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Output-driven citizenship education

A focus on learning outcomes to improve the quality of citizenship education

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Metaphorically, democracy can be seen as a ship: the ship of democracy, i.e., the political and legal institutions of democracy, only sails stable and towards its goal if the crew, i.e., the citizens of democracy, are willing and able to keep course. (De Waal, 2019, p. 32)

Democracy is a form of government essential in societies characterised by diversity in terms of culture, political ideas, religion, and more. However, a resilient, humane and healthy democracy cannot be taken for granted (De Winter, 2004). It needs to be actively maintained by citizens who underscore democratic processes (e.g., respecting the rule of law) (Council of Europe, 2018) and fundamental democratic values (e.g., equality and non-discrimination) (Levinson, 1999). For example, even if discrimination is formally and constitutionally prohibited, for discrimination to no longer occur in society, citizens' involvement and commitment is necessary (cf. De Waal, 2019) to not only be aware of one's own actions but also to have an eye for structural roots of discrimination in the distribution of opportunities, resources and power. In that sense, it is important that citizens in a democratic society are able and enabled to critically explore situations of (in)equality and (in)justice (Wardekker, 2001; Westheimer, 2008). Competence in such civic and democratic principles helps citizens navigate in a society that can be characterised as increasingly complex, individualistic, polarised and 'super diverse' (Jennissen et al., 2018; Mattei & Broeks, 2018; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2010; Vertovec, 2007).

Many European countries have responded to the increased attention to and importance of civic and democratic competence of citizens by setting up national legislation that positions this task with schools via citizenship education (Eurydice, 2017). Citizenship education is part of the school's socialisation function (Dijkstra et al., 2018) and involves teaching young citizens the competences needed to participate in a democratic, pluriform society (Schulz et al., 2018). Next to qualification, which focuses on preparing students for further education or participation in the economy and labour market, socialisation is considered an important function of education (Council of Europe, 2018; Dijkstra et al., 2018). As education is the one thing that all young citizens have in common, schools have the potential to provide all students, regardless of their background characteristics, the opportunity to acquire the competences (i.e., the knowledge, skills, and attitude) needed to participate in a pluriform democracy (Beane, 2013).

Towards Output-driven Citizenship Education

In line with the increasingly acknowledged importance of citizenship education, a growing number of studies have paid attention to the characteristics of effective citizenship education (Coopmans et al., 2020; Geboers et al., 2013; Isac et al., 2014; Wanders, Van der Veen, et al., 2020; Wanders, Dijkstra, et al., 2020). Among the key research findings are studies that point to the importance of providing students with an open classroom climate in which they can critically and respectfully debate and exchange opinions (De Schaepe-meester et al., 2022a; Geboers et al., 2013; Knowles et al., 2018). Moreover, it is advocated to encounter the school as a so-called ‘mini-society’ (cf. Dewey, 1923) and create opportunities for students to learn and practice democracy (Isac et al., 2014; Rinnooy Kan et al., 2021) and enable students’ engagement in political activities in school (Hoskins et al., 2017). Despite the increasing scientific knowledge in this field, research on how schools can effectively foster citizenship competences in students remains scarce (Coopmans et al., 2020).

In contrast, school effectiveness and improvement has been more extensively studied in the educational domain that focuses on the qualification of students (e.g., via reading and mathematics) (Creemers et al., 2022; Sammons et al., 1995). In that respect, various studies have demonstrated the positive effects of an output-driven approach on students’ cognitive learning outcomes (cf. Van Geel et al., 2016; Van Kuijk et al., 2016). In an output-driven approach, sometimes also referred to as a results-oriented approach (cf. Ledoux et al., 2009), the idea is to systematically use data on students’ learning outcomes to ground educational decisions and, resultingly, maximise student learning (Kippers et al., 2018; Staman et al., 2017; Visscher & Ehren, 2011). The underlying building blocks of an output-driven approach differ somewhat in order and composition but largely comply with a cyclic sequence (Kippers et al., 2018; Ledoux et al., 2009) that starts with the formulation of a vision (Hilbers et al., 2010), which is translated into concrete learning objectives (Van der Kleij et al., 2015), according to which the curriculum is designed (Leeman et al., 2020), of which the learning outcomes can be measured and evaluated to see whether the learning objectives have sufficiently been met (Kippers et al., 2018; Van der Kleij et al., 2015).

