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## AWARENESS TOWARDS HUMAN RIGHTS AND DEMOCRACY EDUCATION: A MIXED METHOD RESEARCH

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### ABSTRACT

*This study aims to evaluate prospective teachers' views on the elective Human Rights and Democracy Education course taught in the Faculty of Education. This study was conducted based on a mixed-methods approach. For this purpose, the opinions of 144 students who took and did not take this course were evaluated according to the branch, gender, and class variables using the "Attitude Scale towards Human Rights Education." In addition, the views of 10 students on the effectiveness, importance, and recommendations of the course were collected through focus group interviews. According to the results obtained, there was a statistically significant difference in the Education of Human Rights Field scores based on whether the students took the course or not, but there was no significant difference in the Human Rights in Education Environment scores in terms of department, gender, and class level. Students emphasized the importance of this course and stated that it should be taught practically at all levels.*

**Keywords:** Democracy education, Education, Human rights education, Teacher education, Citizenship.

### INTRODUCTION

Human rights and freedoms are essential elements that individuals need throughout their lives due to their nature. As a part of free-living, people have fought long battles throughout history regarding human rights and democracy (Özensoy, 2019). Eventually, human rights, which are secured as legal and political arguments (Council of Europe, 2012), are expressed as universal rights that people have by birth, regardless of religion, language, race, or gender (Osler & Starkey, 2006; Ghosal, 2010). Based on the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, human rights are considered indispensable elements that make people's lives more meaningful (Toole, 2013). In terms of adding value to people's lives, the protection of all fundamental human rights and complementary freedoms, including the right to life, health, education, housing and property, travel, and complaint, are legally guaranteed (Ghosal, 2010). With these dimensions, human rights and freedoms are seen as universal and individual characteristics carrying egalitarian and fair values (Donnelly, 2007; Donia, 2020). Living in a democratic environment where rights and freedoms are fundamental is considered essential for every individual (Zedgenizova *et al.*, 2021; Sadovnikova *et al.*, 2022). In this context, the aim of reaching democratic societies where people's rights and freedoms are secured by democracy is prioritized

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for every state (Özbek, 2017). Establishing and maintaining proper communication and interaction between individuals and the state requires building societies based on trust, respect, and tolerance, where people's basic human rights and freedoms are guaranteed (Acun, 2014). Only in such an atmosphere can societies that adopt democratic values and processes be achieved (Hanawi *et al.*, 2022).

When discussing democracy, concepts such as popular sovereignty, the people deciding their future freely, responsibility, and social participation are understood (Council of Europe, 2012). In ensuring national unity and integrity, societies in harmony with democracy and fostering love and awareness for the homeland stand out in terms of acquiring democratic values (Tuhuteru, 2023). Political experiences in achieving democratic societies support today's democratic attitudes (Ma & Ouyang, 2020). The relationship between individuals and the state in terms of 'citizenship' emphasizes democratic foundations. Democracy is based on a fair and egalitarian government for individuals. Human rights and freedoms and the concept of democracy have been debated for many years, and finally, they maintain their unity and importance as inseparable components that form the basis of the relationship between citizens and the state within the framework of democratic processes (Beetham, 2013; Landman, 2018). The 'democracy' factor is considered remarkably necessary and important in the development of human rights (Goodhart, 2008). In terms of respect for human rights and democracy (Demirel-Pegg & Moskowitz, 2009), democratic societies are described as communities that are respectful of human rights and in harmony with democratic values and attitudes, and tolerant (Tuhuteru, 2023). While international institutions, organizations, and documents emphasize that the concepts of democracy and human rights, which are considered together within the scope of international standards, are an inseparable whole (Kolstad, 2022), the focus is on the protection of the related obligations between citizens and the state in local and international fields based on human rights and democracy education, including 'real and virtual environments' (United Nations Human Rights Council [UNHRC], 2016). In this context, the ideal of a democratic society, it is aimed to raise democratic citizens by ensuring social, cultural, and political processes are legally protected with a fair and equal approach, taking advantage of today's technological environments and emphasizing access to information (Ulubey & Gözütok, 2015; Akmal, 2017). In today's world, with the accelerating pace of scientific and technological developments, the necessity of democratic governance processes based on human rights and freedoms is drawing attention from every society. As required by modern societies today, within the scope of 21st-century skills, it is observed that citizenship rights and freedoms are integrated into democratic societal processes by adapting to the process for sustainable development (Balbağ *et al.*, 2017). At this stage, it is evident that attention is drawn to the concept of 'quality education' within the understanding of today's 'sustainable education'. Within the scope of quality education, the relationship between individuals and society in education and training processes is addressed in terms of the state-citizen relationship, including the effective political transformation of social media (Arpanudin & Aulia, 2019; Promise *et al.*, 2023). To fulfill the requirements of the current techno-digital age and to capture the process by adapting to the era, education, and training processes also include the theme of human rights and freedoms to access democratic societies (Alshurman, 2015). Under the emphasis on quality education, the acquisition and embedding of fundamental human rights and freedoms into daily life within the



