

CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION IN ALBANIA A COUNTRY STUDY ON THE SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS' KNOWLEDGE AND ATTITUDES

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Abstract

The aim of this study, funded by the U.S Embassy in Tirana, is to provide field/empirical data on the basic knowledge, skills and attitudes that Albanian students have by the end of secondary school. The study also intends to promote an evidence-based policy making in order to develop a regional approach to policy makers, teachers, data collection and evaluation of CE; develop long-term comparative research and methodological matrix and contribute at the national and regional level by sharing support to promote the use of empirical data for the improvement of CE theory and practice.

The questionnaire administered for the purpose of this study contains questions regarding a) knowledge about democracy and related issues, b) attitudes towards school subjects, c) attitudes towards democracy and related issues and d) demography.

The results of the study show satisfactory levels of democratic citizenship knowledge and attitudes among secondary school students. However, they suggest that there is a need for change in teaching methods in order to improve the teaching of democracy by reducing lectures and increasing the use of active methods of learning, modern media and particularly internet to improve teaching of democracy and human rights, increase number of classes per week and to run projects that link schools together at local and national level.

Keywords: *citizenship, knowledge, attitudes, democracy*

1. Introduction

According to the Albanian Law on Compulsory Education “*The mission of school is the spiritual emancipation, material progress and social development of individuals*”, and “*...compulsory education aims at developing students’ intellectual, creative, practical and physical skills, at providing them with basic elements of civic culture and education*”. The principal components of Democratic Citizenship Education in Albania are: *education with human rights, multicultural education and education for peace* and they are based on fundamental documents like: Universal Declaration of Human Rights, European Convention of Human Rights, UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education, Convention on the Rights of the Child, Convention on Protection of National Minorities, as well as European Charter on Languages of Minorities in Europe. Civic Education in Albania is taught as a separate subject from grade 1 to grade 10 of schooling. It is divided into three cycles:

In the first cycle, primary grades 1-4, “Social education” is taught with one lesson a week during the entire school year. The purpose of this subject is to provide children with knowledge and skills

indispensable for their participation in social processes and help them to master values and beliefs characterizing citizens in a democratic society. *In the second cycle*, elementary grades 5-9 “*Civic education*” is also taught once a week. Its objective is to train students as future citizens. Curriculum content intertwines social, political, judicial and economic concepts with universal values in order to provide students with knowledge and skills necessary for civic life and enable them to master democratic values. “*Knowledge on society*” is the name for civic education in the lower secondary level, grade 10. It is taught twice a week and its objective is to provide students with knowledge and skills necessary for active participation in social life and for exercising their freedoms and rights as citizens of a democratic society.

2. The aim of the study

This study is funded by the Embassy of USA in Tirana, Albania. The aim of the study is to provide filed/empirical data on at least two issues: 1) the methodological approach and the validity of the research instrument and 2) basic knowledge, skills and attitudes the students have by the end of secondary school. The study also intends to promote an evidence based policy making in order to develop a regional approach to policy makers, teachers, data collection and evaluation of CE; develop long-term comparative research and methodological matrix and contribute to national and regional level by sharing support to promote the use of empirical data for the improvement of CE theory and practice

3. Method

Albania has a wide national network of a total of 522 high schools. 57% of these schools are located in urban areas and 43% in rural areas. 85% of these schools are public and 15% are non-public or private schools. 67.5% of Albanian high schools are gymnasiums or grammar schools and 32.5% are professional schools. 80% of professional schools are 4-year schools, 15% are 5-year schools and the rest are 3-year professional schools.

About 30% of the students’ sample attends technical/economic/social-cultural secondary schools, while 70% attends gymnasium or grammar schools. 49% of the respondents are females and 51% are male students. In order for our sample to be representative of the total student population, there are 3 classes of technical/ economic/social-cultural secondary schools and 7 classes of gymnasium students.

The survey was conducted during November 2013 by the Institute for Democracy and Mediation (IDM), an interdisciplinary research and public policy institute. Selection of participants was done using a Primary Sampling Unit System: 10 schools were randomly drawn from Albanian schools’ database and within the schools and classrooms 250 students were again selected randomly by ensuring anonymity.