Whereas an output-driven approach received considerable attention in studies conducted in the qualification domain of education (e.g., to enhance students’ reading or mathematics ability), it has not been studied in the educational domain that focuses on the socialisation of students, among which is citizenship education. The substantive empirical evidence pointing to the positive effects of an output-driven approach in the qualification domain (cf. Van Geel et al., 2016; Van Kuijk et al., 2016) makes it worthwhile to examine

whether such an approach would also be applicable in citizenship education. However, several characteristics of citizenship education make the applicability less self-evident than in subjects like reading and mathematics. These characteristics include foremost the normative notion of citizenship education, meaning that what is considered ('sufficient') competence in citizenship is normative (Eidhof et al., 2016). Whereas for reading and mathematics, there are often relatively objective and detailed guidelines based on formal regulations and academic considerations available that help schools to determine the content and outcomes to be achieved, this is less common in citizenship education. For example, in the Netherlands, there is legislation on citizenship education that provides schools with relatively broad guidelines (i.e., schools need to ensure that their citizenship education does not conflict with fundamental values of democracy), but it is up to schools to decide the exact learning objectives and curriculum in citizenship education. Another characteristic of citizenship education that makes applying an output-driven approach less self-evident is the limited availability of reliable and valid measurement instruments that schools can use to gather information on student outcomes in citizenship education (Daas et al., 2016). When examining whether an output-driven approach would be possible for citizenship education, the differences between using data to enhance students' reading and mathematics ability versus their citizenship competences must not be ignored.

This Dissertation

The previous section explained that democracy needs to be actively maintained by citizens who underscore and have knowledge of democratic principles and fundamental democratic values, that an appeal is made to schools to foster these competences in students, and that research on how schools can effectively do this is still scarce. The section also explained that an output-driven approach is a cyclic process in which data on students' learning outcomes are used to measure whether learning objectives have been met. An output-driven approach is well-studied in the qualification domain of education and well-known for its positive effects on learning outcomes. However, in the context of citizenship education, it has not been studied. While not ignoring the substantial differences between education regarding the qualification and socialisation of students, it is relevant to examine the role of learning outcomes in improving the quality of citizenship education. Hence, the overarching research question was: 'To what extent are standardised measurement instruments able to provide for the psychometric quality and data allowing for insight into civic learning outcomes, and how can insight into civic learning outcomes be used to improve the quality of citizenship education in primary education?' In this respect, civic learning outcomes refer to the competences (e.g.,

the knowledge, attitude, and skills) that students have at a certain point of measurement without presuming that these competences are a direct result of the school (i.e., family, peers, et cetera also play a role). The remainder of this chapter elaborates on the central constructs and context of this dissertation and ends by providing an outline of the remaining chapters.

Citizenship Competences

Citizenship competences are generally understood as the knowledge, attitude, and skills (young) citizens need to participate in a pluriform and democratic society (Schulz et al., 2018; Ten Dam et al., 2011). In scientific research, citizenship competences have been further conceptualised in (related but) different ways. In the International Civic and Citizenship Education Study, for example, citizenship competences are conceptualised as the knowledge, attitude, and skills in four content domains: (1) civic society and systems (i.e., citizens, state institutions, and civil institutions); (2) civic principles (i.e., equity, freedom, sense of community, and the rule of law); (3) civic participation (i.e., decision-making, influencing, and community participation); and (4) civic identities (i.e., civic self-image, and civic connectedness) (Schulz et al., 2018). In the UK, the Citizenship Education Longitudinal Study has looked at, among others, citizenship interest, interest in politics, participation, mobilisation, trust, group membership, and perceived costs and benefits of participation (Keating et al., 2010). In addition, in the Citizenship Competences Questionnaire, citizenship is conceptualised as the knowledge, attitude, and skills in four so-called social tasks: acting democratically (i.e., acceptance of and contribution to a democratic society), acting in a socially responsible manner (i.e., taking shared responsibility for the communities to which one belongs); dealing with conflicts (i.e., handling of minor situations of conflict or conflicts of interest to which the student is a party); and dealing with differences (i.e., handling of social, cultural, religious, and outward differences) (Ten Dam et al., 2011).

