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Article Name	Seventh-Grade Students' Perspective on Non-Governmental Organization

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Abstract

Individuals can encounter non-governmental organizations (NGOs), one of the most significant experiences of citizenship, during the early stages of their education. Individuals with foundational experiences at the primary school level, as they reach the middle school level, gain the opportunity to better understand the meaning and importance of NGOs through social studies and equivalent courses. Determining how students perceive NGOs at the end of this educational period is crucial in shaping education about NGOs and citizenship education. This study aimed to reveal the middle school 7th-grade students' point of view on the NGO and NGO-citizen relationship. The study was carried out as a qualitative study. The qualitative study sample consisted of 39 (20 females, 19 males) 7th-grade students selected with purposive sampling methods. The data collected with open-ended questions were analyzed with content analysis. As a result of the study, it was determined that the students considered NGOs in terms of helping people and volunteerism. On the other hand, it was also seen that the students did not mention the political characteristics of the NGOs. It was found that students have a perspective of looking out for mutual benefit in the relationship between the NGO and the citizenship. In addition, all the students emphasized the responsibility to support the NGOs. Nevertheless, this mentioned support was more financial, and there was not enough emphasis on the support provided by social and political participation.

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Research Article**Seventh-Grade Students' Perspective on Non-Governmental Organization***Fidaye CİNCİL¹  Kerem ÇOLAK² **Abstract**

Individuals can encounter non-governmental organizations (NGOs), one of the most significant experiences of citizenship, during the early stages of their education. Individuals with foundational experiences at the primary school level, as they reach the middle school level, gain the opportunity to better understand the meaning and importance of NGOs through social studies and equivalent courses. Determining how students perceive NGOs at the end of this educational period is crucial in shaping education about NGOs and citizenship education. This study aimed to reveal the middle school 7th-grade students' point of view on the NGO and NGO-citizen relationship. The study was carried out as a qualitative study. The qualitative study sample consisted of 39 (20 females, 19 males) 7th-grade students selected with purposive sampling methods. The data collected with open-ended questions were analyzed with content analysis. As a result of the study, it was determined that the students considered NGOs in terms of helping people and volunteerism. On the other hand, it was also seen that the students did not mention the political characteristics of the NGOs. It was found that students have a perspective of looking out for mutual benefit in the relationship between the NGO and the citizenship. In addition, all the students emphasized the responsibility to support the NGOs. Nevertheless, this mentioned support was more financial, and there was not enough emphasis on the support provided by social and political participation.

Keywords: Citizenship education, social studies education, students' perspective, NGO

1. INTRODUCTION

A non-governmental organization (NGO) is any association that independently addresses various social issues, takes on the duty of training and informing the public, and recommends numerous topics (TDK, 2022). With their organizational structures and emergence goals, non-governmental organizations carry out a variety of tasks. They are accountable for a wide range of things, including social welfare, environmental values, health and safety, and education (Willetts, 2002). In this sense, NGOs link the government and civil society in various areas, such as natural disasters, violence, environment, education, and violation of individual rights and freedoms.

Although NGOs are made up of a wide variety of structures, their common goal is to focus on long-term issues (climate change, human rights and democracy, etc.) (Hall-Jones, 2006). They provide this through services (such as aid and shelter), education, raising awareness, and defending the public interest (Stromquist, 2002). They promote social participation by assisting interest groups and facilitating participant involvement (Abiddin, Ibrahim & Abdul Aziz, 2022).

In this section, education from general to specific, social studies education and in this context, the relationship between social participation and NGO will be summarized first. Then, justifications for the study's relevance and significance will be provided in light of the literature, and the study's aim will be outlined.

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1.1. Education and NGO

Education is one of the areas where the impact of NGOs can be seen concretely. Social forces, NGOs and focus groups have always greatly influenced education, and even these significant influences have played a decisive role in creating and organizing education programs (Taylor, 2019). In addition to the official economic support for education, NGOs play an important and increasing role in financing basic education (Naylor & Ndaruhutse, 2015). Ribeiro, Rodrigues, Caetano, Pais and Menezes (2012) suggest that many countries still dominate compliance models in citizenship education and emphasize that a robust civil society should be encouraged for citizenship education. The way to a strong civil society is to consider the current and future needs of the society. These needs establish the objectives of NGOs, and individuals are trained in conformity with these objectives in schools, which are essential to NGOs (Park, 2006). One of the fundamental objectives of the school is, without a doubt, to train active citizens. In this respect, NGOs help schools and students understand the power of citizenship (Xiong & Li, 2017) and provide them with information and materials about the field they work in (Ersoy, 2014). In summary, education is indispensable for NGOs and NGOs to fulfil their function in transforming society into a more livable form.

Undoubtedly, the social studies course comes first among the courses that can be benefited from NGOs at primary and middle school levels. The social studies course aims to prepare students for social life with the knowledge, skills, and value dimensions it entails and to acquire the skills and qualifications needed to be an active citizen. One of the objectives of social studies education is “to train young people as active and responsible citizens in democratic societies” (NCSS, 2016). The critical thing in active citizenship education is to enable students to become action-oriented participatory individuals in society. Therefore, fostering active citizenship involves real-world, long-term experience gained through a direct link between the school and the real world.

