

# 7<sup>th</sup> Grade Students' Feelings about Injustices They Experienced at School and Ways to Seek Their Rights

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**Abstract** This study was carried out in order to determine what kinds of injustices 7<sup>th</sup> grade students experienced in Turkey, what they felt about these injustices, in what ways they sought their rights and what they suggested to avoid injustice in the school environment. Participants were selected from a total of 5 schools in Adiyaman and Gaziantep, 3 in the city centers and 2 in the villages. In this qualitative study, semi-structured interview form was used as the data collection tool and data were analyzed using descriptive analysis. At the end of the study, it was found that the students experienced injustices in various ways by their teachers, school administrators and friends in the school environment. It has been determined that students are trying to seek their rights by using the means of communication and consultation to school officials or teachers. The students expressed their willingness to help their friends by not being insensitive to their injustice. The students also expressed that they were angry, saddened and felt lonely when they were in a state of injustice, and stated that in order to avoid injustice in the school environment, there should be more discipline, everyone should respect each other's rights, everyone should be equal and fair and students should be informed about the issue.

**Keywords** Social Studies, Student Rights, Ways to Seek Rights

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## 1. Introduction

One of the most important goals of education in democratic, modern and developed countries is to educate individuals who are aware of their rights and who are able to use them effectively. Thus, students are expected to understand rights of others and the importance of respecting these rights while learning their rights. Indeed, such individuals are needed for social and individual well-being.

People have legal rights when they are born, even in the

womb. Individuals start to use these rights frequently, especially after they begin to have social life. For this reason, it is very important for individuals to learn their rights at an early age. Naturally, individuals learn some of the social rules and the rights they possess from their families, who are the first social entities of their lives. This is because individuals spend their childhood period with their families in which they first learn to respect others' ideas and they become aware of the fact that using their rights puts people under some responsibilities [1]. Concepts such as participation, discussion, openness, justice and self-discipline can not only be learned theoretically but can also be learned by living in real environments and the family is the first of these real environments in the lives of individuals [2]. Therefore, the family plays an important role in the development of children's citizenship consciousness [3].

The teaching of democratic values is a process that first begins in the family and continues with formal education [4]. Every democratic, contemporary state tries to teach students about democracy, and their rights and responsibilities during the early education period. This is because even though most people receive primary education, they may not continue secondary and higher education. Thus, effective citizenship education is one of the fundamental aims of primary education in contemporary countries [5].

In this context, in Turkey, the subjects related to social life and rights are included in the Life Science lessons which are offered in the 1st, 2nd and 3rd grades, and they take place in Social Studies lessons which are in the 4th, 5th, 6th and 7th grades comprehensively. For example, in the "Individual and Community" learning area in the 5th grade Social Studies course, there is a unit titled "I Am Learning My Rights" which constitutes 11% of this course. Through this unit, it is projected that students will become individuals who are aware of their personal and social competences, who are innovative, who can communicate properly with others, who can take responsibility, who are respectful to other individuals and who have high self-confidence. In addition, at the end of this unit, it is

aimed to make students aware of their rights as an individual by learning to establish the relationship between rights and responsibilities [6].

Recently, there has been a noticeable increase in the tendency towards children's rights [7]. However, it is not enough for children to only know their rights to be effective individuals. In addition to knowing their rights, having the ability to exercise these rights, being able to seek legal rights in the face of injustice and seeing that the democratic practice in their daily lives are vital for the internalization of the democracy culture.

In Turkey, there is scarce research on what kind of injustices primary school students experience in the school environment and in what ways they seek their rights. The results of a limited number of previous studies on this issue can be summarized as follows. In a phenomenological study that investigated the perceptions of social studies teachers and their students on citizenship and democracy education, it has been determined that the content of this course was not sufficient to provide citizenship competencies to the students, that this course was not given the required importance and that the level of satisfaction of teachers and students was low [8]. In a qualitative study of the perceptions of 8th grade students' perceptions of responsibility, rights, equality, citizenship and sovereignty, which are frequently used in citizenship education, it was found that most of the students who participated in the survey were well informed about the concepts of rights and responsibilities and they were very conscious about what they should do if they encountered a violation of rights. However, in the same study, it has been stated that some students perceive the concepts of equality, citizenship and sovereignty in an incomplete way, that they have difficulty expressing the meanings of these concepts and that they have misconceptions by mixing them with different concepts such as rights, duty and freedom [9]. In a qualitative study that investigated the perceptions of primary school teachers and parents about the rights of children, the practices they had at home and school for the education of children's rights, and the problems they face, it has been determined that parents and teachers did not know the rights of children adequately and that children could not learn and use their rights at home and in school at a sufficient level. Moreover, it has been stated that teachers and parents have experienced problems arising from economic, socio-cultural, political and educational systems in the study of the rights of the children [10]. In a quantitative study to determine the democratic attitudes of primary school students according to some variables, it was stated that the democratic attitudes of the students were in the level of "I strongly agree" and that measures should be