context of democratic processes have been an ongoing concern from the past to the present (Siregar & Kemala, 2023). Educational environments where people who have adopted fundamental rights and freedoms can demonstrate democratic participation in the development of democratic societies are seen as an important area (Becker *et al.*, 2015; Sant, 2019; Marjanovic-Shane *et al.*, 2023). In recent years, the prominent issue of 'human rights and democracy education', both in its international documents and constitutional processes and in its versions reflected in countries' curricula and taught as a course, maintains its relevance. By imparting citizenship rights and responsibilities to individuals through human rights and democracy education courses from an early age, it is envisaged that the goal of creating democratic societies based on respect, tolerance, values, and appreciation of differences (Council of Europe, 2012; Karatekin *et al.*, 2012) will be supported within democratic education environments (Dewey, 1916; Osler & Starkey, 2006; Donia, 2020). In studies focusing on human rights and democracy education, the interaction between school, family, and social environment is at the forefront (Arpannudin & Aulia, 2019). Universal human rights and freedoms, along with democracy, are taught holistically, encompassing knowledge and skills, starting in the family and continuing systematically in schools. The human rights and democracy education process, which is carried out in schools in coordination with families, is encouraging for today's democratic education approach (Gillespie & Melching, 2010). In this process, educators have roles and responsibilities in the quality attainment phase of human rights and democracy education. In this context, the responsibilities of educators in conveying democratic values and tendencies in educational environments are primary (Tuhuteru, 2023). Teacher candidates are expected to adopt and demonstrate these rules themselves to raise awareness and respect for human rights and democracy (Samancı, 2010; Nanackchand & Berman, 2012; Aslan & Aybek, 2018). In this direction, there are compulsory and elective courses on 'Human Rights and Democracy Education' in universities' teacher training programs for the planned and regular functioning of the process related to human rights and democracy education.

This research aims to evaluate the Human Rights and Democracy Education course according to the opinions of teacher candidates. For this purpose, it was investigated whether there was any difference between students' attitudes towards Human Rights Education by gender, department, grade level, branch, and between teacher candidates who have taken the course and those who have not; and students' views on reading books related to the subject, attending symposiums, seminars, conferences, and what kind of education should be provided on this issue were sought.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study was conducted based on a mixed-methods approach. Mixed methods are preferred in studies where multiple methods are chosen, and both qualitative and quantitative data are intended to be considered as a whole (Halcomb & Hickman, 2015). The mixed-method approach provides benefits to different disciplines conducting interdisciplinary studies (Doyle *et al.*, 2009). Studies based on this method allow holistic association and comparison of quantitative and qualitative data (Tashakkori & Creswell, 2007). The study's quantitative data were obtained through the "Attitude Scale towards Human Rights Education" developed by Kepenekçi (1999). The scale was prepared as a 5-point Likert scale, with options such as Strongly Agree, Agree, Undecided, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree. The scale consists of 23 attitude statements and 2



factors; the first has 18 statements related to human rights education, and the second has 5 statements related to human rights in the educational environment. The reliability coefficient of the scale was found to be .90. A normality test was applied to the research data, and non-parametric tests were used according to the obtained results. The reliability coefficient of the scale in this study was found to be .80, which indicates the study is valid and reliable. The quantitative dimension of the study included a sample group of 144 teacher candidates who have/have not taken this course. In the qualitative dimension of the research, a semi-structured interview form prepared by the researchers was revised by obtaining the opinions of 3 experts. Subsequently, focus group interviews were conducted with participants to collect qualitative data. The interviews were conducted with 10 volunteer teacher candidates. The participant group to be included in the focus group interview was determined according to the easily accessible sampling model. In easily accessible sampling, the researcher has the initiative to work with people they can reach throughout the process (Küçük, 2016). The easily accessible sampling method was used to reach the teacher candidates in the study group quickly and effectively (Baltacı, 2018). The attitudes of 59 teacher candidates who took the Human Rights and Democracy course at the Faculty of Education, 85 teacher candidates who did not take this course, and the opinions of 10 teacher candidates were evaluated. Ethical approval with the number 2021-SBB-0317 was obtained for this study. Students' opinions on Human Rights Education were obtained in the semi-structured interview forms. The form prepared for teacher candidates included questions about whether they received Human Rights and Democracy course education, read books on the subject, attended symposiums, seminars, and conferences, and what kind of education should be given on this issue. The obtained opinions were examined through content analysis, findings were evaluated, codes determined with the opinions of two experts were evaluated, and approvals were obtained by presenting them to the teacher candidates participating in the research. Content analysis processes are utilized in studies related to social sciences with strong analysis techniques (Krippendorff, 1989). Content analysis is used by researchers to fully reveal the content of the document in all aspects to make the study process meaningful (Drisko & Maschi, 2016). Personal information about the participants in the qualitative dimension of the study is presented in **Table 1**.

**Table 1.** Participants in the Study Group

Participants	Gender	Department	Grade Level
P1	Female	Female Psychological Counseling and Guidance (PCG)	3rd Grade
P5	Female	PCG	3rd Grade
P2	Female	Elementary Mathematics Teaching	3rd Grade
P4	Female	Elementary Mathematics Teaching	3rd Grade
P3	Female	Science Teaching	4th Grade
P7	Female	Science Teaching	3rd Grade
P6	Female	Social Studies Teaching	3rd Grade
P8	Female	Classroom Teaching	3rd Grade
P9	Male	Classroom Teaching	4th Grade

P10	Female	Art Teaching	3rd Grade
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Examining **Table 1**, it is observed that there are 9 female and 1 male students. It is seen that 8 of them are in the 3rd grade and 2 are in the 4th grade. In the interviews, there are 2 participants from the PCG department, 2 from Mathematics Teaching, 2 from Science Teaching, 1 from Social Studies Teaching, 2 from Classroom Teaching, and 1 from Art Teaching.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this study, the attitudes and opinions of pre-service teachers towards Human Rights and Democracy Education have been evaluated. Firstly, the attitudes of pre-service teachers towards this course have been evaluated according to their gender, department, grade level, and whether they have taken this course or not.

