The Different Grades Students' Understanding Levels of the Concept of Religion in Turkish Elementary Education

By

Abdulkadir Çekin[*]

Abstract

The aim of this study is to examine the different grades students' understanding levels of the concept of religion in elementary education. A total of 107 different grades students taken from elementary schools were asked the concept in using open ended question developed by the researcher. Obtained data showed that students couldn't understand the concept correctly and scientifically and the majority of the students had a misconception about the concept such as worshipping, worships, being ethical, ethical behaviours and obligatory behaviours. Furthermore, some students had specific conceptual confusions about the concept.

Keywords: Religious culture and ethics teaching, religious concepts, misconception, understanding level

_____

[*] Associate Professor, Kastamonu University, Education Faculty, Religious Culture and Ethics Teaching, Kastamonu, Turkey. Tel.: +90 505 833 25 95; mailto: acekin@kastamonu.edu.tr

1. Introduction

Concepts are the abstract and common envisions of objects. Concepts help students to form basic cognitive structure and to learn new data significantly (Erden, 1997). In elementary education, students' learning true knowledge about the religious dimensions of the life and understanding basic religious concepts to solve the encountered problems by means of that knowledge are required elements in religious culture and ethics teaching. Some of the aims of religious culture and ethics teaching in elementary education are to provide students understand and to use the religious concepts correctly (MEB, 2010). In the fourth grade in elementary schools, students encounter religious concepts for the first time in their life. In this situation, some students understand these concepts; some of them confuse the meaning of concepts. Classical methods used in concept teaching and insufficiently establishment relations concepts with the daily life, cause inadequate learning of concepts in students. The meaningful learning is to construct new data on older by establishing relations between them in cognitive structure of students (Geban & Uzuntiryaki, 1999). By taking into consideration pre-knowledge of students, teachers can achieve meaningful learning in teaching new religious concepts. The factors affect meaningful learning are textbooks, teaching methods and techniques, pre-knowledge of students and abstract concepts. In this context, the aim of the study is to examine the different grades students' understanding levels of the concept of religion in Turkish elementary education.

2. Method

In this study, a qualitative framework (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2004) was utilized in collecting and analyzing the data. The data were gathered from different grades students at a state elementary school.

2.1. Sample

A total of 107 students participated in the study. The participants were from 5 different grades students "4 (N= 32), 5 (N= 27), 6 (N= 26), 7 (N= 11) and 8. (N= 11)" who receive education in religious culture and ethics teaching at an elementary school in Ankara.

2.2. Data Collection

The data were collected in the spring term of 2011-2012 academic year. The primary source of the data included semi-structured interviews. All of the participants allowed the interview to be recorded. Interview sessions were held in their classroom. Each interview took about 10 to 15 minutes. During the interview, following question was asked: Could you define the concept of religion with your own words?

2.3. Data Analysis

Interviews were audio taped and regularly transcribed. Data were indexed, labelled, and coded according to the major topic. By using the content analysis, the discourse was systematically examined based on various coding categories. While doing content analysis, first, data were read many times to ascertain any patterns. A matrix was developed according to the given answers to each question. In order to understand the general category, open coding was used. Furthermore, in order to see the related subcategories, axial coding was applied. Data were evaluated by using the concept evaluation criteria developed by Westbrook & Marek (1991) and these criteria have been given in Table 1.

Table 1. The Criteria Taken into Consideration in Evaluation the Data

The Level of Understanding and Evaluation Points	Evaluation Criteria
0- Not understand	No answer, wrong or unclear answers
1- Misconception	Scientifically wrong answers
2- Partly understand with misconception	Partly correct answers, but some misconceptions
3- Partly understand	Scientifically approved answers
4- Understand	Entirely scientific correct answers

3. Findings

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics

Item	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean (X)	Std. Deviation
Religion?	107	0	4	1,25	1,038

When the Table 2 is examined, it can be said that students cannot understand the concept of religion correctly and they had misconceptions about the concept.

Table 3. Frequencies

Religion?		Frequency	Percent
0	Not understand	25	23,4
1	Misconception	47	43,9
2	Partly understand with misconception	23	21,5
3	Partly understand	7	6,5
4	Understand	5	4,7
	Total	107	100,0

When the frequencies are examined, it can be said that %43.9 of the sample have misconception about the concept, %23.4 of the sample cannot understand the concept, %21.5 of the sample partly understand the concept with misconception, %6.5 of the sample partly understand the concept and %4.7 of the sample understand the concept correctly and scientifically.

In the study, chi-square analysis has been used to determine whether any differences are available among the understanding levels of students with regard to grades and the findings have been shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Distribution of Understanding Levels of Students with Regard to Grades

	Religion?		Not understand	Misconception	Partly understand with misconception	Partly understand	Understand	Total
Grade	4. Grade	N	14	12	6	0	0	32
		%	43,8%	37,5%	18,8%	,0%	,0%	100,0%
	5. Grade	N	7	14	5	1	0	27
		%	25,9%	51,9%	18,5%	3,7%	,0%	100,0%
	6. Grade	N	4	13	5	2	2	26
		%	15,4%	50,0%	19,2%	7,7%	7,7%	100,0%

7. Grade	N	0	4	3	3	1	11
	%	,0%	36,4%	27,3%	27,3%	9,1%	100,0%
8. Grade	N	0	4	3	2	2	11
	%	,0%	36,4%	27,2%	18,2%	18,2%	100,0%
Total	N	25	47	23	7	5	107
	%	23,4%	43,9%	21,5%	6,5%	4,7%	100,0%

$(X^2=32.22 \ sd=16 \ P:,000)$

When the Table 4 are analyzed, it can be seen that %43.8 of the sample cannot understand the concept in the fourth grade, %51.9 of the sample in the fifth grade, %50 of the sample in the sixth grade, %36.4 of the sample in the seventh grade and %36.4 of the sample have misconceptions about the concept of religion in the eighth grade. The findings revealed that students who receive education in the fourth grade cannot understand the concept and students who receive education in the fifth, sixth, seventh and eighth grades have misconceptions about the concept of religion. Besides, there were significant differences between students' conception abilities and their grades [p<,05]. In order to analyze these quantitative findings more accurate, it must be needed to examine the qualitative findings of the study. Obtained qualitative findings have been given Table 5.