taken in order to increase the democratic attitudes of the students to the highest level [11]. A qualitative study that examined the problems faced in social studies education based on the opinions and experiences of novice social studies teachers has revealed that teachers had various problems caused by some negative attitudes and behaviors of the administrators, teachers, students and parents [12]. In a survey conducted in the United States, to the question "what should be included in school programs at primary education level?", 94% of the participants responded as "respect for other people", 91% responded as "compassion towards other people" and 90% responded as "self-respect [13].

In a survey of students' perspectives, it was found that 13.3% of primary school teachers were not sufficiently sensitive to democracy and human rights, 22% did not model democratic values in class and school environment, 34% did not consider students' ideas when selecting prefects and representatives of other educational activities [13].

As seen in the studies summarized above, there is a need to examine the injustices in which students think they experience at school, the ways in which they seek justice, and what they feel about injustice. In this sense, conducted with 7th grade students in Turkey, this study aimed to find out what kind of injustices students had in school environment, how they felt in the face of these injustices and in what ways they were seeking their rights.

## 2. Materials and Methods

Qualitative research method was used in this study. Having a holistic approach, enabling the discovery of perceptions, having flexibility in research design and having an inductive analysis approach are important characteristics of qualitative research methods [14].

### 2.1. Participants

Since the research subject is related to the rights individuals have and their way of seeking their rights, and because in Turkey these topics are introduced especially in 4th, 5th, 6th and 7th grade social studies courses, 7th grade students were identified as the participants.

The students who participated in the study were selected from 5 schools, 3 from urban centers and 2 from villages, from different socio-economic levels in the cities of Adiyaman and Gaziantep. A total of 13 students, 7 females and 6 males, participated in the study. Nine of the students are studying in the city center while 4 are studying in the village schools. Demographic information related to the participants is shown in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Demographic Information of Participant Students

ID	Gender	Grade	School	Mother's Education	Father's Education
S1	Male	7	City	Primary school	Middle school
S2	Male	7	City	High school	Primary school
S3	Female	7	Village	Primary school	Primary school
S4	Female	7	City	Primary school	High school
S5	Female	7	Village	Primary school	Primary school
S6	Female	7	City	High school	Primary school
S7	Male	7	City	Primary school	Primary school
S8	Male	7	City	Primary school	Middle school
S9	Female	7	City	Middle school	Middle school
S10	Female	7	Village	Primary school	Primary school
S11	Female	7	Village	Primary school	High school
S12	Male	7	City	High school	Primary school
S13	Male	7	City	High school	Primary school

## 2.2. Data Collection and Analysis

In this research using qualitative research design, semi-structured interview form was used as the data collection tool and data were analyzed using descriptive analysis. In the interview form, the following questions were directed to the students:

1. Do you think that your teachers or school administrators are being unfair to you? If so, what are these injustices?
2. What do you do when your teachers or school administrators commit injustice to you?
3. Do you think your friends are unfair to you? If so, what are these injustices?
4. What do you do when your friends commit injustice to you?
5. What do you do when one of your friends experiences injustice?
6. What do you consider when using your rights in the school environment?
7. How do you feel when your rights are violated?
8. What do you suggest to avoid violations of rights in the school environment?

After obtaining the data, the researcher and a colleague formed sub-themes and those sub-themes were discussed. The reliability of the study was calculated using the formula "Reliability = Consensus / (Consensus + Disagreement) × 100" [15]. The reliability ratio between the researcher and the colleague was found to be 90%. Some quotes from the interviewees related to the themes are given below.

## 3. Findings

In this section, findings related to the answers given by the students to the questions in the interview form will be

explained.

