



To What Extent Do Children in Primary Schools Have a Voice in Context of the Right to Participation in Türkiye?: A Case Study

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Abstract

The purpose of the current research is to investigate the arrangements addressing primary school children's right to participation in education and the level of realization of the right to participate. To this end, the research conforms to the explanatory sequential design. The quantitative phase of the research was carried out with 2172 students enrolled in 77 primary schools whereas the qualitative phase was implemented with 4 teachers and 36 students. The research data yielded from the child's right to participation-based classroom scale and teacher and student interview forms regarding the realization of the right to participate in education developed within the scope of the research were analysed through statistical, content, and descriptive analyses. The findings highlighted certain deficiencies in terms of the arrangements on children's right to participation in schooling and the level of their participation in decision-making processes. In CHP (class with a high level of participation) and CLP (class with a low level of participation), 13 contexts concerning the children's participation in decision-making processes were identified. In this respect, it was determined that children's participation in the decision-making processes was ensured in both groups on some of the issues that may concern in their lives, while it was determined that the children in both groups were not included in decision-making processes in terms of participation in environmental protection and sustainable development. Besides, it was revealed that the children in CLP were not included in seven contexts including the processes of the election of class representatives of the student council and the establishment of classroom rules.

Keywords Children's right to participation in education · children's rights · children's rights education · primary school education

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1 Introduction

Children's rights include the right to be protected from any abuse and harm and raised as healthy individuals in terms of health, ethics, and psychology (Akyüz, 2021). Numerous documents have been published on an international scale to ensure the rights of children and to guarantee that all children shall be provided a life in accordance with their rights. In this regard, the most widely accepted and comprehensive global legal instrument so far has been the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (Correia et al., 2019; Flowers, 2007). UNCRC is fundamental to the welfare and protection of children around the world (Delgado et al., 2023). Children's right to participation has not been included in previous international documents yet has been mentioned in the UNCRC for the first time (Flowers, 2007) and considered the most crucial value of the document (Delgado et al., 2023). Article 12 of the Convention establishes "the right of every child to freely express his or her views; in all matters affecting her or him, and the subsequent right for those views to be given due weight, according to the child's age and maturity" (Hodgkin & Newell, 1998). Article 12 combines child's rights to freely express his/ her views (Article 13), to have his/ her own thoughts and beliefs and to choose his/ her religion (Article 14), to meet his/ her own friends and join groups or associations (Article 15), to keep some things private (Article 16) and to get information in lots of ways so long as it is safe (Article 17) (Ruiz-Casares et al., 2017; Lansdown, 2020). The right to participation defines children as the individuals having fundamental human rights and their own thoughts and feelings (Hodgkin & Newell, 1998, p.165). The right to participation ensures children the right to be heard, taken seriously and included in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting him or her in addition to a wide range of matters such as family, education, game, health, child-care as well as decision-making processes. This right constitutes a fundamental value for the realization of other rights and a crucial principle in ensuring the best interests of the child (Lansdown, 2020). Furthermore, children's participation in decisions that affects their lives emerges not only as a right, yet as a key strategy in shaping their relationships with adults and becoming active citizens (Ray, 2010). The children's right to participation and children's learning about this right is of great importance in order for them to become participatory citizens having democratic values (Christensen & James, 2000; Miller, 1997; Turnšek & Pekkarinen, 2009) and to establish a culture of democracy (Correia et al., 2019). On the contrary, not providing children with the right to participation teaches them not to be democratic and impedes their experiences of autonomy and self-regulation and motivations to learn (Murray & Cousens, 2020). It has also been evidenced that constantly ensuring children the right to participation in various settings such as family, school etc. aid children to improve their self-esteem, cognitive abilities, social skills and respect for others (Covell & Howe, 2005; Kirby & Bryson, 2002; Kränzl-Nagl & Zartler, 2010). In this context, certain arrangements are required to be made for children's democratic participation in decision-making processes in schools and they are ensured to acquire skills for the

understanding and implementation of democratic principles and values (Lansdown, 2001). The children's right to participation is not a new emerging concept though there are various difficulties encountered in its implementation (Correia et al., 2019). A school or a classroom culture where children's right to participation is effectively enforced is rarely observed across the world (Lansdown et al., 2014). In this regard, the attitudes and beliefs of the school administration and teachers concerning the right to participation are key factors, and negative beliefs and convictions are a significant obstacle to ensuring children's participation at both school and class levels (Kılıç & Öztürk, 2018). An overall lack of awareness of children's right to participation, adults' doubts regarding children's capacity to participate, and views that empowering children would undermine authority are listed among the obstacles to the realization of the right (Lundy, 2007). Indeed, it has been acknowledged that the realization of the children's right to participation is highly challenging even in democratic societies and various drawbacks are encountered in this process (Lansdown, 2020), requiring efforts to implement their right to participation. Accordingly, it has been observed that researchers carry out various studies to investigate the realization of children's right to participation, evaluate the inclusion of children in decision-making processes and to make this right functional. Several studies concerning making children's right to participation functional and clarifying their participation in decision-making processes have been encountered in the literature. In this respect, Hart's (1992) Ladder of Participation is regarded as one of the most influential frameworks developed to unveil the participation status of children. The Ladder of Participation identifies eight rungs of young people's participation that start from manipulation- in which youth do as directed without understanding of the purpose for the activities towards youth initiated shared decisions with adults where decision-making is shared between youth and adults working as equal partners. However, Shier's Pathways to Participation describes five stages of child/ youth participation, leadership, and decision-making in organizations and communities in addition to three stages to commitment identifies as "openings", "opportunities" and "obligations". Healy and Darlington (2009) identify three principles in order to promote the participation of children in decision-making processes that are respect, competence and transparency. Stamm and Bettzieche (2015) devised "a model on meaningful participation of children" that was based on child-led participation, collaborative participation and consultative participation. Mayne et al. (2018) introduced a hierarchical model of children's (3- to 8-year-olds) research participation rights that builds on work by Roger Hart. Lundy (2007) focused on four elements for the effective participation of children in decision-making process. In this respect, it was aimed to provide an insight into the various levels of information that can be provided to children, the understanding that results, the scope given to them to express their views, and the degree to which their voices ultimately exert influence in research contexts. In addition to the studies which put forward various frameworks regarding children's right to participation, it has been observed that numerous studies have been carried out in which researchers investigate the participation status of children and the factors affecting the participation process. In this context, Thornberg and Elvstrand (2012) conducted a

study in three elementary schools in Sweden and investigated children's views and experiences of democracy and pupil participation in relation to everyday school life. On the other hand, Correia et al. (2019) systematically examined and evaluated the studies on children's right to participation. Simó et al. (2016) aimed to explore how secondary school students understand and experience the concepts of democracy and participation. Forde et al. (2018) presented findings from a research study on children's (7- to 17-year-olds) participation and opportunities for young people's participation in their homes, schools and communities in Ireland. Korfiatis and Petrou (2021) focused on 8–9 years old children environmental conceptions and how they were affected by their participation in a school kitchen-garden project within such contexts as the status of children's sense of ownership on participation, control centre and self-efficacy. Moran-Ellis and Süinker (2013) address the roles of adults' responsibility/ trust in children's democratic participation. Turnšek (2016) reported the results of a quantitative study examining Slovenian preschool teachers' views on the implementation of the idea of the competent child and child participation in preschools. Lloyd and Emerson (2017) aimed to explore the nature of the relationship between wellbeing and participation rights of approximately 3800 children in Northern Ireland. The aforementioned studies are of great importance in terms of unearthing the status of the realization of children's right to participation in different countries around the world and the difficulties faced in this process in addition to contributing to the effective realization of children's right to participation. In Türkiye, which is among the states parties to the UNCRC, a number of educational policies on the realization of the children's right to participation at primary school level have been developed. The education system in Türkiye is centralised and education policies are prepared by the state and implemented simultaneously in all schools across the country. In order to realise children's right to participation at the primary school level, the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) includes learning outcomes related to children's right to participation in the curricula of various courses such as life science and social studies. Through these curricula, it is aimed to provide knowledge, awareness and skills related to children's right to participation in all grades at primary school level. On the other hand, the MoNE has made it a legal obligation for school student councils to be formed through elections and to work actively, for class representatives of the school student councils to be determined through elections, and for children to be included in the executive commission of Guidance and Psychological Counselling Services, the Social Activities Board and the School Development Management Team. Thus, the MoNE tried to make the establishment of mechanisms to realise children's right to participation in primary schools compulsory in all primary schools across the country. Furthermore, it is also observed that documents guiding child and educational policies, such as the MoNE, 2019–2023 Strategic Plan (MoNE, 2019), the 11th Development Plan for 2019–2023 (Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye Strategy and Budget Presidency, 2019), and the 2023–2028 Türkiye Child Rights Strategy Document and Action Plan (the Ministry of Family and Social Services, 2023), include regulations to realise children's right to participation in school systems. When these documents are evaluated in general, it can be