Within citizenship competences, most studies have distinguished knowledge, attitude, and skills. Citizenship knowledge is about having (or obtaining) knowledge, insight and understanding of democratic principles and the peaceful and non-violent co-living together with citizens who hold different beliefs, religions, cultures, appearances, sexual orientations, or otherwise (Ten Dam et al., 2011). In addition, citizenship knowledge entails having knowledge about the democratic society (such as the function of laws), the underlying democratic principles (such as that all citizens are of equal value), and the application of democratic principles (such as elections) (Munniksma et al., 2017; Schulz et al., 2018).

Citizenship attitude concerns that students are (or become) willing to live up to democratic decision-making (e.g., willing to hear everyone's opinion), have the desire to

uphold social justice and do not want to harm others or the environment, are willing to search for solutions in conflict situations, and have a positive attitude towards differences (Ten Dam et al., 2011). In addition, citizenship attitude is about what young citizens think of democratic principles (like the rule of law), their perceptions of good citizenship (such as respecting individuals with different beliefs), about underscoring that all citizens have equal rights and are of equal value, and about trust in societal institutions such as the government and the media (Munniksma et al., 2017; Schulz et al., 2018).

Citizenship skills involve that students become able to pose their own opinion and listen to those of others, take a socially just position, switch perspectives and listen to others in conflict situations, can function in unfamiliar situations and adjust to the habits of others (Ten Dam et al., 2011). In addition, citizenship skills are about being able to follow a debate on television, consume news about societal or political topics, talk about societal or political topics, or participate in civic activities such as volunteer work or demonstrations (Munniksma et al., 2017; Schulz et al., 2018). In most standardised measurement instruments, citizenship skills are measured by asking students to indicate their abilities and, as such, provide information on students' self-efficacy (Keating et al., 2010; Schulz et al., 2018; Ten Dam et al., 2011).

Measurement Instruments

Scholars and schools can use both standardised and unstandardised measurement instruments to capture students' citizenship competences. In a standardised measurement instrument, the same questions in the same format are generally administered among all participants. An example of a standardised measurement instrument is a test or a questionnaire consisting of the same questions and answering options for all students, designed for general use and not linked to specific circumstances. Examples of standardised questionnaires in citizenship education include the instruments used in the International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (Schulz et al., 2018) and the Citizenship Education Longitudinal Study (Keating et al., 2010), as well as the Citizenship Competences Questionnaire (Ten Dam et al., 2011). Standardised measurement instruments psychometrically ensure that the same underlying constructs are measured and that the results of all participants are comparable, which is an important advantage of such instruments. In unstandardised measurement instruments, the means of measurement is not necessarily similar for all participating students. Consequently, the results of unstandardised measurement instruments are not always comparable across participants, which marks a relevant limitation. An example of an unstandardised measurement instrument is when students are asked to construct a portfolio in

which they demonstrate their competence development in a self-chosen learning goal by providing evidence (Daas et al., 2016).

Both the questionnaire and portfolio provide insight into students' citizenship competences, and schools can potentially use both types of data to improve the quality of citizenship education. However, the studies in this dissertation predominantly shed light on the psychometrics and data of standardised measurement instruments and how they can be used to improve the quality of citizenship education. The reason for this focus is that standardised measurement instruments offer some advantages over unstandardised measurement instruments, such as that the learning outcomes from all students in a group, grade or school can be compared to those of other participating schools (or even a selection of schools which is considered comparable, for example, all schools within one school board or in one region). In addition, the use of standardised measurement instruments to gain insight into students' civic learning outcomes has proven itself in scientific research (cf. Keating et al., 2010; Schulz et al., 2018; Ten Dam et al., 2011), whereas unstandardised measurement instruments generally require more development (cf. Daas, 2019). As this dissertation is a first exploration of the role of students' civic learning outcomes in improving the quality of citizenship education, the studies focused on standardised measurement instruments as they have been more thoroughly developed and studied.

