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## An Action on Gender Equality: Educational Practices for Primary School Students in Turkey<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

Traditional gender roles are transferred to the children in many ways and this makes it difficult to ensure gender equality. Starting from the problem regarding the sensitivity of students for gender equality in a public school, the aim of this study was to enhance the sensitivity of fourth grade students in a primary school towards gender equality and to examine this development process through the prepared teaching process. The research design was action research and the participants were 32 fourth graders in a primary school in Adana, Turkey. The data collection tools were, Awareness For Gender Equality Form (TCE-FF), semi-structured interview forms, class observations, researcher diary, self-assessment/course evaluation forms and observer evaluation forms. In order to analyze the data, inductive and deductive content analyses, descriptive analysis and constant comparative analysis were used. Findings showed that students enhance their way of defining sexes, gender and gender equality, they put forward many indicators of inequalities and equalities in the right way, they have a better understanding of the contributions of equality and they brought about many suggestions for providing gender equality. These results imply that educational practices could be a part of the solution regarding the struggle against gender inequality.

**Keywords:** action research, equality education, gender equality, fourth graders, teaching for gender equality

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## Introduction

Sex and gender are among the most important factors affecting our way of life. While sex includes some constant and universal features, gender-related features have cultural and social characteristics (Gözütok et al., 2017). Gender has been defined by the World Health Organization (WHO) as socially constructed characteristics of women and men, such as their relationships with one another or the roles and norms associated with these groups (2011). Değirmenci (2017) mentioned that gender is 'historically, socially and culturally established sex'. Gender identity includes cultural symbols attributed to men or women (Piscalho et al., 2010). In the context of these characteristics, the equality of people is a very sensitive and controversial issue.

The roles attributed to men and women could be classified as traditional or egalitarian. While traditional roles for women are roles such as taking care of housework and not participating in professional life, men are given responsibilities such as being the head of the house and earning money (Zeyneloğlu & Terzioğlu, 2011). It is stated that gender roles are learned and internalized through social relations and learning through imitation is also effective in this process (Vatandaş, 2007). In addition, it has been observed that ideological factors and sexist approaches negatively affect gender equality (Brandt, 2011).

Gender equality is vital for the development of societies (World Economic Forum [WEF], 2014). All forms of discrimination are unacceptable in the context of human rights and fundamental freedoms (General Directorate on the Status of Women [GDSW], 2008). In a society, equal participation of women and men should be supported in every field for the welfare and peace, the development of the society, and the improvement of the status of women in the society (Karasu et al., 2017). One of the most important dimensions of human development is gender equality. The inability of one-half of humanity to benefit from human developments and improvements destroys the universal character of these developments (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2016). Considering that numerically half of the society consists of women, it is obvious that leaving women powerless and negative situations created by inequality will seriously hinder the development of societies.

When we look at the situation regarding gender equality in the world, it is seen that many countries legally apply gender equality in areas such as inheritance, property ownership and marriage. Legally, gender-based discrimination is prohibited in the constitutions of 136 countries and equality is guaranteed (The World Bank, 2011). However, in Global Gender Gap Report 2020, it is indicated that even though inequalities through the 'Educational Attainment' and 'Health and Survival' dimensions have decreased, these inequalities are still high in 'Economic Participation and Opportunity' and 'Political Empowerment'. In the latest report, the global gender inequality index is 68.6% (WEF, 2020), which means that there is a gap of 31.4% between men and women on many different platforms. Although there are concrete steps and developments toward gender equality in many countries, it is seen that women are still exposed to discrimination, sexual abuse or violence.

These inequalities are not a new topic to talk about. They have been with us since the birth of communities and have accompanied us for many years. All the social institutions such as families, law, media, sports, arts, etc. face these unequal conditions and even sometimes feed them. Starting with the liberal movements of feminism in the 1790s, these inequalities are the topic of women's liberty and equality. This was the beginning of the way to gender equality.

Starting with liberal feminism the rights and status of women were started to be discussed. In the first scene of feminism, liberals asked for much more about fundamental rights and voting. The demands of liberal feminists can be grouped under three main headings: equality in business life, home (family) and social life. Accordingly, they dealt with discussions on women's participation in public life in line with the understanding of natural rights and individualism (Dikici, 2016, p. 525). Liberals unlike other feminists support the existence of family institutions and they were mostly criticized by their discrimination between public and private spheres and their support for the free market. With socialist feminism, the focus was on the patriarchal structure (Güneş, 2018; Özdemir, 2017). In general, we see that socialist feminism puts forward some problems such as the roles of women within the family and the reflection of power order on society, women's participation in paid labor and charging the domestic labor, the effects of women's class position, and alienation. Starting with the 1960s', radical feminism was the pioneer and they focused on women's liberation. Their main aim was not to get equal rights for women and men but to take actions that would eliminate the male-dominant values in society and change the society itself (Altınbaş, 2006, p. 40). Another important feminist movement was postmodern feminism which still has its roots within the social movements regarding women and feminists. It reveals that we produce ourselves within this gender meaning system by expressing that gender differences consist of a system of signs that we produce and interpret, as well as positioning human experience in language and considering the constructive function of legal language as its basic principles. The route of feminism goes on with some other movements such as eco-feminism and 21st-century feminism. While ecofeminists believed that the domination over nature was related to the domination over women and emphasized that this domination would only end with the end of the male-dominated understanding (Yörük, 2009, p. 84), it is seen that approaches such as postmodernism, woman centrism, global feminism and ecofeminism continue their existence by changing and transforming them. It can be predicted that all feminist movements will continue to exist, albeit with different understandings and conceptualizations, until the goal of gender equality is achieved in a global context.

It is seen that each approach struggles to improve the position of women and reduce the effects of the patriarchal order in different ways. On the other hand, we see that women still have the same problems (not all women have their legal rights, they are still responsible of households, still a small number of working women, they are slightly visible in political life, etc.). Looking at feminism today, it is obvious that feminists see the path to equality as the transformation of society. What feminist theories say put a basis for this study in terms of the endeavor to create equal communities. The educational initiatives could create a change both in individuals and societies as well.

### ***Problems within the social institutions***

An important obstacle could be considered as gender stereotypes existing and being reproduced in each social institution. In the family, children learn the traditional gender roles. It has been observed that the children of families that have adopted gender stereotypes are more attached to traditional gender roles (Hoffman & Kloska, 1995, pp. 292-293).

From a historical perspective, it is seen that patriarchal ideology also affects legal norms, and this perspective dominates legal practices. This leads to the injustice of the law (Uygur, 2015, p. 122). When we look at the rules of law from a historical perspective, it is seen

that those who reveal, use and interpret them are men. It affects women in both using their rights through daily life legally and raising their voice in other areas of life such as art, sports, media and so on. Religion is one of the institutions supporting the patriarchal way of life. There are some gender inequalities in different religions. In Islam, women can inherit only half as much as men, polygamous marriage is free only for men, women cannot go for divorce, etc. (Kazemi, 2004, p. 254). Women have no right to inherit or decide on their own, they have to give their income to their husbands in Hinduism while they are also referred to as evil beings in Buddhism. In both Christianity and Judaism, the social roles given to women are to do household chores, obey their husbands, to take care of children (Gürhan, 2010, pp. 64-68). These aspects make their way to every different part of life around the world creating a hard path to equality.

Women face many inequalities in media, science, sports, arts, etc. as well. In a study by İnceoğlu and Akçalı (2018), it is seen that women are more invisible in TV series and they are reflected much more as compliant, nice, and polite, regarding their occupations mostly associated with being housewives or wealthy but unemployed roles. Women are also invisible through the administrative status of media. What we see in sports is that many women do sports professionally but are not visible and supported as much as men. In different studies, it has been found that sports are categorized according to gender (Alvariñas-Villaverde et al., 2017; Kavasoğlu & Yaşar, 2016; Riemer & Visio, 2003; Schmalz & Kerstetter, 2006). Also, other studies show that women doing sports are not visible in sports media (Markula, 2009; Koivula, 1999; Arslan & Koca, 2006).

We see women less on the scene in science and arts as well. Women have been sexual objects and sometimes associated with evil figures through the arts. It shows that women are described in a masculine discourse through the arts. Even though there are many talented women artists; they were not as visible as men throughout history. Akalın and Baş (2018) indicate that different artists lived in various periods in history such as Levina Teerlinc, Sofonisba Anguissola, Artemisia Gentileschi, Camille Claudel, Margaret Keane faced difficulties despite their being as talented as their male counterparts. Marie Curie's story regarding the Nobel Prize is one of the symbols of inequalities women confronted in science area within many years. Science is another area that is defined as more appropriate for men and girls are still not equal to boys in terms of reaching science education (Özkazanç, 2010, p. 16) and this is the same in many countries.

To the point all of these bring us, we should see the inequalities in the society. Because, it would be the first step to eliminate it.

### ***What about the remedies?***

As mentioned before, the most emphasized way of enhancing the balance and providing equality between men and women is transforming the patriarchal society. What could be the way of doing this? We could bring about many different solutions including the family and society. However, education could be a good point to start:

- Education and school can be a means of change as well as a mechanism of social control (Tan, 2000).
- The extent to which children adopt traditional stereotypes about boys or girls can affect how they deal with the gender biases they experience; training on this can also make

them more successful in recognizing this and dealing with these prejudices (Brinkman, 2009).

- Despite gender inequality outside of school, teachers can make a difference (Aikman & Unterhalter, 2007, p.29).