An active citizen is a person who believes that every individual in the society should participate in political and social life and has specific roles and responsibilities. The characteristics of an active citizen are creating awareness in society, changing society, contributing to society, and fighting against injustice (Khandpekar, 2016). What is expected from an active citizen is to contribute both to personal development by taking individual responsibility and to social development by taking social responsibility. The society mentioned here can be extended to all humanity, starting from his/her immediate environment.

The active citizenship learning area included in the social studies curriculum, which started to be implemented in Türkiye in 2018, directly serves to raise individuals as active citizens. In this curriculum, NGOs are mentioned when creating active citizens; explicit content about NGOs is presented in this context. In this context, the social studies course is one of the most crucial courses at the primary and middle school level that provides the relationship between education-NGO in general and citizenship education-NGO in particular. Therefore, NGOs should be open to cooperation with schools in raising active citizens, create units that work with students, and make activity plans for students regarding active citizenship education (Kallioniemi, Zaleskiené, Lalor & Misiejuk, 2010). Raising people as active citizens who support and participate in NGOs is of great importance in developing democracy at local, national and global levels (Ersoy, 2014; Ribeiro, Caetano & Menezes, 2016). Thus, active citizenship education from primary school to higher education is important.

1.2. Social Participation and NGO

Students need to learn a variety of abilities in order to comprehend and contribute to the growth of democracies. One of these skills is social participation, a significant feature of active citizenship. With social participation skills, students are expected to participate in scientific, social, cultural, arts and sports activities in and out of school. By this means, it aims to develop students' sense of success, motivation, self-confidence and responsibility. Since students' tendencies and knowledge shape their actions, schools play an important role in developing social participation skills (Kallioniemi et al.,

2010). NGOs offer students social participation opportunities through voluntary service activities (Dere & Akdeniz, 2021). The values and skills gained by the students participating in the activities within the social studies course also contribute to citizenship education (Bengiç-Çolak, 2015). For this purpose, it is aimed to provide students with attitudes, behaviors and skills such as taking responsibility with social participation skills, being able to deal with the social problems around them individually or in cooperation with others and developing and implementing projects that will contribute to their solution, working willingly to complete the group tasks and feeling responsibility towards the group (MoNE, 2018).

1.3. Research Problem and Literature Review

It was reported that in Eurostat in 2019 and Youth Wellbeing in 2017 that the participation of the young is low in active citizenship and participatory activities due to their lack of time and interest (Görgün-Baran, 2019). This data clearly shows that the relationship between the young and the non-governmental organizations, which is the primary option of participatory activities, is weak. One of the reasons of the young's indifference is undoubtedly because of their limited or even lack of non-governmental organization experiences. Considering that the young spend a substantial part of their time in school, it can be clearly seen that it is indispensable for the young to gain non-governmental organization experience within the education process. It is possible to say that the frequency and quality of the active citizenship experiences of the young will increase as the education level increases. Even though these experiences start from the first stages of education, it would not be wrong to state that meaningful experiences for NGOs start especially at the middle school level, considering the developmental characteristics of the students. Therefore, cooperation between non-governmental organizations and education is extremely important in order to raise active and engaged citizens.

Most of the research on non-governmental organizations in the field of education is related to the educational activities of non-governmental organizations (Akatay, 2019; Kallioniemi et al., 2010; Karataş, 2013; Naylor & Ndaruhutse, 2015; Park, 2006; Ribeiro et al., 2012; Ribeiro et al., 2016; Selanik-Ay, 2016; Taylor, 2019; Xiong & Li, 2017). There are also studies conducted with teachers and mostly preservice teachers for active citizenship (Değirmenci & Eskici, 2019; Dere & Akdeniz, 2021; Egüz & Kafadar, 2020; Ersoy, 2014; Faiz, 2020). In addition, there are also studies directly on students related to active citizenship (Akar & Keser-Aschenberger, 2016; Bengiç-Çolak, 2015; Demirhan-Işık, 2018; Finley, 2011; Kızılay, 2015). In the literature, there is not enough study that directly examines the perceptions and thoughts of middle school students about NGOs and the relationship between NGOs and citizenship.

Today, countries worldwide are concerned about their futures due to issues such as young people's apathy about the political and social difficulties facing the society in which they live. It is of the utmost importance to shed light on how the connection between active citizenship and NGOs is typically construed, given that the utilization of NGOs in teaching is a critical factor in the formation and modification of students' perceptions of active citizenship. In this direction, determining the perspective and knowledge level of the students will also contribute to the determination of the relationship between NGOs, educational institutions and citizenship education. On the other hand, it is thought that it will help the studies about NGOs and educational institutions and guide similar research to be carried out with students. It will contribute to the visibility/recognition of NGOs' political, social and economic duties, especially by children and young people. It is thought that this study will contribute to the literature in terms of changing or improving the perceptions of students, the adults of the future, regarding the contribution of NGOs to the existence of democracy in the society in which they live and to their development as active citizens.