Students in Regular and Special Needs Primary Education

The scope of this dissertation is delineated to students in primary education who are approximately ten to twelve years old. Previous studies demonstrated that students from this age group are well capable of acquiring citizenship competences (Barrett et al., 2021; De Winter, 2004; Drisko, 1993). More specifically, Drisko (1993), for example, argued that, unlike popular thought, primary school students are well capable of discussing democracy and fundamental democratic values. To illustrate this point, he shares a classroom example in which shared responsibility was fostered in students aged approximately six years old when they discussed rules and behaviour in the schoolyard, and another example in which the meaning of Jefferson's 'all men are created equal' was well discussed and interpreted with students aged approximately ten years old.

Within primary education, the studies in this dissertation were focused on students attending grades 5 and 6 of regular primary education and students attending the last ('leaving')

grade of special needs primary education¹. Whereas these two groups are part of the primary education system in the Netherlands, they differ in student population. In this respect, students in special needs primary education often experience learning and behavioural difficulties such as externalising problem behaviour; internalising problem behaviour; a lack of motivation, effort and concentration; a slow pace of work; having a speech, language or numeracy disorder; being gifted; having an autism spectrum disorder; or being behind in literacy and or numeracy (Van der Veen et al., 2010). Recently, two studies have been conducted in the Netherlands to describe the status quo of citizenship competences of these students. In regular primary education, this measurement was carried out in 2019-2020 among students in grades 5 and 6 (approximately ten to twelve years old) (Inspectorate of Education, 2022b; Slijkhuis et al., 2021). The main findings include, among others, large differences between students based on their estimated educational attainment in citizenship knowledge and self-estimated skills, a decline in citizenship knowledge as opposed to a comparable measurement in 2009 among students in grade 6, and citizenship attitudes that are best described as ‘moderately positive’, for example towards cooperating in a group, dealing with differences and trust in institutions. Also, this study found that even though most schools underscore the importance of citizenship education, the formulation of a vision, learning objectives and curriculum plan were largely missing (Inspectorate of Education, 2022b; Slijkhuis et al., 2021). Even though these are valuable research findings, research on how schools for regular primary education can effectively foster citizenship competences among students remains scarce. In addition, the fact that a vision, learning objectives and a curriculum plan, as building blocks of an output-driven approach, were largely missing in schools for regular primary education illustrates an opening for improvement.

The same study design was carried out among students with learning and behavioural difficulties who attended the last (‘leaving’) grade of special needs primary education during the school year of 2020-2021 (aged approximately ten to twelve) (Inspectorate of Education, 2023; Slijkhuis et al., 2023). The main findings include that students in special needs primary education have less citizenship knowledge than students in regular primary education, that differences in citizenship knowledge and applied skills between students can partly be

¹ In the Netherlands, special education is divided in four domains: (1) for blind and visually impaired students; (2) for deaf and hearing impaired students and students with a language development disorder; (3) for students who are physically and mentally impaired and students who are long-term sick; and (4) for students with severe learning and behavioural difficulties (Van der Veen et al., 2010). This dissertation did not include students in special needs primary education who are blind or visually impaired, deaf or hearing impaired, physically and mentally impaired, and long-term sick students.

attributed to the classroom they are in, and that citizenship education in special needs primary education is predominantly visible in the school and classroom climate and in discussing current affairs and news. In addition, citizenship education in special needs primary education appeared to be a little less organised and concretised than regular primary education, for example, via a shared vision, concrete learning objectives and a curriculum plan (Inspectorate of Education, 2023; Slijkhuis et al., 2023). With the exception of this recent study, research into the quality, effectiveness, and learning outcomes of citizenship education in special needs primary education is largely missing. At the same time, the learning and behavioural difficulties of students in special needs primary education may pose an extra challenge in acquiring citizenship competences. This underscores the importance of research into the learning outcomes and characteristics of citizenship education in special needs primary education. In this respect, this study set out an important foundation by demonstrating that standardised measurement instruments can be used to obtain such insights.

