

Article

Skill-based reform or rhetoric? Analysing the citizenship curriculum in Türkiye with the ICCS framework

Zafer Kuş

Kırşehir Ahi Evran University, Kırşehir, Turkey

Highlights:

- The first systematic ICCS-2022–based mapping of Türkiye’s 2024 Social Studies curriculum.
- Detailed and auditable coding of the text to ICCS’s dimensions and 12 sub-dimensions.
- Strong emphasis on knowledge and reasoning, limited representation of attitudes and participation.
- A more “personally responsible” citizen profile than participatory/justice-oriented models.
- Actionable policy/practice proposals: action civics, authentic participation tasks, and assessment rubrics.

Purpose: This study addresses the gap created by Türkiye’s non-participation in International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS) cycles by determining the extent to which the 2024 Social Studies curriculum aligns with the ICCS 2022 Assessment Framework across the content, cognitive, attitudes, and engagement dimensions. It interprets alignment/misalignment patterns through the lenses of critical, democratic, and global citizenship and the theme of national ideological continuity.

Design/methodology/approach: A qualitative documentary analysis and qualitative textual analysis of the Social Studies curriculum for grades 4–7 was conducted. The was systematically coded to ICCS’s 12 sub-dimensions.

Findings: The curriculum prioritises cognitive and content dimensions—especially reasoning and applying—while attitudes and engagement are comparatively underrepresented.

Research limitations/implications: Findings are limited to 2024 curriculum, the school grades 4–7 and the ICCS framework. Classroom enactment, teacher choices, and students’ lived experiences were not observed.

Practical implications: Mapping Türkiye’s Social Studies curriculum to ICCS reveals strength on cognitive and content dimensions and weakness on attitudes/engagement dimension, indicating the need to more visibly integrate transformative democratic citizenship into the curriculum (e.g., action civics, authentic participation tasks, assessment rubrics that capture participation dispositions and value-based decision-making).

Keywords: citizenship education, ICCS, curriculum, social studies, Türkiye

Corresponding author:

Zafer KUŞ, Department of Social Studies, Faculty of Education, Kırşehir Ahi Evran University, Türkiye.
E-Mail: zaferkus@gmail.com

Suggested citation:

Kuş, Zafer (2026). Skill-based reform or rhetoric? Analysing the citizenship curriculum in Türkiye with the ICCS framework. *Journal of Social Science Education*, 25(1).
<https://doi.org/10.11576/jsse-8406>

 Open access



1 INTRODUCTION

Over the past two decades, there has been a marked erosion in democratic values, human rights, and civic consciousness worldwide. As underscored by Freedom House (Gorokhovskaia & Grothe, 2025), freedoms have declined consecutively across the globe; regional conflicts, authoritarian drift, and political pressures have weakened the functioning of democratic processes. Similarly, findings from the International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS) 2022 (Schulz, Ainley et al., 2023) indicate pronounced inequalities among students in civic knowledge, democratic attitudes, and participation. This picture renders the role of education even more critical for the future of democracy. The United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development has set ambitious targets to mitigate global challenges and to build peaceful lives through education (Westheimer, 2020). In the same vein, the Asia Society/OECD (2018) report regards the development of global competence as essential for individuals to participate effectively in local, national, and global public life. In this context, a "critical citizenship" approach emerges as a bulwark against democratic erosion; it is supported through curriculum reforms that aim not only to promote knowledge acquisition, but also to cultivate critical thinking, respect for diversity, and a sense of global responsibility (Banks, 2017; Osler & Starkey, 2018). Although many countries frame their reforms in the language of skills and competences, the aims and contents of citizenship education are, in practice, frequently shaped by national identity building, securitisation, and ideological orientations (Apple, 2014; Ben-Porath, 2006; Şiraz & Bay, 2021; Westheimer & Kahne, 2004). This duality opens a global debate over how far citizenship education can be emancipatory and critical.

Türkiye's recent curriculum reform—the "Century of Türkiye Education Model"—sits squarely within these tensions. While its official discourse emphasises a "skills-based curriculum," questions remain as to whether, beyond the rhetoric, the curriculum is anchored in an ideological framework centred on national identity and religious values. The label "Century of Türkiye" featured prominently as a governing party slogan during the election period. Against this backdrop, it is debatable whether the new citizenship curriculum orients students towards critical and global citizenship or instead consolidates a more ideologically driven model of citizenship.