said that children's participation in scientific, cultural, artistic and sportive activities is ensured, a child-participatory School Development Model has been established, various arrangements that ensure children's participation in decision-making processes in schools and strengthen children's participation in different contexts come to the fore. Apart from such legal documents, it can be said that projects and activities such as the "Zero Waste Project" and the International Children's Forum held with the theme of "Climate Change and Child Participation" have been carried out for the participation of children (the Ministry of Family and Social Services, 2023). More examples can be given for educational policy documents and projects to ensure children's right to participation. However, it should be noted that these actions are important steps for the realization and increasing awareness of children's right to participation in Türkiye. These steps serve to strengthen and facilitate the realization of children's right to participation in primary schools in Türkiye. However, in the process of realising policies and regulations on children's right to participation in Türkiye, various difficulties are encountered, especially in practice. In this context, negative attitudes, beliefs and behaviours of teachers and school principals who will implement children's right to participation in schools, and their lack of knowledge and awareness are shown as important factors (Kılıç & Öztürk, 2018; Öztürk et al., 2019; Urfaloğlu, 2019). Accordingly, it is pointed out that boards and commissions such as school councils, where student participation is a legal obligation, exist only on paper in some schools (Çam Tosun, 2021, Kılıç & Öztürk, 2018; Genç et al., 2011). On the other hand, the inadequacy of in-service training activities for primary school teachers on children's rights education, the absence of courses on children's rights education in the pre-service primary teacher training programmes prepared by the Council of Higher Education (CoHE) and the deficiencies in the supervision mechanisms appear as a deficiency that makes it difficult to implement children's rights education (Öztürk et al., 2019). In particular, it can be said that this situation has a limiting effect on the realization of children's right to participation. On the other hand, classroom teachers need to have good curriculum literacy skills in order to implement the regulations related to children's right to participation in curricula. However, classroom teachers lack knowledge about the official curricula, which leads to inadequacies in the implementation process (Erdamar & Akpınar, 2021). This situation also poses a risk for the implementation of the regulations in the curricula regarding children's right to participation. Although policy studies have been carried out to increase the realization of children's right to participation in primary schools in Türkiye, the existence of preventive factors in practice makes it necessary to carry out studies to understand the process more clearly. In this direction, it is observed that a number of studies have been conducted on the level of realization of children's right.

In this regard, Kılıç and Öztürk (2018) examined the level of realization of children's right to participation in a primary school with a high level of children right-based structure in Türkiye. Urfaloğlu (2019), however, provided an insight into the level of realization of children's right to participation in two classrooms in primary school in the context of democratic attitudes and the shared democratic values in the process of realization of this right. Nonetheless, it has been found that the studies are

few in number and are carried out with a limited number of participants. Moreover, in order to reveal the realization of the children's right to participation and the deficiencies occurring in this process, further research conducted on large sample sizes in which both quantitative and qualitative data are examined is required. The data to be obtained from these studies will provide a basis for further research to describe the current situation in Türkiye, reveal the requirements and realize the children's right to participation in primary schools. Added to this, it will constitute a crucial resource for the generation of theoretical knowledge concerning the children's participation rights, the identification of the needs in the field and, hence, the policies to be executed on an international scale. In line with the reasons noted above, the purpose of this paper is to determine the arrangements on the children's right to participation in classroom environment in primary schools in Türkiye and to unveil the realization level of this right.

2 Method

2.1 Research Model

The current research that was intended to investigate children's right to participation in primary schools aligned with the explanatory sequential design. This research model is characterized by the quantitative data that is collected and analysed beforehand, and then, qualitative data is collected and analysed based on quantitative results. In this regard, the first phase of the research- quantitative phase- is followed by the qualitative phase carried out to explain the relationships and tendencies included in the quantitative data (Creswell et al., 2003. p.90). In this research, descriptive analysis was adopted in the quantitative phase and the qualitative phase was designed as a case study. In the first step of quantitative phase, the children's right to participation-based class structure in primary schools was examined and, in the second step, however, the classes children's right to participation in education was high (referred to herein as CHP- class with a high level of participation) and the ones where children's right to participation in education was low (referred to herein as CLP- class with a high level of participation) were compared. On the other hand, in qualitative phase of the research, the realization level of children's right to participation in CHPs and CLPs were investigated. Thus, the quantitative data were clarified in the qualitative phase of the research. In the qualitative phase, data were collected from different sources in order to conduct in-depth analyses and gain a holistic understanding in accordance with the nature of the case study (Creswell, 2007; Patton, 2014). In this regard, unlike the quantitative phase, classroom teachers were also included in the process and information about the arrangements that teachers made in their classrooms in the context of children's right to participation was collected. Thus, the data collected from children for the level of realization of children's right to participation in primary school classrooms were deepened in a comparative and holistic manner with the data collected from classroom teachers. For the realization level of children's right to participation, the process was made more understandable by supporting the examinations made from the perspective of

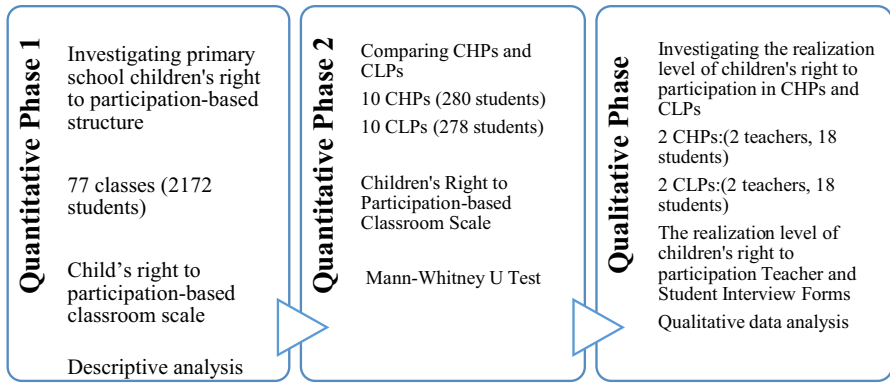


Fig. 1 The process followed for the explanatory sequential research model

children with the data obtained from the perspective of teachers. The process followed in the research is given in Fig. 1.

2.2 The Study Group of the Research

2.2.1 The Study Group of the Quantitative Phase of the Research

The study group of the quantitative phase of the current research consisted of 2172 students attending 77 classes at 4th grade enrolled in 15 primary schools. Five of the schools were of high-level socio-economic status, 5 were of medium level of socio-economic status and 5 were of low level of socio-economic status. Of all participants, 1169 were female and 1003 were male. In the qualitative phase of the research, however, 558 students attending 10 classes with high level of participation and 10 classes with low level of participation in consequence of mean scores of Children's Right to Participation-based Classroom Scale (CRPCS) regarding 77 classes. Of all participants, 317 were female and 231 were male.

2.2.2 The Study Group of the Qualitative Phase of the Research

The study group of the qualitative phase of the research was determined through deviant sampling pattern, one of purposive sampling methods. Accordingly, the arithmetic scores of 77 primary school classes from CRPCS were examined and the two classes with the highest arithmetic score and the two with the lowest arithmetic score were determined. Teachers in these classes and nine students were included in the current research, three of whom were with high level of achievement, three of whom were with medium-level of achievement and three of whom were with low level of achievement. In this respect, 4 classroom teachers and 36 students were included in the study group. In the research, the pseudonyms (HS1, HT1, LS2, LT2...) for participants were used. In this respect, the pseudonyms of HS, HT, LS and LT refer to the student in CHPs, the teacher in CHPs, the student in CLPs and

the teacher in CLPs respectively. The first one of the participant classroom teachers (HT1) in CHPs was female, graduated from the undergraduate programme of classroom teaching and did not do postgraduate education. The teacher, who has 21 years of experience, has not received any training on children's rights or children's rights education. The second of the participant classroom teachers in CHPs (HT2) was female, graduated from the undergraduate programme of classroom teaching and did not have a postgraduate education. The classroom teacher with 16 years of experience did not receive any training on children's rights or children's rights education. However, he/she attended a seminar on the protection of children from abuse. The first of the participant teachers in CLPs (LT1) was a male, graduated from a bachelor's programme in classroom teaching and is currently studying for a master's degree in classroom education. With 20 years of experience, this teacher has not received any training on children's rights or children's rights education. The second of the participant teachers in CLPs (LT2) was female, graduated from the undergraduate programme of classroom teaching and did not have a postgraduate education. The teacher with 20 years of experience has not received any training on children's rights or children's rights education. 10 of the students in CLPs were female and 8 were male; however, 12 of the students in CHPs were female and 6 were male. The number of siblings of these students varies between 2 and 4. The education level of their parents varies between primary school and university level in both groups; the majority of their mothers do not work.

2.3 Data Collection Instruments and Procedure

In the present study, the Children's Right to Participation-based Classroom Scale (CRPCS) developed within the framework of the study, Children's Participation Rights- Teacher Interview Form (IF1) and Children's Participation Rights- Student Interview Form (IF2) were used as data collection instruments.

