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An Overview of Peace Education in Turkey: Definitions, Difficulties, and Suggestions: A Qualitative Analysis

Semra DEMİR [a]
Erciyes University

Abstract

In modern world, advances and changes experienced in social, political, and economic domains cannot be effective in diminishing the unwanted behaviors displayed by individuals in a society. This underpins the need for creating a peace culture based on equality, justice, democracy, human rights, tolerance, and solidarity in a society. The purpose of this study is to examine the opinions of classroom teachers in Turkey about different aspects of peace as a concept and peace education in terms of problems, expectations, and suggestions. This research has been designed in accordance with qualitative research paradigm, and semi-structured interview technique has been employed as the data collection tool. 13 teachers have voluntarily participated in this study. Findings have revealed that participating teachers have similar definitions regarding not only global and national peace, but also individual peace. Predominantly test-oriented and exam-based education system have been found to be the reason why educational institutions cannot fulfill their duties and responsibilities concerning peace education, and the struggle to realize parents' expectations about the test-oriented program impedes all other efforts that could otherwise be spent on peace education. Furthermore, teachers have been determined to have low levels of awareness, knowledge, and skills related with peace education.

Key Words

Peace, Peace Education, Primary Schools, Primary Education Teachers, Qualitative Analysis.

In modern world, advances and changes experienced in social, political, and economic domains cannot be effective in diminishing the unwanted behaviors displayed by individuals in a society. Although primary education seems to be successful in a systematic sense, increasing violence in society and behaviors that students demonstrate both in and out of school such as temper tantrums, intolerance, violence trends, trying to resolve the problems with violent methods and insult prove that individuals cannot be furnished with expected positive behaviors sufficiently. This underpins the need for creating a peace culture based on equality, justice, democracy, human rights, tolerance, and solidarity in a society. Schools are undoubtedly the starting point for social change. Schools and teachers can help make this change through peace education.

Peace is generally perceived as weak, passive, boring, and dull (Mathews, 2002). Peace education is only found in the amateur programs of voluntary institutions (Bursalıoğlu, 1987). According to Harris (2003, p. 9), peace education aims to improve behaviors and knowledge necessary to form a secure world and a supportive environment. Main purpose of peace education is to grow the skill to think critically, analytically, and analogically (Blenesi, 1994). Türnüklü (2006) states that interfering with children's cognitive, affective, and behavioral

a PhD. Semra Demir is currently an Assistant Professor at the Department of Educational Sciences, Curriculum and Instruction. Her research interests include program development, program evaluation, peace and democracy education, multicultural education and effective teaching in the classroom. *Correspondence*: Assist. Prof. Semra Demir, Erciyes University, Ziya Eren Faculty of Education, Department of Educational Sciences Kayseri/Turkey. E-mail: sdemirf@erciyes.edu.tr Phone: +90 352 4374937/37267.

development during pre-school and school years is the only way to reduce conflict based solution tradition. This helps with the socialization of students (Auer, 2002, p. 72).

As well as being an important component of quality primary education, peace education also contributes to the development of knowledge, skills, and values of individuals. These knowledge, skills and values can help change unwanted behaviors of children, teenagers and adults. Individual's resolving conflicts with oneself and with others through peaceful ways and finding peaceful solutions for different situations can be considered as a result of this change. Peace education helps students develop conflict resolution skills at individual, local, national, and international levels, reduce the tendency to violence, respect human rights, and internalize peace (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2005). However, peace education needs teachers who are at peace with themselves, have social sensitivity, are good at solving problems peacefully, and have sufficient knowledge and experiences to achieve its goals. Since democracy and freedom understandings and lifestyles of teachers are determinants of their problem solving styles, knowledge, experiences, and practices of classroom teachers who are important models in this issue affect the first years of students' education significantly.