### *1. Findings Related to the Attitudes of Pre-service Teachers Towards Human Rights and Democracy Education*

The opinions of the students were obtained using the Attitude Scale Towards Human Rights Education, and the normality test of the data was performed. The findings obtained are presented in **Table 2**.

**Table 2.** Normality test results of the Attitude Scale Towards Human Rights Education

	N	Ave.	SD	Skewness (SH)	Kurtosis (SH)	Kolmogorov-Smirnov		
						Statistics	sd	p-value
Education of Human Rights (F1)	141	4.14	,59	-.55 (.20)	17 of 40	—0.071	139	.085
Human Rights in the Education Environment (F2)	145	4.63	,55	-2,01 (.20)	4.6 (.40)	.251	139	<,001



When **Table 2** is examined, it is explained that the data is not normally distributed, so non-parametric tests are used. It has been investigated whether there is a difference in student attitudes according to gender, and the obtained data are presented in **Table 3**.

**Table 3.** Descriptive Statistics and Comparison Results of the Attitude Scale Towards Human Rights Education According to Gender

Factor	Gender	N	Ave.	SD	Median	Min.	Max.	Ave. Order	Mann-Whitney U	C	p-value
F1	Female	109	4.17	,55	4.17	2,67	5,00	73,04	1413	-1.389	.165
	Male	31	4,00	,69	3,94	2,11	5,00	61,58			
F2	Female	112	4,66	,51	5,00	2,00	5,00	74,04	1507.5	-1.205	.228
	Male	31	4.50	,67	4,80	2,60	5,00	64,63			

Upon examining **Table 3**, it is understood that there is no statistically significant difference in students' Attitudes Towards Human Rights Education according to gender, and the averages of

females are slightly higher than those of males. It has been investigated whether students' attitudes differ according to the departments they receive education in, and the obtained data are presented in **Table 4**.

**Table 4.** Descriptive Statistics and Comparison Results of the Attitude Scale Towards Human Rights Education According to Departments

Factor	Department	N	Ave.	SD	Median	Min.	Max.	Ave. Order	Chi-square	sd	p-value
F1	Science	6	4.12	,60	4,19	3,11	4,78	70,58	1.394	6	,966
	Mathematics	27	4,03	,62	4.14	2,11	4,94	65,91			
	PdR	29	4.17	,60	4,33	2,72	5,00	73,36			
	Graphic-Work	13	4.06	,61	3,94	3.33	4,94	63,08			
	Class	13	4,19	,46	4.06	3.56	5,00	71,58			
	Social Sciences	32	4.15	,68	4,25	2,67	5,00	72,97			
	Turkish	21	4.21	,47	4.11	3,22	5,00	74,95			
F2	Science	6	4.57	,39	4.50	4,00	5,00	59,00	9.110	6	.167
	Mathematics	27	4,67	,57	4,80	2,60	5,00	74,00			
	PdR	30	4,76	46	5,00	3,00	5,00	83,57			
	Graphic-Work	13	4.29	,69	4.40	3,00	5,00	47,50			
	Class	14	4,72	,38	4.90	4,00	5,00	79,29			
	Social Sciences	32	4.58	,65	4.90	2,00	5,00	70,69			
	Turkish	23	4.62	,49	5,00	3,60	5,00	75,50			

( $p > .05$ )

It has been investigated whether students' attitudes differ according to the class level, and the obtained data are presented in **Table 5**. Upon examining **Table 4**, it is understood that there is no statistically significant difference in students' Attitudes Towards Human Rights Education according to departments. When the average scores are examined, it is seen that the attitude levels of all teacher candidates regarding human rights and democracy education are high, however, in the 1st Dimension, the Turkish teacher candidates; and in the 2nd Dimension, the PDR teacher candidates are higher than other departments.

**Table 5.** Descriptive Statistics and Comparison Results of the Attitude Scale Towards Human Rights Education According to Class Levels

Factor	Class	N	Ave.	SD	Median	Min.	Max.	Ave. Order	Chi-square	sd	p-value
F1	1st Grade	5	4,23	,58	3,94	3,67	4,89	70,60	1,550	2	,231
	2nd Grade	75	4,17	,61	4,28	2,67	5,00	73,25			
	3rd Grade	58	4,07	,57	4,00	2,11	5,00	64,56			

	1st Grade	5	4,68	,46	5,00	4,00	5,00	75,00			
F2	2nd Grade	76	4,64	,56	5,00	2,00	5,00	72,64	,231	2	,891
	3rd Grade	61	4,58	,57	4,80	2,60	5,00	69,79			

( $p > .05$ ).

It has been investigated whether students' attitudes differ depending on whether they received Human Rights Education or not, and the obtained data are presented in **Table 6**. Upon examining **Table 5**, it is understood that there is no statistically significant difference in students' Attitudes Towards Human Rights Education according to class level. It is observed that the averages of the 1st-grade teacher candidates are higher in both dimensions compared to other classes.

