

interaction becomes healthier in environments where the foundations of multicultural education are well understood. Students are at the centre of multicultural education. Important responsibilities fall on teachers who will serve as guides to students. According to Akcaoğlu and Aral (2024), in the 21st century, factors such as the intensification of migration movements, technological developments, the diversification of content shared on social media and the increase in rapid transportation opportunities have increased the importance of multicultural education and accelerated the expansion of its implementation in schools. Furthermore, when schools are examined within the context of educational inequalities and external factors, it can be seen that multicultural education emerges as a fundamental component of the school environment.

The term “children’s rights” gained prominence with the Convention on the Rights of the Child adopted in 1989. With this convention, children’s fundamental rights were placed under protection. The Republic of Türkiye also signed this convention. Schools are among the most important institutions where children can learn about their rights (Ceylan & Bozkurt, 2024).. Studies are being conducted at the primary school level, which is an important stage of formal education, to help children learn about their rights. Children’s rights hold an important place particularly in the Life Sciences and Social Studies curricula. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child has also significantly increased public awareness regarding children’s rights. To affirm its principles, a large number of signatory countries endorsed a comprehensive set of civil, economic, social and cultural rights that they argue should benefit the global community of children (Franklin, 2002). The concept of “cultural rights” included in this definition indicates that children’s rights and multicultural education, which are the two key variables of the current study, are closely interconnected. Douglas and Sebba (2016) stated that proponents of the historical school of law perceive legal norms as an inevitable reflection of the traditional cultural norms of the society in which they are applied. This demonstrates the role of cultures in the determination of rights. Meray (2012) compared the Social Studies curriculum

in Türkiye with the Social Studies curriculum in the United States. The study concluded that the concept of children’s rights is given greater emphasis in the Social Studies curriculum in Türkiye. However, it was determined that there were no specific learning outcomes related to the protection of children. Based on the findings of this study, it can be said that there are efforts in Türkiye addressing children’s rights. However, it should not be overlooked that these efforts have certain shortcomings and need to be improved. According to Henning (2022), children’s rights should be implemented for all children regardless of gender, language, religion, race, origin or socioeconomic status and these rights should be taught to them. Living in a refugee camp, on the streets, in a care institution, or with their family should not constitute a reason for children to be deprived of these rights. Based on this view, education on children’s rights should be provided without granting priority or privilege to any particular group.

When the literature is examined, it is seen that the most fundamental and influential actors students encounter during their first years of school life are primary school teachers. Primary school teachers assume an important role not only in students’ academic development but also in their social, emotional and moral development; in this respect, they are among the first and most influential role models for students. In this context, primary school teachers’ awareness, knowledge levels and attitudes regarding children’s rights, as well as their perceptions and experiences related to multicultural education, are considered decisive factors in creating an egalitarian, inclusive and rights-based learning environment in educational settings. Especially in classroom environments where students from diverse cultural, linguistic and socio-economic backgrounds are together, teachers’ approaches to multicultural education and their practices that uphold children’s rights are of critical importance for students’ development of a sense of belonging and their active participation in the educational process.

Wang and Holland (2011) examined the educational opportunities of migrant children in Shanghai within the context of equality of opportunity in education. The findings of the study revealed the

presence of three fundamental problems that limit migrant children's access to quality education: the low educational quality of schools designated for migrant children, restrictions on access to public schools and high educational costs coupled with high levels of student mobility. Within this framework, the study emphasizes that the educational rights of migrant children are shaped by the political preferences of local governments, public attitudes and the capacity of public schools, rather than by structural guarantees.

In a study focusing on the development of cultural sensitivity during the teacher training process, Kong and Zou (2022) examined the impact of providing pre-service teachers with multicultural field experiences. Findings based on interview data indicate that field experiences involving direct interaction with multicultural students positively influence pre-service teachers' beliefs and practices regarding Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT). This result demonstrates that multicultural competencies should be developed not only through theoretical knowledge but also through practical experiences.

Following the incorporation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child into Swedish domestic law in 2020, Olsson (2020) examined the status of children's rights within teacher education. The analysis of 362 lesson plans and programs across 12 universities, along with survey results from 156 teacher educators, indicates that while knowledge of children's rights is considered significant, curricula remain limited in defining the specific knowledge and competencies required by pre-service teachers. The assessment, based on Felisa Tibbitts' analytical framework for human rights education, reveals that Swedish teacher education falls within a "Values and Awareness Model" which emphasizes socialization but does not aim for social transformation.