This study is not the first one to claim this and through literature, there are many studies working with various groups of age and status using educational practices to open a pathway to equality. Studies conducted by Brinkman (2009), Mai (2015), Ifegbesan (2010), Esen (2013), Acar-Erdol and Gözütok (2017), Acar-Erdol (2017) are some of them. In these studies, there are endeavors to see the stereotypes both students and school staff have, also what the needs for teaching gender equality are and what the effects of teaching gender equality could be. Also, the results show that students and teachers believe in the necessity of gender equality education and the practices work out. So, this study also shares the same aim and expectations. However, these studies are mostly based on observation or views regarding gender stereotypes and also program development instead of a real instructional process, so this study conducted has a distinctive position towards gender equality education in that manner.

The pathway the feminist approaches followed and the persistence of inequalities they fought with is one of the main reasons for this endeavor. Also, the visible inequalities and the dominance of the patriarchal way of life through each segment of social structure are another reason that this study is worth it. Other factors that this study thought crucial are providing students with an equal school atmosphere (even temporary), contributing to the fight against inequalities, putting forward reusable materials and a draft program, and bringing students the opportunity to speak for themselves.

## **Purpose of the Study**

The main purpose of this study was to develop the sensitivity of fourth-grade students in a primary school towards gender equality and to examine this development process through the prepared teaching process. Answers to some questions in this regard were sought:

- What is the current situation regarding the sensitivity of fourth-grade students in a primary school towards gender equality?
- What are the problems encountered in the teaching that aims to develop students' sensitivity towards gender equality and what are the possible solutions to these problems?
- How does Gender Equality Teaching contribute to the development of students' sensitivity towards gender equality?
- What are the views of primary school fourth-grade students on the applied Gender Equality Teaching?

## **Method**

### **Research Design**

Designing this study, it was thought that one of the best ways to deal with a social problem is to take action where the problem is detected. Therefore, action research was the main design. Action research could be used in many different ways regarding education.

Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2011, p. 344) explain these as instructional methods, learning strategies, evaluation processes, attitudes and values, maintaining teachers' professional development, management and control and administration. In line with this, action research model was used here to change the values system of students and it is aimed to change their beliefs regarding equality value in terms of gender. Specifically, the study was designed according to participatory action research (by Lewin) and critical action research (by Boog) models. Regarding the participants it was participatory and in creating a good example and also dealing with the causes and results of inequalities it was critical. The researcher had two roles as a researcher and instructor. As action research requires the researcher to teach, collect data and analyze at the same time, it was a challenging process. In this study, the researcher (also the instructor) had difficulties with managing the class while observing the class and putting new plans into action to solve the inequality problems in the meantime.

## Participants

The participants of the study were students, teachers/researcher and the validity committee. The school where the instruction took place was determined by criterion sampling. It is accepted that gender stereotypes are mostly formed at early ages and therefore intervention and education for gender equality is crucial in childhood. From this point of view, students at early ages were targeted. Regarding their illiteracy skills should be at a point, considering their ability to answer questions within interviews throughout the whole process and still being at early ages through which the character traits are being shaped, fourth graders were chosen as the participants. The criteria were having middle-socioeconomic status, being a primary school, having more than one classroom of fourth graders, the school's attitude towards research, volunteering and the most important one was the existence of a problem regarding gender equality in line with the data obtained from the measurement tools applied to teachers and students. Among different classes in the school, the one with the lowest gender equality awareness grades was chosen. This level was determined by Awareness for Gender Equality Form (TCE-FF). Through the action process, the participants were 32 students in fourth grade (18 boys, 14 girls), also six students among these (within the same class) were focus students determined by TCE-FF. Also, the other participant was the teacher/researcher conducting the whole instructional and research process. The real teacher of the classroom was an observer in the class. Lastly, the validity committee guided the instructional and research process as well. Students were addressed as S1, S2, ... and their gender was referred to as B (boy) or G (girl) through the study.

## Data Collection Process

This process consisted of the determination of the problem and the current situation with the needs of the students regarding gender equality education; the action process and the reapplication of the forms and interviews. In the first part, Awareness for Gender Equality Form (TCE-FF) and semi-structured interview form were used to collect data. The awareness form was structured by the researcher and included three questions about sex, equality and gender equality and five questions based on some scenarios regarding equality issues (e.g. about a girl's wrestling or the toys boys and girls could play with...). Expert opinion and pilot application were conducted to ensure the reliability and validity of the form. Also the semi-structured interview form used both in the first part and after the action process was developed by the

researcher and consisted of questions regarding their views about gender, gender equality in their families, society and how it could be provided and so on. The form was asked for expert opinion and the pre-interviews (before the instruction process) lasted for 456 minutes and 22 seconds. Through the action process, video recordings of the lessons, semi-structured interview forms for the focus students (after each cycle), self-assessment/course evaluation forms, researcher diary and observer evaluation form were the other tools used for data collection. In the last part, reapplication of TCE-FF and semi-structured interviews were also the other part of collecting the data. The last interviews lasted for 757 mins 59 secs. All the interviews were recorded by a voice recorder.

## Data Analysis

The process of data analysis was also structured according to the nature of the data collected. Through the analysis of TCE-FF, interviews (pre and post) and observations, both deductive and inductive content analyses were conducted while descriptive analysis was performed to analyze the interviews between the cycles and self-assessment/course evaluation forms. Also constant comparative analysis method was carried out while analyzing the data collected by each different tool. As for reliability and validity, triangulation (different sources and data collection methods), thick description, peer review, member checking, inter-coder agreement (within content analyses), detailed reporting and checking for the researcher effects (avoiding prejudices or any other subjective judgment) were the measures taken through this study. As the action process a long period and contains many different data collection tools and assessments, instead of putting every single data within the process, a holistic view was followed and the findings obtained by pre and post-interviews were presented throughout this study.

## Ethical Issues

As in all studies, it is also important to consider some ethical principles within action research. In this study, especially hiding the identity of the participants, making them participate informing them about the aims and asking them to volunteer and member checking during data transcription were some of the precautions taken. Furthermore, all the legal permissions (permissions by the National Education Directorate/School Administration) were provided before the process started. The permission numbered 15472027 and dated 12.06.2018 was provided by the National Education Directorate in Adana. Before the instruction, all the processes and the aims were explained to the students and they were asked to volunteer. Afterward, the parents were asked for permission. The same procedure was performed for interviews and observations. For all of the teaching process, the ethical principles of the teaching profession were followed.

## Action Process

This study was based on the problem of sensitivity regarding gender equality in a primary school. The instruction process was conducted with a fourth grade class. Based on the findings of tools applied to reveal the current situation and needs, action plans were prepared. For the first action plan, the current situation was evaluated and mostly knowledge

level and some activities regarding sex, gender, equality and gender equality were planned. For the second action plan, the problems within the first cycle were considered and measurements were based on preparing the teaching process. For the last action plan, the problems that were not solved through the first and second cycles were dealt with and all these plans were evaluated by the data collected through observations, interviews and observer evaluation forms. The instruction lasted for 11 weeks (Oct, 11- Dec, 20 in 2018) and each week's lesson (on Thursdays) was two hours (40'+40'). The classroom was a big one and there was a smart board for the visual materials. For these lessons, 42 learning objectives were determined. The themes of these cycles are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1**

Themes within the cycles of action process

CYCLES	WEEKS	THEMES
1 <sup>st</sup> CYCLE:	1. Week	Equality and Gender
	2. Week	We are equal at home!
	3. Week	We are equal in society!
	4. Week	We do sports as men and women!
	5. Week	Art is ours, we are artists!
2 <sup>nd</sup> CYCLE:	6. Week	It is wonderful to be a scientist!
	7. Week	Women and Men in Media!
	8. Week	Living together as women and men!
	9. Week	Play and Gift World!
3 <sup>rd</sup> CYCLE:	10. Week	No violence! Yes to Love!
	11. Week	Come on Girls to School! Let's Go Women to Work!

## Findings

### The Development of Gender Equality Sensitivity

#### *Findings by TCE-FF (Form)*

First question was their thoughts about the symbols of men and women (used in bathrooms or signboards) and the features of sexes. In pre-application of the form they mostly define the symbol by sexes (women and men) and emphasized physical differences while in the post application; some of them linked this symbol with gender equality and some rejected the differences. For example, S24 (B) said in pre-application of the form 'There are different properties of sexes, some being girls and some being boys and they wear different clothes' stressing the differences and afterwards changed his views as 'The picture tells me about equality of women and men. Sexes do not have different properties.'

The second question was about equality and gender equality. In the pre-application they mostly defined the symbol by equality and slightly emphasized gender equality and instead talked about equality of numbers etc. while in the post application; nearly half of them mentioned gender equality and some stated working at same jobs, sharing households, etc.

The third question was about a scale with two pans one with a man and the other with a woman (woman on the dominant pan). Through pre-application; students mentioned physical weight differences, equality of people and with the post-application they indicated gender

inequality, a higher number of men. It is obvious with S8 (G) explaining the picture as 'An object weighing the weight indicates who is heavier' in the pre-application, later indicating his opinion as 'More support for men and no support for women at all' in the last application of the form.

The fourth question included a short example talking about a girl who wants to engage in wrestling. In the application before the instructional process, they stated some reasons hindering the girl from wrestling such as worrying about injury, seeing wrestling as men's sport and about their views nearly half of them mentioned they would support it, their suggestions were not caring for elders, switching to another sport, struggling to succeed, persuading etc. Through post-application again worrying about injury and its unsuitability for women was stressed while they mentioned more support. One of the students explained his views regarding this girl's situation as 'I think this could be solved resolved like this. Elif should do whatever her family or teacher wants' in the pre-application of the form but later told 'the solution could only be with supporting her' (S13, B).

Fifth question was about toy preferences. Within pre-application of the form, most of the class chooses baby, cleaning set and kitchen set for girls and spider man, car, plane for boys. Some of them chose kitchen set, plane suitable for both. They explained their reasons with sexist views. In the post-application, most of the students mentioned that both can play with every toy. Also the number of students choosing the stereotyped toys above decreased. They explained their preferences with egalitarian opinions. This change is seen for example with answers of S22 (B), while he said 'They cannot choose the same toys because Ayla is a girl and Mehmet is a boy' before the instruction, he stated 'I think Ayla and Mehmet could play them all because toys and children could not be discriminated' afterward.

