

Ghania Dif

The Manifestation of Citizenship in Schoolbooksa Reading of Civics Books for Primary Education in Algeria

# The Manifestation of Citizenship in Schoolbooksa Reading of Civics Books for Primary Education in Algeria

Ghania Dif

<sup>1</sup>University of Algiers2, Abou El Kacem Saâdallah (Algeria).

The E-mail Author: Ghania.dif@univ-alger2.dz

Received: 06/2023

Published: 03/2024

## Abstract:

Education for citizenship is based on the use of education as a mechanism for embodying the values and dimensions of citizenship, which are linked to general social, political and cultural transformations at both local and global levels. Textbooks serve as a means of transmission and undoubtedly contain rules, norms and dimensions related to the organisation of social and human life. However, behind this apparent image there are also implications, challenges and contradictions related to the level of intellectual and political development of society, its political authority and historical processes, as well as the clarity of the social project it represents. For this reason, the subject of citizenship in textbooks, especially in civics textbooks, has attracted the attention of numerous local and international studies within the framework of what is known as the sociology of curricula or the sociology of the textbook.

The conceptualisation of citizenship in Algerian textbooks suffers from confusion, mainly due to the borrowing of the concept from its historical and political field, without a scientific examination of the limits of this borrowing. As a result, the meaning of citizenship fluctuates between its original reference, in which it was born and developed, and the fabricated meaning associated with another historical and civilisational reference, in an attempt to combine what is not local with what is deeply rooted in mental structures and collective consciousness.

This article seeks to explore the methods by which authors of civics textbooks for primary education in Algeria have overcome this confusion, and how they have constructed the new meaning tailored to the Algerian context in order to identify its characteristics.

**Keywords:**Citizenship, education for citizenship, textbooks, civic education

*Tob Regul Sci.*<sup>TM</sup> 2024;10(1): 1993 - 1998

DOI: [doi.org/10.18001/TRS.10.1.125](https://doi.org/10.18001/TRS.10.1.125)

## Introduction:

This article serves as an entry point for discussing the dilemma of citizenship in Algerian school discourse. This dilemma is manifested in the confusion that characterises citizenship in the content of civics textbooks for primary education and in the way it is presented by the authors.

The article begins with the basic idea that citizenship developed in its historical context in the West during different and successive periods. It has emerged as a result of philosophical and

Ghania Dif

## The Manifestation of Citizenship in Schoolbooks: A Reading of Civics Books for Primary Education in Algeria

political theorising, as well as social and political movements that have struggled to improve the conditions of Western individuals.

The purpose of this article, therefore, is to examine the methods by which the authors constructed the representation of citizenship as a concept used in the text. What are the implications ascribed to this citizenship? What are the meanings attached to it?

The theme is approached in two moments. The first moment presents the concept as perceived by the authors, while the second moment offers a sociological reading to interpret the aforementioned determinations.

### **The importance of the textbook:**

Many sociological studies, especially in the field of curriculum sociology, have emphasised for decades that the textbook is not simply a means of transmitting knowledge. Rather, it actively contributes to the social and political socialisation process of educated children and adolescents. Guy Rocher even refers to the textbook as a "social system" (Guy Rocher, p. 7). He justifies this claim in a lecture at the University of Montreal. In addition to the cognitive content, it has become clear that there are implicit cultural, political and ideological elements in the textbook. The suggested texts consumed by students contain conceptions of social reality and its social, cultural and even political organisation. They convey a value system to students and shape their social representations of social reality.

The textbook is therefore seen as important in the lives of learners. However, it can also become a dangerous tool that influences their mental and intellectual life. This danger can also extend to their emotional and social lives. Any flaw in the concept presented in the textbook implies a disruption in the minds of the consumers of its cultural and normative content. The peaceful, obedient, compliant, rebellious or lost mind, as well as the creative mind, are all outcomes that are fundamentally influenced by the school through the ideas it presents about the desired education of individuals. Behind all this is the culture of society in the way it treats the individual first as a child and then as an adolescent and an adult.

