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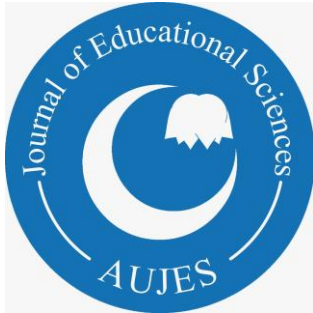
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Curriculum**

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## Education Stakeholders' Views on Controversial Issues in Terms of Null Curriculum

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### Abstract

This study aims to identify the controversial issues in Turkey based on the views of some education stakeholders and analyze the experiences of teachers in terms of those controversial issues. This study was designed in a qualitative research design. The participants of the study are 250 academics from the departments of educational sciences, maths and science, Turkish and social sciences, primary education, foreign languages and fine arts of universities; 26 form tutors, religious culture and ethics, Turkish, science, maths and English teachers employed in public schools in Eskişehir; and the representatives of 5 teacher unions. The data were collected through semi-structured interviews with teachers and open ended questionnaires with academics and the representatives of teacher unions. Inductive analysis method was used to analyse all the data. The study revealed that the controversial issues which were identified by the help of education stakeholders were mostly not covered in elementary education curriculum and in teachers' practices due to various reasons such as teacher approaches and competences, student approaches, parents, course books and the curriculum. In other words, the controversial issues could be named as the null curriculum itself.

**Key words:** Critical pedagogy, Controversial issues, Null curriculum, Basic qualitative research.

### Introduction

Education is a system which overlaps with social and cultural structure. Teachers, as one of the most important stakeholders of the education system, are the key practitioners responsible for conveying the issues compatible with the aims of the education system to the students. However, when the controversial issues are to be addressed in the classroom; the ideologies on which the curriculum is heavily based are the determinants of how much teachers can address these issues in the classroom. Ideology is a set of compatible beliefs and attitudes which are clearly seen as a common sense while opposing other thought and belief systems. When people or political parties disagree about how society, school, or economy should be organized, they rely on this common sense to ensure whether their ideas are accurate or not (Hill & Cole, 2001). In this respect, education can be said to be shaped to a great extent by ideological views.

The ideology of education is a set of general beliefs which is adopted by teachers, students and parents to justify their actions in educational settings (Konarzewski, 1998). Ideologies which have deeply effected education systems are neoliberal and conservative ones. These two dominant ideologies were defied by radical ideology, which opposed the status quo in society and global inequality. Radical ideology, which advocates anti-globalization, has taken a stand against poverty, capitalism and transnational commercial corporation. Moreover, this political effort aimed at creating a social cohesion based on equality and justice between men and women, ethnic groups, countries and social classes (Claire & Holden, 2007). Radical pedagogy is the educational outcome of radical ideology. According to radical pedagogy, the subjectivity of the individual and his duty of providing the necessary conditions for changing the political, economic and social foundations of the society in which he lives should be reconsidered (Giroux, 2014). Critical pedagogy which emerged as an extension of radical pedagogy intends to produce a new synthesis of humanist and libertarian pedagogy that aims to transform dominant culture and oppression (Peters, 2005). Critical pedagogy, reminiscent of John Dewey, encourages problem-solving and discussion around topics drawn from students' real-life experiences some of which are controversial (Smith, 2000).

Controversial issue is a complex subject area that engages interest, conflicting ideas, values, priorities and stimulates strong emotions (Claire & Holden, 2007). The classification of an issue as controversial is influenced by the policies. In other words, the policies affect what is controversial and what is not. Curriculum in schools are largely influenced by the tides of ideological struggle in a society (Camicia, 2008). According to

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Dewey (1933), current education systems are narrowly content-oriented and isolated from controversial issues. This approach, which tends to avoid controversial issues, has separated and severed disciplines from their social contexts, thus shading their benefits. However, students need a chance to make judgments about how social values and predetermined standards of non-negotiable standards emerge and are eternalized, and to discuss controversial issues (Griffin, 1942). When it comes how to handle controversial issues at school, critical pedagogy is seen to focus on the hidden curriculum. According to critical pedagogy, the hidden curriculum is more effective than the formal curriculum (Yıldırım, 2013). Giroux (2014) argues that the schools fulfill the task of educating students in the way that political, economic and social institutions wish, through the hidden curriculum. The hidden curriculum is an important theoretical basis in the development of critical pedagogy. It tends to instill the existing social order into students, but if it is well structured, it can contribute to the construction of a democratic society.

As mentioned above, critical pedagogy focuses on the implicit dimensions of the curriculum. Yet, the occurrence of the unexpected outcomes as well as the expected ones as a result of teaching at schools indicates the existence of something more than formal and hidden curriculum. Eisner (1985) defines it as null curriculum. The null curriculum is the sum of all the information and processes that are necessary in order to educate the students for social life but ignored. Issues such as race, gender, politics and religion are often considered to be controversial, and these issues are generally neglected in the curriculum. The basic teachings of critical pedagogy; such as justice and equality, the political nature of education and the need to teach students to resist the antidemocratic one are mostly ignored. In these basic teachings of critical pedagogy, the null curriculum plays as important a role as the formal and hidden curriculum. According to McLaren (2011, p. 291), "Knowledge acquired in schools - even anywhere - is never neutral or unbiased because it is ordered and shaped in certain ways; silent logic plays a role in what is highlighted and excluded". It is possible to think of the null curriculum as a hierarchy, from the exclusion of an entire discipline to ignoring a single issue (Flinders et al., 1986). So, who excludes those issues? Either the interests and capabilities of curriculum specialists, the teachers and the policies of the ruling party. The curriculum specialists design curriculum according to the the policies of the ruling party and the schools have to stick to it. On the other hand, null curriculum in the classroom defines the curriculum not covered by the teachers in practice by some reasons (Wilkinson, 2014). Teachers' attitudes and values and their self-efficacy beliefs prevent them from addressing certain issues. Teachers often prefer teaching subjects which they find safe and secure since they want to avoid problems they may encounter (Holden & Hicks, 2007). In this way, students can't face real life problems as the subjects taught at schools are mostly on traditions and beliefs. Moreover, the negligence of these issues in the curriculum gives students the message that these issues have no equivalence in their social life (Eisner, 2005).

Research focusing on controversial issues in terms of null curriculum shows that controversial issues are neglected in the curriculum of different countries with almost the same reasons. However, there are few studies which discuss both the aim of the controversial issues in education, the barriers to achieving this aim and the role of controversial issues in the practices of teachers in terms of null curriculum (Chowdhury&Siddique, 2017; Cocke, 2017; Emery et al. 2017). In these studies controversial issues are discussed in the context of their definition, their role in curriculum, teacher experiences and impact on students' learning. This study also aims to reveal the null curriculum related to controversial issues in elementary curriculum in Turkey. The stakeholders of the research are primarily academics. Because they are both decision makers in making the national curriculum and they are teacher educators. Another group of stakeholders is teachers because it is thought that they know best the practice and the problems encountered in schools related to controversial issues. The last group of stakeholders is teacher unions because they are thought to be effective decision makers both in the defense of teacher rights and in the making of national curriculum. To this end, research questions in this study are as follows:

- (1) What are the education stakeholders' views on current and historical controversial issues and which of them should be included in elementary curriculum?
- (2) What are the education stakeholders' views about the controversial issues regarding the classroom practices and elementary and secondary education curriculum?