The sixth question is based on choosing a manager (woman or man) for a company. While they similarly talk about gender equality, both are deserving and some of them mention men's being better managers in pre and post-applications, in post application they stated some positive discriminations for women and they offered more egalitarian solutions.

The seventh question was about a man and a woman scientist. In the pre-application, more sexist choices were made and they mentioned men's being more successful, and being happy for him, while in the post application we see a more egalitarian attitude (both are successful), talking about feeling worthless, gender discrimination, as for solutions sexist solutions decreased while egalitarian solutions increased. S15 (B) stated that science is a field that men are more successful in the pre- application and suggested 'Cansu could be successful as much as Emre and this problem could be solved' while in post-application he said both could be successful.

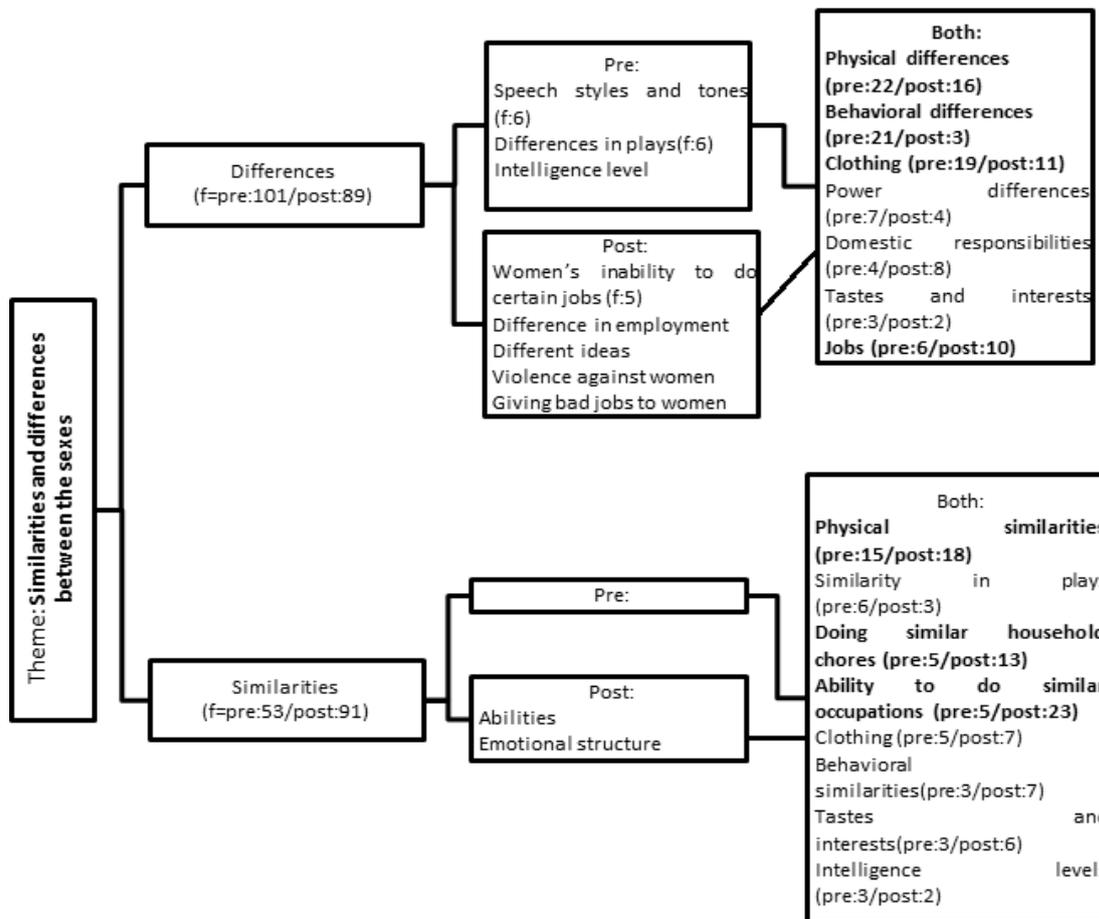
The last question included ads and who acts there. Within pre-application of the form, some students said there are ads suitable for men and some for women; also they mentioned physical features etc. Post-application showed that some students mentioned they could both act in any ads. S13 (B) also stated his views 'I think there are more men. Because they don't support women. Because there are a lot of celebrities in men... They are chosen according to advertisements, celebrities and volunteers... I let both of them play equally because it would be the same.' after the instruction.

**Findings by Interviews**

During the interviews, students were asked the same eight questions both in the beginning while the needs and current situation were determined and at the end of the action process. The students’ answers were given together on the table below. The questions focused on the views of students on similarities and differences between sexes, the definition of gender equality, the neighbourhood’s perspective on women and men, the presence of gender equality in their own families, the necessity of gender equality, the similarities and differences between what women and men can do and suggestions for gender equality.

The first question of the interview was regarding students’ views on genders and the characteristics of them as well. Students mentioned some differences and similarities shown in Figure 1.

**Figure 1**  
*Students’ Views on Similarities and Differences between Sexes*

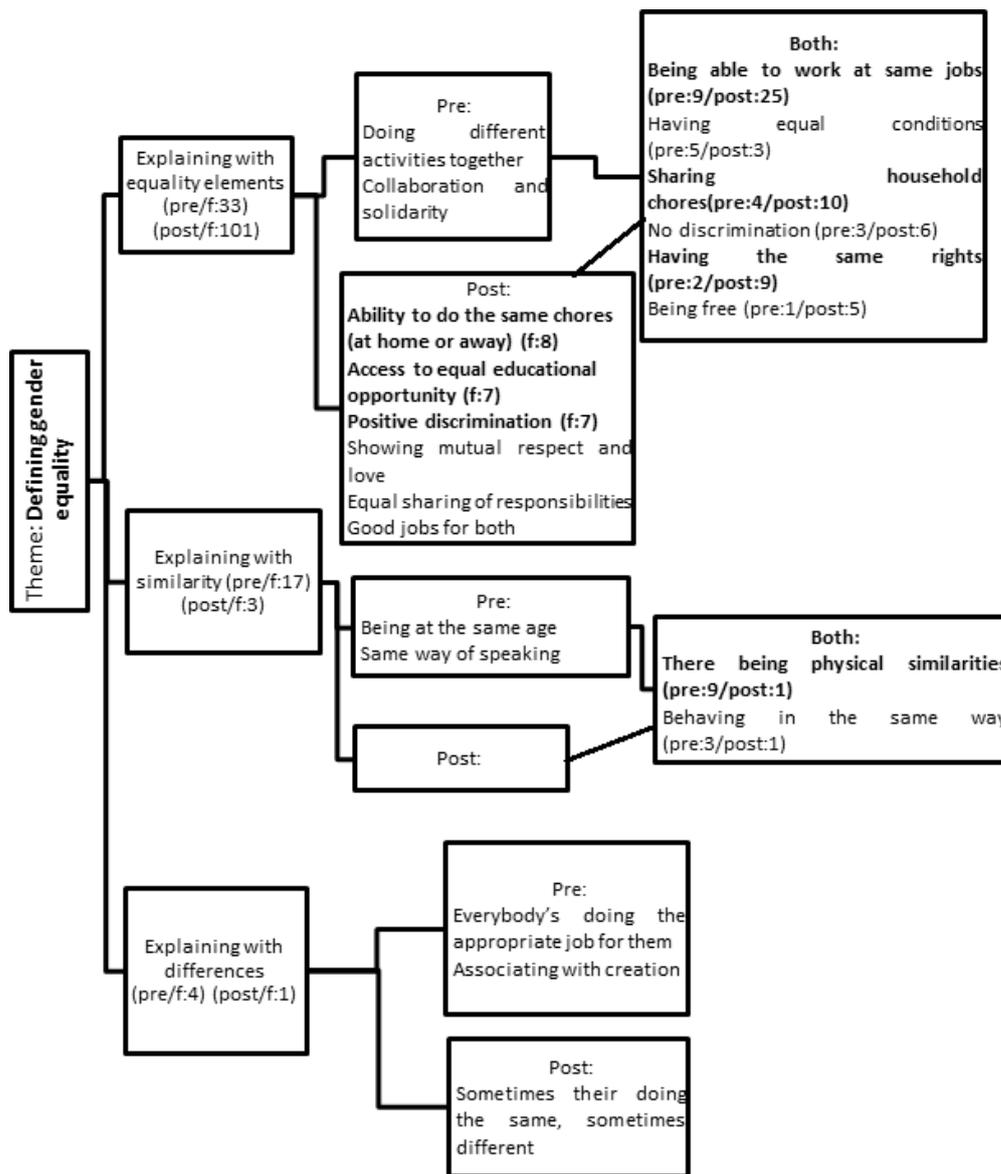


As seen on Figure 1, students focused on some differences such as physical, behavioral differences or differences in clothing before the instructional process and these changed for some inequalities within the society such as having different jobs, women’s inability to do certain jobs, violence and so on. As for similarities, students again mostly mention physical similarities beforehand and afterwards they mentioned both’s doing similar

household chores or similar occupations and having more similarities in general. One of the students talking about the similarities said ‘For example, women know how to cook, and most men know how to cook. After that, a man can do cleaning and a woman can, too’ (S31, B).

Through the interview, the next question asked about their views on gender equality (its definition and description). The answers are presented in Figure 2.