When these studies are evaluated together, it is evident that structural inequalities persist in access to the right to education for children from diverse cultures; conversely, teacher education plays a central role in developing a multicultural and rights-based educational approach. Research conducted in the contexts of China and Sweden (Wang & Holland, 2011; Kong & Zou, 2022; Olsson,

2020) demonstrates that raising awareness among pre-service teachers regarding cultural sensitivity, multicultural competence and children's rights is decisive in ensuring equity and justice in education. Therefore, strengthening equality of opportunity and a rights-based approach in education requires a holistic transformation not only at the policy level but also in the content and practical dimensions of teacher training programs.

The current study seeks to answer the question: "What are the experiences of primary school teachers regarding multicultural education and children's rights?" By exploring the experiences, perceptions and classroom practices of primary school teachers, the current study intends to establish a robust theoretical and empirical basis for future interventions in teacher training and policy development.

METHOD

The study employed a phenomenological design. Phenomenology is a qualitative research design that aims to examine in depth the experiences and perceptions of individuals regarding a specific phenomenon, as well as the meanings they attribute to these experiences. In this approach, the central goal is to uncover the ways in which participants experience and make sense of a particular phenomenon. Phenomenology requires researchers to suspend their own assumptions and focus on the subjective experiences of participants. Data collection often involves in-depth or semi-structured interviews; the analysis process focuses on identifying common themes to get to the heart of the matter (Creswell, 2013). This method was chosen for the current study in order to deeply examine the teaching experiences of primary teachers regarding multicultural education and children's rights.

Data Collection Tool

The current study was designed as a qualitative study using a semi-structured interview technique in the data collection process. The questions included in the interview form were submitted to the review of a field expert, a measurement and evaluation expert and a language expert in order to ensure content validity. In line with the feedback received from the

experts, the necessary revisions were made and the form was finalized.

Data were collected through face-to-face interviews with the teachers who volunteered to participate in the study. The participants were informed, their consent was obtained and with their permission, the interviews were recorded using an audio recording device. To assess the comprehensibility and functionality of the interview questions and to increase reliability, pilot interviews were conducted with two teachers prior to the study. As the pilot study confirmed that the questions were appropriate for eliciting the experiences under investigation within the scope of the study, the data collection process was continued accordingly.

Study Group

The study group consists of 25 primary school teachers who were working in the Pamukkale and

Merkezefendi districts of Denizli province during the 2023-2024 school year. Of the participants, 13 are males and 12 are females. The participating teachers' ages range from 28 to 59 and their professional experience varies between 5 and 34 years. The vast majority of the participants stated that they hold an undergraduate degree. The teachers in the study group work in schools with different socioeconomic levels and there are students from diverse cultural backgrounds in their classrooms. In this respect, the study group provides a diversity that is suitable for examining the dimensions of the research problem within the context of multicultural education and children's rights. To ensure the confidentiality of the identities of the primary school teachers participating in the study, each of them was assigned a code name. Detailed demographic information about the participants is presented in Table 1.

Table 1.: Characteristics of the Participants

	Participants	Gender	Age	Professional experience	Education level
1.	Adem	Male	45	8 years	Undergraduate
2.	Arzu	Female	31	8 years	Undergraduate
3.	Hakan	Male	54	30 years	Undergraduate
4.	Seher	Female	38	14 years	Undergraduate
5.	Fatih	Male	53	30 years	Undergraduate
6.	Sezen	Female	28	5 years	Undergraduate
7.	Serpil	Female	38	15 years	Undergraduate
8.	Sami	Male	59	34 years	Associate's
9.	Zuhal	Female	35	10 years	Undergraduate
10.	Harun	Male	42	16 years	Undergraduate
11.	Defne	Female	47	24 years	Undergraduate
12.	Serkan	Male	40	14 years	Graduate
13.	Zeynep	Female	52	27 years	Undergraduate
14.	Handan	Female	28	5 years	Undergraduate
15.	Osman	Male	32	8 years	Undergraduate
16.	Mehmet	Male	50	25 years	Undergraduate
17.	Mustafa	Male	46	23 years	Undergraduate
18.	Zehra	Female	43	20 years	Undergraduate
19.	Reyhan	Female	52	28 years	Undergraduate
20.	Recep	Male	32	9 years	Graduate
21.	Elif	Female	38	10 years	Undergraduate

	Participants	Gender	Age	Professional experience	Education level
22.	Süleyman	Male	55	20 years	Associate's
23.	Filiz	Female	42	14 years	Undergraduate
24.	Murat	Male	41	18 years	Graduate
25.	Hüseyin	Male	38	10 years	Undergraduate

In the study, 25 primary school teachers were selected using the maximum variation sampling method. Maximum variation sampling is a type of sampling in which as much diversity as possible is ensured in accordance with the different situations identified within the population (Büyüköztürk et al., 2014). The participants to be interviewed were determined based on the presence of students from different cultural backgrounds in their classrooms and their employment in schools located in different socioeconomic areas. This sampling method was preferred in order to observe how the phenomenon under investigation is experienced in different contexts.