## **Methodology**

This part of the study includes information on research design, participants, data collection and analysis process, validity and reliability of the research.

### **Research Design**

This study was designed as basic qualitative research which based on the most common data collection tools such as open-ended questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. The analysis techniques employed are the identification of coding and repetitive themes related to data from inductive analysis. As codes, categories and

content analysis are commonly used in basic qualitative research, they can be described as inductive (Lim, 2011). Unlike other qualitative research designs, the basic qualitative research design is particularly suitable for an in-depth understanding of applied educational processes.

### Participants

The participants are called education stakeholders in this research. In accordance with the nature of the qualitative research, the selection of participants was based on volunteering.

In this part of the research related to the academics, no sample was taken and the whole universe was tried to be reached. The universe of the research regarding the academics at universities consists of 73 universities with faculty of educational sciences in the 2016-2017 academic year and 4287 academics who were contacted via e-mail addresses. The universities with faculty of educational sciences listed in 2016 on the website of the Council of Higher Education (<http://www.yok.gov.tr/web/guest/universitelerimiz>) were taken as basis. 250 academics from the departments of mathematics and science (28,8%), educational sciences (26,4%), Turkish and social sciences (25,6%), elementary education (10,4%), foreign languages (5,6%) and fine arts (3,2%) joined the open-ended survey prepared on google survey.

The second participant group of the study are 26 teachers from the elementary schools in the central districts of Eskişehir. Form tutors (n=6), social studies (n=4), science (n=4), religious culture and ethics (n=3), Turkish (n=3), mathematics (n=3) and English (n=3) teachers participated in the research. 50% of the participants were female and 50% were male. Participants had at least four and at most twenty-nine years of professional experience. In the selection of teachers, convenient sampling, one of the purposeful sampling methods was used. While reporting the research, an alias was used for each participant to protect their privacy.

The representatives from the central boards of five teacher unions with different ideological views are the third group. Criterion sampling method was used to determine the teacher unions. The unions with the highest number of members and those which reflect different ideological views were taken as samples. The number of union members is based on the "Communiqué on July 2017 Statistics on the Number of Members of Public Servants Unions and Confederations in accordance with the Law on Public Servants Unions and Collective Bargaining Law No. 4688" published in the Official Gazette on 5 July 2017. Those teacher unions with the number of members they represent are Eğitim-Bir-Sen (n=420.129), Türk-Eğitim-Sen (n=201.282), Eğitim Sen (n=93.143), Eğitim İş (n=48.993) and Anadolu Eğitim Sen (n=1060).

### Data Collection and Analysis

In accordance with the design of the study, the data were collected through semi-structured interviews and open-ended questionnaires. For the survey to be applied to the academics, seven open-ended questions were created by the researcher in line with the theoretical framework of the research. In line with expert opinions, the questionnaire was reduced from seven to five items, and the questions in the personal and academic information section of the questionnaire were changed and the questionnaire was finalized. The same process was applied for the survey to be applied to the teacher union representatives and this data collection tool was given its final form as well. Before collecting the research data, the questionnaire was sent to two academics selected from ten universities in order to test the intelligibility of the prepared questionnaire. Six academics from the departments of educational sciences, mathematics and science, Turkish and social sciences responded the questionnaire. In line with the expert opinions, both questionnaires consisted of five same open-ended questions, and participants were asked to justify their answers in each question. Only one question was different in teacher unions' questionnaire (question 6) as the experts stated that it was especially important to find out the opinions of teacher unions about the goals of controversial issues in education to see the different perspectives of different ideological views. That question is also same with one question in semi-structured form of teachers. The forms were finalized regarding the feedback from field experts.

For semi-structured interviews to be applied to the teachers, interview questions were prepared by the researcher in line with the theoretical framework of the research. In line with the expert opinions received through the expert evaluation form, the questions that were deemed inappropriate were removed, and the questions were finalized in terms of the language and content used. Finally, before the interviews with the main participants, pilot interviews were conducted with two teachers from different fields in the school where the researcher worked as a teacher. The purpose of these interviews was to get the opinions of the participants about the clarity of the questions and to determine the average duration of the interviews (Adıgüzel, 2016). Figure 1 shows the semi-structured interview and open-ended survey questions.

**Yarı Yapılandırılmış Görüşme Formu (öğretmen)**

Bize kendinizi tanıtabilir ve eğitim geçmişinizden kısaca bahsedebilir misiniz?

**Size göre ilkökul ve ortaokulların amaçları ne olmalıdır?**

2.1. Tartışmanın eğitimdeki amacının ne olduğunu düşünüyorsunuz?

2.2. Toplumumuzda güncel veya tarihsel olarak süregelen **tartışmalı konular** size göre nelerdir?

2.3. Tartışmalı konulara eğitimde yer verilmeli midir? Neden? (sendika) **İlkokul ve ortaokul öğretim programlarında yer almayan ancak yer alması gerektiğini düşündüğünüz konular nelerdir?**

3.1. Branş dersinizde yer alması gerektiğini düşündüğünüz tartışmalı konular nelerdir?

3.2. Öğretmenlik yaptığınız alana ait öğretim programında tartışmalı konulara ne kadar yer verildiği açısından değerlendirir misiniz?

3.3. Tartışmalı konuların sınıf ortamına taşınmasının dersinize katkısı hakkında ne düşünüyorsunuz?

3.4. Tartışmalı konuların sınıf ortamına taşınması gerektiğini düşünüyorsanız bu konular, ilkökul veya ortaokulun hangi düzeyinden başlanarak ele alınmalıdır?

**İlkokul ve ortaokul öğretim programlarında yer alan ancak yer almaması gerektiğini düşündüğünüz konular nelerdir?**

**Öğretim programlarında yer almasının önemli olduğunu düşündüğünüz konuları derslerinizde ele alırken nasıl bir süreç izliyorsunuz?**

5.1. Bu konuların öğretiminde hangi strateji/yöntem/ teknikler kullanılmaktadır?

5.2. Siz hangi strateji/yöntem/ teknikleri kullanıyorsunuz?

5.3. Öğrenciler tartışmalı konuları sınıfa getiriyorlar mı? Daha çok hangi konular sınıfa getiriliyor?

5.4. Öğrenciler tartışmalı konuları sınıf ortamına getirdiklerinde sizin yaklaşımınız nasıl oluyor?

5.5. Tartışmalı konuların öğretim sürecine aileleri rolünü nasıl değerlendiriyorsunuz?

**Öğretim programlarında yer almasının önemli olduğunu düşündüğünüz konuların sınıfta ele alınmasında karşılaştığınız zorlukları anlatır mısınız?**

6.1. Tartışmalı konuları sınıfta ele alıyorsanız bu duruma ilişkin sınıfta yaşadığınız deneyimleriniz var mı? Bu deneyimlerden biraz bahsedebilir misiniz?