Geographical selection of schools is stratified by regions and by urban/rural locations. Accordingly, our choice included two schools in Shkodra, two schools in Durres, three in Elbasan and three in Tirana. Of these, four schools were selected in rural areas, one per region. Therefore, the selection of schools and participants is representative of the whole high school student population.

The 250 sample allowed for a statistically acceptable margin of error for subgroup sample through subgroup analysis based on gender, urban/rural, and geographical areas.

The questionnaire administered for the purpose of this study contains four parts:

- Part one, questions regarding knowledge about democracy and related issues
- Part two, questions regarding attitudes towards school subjects
- Part three, questions regarding attitudes towards democracy and related issues
- Part four, demography

The questionnaire was administered separately in each class in the presence of administrators and the total time allocated for filling in the information was 60 minutes.

4. Results

4.1 Knowledge about citizenship, human rights and democracy

In the first section students were asked to give answers to 25 questions on democracy and Human Rights. Out of 37 alternatives in 12 cases the right answer was selected from more than 50 % of respondents. When asked about “what the rule of law means”, 58% of students indicated “everyone’s equality before the law” as the correct answer. Students answered correctly to the questions related to three of the fundamental rights: freedom of expression, freedom of religion and freedom of assembly and association. They also correctly indicated the case in which media threaten public security as the only case when government may limit media freedoms.

66.40% of participants correctly named the form of spontaneous organization to protect the environment as a non-governmental organization and 79.60 % of the respondents rightly answered that freedom of religion means that people have the right to practice religion.

84.80 % of students were able to correctly answer the question regarding the primary role of ombudsman as the citizens’ protector from the misuses of power and 62.80% of them recognized that the international legal instrument on human rights protection is a Convention. A considerable number of student respondents were able to link the international organization acronyms to their main missions. This showed that students are highly informed about international organizations. The respondents chose “equal voting rights” and “secret ballot” as relevant characteristics of democratic elections. Interestingly their second choice was “secret ballot and honest electoral campaigns” which correspond with one of the biggest concerns regarding elections in Albania: transparency of campaign funding resources.

An important generalization can be drawn by looking at the correct answers in relation to students’ location. The vast majority of correct responses (28 out of 37) have been chosen from students who study in Tirana. Accordingly, when asked about which statement is true for citizens of democratic state the correct answer “to elect and control government” was chosen significantly more often in Tirana. Moreover the correct interpretation of the statement “the government is limited” was chosen more often in Tirana than in other cities. Out of 37 correct alternatives 9 have been chosen more often from students of Elbasan, ranking this region in the second place for the correctness of given answers.

Students participating in this survey are part of different subgroups. Apart from their region or gender they have, they have also been categorized by considering their plans for the future. Thus 48.80% of students responded that they will seek employment after finishing high school (which does not necessarily mean that they will not continue university studies) and 51.20 % will not seek employment after high school. In correlation to correct answers, we can say that the number of correct answers is slightly higher among students who don't want to seek employment after secondary school. Only in 16 % of cases the correct answer was given more often from students who planned to seek employment after secondary school.

No significant difference has been noted between students' performance and correct answers. In several cases outstanding students chose wrong alternatives while average and below average students had a better performance.

4.2 Attitudes on citizenship education in school

In this section students were asked to give answers to 8 questions regarding their attitudes towards Civic Education as a school subject.

Students of secondary schools in Albania have the possibility to broaden their knowledge about democracy through a specific subject called "Knowledge of Society". When asked about their level of satisfaction with the content of secondary and primary school textbooks, their answer reveal that are slightly more satisfied with the subject content in the secondary school. To learn more about the content several questions were asked in relation to democracy and human rights issues. In all these cases students, who have been learning "a lot" and "very much" about a specific item, account for more than 50 % of the sample. This tendency changes when student were asked about more skill-oriented issues.

When asked about their level of satisfaction with the way teachers approached the subject both in primary and secondary school, students showed a better impression of teachers in secondary school. 54, 8% of students think that the method of "checking students understanding of key concepts" has been used "often" or "very often" whereas 67.2 % of students sample think that they have been encouraged to express their opinion "often" or "very often".