In Turkey, although there are some studies conducted to develop programs related with peace education and to assess the efficacy of those programs, the absence of a qualitative study—similar to this one—examining primary school teachers' opinions about peace education and related concepts is worth noting. The opinions of classroom teachers working at primary schools in Kayseri, located in the mid-region of Turkey, were investigated through this study. In this sense, this study can be considered as a 'needs analysis' revealing the current perceptions about peace education and determining what is needed for it.

The purpose of this study is to examine the opinions of classroom teachers in Turkey about different aspects of peace as a concept and peace education in terms of problems, expectations, and suggestions. Findings of this study are conceived to be helpful in directing teachers' and other related authorities' attention towards peace education and in designing other studies with broader scopes.

For this purpose, answers were sought to these questions: (*1*) What are the opinions of teachers about peace, global/national/individual peace, and peace education? (*2*) Who has the most important role in peace education? (*3*) What is the role of educational institutions in establishing peace? (*4*) Should peace education be given as an alternative to violence? (*5*) What are the qualities that peace education teachers should have? (*6*) What is the place of peace education in instructional programs in Turkey?

Method

Research Model

Employing survey method, this research was designed in accordance with descriptive research paradigm. Semi-structured interview technique was employed as the data collection tool. This technique is neither as restrictive as fully-structured interviews nor as flexible as unstructured interviews (Karasar, 1995).

Participants

Stating that sample forming strategies are highly related with the purpose and research questions that guide the study because of the broad variety displayed by research approaches, purposes, and settings (2005, p. 183-184), Punch also points that holistic reality of the research model and the harmony of the sample with other elements are assumptions stemming from variety. In this sense, a sample plan that would reveal the concepts concerning the conceptual framework and research questions and that would be efficient in terms of accessibility and time by producing descriptions compatible with real life has been developed by Miles and Huberman (1994, p. 34) while seeking answers to questions that might provide some guidance for a qualitative sample plan.

In this research, purposeful sampling method was used and 13 primary school teachers (7 female, 6 male) working in three different schools located in downtown Kayseri participated in the study voluntarily.

Among the participants, three of them are 1st grade, one of them is 2nd grade, one of them is 3rd grade, five of them are 4th grade, and two of them are 5th grade teachers. Another participant works as a school principal although s/he is a classroom teacher. The average seniority of the teachers is 20 years whereas their age mean is 39. Participants were given code names in accordance with research ethics.

The Tool and Process of Data Collection

All interviews were completed by the researcher. The first meeting was held on February 08, 2010 and the last one on February 19, 2010. Related literature was taken into consideration during the formation of the questions on the interview form. Especially, the framework of peace education created for teachers by UNESCO (2005) was utilized. Interviews were audio-recorded with the consent of the participants. For the reliability of the research, the researcher had to treat all the participants equally and collect as many and correct data as possible (Denzin & Lincon, 2000). Therefore, a setting that would make the participants feel comfortable and answer the questions honestly was created. Participants were observed to behave intimately and sincerely during the interview. Participants expressed their satisfaction orally about being interviewed on this subject. Interviews lasted between 25-40 minutes.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

In the data analysis process, recorded interviews were transferred onto the computerized interview casting form consisting of five chapters, in the order of interviewer-participants. The form consists of context records, descriptive information, descriptive index, interviewer comments, and general comments sections. At this stage, interview casting and audio recordings were examined by an expert, and inaccurate or missing parts were corrected. 75 pages of data were obtained from all the interviews. *Member control* method was used to improve the internal reliability and validity of the research.

Descriptive analysis technique was used to analyze the data obtained through the interviews. The goal of this type of analysis is to present the findings to the reader in an organized and interpreted way. For this purpose, the obtained data are first logically described; then, cause-effect relationship is depicted through interpreting (Yıldırım & Şimsek, 2005). The data in this study were also described and interpreted according to previously determined themes. Including direct quotations from the interviewers and explaining the results accordingly bear importance for the validity of the study (Wolcott, 1990). Direct quotations were often used to increase the validity by dramatically reflecting the participants' opinions. In results section, line numbers were shortened in the form of (st) and used in direct quotations.