This study aims to determine the perspectives of middle school 7th-grade students about NGOs and the NGO-citizenship relationship. For this purpose, the research questions are determined as follows:

What is the students' perspective on non-governmental organizations?

What is the students' perspective on the relationship between non-governmental organizations and citizenship?

2. METHOD

Qualitative inquiry is a research approach in which research and findings are presented non-numerically, the research is conducted in a natural setting, and the number of individuals or situations examined is limited (Robson, 2015). In this study, a qualitative research approach was chosen, as the aim is to uncover the impressions of participants who have experience with the situation that needs to be investigated without worrying about generalization (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2002). Additionally, it was tried to obtain in-depth and detailed information about students' perspectives on NGOs and NGO-citizen relations.

2.1. Participants

Since the study is based on a qualitative approach, the purposive sampling method was used to obtain in-depth data on the researched subject by providing information-rich environments (Patton, 2002). In the criterion sampling method, which is one of the purposeful sampling methods, there are several predetermined criteria and these criteria can be prepared by the researcher, or a pre-created criteria list can be used (Patton, 2002). In this direction, points such as the fact that the subjects within the scope of active citizenship learning area were covered in the 4th, 5th, and 6th grades of the students in the 7th grade which is the last year social studies course is taught in Türkiye, that the selected school has worked with at least one NGO per year, that the participants are familiar with the NGOs were chosen as criteria. With these criteria, the study was carried out with 39 (20 f, 19 m) 7th-grade students studying in two different middle schools in the central district of Trabzon province. The participants consist of students who have attended at least once to informing or activities about NGOs given in their schools. Social studies is a course taught between the 4th and 7th grades in Türkiye, and students are expected to reach all the acquisitions of this course at the 7th grade level. This study was carried out with the 7th grade students since it was expected that the students would have obtained all the information about the NGOs, which they could encounter directly, at the middle school level.

2.2. Instruments

An open-ended question protocol prepared by the researchers was used as a data collection tool in the study. Open-ended questions, preferred if the participants are to respond freely, provide in-depth answers about people's experiences, perceptions, ideas, feelings and knowledge (Patton, 2002). In this study, the open-ended question protocol, which is one of the qualitative data collection tools, was preferred to reveal the perspectives of the participants in a more comprehensive and detailed way (Creswell, 2013). It is possible to collect more detailed data, particularly from elementary and secondary middle school students, if they express their opinions in writing instead of verbally. While creating the questions used in the study, a draft form including a total of 11 open-ended questions was prepared in line with the research problem. The draft form was rearranged according to the feedback of two faculty members and three postgraduates who have studied citizenship education in social studies education. A pilot study was conducted with 15 students from the 7th grade of a middle school located in the district center to ensure the validity and reliability of the form, and as a result, the open-ended question protocol was finalized. In the open-ended question protocol, characteristics and functions of NGOs, the views of students on how the relationship between citizenship and NGOs should be, and how citizens can contribute to NGOs were tried to be revealed in addition to their perspectives on the definition.

2.3. Data Analysis

Content analysis, a data analysis method among qualitative approaches (Schreier, 2014), is generally utilized for interview transcripts, diaries, and similar documents (Patton, 2002). In this

research, the content analysis method was chosen to reveal the relational network within the qualitative data obtained from the participants and the meanings hidden among the data (Patton, 2002). Thus, in line with the data obtained, it was tried to understand the students' views clearly. In this context, each response was directly transferred to the computer environment to facilitate the analysis. Then, all the responses to the open-ended questions were carefully read and coded. Different methods can be opted for attributing importance to the codes through numerical values as a result of the content analysis (Schreier, 2014). In this study, the codes were digitized and given the idea that they could reveal the participant's views more clearly. During the data coding, the first researcher initially determined the codes; then, the second evaluated the developed codes. After this two-stage process, the researchers met and reviewed the entire coding process. After this stage, the different coding suggested by the researchers were reconsidered and a consensus was reached for each conflicting code. The finalized codes and the frequencies of these are presented with graphics. Also, to ensure the confidentiality of the participants included in the study voluntarily, their names were coded as P1, P2, ..., and P39.

Some strategies were used to ensure credibility, transferability and consistency, and confirmability in the current study:

Two experts with qualitative research experience were consulted about the entire study. Both researchers contributed to the research process holistically. Before the data collection was started, a pilot study was conducted, and the data collection tool was updated by taking expert opinions. The data collection was carried out with voluntary participants selected from two schools using the purposive sampling method. In addition, the data obtained from the study were coded in a general framework by the researchers and reported directly without including the researchers' comments. The codes developed with the raw data were checked by continuous comparison. Results related to the developed codes are presented through direct quotations.