6.2. Eğer varsa sınıfta yaşadığınız zorlukların nelerden veya kimlerden kaynaklandığını düşünüyorsunuz?

6.3. Kendinizi tartışmalı konuların öğretimi açısından değerlendirir misiniz?

6.4. Yaşadığınız sorunların çözümüne yönelik önerilerinizi belirtiniz.

7. **Görüşme soruları dışında konuyla ilgili eklemek istediğiniz başka düşünceleriniz varsa lütfen belirtiniz.**

**Açık Uçlu Anket Soruları (sendika-akademisyen)**

1. Toplumumuzda güncel veya tarihsel olarak süregelen **tartışmalı konular** size göre nelerdir? Lütfen listeyiniz. (Sendika-Akademisyen)

2. İlkokul ve Ortaokul öğretim programlarında **yer almayan ancak yer alması gerektiğini düşündüğünüz tartışmalı konular** nelerdir? Lütfen gerçekleriyle belirtiniz. (Sendika-Akademisyen)

3. Bir önceki soruya verdiğiniz yanıtınızda belirttiğiniz olduğunuz **tartışmalı konular**, ilkökul veya ortaokulun hangi düzeyinden başlanarak ele alınmalıdır? Lütfen **nedenleriyle** birlikte açıklayınız. (Sendika-Akademisyen)

4. İlkokul ve Ortaokul öğretim programlarında **yer alan ancak yer almaması gerektiğini düşündüğünüz tartışmalı konular** nelerdir? Lütfen gerçekleriyle belirtiniz. (Sendika-Akademisyen)

5. Size **tartışmalı konuların** öğretiminde hangi etmenler ve paydaşlar önemlidir? Nedenini lütfen açıklayınız. (Sendika-Akademisyen)

6. Size göre **tartışmalı konuların** eğitimdeki hedefleri ne olmalıdır? Lütfen listeyiniz. (Sendika-Öğretmen)

Figure 1. Semi-Structured Interview and Open-Ended Survey Questions

As can be seen in Figure 1, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the teachers and open-ended questionnaires were conducted with academics and teacher union representatives. Due to the large number of universities (73) with faculties of education and academics (4287), online data collection tool was used to collect data academics. Open-ended surveys distributed by hand to teacher unions were answered by five central board members. After the questionnaires were completed, they were hand-delivered again.

After all the interviews with the teachers were completed and the audio recordings of the interviews were written down, line numbers were given to the interview transcripts. Thus, the interview data was made ready for coding. The coding was done with the analysis form created by the researcher in the Excel computer program shown in Figure 2.

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
1	<b>İNSAN HAKLARI İLE İLGİLİ TARTIŞMALI KONULAR</b>	<b>ÖĞRETMEN</b>	<b>AKADEMİSYEN</b>	<b>SENDİKA</b>	<b>7</b>		
2	Siyasi Katılım ve Vatandaşlık	6	100	5	111	Sağlık Hakkı, işçi ve emekli hakları, hukuk ve adalet sistemi, çocuk hakları, özgürlük, demokrasi, laiklik, toplumsal fırsat eşitliği	Siyasi Katılım ve Vatandaşlık
3	Çokkültürlülük	3	92	2	97		Çokkültürlülük
4	Toplumsal değerler	5	33	1	39		Toplumsal değerler
5	Terör ve şiddet	1	35	3	39		Terör ve şiddet
6	Çevre saldı	0	6	0	6		Evrimsel Teorisi
7		15	266	11	292		Ermenisi sorunu
8	<b>FEN VE TEKNOLOJİ İLE İLGİLİ TARTIŞMALI KONULAR</b>	<b>ÖĞRETMEN</b>	<b>AKADEMİSYEN</b>	<b>SENDİKA</b>	<b>7</b>		
9	Evrimsel Teorisi	4	29	0	33		Biyoteknolojik gelişmeler ve tıbbi teknolojileri
10	Biyoteknolojik gelişmeler ve tıbbi teknolojileri	4	26	0	30		Enerji Kaynakları
11	Enerji Kaynakları	5	25	0	30		Çevre duyarlılığı
12	Çevre duyarlılığı	7	21	0	28	<b>İYİ HAYAT HAKKI (14)</b>	Yürütme sistemi (Anayasa değişikliği, başkanlık, Atatürk ve Atatürkçülük)
13	Küresel Isınma ve İklim Değişikliği	2	17	0	19		Ekonomi (İstetim, tüketim, verimlilik ilişkileri, et
14	Sağlıklı Beslenme ve Gıda Güvenliği	3	13	0	16		Dinler tarihi ve dinsel inanışlar/olaylar (Genç
15	İnternet ve Teknolojiye Bağlı Sorunlar	4	7	0	11		Küresel Isınma ve İklim Değişikliği
16	Küresel Isınma	2	8	0	10		Türk Dış Politikası (Türkiye batı ilişkisi, AB üyesi
17	Bilim/Bilimsellik	0	15	0	15	<b>İNSAN HAKKI (14)</b>	Din ve toplum (inanç ve vakar ilişkisi, din sömü
18	Organ Bağışı	0	0	0	0		Önemli şahsiyetler-Tarihî kişilikler
19	Hastalıklar ve Taçlar	0	5	0	5		Sağlıklı Beslenme ve Gıda Güvenliği
20	Kürtaj	0	5	0	5		Siyasi Görüş Ayırıkları (ideoloji, parti, sağ-sol ç
21	Erveran olgusunu Büyük Parlamento (Bigbang)	0	4	0	4		Bilim/Bilimsellik
22	Özetler	0	3	0	3		İnternet ve Teknolojiye Bağlı Sorunlar
23	<b>Toplam</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>484</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>525</b>		<b>YEREL EĞİTİM</b>
24	<b>DİL, DİN VE SİYASET İLE İLGİLİ TARTIŞMALI KONULAR</b>	<b>ÖĞRETMEN</b>	<b>AKADEMİSYEN</b>	<b>SENDİKA</b>	<b>7</b>		
25	Yürütme sistemi (Anayasa değişikliği, başkanlık sistemi, yürütme)	2	12	0	14		Dinle Girişimleri (27 MAYIS, 12 EYLÜL, 28 ŞUB
26	Dinler tarihi ve dinsel inanışlar/olaylar (Genç İnanç Akademi Sorunları-özetler, senat, tarih)	2	19	0	21		Dil kullanımı ve dilin yazılması
27	Türk Dış Politikası (Türkiye batı ilişkisi, AB üyesi, BOP)	1	17	0	18		Medya (diziler, evlenme programları, vandaş yar
28	Din ve toplum (inanç ve vakar ilişkisi, din sömürsü, ahlak, dindeci, dinimiz, gerici)	4	13	0	17		Felsefe (kültürsümesi, duralatik düşünme, dış
							Organ Bağışı
							İslam dininin içeriği ile ilgili konular (Kuran-