**Figure 2**  
Students’ definitions of gender equality



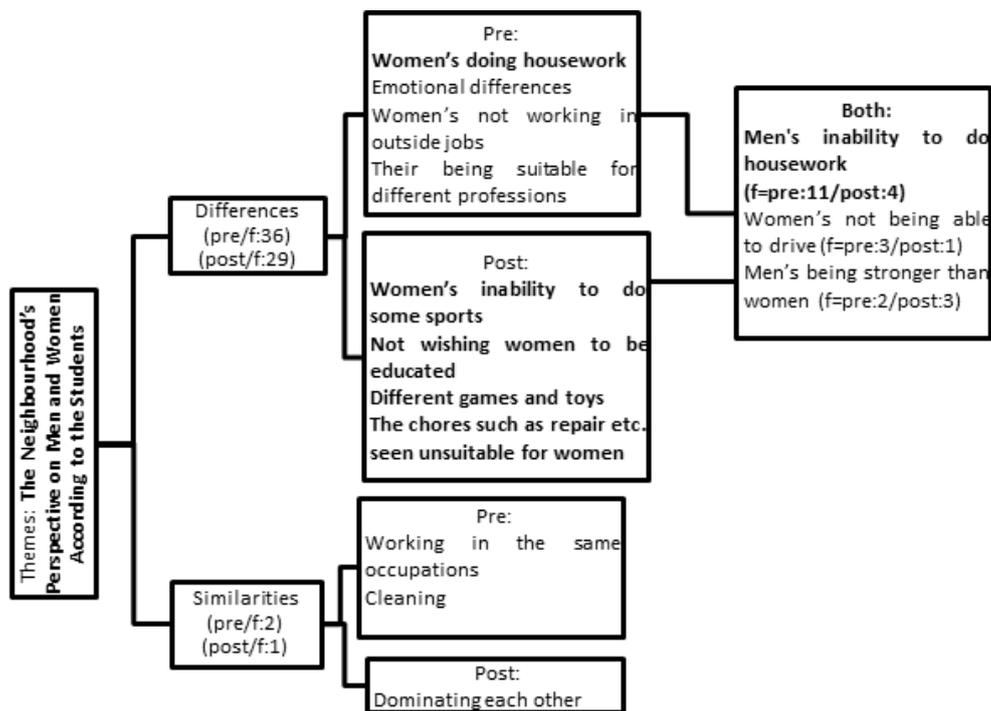
Students made different definitions for gender equality through the interviews. While they defined it mostly with doing same jobs, having equal conditions, having physical similarities in the first interviews, during the post interviews, they focused on doing same jobs, equal rights and sharing household chores. They also mentioned more detailed elements

related to equality such as equal education, mutual respect and so on. S12 (G) made a definition based on equality after the instruction 'For example, if both have the same rights, equality would be. For example, both have the right to have a profession. Both of them have the right to travel, health, and education rights, they all have. For example, they both have the right to have a child.

With the next question, the neighborhood's views on men and women were asked to students. The findings obtained are shown in Figure 3.

**Figure 3**

*The neighborhood's perspective on men and women according to the students*



As seen on Figure 3, students indicated the adults in neighborhood mostly talk about differences and these are much more about housework, emotional status, etc.... The most emphasized differences were men's inability to do housework and women's doing housework in the interviews at the beginning. Even not much changed in students' perceiving their neighborhood in terms of views on gender inequality after the instruction, still it was seen that students mentioned some more various differences such as sports, education, games or repairing. S16 (G) told about her experience 'I was cleaning the house. My mom told my brother 'Stay here and watch your sister', my brother said 'I will also do' and mom said 'You cannot, you are a boy' showing her realization of unequal sayings after the instruction.

There were questions asking about gender equality in the family and country. Firstly, students were asked if there is gender equality in their families. Most of the students (pre:23, post:22) assured that there is gender equality in their families and explained it in different ways. The findings regarding their explanations for gender equality/inequality in families are presented in Figure 4.

**Figure 4**

*Indicators of gender equality/inequality in the family according to student opinions*

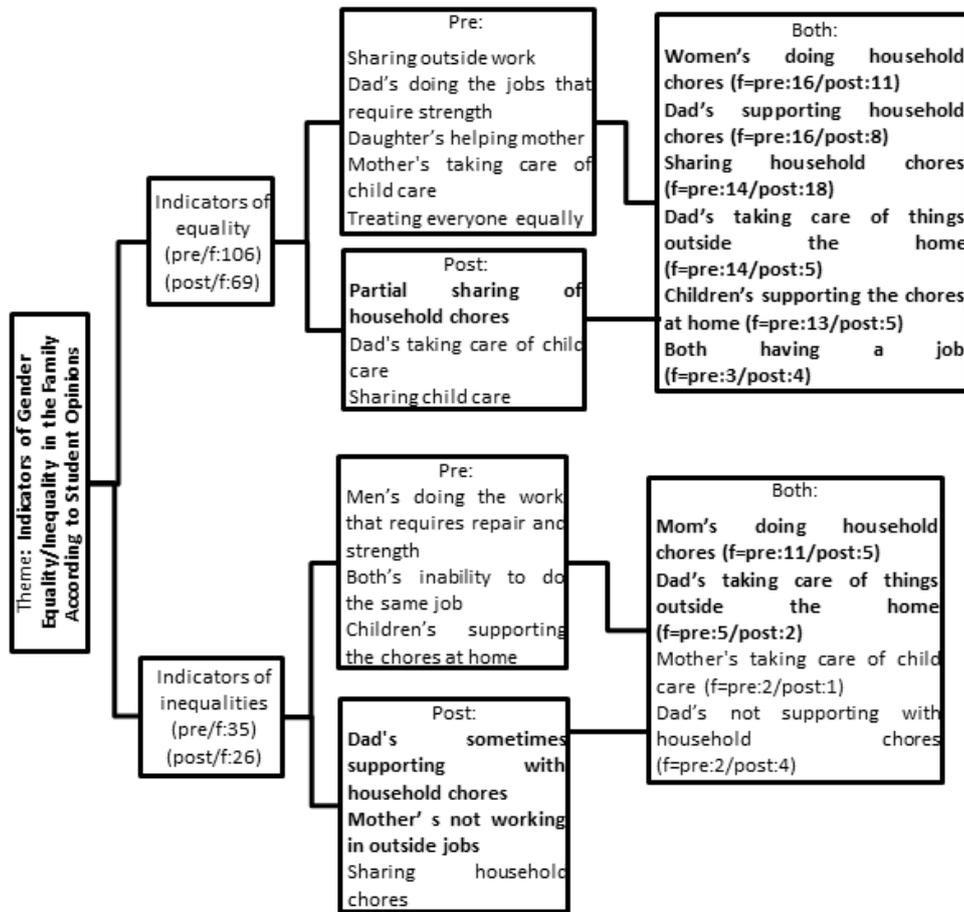
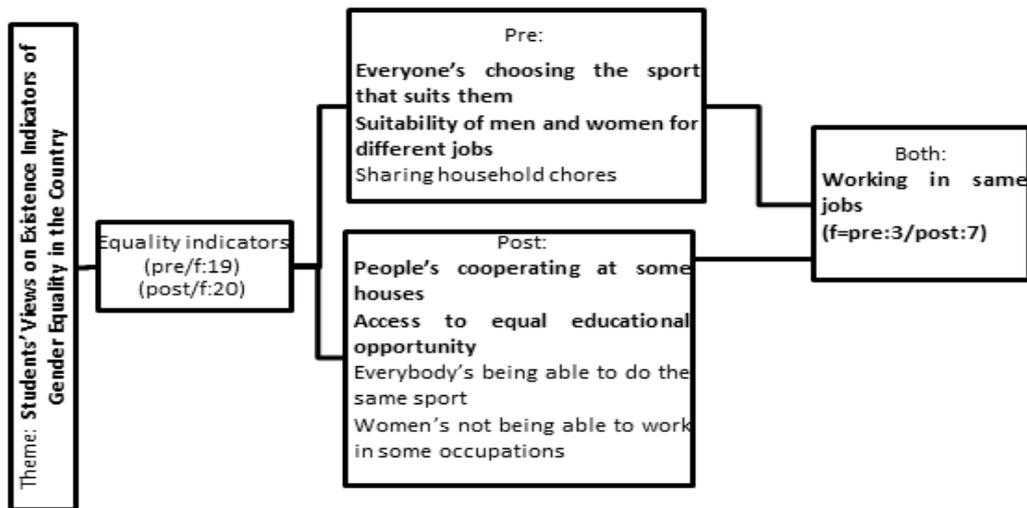


Figure 4 shows before instruction about gender equality, students mostly mentioned some indicators of equality such as women’s doing household chores on their own or dad’s support with sharing them as well and also dad’s taking care of things outside home and children’s supporting the chores were stated as markers of equality. These same indicators were stated while the focus moved on sharing household chores and some different indicators such as both having a job, dad’s taking care of child or sharing childcare were also put forward. As for inequality, students referred to mom’s doing household chores and dad’s doing the things outside home both in pre and post interviews; they emphasized dad’s never or sometimes supporting household chores, mom’s not working outside jobs at the last interviews. S10 (G) gave examples of the equality in her house during the post-interviews as; ‘Because my father does certain jobs, my mother does certain jobs. When my mother does not have time, my father helps her. For example, my father is ironing. Sometimes he collects the laundry.

For the question about gender equality in Turkey, students’ views were gathered under two different tables as fields and indicators regarding the existence of gender equality and the absence of gender equality. They are presented on Figure 5 and Figure 6.