3. FINDINGS

In this section, the data were presented in graphics with direct quotations after being analyzed. Students' views on the definition, characteristics, functions, citizen-NGO relationship and the contribution of citizens to NGOs were presented under headings.

3.1. Definition of Non-Governmental Organization

The students' views on how they define the concept of NGO are presented in Figure 1 by coding.

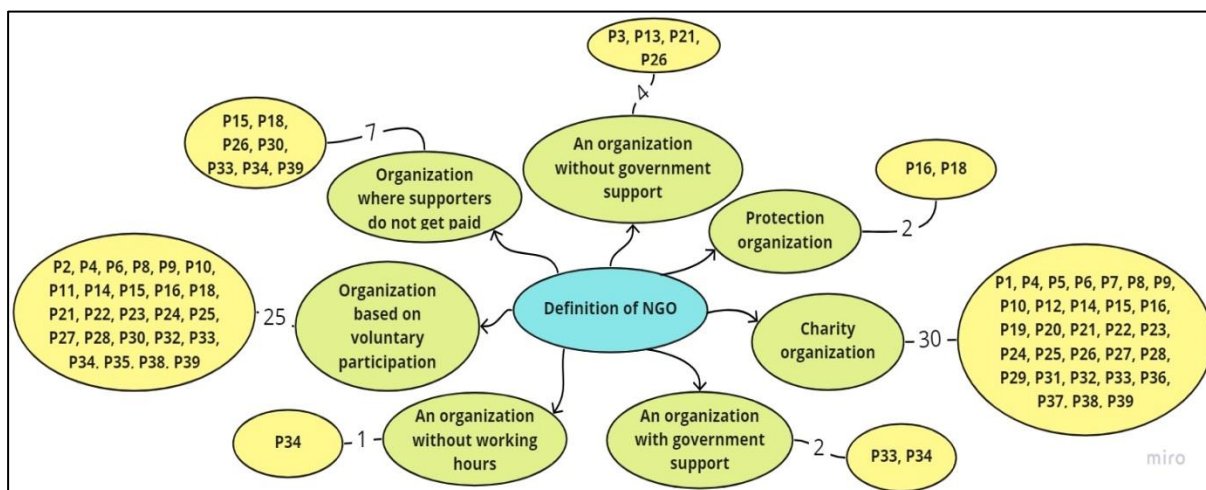


Figure 1. Definition of non-governmental organization

As seen in Figure 1, the concept of NGO is predominantly considered by students as a ‘Charity organization’ and ‘Organization based on voluntary participation.’ P3 stated the following regarding the definition that includes many of the mentioned codes: ‘It is an organization where volunteers contribute or help without demanding a wage or expecting something in return. They are established with the support of the state and individuals with better financial status and aim to meet all kinds of needs.’ Similarly, P18 also stated, ‘Organizations created by people who help people and do this work voluntarily and do not receive a salary in return are called non-governmental organizations.’

It is noteworthy that the students especially emphasized the participation of charity organizations and volunteers while describing the NGOs. Another underlined issue is the emphasis that individuals do not receive money in return for their support. In addition, some students expressed the NGO as a state-supported organization and an organization not supported by the state. Here, two opposing views emerged as whether the NGO has state support. Even in small numbers, organizations for protection purposes and organizations that do not have working hours are among the definitions made.

3.2. Characteristics of Non-Governmental Organizations

The students' views on the characteristics of NGOs are presented in Figure 2 through codes.