Figure 2. A Section From the Excel Content Analysis Form

As it is seen in Figure 2, while coding the data on controversial issues, which is the first question of the research, content analysis method was used. By focusing on the concepts and words related to the controversial issues in the interviews, the codes and themes were created by bringing together the related codes. The themes and codes related to the controversial issues and their repetition numbers were tabulated. After determining the

codes and themes related to the controversial issues, content analysis was carried out based on the existing themes in the analysis of the data related to the second research question. In addition, new themes from the interview transcripts were also included in the study. The responses of the academics and teacher union representatives to the open-ended questionnaire were transferred to the analysis form previously created in the Excel computer program by the researcher. The views of the academics and teacher union representatives were also coded in line with the data obtained from the content analysis and gathered under themes. New codes and themes obtained from the questionnaires were added to the codes and themes created previously from the analyzes of the interviews with the teachers. All the stakeholders' opinions were put together under the themes and codes and participants' opinions were presented in numbers as real person in the Excel table as can be seen in Figure 2.

Excel analysis form was presented to the expert opinion in terms of the consistency of the codes with the analysis and the overlap of the themes. The expert opinion form was sent to twelve faculty members working in different departments of education faculties of different universities. Nine of the experts to whom the questionnaire was sent expressed their opinions. Two of these experts are faculty members and seven of them are assistant professors whose areas of specialization are curriculum and instruction, science, mathematics and social studies education. In line with the expert opinions, the codes and themes were revised and the analysis process was completed.

### **Validity and Reliability**

A scientific research is evaluated according to its validity and reliability. In this research, the first criterion in increasing validity and reliability was *credibility*. To provide credibility, participant confirmation was tried to be ensured both by confirming the opinions expressed by the participants during the semi-structured interviews and by sharing them with the participants after the transcription and coding process. Verbal and written consents of the teachers were obtained both by voice recordings and consent forms. Another written consent form was also prepared for teacher union representatives and academics. Expert opinion was also applied to ensure credibility. The researcher consulted expert opinions at all stages of the research. Permissons were obtained from the Scientific Ethics Committee of Anadolu University and Eskişehir Provincial Directorate of National Education. Data sources and data collection methods were diversified. In the diversification of data sources, different education stakeholders were involved in the study, thus the data sources were enriched as much as possible.

Regarding the *transferability* criteria, direct quotations from the participants were reported. Regarding the *consistency* criteria, the researcher paid attention not to move away from the theoretical framework of the research in the stages of data collection tools, data collection and analysis. In semi-structured interviews, the researcher used the interview guide she had prepared before. In the transformation of data obtained from open-ended questionnaires and semi-structured interviews into themes, two data sets were continuously compared by the researcher. Regarding the *verifiability* criteria, the researcher based on the principle of impartiality at every stage of the research process. In line with research *ethics*, in order to protect the confidentiality of the participants' identities, instead of the participants' real names, each participant was given a pseudonym with the suggestions of the thesis advisors.

The codings were presented to the expert opinion in terms of both the consistency of the codes with the interview transcript and the overlapping of the themes and the codes under them. Expert committee consists of associate professors and doctoral faculty members working at Anadolu University educational sciences, Turkish and social sciences, elementary education, mathematics and science education departments. Two of the experts are working on controversial issues and two of them are working on qualitative research. The experts were informed about the purpose of the research and the coding technique. Experts confirmed the consistency of the codes with the interview transcripts. In addition, in line with the opinions of the experts, the codes and themes were revised and thus the analysis process was completed.

### **Results and Discussion**

In this part of the study, the results are presented within the framework of the research questions. The numbers presented in the tables below reflect the real person numbers. People who represented multiple ideas on different themes are counted several times. That's why the total number of the ideas doesn't match with the total number of the participants.

#### **The Education Stakeholders' Views on Controversial Issues**

The first problem of the study is related to education stakeholders' views about the current and historical controversial issues and which controversial issues should be included in elementary curriculum. The opinions related to each theme and sub-theme is given below with abbreviations for academics (A), teacher unions (U),

teachers (T), Eğitim Bir Sen (EBS), Eğitim Sen (ES), Türk Eğitim Sen (TES), Eğitim İş (Eİ), and Anadolu Eğitim Sen (AES).

The education stakeholders' views related to current and historical controversial issues in Turkey were categorized under 5 main themes respectively;

- Human rights,
- Science and technology,
- Religion and politics,
- Historical events, problems and figures,
- Economics, media, art and philosophy.

According to the academics and teacher unions, the most controversial issue was human rights. While teacher unions didn't assert that science and technology was a controversial issue, academics believed that it was the second most controversial topic. In addition, only one person from teacher unions thought that religion and politics; economy, media, art and philosophy were controversial issues. For teachers, science and technology was the most; economy, media, art and philosophy was the least controversial themes. Sub-themes under human rights main theme are given in Table 1;

Table 1. Sub-themes under human rights main theme

Sub-Themes	Academics	Teachers	Teacher Unions
Participation and citizenship	100	5	5
Multiculturalism	92	3	2
Social values	39	5	1
Terror and violence	35	1	3
Sexual assault	6	0	0

As seen in Table 1, according to the academics, teacher unions and teachers, the most controversial sub-theme was participation and citizenship. The least controversial sub-themes were sexual assault for academics, social values for teacher unions, terror and violence for teachers. As it comes to which of these sub-themes should take place in the elementary curriculum, academics claimed multiculturalism should take place most and sexual assault should take place least in the curriculum. On the other hand, participation and citizenship was the issue which teacher unions believed that should take place most in the curriculum. However, they didn't claim that multiculturalism and sexual assault should be included in the curriculum. One of the teacher unions (ES) emphasized the need to focus on universal values in education. Another representative, on the other hand, argued that values related to patriotism and being Turkish as an upper identity should come to the forefront (TES). Three of the teachers stated that social values and two of them stated that participation and citizenship should be included in elementary curriculum. Social studies teacher Ferit said: *Today we have the right to elect and to be elected, so we have to know how much of this right we use effectively, how we should use it. I think 8<sup>th</sup> graders must know it. We can't teach enough because the curriculum doesn't cover it.* Teachers didn't state that sexual assault, multiculturalism and terror and violence issues should be included in the curriculum. Other sub-themes under science and technology main theme are given in Table 2;

Table 2. Sub-themes under science and technology main theme

Sub-Themes	Academics	Teachers	Teacher Unions
The theory of evolution	33	4	0
Biotechnological studies and reproductive technologies	26	4	0
Energy resources	25	5	0
Environmental awareness	21	7	0
Global warming and climate change	17	2	0
Healthy nutrition and food safety	13	3	0
Science / scientific knowledge	15	0	0
Internet and technology related problems	7	4	0
Sexuality	8	2	0
Organ donation	6	0	0
Diseases and medicines / vaccines	5	0	0
Abortion	5	0	0
Euthanasia	3	0	0