FINDINGS

The data obtained in the study were analyzed using the content analysis technique. Content analysis includes replicable and valid procedures for making inferences about the context of observed communications (Krippendorff, 1980). In content analysis, higher-level abstractions are made based on the codes and themes are identified accordingly. Thus, the data are organized within a conceptual framework (Merriam, 2009). Since it was aimed to examine the data of the study in a detailed and in-depth manner, this analysis technique was preferred.

The data obtained as a result of the interviews were transcribed. Then, codes were generated by selecting the words that were considered significant. The identified codes were examined in terms of meaning and content and then grouped into sub-themes. As a final step, the sub-themes were brought together under overarching themes. The data analyzed using the content analysis technique were examined by the researcher at two different times and then compared in order to ensure reliability and validity. Miles (1994) stated that reliability can be calculated using the formula [Agreement / (Agreement + Disagreement)]

and indicated that the obtained ratio should be at least 70%. As a result of the calculation conducted in line with this formula, the reliability coefficient of the study was determined to be 84%. As a result of the qualitative data analysis, 3 themes, 8 sub-themes and 326 codes were identified. Under the first theme, "Activities", two sub-themes were established: "Cultural Activities" and "Children's Rights Activities". The second theme was identified as "Problems". Three sub-themes were developed under this theme: "Instructional Problems", "Adaptation Problems" and "Financial Problems". Finally, the third theme was established as "Opinions". This theme consists of three sub-themes: "Positive Opinions", "Negative Opinions" and "Suggestions" (Figure 1).

The theme "Activities" consists of two sub-themes: "Cultural Activities" and "Children's Rights Activities". There are 56 codes under the sub-theme of Cultural Activities. Some of the participants in the study stated that they do not include cultural activities in their lessons. Mustafa Teacher explained why he does not carry out activities related to different cultures with the following statement: "I do not conduct any activities on this issue. I wish we were not in such a situation. In that case, most of the problems we experience would be resolved." Teacher Hakan, on the other hand, stated that he tries to help students from different cultural backgrounds adapt by organizing activities related to Turkish culture, as reflected in his words: "...there are children from different cultures, but I focus on and teach elements of Turkish culture." The sub-theme of Children's Rights Activities consists of 49 codes. Twelve primary school teachers stated that they teach the concept of children's rights using methods and techniques appropriate to the constructivist approach. The methods and techniques mentioned include case studies, keeping diaries, a "rights corner", watching videos, visual and auditory materials, drama, the

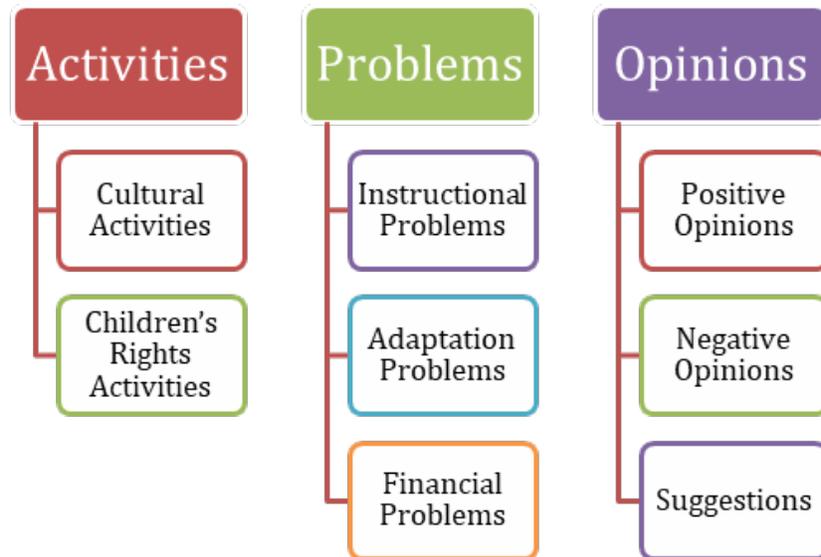


Fig. 1: Themes and Sub-themes

Six Thinking Hats technique, the station technique, circle discussion and brainstorming. Teacher Osman stated that he implements activities in line with the constructivist approach, saying: "...I apply activities suitable for the constructivist approach that we learned at university. I can mention role-playing, brainstorming and the Six Thinking Hats technique." Teacher Seher expressed a similar experience by stating, "Drama activities are very useful. We once examined children's rights using the Six Thinking Hats technique. It was very enjoyable." It can be seen that, through these methods and techniques, the lesson becomes engaging and enjoyable.