This study aims to analyse Türkiye's citizenship curriculum through the ICCS as a comparative international framework. We examine the extent to which the curriculum aligns with ICCS content dimension and with its cognitive and attitudinal dimensions. In doing so, the study seeks to determine whether the new curriculum advances an approach to citizenship that is skills-based, critical, democratic, and global, or whether it primarily reinstates a knowledge-heavy, traditional transmission model. To date, Türkiye has not participated in the ICCS rounds conducted by the IEA, creating a notable gap in understanding the country's position within cross-national comparisons of citizenship education. Addressing this gap, the present study systematically relates Türkiye's citizenship curriculum to ICCS content, cognitive and attitudinal dimensions. It thus offers a context-sensitive contribution for Türkiye while also bringing the Turkish case into the global comparative literature on citizenship education.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: CITIZENSHIP BETWEEN NATIONAL BELONGING AND CRITICAL–GLOBAL ORIENTATIONS

2.1 Citizenship education

Citizenship is a multi-dimensional status that, in addition to the rights and responsibilities arising from membership in a nation-state, also confers a social identity on individuals. With the rise of nation-states, citizenship was largely constructed around national identity; a common language, culture, and historical memory became the principal elements strengthening the sense of belonging (Anderson, 1991; Smith, 1991). Accordingly, citizenship education has sought to socialise younger generations as individuals who identify with the values of the state and are prepared to sustain social order; in many countries, education has thus functioned as an instrument for reinforcing national loyalty (Banks, 2008; Copeaux, 1997/2014; Heater, 2004).

In the twenty-first century, however, citizenship education has encountered new tensions. Challenges such as global migration, climate change, human rights violations, pandemics, and digital security issues have made it necessary for education to encompass not only national attachment but also global responsibility, solidarity, and critical engagement. In many countries, framed by a ‘crisis’ narrative, citizenship education is viewed as a general remedy for young people’s political/social disengagement and the erosion of social cohesion (Holford, 2008). The European Union and many states have sought to mainstream programmes of active and participatory citizenship; in this respect, the Council of Europe’s (2016) Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture models the competences expected of an ‘effective, participating citizen’. The United Nations and UNESCO (2015)—through the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2004–2014) and the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals—have likewise underscored the role of education in social transformation.

Nevertheless, a growing tension persists between the aims of reinforcing national belonging and cultivating a sense of global responsibility within citizenship education. The literature conceptualises these divergent orientations through several typologies. Westheimer and Kahne (2004), for instance, distinguish ‘personally responsible,’ ‘participatory,’ and ‘justice-oriented’ citizenship; Banks (2017) approaches citizenship with an explicit emphasis on social transformation. Leenders and Veugelers (2006) highlight the tension between conforming citizenship and critical democratic citizenship, while Dalton (2008) differentiates between duty-based and participatory citizenship. Taken together, these debates suggest that citizenship education continues to struggle to move beyond the binary between national identity transmission and more critical democratic orientations.

2.2 Critical citizenship

Amid democratic backsliding, widening inequalities, and transnational risks, critical citizenship has gained salience as an ethical–political mode of subjecthood that reaches beyond legal status. A critical citizen does more than know their rights and responsibilities; they interrogate injustice and power relations, engage in dialogue across difference, and participate in democratic life through public reasoning and collective action in ways that are both effective and transformative (Biesta & Lawy, 2006; Freire, 1970/2018).

As Westheimer and Kahne's (2004) typology highlights, the goal is not the personally responsible citizen but the participatory and justice-oriented one. Similarly, Andreotti's (2006) call for critical rather than "soft" global citizenship renders inequalities, representation, and power visible, thereby deepening cosmopolitan responsibility and solidarity. Isin and Nielsen's (2008) notion of "acts of citizenship" likewise treats citizenship not as a static identity but as a repertoire of border-crossing, claim-making practices. Taken together, critical citizenship is a normative-practical orientation that brings into focus structural critique, ethical encounters with difference, a culture of public deliberation, rights-based collective action, and responsibility at a global scale. It positions learners as agents who can confront global challenges and contribute solutions through human-rights and sustainability perspectives.

The school—often described as a "mini-society" offering shared time and space—strengthens the idea that democratic citizenship can be renewed through education (Print et al., 2002). In this view, schooling is positioned not merely as a means of reproducing national loyalty but as a site for cultivating an inclusive, human-rights-oriented democratic culture (Banks, 2008; Osler & Starkey, 2005). This function requires a framework for citizenship education that extends beyond knowledge and compliance to include autonomous subject formation (Biesta, 2009).

Yet practice often reveals sharp contradictions. While many education systems promote critical thinking, deliberation, and participation, they simultaneously reframe or constrain curricula in the name of national unity, security, and ideological stability. This tension is especially visible in societies marked by migration, diversity, and religious/cultural plurality, where students are expected both to become justice-oriented citizens respectful of difference and to cohere around state loyalty and national identity (Leenders & Veugelers, 2006; Osler & Starkey, 2005).

This dual orientation creates a deep-seated fault line at the heart of citizenship education: Should education cultivate critical, transformative citizens, or should it reproduce ideological continuity within national boundaries? The question is global rather than uniquely Turkish. However, in Türkiye the dilemma has become particularly salient with the 2024 curriculum reform, which simultaneously amplifies themes of values and belonging while, in the very same text, invoking aims of critical thinking, participation, and inclusion—thereby institutionalising the structural tension.