**Figure 5**

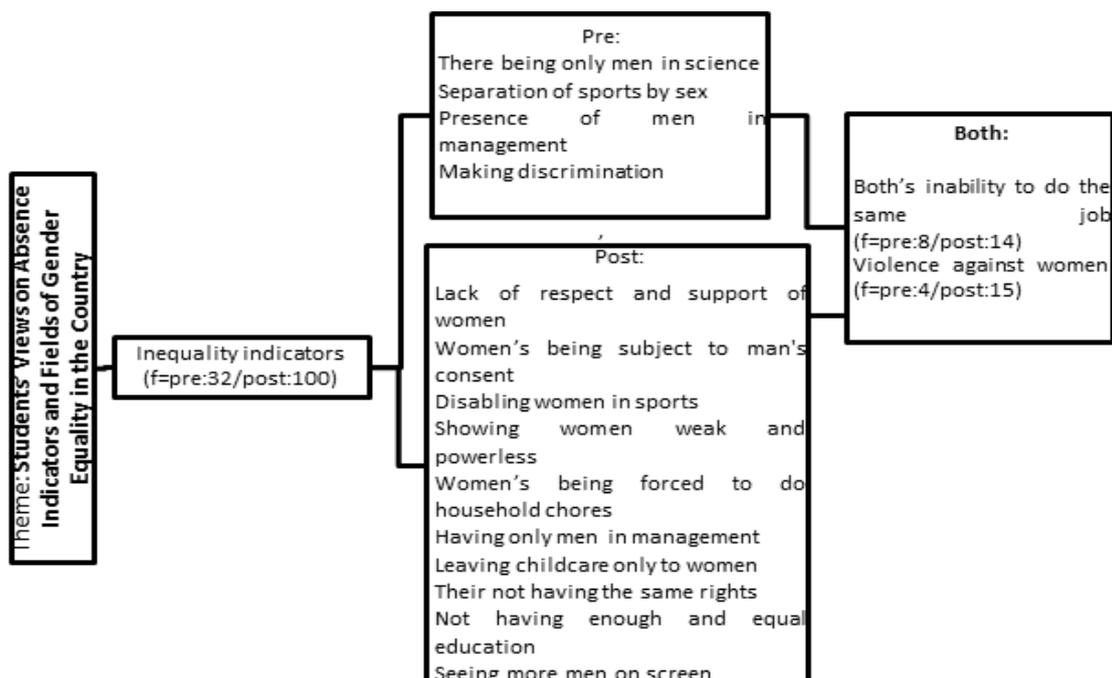
*Students' views on existence indicators and fields of gender equality in Turkey*



It is obvious in Figure 5 that the areas in which students believe there is equality were sports, science, business life, art, domestic life and etc.... After the instruction, only some of the students mentioned the same areas as of gender equality and also some stated some occupations, media or education as well. In the previous interviews, students put forward some indicators of this equality such as everyone's choosing the sport suit them, suitability of men and women for different jobs, working in same jobs while at the end they explained this equality by working in the same jobs, cooperating in the house or equal education. Within the same question, students also mentioned the inequalities and the indicators of this lack of equality as well. They are shown in Figure 6.

**Figure 6**

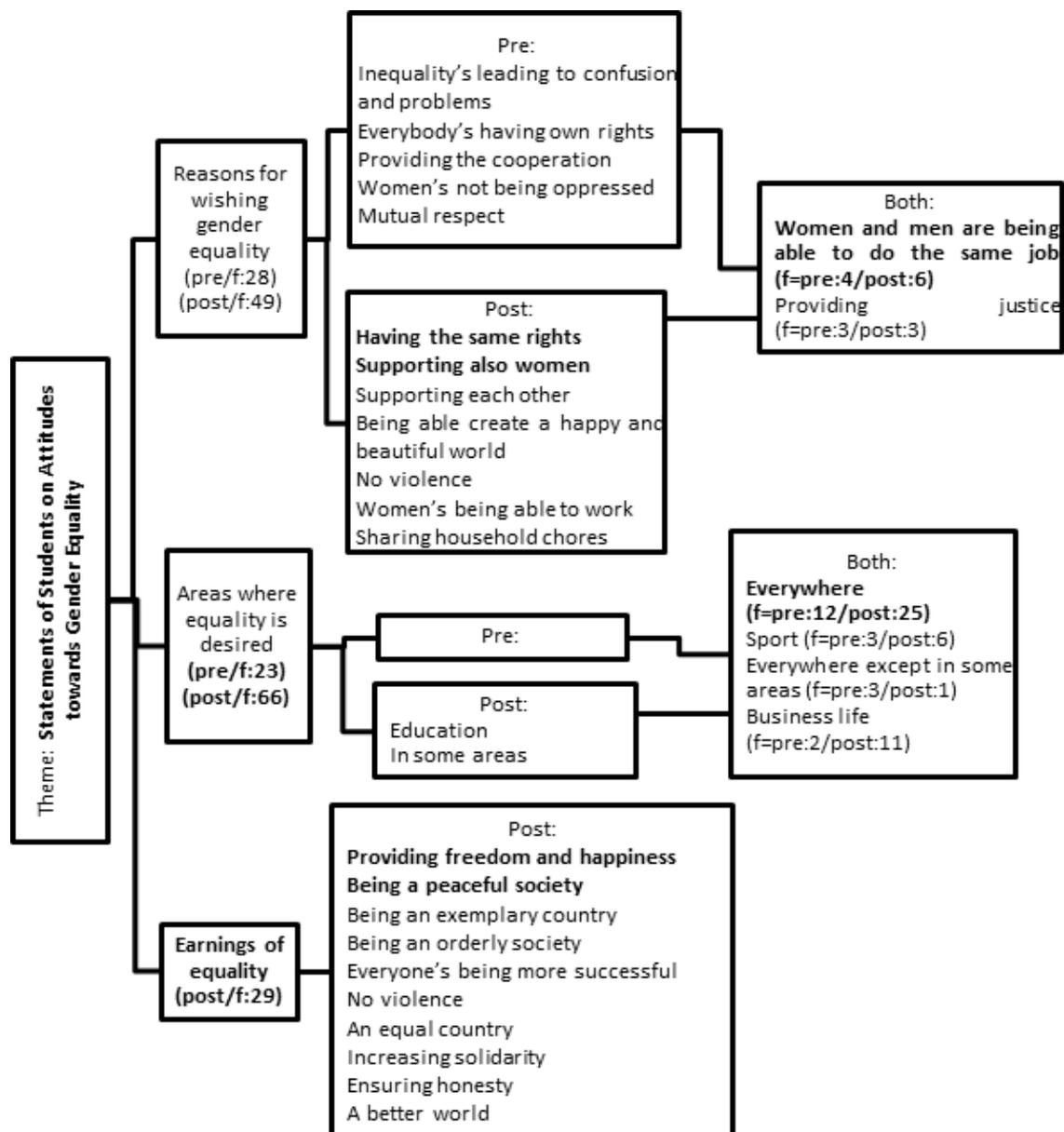
*Students' views on absence indicators of gender equality in Turkey*



Students mentioned the areas of inequality in the country such as sports, science, and education both in pre and post interviews but in the last interviews students also indicated business life, politics, media and etc.... It is seen on Figure 6 that the students put forward many more indicators regarding the inequality of gender in the country in the last interviews. They focused on both's inability to do the same job, violence against women, lack of respect and support for women, women's being subject to men's consent, disabling women in sports and so on.

When students were asked about their attitudes towards gender equality, the answers differed between pre and post interviews. Students' reasons for desiring gender equality, the areas they wished to see gender equality and the earnings of equality they mentioned were presented on Figure 7.