2.3.1 Children's Right to Participation-Based Classroom Scale (CRPCS)

In the research, the Children's Right to Participation-based Classroom Scale (CRPCS) was developed in order to determine what kind of arrangements were made to realize children's right to participation in classroom environment in primary schools. In the process of developing the scale, various actions such as literature review, consulting to expert opinions and creating an item pool were taken. In order to ensure content validity of the scale, the opinions of five experts were taken and the pilot study of the scale was carried out. In line with the feedbacks given, a draft of the scale consisting of 32 items was generated. For the exploratory factor analysis (EFA) to be carried out the draft was administered to 4th grade students and a data set consisting of 320 people was obtained after necessary examinations. As a result of the factor analysis, 25 items with 5- Likert type that are related to participation in the process of learning- teaching, physical arrangement and participation in communication process, gaming, participation in entertainment and social activities, active participation in environmental protection have been included in the scale. It was

seen that the factor loadings of all items varied between 0.771 and 0.886, common variance varied between 0.662 and 0.829. It was also found that total variance of the five factors explained by the scale is 60.7%. With the aim of the determination of the relationships between the total score and the sub-factors of the scale, the correlation values were computed. It was determined that there was a medium or high-level significant positive correlation between the sub-factors and total score of the scale and a low-level and significant correlation among the factors. In this regard, it can be said that the sub-factors act as an element of the scale and each sub-factor measures different characteristics. Concerning the sum of the scales, a Cronbach's alpha of 0.907 was obtained whereas this value regarding the sub-factors was observed to vary between 0.866 and 0.936. A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was carried with a sample size of 247 people. The analysis revealed the following values: $\chi^2/\text{sd}(\text{CMIN}/\text{DF}) = (1.103)$; CFI= (0.994); IFI= (0.994); RMSEA= (0.020) and SRMR= (0.030), showing an excellent fit range. Nevertheless, the following values were also reported: GFI= (0.909); AGFI= (0.889) and NFI= (0.944), considered at an acceptable range. As a result, a reliable and valid scale has been designed.

2.3.2 Children's Participation Rights- Teacher Interview Form (IF1)

The IF1 was prepared to be employed to determine the level of realization of children's right to participation in their classrooms in primary schools from the perspective of teachers. In the process of preparation, the relevant literature was reviewed and open-ended questions were developed based on the quantitative findings. The interview questions were presented to expert opinions and a case study was performed. The necessary corrections were made in accordance with the experts' contributions and the IF1 form was finalized. With the purpose of determining the realization level of children's right to participation in classrooms in primary schools, 13 open-ended questions in 13 different fields of practice such as the election of class president, determination of classroom rules and inclusion of children in decision-making processes on issues concerning them were included.

2.3.3 Children's Participation Rights- Student Interview Form (IF2)

In the current study, GF2 was generated and used to examine the realization level of children's right to participation in classrooms in primary schools from the children's perspectives. In the preparation process of the student interview form, similar processes as IF1 were followed, and 13 open-ended questions would enable researchers to investigate 13 different fields of practice in the aforementioned teacher interview form from the children's perspectives.

2.4 Data Collection Process

Quantitative data were collected beforehand, followed by the gathering of qualitative data. The quantitative data were obtained from 2172 students enrolled in 77 primary schools via Children's Right to Participation-based Classroom Scale. However, the

qualitative data were yielded from 4 classroom teachers through IF1 and 36 students via IF2 by carrying out semi-structured interviews. In the research, the participants were assured regarding the confidentiality of the data obtained from the interviews. Initially, demographic information was asked and then the questions in the form were addressed respectively. The interview process was recorded through a voice recorder on the participants' permission. In order to motivate the students to participate in the study and provide detailed information during the data collection process; children's right to participation and its importance, the benefits that children's right to participation will provide when it is realized in classrooms were explained. The importance of the research and the benefits of participating in the study were explained. When they participated in the research and provided detailed information about the process reflecting the real processes, it was explained that their contribution to this process and their opinions were very valuable.

2.5 Data Analysis

2.5.1 Analysis of Quantitative Data

The quantitative data yielded from 2172 students through the Children's Right to Participation-based Classroom Scale were descriptively analysed by computing percentages and frequency values. The data collected from 558 students attending 10 CHPs and 10 CLPs were analysed by performing Mann-Whitney U test since the normality assumption of independent groups t-test was not provided.

2.5.2 Analysis of Qualitative Data

In the research, a two-step process in which both content and descriptive analyses were performed was followed to analyse the qualitative data. The data obtained from interviews of both the students and the teachers were transformed into written documents. In the first stage of the analysis process, content analysis was carried out and by examining the transcript line by line, the relevant codes regarding the fields of practice for the children's right to participation were created. Following this process, 13 fields of practice codes for children's right to participate emerged. In the second stage, descriptive analysis was conducted in order to determine the level of realization of children's right to participation in 13 fields of practice related to children's right to participation determined in the content analysis process. For the descriptive analysis process, the data set was reorganized and the data collected from the students and the teachers for each field of practice related to children's right to participation were brought together. Thus, data set units reflecting each of the 13 fields of practice for children's right to participation from both student and teacher perspectives were formed. In the descriptive analysis process, the descriptive analysis framework created by Kılıç and Öztürk (2018) based on Shier's (2001) participation model was used. There are two dimensions as "participation levels (PL)" and phases of arrangements for participation in this framework. The new level- L0- in the participation levels and non-existent-NE- in the arrangement phases were added

Table 1 The descriptive analysis framework based on Shier's model

| Participation Levels (PL)- Explanations | The arrangement phases for children's right to participation (APC) |
|---|--|
| Level 0 (L0): Children are not involved in the process under no circumstances. | Non-existent (NE): Organizations or individuals do not specify that they are ready in the arrangement process. |
| Level 1 (L1): Children can express their ideas if they want. They are not encouraged to come up with ideas. | Openings (OP): Organizations or individuals specify that they are ready to make arrangements in order for ensuring children's participation. |
| Level 2 (L2): Children are encouraged to express their ideas. | Opportunities (O): Procedures are prepared and implemented for the realization of children's right to participation. |
| Level 3 (L3): Children's ideas are paid attention to in the decision-making process. | Legal Obligations (LO): The realization of children's right to participation is compulsory as a policy requirement. |
| Level 4 (L4): Children participate in the decision-making process directly. | |
| Level 5 (L5): Children share power and responsibility in the decision-making process. | |

by Kılıç and Öztürk. Table 1 displays the analysis framework used to determine the realization level of children's right to participation.

In the descriptive analysis of the data, the participation levels, and the arrangement phases for children's right to participation regarding each field of practice for children's right to participation were identified and analysed. In the descriptive analysis process, the data set units created for each field of practice regarding children's rights to participation were analysed separately. In this regard firstly, the level of children's right to participation in the relevant field of practice was determined, and then the phases of the arrangements for participation were identified. This analysis process was carried out separately for the data collected from each class in CHPs and CLPs. This structure, which includes content analysis and descriptive analysis processes to determine the level of realization of children's right to participation, is presented in a single table. For the determination of the level of realization of children's right to participation; the practices for children's right to participation, the level of children's right to participation in these practices, and the phases of arrangements for participation for each level can be seen in Table 4 in Section 3.

2.6 Reliability and Validity of the Research Process

The following studies were carried out to ensure reliability and validity in the current research:

Data triangulation was occurred through collecting data from different set of sources; overall processes and analyses were made clear for the readers to understand; the inferences reached was explained in detail by direct quotations and coder reliability was used to ensure the reliability of the results of the analysis. The coding done by the researcher for ensuring reliability was presented to external experts and agreement and dissidence were determined between the codes (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Inter-coder reliability was found as 88.7%.

2.7 Ethical Studies Carried out During the Research Process

The study was conducted based on ethical principles in the planning, implementation and reporting processes. In this context, in the planning process of the study, attention was paid to ensure that all stages such as the formulation of the research problem, the determination of the participant group, the creation of data collection tools and processes were in accordance with both scientific and ethical principles. In all processes of the study, it was taken as a basis not to harm the participants psychologically, emotionally and physically and to ensure the confidentiality of personal data. Before conducting the study, research and implementation permission was obtained from the Provincial Directorate of National Education of the MoNE in the province where the research was conducted. In this process, the research proposal, documents related to data collection tools and processes, parent and participant consent forms were submitted for review. The documents submitted were examined and approval was given for the conduct of the study by the Provincial Directorate of National Education of the MoNE. During the data collection process, written consent was obtained from the families and children participating in the study. Children who were approved by their families and who volunteered to participate in the study were included in the study. Written consent was also obtained from the classroom teachers participating in the research and volunteerism was taken as a basis in the participation process. In this process, families, children and classroom teachers were informed about the purpose and importance of the study, data collection tools and processes, recording of data and the process of ensuring the confidentiality of personal data. In the qualitative data collection phase, during the interview processes, first of all, information was given about the purpose of the study, approval was obtained for participation, and it was stated that they could leave the process at any time during the interview. Permission was requested to record the interview processes and the interviews were recorded and care was taken not to be directive in any way during the interviews. In the reporting phase of the study, letter codes were used instead of person names to ensure the confidentiality of personal data during the presentation of the findings.