2.3 ICCS framework

The International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) has made substantial contributions to the field of citizenship education by developing assessment instruments and compiling rich cross-national datasets (Torney-Purta, 2002). Its pioneering Civic Education Study began in 1971, and a second wave in 1999 (CIVED 1999) further strengthened the theoretical and measurement bases for examining democratic citizenship internationally (Amadeo et al., 2002; Torney et al., 1975). Building on CIVED, ICCS enables cross-cohort comparisons of attitudes and is among the most comprehensive comparative programmes evaluating students' civic knowledge, attitudes, and participation (Barber & Torney-Purta, 2012). Implemented first in 2009 and repeated in 2016 and 2022, ICCS enables participating countries to track changes in Grade 8 students' civic outcomes over time (Schulz, Fraillon et al., 2023).

ICCS aims to analyse—within a comparative framework—students' levels of civic knowledge, their orientations toward democratic values, their school- and community-based participation experiences, and their prospective civic dispositions. The ICCS 2009 assessment framework is

organised around three dimensions (Schulz et al., 2011): (a) a content domains dimension—civic society and systems; civic principles; civic participation; civic identities; (b) a cognitive processes dimension—ranging from knowing to reasoning and applying; and (c) an affective-behavioural dimension—covering attitudes toward civic principles, institutions, and public issues, as well as participation-related experiences, intentions, and expectations for future engagement. The ICCS 2022 assessment framework, by contrast, is presented in two main parts (Schulz, Fraillon et al., 2023): (1) civic knowledge, structured through four content domains and two cognitive domains; and (2) civic attitudes and engagement, comprising three domains for attitudes and three domains for engagement. By linking civic knowledge and cognitive processing with attitudes and engagement, ICCS resists reducing citizenship education to purely cognitive outputs and foregrounds democratic commitments, awareness of rights and responsibilities, participation practices, and identity formation.

2.4 A historical evolution in citizenship education in Türkiye

Since the founding of the Republic, citizenship education in Türkiye has consistently carried an ideological charge. In the early Republican period, citizenship—integral to nation-state building—was defined through secularism, modernisation, and national identity; education policy was conceived as the principal vehicle for transmitting the values of the new regime (Kuş, 2020; Üstel, 2018). Accordingly, curricula cast the “good citizen” as loyal to the state, prioritising national unity and cohesion, and aligned with modernisation goals. After 1980, citizenship education was reframed along more explicitly nationalist and religious lines. In the wake of the Cold War, heightened security concerns and growing polarisation created the conditions for reorganising the curriculum around national unity, patriotism, and religious values. This phase is marked by instances where citizenship served less to foster democratic participation than to consolidate ideological coherence.

Over the past two decades, Türkiye has implemented several notable reforms in citizenship education (see Table 1). The 2005 reform introduced a constructivist orientation and was widely regarded as a major shift; in 2018, the curriculum was revised with a strengthened emphasis on values education; and most recently, the 2024 reform was enacted. The most recent reform, presented under the banner of the “Century of Türkiye Education Model,” reflects both continuity and change in this trajectory. While the official discourse foregrounds a “skills-based,” “contemporary,” and “student-centred” approach, critical readings contend that, at the level of content, national and religious values are placed at the centre, whereas global orientations—such as gender equality and critical citizenship—are pushed to the margins. Thus, even as the reform appears to align with global competence/skills rhetoric, it has been criticised for advancing ideologically driven aims.

2.5 Research aim and questions

Although citizenship education in Türkiye has historically been shaped by shifting ideological orientations, most existing research remains confined to the national context, and Türkiye’s position within the ICCS framework has not been examined systematically. Because Türkiye has not participated in ICCS cycles, there is a significant gap in understanding where the Social Studies Curriculum of the Century of Türkiye Educational Model (MoNE, 2024) sits on an international

comparative scale. To address this gap, the present study conducts a systematic analysis of the new curriculum against the ICCS 2022 Assessment Framework, mapping the extent to which it covers ICCS domains of the content domains (civic institutions and systems, civic principles, civic participation, civic roles and identities), processes of the cognitive domain (knowing; reasoning and applying), and attitudes/engagement of the affective-behavioural domain (attitudes toward principles and institutions/public issues; experiences of participation, dispositions toward participation, and expectations of future engagement).

The overarching aim is to determine the degree to which Türkiye's new citizenship curriculum aligns with critical, democratic, and global citizenship orientations and, conversely, the extent to which it reproduces national ideological continuity. Accordingly, the study addresses the following research question: To what extent is the Social Studies curriculum introduced with the 2024 reform aligned with the ICCS 2022 Assessment Framework's content, cognitive, and attitudes/engagement dimensions?