Findings

In this section, findings are organized and presented according to the themes produced by research questions. 6 themes emerged at the end of the interviews are: (*1*) Definitions regarding the concepts of peace, global/national/individual peace, and peace education (*2*) The most important role in peace education (*3*) The role of educational institutions in establishing peace (*4*) Peace education as an alternative to violence (*5*) The qualities peace education teachers should have (*6*) The place of peace education in the instructional program

Definitions Regarding the Concepts of Peace, Global Peace, National Peace, Individual Peace, and Peace Education

Themes emerged after the analyses of the definitions provided by the participants are presented below in a frequency based sequence.

Participating teachers defined the concept of *peace* in relation with the following words; love (6), respect (6), understanding (3), absence of violence (3), tolerance (2), peace (2), solidarity (2), happiness (1), conscience (1), reconcilement (1), trust (1), and harmony (1). Ms. Sevgi said, "*Happiness comes to my mind when I think of peace. Tolerance and understanding are components of peace. There is no injustice. People respect each other's rights.*" (st.38-40). Mr. Faruk defined peace as "*People love each other and live in peace.*" (st.3). Ms. Gul stated that peace was related to trust by saying "*Peace is mutual trust.*" (st.2). Similarly, Mr. Sami, who had been a teacher for 28 years, defined the concept of peace as love, respect, and conscience.

Regarding *global peace*, almost half of the participants (6) emphasized the importance of respect for differences. In addition, absence of violence (4) and global fraternity (3) were also noted by the participants. Ms. Gulsah said, "*Global peace is the chance to live without the fear of war, living without the will to occupy other countries or the fear to be invaded by others. Global peace is mutual love and appreciation.*" (st.12-16).

About the *national peace*, participants primarily underpinned the importance of mutual respect for and acceptance of differences among the peoples of a country (6). Likewise, the frequency of definitions stating that people in a country should live in peace through trusting each other and tolerating differences was 5. Two of the participants noted that there was no peace in our country. Ms. Cigdem

said, "*We don't have a unified type of citizens. Our country consists of people from different ethnic backgrounds. National peace means that all these ethnic groups respect, love, and tolerate each other.*" (st.7-9). According to Tacar (1996), social peace cannot be established through humiliating or ignoring different identities.

Concerning *individual peace*, nearly all participants (10) stated that individual peace meant to be at peace with oneself. Other participants' opinions were loving people, being tolerant (1), knowing one's rights, respecting others' rights (1), and being unselfish (1). Sommers (2001, p. 4) note that peace education is a tool to increase behaviors such as responsibility, tolerance, friendship, freedom, and justice.

Teachers were asked if they had known anything about the concept of *peace education* earlier, and what this concept meant to them. Approximately, all of the teachers (10) answered that they had never heard anything about it. One of them said it might be related with psychological support while another participant replied that it might be a kind of love education.

The Most Important Role in Peace Education

Upon being asked "Who has the most important role in peace education?", 8 of the teachers said it was the teacher, 4 of them stated that it was the family, 1 of them noted that it was the school administration, and another one said it was the Ministry of National Education. Moreover, further questioning about the influence that a teacher's perception of peace has over a student's yielded that all the participating teachers believed that a teacher's perception of peace would be highly influential over a student's since teachers were taken as role models. Accordingly, Ms. Cigdem said, "*… it absolutely affects because teacher is the role model. Teacher is a whole with all his/her behaviors, movements, and everything. The child will definitely imitate him/her...It is the teacher. We are the ones that teach the right way.*" (st.37).

The Role of Educational Institutions in Establishing Peace

Participating teachers underlined that educational institutions had no contribution to the establishment of peace due to test-oriented and exam-based education system. Emphasizing that the education system depending on memorization is still at large, participants agreed that schools were not effective about peace education because of the education approach favoring instruction more than training.

All teachers stressed the important role of schools as being a place where children learn to love, respect, and tolerate. However, still teacher's initiative bears crucial importance in this sense. On the other hand, some teachers noted that overpopulation of schools was a significant factor preventing schools from carrying out their responsibilities effectively.