3 Findings

The aim of the present study is to investigate the arrangements addressing primary school children's right to participation in education and the level of realization of the right to participate. To this end, the research conforms to both quantitative and qualitative design. The findings of the study are presented under two headings: "Quantitative findings on the examination of children's right to participation-based classroom structure in primary schools" and "Findings on the level of realization of children's right to participation in primary schools".

3.1 Quantitative Findings on the Examination of Children's Right to Participation-Based Classroom Structure in Primary Schools

Within the scope of the findings related to the examination of children's right to participation-based classroom structure in primary schools, the classrooms were investigated descriptively based on their scores of children's right to participation-based classroom scale. The results of descriptive analysis regarding the CRPCS scores of 77 classes are given in Table 2.

Examining the descriptive findings regarding the CRPCS scores of primary school classes in Table 2, in the context of participation in physical arrangement and communication process, children were found to agree that their opinions concerning physical arrangements were asked the most while noting that their teacher sought their opinions regarding choosing the friends with whom they sit in the classroom to the least extent. Accordingly, 46.8% of the students reported that they chose the friends with whom they sat in the classroom. Added to this, 72.7% of the students stated that they were able to hang the works they wanted and express their requests and complaints with ease; however, 68.6% said that their teacher encouraged them to express themselves.

The context of participation in teaching- learning process encompasses certain evaluations related to children's participation status of decisions and activities towards the planning of teaching- learning activities in primary schools. In this respect, 43.6% of the students stated that their teachers asked for their opinions when giving homework whereas 40.0% of them emphasized that their opinions were asked by their teacher while planning weekly lesson timetable. Considering this finding, it can be interpreted that the children's participation is not ensured at high rates in the planning of homework and weekly lesson timetables. On the other hand, 53.0% of the students uttered that they decided about the activities to be done in the classroom together with their teacher, and 59.1% of them noted that they were included in the evaluation process of course achievements. In addition, while 62.7% of the children stated that they were allowed to choose their friends to carry out group works, a significant rate of 80.2% said that everyone participated in the activities in their classroom.

In the research, findings related to children's right to participation in decision-making processes concerning gaming, entertainment and social activities were revealed. Accordingly, 51.7% of the children pointed out that they were able to choose the student clubs in their school in which they would participate, and 57.3% of them noted that their teacher asked for their opinions regarding the ceremonies to be held in the school and 60.6% of the children stated that their opinions related to the social activities to be held in the classroom were asked by the teacher. These findings show that children's participation in the selection of student clubs, ceremonies and social activities is 60% or less. In addition, it has been seen that the highest level of children participation in this category is realized in the context of gaming, entertainment and recreational activities. 68.1% of the students noted that they participated in gaming, entertainment and recreational activities; however, 68.5% of them emphasized that they took part in decision-making processes for gaming, entertainment and recreational activities.

Table 2 The results of descriptive analysis regarding the children's right to participation-based classroom scale

| Factors | Items | Disagree | | Neutral | | Agree | |
|--|---|----------|------|---------|------|-------|------|
| | | F | % | F | % | F | % |
| Participation in physical arrangement and communication process | Our teacher hangs everyone's works on the class boards if they want. | 517 | 23.8 | 77 | 3.5 | 1578 | 72.7 |
| | Our teacher hangs only the works s/he wants on the class boards. | 1548 | 71.3 | 98 | 4.5 | 526 | 24.2 |
| | Our teacher asks for our opinion when making physical arrangements in the classroom. | 211 | 9.7 | 252 | 11.6 | 1709 | 78.7 |
| | We are allowed to choose the friends we will sit with in the classroom. | 645 | 29.7 | 510 | 23.5 | 1017 | 46.8 |
| Participation in the process of learning- teaching | We can express our requests and problems to our teacher with ease. | 255 | 11.7 | 339 | 15.6 | 1578 | 72.7 |
| | Our teacher encourages us to express ourselves. | 255 | 11.7 | 428 | 19.7 | 1489 | 68.6 |
| | Our teacher asks for our opinion when giving homework. | 840 | 38.7 | 385 | 18.7 | 947 | 43.6 |
| | Our teacher asks for opinion while planning the weekly lesson timetable. | 845 | 38.9 | 458 | 21.1 | 869 | 40.0 |
| | Our teacher ensures that we all participate in activities during the lessons. | 220 | 10.1 | 210 | 9.7 | 1742 | 80.2 |
| | Our teacher includes us in the process of evaluating our course achievements. | 311 | 14.3 | 578 | 26.6 | 1283 | 59.1 |
| | In our class, we are permitted to choose our friends with whom we will do group work. | 378 | 17.4 | 432 | 19.9 | 1362 | 62.7 |
| We make decisions about which activities to do during the lessons together with our teacher. | 563 | 25.9 | 457 | 21.0 | 1152 | 53.0 | |

Table 2 (continued)

| Factors | Items | Disagree | | Neutral | | Agree | |
|--|---|----------|------|---------|------|-------|------|
| | | F | % | F | % | F | % |
| Participation in gaming, entertainment and social activities | In our class, we participate in games, entertainment and social activities. | 306 | 14.1 | 386 | 17.8 | 1480 | 68.1 |
| | Our teacher asks for our opinion to participate in the ceremonies to be held in school. | 499 | 23.0 | 429 | 19.8 | 1244 | 57.3 |
| | We decide the games to be played in the game and physical activities lesson together with our teacher. | 345 | 15.9 | 339 | 15.6 | 1488 | 68.5 |
| | We choose which of the student clubs in the school we will participate in. | 555 | 25.6 | 494 | 22.7 | 1123 | 51.7 |
| Active participation in environmental protection | Our opinions are also taken for the social activities to be organized in the classroom. | 360 | 16.6 | 496 | 22.8 | 1316 | 60.6 |
| | In our classroom, awareness-raising activities are carried out to keep our environment clean and protected. | 243 | 11.2 | 316 | 14.5 | 1613 | 74.3 |
| | We are informed on what we can do for recycling and sustainable development through certain activities. | 239 | 11.0 | 604 | 27.8 | 1329 | 61.2 |
| | Our teacher enables us to produce projects related to the environment in the classroom. | 340 | 15.7 | 469 | 21.6 | 1363 | 62.8 |
| | In our classroom, we assume responsibility for keeping the environment we live in. | 206 | 9.5 | 226 | 10.4 | 1740 | 80.1 |

Table 2 (continued)

| Factors | Items | Disagree | | Neutral | | Agree | |
|--|--|----------|------|---------|------|-------|------|
| | | F | % | F | % | F | % |
| Participation in decision-making processes | Our class representative of the student council in the school is democratically elected among the candidates we have determined. | 332 | 15.3 | 500 | 23.0 | 1340 | 61.7 |
| | Our teacher establishes classroom rules with us. | 488 | 22.5 | 452 | 20.8 | 1232 | 56.7 |
| | Our teacher asks for our opinions that may be related to us. | 314 | 14.5 | 429 | 19.8 | 1429 | 65.8 |
| | Our class president is elected among the candidates we have determined. | 329 | 15.1 | 313 | 14.4 | 1530 | 70.4 |

In the context of active participation in environmental protection and sustainable development, it was aimed to provide an insight into the organization of certain activities related to environmental cleaning, recycling and sustainable development and the duties and responsibilities of the students in these processes. Accordingly, the students (80.1%) stated that they assumed responsibility to keep their classroom clean most, and then the students (74.3%) noted that certain awareness-raising activities were conducted to ensure environmental cleaning and protection. Besides that, 61.2% of the students pointed out that certain information activities related to recycling and sustainable development were held in their classroom and 62.8% of them stated that they participated in environmental projects carried out in their classroom. In light of these findings, it can be concluded that certain activities concerning assuming responsibility and raising awareness especially towards classroom cleaning has come into prominence in primary schools within the context of participation in environmental protection and sustainable development.

Within the scope of participation in decision-making processes, examinations into such topics as the inclusion of students in decisions that are related to them, in the election of representatives and the establishing of rules were carried out. In this regard, 65.8% of the students stated that they took part in the decision-making processes related to them, and 70.4% of them noted that they elected their class president among the candidates they determined. Moreover, 56.7% of the students pointed out that they were included in the decision-making process while establishing classroom rules whereas 61.7% of them stated that the representative of the student council of their class in the school was democratically elected among the candidates they determined. The findings indicate that the rate of the inclusion of children in the most important practices in which children have the right to participation in the classroom varied between 56.7% and 70.4%.

As pointed out by the abovementioned findings, it can be concluded that the participation in 14 out of 24 different practices originally 25 items, one is reverse scored item) identified regarding children's right to participation in classes is 65.8% or less.