This study adopts the ICCS as its conceptual anchor. Türkiye's absence from ICCS cycles to date makes it particularly relevant to examine how the current citizenship curriculum aligns with this international framework. In doing so, the study addresses a gap in the literature and positions citizenship education in Türkiye more precisely within a cross-national comparative context (Amadeo et al., 2002; Torney et al., 1975; Schulz, Fraillon et al., 2023). In doing so, the study offers an ICCS-based, scalable, and reproducible mapping of Türkiye's current curriculum, generating an original contribution to both the national discussion and the comparative education literature by juxtaposing indicators of critical/democratic/global citizenship with the theme of ideological continuity within a single analytical lens.

3 METHOD

3.1 Data collection

This study employs a qualitative documentary analysis to systematically align and interpret the 2024 Social Studies curriculum with the ICCS framework. The data *corpus* for this study comprises the Social Studies curricula for Grades 4, 5, 6, and 7 promulgated under the 2024 reform. These documents were selected because they are official and current, and because they provide a comprehensive articulation of program aims, learning outcomes, core knowledge/learning areas, and assessment criteria. Examining these documents offers a robust basis for determining the extent to which Türkiye's new curriculum aligns with international standards, specifically the ICCS framework.

Table 1. Major curriculum reforms in Türkiye and the citizenship education emphases in official discourse

Year	Reform	Citizenship education emphasis in official discourse
2005	Constructivist curriculum	Student-centred learning; active participation; development of critical thinking and problem-solving skills.
2018	Revised curriculum	Strengthening values education; fostering national and moral values; preservation of cultural identity.
2024	Century of Türkiye-Educational Model	Skills-based learning; holistic development; prioritisation of core values and competencies; preparing individuals suited to contemporary demands.

3.2 Data analysis / Assessment framework

The analysis adopted the ICCS 2022 Assessment Framework as its reference point (Schulz, Fraillon et al., 2023). The framework is presented in two main parts: (1) Civic knowledge (four content domains and two cognitive domains) and (2) Civic attitudes and engagement (three domains for Attitudes and three domains for Engagement), yielding 12 domains in total (see Table 2).

Table 2. Frameworks and dimensions of ICCS for curricular analysis

Framework	Dimension	Sub-dimension
Civic knowledge	Content domains	Civic institutions and systems
		Civic principles
		Civic participation
		Civic roles and identities
	Cognitive domains	Knowing
		Reasoning and applying
Civic attitudes and engagement	Attitudes	Attitudes towards civic principles
		Attitudes towards civic issues and institutions
		Attitudes towards civic roles and identities
	Engagement	Experiences with engagement
		Dispositions towards engagement
		Expected future engagement

The ICCS (2022) framework provides detailed conceptual definitions and content scopes for each subdimension of citizenship education. In this study, the definitions and indicators associated with the 12 ICCS subdimensions were operationalised, and a coding scheme (codebook) was developed that specified inclusion/exclusion criteria and decision rules for each subdimension. The unit of analysis consisted of curriculum statements, including the overall aims and learning outcomes in the Social Studies curriculum. Coding was conducted through a two-step procedure. In the first step, all learning outcomes were manually coded by the researcher using the ICCS-based codebook. Each learning outcome was assigned to a single dominant ICCS subdimension, based on its primary emphasis and intended purpose. Decision-making criteria included the focus of the learning outcome, the verbs used, and explicit textual cues indicating levels of public action or civic engagement. In the second step, a generative AI tool produced pre-coding suggestions using the same coding scheme. This step was designed not as an independent analysis, but as a comparative consistency-checking procedure to support the researcher’s coding. Researcher-assigned codes and AI-generated suggestions were systematically compared, revealing an agreement rate of approximately 90%. In cases of disagreement, the relevant learning outcomes were flagged and re-examined by the researcher through a renewed semantic analysis grounded in the ICCS subdimension definitions, and a final code was assigned in a second coding round. Final decisions were based on the conceptual boundaries of the ICCS framework and explicit textual evidence within the learning outcomes, and brief justification notes documenting the resolution of disagreements were recorded.

4 FINDINGS

The analysis indicates that, within the Social Studies curriculum, the ICCS dimensions are prioritised in the following order: ‘Cognitive domain’, followed by ‘Content’, ‘Engagement’, and ‘Attitudes’ (Table 3). Accordingly, the curriculum places greater emphasis on ‘Cognitive’ and ‘Content’ dimensions of civic/citizenship education, while ‘Attitudes’ and ‘Engagement’ receive comparatively limited attention.