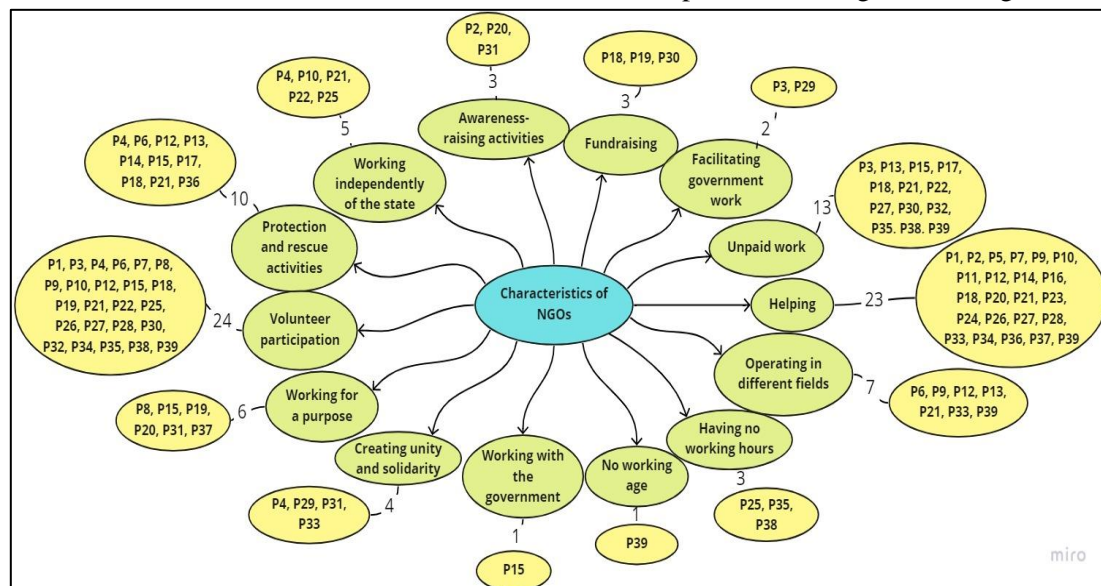


Figure 2. Characteristics of non-governmental organizations

As seen in Figure 2, ‘Volunteer participation’ was emphasized the most in the codes developed for the characteristics of NGOs, followed by ‘Helping’ and ‘Unpaid work’ codes. In addition to these, different characteristics of NGOs such as ‘Protection and rescue activities,’ ‘Working for a purpose,’ ‘Creating unity and solidarity,’ ‘Awareness-raising activities’ and ‘Fundraising’ are emphasized. P18 made the following statement referring to codes such as ‘Volunteer participation, helping, unpaid work, fundraising,’ including many of the characteristics of the NGOs: ‘NGOs help people for free. Their employees are volunteers and are not paid for it. Non-governmental organizations keep afloat with donations.’ As emphasized in the definition of NGOs, P11 stated that ‘Helping people for free and doing favors is their most important characteristic’ with regard to ‘Helping’ in terms of their characteristics. Among other important characteristics not mentioned by the participants, P2 stated, ‘They carry out activities to help people and raise awareness in some areas’ regarding the code of ‘Awareness raising activities.’ P3 stated, ‘They do not receive a salary, they are volunteers, and in this way, they help the affairs of the state’ regarding the code of ‘facilitating government work,’ P4 on the code of ‘creating unity-togetherness’ stated, ‘They have volunteers. They provide unity. They operate

independently of the state. They save lives.’ and P25 stated on the code ‘Having no working hours’ that ‘*It is voluntary, they do not have working hours, they do not receive money from the state.*’ Another characteristic of the NGOs, which only one participant focused on, was expressed by P39 as ‘*They have no working-age...*’.

3.3. Functions of Non-Governmental Organizations

The students’ views on what NGOs do are presented in Figure 3 through codes.