3.2 Quantitative Findings on the Examination of Classes With High and Low Level of Participation in Primary Schools Children's Right to Participation

In the present research, in order to clarify in which contexts the differentiation in the children's right to participation-based structure in classrooms in primary schools emerged, the classroom environments with high and low levels of participation were investigated. In this regard, the results of Mann-Whitney U test on the total and sub-factor scores of the children's right to participation classroom scale are presented in Table 3.

As seen in Table 3, Mann-Whitney U test results of the total and sub-factors of the Children's Right to Participation-based Classroom Scale show that there is a significant difference between the groups in which there are the classes with high and low level of participation. It has been seen that there is a significant difference in favour of the group with the class having high level of participation considering the total score of $U = 11028.500$, $p < .05$ and mean rank of the CRPCS; $U = 16087.500$,

Table 3 Results of Mann-Whitney U test on the total and sub-factor scores of the children's right to participation-based classroom scale

| Factor | Group | N | Mean Rank | Sum of Ranks | U | P |
|--|-------|-----|-----------|--------------|-----------|--------|
| Factor 1 (Participation in physical arrangement and communication process) | Min. | 278 | 197.37 | 54868.50 | 16087.500 | 0.000* |
| | Max. | 280 | 361.04 | 101092.50 | | |
| Factor 2 (Participation in the process of learning- teaching) | Min. | 278 | 212.65 | 59116.50 | 20335.500 | 0.000* |
| | Max. | 280 | 345.87 | 96844.50 | | |
| Factor 3 (Participation in gaming, entertainment and social activities) | Min. | 278 | 188.35 | 52361.50 | 13580.500 | 0.000* |
| | Max. | 280 | 370.00 | 103599.50 | | |
| Factor 4 (Active participation in environmental protection) | Min. | 278 | 198.97 | 55314.00 | 16533.00 | 0.000* |
| | Max. | 280 | 359.45 | 100647.00 | | |
| Factor 5 (Participation in decision-making processes) | Min. | 278 | 188.60 | 52430.50 | 13649.500 | 0.000* |
| | Max. | 280 | 369.75 | 103530.50 | | |
| Total | Min. | 278 | 179.17 | 49809.50 | 11028.500 | 0.000* |
| | Max. | 280 | 379.11 | 106151.50 | | |

$p < .05$ and mean rank of Factor 1; $U = 20335.500$ $p < .05$ and mean rank of Factor 2; $U = 13580.500$ $p < .05$ and mean rank of Factor 3; $U = 16533.00$ $p < .05$ and mean rank of Factor 4 and $U = 13649.500$ $p < .05$ and mean rank of Factor 5. Evaluating this finding with the scope of the factors, it can be said that the classes with high level of children's right to participation-based structure are better in terms of participation in learning- teaching process, physical arrangement and communication process, gaming, entertainment and recreational activities as well as active participation in environmental protection and decision-making processes.

3.3 The Realization Level of Children's Right to Participation in Primary Classes

In the research, studies were also conducted to examine the arrangements related to the realization of children's right to participation in primary classes and the realization level of their right to participation. In this context, two classes with high realization level of children's right to participation and two classes with low realization level of children's right to participation were investigated and findings were given in Table 4.

In Table 4, it has been seen that 13 different fields of practice are examined to determine the realization level of children's right to participation and, apart from four of these fields, the realization level of children's right to participation shows difference in CHPs and CLPs. It is possible to investigate the realization level of children's right to participation respectively in 13 fields of practice.

As noted in Table 4, findings on children's participation in decision-making processes on issues that are related to them which is the direct equivalent of children's right to participation have shown that the realization level of children's right to participation is at the level that children directly take part in decision-making processes in CHPs (L4) and, in CLPs, at the level that children's opinions are taken into account in decision-making processes (L3). It has been found that the arrangements for children's right to participation are at opportunities level. Accordingly, students in CLPs stated that their teacher encouraged them to express their opinions and that she paid attention to their ideas. However, the children in CHPs noted that their teacher directly included them in decision-making processes on certain issues that concerned them. The children reported that their teacher took their opinions of the whole class individually or collectively and commenced the decision-making process. One of the students expresses this situation as follows: "...when there is a situation that is related to us, our teacher (HT2) calls us over and talks to us without our friends hearing and asks for our opinions. We will find a solution to our problem with one voice..." (HS1).

Findings on children's participation in the election of class president have revealed that the realization level of children's right to participation in CHPs and CLPs were L5 and L3 respectively and that the arrangements for participation were at opportunities level. Teachers in classes with high level of participation reported that students determined the class president and they held the presidency through elections in order to raise awareness on democracy. One of the teachers explained this situation as follows: "...I pay attention to the administration of democracy in

Table 4 The realization level of children’s right to participation in CHPs and CLPs

| | CHPs | | CLPs | |
|---|--------|-------------------|--------|-------------------|
| | Levels | APC | Levels | APC |
| Children’s participation in decision-making processes on issues related to them | L4 | Opportunities | L3 | Opportunities |
| Children’s participation in the election of the class president | L5 | Opportunities | L3 | Opportunities |
| Children’s participation in the process of generating weekly lesson timetables | L3, L2 | Opportunities | L0 | Non-existent |
| Children’s participation in activities inside and outside the classroom | L3 | Opportunities | L0 | Non-existent |
| Children’s participation in the process of arranging classroom seating | L3 | Opportunities | L0 | Non-existent |
| Children’s participation in ceremonies | L4 | Opportunities | L0 | Non-existent |
| Children’s participation in the preparation process of class boards | L5 | Opportunities | L0 | Non-existent |
| Children’s participation in the process of establishing classroom rules | L4 | Opportunities | L0 | Non-existent |
| Children’s participation in the election of class representative of the student council in the school | L5 | Legal Obligations | L0 | Legal Obligations |
| Children’s participation in the planning of Physical Education and Sports lesson | L4 | Opportunities | L4 | Opportunities |
| Children’s participation in the evaluation process of student achievement | L0 | Non-existent | L0 | Non-existent |
| Children’s participation in the planning process of homework | L0 | Non-existent | L0 | Non-existent |
| Children’s participation in environmental protection and sustainable development | L0 | Non-existent | L0 | Non-existent |

CHPs: Classes with high level of participation; CLPs: Classes with low level of participation; APC: The arrangement phase for children’s right to participation

Table 4 is based on Shier’s Pathways to Participation Model (2001)

class. We determine the candidates for the election of class president. Anyone can run for presidency if they want to. We elect our class president among those standing for..." (HT1). Students at CHPs made similar statements as their teachers and stated that they themselves determined the class president through elections. One of the students explained this situation as follows: "Everyone who wanted to be the class president was a candidate. I was even one of them. I got the most votes and was elected as the class president" (HS3). Nevertheless, teachers in classes with low level of participation noted that they sought their students' opinions in the process of determining the candidates for class presidency, yet they decided who would be the candidate and that the students voted for the determined candidates. One of classroom teachers commented on this as follows: "... I ask who wants to be president in the elections of class presidency... I nominate five of them. Then, we vote for the president..." (LT2).

In the present research, findings on the children's participation in the planning of weekly lesson timetable were also obtained. Teachers in CHPs noted that they had plans prepared at the beginning of the semester, yet they might make certain changes on students' requests. In this regard, one of the teachers stated that she took students' opinions into account and made daily changes on the lesson plan if deemed necessary (L3) and the other classroom teacher reported that he established a classroom setting where students had the opportunity to communicate their requests (L2). The classroom teachers in CLPs, however, said that they planned their weekly lesson timetable without involving the students in the preparation process (L0). Furthermore, it was found that a classroom environment where students had the chance of conveying their requests was not provided. One of the students in CLPs commented on this situation as follows: "...We have a syllabus. Our teacher prepared it. She (LT2) hand it out and we bring our books and notebooks accordingly to that. We prepare our school bags accordingly. We have our lessons accordingly..." (LS2).

The findings on children's participation in the process of determining the in-class and out-class activities have indicated that the realization level of children's participation in CHPs and CLPs show difference. Accordingly, it was revealed that the children's opinions in CHPs were paid attention (L3) and that the children in CLPs were not included in the process (L0). The classroom teachers in CHPs noted that they generally made decisions by considering the children's opinions in the planning of the activities. Teachers emphasized that they took their students' opinions into account in order to facilitate learning, encourage students and make the lessons more effective and efficient.

One classroom teacher stated this situation as follows:

"They will learn the subjects we will explain. They will do the activities by themselves. This is a learning process; acquiring children's contributions and asking for their opinions in this process encourage them to attend the lessons more willingly, making learning easier... they participate more effectively in the process..." (HT2).

Teachers in CLPs stated that they determined the activities themselves. In the same vein, students reported that their teachers made decisions on the activities

and they were not included in this process. One student stated this as follows: *“No, he (LT1) doesn’t. He decides based on the subject. He tells us to do the activity if needed. Our teacher determined the activities...”* (LS5).