**Table 6.** Descriptive Statistics and Comparison Results of the Attitude Scale Towards Human Rights Education According to Students' Course Participation Status

Factor	Taking Lessons:	N	Ave.	SD	Median	Min.	Max.	Ave. Order	Mann-Whitney U	C	p-value
F1	Has not received	56	3.99	0,56	3,94	2,11	5,00	58.82	1698	-2.784	,005*
	Received	84	4,23	,59	4,33	2,67	5,00	78,29			
F2	Has not received	59	4.58	,57	4,80	2,60	5,00	70.37	2382	.548	.584
	Received	85	4,65	,55	5,00	2,00	5,00	73,98			

( $p > ,05$ )

Upon analyzing **Table 6**, a statistically significant discrepancy is observed in students' Attitudes Towards Human Rights Education based on whether they have participated in a human rights-related course, specifically in the dimension of Education in the Field of Human Rights (F1) (U: 1698, Z: -2.78,  $p < .01$ ). The scores of students who attended the course (Median: 4.33) surpass those who did not (Median: 3.94). However, no statistically significant difference was detected in students' attitudes within the dimension of Human Rights in the Educational Environment (F2).

When the overall findings are examined, it is concluded that teacher candidates' Attitudes Towards Human Rights Education do not differ according to gender, department, and class level in the dimensions of Education in the Field of Human Rights (F1) and Human Rights in the Educational Environment (F2). However, the attitudes of students who have and have not taken this course differ in the dimension of Education in the Field of Human Rights (F1) but do not differ in the dimension of Human Rights in the Educational Environment (F2). From the findings obtained, it is concluded that teacher candidates' attitudes in the dimension of Education in the Field of Human Rights differ from those who have not taken the course.

## 2. Findings Related to Teacher Candidates' Opinions on Human Rights and Democracy Education

The findings obtained from focus group interviews with teacher candidates are evaluated in this section. First, teacher candidates were asked what the concept of human rights means to them, and the opinions obtained are presented in **Table 7**.



**Table 7.** Opinions on the concept of human rights

What is the concept of human rights?	n	Participants
Fundamental rights that people can enjoy equally	5	P1,P3,P6,P7,E9
People need to know these rights.	4	P2,P3,P5,P8
That people live equally justly free and well	1	P1

Upon examining **Table 7**, teacher candidates have stated that the concept of human rights refers to the fundamental rights that all people can benefit from (5), that all people need to learn about these rights (4), and that the concept of human rights means people living equally, fairly, freely, and well (1). One student who ranked the concept of human rights as the basic rights that all people can equally benefit from said:

*"In my opinion, human rights are the freedoms, and rights that people use in many individual, social, artistic fields, without making any distinction between people, regardless of religion, language, or race, primarily protecting the right to life between birth and death, and even after death" (P7).* Secondly, students have mentioned that all people should learn about these rights. One student stated,

*"I think human rights should not only remain in theory but also be implemented and consciously taught by people" (P8),* while another said,

*"Human rights are the rights that all people possess without discrimination based on race, gender, language, and religion. People are born with these rights, and everyone should learn about them" (P2).* According to a student who believes that the concept of human rights means living equally, fairly, freely, and well, they explain,

*"The cause of many sorrows that have existed, exist, and continue to exist on Earth is the inequality between people. In this world where there are people who cannot even have the basic human right to life, we, the lucky ones, somehow continue our lives. However, the issue is not just living, but living equally, without discrimination, freely, and well" (P1).*

When the obtained findings are evaluated in general, it can be seen that, according to teacher candidates, the concept of human rights is about fundamental rights, all people should learn about these rights, and the concept of human rights means people living equally, fairly, freely, and well. In the second step, opinions on human rights education were collected, and the obtained opinions are presented in **Table 8**.

**Table 8.** Opinions on human rights education

The Importance of human rights education	n	Participants
Human rights education should be provided	5	P1, P2, P3,P4,P5
Human rights education should start from the foundation	2	P6, P7,
This training should not remain in theory	1	P8
This training should be given at the age of maturity	1	P9

Upon examining **Table 8**, teacher candidates have expressed their opinions that human rights education should be provided (5), human rights education should start from the basics (2),



human rights education should not remain in theory (1), and this education should be provided when individuals reach a certain level of maturity in terms of thinking (1). A student who expressed the opinion that human rights education should be provided said:

*"Allan Bloom said, 'Education is the movement from darkness to light.' If we want to replace something with something better, I think we need to start with education. Ignorance is darkness, turning people away from the concept of being human and into obedient robots who don't think and accept everything they hear. In this context, I think human rights education is very important for all humanity to create a brighter future"* (P1). A student who had not previously received any education on human rights also stated,

*"Even though I have not received any education on human rights before, I believe that human rights education will be an effective and beneficial education for raising awareness about human rights for every individual"* (P3). Secondly, opinions were collected on the need for human rights education to start from the basics. One student said,

*"I agree that it should start from the basics because our rights don't start at a certain age; they start from the moment we are born, and we are not very aware of them. Even as university students, we learned about many rights we were not aware of within the scope of this course. I think it would be more effective and better if small activities on this subject are conducted for children from the age of three or four"* (P7). Another student said;

*"I think human rights should be taught as a course from the very basics because we can adapt it to our lives only from childhood to adulthood"* (P6). One student commented,

*"Human rights should not remain in theory, in my opinion. Another opinion is that this education should not be theoretical. All the articles are very clear and, in fact, strong rights. Still, the fact that they are not known unfortunately exploits these rights, and that's why education is very important at this point. It can be started at the earliest age with conscious education"* (P8), drawing attention to the importance of practice. Another opinion is that this course should be provided when people reach a certain level of maturity. One student explained,

*"Here, I think that when we come to the age of maturity in terms of thought, this education should be given. If we don't know how to write with a beautiful pen in our hand, it won't work. Without knowing our rights, we cannot live a good life"* (P9). When the obtained findings are evaluated, according to teacher candidates, human rights education should be provided, this education should start from the basics, these courses should not remain in theory, and this course should be given to children when they reach maturity. In the second step, students were asked what kind of education they received on human rights and democracy, and the findings related to the opinions obtained are presented in **Table 9**.