Context of Citizenship Education in the Netherlands

This section provides a detailed description of citizenship education in the Netherlands as the context in which the studies in this dissertation have been conducted. Following concerns about decreased social cohesion (De Groot et al., 2022), the Dutch parliament accepted the ‘Active citizenship and social integration’ law in 2005. By doing so, the Netherlands was the last European country to formalise citizenship education in national legislation (Eurydice, 2005). This was no coincidence, given that the Dutch school system is characterised by high school autonomy (Dijkstra et al., 2021). As a result of this legislation, government-funded schools in the Netherlands were obligated to pay attention to the fostering of active citizenship (i.e., the willingness and ability to participate in a community and to contribute to it actively) and social integration (i.e., social participation, participation to society and its institutions, and familiarity with and engagement in expressions of Dutch culture) in the curriculum (De Groot et al., 2022; Dijkstra et al., 2021). This included regular primary education and special needs primary education (consisting of students aged approximately five to twelve), regular secondary education and special needs secondary education (consisting of students aged approximately thirteen to eighteen).

In 2009, the quality of citizenship education in regular primary education in the Netherlands was first assessed (Wagenaar et al., 2011). The findings concluded that there was a discrepancy between the desired and accomplished level of students’ citizenship knowledge. In the same year, schools for regular secondary education in the Netherlands also participated in the ICCS 2009 study (Maslowski et al., 2012; Schulz et al., 2009). The research findings

pointed out that, compared to surrounding and comparable countries, Dutch students in grade 8 (approximately fourteen years old) generally had less citizenship knowledge and less interest in political and societal topics. In addition, compared to other countries, Dutch students were more reluctant towards support for equal rights for immigrants (Maslowski et al., 2012). Seven years later, the results of the Netherlands' participation in the ICCS 2016 study were presented (Munniksmma et al., 2017). The main findings include that, as compared to students in comparable countries (i.e., Belgium (Flanders), Denmark, Sweden, Norway, and Finland), students in grade 8 in the Netherlands obtained lower scores on, among other things, citizenship knowledge, voting intentions, participating in peaceful demonstrations, and on trust in political parties, the parliament and other individuals in general.

In line with the findings regarding the citizenship competences of Dutch students in the previous studies, the Dutch Inspectorate of Education has repeatedly reported that the quality of citizenship education and, resultingly, citizenship competences of students in the Netherlands have ceased to develop (Inspectorate of Education, 2012, 2014, 2016, 2019, 2022a). The fact that students' citizenship competences were not at the desired level, and the assumption that a stronger focus on concrete learning objectives and learning outcomes in citizenship education would contribute to the quality of citizenship education, were among the main reasons to ground a revision of the 'Active citizenship and social integration' law from 2005. Hence, in 2021, the law 'Clarification of the citizenship education assignment to governmentally funded schools' was established (Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, 2021). The revised law prescribes that schools must visibly pay attention to a democratic and societal component of citizenship education, a social component of citizenship education, and fundamental democratic values. In addition, schools are now (i.e., since the introduction of the revised law) obligated to monitor the learning outcomes in citizenship education, including documenting to what extent they match the learning objectives.

In sum, the context in which the studies in this dissertation took place is characterised by a discrepancy between the desired and accomplished level of students' citizenship competences which seems quite robust throughout the years and manifests across different educational sectors. This illustrates the need to further improve the quality of citizenship education in the Netherlands. Moreover, the tension between a high level of school autonomy on the one hand, and the government's responsibility for the quality of (citizenship) education on the other hand, is deeply embedded in the history and culture of the Netherlands (Dijkstra et al., 2021), and manifests in legislation which is increasingly prescriptive but still formulated in rather general terms that leave much autonomy with schools. This underscores the potential

of supporting schools with empirical insights that help them to improve the quality of citizenship education, for example, by exploring the role of students' civic learning outcomes.

Dissertation Outline

The overarching research question of this dissertation was to examine the extent to which standardised measurement instruments are able to provide for the psychometric quality and data allowing for insight into civic learning outcomes, and how insight into civic learning outcomes can be used to improve the quality of citizenship education in primary education. To this end, four studies were conducted.