As seen in Table 2, according to the academics, the theory of evolution was the most and euthanasia was the least controversial sub-themes. According to the teacher unions, none of the science and technology



related issues were controversial. While teachers believed that environmental awareness was the most and global warming and sexuality were the least controversial sub-themes, they didn't assert that science/scientific knowledge, organ donation, diseases and medicines/vaccines, abortion and euthanasia were controversial issues. On the evolution theory, one of the science teachers said: *I think the most controversial issue in our field is evolution. Uh, because there's something about it. Some people think we've evolved from completely different genres, so here's the fact that it's not just that there's a change in small nuances. There is also a religious dimension. Evolution is the most controversial issue at the moment. Unsolved maybe won't be solved forever (Nazlı).* Related to science and technology theme, all the controversial issues except organ donation were thought to be included in the elementary curriculum. According to the academics, the theory of evolution was the most and abortion was the least important issue that should take place in the curriculum. Although union representatives didn't comment on the science and technology related controversial issues before, they agreed on the theory of evolution (ES, Eİ), environmental consciousness (Eİ) and sexuality (TES, ES) issues to be included in the curriculum. The teachers asserted that the issues they listed as controversial, such as the theory of evolution, environmental awareness, sexuality and the problems related to internet and technology, should be included in the curriculum. Science teacher Şenay said: *The theory of evolution was removed from the science curriculum. I think it should be included again.* In addition, while science/scientific knowledge wasn't discussed as controversial by teachers beforehand, three of the teachers stated that it should be included in the curriculum. Other sub-themes under religion and politics main theme are given in Table 3;

Table 3. Sub-themes under religion and politics main theme

Sub-Themes	Academics	Teachers	Teacher Unions
Management system	22	2	0
Errors in religious interpretation and practice	14	9	0
Current international political problems	21	1	0
Religious beliefs and formations	19	2	0
Differences of political views	13	1	1
Military coups	10	0	0
Political trust	3	2	0
Agricultural policies	4	0	0

As seen in Table 3, management system was the most and agricultural policies was the least controversial sub-themes. Nevertheless, teachers didn't assert that military coups and agricultural policies were controversial issues. Only one of the union representatives believed that differences at political views was a controversial issue in Turkey. The other representatives didn't report any ideas about religion and politics theme. Teachers mentioned about the referendum and the political system discussions about the management system. One of the form tutors said: *Well, mostly management system is discussed. As we have seen recently, the structure of the state, how it should be governed, who will manage the country in what way and how are the issues discussed recently (Ahmet).* According to the academics management system was the most and political trust was the least controversial issues. On the other hand they thought, religious beliefs and formations should take place most; agricultural policies and political trust should take place least in the curriculum. Although union representatives didn't find anything controversial about religion and politics, one of the representatives (ES) stated that religious beliefs and formations should be included in the curriculum. This representative argued that the history of religions should be included in the curriculum in order to understand other religious belief systems. One of the representatives (EBS) stated that the errors made in religious interpretation and practice should be eliminated in the society, so it should be included in the curriculum. Two of the representatives (ES, AES) stated that the issues related to the current politics should be included in the curriculum. One of the teachers argued that religious beliefs and formations and another teacher stated that the errors made in religious interpretation and practice should be included in the curriculum. English teacher Musa said: *The history of all religions should be included in the curriculum to give students the chance to see the bigger picture.* However, the teachers didn't believe that the issues related to the management system, the coup attempts, international contemporary political problems and political trust should be included in the curriculum. Other sub-themes under historical events, problems and figures main theme are given in Table 4;

Table 4. Sub-themes under historical events, problems and figures main theme

Sub-themes	Academics	Teachers	Teacher Unions
Deportation law	30	4	1
Atatürk and Kemalism	20	1	3
Historical figures	11	5	0
Cyprus issue	6	4	0

Aegean islands	5	4	0
Lausanne treaty	3	1	0

As seen in Table 4, deportation law was the most and Lausanne Treaty was the least controversial sub-theme for academics. According to the teachers, historical figures was the most and Lausanne Treaty was the least controversial sub-theme. In addition, two of the union representatives believed that deportation law, Atatürk and Kemalism were controversial sub-themes. One of the history teachers who commented on the Lausanne Treaty said: *There is much debate about Lausanne Treaty. Yes, it can be discussed, but if you don't see Lausanne as a gain, I am closed to discussion. Because as the conditions of the agreement are so clear, if they don't see Lausanne as a gain, then I think that those people have ulterior motives (Ferit)*. According to the academics, Atatürk and Kemalism should take place most; Lausanne Treaty and Aegean Islands issue should take place least in the curriculum. Although the teacher unions had previously considered the issues of deportation law and Atatürk and Kemalism controversial, they didn't state that they should be involved in the curriculum. The teachers didn't think that the historical figures and the Lausanne Treaty, which they had previously considered controversial, should be included in the curriculum. Only one of the teachers stated that Atatürk and Kemalism should be included in the curriculum. The Turkish teacher Simge said: *The MoNE removed Atatürk's principles from the curriculum. I think it should be included again.*

As no sub themes came out under the themes of economics, media, philosophy and art these themes were taken as they were and given in Table 5;

Table 5. Economics, media, philosophy and art themes

	Academics	Teachers	Teacher Unions
Economics	20	1	1
Media	4	4	0
Philosophy	7	0	0
Art	3	0	0

As seen in Table 5, while the teacher unions didn't comment on philosophy, media and art, only one representative stated that the issue of economics was controversial. It was seen that academics believed economics and philosophy were more controversial than media and art. While teachers didn't express any opinions about philosophy and art, the issue of media was found more controversial than economics. One of the teachers about the economics issue said: *People cannot improve themselves in terms of culture because of the economic problems. Yet, it is argued that we don't have any economic problems. We are assured to have a better income day by day, but this isn't true and acceptable (Banu)*. The only view that the issues of economics, philosophy, media and art should be included in the curriculum was stated by the academics. The academics previously discussed economics, philosophy, media and art issues as controversial, but the issues that should be included in the curriculum changed as philosophy, economics, art and media. Although teachers had previously found the issues of economics and media controversial, they didn't assert that these subjects should be included in the curriculum. The economics issue, which a union representative previously stated as controversial, wasn't expressed by union representatives as an issue to be included in the curriculum. As a result, although the participants stated some issues as controversial, they didn't assert that those issues should be included in the curriculum, or vice versa.

### The Education Stakeholders' Views on the Goals and Teaching Processes of Controversial Issues in the Curriculum

In this part of the study, the goals and teaching processes of the controversial issues have been tried to be revealed by discussing them together with the obstacles in front of them.

#### *The Education Stakeholders' Views on the Goals of the Controversial Issues and the Obstacles in Front of Them*

The second problem of the study is related to the education stakeholders' views about the goals and teaching processes of controversial issues in the elementary curriculum. To this end, teachers and unions were first asked about their views on the goals of the controversial issues and the obstacles in front of them while putting it into practice. Based on the analysis of answers, it was found out that the goals of controversial issues in education were as in Table 6.