**Figure 7**  
Statements of Students on Attitudes towards Gender Equality

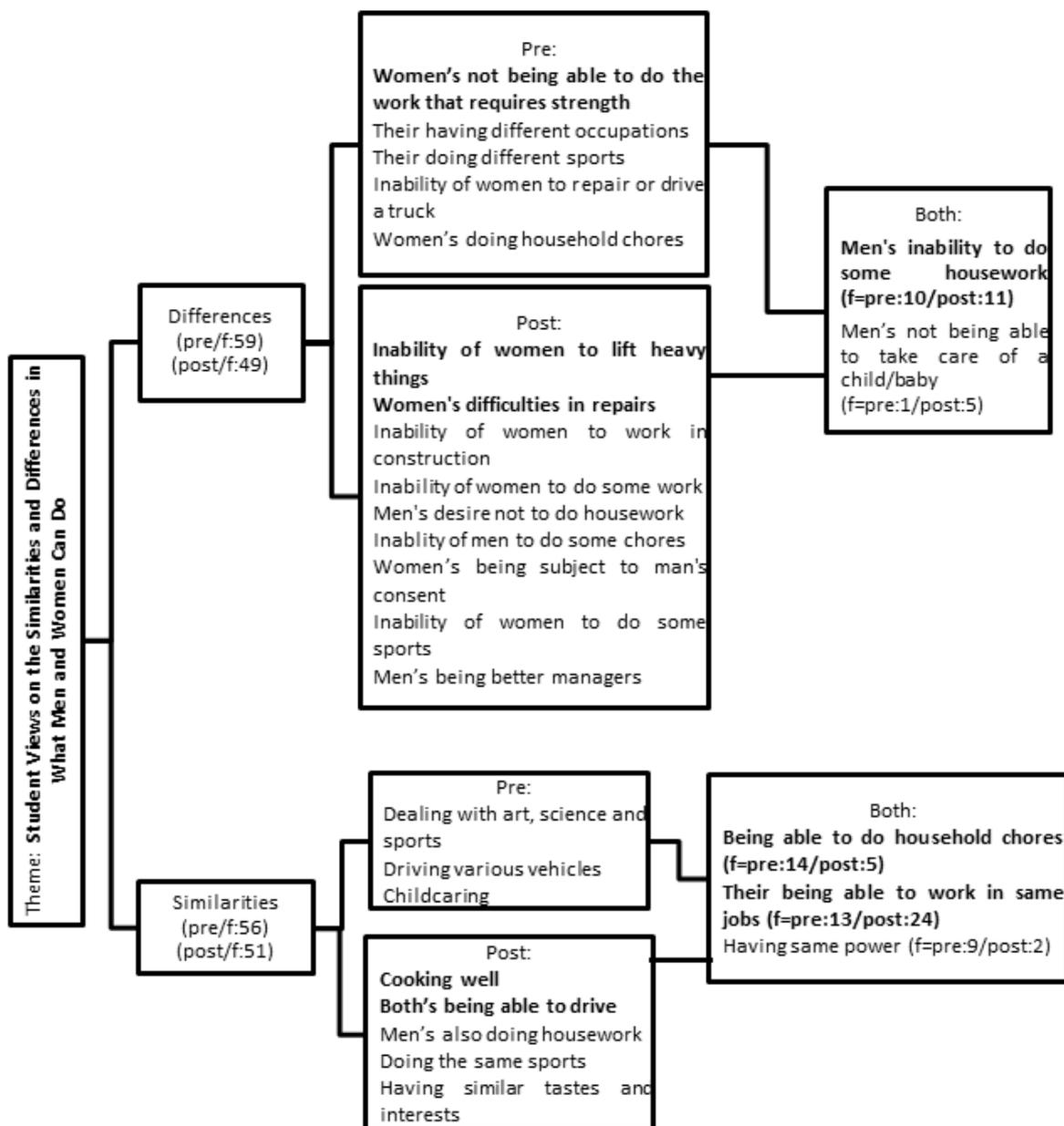


As seen on Figure 7, students' desire for gender equality increased after the instructional process and besides the problems could reveal due to inequality, justice or cooperation, they put forward new arguments such as having equal rights or supporting women/each other in post-interviews. Most of the class found to wish for equality in everywhere and they even stated some earnings of this equality. There were some students not desiring for equality in the first interviews coming up with reasons such as they should be different and having different physical properties which vanished after the instruction.

The next question within the interviews asked about students' views on similarities and differences between women and men. The findings are in Figure 8.

**Figure 8**

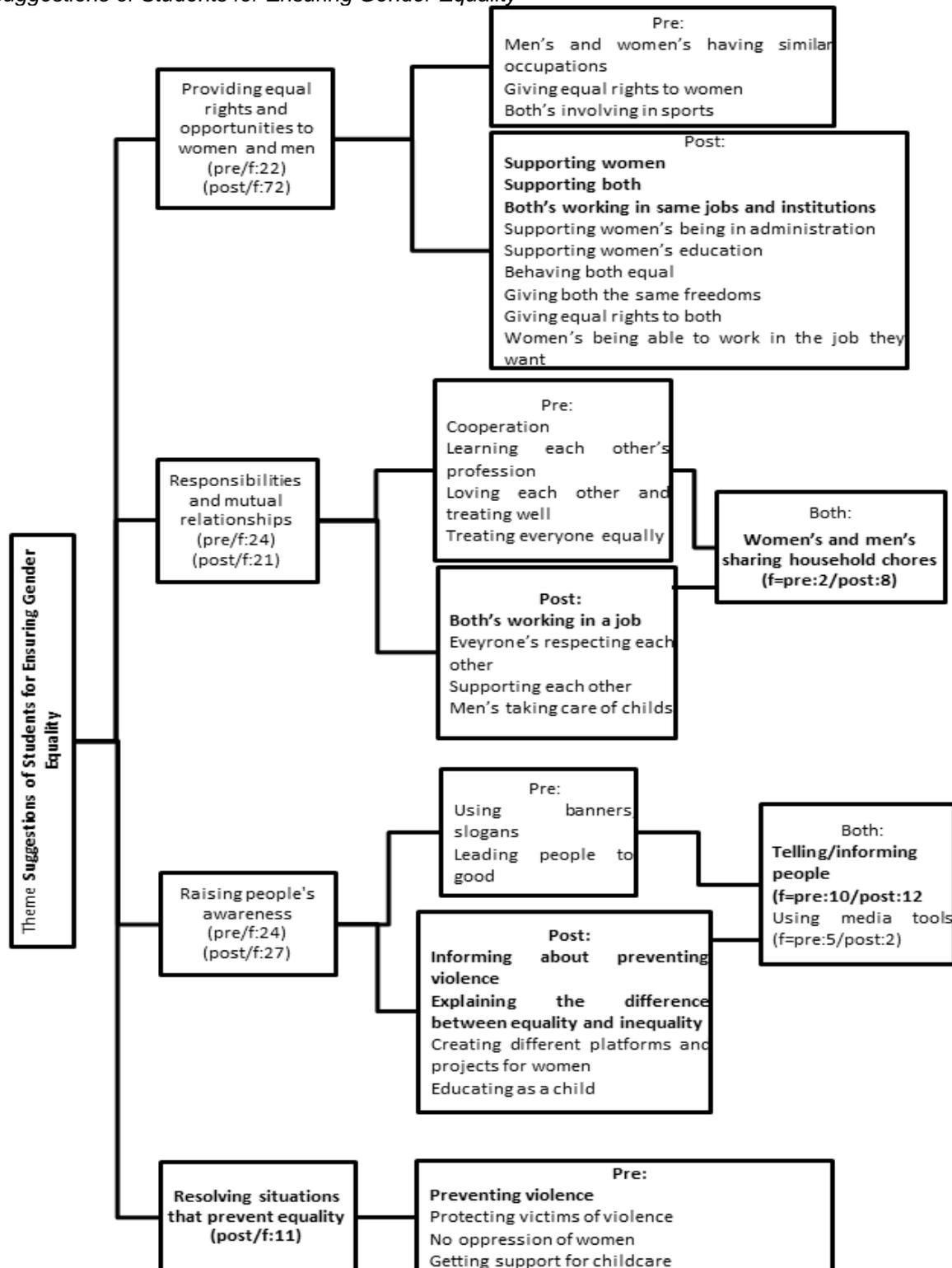
*Student views on the similarities and differences in what men and women can do*



Students stated many similarities and differences in pre and post interviews. Their focus on differences did not change much but they mentioned some similarities such as doing the same jobs, cooking or driving in the post interviews.

The last question was about their suggestions in order to provide gender equality. Students brought about many different suggestions shown on Figure 9.

**Figure 9**  
*Suggestions of Students for Ensuring Gender Equality*



It is apparent in Figure 9 that students put forward many suggestions to provide equality of men and women both in pre and post interviews. While the number of suggestions increased in post interviews, students also stated some different suggestions than before such as supporting women or both, supporting women's being administrators, behaving equal to both, informing people about violence and so on. Moreover, students also mentioned some problems that have to be solved to ensure equality such as preventing violence or protecting the victims.

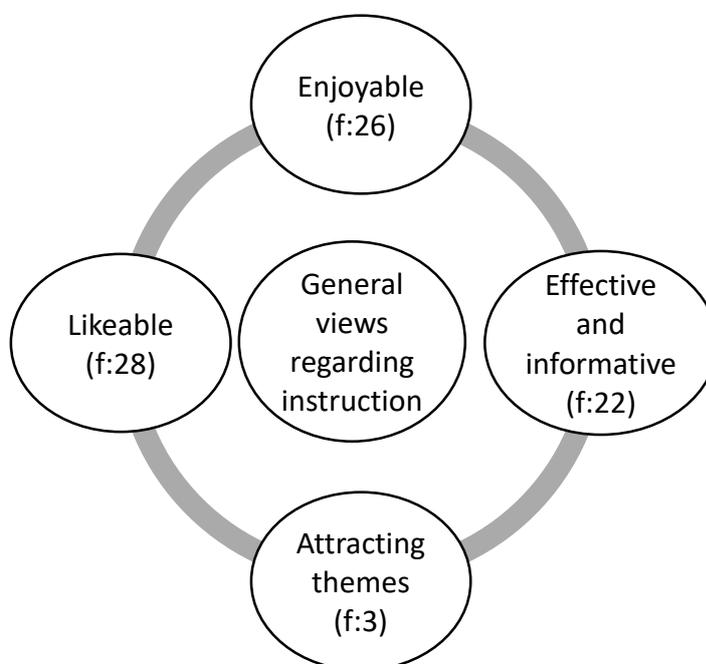
These findings show that students still think of some differences between men and women such as physical differences or some roles. Nevertheless, they could mention many similarities, define gender equality with equality elements, evaluate their families or country in terms of gender equality and could associate the situation of equality or inequality with many indicators. The desire of students' towards gender equality is high both before and after the instruction but they could put forward some benefits of equality after the instruction as well. It is seen that they could indicate many different recommendations through gender equality.

### The evaluation of the action process

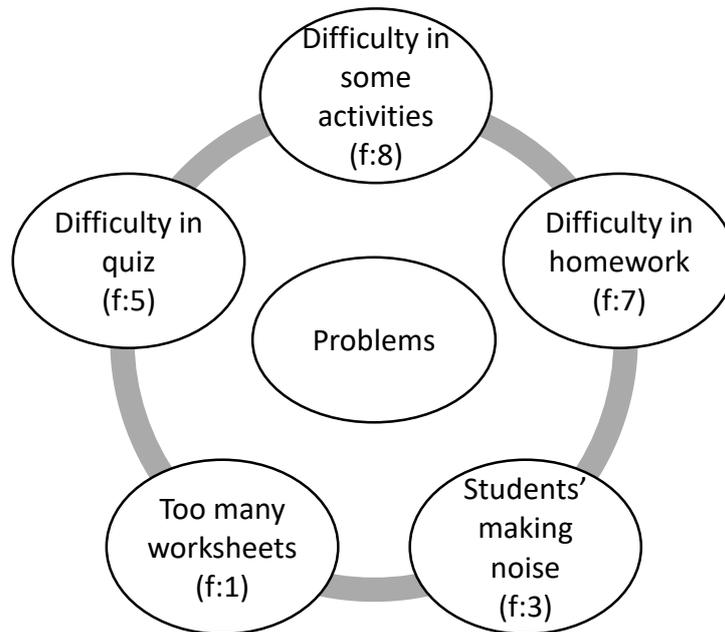
After the instructional process, students were also asked some questions to evaluate the whole teaching duration during post interviews. They were asked about the problems, positive sides, contributions and their suggestions for the courses they experienced. Figure 10 shows their general evaluation of the courses.