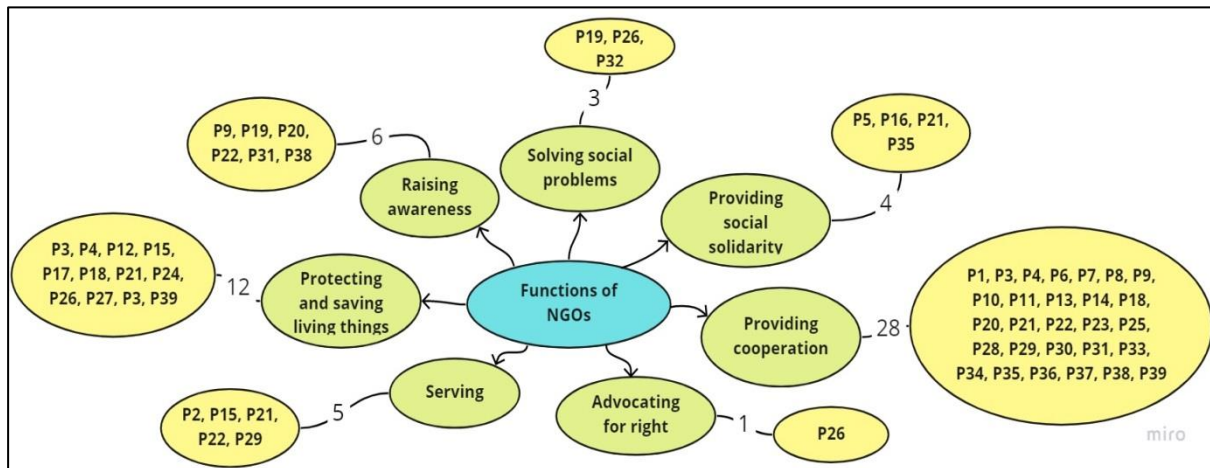


Figure 3. Functions of non-governmental organizations

As can be seen in Figure 3, the emphasis is placed on ‘Providing cooperation,’ followed by the codes of ‘Protecting and saving living things’ and ‘Raising awareness’ follow it most. Different benefits of NGOs are also emphasized, such as ‘Serving,’ ‘Providing social solidarity’ and ‘Solving social problems.’ In their response, which includes many characteristics as well as the two most emphasized codes, Regarding NGOs, P21 stated that they provided food, shelter and clothing aid to people who lost their homes in natural disasters (avalanche, landslide, flood, etc.) and increased solidarity by collecting donations from the surrounding provinces. He also stated that they provide assistance to developing countries in terms of health, money and shelter, and that they support health and protection of living life in difficult situations such as wars. Students underlined the benefits of NGOs, such as providing cooperation and protecting and saving living life. Related to the code of ‘Awareness raising and awareness raising,’ one of the other benefits stated by the participants P31 said, ‘It has benefits such as making people sensitive to the environment, planting trees in the environment, and raising awareness.’ P2 stated, ‘They enable volunteers to serve people without receiving or giving money’ on ‘Serving.’ P16 expressed, ‘They make people sitting idly in their homes engaged citizens for their nation’ related to ‘Providing social solidarity,’ and P32 stated, ‘They play a great role in solving the problems of the people, that is, in solving the problems of the society’ related to ‘Solving social problems.’ Lastly, P26 said, ‘They are organizations that do not allow all living things in the world to be harmed, protect and defend the rights of all, and try to make the world better’ with regard to ‘Advocating for rights,’ which was included in one’s views.

3.4. The Relationship between Citizenship and Non-Governmental Organizations

The students' views on the relationship between citizenship and NGOs are presented in Figure 4 through codes.

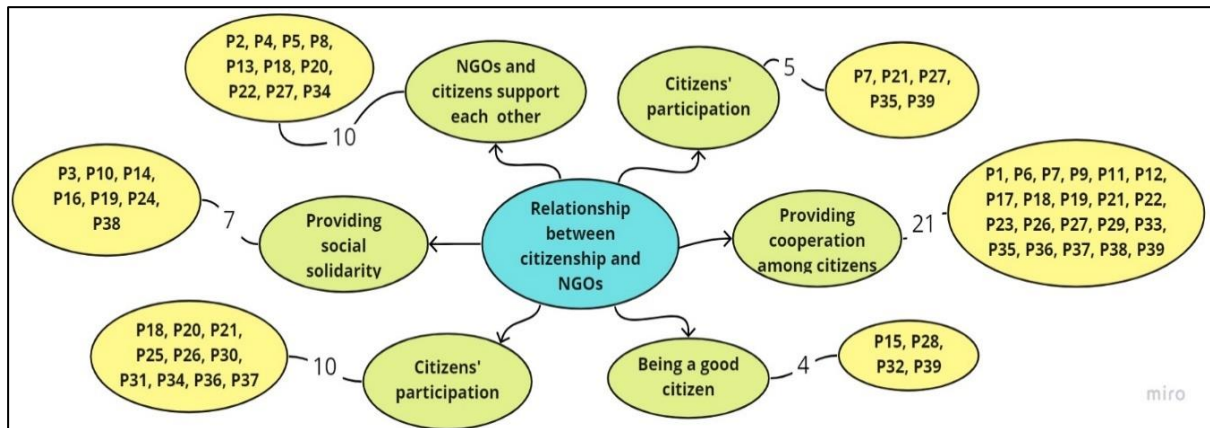


Figure 4. Relationship between citizenship and non-governmental organizations

As seen in Figure 4, the most emphasized code is 'Providing cooperation among citizens' among the codes related to how the students perceive the relationship between NGOs and citizenship. It is followed by the codes 'NGOs and citizens support each other,' 'Citizens' participation' and 'Providing social solidarity.' In addition, some students expressed this relationship as 'Helping become citizens' and 'Being a good citizen.' Cooperation stands out in this question as in the others. Regarding 'providing cooperation among citizens' student P21 stated 'non-governmental organizations fulfill their duties duly, free of charge and voluntarily. Citizens also donate to these organizations to help people, providing mutual aid. They also fulfill their civic duties.' On the same subject, P38 said 'It allows citizens to ask for a little help as they want other citizens in their own country to be comfortable.'

P18 also emphasized the 'Citizens' participation' with their statement, 'non-governmental organizations help where needed, thanks to responsible citizens. Because if citizens do not donate to non-governmental organizations, they cannot help people, there is such a relationship.' regarding 'NGOs and citizens support each other.' In addition, P26 expressed, 'Citizens donate to NGOs and join them voluntarily. Moreover, NGOs help citizens.' The view of 'Providing social solidarity' was expressed by P10 as follows: 'We, as citizens, do not expect everything from NGOs, and we can strengthen solidarity as a society by helping them.' P35 and P7 emphasized 'Helping become citizens.' P35 said, 'As citizens of that country, we have a responsibility to help and contribute to non-governmental organizations,' and P7 said, 'I think it is a civic duty to help non-governmental organizations.' Lastly, the relationship between NGO and citizenship was expressed as 'Being a good citizen.' Regarding this, P28 and P32 stated, 'Joining and supporting non-governmental organizations shows that we are good citizens'.