### 1. Do you think that your teachers or school administrators are being unfair to you? If so, what are these injustices?

When participating students' answers are examined, it is seen that the students think that they are treated unfairly when some students are privileged. Some related student opinions are as follows:

*S3: Yes they are unfair, some of our friends cannot give the cleaning money, while those who give the cleaning money benefit from some things, those who do not cannot benefit.*

*S4: There are five students in our class, our teacher always likes them, he/she is always angry at us.*

*S9: The principal and some teachers are acting softly to the ones in the school soccer team, and they welcome their mistakes.*

*S10-11: Physical Education teacher always allows 8th grade students to play with the soccer ball, but he/she allows us only during the class.*

When the answers are examined, it is seen that certain students have given privileges within certain criteria and that teachers and administrators behave badly to some students while they are soft and caring towards others. This situation is defined as affinity or favoritism, and it is explained in the Turkish Dictionary [16] as "Unjustly, favoritism against law and rule, backing up". "Favoritism" is contrary to the principles of equality and justice.

Some students who participated in the study seem to think that their teachers or administrators are angry with them because of the mistakes of others, and that they are not treated fairly.

*S2: Yes, I think there is injustice. My teacher took me to the front row because there was a lot of noise coming*

from behind, but I do not understand the lesson there.

S8: Yes, an injustice is being done, someone else is talking but he/she is angry with me, like it was me.

Some of the students stated that they were in a state of injustice because they could not get results from the authorities they issued complaints:

S1: My friend makes bad jokes to me, I complain to the assistant manager but he does not take into consideration.

Five students who participated in the study stated that they did not suffer injustice. For example:

S5: I do not think that my teachers or school administrators are unfair to me.

S12: There is no injustice against me in my school.

## 2. What do you do when your teachers or school administrators commit injustice to you?

Some of the students stated that they will seek their rights by applying to the higher authorities or by objection. It can be said that these students consciously use the ways of seeking their rights.

S3: I try to seek my rights when I am treated unjustly by my teachers or school administrators.

S2: I would go to the principal.

S13: I would go to the school principal or other authorities.

S6: I feel very sorry when I was treated unfair. I try to express myself if I'm really right, I try to talk.

S11: I try to solve by talking.

S10: I defend my own rights till the end; if my rights are still ignored, then there is nothing left to do.

A student who participated in the research stated that she would seek solutions through anger:

S9: I get very angry at first, and then I suddenly burst out in a timeless manner. I guess my classmates are afraid of me because of that.

When we look at this student's answer, it seems that the student does not choose to talk about his rights or seek other legal ways; rather he gets angry or perhaps aggressive. Anger is often a emotion that arises when an individual encounters any situation, event, or person that interferes with him/her. For example; individuals may get angry in situations such as missing an opportunity, impenetrability, fight, discussion, inability to express oneself, suffering from injustice, exposure to insult or disrespect, and loss of loved ones. Counseling services of schools should help students for anger management.

Some of the students, on the other hand, indicated that they would not do anything when they experience injustice:

S4: I do not do anything

S8 and S12: I do not apply

S1: He/she is my teacher, I cannot solve the situation

with a fight, I would keep it to myself.

S7: I am already shy, I do not do anything.

It is clear that these students cannot effectively use the ways to seek their rights.

## 3. Do you think your friends are unfair to you? If so, what are these injustices?

Some of the students in the study did not think that their friends were unfair towards themselves. For example:

S7: My friends are not unfair me, and I do not make friends with those who would do wrong with me.

S2: They are not unfair to me.

S11: No, they are not doing wrong.

S10: I do not think they are unfair.

However, it is seen that most of the students think that they are exposed to unfair practices by their friends for various reasons:

S6: I do not think that my friends are unfair to me, but they are to some of others. For example they are teasing or belittling.

S9: Yes. I do think so, because sometimes they get along well with me, then they do not talk to me even if I do nothing.

S13: My friends are unfair to me, because they are jealous of me, so I ignore them.

S3: They do not hesitate making me or anyone else sad while playing.

S5: I think that my friends are unfair to me. When something happens, they judge people without listening.

S4: I have a few friends, I like them, but these friends sometimes prepare questions for exams, hard questions which they know the answers to, and they made the teacher ask these questions on the exam.