Findings on children’s participation in the arrangement of classroom seating showed that children’s participation was not ensured in CLPs (L0) and that children’s opinions were attached importance in CHPs (L3). Regarding children’s participation in the arrangement of classroom seating, teachers in CHPs reported that the seating of the students was determined based on their health status and physical characteristics, yet that their opinions were also taken into account in this process. However, classroom teachers in CLPs said that they arranged their students’ seating in the classroom according to their height, gender etc. and that they did not include the students in this process. Justifying this situation, one student in CLPs explains as follows:

“No, he (LT1) doesn’t. She arranges seating according to height. He makes us sit next to the person she is sure we do not talk to. I am sitting with a friend I do not want. I wish our teacher would allow us to sit with the friend we want.” (LS7).

Another field of practice under investigation within the scope of research was children’s participation in ceremonies. It has been determined in this field of practice that children’s participation showed difference; hence, the level of children’s right to participation has been found to be that children directly take part in decision-making processes in CHPs (L4) while, in CLPs, children are not included in the processes by no means (L0). Teachers in CLPs noted that they selected the students among the ones with high level of self-confidence, academic achievement and skill during the process of participation in ceremonies and that they did not ask for the children’s opinions in this process. Students in CLPs also made statements confirming this situation. One of the students said, *“No, she (LT2) does not, she decides herself. She gives the poems to be read at ceremonies to my friends. She does not ask us; she gives them to the students she wants. She usually chooses from hardworking students...”* (LS5). Another student expressed this situation as *“No, he (LT1) does not take (our opinion). For example, he doesn’t ask us if we want to participate in folk dances. I wanted to participate in this...”* (LS10). Nonetheless, teachers in CHPs stated that those who intend to participate in ceremonies are included in these activities. Besides that, teachers in CHPs added that children’s participation in ceremonies is assured for their development of self-confidence and sense of responsibility, therefore, they encouraged their students and they still take their students’ opinions into account. One classroom teacher explained this situation as follows:

“...Some of my students want to stand out and I have definitely charged him/her with being a presenter. But some are excited and shy, so I have given certain tasks to him/ her within the group... Without doubt, I try to ensure that every child take part in ceremonies in the school. Some said that they did not want to participate this year. And I said I would be glad if you did. But she did not want. I left him/her to his/her devices...” (HT1).

In the process of preparing class boards, classroom teachers in CHPs were revealed to provide opportunities for all students to exhibit their works and all the students who agreed displayed their works (L5); however, in classes with low level of participation, it was found that only the good ones approved by the classroom teachers were pinned on the board (L0). The fact that teachers in CHPs considered the pinning of the materials of all the students is of great importance and that only good works could be pinned on the board according to teachers in CLPs has played a pivotal role in this process. One student in a class with low level of participation explained this situation as follows:

“Our teacher decides the materials to be pinned on the board. He (LT1) checks the pictures or activities we do. He gives the materials s/he likes to the bulletin board attendant. Then, he pins it on the board. Our teacher pins the good ones on the board.” (LS12).

In the context of children’s participation in establishing classroom rules, teachers in CHPs noted that they included students in decision-making process (L4), however, that they made the final decision for students’ sake. The teachers emphasized that it was easier for children to follow the rules they formed together and that they take their opinions for this reason, yet they made the final decision for the students’ interests. On the contrary, teachers in CLPs stated that they did not involve students in the process of forming rules, that they determined the rules and pinned them on the class board and that they asked students to comply with those rules. One of the students said, “*No, she (LT2) decides herself. Our teacher has rules. She brought those rules to the classroom on a paper and hung it up. We follow those rules. I don’t know how she does it*” (LS7). Another student stated that the rules were determined by the teacher and if they did not follow the rules, they were punished as follows:

“Our teacher (LT1) set the classroom rules. We follow the rules. If we don’t, we get punished. For example, if we don’t follow the rules, we can’t go to gym class or our teacher gives too much homework. The rules are posted in the classroom” (LS13).

This was observed to be due to the assumption of preventing of the problems to be faced later. One teacher commented:

“I write the rules on the boards. I talk to student about these rules...I explain the problems that we may experience when these rules are not followed. After forming all the rules, I write all of them on a coloured carton and pin it in a way that everybody can see and read easily...” (LT2).

Regarded as a legal obligation among the arrangements made for children’s right to participation, the level of children’s participation in the election of class representative of the student council in the school has been demonstrated to show significant difference according to the findings of the current research. It was found that the representative was determined by the students in classes with high level of participation (L5) while, in classes with low level of participation, the representative

was selected by teachers among hard-working and self-confident students who had the capacity to represent the class in the school and were likely to be elected at the school level (L0). One classroom teacher in CLPs stated this situation as follows: *“In my class, I determine the representative myself among hard-working and self-confident students who can represent our class in school. Because the representative needs to be the candidate who is loved and by other students and can win the election...”* (LT1) One of the students at CLPs said that he was not included in the decision-making process during the election of the class representative for the school student council:

“Our teacher selected our class representative for the school council. He (LT1) chose our friend who can speak freely in class and is hardworking. So that he/she could represent us better. But I think everyone who wanted to be a candidate should have been a candidate and should have been elected in this way” (LS11).

The level of realization of children’s right to participation in physical education and sports lessons has been found to be determined as children directly participate in decision-making processes in CHPs and CLPs (L4). In this regard, physical education and sports lesson was revealed to be a field of practice in which high realization level of children’s participation in decision-making processes was ensured in both CHPs and CLPs. The findings have shown that the teachers in both groups pay attention to students’ requests on the games to be played in physical education and sports lessons and make a decision together with them. One of the students in CHPs said:

“Yes, she (HT2) does. Our teacher asks for our opinion. At first he/she asks what we want to play and we tell her. Our teacher considers what the majority wants according to the games we tell her to play, but sometimes she talks to us and decides on something other than what we tell her... Sometimes our teacher plays with us...” (HS5).

Another noteworthy finding in the study is that children are not included in the evaluation process of student achievement in both CHPs and CLPs by no means (L0). Accordingly, teachers in CHPs and CLPs reported that exams were conducted to measure student achievement, they made scoring on students’ in-class participation based on their exam scores and course success, and did not involve students in this process. One teacher in CHPs commented on this as follows:

“...I give exams to evaluate students’ course success, preparing exams according to the subject we address. I inform students about the exam schedule in advance. I give the exam that day. I also give final grades depending on their course achievements...” (HT1).

Similar to their teachers’ statements, students in CHPs and CLPs also stated that they were not consulted during the assessment process. One of the students in CHPs said, *“The teacher (HT1) does not take our opinions on this issue. We take exams in classes. She evaluates us according to the grades we get from the*

exams we take. We get a report card grade accordingly" (HS9). One of the students in CLPs stated that not only were they not included in the planning of the assessment process in the classroom, but also that the teacher determined the students who would participate in different assessment activities organized at the school and that the students were not given the right to choose:

"She (LT2) does not ask for our opinions when she makes the assessment. She tells us the exam time. We study. We get points from the exam. Sometimes we take a practice test at school. Our teacher also tells us who should take the test. For example, one of our friends did not want to participate. But our teacher did not accept" (LS9).

In the research, it was found that the process of forming homework was another field of practice where children's participation was not assured in both CHPs and CLPs. Teachers in CHPs and CLPs noted that children were not involved in the formation process of homework and they assigned homework in a way that would not tire students in order to prevent repetition and forgetting and to ensure better learning. Added to this, it was found that teachers assigned homework according to the subjects learnt in the class, therefore, they decided on the assignments. Justifying this situation, students reported that they were not involved in this process, and that their teacher assigned homework in order to revise the subjects covered. One of the teachers in CLPs stated this situation as follows:

"I decide on homework and assign based on the subjects learnt in the class. That's why the subjects are better understood. They make an overall revision at home. I prepare assignments accordingly. I think that the subjects that I didn't assign homework are forgotten more quickly..." (LT2).

One of the CHPs students said, "*Our teacher (HT2) gives us homework from what we have covered in class. Our teacher decides which homework to assign. She does not ask for our opinion... she gives photocopies...*" (HS7). Some of the students in CLPs stated that they were not included in the decision-making process in the process of assigning homework, which led to problems such as too much homework, and that their opinions were not taken into consideration when they shared this problem with their teachers. One of the students in the CLPs stated:

"Our teacher (LT1) sets the homework. He gives homework every day. We are constantly solving tests. Our teacher does not take our opinion on this issue. Sometimes we even tell the teacher that we have too much homework. But our teacher gives it anyway" (LS14).

In the context of children's participation in decision-making processes for projects, activities etc. related to environmental protection and sustainable development, the research findings have demonstrated that children were not involved in decision-making processes in CHPs and CLPs (L0). In this respect, it was seen that various activities were carried out both at class and school levels regarding environmental protection and sustainability. However, it was detected that these

activities were planned by school administration and teachers and that students participated in the activities. One student explains this process as follows: “... *There are recycling bins in our school. Our teacher taught us what to throw here. We also collect batteries in the classroom. We protect the environment by doing so...*”.