Peace Education as an Alternative to Violence

All participating teachers stated that peace education should be provided as an alternative to violence. Some of the teachers noted that firstly teachers should be trained since students would learn about peace from them. Furthermore, a majority of the participants said that peace education should be provided not only through theory, but also through practice. Mr. Zeki pointed that "*…this may be one of the items of peace education since there are other causes that lead to violence such as financial difficulties, people's life styles, or family structures. These should also be tackled. For example, you can educate a person about peace properly, but if you do not eliminate his/her financial difficulties, what can you do? … I'm saying that standards of living must be improved. Indeed, what I mean is that, people should be able to apply it after being educated about peace.*" (st.52-62).

The Qualities a Peace Education Teacher Should Have

Following are related sub-themes: being well-equipped about peace education (3), being tolerant and democratic (6), respecting differences (1), loving and respecting self and others (1), being fair (2), and being presentable, and having leadership qualities and world knowledge (1). Almost all the participants stated that they had most of the aforementioned qualities, but still they needed peace education. Mr. Zeki said "*…somebody who is at peace with himself, who loves people as well as other creatures…I believe teachers are the ones who respect opinions the most these days. We listen to all kinds of opinions, and respect them. We don't silence people now like we used to do. This is what this system wants.*" (st.115-120). A renowned philosopher Krisnamurti (1988) emphasize that teachers should be trained in a way that leads to understanding of the whole life process for a proper education.

The Place of Peace Education in the Instructional Program

Without an exception, all participants stated that the instructional program had some learning outcomes related with peace education, but they were inadequate, and it was up to the teacher to achieve them or not. Mr. Engin; "*…Especially, Turkish Language, Social Studies, and Civics courses have such outcomes. As for me, the curriculum is fine, but we have problems giving up our old habits. Teachers can't resist against parents' expectations and exams.*"

Discussion

Peace is a wide concept with mental and practical definitions. Turkish Language Association defines peace as a setting where harmony, mutual understanding, and tolerance rule (Türk Dil Kurumu [TDK], 2006). The results of Kamaraj and Kerem's (2006) study over several countries at various development levels (including Turkey) indicated that highly developed countries (Sweden, Germany, Canada, the United States, and the Netherlands) defined peace as the absence of war, social justice and harmony, and being equal in the eyes of the law. However, in the same study, countries at medium and low development levels (Mexico, Nigeria, India, and Guatemala) defined peace as healthy progress, individuals' ability to adapt to the world, the absence of discrimination, and the absence of war just like the highly developed countries. The results of their study can be said to be compatible with the definition of the concept of peace within the literature, which is *the absence of war*.

According to Kamaraj and Kerem (2006), well-developed countries defined global peace as the absence of war and economic injustices, even distribution of power, and creative solutions to problems by people. Similarly, countries at medium and low development levels stated that global peace meant the absence of war and even distribution of sources and power. Ms. Sevgi's, opinions, one of the participants, are consistent with the findings of other studies. Yılmaz (2010) underpins that people unite around specific ideals although they come from different ethnic, religious, or thought groups, and this helps create a solid social structure since they behave on the basis of their common ground, which is *living in the same society*, if peace is settled within the community. Among the findings of the current study, Mr. Onur's opinions regarding that ethnic differences present in our society have been emphasized more recently, but people have found a way to meet around the common interest without pushing their personal interests forward seem to be consistent with Yılmaz's (2010) explanations.

As stated by Aydın (2001) peace culture and internalization of peace culture have a prominent impact on fulfilling a successful and happy life.