**Figure 10**

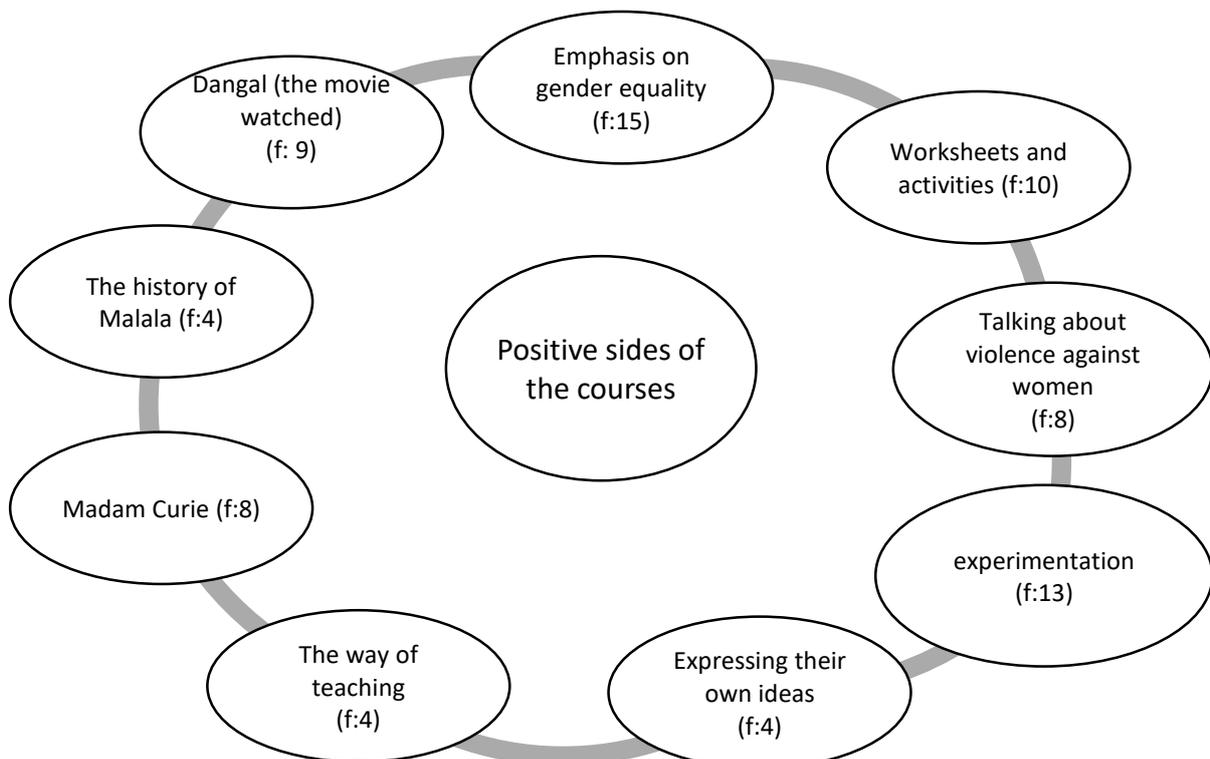
*Students' Views Regarding the Instructional Process*



As Figure 10 shows, students found the instruction enjoyable, likeable, effective and informative in general. Yet, they mentioned some problems as well. These problems are presented on Figure 11 below.

**Figure 11***The problems within instruction process*

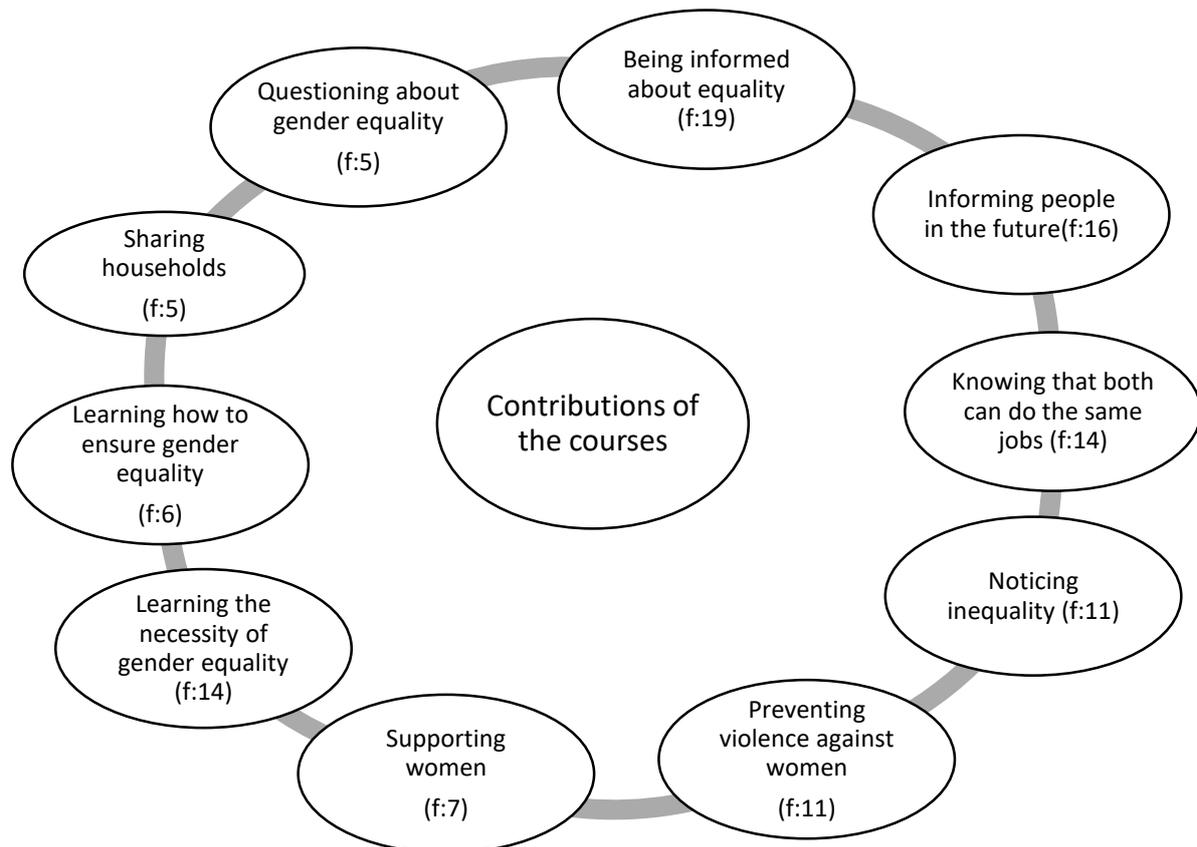
Students identified the problems they experienced in this process as difficulty in some activities of doing homework, having too many worksheets and students' making noise. They were also asked to put forward the positive sides of the courses. The answers are shown on Figure 12.

**Figure 12***The positive sides of the courses*

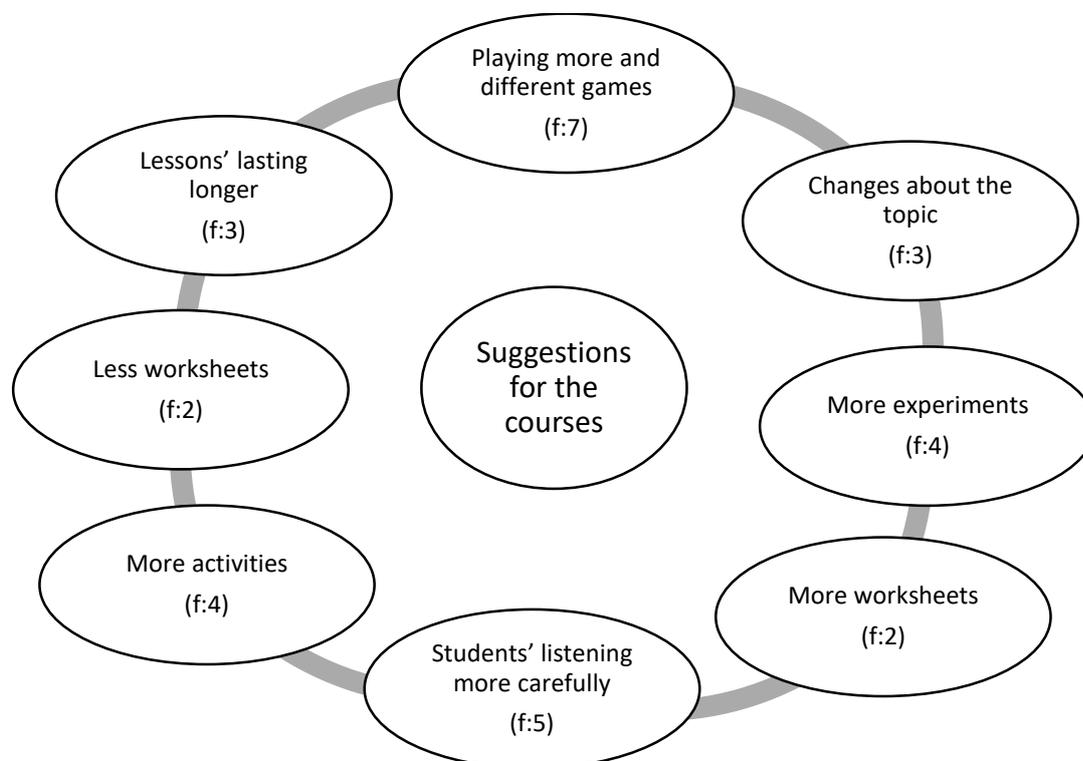
Students mentioned many positive sides such as putting emphasis on gender equality, the worksheets and activities, talking about violence against women, expressing their ideas and so on. The contributions of this process according to students were also presented on Figure 13.