**Table 9.** Opinions on education regarding human rights and democracy

Status of receiving human rights education	n	Persons
I have not received training on human rights and democracy	7	P1,P2,P3,P4,P5,P6,P10
I received training on human rights and democracy	3	P7,P8,P9

**Table 9** shows that 7 students have not received any education on human rights and democracy before, but 3 students have received education on this subject. First, a student who stated that they did not receive education explained;



"I haven't attended a seminar before but would like to. The subject of such seminars is directly about people. People are more interested in things that describe themselves, especially if it is about our rights and freedoms, watching or receiving education on this subject will be enjoyable. (P2)." A student who previously received education on human rights said;

"I took this course in high school and I study in the justice department at the open education faculty where a conference on this subject was given. When I took this course as an elective at the university, it contributed a lot. We know the rights everyone knows, but when we delve into the subject, I experienced the responsibilities and actually the pride of being an individual, I think more work should be done (P8)", indicating the contribution of the education they received. Teacher candidates were asked whether they read books, magazines, and articles on human rights and democracy, and the opinions received were analyzed and included in **Table 10**. When the opinions are evaluated in general, it is understood that there are few who have received education on human rights and those who did not receive education on human rights did not receive education but want to receive it.

**Table 10.** Opinions on reading works on human rights and democracy according to students

Readingbooks, journals,and articles on human rights and democracy	n	Participants
I have read	8	P1,P3,P5,P6,P7,P8,P9,P10
I haven't read	2	P2,P4

Upon examining **Table 10**, it is understood that most students have read books, magazines, or articles on human rights and democracy (8), while two students have not. A student who had previously read said;

"We had articles within the scope of the course we read, as well as many articles I came across while examining documents such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Declaration of the Rights of the Child (P7)", while another stated;

"I remember reading in line with our conversations in the Education in Morality and Ethics course. The subject was the death penalty" (P3), other students mentioned

"I have not read any books, etc. on human rights before."(P2), (P4). Students were asked about their opinions on films and series on human rights and democracy, and the obtained findings were included in **Table 11**. Upon examining the findings, it is understood that the majority of teacher candidates have read resources such as books, magazines, and articles on human rights.

**Table 11.** Opinions on watching films and series on human rights and democracy

Watching movies, TV series, etc.,onhuman rights and democracy	n	Participants
I saw it	10	P1,P3,P5,P6,P7,P8,P9,P10

Upon examining **Table 11**, it is understood that all students have watched films, series, or similar visuals on these topics. One student, regarding the subject, said:

"I had watched a documentary about the story of Malala Yusufzai, a girl who fought for the right to education, which is one of the fundamental human rights. It was the story of a little child who,

*dreaming of having a magic pen that made the wishes she saw in a fairy tale she read every night come true, eventually understood that there was no difference between that magic pen and the ordinary pen she had since the beginning, as she grew older and fought for education"* (P1), providing information about the films she watched. Another student said; *"I have watched movies like 'Life is Beautiful' and 'The Pianist'. In these movies, I saw injustices applied to people because of their race or religion. Especially the movie 'Life is Beautiful' had a great impact on me"* (P2). Another student stated; *"I began to make critical comments on movies, such as questioning why people don't use their rights or realizing that people have these rights. Then, in the conclusions I drew from the movies, I started warning people around me, asking them 'why don't you react when it happens like this here?'"*(P7), emphasizing that she tried to influence both her awareness and others. It is understood that teacher candidates have watched series and films related to human rights; in recent years, it can be said that students have gained knowledge on various topics by watching more films and series. Another question directed to teacher candidates was about the impact of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights on people. The opinions received were analyzed, and the obtained data were included in **Table 12**.

**Table 12.** Opinions on the impact of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights on people

The Declaration of Human Rights	n	Participants
It protects all rights but does not protect them sufficiently	3	P5-P6-P7
Built on equality, freedom, race, gender, justice	1	P5
It has made you more conscious	1	P2
Emphasizes the value of people	1	P3
They are inherent rights	1	P2
Peace is happiness, quality of life	1	P1
It resembles a hollow frame	1	P8
Significant if used	1	P9



When **Table 12** is examined, it is stated that according to the students, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights protects all rights, but not fully (3); it is based on equality, freedom, race, gender, and justice (1); it makes people more aware (1); it emphasizes the value of humans (1); these are rights inherent from birth (1); it promises peace, happiness, and a qualified life (1); it resembles an empty framework (1); and it is meaningless when not used (1). A student who stated that this declaration protects all rights first said:

*"How can there be so much injustice in the world, how can people still make gender distinctions... I started thinking a lot about this, don't people do something while approving this, in the end, those who approve are also humans, actually contradicting themselves in a way"* (P5).