4 Discussion and Conclusions

The Section 4 is organized under two headings. These are as follows; discussion and conclusion on the examination of the structure of children’s right to participation based on children’s right to participation in primary schools, and discussion and conclusion on the comparative examination of children’s right to participation in CHPs and CLPs.

4.1 Discussion and Conclusion on the Investigation of Children’s Right to Participation-Based Structure in Primary Schools

The present paper is designed to investigate the arrangements addressing primary school children’s right to participation in education and the level of realization of the right to participate in Türkiye. Regarding this aim, both quantitative and qualitative data were used to yield a holistic result. Examining the quantitative findings of the research based on sub-factors of CRPCS, the results on the sub-factor of participation in physical arrangements and communication process showed that most of the children (78.7%) were consulted about the physical arrangements in their classrooms, but only 46.8% of the children had the right to choose their deskmates. Given the fact that physical arrangements have a positive impact on students’ learning motivation and academic achievement, it is considered important to take their opinions on how to carry out such arrangements. However, the low percentage of students who are able to choose the friends they sit with can be characterized as a negative situation for the realization of children’s right to participation as well as for ensuring efficiency in learning. As a matter of fact, according to philosophy of progressivism, which is the basic educational philosophy of the curricula taught in all primary schools in Türkiye, students should be given the opportunity to interact, cooperate and learn from each other in order to ensure efficient and meaningful learning (Saeverot, 2011). However, the fact that children cannot choose the friends they sit with is a situation that will reduce their interaction in the learning process. In this context, it can be said that this problem in the process of deciding on the seating arrangement poses a significant challenge both in the realization of children’s right to participation and in the implementation of curricula, which is an important educational policy in Türkiye. It is also not in line with educational policies in Türkiye that aim to promote children’s right to participation.

The results of the CRPCS on the sub-factor of participation in the learning-teaching process showed that most of the students participating in the study did not have problems in ensuring their participation in the activities. Considering the positive

effects of active participation in learning activities on meaningful learning (Walton, 2013), it can be stated that this situation points to the existence of a classroom environment that will contribute positively to children's effective learning. The fact that there are arrangements that ensure active participation in the curricula that guide the education policy in Türkiye and in the teaching materials developed by the MoNE and used throughout the country has a positive effect on ensuring participation in this context. However, other results of the study related to the sub-factor of participation in the teaching-learning process showed that the number of students who could participate in the decisions taken in the planning process of homework assignments, the weekly course schedule and activities in the lessons was quite low. The participation of students in educational arrangements contributes to the realization of children's right to participation as well as increasing the efficiency of learning (Urfaloğlu, 2019). In this respect, children's participation in the planning of educational activities is important both in terms of ensuring children's right to participation and quality educational practices. The fact that the arrangements in this regard are not clearly stated in the educational policies prepared in Türkiye and the current curricula in practice points to the need for improvement in this field.

Children's right to participation is elaborated in terms of participation in games, entertainment, cultural and artistic activities (Hart, 1997). The results related to the sub-factor of participation in gaming, entertainment and social activities of the CRPCS showed that the majority of the students (68.1%) participating in the study participated in gaming, entertainment and social activities. This indicates that the level of children's right to participation in primary school classrooms in Türkiye in this context is satisfactory. The emphasis on ensuring participation in this context in documents such as Türkiye's 11th Development Plan for 2019–2023 (Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye Strategy and Budget Presidency, 2019), the 2023–2028 Türkiye Child Rights Strategy Document and Action Plan (the Ministry of Family and Social Services, 2023), and the MoNE, 2019–2023 Strategic Plan (MoNE, 2019) can be said to have a positive impact on participation in play, entertainment and recreation activities. However, the results of the study show that the inclusion of children in the decision-making processes related to ceremonies to be celebrated at school, student clubs and social activities is at a low level. This indicates the need for improvements in these fields of participation to ensure children's right to participation in primary school classrooms. When this situation is examined in the context of different studies conducted in Türkiye, Urfaloğlu (2019) found that even in classrooms with high democratic attitudes, the level of realization of children's right to participation in the process of planning ceremonies remained low. Contrary to the findings of the current research, Kılıç and Öztürk (2018) concluded that children's participation in ceremonies were paid attention, albeit at varying levels, and that their participation in social activities were realized under teachers' guidance instead of their direct participation.

In the research, another field of practice was identified as participation in environmental protection and sustainable development. Participation in environmental protection and sustainable development, one of the significant contexts in which children's right to participation is realized (Akyüz, 2021; Hart, 1997; Hodgkin & Newell, 1998) also provides opportunity for the implementation of children's other

rights (Howe & Covell, 2007; Osler & Starkey, 2002). The quantitative findings of the study on the sub-factor of effective participation in environmental protection indicated that most of the students were informed about issues such as keeping the environment clean, recycling, and participating in projects and activities. This situation is important both in terms of ensuring children's right to participate and in terms of developing environmental awareness in children. The fact that various arrangements are included in various curricula and educational materials such as life sciences and science prepared by the MoNE in Türkiye may be effective in carrying out intensive activities in the context of participation in environmental protection and sustainable development in primary school classes. When the quantitative results of the research are evaluated in general, it can be said that there are significant deficiencies in terms of participation in decision-making processes, especially in the planning of educational activities in primary school classrooms, but there are also areas where the right to participation is well realized, and the educational policies adopted in this process have a supportive effect.

4.2 Discussion and Conclusion on the Comparative Analysis of Children's Right to Participation in CHPs and CLPs

In the research, comparative analyses were conducted to determine how there were differences or similarities in which fields of practice in groups with high and low levels of children's right to participation and the level of realization of children's right to participation. The quantitative findings of the study demonstrated a significant difference in favour of classes with high level of participation in terms of CRPCS and sub-factors. Furthermore, the qualitative results of the study showed that there were 13 different fields for children's participation in decision-making processes in primary school classrooms. In nine out of all contexts, it was found that CHPs differentiated positively from CLPs in terms of the level of children's participation in decision-making processes. Among these contexts, students' participation in the decision-making processes of the issues related to them and children's participation in the election of the class president are relatively close to each other. CHPs and CLPs were observed to be at "opportunities" phase regarding these practices and it was considered important that supportive arrangements were included for children's participation in classrooms. In line with Article 12 of the UNCRC, considering that the fact that each child is assured the right to express his/her views freely in all matters affecting the child (Hodgkin & Newell, 1998) is taken as a basis for the right to participation (Ray, 2010), the arrangement to be realized at various levels both in CHPs and CLPs are responded positively. These results are in line with Turkey's education policies to realize children's right to participation. These results are in line with Türkiye's educational policies to realize children's right to participation. In this respect, it can be said that educational policies have a supportive effect in these contexts. As pointed out by Olufisayo John-Akinola et al. (2014), the right to participation is realized only when a school environment where children respect for others' views and freely express their opinions is assured. Furthermore, certain democratic implementations in classes play a pivotal role in the cultivation of democratic values

by children as well as being actively participating citizens in democratic processes (Pascal & Bertram, 2009). In this regard, ensuring children's participation in the election of class president, one of the fundamental means of understanding democracy culture and integrating it to their lives is regarded as an opportunity to adopt democratic culture of life. Although children's participation in decision-making processes of the election of class presidency is considered positive, assuming responsibility improperly while participating in this process is responded negatively. Similar to this result, Bilge and Akbaba (2014) found that the right to vote was not practised in the 1st, 2nd and 3rd grades of primary schools. Correia et al. (2019) articulated that the use of right to participation by children through such practices was of great importance in terms of developing the culture of democracy.

Classes with high level of participation were found to be at "*opportunities*" phase in six out of seven fields of practice whereas it was observed that there was no arrangement concerning children's participation in classes with low level of participation. Of all practices, two were related to the arrangements including children's participation in decision-making processes of classroom seating and preparing class boards. Given the fact that children's active participation in the activities carried out during learning-teaching process and other arrangements in class is included in their participation rights (Davies et al., 2006), failure to ensure children's participation in decision-making processes of physical arrangements in classroom and the organization of teaching has been in classes with low level of participation responded negatively. In similar vein, Forde et al. (2018) concluded that children's views were not taken in the process of forming lesson timetables. In addition, findings have indicated that teachers arrange classroom seating based on their personal beliefs and attitudes and that they selected the teaching activity through which they believed the subject was taught best. In fact, Kılıç and Öztürk (2018) argued that children's rights were not realized resulting from teachers' negative beliefs about the necessity of children's participation. Lundy (2007) highlights the fact that children's right to participate in the process of learning-teaching process is perceived as a threat as it destroys the authority of the teacher poses a significant problem for the implementation of this right. Moreover, Thornberg and Elvstrand (2012) stated that the tendency to enforce instead of negotiating in learning-teaching processes and in-class arrangement prevented children's right to participation from being implemented.