Table 6. The goals of controversial issues in education

Goals	Teachers	Teacher Unions
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Preparing students for the real world	✓	✓
Developing students' thinking skills	✓	✓
Providing students with discussion culture	✓	✓
Instilling self-confidence in students	✓	✓
Meeting in common truth	✓	x
Providing students with perennial learning	✓	x

As seen in Table 6, teachers and unions agreed on four goals about controversial issues. To start with the goal to prepare students for the real world, English teacher Musa said: *So, everything is the same and one in the classroom but there is no such reality in society and real life.* Three of the representatives (TES, ES, AES) argued that these issues should be included in the curriculum in order to prepare students for the real world. However, a union representative (TES) emphasized the need to pay attention to the issues that won't undermine the unity and solidarity of the country. A union representative (ES) underlined the importance of being pedagogically cautious and objective as the basic principles while determining and discussing the controversial issues.

Education stakeholders agreed on the necessity of controversial issues to prepare the students for the real world. However, they mentioned some obstacles stemming from the curriculum. The teachers claimed that exam-oriented curriculum that encourages rote learning caused teachers, students and parents to consider controversial issues as a waste of time. Social sciences teacher Bora said: *Children are concerned about central exams. So I cannot ignore this and turn my back or say that this is my educational goal and I will adhere to it. I have no chance of doing that.* Teachers stated that there wasn't enough time for controversial issues because the curriculum is academically overburdened. Similar to the teachers, two teacher unions drew attention to the curriculum. One of the representatives (ES) stated that although these issues are from real life, pilot practices should be carried out in the process of preparing the curriculum in order to avoid the reactions related to these issues. The academics also argued that multiple choice exams condemned the education system out-of-date learning and teaching processes. Moreover, they added that the current curriculum didn't cover controversial issues, and argumentation skills were avoided in the curriculum not to raise good decision makers. All in all, elementary curriculum failed preparing students for the real world problems.

Teachers and teacher unions also asserted that controversial issues developed students' thinking skills as much as they prepared them for real life. It was seen that controversial issues were perceived by teachers as a tool that leads to discussion rather than as a goal themselves. They thought that controversial issues led students to free, scientific and objective knowledge. Social studies teacher Bora said: *If we want the child to find the truth himself, perhaps most of the courses should be based on controversial issues. After analyzing and synthesizing, the students will find the truth and controversial issues are a path to this.* Yet, the teachers mentioned some obstacles again. They thought that students' cognitive maturity and readiness were inadequate to understand the controversial issues and they opposed these issues because of their previous misleading. They accepted the wrong sources of information as correct. Religious education and ethics teacher Büşra said: *This is already the most serious distress in religion. It is very important from where you learn, from which source you learn...* Two of the representatives (Eİ, AES) argued that controversial issues should be included in the curriculum in order for students to be able to think, understand, question and analyze. Similar to the teachers, one of the representatives (EBS) also stated that these issues should be included in the curriculum in accordance with students' cognitive maturity. According to him, if the students weren't mature enough, they wouldn't be able to understand these issues.

To provide students with discussion culture was another goal of the controversial issues stated by the participants. Teachers argued that most of the students didn't know how to listen and respect different opinions while discussing about something. Therefore, teachers thought that controversial issues could be employed as a tool in teaching discussion. According to the teachers, the lack of discussion culture among the students was due to the lack of democracy culture in their families, and children were raised under the shadow of taboo and oppression. Turkish teacher Alkım said: *If the family is conscious, the child is conscious too. In other words, families who follow the agenda and try to teach their children something about these issues already raise their children's awareness. But if the family doesn't follow the agenda, the children don't know much about the news and events around them. So they inevitably become oblivious.* Two of the representatives (EBS, AES) argued that these issues could give students the opportunity to learn and discuss, to understand and respect differences. One of the representatives (EBS) stated that he opposed categorically prohibited education but still thought that students shouldn't be muddled on some subjects. Another representative (TES) stated that the personality of the children arose from the relationships that the family members established with each other and what the child learned in the family and what he learned at school should be supportive of each other. One of the important

points emphasized by this representative was that not every issue might be discussed in every family, and that was related to the educational background of the family. Another representative (ES) argued that education on controversial issues should be considered especially with the parental dimension due to the existence of established ideas in adults. In this regard, families should be educated first and the purpose of education about controversial issues should be explained to them. A representative (Eğitim İş) argued that each family had the right to decide how their children would be raised, but should be intervened if they educated the child in such a way as to harm the society and nature. Another representative (EBS) argued that the families should also participate in the education process and the issues which the family didn't want to be taught should be given in accordance with their diligence or the parents should be enlightened on these issues. Finally, a representative (AES) asserted that families could react because teachers or other students had different opinions and used this as a complaint factor. Thus, legal arrangements should be made to prevent this situation. As well as teacher unions and teachers, the academics pointed out the family as a source of problems. Academics stated that the role of the family was very important and could even prevent learning at school. For this reason, it was necessary to provide school-parent cooperation and inform the parents about the necessity of controversial issues while teaching democracy.

As well as providing students with discussion culture, participants believed that another goal of controversial issues was to instill self-confidence in students. Teachers thought that controversial issues especially helped shy, unsuccessful or naughty students to express themselves. According to the teachers, students who had increased self-esteem through controversial issues had better communication with their peers and teachers. The students usually had an idea and were willing to talk about these issues since they aroused from their own lives. Science teacher Nazlı said: *For example, students like to talk about an environmental issue or environmental consciousness as they often hear about it and they can add much to this. In other words, it increases students participation.* Two of the representatives (EBS, ES) argued that opportunities for students to be self-reliant through controversial issues could be created in an interactive environment with the help of their teachers. Unlike representatives, teachers agreed on two more goals namely; to meet in common truth and to provide students with perennial learning. The teachers who thought that the goal of controversial issues was to meet in common truth believed that these issues helped students to see the common points of different ideas and see from the different perspectives. Finally, some of the teachers thought that controversial issues helped teachers provide students with perennial learning. Science teacher Şerife said: *For instance, we discussed nuclear power plants in the class. After a few weeks, when I asked about it, I saw that they remembered the issue very well.*

#### *The Education Stakeholders' Views on the Teaching Process of the Controversial Issues and the Obstacles in Front of Them*

The process while handling controversial issues is as important as the goal of these issues in the elementary curriculum. There are many obstacles defined by the participants while handling the controversial issues in class. These are listed in the Table 7 below and supported with stakeholders' views.

Table 7. The obstacles handling the controversial issues

Teacher approach	Fear of being spied on and so avoiding these issues Epistemological and cultural beliefs Seeing it as a waste of time Having to keep up with the coursebook and curriculum
Teacher competences	Lack of field knowledge Lack of pedagogical qualifications
Parents' approach	Exam oriented point of view Epistemological and cultural beliefs
Students' approach	Misconceptions related to controversial issues Exam oriented point of view Socioeconomical background

As it is seen in Table 7, one of the most important part of the process is teacher approach. In order to examine teachers' approaches to controversial issues, they were asked how they behaved when the students brought these issues to the classes.