Then a student explaining the emphasis on equality and freedom said:

*"It talked about justice, equality, and freedom as our basic rights, but how much can we apply these, both personally and at the country level, and as a state... Of course, it creates question marks in our minds"* (P6). Another student stated that the

*"Universal Declaration articles are based on equality, race, gender, and justice"* (P5), and another student explained that after reading the declaration, they became more aware of their

responsibilities and rights (P2). A student who thinks that people are not knowledgeable about their rights said:

*"In each article, it actually writes about the rights that people have from birth and that these rights cannot be arbitrarily taken away from them. I think that among the reasons for so much injustice in a society that signs this declaration is that individuals do not fully understand or know their rights and responsibilities"* (P2). Another student similarly said:

*"When looking at the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the content and details of the rights people have can be seen. It is seen that this content and details emphasize that humans are valuable beings and that equality is in question without distinguishing any human. When I examined the declaration within the scope of courses such as ethics and morality in education, Turkish education system, and school administration, I thought that there were many attitudes I needed to internalize and pay attention to. In this sense, I concluded that it is necessary and important for me to improve and develop myself"* (P3), stating that this declaration imposes responsibilities on them. A student who thinks that the articles in the human rights declaration need to be implemented said:

*"I think that there are articles that will bring peace, happiness, and a more qualified life to humanity if they can be implemented within the declaration"* (P1), stating that it is necessary for a better quality of life. Another student said:

*"When we look at the human rights declaration, it looks like a framework, but in practice, I wish we could hang pictures inside that frame and if all those pictures could show people smiling, living in peace as written in those articles, and see a black woman and a white woman holding hands, these should not remain romantic"* (P8), stating that the articles of the declaration need to be implemented. Another student expressed their opinion on the non-use of existing rights:

*"It provided more thinking about questions like the difference between not using something I have and not being able to use something I don't have, what does it mean for me to have this after not using it, looking a bit more at state interests, many states moved from colonization to protection, and I thought they approved these and did not implement them"* (P9). When the findings obtained are examined, it is understood that human rights documents cannot fully protect human rights; human rights are based on equality, freedom, race, gender, and justice and make people more conscious; they emphasize that humans are valuable and have these rights from birth; they promise a peaceful, happy, and high-quality life; the concepts need to be filled with meaning, and they are meaningless if not used. Teacher candidates were asked which topics should be prioritized in Human Rights Education, and the findings obtained are presented in **Table 13**.

**Table 13.** Opinions on the topics that should be included in Human Rights Education

Priority issues in human rights education	n	Participants
Right to life, freedom, equality, right to education	7	P1,P2,P3,P5,P6,P7,P8
The concept of humans should be emphasized	2	P9,P10
Empathy should be established	2	P5-P6
Practices should be included rather than theory	2	P7,P8

When **Table 13** is examined, the priority is the right to life, freedom, equality, and the right to education (7), followed by the need to focus on the concept of humans (2). Later, it is stated that establishing empathy (2) and giving more emphasis on practice rather than theory (2) is important.

A student who emphasizes the importance of the right to life, freedom, equality, and the right to education as the priority says;

*"In my opinion, while teaching everyone their rights, it should also be understood that other people have these rights too. This is because people tend to ignore the rights of others when they experience discrimination or injustice, focusing entirely on their own rights. Therefore, the priority in education should be to instill this awareness"*(P2). Another student says,

*"I would try to establish concepts of equality and justice. These would be my priorities"* (P5). Another student states the topics they would prioritize by saying,

*"First of all, I would try to explain that everyone has equal and free rights regardless of language, religion, or politics, and apart from that, I would try to make them understand the idea that everyone is equal before the law and has the right to equal protection by the law"*(P6). The importance of empathy has been mentioned by two students, one of whom says that empathy should come before everything else, stating,

*"First of all, I would try to develop a sense of empathy in students"*(P5). A student who emphasizes the importance of focusing on practice instead of theoretical explanations says,

*"Instead of just explaining the theory, I think my bigger priority would be to fully internalize these behaviors in them by doing small practices"*(P7). Another student says,

*"For example, in our high school, the course was politically inclined due to its content, but it should not be seen as political; I believe there are points where every individual needs to learn and apply them seriously. I think we must first overcome these mental barriers for this course"*(P8). A student who believes that the concept of humans should be addressed first says,

*"In my opinion, there should not be just one topic, but instead, a sense of 'us' instead of 'me' should be developed. Once there is a guarantee of life, I do not think there will be any problems. As teacher candidates, we should first focus on the concept of humans in priority topics"*(P9). Another student says,

*"The concept of human should be focused on, from human's birth to their creation on Earth... I think it should be approached philosophically. After the concept of human is internalized, then there are different genders, species, religious and sectarian differences, and later on, these should be studied and a sense of appreciation for the environment, nature, and people should be instilled"*(P10), emphasizing the importance of the concept of human in this course. When the opinions on the topics that should be prioritized in human rights education are evaluated in general, according to the teacher candidates, it is important to emphasize the right to life, freedom, equality, and the right to education, focus on the concept of human, the importance of establishing empathy, and giving more weight to practices rather than theory in these courses. The suggestions of teacher candidates to increase the effectiveness of Human Rights Education have been evaluated, and the findings obtained are presented in **Table 14**.