When the answers are examined, it is seen that the students think that they are treated unfairly for various reasons in their relations with their friends. For example, a student stated that he has not been treated unfairly, but some of his friends were mocked and belittled. Some students also think that their friends have selfish behaviors, and they do not allow anyone else to speak during courses. Some students think that their friends have been unfair because they have judged people without listening to others.

## 4. What do you do when your friends commit injustice to you?

It is seen that the students answered this question in different ways. One of the students answered "I will not do anything" (S8), while others said they would seek their rights in some way. It seems that most of the students stated that they would try to find a solution by talking to their friends:

S11: I will say it's wrong if they are unfair to me.

*S6: I will talk to him/her, I will apologize if I am wrong. If he/she is wrong, I expect him/her to apologize.*

*S5: I will tell them that they should reconsider the situation and think calmly.*

However, when they could not find a solution by talking, they stated that they would try different ways. These ways are going to an authorized person, breaking the relationship with the friend and suggesting empathizing.

*S4: If my friend behaves unfair to me, I will talk to him first. If it does not work, I will talk to the teacher.*

*S3: When my friend is unfair to me, I will ask him/her what he/she would do if someone else did the same to him, and then I will not talk to him/her for a while.*

*S7: I will cut off my relationship with my friend immediately and expect him/her to understand that he is unfair to me.*

Some of the students stated that they will apply directly to an authorized person:

*S2: I will apply to the school administration.*

*S10: I will talk to my teacher.*

*S13: I will go to an authorized person in the school.*

*S12: I will talk to school administration or teachers.*

One of the students stated that he would resort to violence:

*S1: I will get angry and jump in (in the sense of fighting).*

It seems that most of the students who participated in the study try to solve problems through communication when they think they are treated unjustly by their friends, invite their friends to explain the situation or even to empathize them. In situations where they cannot resolve by talking, it is also apparent that some of the students will directly contact the school administration or the teacher, while other choose cutting off their relationships with those friends.

### **5. What do you do when one of your friends experiences injustice?**

When the answers of the students are examined, it appears that they will not be insensitive and they will help their friends in case of injustice. For example:

*S12: I support of friendship, I would cover his/her back and defend his/her rights.*

*S10: I try to understand the problem whether it is related to me or not, but mostly I defend my friend's rights.*

*S6: I talk to the person who is unfair and ask him to apologize to my friend.*

*S5: When someone treats one of my friends unfairly, I talk to them both and I ask the other why he/she did that. I will not just be OK with it.*

*S9: If the one who committed injustice is a teacher, I*

*will talk to the teacher, but if it is a student, my response will be harder.*

Students stated that in a case of injustice, while they are defending their friends' rights they would use methods such as finding a solution, conciliation, distinguishing right and wrong, appealing to higher authorities and persuading. All of the students stated that they would defend their friends' rights in some way. Finally, one of the students (Ö9) stated that if teachers were unfair, she would talk to them, but if one of her friends were unfair, her solution would be a harsh one.

### **6. What do you consider when using your rights in the school environment?**

Participating students' answers to this question revealed that students generally try not to violate the limits of others while using their rights and freedoms.

*S1: I act thinking that my own freedom has also a limit.*

*S2: I try to use my rights and freedoms without restricting others'.*

*S7: I try not to cross the line.*

*S6: I use my rights and freedoms without disturbing others.*

*S5: When I use my rights and freedoms in the school environment, I pay attention not to disturb others. I apologize if I do.*

*S3: I try to use my rights and freedoms without overdoing it and without disturbing the people around me.*

### **7. How do you feel when your rights are violated?**

Answering to this question, majority of the students responded that they angry and frustrated. Moreover, sadness, feeling alone and crying are among the feelings that students feel when they experience injustice. For example:

*S1: Anger, hatred, greed*

*S7: When my rights are violated, I think and I ask to myself "what I have done so that my rights are violated?"*

*S11: I feel bad, sorry and angry.*

*S8: I feel sorry, I get angry.*

*S10: I get very annoyed, I think about doing very bad stuff, but I do not, I just cry. Sometimes I feel like I'm barely breathing.*

*S5: I feel like a lonely person who does not have anyone around.*

### **8. What do you suggest to avoid violations of rights in the school environment?**

Examining students' answers to this question, it was observed that most of the students stated that if everyone respects each other's rights and does not exceed their limits, this problem will be resolved.