**Figure 13**

*Students' views on the contributions of the courses*



As it is obvious on Figure 13, students stated these courses could contribute in many different ways such as being informed about equality, informing people about equality, knowing that both can do the same jobs, noticing inequality, learning the necessity of gender equality, etc... Lastly, students were asked if they have any suggestions regarding the courses to be more effective and attractive. Their suggestions were shown on Figure 14.

**Figure 14***The suggestions of students regarding the courses*

Students mostly emphasized playing more games, lessons' lasting longer, doing more activities and worksheets, more experiments and so on as their suggestions for the courses. The overall findings regarding the evaluation of instruction show that students enjoyed the courses and they believe its usefulness. They also mentioned some problems mostly about having difficulty in some activities and topics besides some classroom management problems such as the students' making noise during the lessons. Even though, they stated many contributions of lessons and they suggested continuing to lessons and such activities.

### Conclusion, Discussion and Implications

Findings showed that before the instruction, students were lack of enough knowledge about equality and gender equality notions, they had difficulty in discriminating between equality and inequality, they could partly observe stereotypes, and they mostly defined sex and gender via traditional arguments. This could be associated with the roles learned in their neighbourhood (family, friends, etc...) and within society. Özdemir and Balcı Karaboğa (2019, p. 762) indicated that children acquire the roles and characteristics of their gender at a young age, and these learnings starting within the family are reinforced by factors such as friends, school, and media. The findings through determining the present situation and needs revealed that there is a need for gender equality education and raising awareness for equality.

After the instruction, the students described gender equality, which they previously defined as doing the same jobs, having equal conditions, mostly by physical similarity, with explanations such as working in the same jobs, sharing the chores at home, having the same rights in the last interviews; while there is not much change in the differences (physical

differences, behavioral differences, clothing, etc.) mentioned when talking about the differences between women and men, it has been observed that there are more students who refer to their professions and responsibilities at home in terms of similarities. This may be an indication that education for students' gender equality creates some changes in students' stereotypes. In this context, it is seen in the literature that similar educational practices for children or adults provide an egalitarian change in gender perception and an increase in egalitarian attitudes attitudes (Acar Erdol, 2017; Esen, 2013; Kollmayer et al., 2020; Uzun et al., 2017; Toraman & Özen, 2019).

It is obvious that education could not change the places of work, home, relations it self or feeling discomfort does not make the person ask the right questions or seek for answers. Apart from knowing, it is necessary to have transformative actions and questioning having the conditions for further questioning (Villaverde, 2018, pp. 3-4). Just like as feminist approaches put forward the transformation of society and patriarchal dominance should be achieved for an egalitarian way of life. Education could start the movement and questioning in this regard. An important gain of this study was to make students question their family and society in terms of gender equality and some students mentioned that they care much more for equality and want to struggle for it.

Within this study, it was seen that students changed their statements regarding the status of gender equality both in their families and countries; they matched the equality/inequality situations with more appropriate examples. Even so, some of the students still associate their mothers' doing housework with equality which signifies that some of the stereotypes did not vanish. Also, some students are found to have the idea of women are less strong than men. In their research, El Kharouf and Daoud (2019) found that male and female students significantly associated tasks at home, such as setting the table and washing clothes, with women, and changing the gas cylinder and ironing mechanism with men, female students said that professions such as journalism, automotive mechanics and taxi driver should be provided for women as well; on the other hand, it has been observed that male students maintain a more traditional understanding in many subjects. In the study, it was also evident that especially two male students persisted in their stereotypes, and even though they gave some egalitarian answers, they showed a more traditional approach in the process. This brings us to think about the argument in that radical feminists also mentioned that some revolutionary changes are needed in the structure of family to change these stereotypes and it is obvious that educational actions would not be enough on their own. Also charging domestic labor or changing women's status within the family was an issue raised by socialist feminism as it is a learned and reproduced traditional stereotype within the social life.

As for equality in the country, students were much more aware of the inequality situations and indicated fewer areas of equality; also brought up more convenient indicators of equality such as equal education or similar jobs. That is students' awareness for detecting inequality was also increased through this action process. Moreover, it was observed that the students showed more positive attitudes towards gender equality; they talked about many different areas where equality should be. Within the scope of the lessons, it is among the findings that students start to offer suggestions for ensuring equality starting from the 4th week, and they offer more suggestions for empowering women and ensuring equality between women and men, especially in the weeks when violence and education are discussed. This can be seen as an indication that students have started to gain awareness of being a part of

the solution by increasing their awareness of gender equality, as well as distinguishing between equality and inequality situations.

The issue of violence against women can be seen as one of the most important problems related to gender discrimination in Turkey in recent years. Regarding this, Kardam (2005) states that violence against women in Turkey is supported by social norms such as the superiority of men, women's behavior being under the control of men (as well as their sexuality), the interventionist attitude of the society contributes to this, and cases of violence against women are explained with reasons such as women's non-obedience. Education initiatives to eliminate such a perception of society and violence are considered very important (Flood, 2011; Khan et al., 2013; Gadd et al., 2014; Taghdisi et al., 2014). In practice, in this context, violence was handled as a theme, and the effects of violence, which constituted an obstacle to gender equality, were included. In these activities, it was observed that the students distinguished the situations of violence related to violence against women, associated it with inequality, and gave examples from their own daily lives, and they also developed many suggestions for the prevention of violence (f:22).

Looking at the application of the form (TCE-FF), students also showed a supportive manner in terms of women's doing sports, however, some students also kept up the opinion that wrestling is dangerous for women. But most of them still put forward egalitarian and useful suggestions to ensure equality in other sports both in the form and through the lessons. It is a significant reality that women are not as visible as men in sports (Kazaz & Hansu, 2020) and in Turkey there is discrimination according to gender (Şahan & Akbulut, 2020). Students also choose the same toys for both girls and boys and explained that they both could play with the same toys while some still showed stereotyped behaviors. In the study conducted by Raag and Rackliff (1998), it was determined that especially boys would like to play with toys that are more suitable for the opposite sex, but they refused to play and stated that their fathers would have a negative attitude towards these toys. In this context, it can be said that students determine their toy preferences both with the effect of stereotypes they have and according to the approval status of the environment. The awareness of students about the involvement of women and men in the fields of management and science increased, but some students used some expressions that men are better in these fields and leadership and authority positions are more associated with men, as observed in studies in the literature (Aylaz et al., 2014; Saint-Michel, 2018; Sakallı Uğurlu et al., 2018), the attitude towards women in science could be explained with that women are seen as less talented than men in the field of science (Valian, 2007), women encounter different prejudices in fields such as science and engineering (Brush, 1991), and insufficient access to science education (Özkazanç, 2010).

It is also promising that students were happy with the instruction and found it useful. The most important problem that they mentioned was about the noise by their friends. Through the observations, observer evaluation and researcher diary, it was also seen that there were some problems such as time management, interference of the class's teacher, students' not listening to each other, others' interrupting the lesson, and problems within group work. Some solutions tried to solve these problems as shortening the activities, talking to the teacher of the class and the other teachers not to interrupt, timing the group work and doing it less. These problems were mostly solved through the end of the process with also the problems regarding gender equality. Students also stated that they had fun and learned through these lessons and they put forward many possible contributions of these lessons such as learning about equality, realizing the unequal situations, struggling against violence, warning and informing people

about gender equality and so on. These feedbacks were also very important in understanding the effects of the instruction and the pathway of the action process. The action research process also helped the researcher/ teacher to follow the whole path of the problems and solutions and find a developmental way to overcome the problems instead of instant interventions as in an experimental study.

The achievements of the students towards gender equality throughout the process are not to be underestimated. However, it should be said that these alone are not sufficient for social transformation. The stereotypes about women and men from past to present; perceptions of typical women and typical men tend to remain constant (Lueptow et al., 1995). Therefore, changing these perceptions requires a very difficult and long process. On the other hand, the implementation process in the research is only 11 weeks, and despite the existence of situations such as intervention to problems, students' adaptation to a new classroom order and teacher (the researcher), it can be said that the achievements of the program for gender equality provide important and promising indicators regarding long-term education that can be done in the future.

Seeing the effective results and solved problems along with some restrictions through the action process, some suggestions could also be pointed out. This was an action research with a teacher-researcher, there might be further studies conducted based on the problems felt by teachers (real) in the classroom. As this instructional process was positive in terms of students' reactions and gender equality attainments, also different educational practices can be planned to improve students' egalitarian attitudes and behaviors. Considering the effects of parents' stereotypes on children's behaviors, they could also be included through these practices. This study was only with students themselves. Based on the classroom management problems throughout the implementations, some different strategies could be utilized in terms of classroom management problems. It is especially seen that the children had stereotypes in the first application of awareness form and this implies that starting the practices from an earlier age can enable children to acquire more egalitarian attitudes without forming stereotypes. It is also important to have egalitarian teachers and school environments to provide sensitivity for gender equality with students. Therefore, some in-service training for teachers or school staff could be provided as well.

### **Contribution Rate of the Researchers**

Author 1 (70%): Conceptualization, methodology, writing-original draft preparation, writing-reviewing and editing, data curation, visualization, investigation.

Author 2 (30%): Conceptualization, supervision, validation, writing- reviewing and editing

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The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest concerning the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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