Opinions concerning the definition of individual peace are congruous with the findings of Kamaraj and Kerem (2006). In Bjerstedt study (2003), an Austrian participant describes the situation in his/her country as "*…There isn't any institutional attempt for peace education, therefore it is up to teacher whether to conduct it or not.*" (p. 66-67). A participant from the United States said "*Teacher training is necessary in order to spread peace education across America. Few teachers are trying to provide peace education on their own, of course not systematically.*". An Indian teacher noted "*I've been a teacher for 20 years. I found some topics that can be a subject for peace education in our books, but there is no explicit emphasis on it*" (Bjerstedt, 2003). It is obvious that findings from different studies are compatible with each other and with those of this study. Having peace culture has a major impact over reaching a happy and successful life (Aydin, 2001). Peace education shouldn't be based on only learning, but also on working and upbringing (Petroska-Beska, 1997).

Peace education starts with the development of several main values and peace values. Family serves as the basis for these values. Considering that many persistent behaviors of children are formed after they take their parents as role models (Eripek, 1982, p. 44; Fındıkçı, 1989, p. 40; Kağıtçıbaşı, 1985), families have a paramount role in terms of peace education. Peace education is against the principles of traditional education, and it generally imposes standards that are hard to handle for schools (Bar-Tal, 2002). It is a known fact that many teachers and managers had to go through a lot of problems with their governments, local educational authorities, and sometimes with the media when they conducted activities about peace education in their classes or schools. Teachers' being coward and uneducated can be noted as a reason for not carrying out peace education effectively (Bjerstedt, 1995). Findings of the current study happen to be congruous with those of Kamaraj and Kerem (2006), Vriens (1990), and Bjerstedt (1995).

One of the primary duties of schools is to meet the psychological needs of students (Glasser, 1999, p. 262). Although research findings seem to support the idea of providing peace education as an alter-

native to violence at schools, it is emphasized that actualizing the goals of such trainings at schools properly is a far-fetched dream without solving and eliminating some social problems. For a more effective education, teachers have to understand and analyze the reflections of the changes in social and cultural domains over students and also have to reduce potentially negative effects to minimum (Levin & Nolan, 2000).

Results

Participating teachers have been determined to have similar definitions regarding global, national, and individual peace. Likewise, that teachers have the most important role in peace education, that families are also an important factor in it, and that school administration and the Ministry of National Education can be effective factors for peace education are also among the results of the current study. Especially, economic and cultural improvements have been identified as significant factors accompanying social and individual peace.

Predominantly test-oriented education system has been found to be the reason why educational institutions cannot fulfill their duties and responsibilities concerning peace education, and the struggle to realize parents' expectations about the tests has been determined to be an obstacle in front of peace education. Especially, over populated classes and the existence of a compulsory curriculum in Turkey prevents teachers who are eager about peace education from exerting enough efforts. Furthermore, the teachers have been determined to have low levels of awareness, knowledge, and skills related with peace education. In order for education to be more effective, teachers have to figure out and solve the effects of social and cultural changes on students, and reduce their negative reflections on them.

Being tolerant and democratic has been identified as the most important teacher quality for peace education. Besides, other features such as respect for differences and fairness were also stated by the participants. Stress related consequences noted by the participants is a major factor influencing a teacher's performance. Some measures that will support communication and social life, and making use of available and suitable lifelong learning programs can be put forward as a suggestion so as to diminish teachers' stress level and improve their performance.

Some of the participants pointed the age when children start schooling as an obstacle to furnish them with some qualities, and stated that such kind of an education was highly correlated with families. Similarly, teachers also pinpointed the importance of preschool education, and emphasized that peace education should start during preschooling as well as underlining that the social, cultural, and economic background of the family had a tremendous impact in this sense.

Studies conducted on peace education in Turkey are limited with Bayram and Aslan (2008), Bedir and Demir (2008), Bedir and Arslan (2008), Bursalıoğlu (1987), Gazioğlu (2008), Kamaraj and Kerem (2004, 2005, 2006), Kerem and Kamaraj (2006a, 2006b), Sertel and Kurt (2004), Tapan (2006), Türnüklü and Şahin (2006), and Yemenici (2008). Designing several studies on this subject at various levels of education bears importance in order to get ahead and increase awareness about peace education.

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