Table 3. Distribution of ICCS “Civic knowledge” and “Civic attitudes and engagement” in the Social Studies Curriculum (%)

Framework	Dimension	Sub-dimension	%
Civic knowledge (90%)	Content domains (24%)	Civic institutions and systems	9,8
		Civic principles	7,1
		Civic participation	2,8
		Civic roles and identities	4,3
	Cognitive domains (66%)	Knowing	22,4
		Reasoning and applying	43,6
Civic attitudes and engagement (10%)	Attitudes (4,2%)	Attitudes towards civic principles	1
		Attitudes towards civic issues and institutions	1,6
		Attitudes towards civic roles and identities	1,6
	Engagement (5,8%)	Experiences with engagement	4,6
		Dispositions towards engagement	0,8
		Expected future engagement	0,4

Note: Percentages refer to the distribution of coded curriculum units (aims + learning outcomes), with 100% = all coded units (N). For example, 9.8% means that 9.8% of units were coded as ‘Civic institutions and systems’. As one dominant ICCS subdimension was assigned per unit, the totals sum to 100%

4.1 Civic knowledge

4.1.1 Cognitive domain

Within the ‘Cognitive’ domain, the most salient emphasis falls on the subdomain ‘Reasoning and Applying’ (43.6%). Learning outcomes prioritise the use of knowledge for interpretation, inference, identifying inconsistencies, inquiry, and problem solving, rather than mere recall. The targeted applications cluster around environment and sustainability, disaster-risk reduction, economic development, the social implications of scientific/technological change, the functioning of democratic institutions, and generating solutions to social problems. The curriculum also expects students to employ social-science methods, develop strategies, and make evidence-based inferences. Illustrative outcomes include:

Questioning human–environment interactions from local to global scales for a sustainable life. (Republic of Türkiye, Ministry of National Education [MoNE], 2024, p. 4)

Providing reasons about the societal effects of technological developments; detecting inconsistencies in debates on these effects. (MoNE, 2024, p. 61)

The ‘Knowing’ subdomain (22.4%) focuses on students’ ability to define, sequence, and recognise core concepts and facts. Prominent content includes the natural and human environment, cultural heritage, social change, and national history. For example:

Identifies the contributions of Mesopotamian and Anatolian civilisations.

Defines a topic of interest regarding the policies that enabled the Ottoman Empire to become a world power.

4.1.2 Content domain

Within the ‘Content’ domain (24%), the largest share is allocated to ‘Civic institutions and systems’ (9.8%), centred on the political, social, and cultural contributions of the Republic, state tradition and institutional continuity, economic systems, and Türkiye’s regional/global role. ‘Civic principles’ (7.1%) foregrounds democratic values such as responsibility, solidarity, fundamental rights, cultural heritage, and sustainability. ‘Civic roles and identities’ (4.3%) addresses identity formation and social belonging, while ‘Civic participation’ (2.8%) targets the development of democratic participation and communication skills. Overall, the distribution suggests a priority on institutional structures and functioning, with values, identity, and participation treated as secondary. Examples include:

Identifies factors influencing the decision-making process of governance. (‘Civic institutions and systems’)

Identifies Türkiye’s resources and the characteristics of its economic activities. (‘Civic institutions and systems’)

Identifies relationships between groups and roles. (‘Civic roles and identities’)

Recognises democratic participation processes. (‘Civic participation’)

4.2 Civic attitudes and engagement

4.2.1 Engagement

The ‘Civic attitudes and engagement’ dimension is comparatively underrepresented (10%). Within ‘Engagement’, the most visible component is ‘Experiences with engagement’ (4.6%). Here, the curriculum emphasises students’ opportunities to experience democratic participation, develop communication and collaboration skills, assume responsibility for safeguarding cultural heritage, and produce artefacts/solutions addressing social problems. By contrast, ‘Dispositions toward engagement’ (0.8%)—aimed at fostering awareness of the importance of democratic participation—and ‘Expected future engagement’ (0.4%)—intended to build sensitivity to preventive measures (e.g., against disasters) and to future civic roles—are only minimally reflected.

Illustrative outcomes include:

Plans and conducts research addressing a social problem. (‘Experiences with engagement’)

Recognizes the importance of democratic participation and begins to experience participation processes starting from the immediate environment. (‘Dispositions toward engagement’)

4.2.2 Attitudes

The ‘Attitudes’ subdimension is also limited in scope. Indicators related to ‘Commitment to democratic values’, ‘Institutional trust’, and ‘Social belonging’ occupy a relatively narrow space in the curriculum, suggesting that affective orientations are not as systematically operationalised (e.g., through explicit criteria, rubrics, or task designs) as cognitive and content elements.

5 DISCUSSION

5.1 Discussion of findings

This study analysed Türkiye's citizenship curriculum through the lens of the ICCS as an internationally comparative reference framework. The findings indicate that the Social Studies curriculum constructs citizenship education primarily around content domains and cognitive domains, while allocating relatively limited emphasis to attitudes and engagement. This distribution supports the acquisition of a substantial knowledge base and the development of reasoning and application skills, particularly within the 'Reasoning and applying' subdomain. However, it simultaneously creates notable gaps in terms of experiencing democratic participation, expanding repertoires of public action, and fostering institutional trust.