*S7: In the school environment there should be no fighting, no violence, everyone should respect each other.*

*S1: Everyone is equal; the strong should not crush the weak.*

Some of the students have argued that more discipline should be applied:

*S9: The principal and some teachers should use more discipline.*

*S13: Teachers should not be polite and courteous to those who are unfair.*

Some students stated that the problem can be solved through equality and justice:

*S5: I recommend being fair in order to avoid injustice in the school environment. I recommend that who is right and who is wrong should be distinguished, and that the views of both sides are carefully heard and examined.*

*S10: Just be fair and that is enough.*

*S4: Teachers should consider all students as equal, our rights and freedoms should not be captured in a trap.*

A student has suggested that people should be informed about this issue.

*S6: Brochures should be distributed and public spots should be arranged so that all people can understand their rights.*

#### 4. Result

When the results obtained from the study are examined, it is observed that the majority of the students have experienced injustice in various ways from their teachers or school administrators. It is also seen that some students are granted privileges within certain criteria, and even the teachers and administrators behave softer and caring for those students while they are being mean for others. Again, some of the students seem to have indicated that they were punished unfairly because of someone else's mistake and that they were not treated fairly in this regard. Some students who participated in the study stated that they were in a state of injustice because they could not get results from the authorities they issued complaints.

One of the results of the study indicated that while some of the students stated that they would appeal to higher authorities or oppose when seeking their rights, a student would search for solutions through anger. Some of the students reported that they would do nothing if they were treated unjustly.

One of the results of the study shows that some of the students think that their friends were not unfair to them. On the other hand, some students have expressed that they are sometimes in a state of injustice due to various reasons in their relations with their friends. For example, a student states that he has not been treated unfairly, but some of his friends have been teased and belittled. Some students also think that their friends have selfish behaviors, and they do

not allow others to speak in the classroom. Some students think that their friends have been subjected to injustice without distinguishing who is right and who is wrong.

It seems that most of the students would try to solve the problem by communicating with their friends when they think they are treated unjustly by their friends. It has also been found that some students have invited their friends to explain the situation, and even invite them to empathize. In cases where they cannot resolve by communicating, some students would apply to the school administration or cut off the communication with the friend. However, it is seen that some students will directly go to the school administration or teachers. The reason for this difference may be the closeness of the students to their friends, or the nature of the injustice they go through. As a matter of fact, if the students believe that they can cope with the situation themselves, then they may first prefer to talk through their friends and then go to the higher authorities. It seems that there is a serious decrease in the proportion of students saying that they do not do anything when they think they are treated unfair by the school administrators or teachers. This may be due to power imbalance. The number of students who would seek their rights against a friend whose strength is equal to is significantly increased.

As one of the results of the study, it was seen that if one of their friends experienced injustice, students would not be insensitive to the situation and would help him/her seek his/her rights and support him/her. Students stated that in a case of injustice, while they are defending their friends' rights they would use methods such as finding a solution, conciliation, distinguishing right and wrong, appealing to higher authorities and persuading. All of the students stated that they would defend their friends' rights in some way. Finally, one of the students (Ö9) stated that if teachers were unfair, she would talk to them, but if one of her friends were unfair, her solution would be a harsh one.

Another finding from the survey shows that the majority of the students uses their rights and freedoms and tries to avoid violating others' borders. It seems that the majority of the students would be frustrated when their rights are violated. Along with this, sadness and loneliness are among the feelings that students experience when they are in a state of injustice.

Finally, in order to avoid violations of rights in the school environment, the majority of the students stated that everyone should respect each other's rights and should not cross their limits. Some students responded that more discipline should be applied in the school environment, and some of them argued that equality and justice would solve the problem. A student has suggested that people should be informed about this issue.

#### 5. Conclusions

Based on the findings it can be concluded that students

are trying to seek their rights by using the means of communication and consultation to school officials or teachers. Students are willing to help their friends by not being insensitive to their injustice. The students were angry, saddened and felt lonely when they were in a state of injustice. Based on this, it is recommended that in order to avoid injustice in the school environment, there should be more discipline, everyone should respect each other's rights, everyone should be equal and fair and students should be informed about the issue.

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