. Students may be developing a solid foundation regarding good citizenship through the development of the social aspects of citizenship. Youniss,

McLellan, and Yates (1997) support this assertion, that the foundations that students participate in can create a "civic identity" and that these foundations "introduce young to the basic roles and processes required for adult political engagement" (p. 624). As teachers, we must continue to stress both aspects of citizenship. We must find ways to make the political side more meaningful to our students. Because the social side of citizenship requires active participation by students, it may be useful to also apply this teaching method to the political side. Service learning has found its way into middle and high school social studies curricula, and it is not surprising that students think of citizenship as "helping others" when 84% of all high schools require some type of community service learning (Bilig, 2000). When students define citizenship, they may be reacting to the change in the curricula in the new century, which now encourages service learning. We must find ways to broaden the concept of citizenship by teaching students that political engagement and activism also are tools for assisting others in our society.

It is important to realize that citizenship has a dual nature: social and political. The social nature of citizenship deals with how citizens interact with one another; whereas, the political nature involves how citizens interact with the state. Both elements are essential for a citizen to participate in a democratic society (Alazzi & Chiodo, 2008).

Implications for Future Research

The researcher believes that the participants' experience described in this study represent what might occur in any middle or high school in Jordan. Additional research is needed to add or refute the conclusion of this study. This study was conducted in three schools in the same school district, and this could be a potential deficiency. Further studies are needed from different districts to analyze a broad

base of students. The expectation, environment, and socio-economic status may not be the same from different school settings; therefore, the attitudes of the students, teachers, and parents may vary. Indeed, these two bound systems (seventh and eleventh grade students) may be the exception and not necessarily the rule. Although the researcher is satisfied with the facts and findings, the limitations of mixed methods studies are recognized. A broad quantitative survey may further assist the understanding of student's perception toward citizenship. Regardless of the limitations found in this study, the researcher believe that findings add to our understanding of a student's perception toward citizenship education in Jordan. These perceptions need to receive attention on a regular basis to make sure we have progress in assisting our students to acquire knowledge, skills, and a healthy perception toward citizenship education.

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