At this point, a long-standing distinction in citizenship education becomes visible once again: Does the curriculum promote an adaptive model prioritising knowledge and rule compliance, or a participatory/transformational model oriented toward critical engagement and social change? Westheimer and Kahne's (2004) typology clarifies this distinction between the personally responsible citizen and the participatory and justice-oriented citizen. The present findings suggest that the curriculum aligns more closely with the former, indicating a citizenship model that privileges responsibility and compliance over collective action and critical transformation. This imbalance corresponds to a pedagogical configuration in which citizenship is framed as something to be known and taught rather than practised and experienced. As the school's preparatory function for democracy is reduced to knowledge transmission, opportunities for young people to actively engage in public action, deliberation, and critical reasoning become increasingly limited. In this respect, the findings resonate with calls to move from "taught citizenship" to "lived democracy" (Biesta & Lawy, 2006).

The marginal positioning of attitudes and engagement further reinforces the impression that practices associated with critical and global citizenship are rendered secondary within the programme. Andreotti's (2006) distinction between "soft" and "critical" global citizenship highlights the limitations of curricular approaches that emphasise values while leaving structural inequalities and power relations unexamined; in this case, the weak visibility of the attitudes–engagement axis points to a citizenship design in which values are insufficiently translated into public responsibility and action. Similarly, Banks (2008) argues that in increasingly diverse societies, citizenship education must move beyond assimilationist frameworks by strengthening participation and justice-oriented dimensions; otherwise, it risks producing a knowledge-based yet narrowly framed citizenship profile. Comparative research supports this pattern: across many countries, cognitive and content dimensions tend to dominate, while attitudinal and participatory components remain underdeveloped—an imbalance that can foster forms of passive citizenship distancing students from social action, civic engagement, and activism (Joris & Agirdag, 2019; Navarro-Medina et al., 2025).

In the Turkish context, although the Century of Türkiye Educational Model (2024) publicly foregrounds a "skills-based" and "student-centred" discourse, the findings indicate that citizenship learning continues to be structured mainly around knowledge transmission and cognitive outcomes, with limited space for the internalisation of democratic values and the cultivation of participatory practices. To the extent that skills are not systematically linked to public action and

civic engagement, the claim of “skills-based reform” functions less as substantive transformation and more as a rhetorical framing. This pattern reflects the tension identified by Leenders and Veugelers (2006) between critical/participatory educational aims and priorities centred on national unity and security—a tension that is clearly observable in Türkiye’s citizenship narrative.

This tension becomes more explicit when viewed against the recent trajectory of curriculum reform. The citizenship understanding shaped around the discourse of “values education” in the 2018 curriculum update is reformulated in 2024 through the language of skills. Whereas the 2018 framework largely framed citizenship around moral norms, social cohesion, and cultural continuity, the 2024 model more explicitly consolidates citizenship imaginaries around national identity, national unity, social solidarity, and historical continuity. From an ICCS perspective, this shift increases the likelihood that the balance between universal democratic norms—such as human rights, pluralism, negotiation across difference, and critical public reasoning—and national values tilts toward the national axis. In this configuration, the strong emphasis on cognitive dimensions coupled with limited engagement components situates citizenship education closer to a “knowing–understanding–complying” trajectory than to one that expands repertoires of rights-claiming and public action. Consequently, the gap between reform discourse and the instructional architecture of participation risks reinforcing patterns of passive citizenship.

Finally, it is important to note that this study is limited to an analysis of the written curriculum within the ICCS framework. In centralised education systems such as Türkiye’s, however, the effects of citizenship education are not determined solely by official learning outcomes. Elements of the hidden curriculum—including teachers’ pedagogical orientations and citizenship conceptions, school climate, classroom interaction norms, and assessment practices—play a decisive role in shaping how the written programme is enacted and which citizenship experiences become possible in practice. Indeed, our previous research in Türkiye demonstrates that teachers interpret the curriculum in diverse ways (Kuş et al., in press) and that their citizenship understandings significantly influence how the programme is represented at the classroom level (Kuş & Doğu, 2025). Therefore, while the present findings provide a robust indicator of the written curriculum’s orientations, future research would benefit from triangulating curriculum analysis with classroom observations, textbook analyses, and school-level data to more fully capture the practical outcomes of citizenship education.

5.2 Limitations

This study is limited to the official Social Studies curriculum for Grades 4–7. Accordingly, the findings reflect analyses of the curriculum’s stated aims and learning outcomes. Classroom enactment, teachers’ pedagogical choices, and students’ actual learning experiences fall outside the scope of this research. In addition, because the analysis is bounded by the ICCS framework, it prioritises dimensions that enable international comparison, rather than capturing the full breadth of citizenship education as it unfolds in Türkiye’s national context.