Two of the religious culture and ethics teachers stated that they tried to explain the issue as much as possible to support the student's curiosity for learning. However, one of them stated that he addressed these issues in a way that leads students to a single correct answer. Although one of the science teachers stated that

controversial issues support the students' curiosity for learning, two of them stated that they had lots of subjects to teach in the curriculum, yet they don't have enough time. As a result, they preferred to avoid these issues. One of the English teachers stated that some of the controversial issues were generally related to themes in the English course curriculum and they sometimes discussed these issues. The other English teacher said: *If the subject that the student brings to the class is related to the course, I will discuss it in the class but if it is not, I offer to talk about it at the break time (Funda)*. English teacher Musa stated that he didn't find it appropriate to address these issues in the classroom, because it can be risky for him. Two of the mathematics teachers stated that these subjects weren't related to the mathematics lesson and that they directed the students' questions to the teachers concerned. One of the social studies teachers claimed that he addressed the controversial issues in all aspects and finally got the students to find their own truth by passing through their logic filter. Another social studies teacher stated that the teachers were the right source for the students to learn the most accurate information about controversial issues. Thus, it was her responsibility to inform the students whenever they needed. Form tutors stated that they generally gave students an opportunity to discuss these issues, but if the issue that students brought to the classroom wasn't related to the subject at that moment, they postponed it to discuss in related courses. The form tutor Ayten said: *So I always give the opportunity to children to express themselves. Especially in life science lesson, they always ask questions or tell their own stories about controversial issues...* Turkish teachers stated that they usually allowed students to discuss controversial issues related to Turkish course curriculum. Otherwise, they directed the students to the teachers of other courses. Turkish teacher Simge said: *In fact, it depends on the issue. If it is very irrelevant to the issue we are dealing with, then I don't allow the students to talk. But if it is an issue that will contribute to the subject, then I allow them.*

As well as teachers' approaches to controversial issues, it is important for them to feel confident while handling these issues. To this end, teachers were asked to self-evaluate themselves in terms of their competences while teaching these issues. In this regard, one of the religious culture and ethics teachers claimed that discussing religious issues could cause trouble, so he didn't want to draw reaction. Furthermore, he stated that he didn't feel comfortable while discussing these issues. Another teacher expressed difficulty in explaining these issues to the students, but thought that he was a good listener. Two of the science teachers stated that they felt comfortable and successful in addressing these issues. Yet one of them said that she couldn't control the class when these subjects were addressed. She said: *I can't create a discussion environment in a class of 36-40 students. First of all, nobody listens to each other... Because all the students want to be the talking party, not the listening party. That's why I have a hard time (Şerife)*. Two of the English teachers stated that they were doing their best to handle these issues in the classroom. Teacher Ersin said: *I'm doing my best as I told you before. I also include extracurricular activities such as cooperation with other teachers, in-school activities. So I think I'm enough*. Another English teacher said that he was always following the current developments about controversial issues; however, instead of seeing these issues as a propaganda tool, he preferred to be discreet. The mathematics teachers stated that they didn't address these issues in their classes because they weren't in the content of the curriculum. Thus, they considered themselves insufficient. Maths teacher Feray said: *When a student comes to me with a religion or history related controversial issue, I tell him to ask it to his history or religious education teacher. I don't think I'm good enough...* Three of the social studies teachers stated that a teacher should follow the current developments to be sufficient about controversial issues and to be prepared for the questions students may ask. Social studies teacher Hanife said: *To be successful in teaching controversial issues, teachers should read books and follow the agenda. Because when a child asks a question, you need to be informed. I can't say I've been following the agenda. In that sense, maybe a teacher should be more informed*. Another teacher stated that she didn't have enough time to address these issues and she felt unconfident about them. Two of the form tutors claimed that while addressing these issues, politics was involved, they lost lots of time and had difficulty in controlling students. However, a form tutor Veli said: *I think I devote lots of time to these issues. I'm good at communicating with students, especially listening to them. So, I can create a free environment in the classroom about discussions...* Two of the Turkish teachers stated that they considered themselves confident about controversial issues and one preferred not to address these issues but to direct them to other field teachers. Turkish teacher Alkim said: *So I'm confident in dealing with these issues because I try not to explain them just by lecturing. You know, I either support it with a visual, a sound recording, or a brochure. For example, I have videos and slides about diabetes and child abuse.*

When teachers' competences about controversial issues were examined, it was seen that there were some problems arising from different sources about teaching these issues. The greatest problem that academics pointed out was the epistemological and cultural beliefs of the teachers. The academics also asserted that teachers didn't have a field knowledge about these issues. According to the academics, the controversial issues were those that required teachers follow both current events and developments in the field of teaching. To academics, teachers should have pedagogical qualifications as well as pedagogical field knowledge in order to address controversial issues. Some teachers ignored controversial issues even if they were covered in the

curriculum just because they felt pedagogically inadequate. When they were asked, teachers also cited themselves and their colleagues as a source of problem in addressing controversial issues. Problems with teachers were that some teachers disregarded or ignored controversial issues, or used them as a tool to impose their own thoughts. In addition, teachers saw these issues as dangerous and feared of being spied on, they were uninformed about these issues and didn't follow current developments, they got angry in discussions and were unable to maintain impartiality. In addition, the most common problem that teachers complained about addressing these issues was that they didn't know how to conduct the discussion process and lost control. Social sciences teacher Ferit said: *A teacher cannot hold or praise any political party. This is against the law. Social studies teachers are actually at risk. While discussing an issue if the students act partisan in the classroom, they can transfer it to their parents in a different way. This could put the teacher in a difficult situation. In fact, I believe that such pressures should be removed from the teachers.* Parents criticized teacher views that contradicted their own worldview and even made the teacher a target for the students. All teachers from all fields asserted that families had a huge impact on students, that many misunderstandings or incomplete learning about controversial issues originated from families, and that correcting these misunderstandings became difficult as the students grew up. In addition, teachers stated that parents' view of school and education was exam and result oriented and they didn't care about school's role in behaviour and value development. Thus, they weren't aware of or interested in controversial issues. According to the teachers, students from low socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds couldn't develop a perspective to think about controversial issues as they put their basic needs first. In addition, the congregation and sect structures in the surrounding area affected the students. English teacher Ersin said: *The environment where our school is located has a low or middle level socioeconomic structure. Students often can't buy books or notebooks. Their basic needs need to be met so they can think of higher-level things.* According to the academics and teachers, students' curiosity about these issues, their previous experiences and prejudices were effective on their attitudes towards these issues. As a result, it affected the teaching practices and competences of teachers in the classroom.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

In this research, firstly, it was aimed to reveal the views of education stakeholders on controversial issues. Afterwards, the views of teachers and union representatives on the goals of controversial issues in primary and secondary curriculum were discussed. Finally, findings regarding the views of all stakeholders related with the learning-teaching processes of controversial issues in the context of the null curriculum were analyzed.