**Table 14.** Opinions on suggestions regarding human rights education

Recommendations for the Effectiveness of human rights education	n	Participants
Families must be educated	3	P8, P9, P10
Film or theatre studies on human rights should be carried out	2	P2, P8
Education should continue from primary school to university	1	P3
Behaviors must be consistent with training	1	P1
Application should be made with sample scenarios	1	P8
Movies should be watched	1	P2
Books must be read	1	P2
Various posts should be printed	1	P6
Painting should be done	1	P6
Must be a required course	1	P5
Reminder information should be placed in public places	1	P7
Human rights museums can be established	1	P2

When **Table 14** is examined, among the suggestions of teacher candidates to increase the effectiveness of human rights education are educating families (3), conducting activities such as films and theater related to human rights (3), continuing education from primary school to university (1), ensuring consistency between the provided education and behaviors (1), applying example scenarios in these training (1), watching films about human rights (1), reading books (1), writing essays (1), drawing pictures (1), and making these courses mandatory (1). Additionally, the suggestions include placing reminder information in public spaces (1) and establishing human rights museums (1). Educating families on human rights is the top priority. A teacher candidate says about this;

*"First of all, it must definitely start at home, we must start with our parents. We are studying and learning things, but our parents at home are completely deprived of this, so it can be made into a public education, and activities can be organized in the form of conferences"*(P10), while another says;

*"The most important thing is the family. As long as the family provides education, family education programs should be initiated quickly"*(P8), explaining their suggestion. Conducting theater activities related to human rights is the second priority. A student on this subject says;

*"Short films or theater plays can be prepared. Example scenario texts can be given to students. These can be fictional texts or selected from current issues, and they can be interpreted within the framework of human rights"*(P2), while another says;

*"We did drama in class while explaining a topic in this course, I think it is very effective. This method can be used, especially for primary and high school levels and also for university"*(P8), explaining. A student who believes that behaviors contradicting the given education should not be displayed says;

*"We should not display behaviors contrary to the education we provide. Because when they see that what is said is not being done, individuals will be disappointed and it will be difficult for the education to progress healthily. A person can only create great changes when they can*



*change themselves first'*(P1). A teacher candidate who thinks that example scenario activities can be done in human rights lessons says;

*"We did drama in class while explaining a topic in this course, I think it is very effective. This method can be used, especially for primary and high school levels and also for university ... Instructors can conduct a social experiment with their students in class and then assign it as homework"*(P8). There are different suggestions from teacher candidates as well, some of these suggestions are;

*"Human rights museums can be established as out-of-school activities. Students can be taken on tours to these museums, films telling the lives of people who have experienced discrimination or injustice can be shown, books can be read. At the end of the books, they can be asked to write a composition expressing their emotions and thoughts or to draw a picture* (P2) *First, after giving the concepts of human rights as a basic concept, we can have them write compositions on human rights in practice, first, after giving the concepts as a concept, we can try to explain them in practice. Fourth-grade students can also be asked to do a poster work"*(P6). Another suggestion is that these courses should be compulsory, this teacher candidate;

*"The course, which is very theoretical, should be taken out of the classroom a bit and made into a different, compulsory course; human rights is really very important, and it should become a course that everyone can learn with interest"*(P5) said. A student who thinks public service announcements should be made;

*"We have certain rights, for example, small informative notes can be put at bus stops. Like 'Did you know this is your right?' Both increasing permanent learning and creating awareness in out-of-school learning environments"*(P7), the student explained their opinion with an example. When the opinions obtained were generally evaluated, it was important to educate families, to carry out studies such as films and theater related to human rights for students, the importance of human rights and democracy education continuing from primary school to university, the consistency of the education provided with behaviors, in these educations, activities such as writing and acting scenarios, watching movies about human rights, reading books, writing studies on this subject, drawing pictures should be included in the recommendations. In addition, it is emphasized that making courses on this subject compulsory, placing reminder information in public places, and establishing human rights museums is also important. Lastly, teacher candidates were asked about the level of contribution of human rights education to individual development, and the opinions obtained were analyzed and included in **Table 15**.

**Table 15.** Opinions on the contribution of human rights education to the individual

Contribution of human rights education to the individual	n	Participants
It raises consciousness.	3	P3,P5,P6
Ensures to be a person who criticizes and evaluates himself/herself	2	P6,P8
Contributes to being a more positive and constructive individual	2	P7,P9
Contributes to raising good citizens	1	P1
Training to be human	1	P2

When **Table 15** is examined, according to the opinions of teacher candidates, it is understood that human rights courses increase awareness (3), contribute to being a self-evaluating person



(2), being a positive and constructive individual (2), and raise good citizens (1), and teach how to be a good person. On raising awareness, one teacher candidate says;

*"I think awareness is the beginning of every good thing, and I believe that this education will be effective and useful in terms of awareness. I also believe that people who are aware of their rights will have a more positive and constructive outlook on life, and this will contribute to raising individuals who can evaluate, criticize, and control themselves"*(P3), while another one says;

*"This course provides self-awareness, and if you know yourself, the wind won't sweep you away for no reason, a self-aware person realizes and changes themselves. Knowing your rights, understanding and living democracy is very important, in my opinion, this education provides these to us, so it should be given"*(P8). Another teacher candidate also points out the importance of being a good individual;

*"If they receive this education at a young age, they will know their rights and freedoms, and they will become a law-abiding or justice-respecting citizen, more useful to their country, doing every job according to the rules, and growing up as a more beneficial individual for the country and people, so I think the effects and contributions are very significant"*(P7). Another teacher candidate says:

*"Good people bring good societies, and good societies bring a good world along with them. Human rights education will be our biggest helper in evolving into good citizens"*(P1), drawing attention to raising good citizens. The last opinion mentioned focuses on the contribution of human rights education to being human;

*"A person who knows, adopts their rights and responsibilities neither lets others take their rights nor violates others' rights. In a world with so much injustice, providing this education to people from a young age is very important both nationally and universally. Maybe through this education, we can teach our children and students to be human rather than being a position holder"*(P2). When the opinions of teacher candidates on the contribution of these courses to raising individuals are generally evaluated, it is understood that these courses increase awareness, contribute to being human, being a positive and constructive individual, raising good citizens, and teaching how to be a good person. Students have emphasized that human rights education should be provided for everyone to live equally, freely, happily, and peacefully, and that this education should not only take place in universities but also schools starting from a young age.