5.3 Implications

Conceptually, the resulting curriculum profile shows relatively high alignment with the knowledge–cognition dimensions of ICCS but limited alignment with attitudes–engagement. For “learning democracy,” two minimal building blocks—experiential participation and affective/value-oriented outcomes—need to be integrated into the curriculum in more visible,

measurable, and sustainable ways. Policy and practice can address this gap by: (i) scaling action civics cycles inside and outside the classroom; (ii) directly linking authentic participation designs—student councils, participatory budgeting simulations, partnerships with local NGOs—to curriculum goals; and (iii) introducing assessment rubrics that track not only cognitive outcomes but also participation dispositions and value-based decision-making. Such a shift would cultivate students who are not only strong in knowledge and reasoning but also attuned to democratic processes, critical, and active as citizens.

This study demonstrates that, when mapped against the ICCS framework, Türkiye’s Social Studies curriculum exhibits a strong profile in cognitive and content dimensions but a weaker profile in attitudes and engagement. These findings point to the need to integrate the transformative components of democratic citizenship into the curriculum in more visible, measurable, and sustainable ways. Such a shift would preserve the curriculum’s emphasis on knowledge and reasoning while putting in place the institutional and pedagogical conditions necessary to educate students who are not only academically equipped but also attuned to democratic processes, critically minded, and actively engaged as citizens.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This paper used a large language model (LLM) for language editing. The author carefully reviewed and revised all AI-generated outputs to ensure accuracy, originality, and alignment with the research objectives.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

REFERENCES

- Amadeo, J., Torney-Purta, J., Lehmann, R., Husfeldt, V., & Nikolova, R. (2002). *Civic knowledge and engagement: An IEA study of upper secondary students in sixteen countries*. International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA).
<https://www.iea.nl/publications/study-reports/international-reports-iea-studies/civic-knowledge-and-engagement>
- Anderson, B. (1991). *Imagined communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism* (Rev. ed.). Verso.
- Andreotti, V. (2006). Soft versus critical global citizenship education. *Policy & Practice: A Development Education Review*, 3, 40–51.
<https://www.developmenteducationreview.com/issue/issue-3/soft-versus-critical-global-citizenship-education>
- Apple, M. W. (2014). *Official knowledge: Democratic education in a conservative age* (3rd ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203814383>
- Banks, J. A. (2008). Diversity, group identity, and citizenship education in a global age. *Educational Researcher*, 37(3), 129–139. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X08317501>

- Banks, J. A. (Ed.). (2017). *Citizenship education and global migration: Implications for theory, research, and teaching*. American Educational Research Association.
<https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv138wrq5>
- Barber, C., & Torney-Purta, J. (2012). Comparing attitudes in the 1999 and 2009 IEA Civic and Citizenship Education Studies: Opportunities and limitations illustrated in five countries. *Journal of Social Science Education*, 11(1), 47–63. <https://doi.org/10.4119/jsse-590>
- Ben-Porath, S. R. (2006). *Citizenship under fire: Democratic education in times of conflict*. Princeton University Press.
- Biesta, G. (2009). Sporadic democracy: Education, democracy, and the question of inclusion. In M. S. Katz, S. Verducci, & G. Biesta (Eds.), *Education, democracy, and the moral life* (pp. 139–154). Springer.
- Biesta, G., & Lawy, R. S. (2006). From teaching citizenship to learning democracy: Overcoming individualism in research, policy and practice. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 36(1), 63–79. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057640500490981>
- Copeaux, É. (2014). *Tarih ders kitaplarında (1931–1993): Türk Tarih Tezi'nden Türk-İslâm sentezine* [History textbooks (1931–1993): from the Turkish history thesis to the Turkish-Islamic synthesis] (A. Berktaş, Trans.). İletişim Yayınları. (Original work published in 1997)
- Council of Europe. (2016). *Competences for democratic culture: Living together as equals in culturally diverse democratic societies*. Council of Europe. <https://rm.coe.int/16806ccc07>
- Dalton, R. J. (2008). Citizenship norms and the expansion of political participation. *Political Studies*, 56(1), 76–98. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9248.2007.00718.x>
- Freire, P. (2018). *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (50th anniversary ed.). Bloomsbury Academic. (Original work published 1970)
- Gorokhovskaia, Y., & Grothe, C. (2025). *Freedom in the world 2025: The uphill battle to safeguard rights*. Freedom House. <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2025/uphill-battle-to-safeguard-rights>
- Heater, D. (2004). *A history of education for citizenship*. Routledge.
- Holford, J. (2008). Hard measures for soft stuff: Citizenship indicators and educational policy under the Lisbon strategy. *European Educational Research Journal*, 7(3), 331–343. <https://doi.org/10.2304/eeerj.2008.7.3.331>
- Isin, E. F., & Nielsen, G. M. (Eds.). (2008). *Acts of citizenship*. Zed Books.
- Joris, M., & Agirdag, O. (2019). In search of good citizenship education: A normative analysis of the International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS). *European Journal of Education*, 54(2), 287–298. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ejed.12331>
- Kuş, Z. (2020). *Türkiye’de ve dünyada vatandaşlık eğitimi* [Citizenship education in Turkey and around the world]. Pegem Akademi.
- Kuş, Z., & Doğu, B. (2025). Sense-making of citizenship norms by teachers in Turkey: Conservative, liberal, or critical? *Citizenship Teaching & Learning*, 20(3), 335–360. https://doi.org/10.1386/ctl_00190_1