As a result of this study, it has been observed that the controversial issues determined in the post-graduate theses overlap with the issues obtained from this research. In the national literature; according to the results of graduate studies of Seçgin (2009) and Çopur (2015), the top ten most controversial issues are terrorism, unemployment, economic crisis, Turkey-EU relations, staffing, nepotism, corruption, judicial independence, the media and religious abuse. Among the controversial issues obtained from this research; multiculturalism, social values, the theory of evolution, biotechnological studies and reproductive technologies, energy resources, environmental awareness and management system weren't or not at the top ten of other research results. Demir and Pişmek (2018) and Yılmaz (2012), as a result of their studies with social studies teachers, determined controversial issues such as secularism, principles and revolutions of Atatürk, the Treaty of Lausanne, the exile of Sultan Vahdettin and deportation law which are among the findings of this research. Kuş (2015), in his study with social studies and science teachers; obtained controversial issues in line with this research's findings such as violence against women, education system, terrorism, nationalism, religious abuse, euthanasia, human genome project, gene therapy and hybrid seeds. When the post graduate studies in international literature (Philips, 1997; Walsh, 1998; Evans et al., 2000; Rambosk, 2011; Avery et al., 2013 ) are analyzed, it is seen that gay / lesbian rights, abortion, legalization of drugs, creed of belief, pornography, genocide / ethnic cleansing, euthanasia and genetic engineering are the top 10 most controversial issues. Abortion, gay / lesbian rights, genocide / ethnic cleansing, euthanasia and positive discrimination coincide with the results of this study. It's seen that controversial issues vary depending on the historical, cultural and social backgrounds of the countries. Besides; some issues such as sexuality, religion and race, migration, multiculturalism, mother tongue education, Northern Iraq problem, euthanasia, violence against women, media, human rights, animal rights and freedom of press are controversial in both national and international literature.

When the national and international literature is examined, it is seen that controversial issues serve the purpose of improving citizenship skills. Hess (2004) points out that controversial issues aim to develop basic democratic values, to be interested in politics, to increase content knowledge, to think critically and to improve interpersonal skills. All of these goals were also pointed out by teachers and teacher unions in this study. In studies conducted with social science and science teachers in both national and international literature, it is concluded that controversial issues help students develop and support similar skills (Burek, 2012; Çopur, 2015; Kuş, 2015; Emery et al., 2017). In both national and international literature, there are studies that determine which controversial issues are preferred or deemed appropriate by teachers or prospective teachers. When the

results of this study, Çopur's (2015) and Seçgin's (2009) research results are compared; human rights, democracy, environmental awareness and cultural corruption are the subjects which are preferred to be jointly included in the curricula. When the findings obtained from these studies are analyzed, it is seen that highly controversial subjects which rank at the top of the list are not in the list of the subjects which should be included in the curriculum as they aren't suitable to be addressed at schools. It shows that the participants don't think Turkish national education is ready to handle controversial issues though for the sake of democracy education.

When teacher approaches to controversial issues are examined, it is possible to say that teachers are divided into three groups regarding their approaches. Teachers in the first group are willing to discuss and explain the controversial issues that students bring to the class in a fair way. The second group of teachers take a position according to the content of the subject. The teachers in the third group prefer to stay distant to these issues. Regardless of the group, all teachers think that the teacher should maintain neutrality on these issues, yet this is difficult. Oulton et al. (2004) argued that the focus of teachers on controversial issues should be strict adherence to rationality and truth, to propose balanced ideas on the subject and to remain objective. However, studies in the national literature show that this is exact the opposite. When the competences of teachers about controversial issues are examined, it is seen that some teachers from each field feel confident in terms of both cultural background and coping with these subjects, and some teachers feel inadequate. Some teachers, especially from the field of social studies, state that it is necessary to follow the current developments in order to cope with these issues in the classroom and thus they have no difficulty in answering the questions that may come from the students. Some teachers who state that they feel inadequate in addressing these issues say that the feeling of inadequacy stems from not being able to provide classroom control while discussing these issues and not being able to address these issues properly as these issues aren't adequately covered in the curriculum. In many studies in both national (Atalay & Çaycı, 2017; Türkmen et al., 2017) and international (Cocke, 2017; Rhodes & Coda, 2017) literature, it's seen that teachers mostly don't feel safe and confident about teaching controversial issues.

When the sources of problems encountered in the discussion of controversial issues are examined, the sources of problems that teachers, academics and teacher unions point out as common are the parents and the curriculum. According to the stakeholders, the parents' refusal to accept the opinions contrary to their own world view causes them to personalize these issues and make the teacher a target. In addition, the lack of democratic culture in some families, and raising children under the shadow of taboo and oppression are also mentioned as problems with parents. In addition to families, current curriculum don't cover controversial issues that will enable students to be good decision-makers and develop metacognitive thinking skills. Students approach the school in an exam-oriented manner, which causes them to see controversial issues as unnecessary and time-consuming. In addition to students, social and cultural norms make it difficult for teachers to address these issues. Other problems with teachers include the fact that some teachers see controversial issues as unnecessary, use them as a means to convey their thoughts, or don't know how to deal with them. Findings about the sources of problems related to controversial issues are similar to those of many studies from national and international literature (Yılmaz, 2012; Ersoy, 2013; Çopur, 2015; Cocke, 2017; Rhodes & Coda, 2017; Pollak et al., 2018).

In the discussion of controversial issues, regardless of western or eastern civilizations, it is evident that controversial issues that aren't accepted at the macro level cannot be achieved through micro-level efforts and cannot be transferred to real life. For this reason, these issues will continue to be ignored both in teachers' practices and content of the curriculum. In other words, it will be a null curriculum. The results of this study revealed that;

- Teachers' lack of pedagogical knowledge about controversial issues prevent them from developing positive attitudes towards these issues and addressing them in the classroom. In this context, it is believed that teachers should be informed about the aim of controversial issues and how they should be handled in the lessons with in-service teacher training programs.
- Social norms are one of the major problem sources in the discussion of controversial issues. For this reason, it is believed that all stakeholders should be explained that these issues aren't a goal but a tool for raising individuals with democratic attitude. One of the best ways to achieve this is thought to involve the whole school approach and to raise awareness of all stakeholders on these issues.
- One of the obstacles to addressing controversial issues is exam and result oriented education system. Since the curriculum is loaded with the issues asked in the central examinations, it is thought that there isn't enough time for controversial issues. This causes students, teachers and parents to consider controversial issues as unnecessary and time-consuming. Therefore, controversial issues should be covered in the curriculum and if possible should be included in the central examinations.
- Long-term observations are needed for the objective analysis of primary and secondary education teachers' self-efficacy beliefs and student/parents' attitudes towards these issues.

**Limitations**

This research doesn't claim to be representative of all oppositional stakeholders' views in Turkey. The interviews and the data obtained from them are limited by a relatively small group of participants. In addition, this study wasn't operationalised as a systematic comparison between the different teacher views in different regions of Turkey. It was aimed to allow for the teachers' views teaching only in Eskişehir province to describe the situation.

**Disclosure Statement**

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.