Another arrangement not made in classes with low level of participation, yet with high level of participation is to involve children in decision-making processes of forming weekly lesson timetables and activities to be carried out. The fact that children are excluded from decision-making processes related to the preparation of class boards and activities to be conducted in classes, one of significant indicators of children's participation in classrooms, is responded negatively in terms of the realization of their right to participation. Smith (2007) concluded in her study that educational settings providing children the right to participation encouraged them to be active citizens. Shier (2001) underscores the necessity to pay attention to children, support their views and take them into account regarding the activities to be carried out during teaching process and the changes to be made in classroom environment as well as ensuring their participation in decision-making processes and sharing power and responsibility in these processes. A similar situation is observed

in children's participation in the construction of classroom rules. Considering the importance of giving the opportunity for children's participation in establishing school and class rules in terms of democratic school culture (Davies et al., 2005), failure to ensure children's participation in creating class rules in CLPs is regarded negatively in the sense of providing them the right to participation. In parallel with this negative result of CLPs, Olufisayo John-Akinola et al. (2014) emphasises the dominant role of adults in setting the rules in schools, which excludes children's participation. It was also unearthed that children were excluded from decision-making processes related to the election of class representatives in CLPs although certain arrangements concerning children's participation in the election of class representatives for the student council in the school were required to be made. Moreover, it is a striking result that no arrangement on this field of practice was made in CLPs, which is a legal obligation in such countries as Ireland (Forde et al., 2018) as well as being the reflection of democratic living practices in school and classroom settings by its nature and where children's participation can be clearly observed. In this context, the fact that it is a legal obligation in Türkiye to elect the class representative of the school student council indicates an important educational policy formation for the realization of children's right to participation. However, the differentiations and deficiencies experienced in the implementation process of this educational policy can be attributed to the lack of process-oriented indicators and monitoring mechanisms. As a matter of fact, according to classroom teachers, the lack of supervision mechanisms has an inhibiting effect on the implementation of policies for children's rights education in Türkiye (Öztürk et al., 2019). Furthermore, in line with this result, Cox and Robinson-Pant (2005), in their study on primary school children's participation in the school councils, argued that children's control and authority in making and implementing decisions was limited. A similar issue was detected in a study conducted by Cotmore (2004). In this regard, it has been stated that the construction of settings that enable children to exhibit their right to participation in various processes have a positive impact on their focus of control and self-efficacy and their adoption status of the activities in which children take part (Korfatis & Petrou, 2021).

The findings showed that no arrangement was included within the scope of children's participation in evaluating their achievements, forming homework and environmental protection and sustainable development both in CHPs and CLPs. Likewise, Erbay (2013) reported that children's opinions were not taken in assessment processes, one part of students' teaching process. Merey (2013), however, highlights the importance of children's participation in teaching practices and assessment processes. Taking this emphasis into account, the fact that children's participation in assessment processes in the classes is ignored is viewed as a significant shortcoming in terms of the right to participation. In addition, children's participation in environmental protection and sustainable development is one of the issues regarding children's right to participation emphasized in the UNCRC (Hodgkin & Newell, 1998). Therefore, they are expected to take part in decision-making processes on the planning of certain activities relate to this issue. However, it was revealed in the current study that children were not involved in decision-making and planning processes, remaining as a shortcoming in this respect. Within the context of a research by Kılıç

and Öztürk (2018), it was observed that various activities and projects were organized for children's participation in environmental protection and sustainable development. In conclusion, the results demonstrated that children in both levels did not actively participate in the processes of decision-making. The fact that children's participation in decision-making processes in these three contexts is not ensured even in CHPs can be interpreted as a need for the organisation of educational activities in Türkiye and the implementation of educational policies with legal bases that will ensure children's participation in decision-making processes in the context of environmental protection and participation in sustainable development. Given the fields of practice in which no arrangement has been made, it is thought that children's right to participation is unlikely to be implemented at expected levels since it is argued that a well-constructed perception of democracy cannot be acquired provided that children's right to participation is not implemented consistently in all fields of practice and in various environments in order to realize their participation rights. In the literature, it has been pointed out that a holistic approach towards children's right to participation improves children's experiences related to participation (Mayne et al., 2018) and that it contributes to respect for different views and to the development of self-confidence and social skills (Bjerke, 2011; Covell & Howe, 2005; Kränzl-Nagl & Zartler, 2010). On the contrary, it was unearthed that children's participation was limited in such environments as families and schools that do not properly understand and support their right to participation (Forde et al., 2018). Many studies have shown that children regard themselves as social actors and pay attention to voluntary participation in processes (Aston & Lambert, 2010; Bjerke, 2011; Burke, 2014; Taylor et al., 2001). However, it has also been found that their participation is hindered due to adults' approach either consciously or unconsciously (Lundy, 2007, Kılıç & Öztürk, 2018; Thornberg and Elvstrand, 2012).

When the results of the research are evaluated overall, it can be asserted that various arrangements regarding children's right to participation were made in primary schools in Türkiye. Nonetheless, it can be said that there are drawbacks in enacting children's right to participation in certain fields of practice in real life. Furthermore, in the present study, a significant difference was detected between the realization level of children's right to participation in classes with high and low levels of participation. It can be argued that CHPs are better in this context.

5 Limitations and Suggestions

In the study, the realization of children's right to participation in primary school classrooms in Türkiye was examined in detail by first conducting descriptive studies on a large sample with data collected from children, and then in line with the views of teachers and students with a comparative case study. In this context, it provides comprehensive information on the realization of children's right to participation in primary school classrooms in Türkiye. However, in the qualitative dimension of the research, the results regarding the level of realization of children's right to participation are based on interview data and do not include observation data. In addition, using interviews and observations together in the data collection process can

contribute to enriching the information about the realization of children's right to participation in the classroom and the classroom practices carried out in this context. In this context, the lack of observation data in the study can be considered as a limitation. In this regard, it may be recommended to conduct studies in which interview and observation data are collected together in order to examine the realization of children's right to participation in the classroom environment.

In the qualitative phase of the study, the level of realization of children's right to participation in primary school classrooms was examined comparatively with the data collected from CHPs and CLP. In the study, in order to examine the level of realization of children's right to participation, it was desired to work with more classrooms than CHPs and CLPs. However, the fact that the classroom teachers, especially in CLPs, were not willing to participate in the study and that these teachers could not be persuaded during the process caused the number of participating classrooms to be limited to four classrooms, two in CHPs and two in CLPs. However, studying with a larger number of classrooms may contribute to expanding the information on the level of realization of children's right to participation and the supportive and obstructive practices carried out in this context. In this respect, it may be recommended to conduct studies that will include a larger number of CHPs and CLPs.

In the study, it was determined that in the election of the class representative of the school student council, which is a legal obligation, the class representative was elected by the children in CHPs, whereas in CLPs, children did not participate and the representative was directly elected by the teacher. In Türkiye, the attempt to put the election of class representatives of the school student council on a legal basis is an indication of the importance and effort that Türkiye attaches to the realization of children's right to participation. However, although it is a legal obligation, this differentiation in the implementation process points to the need to strengthen the supervision mechanisms related to the implementation of the policy and the necessity to establish indicators that are not only result-oriented but also process-oriented. In this sense, it can be suggested that in the process of formulating educational policies for the realization of children's right to participation at the national and international level, strong supervision mechanisms should be structured and process-oriented indicators should be established to clearly see how the policy is implemented.

In the study, it was determined that children were involved in activities related to environmental protection and sustainable development, but children were not included in decision-making processes related to the development of activities, projects, etc. related to environmental protection and sustainable development in CHPs and CLPs. However, it is important to involve children in decision-making processes in order to raise their awareness about protecting the environment and contributing to sustainable development and to develop projects that will contribute to the process. In this direction, it can be suggested to develop legally based educational policies to disseminate practices that will ensure children's participation in decision-making processes such as projects, activities, etc. for environmental protection and sustainable development in primary school systems.

In the current study, deficiencies were identified in terms of including children in decision-making processes and ensuring their participation rights in various

contexts in primary school classrooms. This situation points to the need for legal arrangements to guarantee the realization of children's right to participation in different contexts in primary school classrooms. In this respect, it may be recommended to prepare comprehensive educational policies that include legal regulations that will make it compulsory to realize children's right to participation in different contexts in primary school classrooms. In addition, it can be suggested that in-service training programmes should be developed and in-service training programmes should be provided for classroom teachers to gain professional competence in order to implement children's right to participation, pre-service classroom teachers should be given courses in this regard during pre-service education, and this should be transformed into an educational policy for classroom teacher training at national and international level.

Author Contribution The authors contributed equally to planning, data collection, data analysis, evaluation, and reporting of the study.

Data Availability Digital data is not available. The data are stored physically.

Declarations

Informed Consent This research included consent forms taken from the participants.

Ethical Approval Yes.

Research Involving Human Participants and/or Animals Human participants (Teachers and students).

Competing Interests The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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