- Kuş, Z., Torunoğlu, H., & Elvan, Ö. (in press). *Turkey's ideological transformation in citizenship education: Teachers' sense-making of the new curriculum reform*. *The Social Studies*.
- Leenders, H., & Veugelers, W. (2006). Different perspectives on values and citizenship education. *Curriculum and Teaching, 21*(2), 5–21.
- Navarro-Medina, E., Ross, E. W., Pérez-Rodríguez, N., & De-Alba-Fernández, N. (2025). Towards an ideal model of education for critical citizenship. An analysis of the Spanish curricular change in social sciences. *European Journal of Education, 60*(1), e70010. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ejed.70010>
- OECD. (2018). *Preparing our youth for an inclusive and sustainable world: The OECD PISA global competence framework*. OECD Publishing.
- Osler, A., & Starkey, H. (2005). *Changing citizenship: Democracy and inclusion in education*. Open University Press.
- Osler, A., & Starkey, H. (2018). Extending the theory and practice of education for cosmopolitan citizenship. *Educational Review, 70*(1), 31–40. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131911.2018.1388616>
- Print, M., Ørnstrøm, S., & Nielsen, H. S. (2002). Education for democratic processes in schools and classrooms. *European Journal of Education, 37*(2), 193–210. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-3435.00102>
- Republic of Türkiye, Ministry of National Education. (2024). *Sosyal Bilgiler Dersi Öğretim Programı (İlkokul ve Ortaokul 4, 5, 6 ve 7. Sınıflar)* [Social studies curriculum (primary and secondary school grades 4, 5, 6 and 7)]. MoNE.
- Schulz, W., Ainley, J., Fraillon, J., Kerr, D., & Losito, B. (2011). *ICCS 2009 international report: Civic knowledge, attitudes, and engagement among lower-secondary school students in 38 countries*. International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA).
- Schulz, W., Ainley, J., Cox, C., Friedman, T., & Losito, B. (2023). *ICCS 2022 international report: Education for citizenship in times of global challenge*. International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA). <https://www.iea.nl/sites/default/files/2023-12/ICCS-2022-International-Report.pdf>
- Schulz, W., Fraillon, J., Losito, B., Agrusti, G., Ainley, J., Damiani, V., & Friedman, T. (2023). *IEA International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS) 2022: Assessment framework*. Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER). <https://research.acer.edu.au/civics/35/>
- Smith, A. D. (1991). *National identity*. University of Nevada Press.
- Şiraz, F., & Bay, E. (2021). Understanding the social studies curricula in Turkey as a political text within the context of citizenship education: Views of academics and teachers. *International Education Studies, 14*(6), 34–52. <https://doi.org/10.5539/ies.v14n6p34>
- Torney, J. V., Oppenheim, A. N., & Farnen, R. F. (1975). *Civic education in ten countries: An empirical study*. Halsted. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000054607>
- Torney-Purta, J. (2002). Patterns in the civic knowledge, engagement, and attitudes of European adolescents: The IEA Civic Education Study. *European Journal of Education, 37*(2), 129–141. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-3435.00098>

- UNESCO. (2015). *Global citizenship education: Topics and learning objectives*. UNESCO.
<https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000232993>
- Üstel, F. (2018). *Makbul vatandaşın peşinde: II. Meşrutiyet'ten bugüne vatandaşlık eğitimi* [In pursuit of the ideal citizen: Citizenship education from the Second Constitutional Era to the present]. İletişim Yayınları.
- Westheimer, J. (2020). Can education transform the world? *Kappa Delta Pi Record*, 56(1), 6–12.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00228958.2020.1696085>
- Westheimer, J., & Kahne, J. (2004). What kind of citizen? The politics of educating for democracy. *American Educational Research Journal*, 41(2), 237–269.
<https://doi.org/10.3102/00028312041002237>

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Zafer Kuş is a Professor in the Department of Social Studies Education at the Faculty of Education, Kırşehir Ahi Evran University, Türkiye. His research interests include citizenship education, identity, political education, and digital citizenship. He has published widely in international journals and presented his work at numerous international conferences. Since 2020, he has served as the Secretary-General of the Social Studies Educators Association.