3.5. Citizens' Contribution to Non-Governmental Organizations

Through codes, students' views on whether and how citizens contribute to NGOs are presented in Figure 5

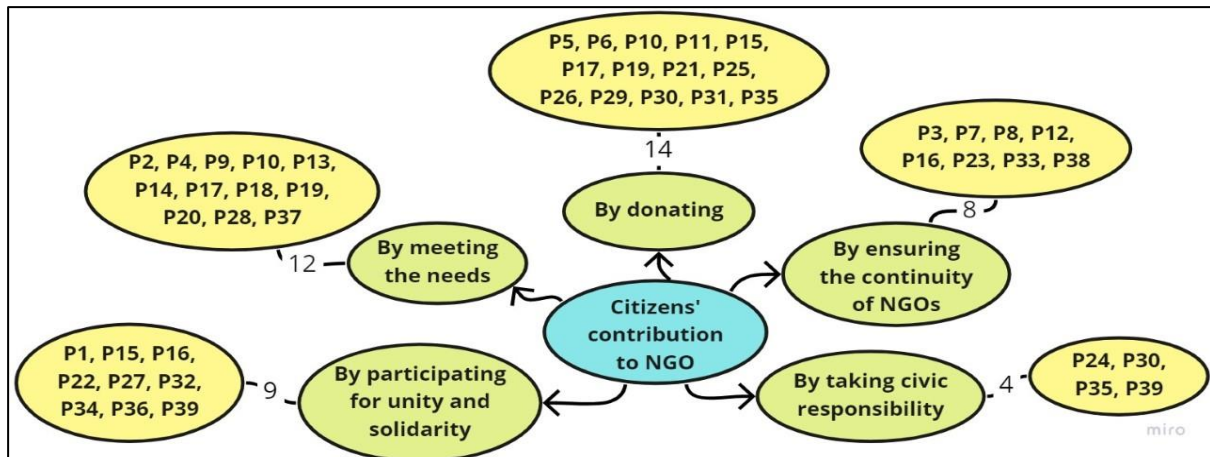


Figure 5. Citizens' contribution to non-governmental organizations

As seen in Figure 5, all the participants first stated, 'Yes, they should contribute,' regarding the codes on the contribution of citizens to NGOs and what contributions they can make. The code most emphasized by students regarding the contribution of citizens to NGOs was 'by donating'. Regarding this code, P31 stated that people who want to donate should participate in NGO activities to carry out projects such as environmental protection and organizing the NGOs. The second most emphasized view by the students is the participation of the citizens 'by meeting the needs'. Considering that everyone may need NGOs one day, P18 emphasized that everyone should help in line with the needs of NGOs and this is a good thing. The students expressed another contribution as 'by participating for unity and solidarity.' Regarding this, P1 said, 'Yes, we should contribute as citizens. After all, we are Türkiye, and no one can be left behind in our country. There has to be unity.' Some of the student's responses to the view 'by ensuring the continuity of NGOs' are as follows: P8 'Yes, they should, because non-governmental organizations can survive with these contributions,' and P16 'They should contribute. Because non-governmental organizations work for them. If citizens do not help, how can non-governmental organizations help them? Otherwise, there would be no non-governmental organizations.' Lastly, the students emphasized the necessity of contributing by 'taking civic responsibility.' Regarding this, P30 said, 'They should contribute because it is a responsibility for citizenship,' and P35 said, 'Yes, because it is their responsibility; they should give material and moral support.'

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4. DISCUSSION and CONCLUSION

The conclusions reached within the titles specified in the study's results are presented in this section.

In the results regarding the definition of NGO, most students defined NGOs as charity organizations or organizations based on voluntary participation. This result coincides with the conclusion in Demirhan-Işık's (2018) study that students characterize NGOs with their volunteering and helping values. It is also seen that NGOs are emphasized as aid agencies regarding their definitions in the study with preservice teachers by Selanik-Ay (2016) and with school administrators by Karataş (2013). Although these studies were not conducted with students, teachers' views should also be considered since they can influence student perception. In this study, it has been determined that very few students have misconceptions about separating NGOs from state-affiliated public institutions, as they describe them as state-supported organizations. This misconception reveals that students have a limited definition of NGOs. Considering the studies on teachers and the preservice teachers mentioned here, it can be said that teachers also play a role in this limited definition of

students. Therefore, it can be claimed that teachers as well as students have a limited knowledge-based conceptualization of civil society.

In the results on the characteristics of NGOs, voluntary participation and helping features were emphasized in parallel with the definition-related results. Unpaid work, protection and recovery activities are the second-level important characteristics. A small number of students also mentioned essential characteristics such as working for a purpose, working independently of the state, providing unity, awareness-raising activities, and facilitating the work of the state. This result is similar to the characteristics of working independently from the state, volunteering and facilitating the work of the state put forward by [Aslan and Alkış \(2013\)](#). It also coincides with the characteristics of volunteering and unity stated by [Bayram \(2015\)](#). This result also shows that students can express the characteristics of NGOs at a limited level, as in the definitions of NGOs, and they have very general and inadequate knowledge. The reason can be shown as students do not encounter NGOs enough in their daily lives, and NGOs are not included in detail, even at school. As a matter of fact, the emphasis on NGOs in the social studies curriculum in Türkiye ([MoNE, 2018](#)) is made directly with an acquisition associated with official institutions only at the 7th grade level. In the information in the 7th grade textbook, it is seen that non-governmental organizations are limited to issues related to aid, health and environment ([MoNE, 2019](#)). This shows the reason for students' inadequate NGO conceptualization is because of the limitation in the content of the social studies course.