## CONCLUSION

In this study, evaluating the attitudes and opinions of teacher candidates towards Human Rights and Democracy Education, it was found that their attitudes towards human rights education did not differ by gender, department, or grade level. However, there was a difference in the Human Rights Education dimension according to whether or not the teacher candidates took a course on human rights. While no gender differences were found in this study, it was understood that women's averages were slightly higher than men's, and there was a difference in attitudes between students who took and did not take the human rights education course. In a similar study, it was understood that female teacher candidates had more positive opinions about human rights education, and active participation by teacher candidates also created differences in attitudes (Karatekin *et al.*, 2012). Another study supporting this result showed that students were





sensitive to human rights, freedom, political participation, and democratic orientations, with girls having more positive democratic attitudes (Obiagu *et al.*, 2023).

According to teacher candidates, the concept of human rights is fundamental rights, and the education of these rights is important and should be taught to all people. The concept of human rights means that people live equally, fairly, freely, and well, and these courses should be more practical than theoretical during children's maturity periods. In a similar study, in terms of the living process in a peaceful and egalitarian environment that respects human rights as a democratic society, the formal process in schools is important. The study, which touches on citizenship education in the instillation of democratic values in this process (Tuhuteru, 2023), supports the process with its approach compatible with the planning of the Human Rights and Democracy Education course.

Teacher candidates should receive training on human rights. It was found that teacher candidates read more resources such as books, magazines, and articles on human rights and watched more series and movies. Supporting this result, a study investigating the political tendencies of young people emphasized that democratic education given through digital channels (web 2.0) supports political tendencies as well as social and political participation (Akmal, 2017). In a similar study, it was understood that technological competencies support the compatibility of human rights and freedoms with democratic attitudes and empathic processes and catch the era in terms of human rights and democratic attitudes (Bujic *et al.*, 2020).

Teacher candidates believe that human rights documents cannot fully protect human rights, and human rights are based on equality, freedom, race, gender, and justice, making people more conscious. It was understood that people are valuable and have these rights at birth, and they promise people a peaceful, happy, and quality life, but it is necessary to fill in the concepts and the implementation is important. Supporting this result, a study on human rights focuses on gaining human rights and taking systematic measures against human rights violations (Çelebi, 2021). According to another study, human rights and democracy-based education give positive results, especially for women and children, encouraging individuals to show social participation and become aware of their rights (Gillespie & Melching, 2010).

In human rights education, the importance of the right to life, freedom, equality, and the right to education should be emphasized, the concept of a human should be discussed, empathy should be taught, and lessons should be more practical than theoretical. According to a study supporting this result, human rights-oriented courses are more focused on the practical aspect. Therefore, the course should be taught by establishing a connection to practice rather than theory. Students and teachers should be informed about this significant issue at a universal level (Özbek, 2017). In a similar study, emphasis is placed on individual effort in the establishment of rights, freedoms, and democratic school processes and administrations, and democratic participation is valued (Marjanovic-Shane *et al.*, 2023). In another study, emphasis is placed on the universality of human rights, and attention is drawn to the establishment of universal rights for all humanity based on the concept of 'equality' (Donnelly, 2007).

It is important to educate families about human rights, to conduct activities such as films and theater related to human rights for students, to continue human rights and democracy education from primary school to university, and to ensure that the education provided is consistent with behaviors. Supporting this result, Kong and Han (2023) point out that respect and sensitivity



towards human rights are supported in the family, school, and social environment atmosphere, and psychological and social impact factors are effective in the process.

Activities such as writing and playing example scenarios, watching films related to human rights, reading, writing, and painting should be conducted in human rights education. A study supporting this result draws attention to human rights, citizenship, and democracy education systematically carried out in the school environment in raising awareness about the democratization process (Alshurman, 2015). Research supporting this study emphasizes that textbooks related to the subject should be prepared considering the age level variable (Eker *et al.*, 2018). Also, among the results obtained in this study, it is important to have compulsory courses on this subject, to place reminder information related to human rights in public places, and to establish human rights museums.

According to another result, it is understood that human rights-oriented courses increase awareness, contributes to being human, being positive and constructive individuals, raising good citizens, and teaching how to be a good person. In a similar study, the relationship between citizen and state is mentioned in terms of political skills, and the acquisition of citizenship consciousness is encouraged throughout the education processes (Şahan & Tural, 2018; Siregar & Kemala, 2023). In another similar study, it is reported that life skills and citizenship education studies strongly support each other, and the provision of these two elements together in democratic education processes accelerates social development within the framework of democratic education (Donia, 2020). According to another result obtained, teacher candidates stated that everyone should be able to live equally, freely, happily, and peacefully, and that human rights education should be provided for a good life, and this education should not only be in universities but also schools from an early age. In a study that mentions the importance of providing human rights and democracy education from the primary school level (Samancı, 2010), it is discussed the necessity of instilling citizenship awareness from an early age. According to the results obtained from this study;

It is suggested that to improve democratic attitudes, teacher candidates should engage in practical activities such as participating in conferences, attending theater performances, and conducting studies on social media. Additionally, human rights and democracy-oriented courses should be made compulsory at all educational levels, from primary school to university, with a strong emphasis on practical application. Within the context of human rights education, it is crucial to highlight the importance of the right to life, freedom, equality, and education. Furthermore, families should also receive education on human rights to ensure a comprehensive understanding and implementation of these values within society.

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