Table 5. Some Qualitative Findings of the Research

Question	Answers	Grade
Could you define the concept of religion with your own words?	Knowledge of worship etc.	4
	Ethical behaviours	
	Worships done by believers	
	Be morally upright and talking friendly	
	Like reading Quran, religious behaviours ordered by God	
	Things like worships and be covered hair	5
	Worshiping to God	
	A thing worshiped	
	Worshiping to being believed in	6
	Believe in God	
	Ethical behaviours ordered by God	
	Things ordered by God	7
	Worshiping to God, performing religious orders	
	Obligatory religious rituals ordered by God	8

When the qualitative findings evaluated, it can be seen that the students define the concept of religion as "worshiping, worships, being ethical, ethical behaviours and obligatory religious rituals" and have misconceptions about the concept of religion intensively.

4. Results and Discussion

In this study that aims to explore the students' ideas about the concept of religion in elementary education, it has been obtained these results: Students couldn't understand (X=1.25) the concept correctly and scientifically and the majority of the students (%88.8) had misconceptions about the concept such as worshiping, worships, being ethical, ethical behaviours and obligatory religious rituals.

Concepts are the reflections of objective reality in human mind (Hançerlioğlu, 1982). Misconception is student's different perception of concepts from scientifically accepted definitions (Yılmaz *et al*, 1999). When taking a look this study' results in this respect, it has been

said that students have been comprehend the concept according to their conceptual thought and they have been formed new definitions (but, incorrect) of the concept.

In this context, when looking at religious culture and ethics course's textbooks in order to investigate reasons of wrong defining the concept of religion, in fourth grade's textbook; religion defined as "religious rules sent by God by means of prophets for people's happiness" (MEB, 2011), but this definition couldn't be acquired by students. In addition, the definition of religion appeared in the unit entitled "what I know about the religion and ethics?" some descriptive explanations about religion such as; "religion order us to believe in God and to worship him alone", "religion is been just ethical", "we must behave friendly and say goodly" (MEB, 2011), might be caused misconceptions in students about the definition of religion.

It is necessary for teachers to find out the wrong thoughts and knowledge of students about the religious concepts. Besides, they must clarify the conceptual framework of concepts and make it real new concepts and thoughts be clear (Özer, 1997). Before the beginning of teaching a concept exploring students' misconceptions, will be helpful to eliminate students' misconceptions (Büyükkasap & Samancı, 1998).

References

Büyükkasap, E. & Samancı, O. (1998). İlköğretim Öğrencilerinin Işık Hakkındaki Yanlış Kavramları, *Gazi Üniversitesi Kastamonu Eğitim Dergisi*, 5 (5), ss. 109-120.

Erden, M. (1997). *Sosyal Bilgiler Öğretimi*, Alkım Yayın Evi, İstanbul.

Geban, Ö. & Uzuntiryaki, E. (1999). Kavram Haritalama ve Benzeşme Yöntemi ile Mol Kavramı Öğretimi, *III. Ulusal Fen Bilimleri Eğitimi Sempozyumu*, 23-25 Eylül 1998, KTÜ, Milli Eğitim Basım Evi, Ankara, ss.169-172.

Hançerlioğlu, O. (1982). *Felsefe Sözlüğü*, Remzi Kitap Evi, İstanbul.

MEB (2010). *İlköğretim Din Kültürü ve Ahlâk Bilgisi Dersi (4–8.sınıflar) Öğretim Programı ve Kılavuzu*, Ankara.

MEB (2011). *İlköğretim Din Kültürü ve Ahlak Bilgisi Ders Kitabı (4. Sınıf)*, 4. Baskı, MEB Yayınları, Ankara.

MEB (2011). *İlköğretim Din Kültürü ve Ahlak Bilgisi Ders Kitabı (5. Sınıf)*, 4. Baskı, MEB Yayınları, Ankara.

Özer, Z. (1997). Bilgi Nasıl Yenilenir?, *Bilim Teknik Dergisi*, Sayı: 359, Ankara, ss. 32-33.

Westtbrock. L. S. & Marek, E. (1991). A Cross-Age Study of Student Understanding of the Concept of Diffusion, *Journal of Research in Science Teaching*, 28 (8).

Yıldırım, A. & Şimşek, H. (2004). *Sosyal Bilimlerde Araştırma Yöntemleri*, Ankara: Seçkin Yayıncılık.

Yılmaz, Ö., Tekkaya, C., Geban, Ö. & Özden,Y. (1999). Lise-1. Sınıf Öğrencilerinin Hücre Bölünmesi Ünitesindeki Kavram Yanılgılarının Tespiti, *III. Ulusal Fen Bilimleri Eğitimi Sempozyumu*, 23-25 Eylül 1998, KTÜ, Milli Eğitim Basım Evi, Ankara.