The *second chapter* focuses on measurement invariance as one of the psychometric standards of measurement instruments that received less scientific attention than other psychometric standards. An assessment of measurement invariance provides information on whether a construct is perceived and measured similarly across groups and whether the results of the measurement instrument can be used for cross-group comparisons. In this study, an assessment of measurement invariance was performed across sex, socioeconomic position, and migration background. This can be illustrated as follows: when students with a low and high socioeconomic position are asked about whether they want to contribute to a classroom conversation about the news, differences in access to news between these two groups of students (e.g., via a newspaper subscription or personal mobile phone) may cause systematic differences in how these two groups answer this question. Instead of measuring the construct of 'democratic attitude' in both groups, this question may measure 'access to news' among students with a low socioeconomic position. In addition, differences in access to news may have increased throughout the years (i.e., students with a mobile phone nowadays have access to a wealth of information whereas those without, do not), causing systematic differences in how groups respond to this question that were not present at an earlier point in time. This illustrates that it is important to periodically assess measurement invariance, particularly when it entails instruments that measure dynamic constructs such as citizenship education that take on meaning in society (Mattei & Broeks, 2018) and of which the meaning may change over time (Putnick & Bornstein, 2016). This study provides the findings of an assessment of measurement invariance using a standardised measurement instrument for citizenship competences that was developed over a decade ago.

The *third chapter* uses a standardised measurement instrument to describe the characteristics and citizenship competences of students in regular primary education and special needs primary education. In addition, this study examined whether the relationship between attending special needs primary education and citizenship competences changed under

the influence of various characteristics of citizenship education. Studies conducted in schools for regular primary education have, for example, demonstrated that positive teacher-student and student-student relationships promoted learning outcomes in general (Baker et al., 2008; Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Roorda et al., 2021; Wentzel, 2017) and in the context of citizenship education (Sampermans et al., 2018; Wanders, Dijkstra, et al., 2020; Wanders, Van der Veen, et al., 2020). Other studies have demonstrated that students with learning and behavioural difficulties are more at risk of experiencing negative relationships with their teachers and peers (Freire et al., 2020; Pinto et al., 2019; Zee & Roorda, 2018). As such, it may be the case that the relationship between special needs primary education and citizenship competences is more positive for students who experience more positive teacher-student and student-student relationships. This study is one of the first empirical studies to provide insight into the citizenship competences and characteristics of citizenship education among students in special needs primary education.

The *fourth chapter* described the development of the Fundamental Democratic Values Questionnaire. By doing so, it elaborated on its ability to provide for the psychometric quality and data, allowing insight into young students' attitudes towards fundamental democratic values. Underscoring fundamental democratic values such as equality, non-discrimination, and tolerance is essential for the peaceful co-living of diverse (groups of) individuals in a pluriform and democratic society (Dekker & Den Ridder, 2016; Levinson, 1999; Welzel & Dalton, 2014). In this respect, the widespread legitimization of fundamental democratic values is visible in national constitutions and international policy documents such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and the Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture (RFCDC). In addition, citizens, too, largely agree that it is important to teach fundamental democratic values in schools (Dekker & Den Ridder, 2016; Van Goethem et al., 2020). Schools are given an important role in fostering fundamental democratic values among young students via citizenship education (Beane, 2013; Council of Europe, 2018; De Winter, 2004; White, 1999). In this respect, the Fundamental Democratic Values Questionnaire not only provides valuable empirical information on young students' attitude towards values essential for the perseverance of democracy, but also provides schools with important insight into civic learning outcomes, which can be used to improve the quality of citizenship education further.

The *fifth chapter* constructs a model for output-driven citizenship education and theoretically reflects on the feasibility of implementing such an approach in the context of

citizenship education. Whereas (aspects of) an output-driven approach have been well-studied in the qualification domain of education (Van Geel et al., 2016; Van Kuijk et al., 2016), it has not been studied in the context of citizenship education (Eurydice, 2017). The model for output-driven citizenship education consists of five building blocks which have been derived from the literature focused on learning outcomes in the qualification domain of education (cf. Kippers et al., 2018; Ledoux et al., 2009; Van der Kleij et al., 2015; Van Geel et al., 2016; Van Kuijk et al., 2016). The building blocks are discussed in light of the opportunity and challenges that play a role when implementing an output-driven approach to the context of citizenship education.

At last, the *sixth chapter* summarises all findings and elaborates on the implications, limitations and directions for future research.