Regarding the function of NGOs, it was concluded that about half of the students focused on helping each other and about one-third on protecting life. On the other hand, very few students expressed the other benefits of NGOs, such as raising awareness, advocating for rights, and solving problems. In the results regarding the function of NGOs, a conceptualization is seen to focus on aid and health areas within their general fields of activity. This reveals that NGOs are recognized by the participants from a narrower perspective, not all their aspects. Similarly, [Demirhan-Işık \(2018\)](#) found that students do not have adequate knowledge of the diversity of NGOs' scope. Non-governmental organizations are also active in areas such as social work, science and sports, apart from health, environment and education ([Akatay, 2019](#)). In addition, the political functions of NGOs, which is one of the reasons for their existence, have never been addressed. It can be said that student awareness of the different functions of NGOs, such as directing politics in the country or directing the ruling power to the development and dissemination of human rights, cannot be achieved. In fact, in democratic (or at least claiming to be) countries, the fact that NGOs are a political control mechanism is one of the most important functions for the existence of democracy.

It has been concluded that the students perceive the relationship between citizenship and NGOs as the citizens taking responsibility to participate in and support non-governmental organizations. Non-governmental organizations are perceived as providing the most cooperation and social solidarity among citizens. In other words, it has been found that both parties perceive it as a relationship based on mutual gain. In parallel with the result here, some participants emphasized the importance of non-governmental organizations in benevolence in the studies conducted by [Kızılay \(2015\)](#) with 7th-grade students and by [Faiz \(2020\)](#) with teachers. In the studies by [Egüz and Kafadar \(2020\)](#) and [Dere and Akdeniz \(2021\)](#), they suggested that citizens should know their responsibilities effectively and that they are individuals who fulfil them according to preservice teachers, which supports the result of the current study. Likewise, [Değirmenci and Eskici \(2019\)](#) revealed in their study that active citizens are people who are sensitive to social problems and know and take responsibility in society. In the current study, it has been revealed that students perceive the relationship between NGOs and citizens to be more about providing cooperation. The results regarding NGO's function are consistent with these.

In terms of supporting non-governmental organizations, all the students stated that citizens should contribute to non-governmental organizations. The studies of [Demirhan-Işık \(2018\)](#) and [Kara \(2022\)](#) also emphasize the responsibility of citizens to support NGOs. Some studies in the literature

have revealed that students are willing to participate in the activities of NGOs (Demirhan-Işık, 2018; Kara, 2022). In some other studies, an increase in the voluntary participation behavior of students at different education levels has also been observed after the interactions such as receiving training or cooperation with the NGO (Kallioniemi et al, 2010; Keser, Akar & Yıldırım, 2011). In the current study, it has been concluded that students mostly perceive the contribution of citizens to NGOs as making donations and meeting the needs of NGOs. This shows that students generally prefer the easy way of providing financial aid. However, when evaluated within the scope of citizenship consciousness, more opinions on contributing by participating are expected. Students should undergo training on this subject at an early age to positively increase their views on it and actively participate in NGOs (Finley, 2011). As the participants of this study, it can be interpreted that the students are willing to support non-governmental organizations by showing sensitivity to problems as active citizens, taking responsibility and actively participating. Thus, it is emphasized in the literature that it is necessary not only to fulfill the rights and duties, but also to show sensitivity to the problems of society and act with a sense of unity since active citizenship is a kind of volunteer activity (Pecnikova, 2016).

Considering the results of the study, it can be said that the student's knowledge about non-governmental organizations is inadequate, and they need more information and experience about NGOs. However, it has not been directly measured by a test. Although the sample was selected from the schools where an NGO carried out a task, it is understood from the study results that this experience is insufficient for the students. Therefore, it can be said that students' NGO experiences should not be limited to their school experience, and they should gain long-term real-life experiences.

Some recommendations can be made considering these results:

Students should be allowed to learn more about NGOs' types, qualifications, and fields of activity and participate in practices, particularly in social studies and other appropriate courses.

Students willing to help and support NGOs should be directed to cooperate with NGOs by organizing activities such as visiting NGOs and hosting NGO officials in the 5th and 6th grades.

With the encouragement of the Ministry of National Education, cooperation between schools and NGOs should be developed, and more promotion and implementation activities should be carried out in schools with NGOs.

This study was limited to two schools in the province. The regional situation and needs can be revealed by conducting more extensive research in different regions or provinces throughout the country.

Projects can be carried out to create a more accurate and comprehensive perception of NGOs in the minds of students and to encourage them to participate, in order to highlight all functions of NGOs -apart from their humanitarian aspect- especially their political function.

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Ethics Committee Decision

Ethical approval and written permission for this study were obtained from the Trabzon University with the decision dated 08/01/2020 and numbered 81614018-E.14.

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