62.4 % of students chose "very often" or "often" alternatives to indicate how often they have been receiving regular feedback about their work. However, teachers mostly use traditional didactic methods in their work with students. 30.8% of students chose the alternative "sometimes" to show how often they have been using "role playing" method during class

46.8% of students have never used the analysis of video materials as learning method. 28.8 % of students never used internet as a learning method while 26.8 used internet sometimes. 50.8% of students have "never" or "very rarely" used analysis of newspapers as learning method.

When asked about how satisfied they are with textbooks (which seems to be the most frequent didactic tool) students' most chosen alternative is "satisfied". Students are generally satisfied with the atmosphere during class hours. As in the above mentioned cases (teachers' approach and subject content) students express more positively about the atmosphere in the secondary school.

In the last question of the second section, students were asked to give two suggestions on how to improve teaching of democracy. The first most frequent suggestion they gave (26 %) is to “reduce lectures and increase active methods of learning”. 36% students expressed “to run projects that link schools together at local and national level” as the second suggestion to improve teaching.

4.3 Political culture

In this section we look at students’ attitudes towards some aspects of democracy and related issues. When asked about the level of information they have about political events in Albania, 6.8 % responded “very much” 46 % of students responded “a lot”. Students who say they have a lot of information about political events most frequently indicated television as their source of information. Whereas students who have fair level of information on political events most frequently chose radio as their source of information.

On the other hand, students find school subjects as an important source of information for political events. As illustrated above, students who have a good level of information on political events (somewhat, a lot, very much alternatives) chose the same category of alternatives for school subjects as source of information.

Regarding their active participation in social life, students showed to have different attitudes. Thus, when asked about “giving money for charity”, the vast majority of them responded that they participate 2-3 times a year and 36 % give money for charity at least once a month. There

is a significant influence of religion especially on students who gave charity 2-3 times a year. Probably this is related to important religion events which take place periodically every year.

54.40 % of our respondents never volunteered to help marginalized categories of society. However, no significant correlation has been noted between “seek employment after school” and “voluntary work”. From this we can deduce that lack of voluntary work is more because of the lack of tradition than a matter of benefit.

60.4 % of the respondents have never had an active participation in political events, for example, a protest. There seems to be no correlation between high level of information and political active participation.

The percentage of students actively participating in school life is lower than 50 %. This may happen even because 64% of population thinks that they do not participate in important decision making in school.

In contrast with their involvement in politics and school, students’ role in the family is highly significant. 74.4 % of students participate at least once a week/month in important decision making. There is no significant correlation between gender and participation in family decision making, consequently, no gender differentiation takes place. The inclusive participation of both gender children in important decisions may have been influenced from the fact that even students’ parents possess the same level of education.

In spite of how students perceive their actual position in the society, they think that in the future they will acquire a more responsible role. 34.2 % of students responded that they are not sure if they will join a political party, but 25.6 % said that they will probably run for a public office and

33.6 % responded that they will probably join a protest or sign a petition while 15.6 % will definitely do it.

35.2 % of the students responded that they will probably contact a politician in office about an important social problem while 20.4 will definitely do it. 32% of students think that they will probably object to superiors at work for unfair treatment while 36.8 will definitely do it. 36.8 % responded that they will probably write to a newspaper about cases of corruption while 24% will definitely do it. Finally, 77.2 % responded that will definitely teach their children that truth and honesty are supreme values in life.

4.4 European integration

In the last two questions students were asked about the importance and impact of their country's integration in the European Union.

Students tend to link Albanian integration into the EU with positive phenomena. Thus, those, who think that EU membership is very important, think that society will become more democratic. Moreover, those who support EU membership think that citizens' living standards will improve. Another reason why students may support EU membership is because they think that this will help to establish better relations with other countries. Most of the students do not think that there is a strong link between EU membership and limitation of national sovereignty.

The vast majority of students that support EU membership do not think that nationalities are jeopardized once becoming a member.

5. Conclusions

The results of the study show satisfactory levels of democratic citizenship knowledge and attitudes among secondary school students. However, they suggest that there is a need for change in teaching methods in order to improve the teaching of democracy by reducing lectures and increasing the use of active methods of learning, modern media and particularly internet to improve teaching of democracy and human rights, increase number of hours per week and to run projects that link schools and communities together at local and national level.