The theme "Problems" consists of three sub-themes: "Instructional Problems", "Adaptation Problems" and "Financial Problems". There are 30 codes under the sub-theme of Instructional Problems. Three of the teachers who participated in the study referred to disciplinary problems. Teacher Hakan referred to disciplinary problems with the following statement: "Classroom order, school order, discipline, the conduct of lessons, efficiency and I could list more; they are all negatively affected." Seven of the teachers stated that they experience problems related to time management. Teacher Osman expressed the time-related difficulty he faces by saying, "There may be disruptions in the learning process. It is necessary to deal with communication problems individually."

Teacher Recep conveyed a similar experience by saying, "Time is a major issue for me. Trying to cover the curriculum while also trying to be helpful to them is very exhausting." Teacher Serkan described the time-related difficulty he experiences as follows: "... there is a time constraint. Since foreign students lack prior knowledge, we cannot cover the subjects on time. It is necessary to deal with them individually. My class has 38 students, and when I try to work with them one by one, nothing gets completed." There are 67 codes under the sub-theme of Adaptation Problems. Twelve of the teachers who participated in the study clearly stated that they experience adaptation problems. Teacher Arzu expressed this by saying, "It is difficult for traumatized children to adapt." She added, "I try to explain that we need to understand them as well, but even some of my colleagues may not be very understanding," indicating that not every colleague demonstrates positive attitudes toward children from different cultural backgrounds. She identified experiencing trauma as a reason for difficulties in adaptation. Teacher Serpil, who emphasized that teachers play a very influential role in adaptation problems, commented: "...I think children can sense the attitudes of some of my colleagues as well. Separation and polarization may occur. If a group that is already prone to delinquency is excluded, they will be left without alternatives..."

Through this remark, she highlighted that teachers, the school environment and students themselves are all influential in the adaptation process. There are 14 codes under the sub-theme of Financial Problems. Teacher Hüseyin referred to the issue of taking belongings without permission, which may arise due to financial difficulties, by stating: "Incidents of taking belongings without permission can also occur due to financial insufficiencies." Teacher Defne stated that she used a wish and complaint box to identify the material needs of her students, expressing it with the following words: "...for instance, we have a wish and complaint box in our classroom. My students use it effectively. They write in it when they have missing items." Teacher Harun noted that he organizes celebrations for students who are unable to celebrate their birthdays, stating: "Since I have few students, we celebrate their birthdays one by one. I try to create good memories with small gifts."

Three sub-themes were established under the theme of "Opinions". These were categorized as "Positive Opinions", "Negative Opinions" and "Suggestions". There are 35 codes within the sub-theme of "Positive Opinions". Eight teachers participating in the study stated that they utilize empathy skills toward diverse cultures and children's rights. Teacher Handan stated that practicing empathy is beneficial in resolving problems, expressing it as follows: "It is very useful to build empathy. When I ask, 'How would you feel if it were you?', everyone calms down..." Three of the teachers who participated in the study highlighted the concept of equality. Teacher Serpil mentioned creating a classroom environment where both students from different cultures and all students can be equal, stating: "...there are students from different nationalities in my class. However, I do not label them as being from this or that nation. They are all my students, and in my eyes, they are equal..." Under the sub-theme of Negative Opinions, 44 codes were identified. Seven of the teachers who participated in the study stated that multicultural education is not necessary. Teacher Sami expressed that he finds multicultural education and diversity risky, stating: "I don't think it is right to blur our culture. We see it in the news, on TV and in newspapers. As we move away from our national identity, problems increase.

Every country wants to preserve its own values. We should protect ours as well." A similar opinion was expressed by Teacher Mustafa, who stated: "...multicultural education may be important in societies like the United States, but it is dangerous in our country. To preserve our national identity, we need to focus on our own culture." Teacher Mehmet, on the other hand, indicated the need for a common cultural education by saying: "...in our time, the same cultural activities were carried out everywhere. There were no activities suitable for every tradition." Two of the teachers who participated in the study stated that some of their colleagues are insensitive and biased toward students from different cultural backgrounds. Under the sub-theme of Suggestions, 31 codes were identified. Six of the teachers who participated in the study suggested using common points as a basis for multicultural education. Teacher Filiz suggested that there could be activities in textbooks that focus on common cultural elements, stating: "...there could be activities that focus on shared cultural elements..." A similar suggestion was made by Teacher Serkan, who stated: "I think the best activity is to design activities that integrate the common aspects of cultures without separating them..." Teacher Seher stated that common religious values could be utilized, saying: "...I have Afghan and Syrian students in my class. What will actually unite us is the fact that our religion is the same..." Three of the teachers who participated in the study suggested organizing activities focused on Turkish culture. Teacher Harun conveyed the suggestion that emphasis should be placed on elements of Turkish culture, stating: "...yes, there is a lot of diversity in our country, but ultimately the culture that should be at the centre in our country is Turkish culture..."

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The purpose of the current study was to examine primary school teachers' experiences regarding children's rights and multicultural education. To this end, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the teachers and the collected data were analyzed systematically. The analysis results revealed the main findings of the study and the following results were reached regarding the teachers' experiences.

The vast majority of the teachers who participated in the study expressed positive experiences regarding children's rights. However, they emphasized that activities related to children's rights in textbooks are insufficient and that more practical applications should be implemented in this area. The teachers also indicated that they use various methods and techniques in teaching children's rights. This finding is consistent with the study conducted by Banko Bal and Güler Yıldız (2021), which revealed that teachers generally have positive attitudes toward children's rights. Similarly, research by Neslitürk and Ersoy (2007) indicated that drama, language activities and language games yield positive results in the teaching of children's rights.

The findings indicate that teachers' positive attitudes and the use of various instructional methods are important in teaching children's rights. In addition, the insufficiency of activities related to children's rights in existing teaching materials highlights the need to diversify educational resources and increase such activities. These results support the importance of both enhancing teachers' pedagogical competencies and enriching teaching materials to ensure the effective inculcation of children's rights.

It was determined that the teachers who participated in the study have both positive and negative experiences regarding multicultural education. The teachers indicated that factors such as cultural diversity, empathy and shared religious values contribute to the formation of positive attitudes, while factors such as assimilation, loss of self-identity, adaptation problems and educational challenges lead to negative attitudes. This finding aligns with the study conducted by Carvalho and Gunn (2025), which concluded that teachers exhibit supportive attitudes toward students' right to have bilingual programs. Similarly, Ciğerci (2020) found that the majority of participants described multicultural education as a form of enrichment and the opportunities arising from this diversity. This supports the teacher experiences revealed in the current study. In 106 studies examined by Chernaya (2018) regarding children's rights, there was a general consensus on children's rights and culturally inclusive practices. Akman (2020), on the other hand, revealed that teachers' attitudes toward multicultural education and refugee students were

moderately positive. The fact that the teachers in the current study reported both positive and negative experiences indicates that their attitudes toward multicultural education are similarly moderately positive. These findings highlight the importance of increasing pedagogical support and making educational environments more culturally responsive so that teachers can develop more conscious and sensitive attitudes in multicultural education.

Eight of the teachers who participated in the study emphasized the importance of empathy skills in both teaching children's rights and multicultural education. It was determined that teachers' attitudes toward multicultural education carry a balanced mix of positive and negative aspects. This finding aligns with the study conducted by Gül and Önder (2022) with teachers of different age groups, which concluded that every student has the right to education and that the protection and educational rights of all segments of society must be guaranteed. Similarly, in the study by Carvalho and Gunn (2025), it was found that teachers exhibit supportive attitudes toward students' right to have bilingual programs. In addition, the study conducted by Kaya (2014) revealed that the majority of teachers believe it is necessary and beneficial to teach lessons on topics such as democracy, human rights, equal opportunities, social justice, cultural diversity and respect for differences. Tur and Aladağ (2022), in their study with Syrian refugee students, found that teachers' perceptions of children's rights were generally positive. These findings support the emphasis placed by the teachers in the current study on empathy skills, highlighting that empathy plays a central role in both the teaching of children's rights and multicultural education.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the current study, various recommendations were developed to enhance primary school teachers' awareness and knowledge of children's rights and multicultural education. First, in-service training programs can be organized to strengthen teachers' competencies in these areas; these programs can be structured to include both theoretical knowledge and practical activities applicable to classroom settings.

In addition, curricula and programs focused on multicultural education and children's rights can be developed to support teachers in implementing rights-based and inclusive practices in the classroom. Furthermore, integrating activities themed around children's rights and multicultural education into the events organized within the scope of specific days and weeks at the school level will contribute to students' learning of these concepts through experience. Such initiatives will lay the groundwork for both teachers and students to adopt a rights-based and multicultural educational perspective. In addition, the necessity of developing instructional materials to support multicultural education can be considered a key recommendation of the current study.

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