This is why it is so important to pay attention to the political content of these books, which accompany students for a long time, especially in primary education. It is a strategic work with cultural and political dimensions, and any error in its assessment becomes a gamble for which whole generations pay the price. The importance of addressing this issue lies in the sensitivity and danger of these contents for the social upbringing and political formation of generations at crucial and fundamental stages of life, such as primary education, especially in the field of civic education.

### **Citizenship, concept and formation contexts:**

The concept of citizenship is seen as a dynamic concept, whether in its modern forms, such as digital citizenship and global citizenship, which have emerged as a result of globalisation and the use of modern technologies, or in its traditional form, which has evolved historically to meet the specific needs of each historical period. This has been expressed in both ancient and contemporary Western political and philosophical thought.

Jean-François Bickel proposes two definitions of citizenship, each emphasising a particular meaning in its interpretation. "In the first sense, citizenship is a status granted to all those who are recognised as members of the political community... a set of rights and duties in their relationship with the political authority of the society in question" (Jean-François Bickel, p. 11). This means that citizenship is a status or position that confers rights and imposes obligations on individuals in their relationship with political authority.

In the second sense, citizenship means "participation in the sovereign political body that deliberates on the laws of society" (Jean-François Bickel, p. 11). This refers to participation in the legislative, executive and judicial powers.

To these two meanings we can add a third, which expresses the realistic and dynamic aspect of citizenship, linked to its daily practice. "Because it is by nature a concept that oscillates between individual life within the family community and social and political belonging to the city, neighbourhood or community" (Abdul Nasser Saleh Al-Yafi, p. 250).

In defining citizenship in its formation processes in the context of Western civilisation, it is important to emphasise that it has evolved from two fundamental dimensions:

- The first dimension is related to its intellectual and theoretical development, specifically linked to the emergence of Enlightenment thought.
- The second dimension is associated with its formation in the context of the emergence of political and social movements and historical transformations in the Western world.

### **Citizenship: A reading of the content of the text:**

Before deconstructing and analysing the text, it should be noted that the content to be analysed in this work is the textbooks of civic education for primary school, specifically the second generation textbooks in the Algerian educational system, from the first to the fifth year of primary school. Within this approach, we will analyse the thematic content of the texts with a political dimension concerning the concept of citizenship as presented in the five textbooks.

The deconstruction of the discourse of citizenship in the textbooks refers to a set of data that constructs the meaning of citizenship in the perception of the textbook authors. These authors are the primary school inspectors, the teachers involved in the curriculum, with the presence of a teaching professor. Firstly, the meaning develops gradually within the text from the first to the fifth year. Secondly, this meaning is completed in the fifth year textbook, emphasising its political dimension, which is the focus of this article. The content is made up of a series of themes that unfold progressively as follows:

A. Issues of national and individual identity.

B. Presentation of the concepts of rights and duties. The right to education is presented along with the right to rest, play, entertainment and sport. The presentation of duties is linked to individual responsibility, such as carrying out one's work with competence and commitment to deadlines, which indicates the duty of discipline as expressed in the text.

C. Explain the concepts of private and public property and of public institutions owned and managed by the State and providing services "for all". This delineation establishes the distinction between the public and private spheres in the daily lives of young citizens. It seems clear that the texts at this stage provide an introduction to the definition of the state and the function of the institutions it owns and oversees.

D. Emphasis on the mechanisms of democratic work and the pillars of democratic life. This includes the provision of rules for collective life based on the authors' concept of solidarity, respect, harmony and effort. This is presented through direct exhortation. The texts also deal with dialogue, negotiation, elections and responsibility. However, all the material presented remains within the framework of the classroom and the school as microcosmic units where children live and experience community life outside the family sphere. This requires learning the rules of coexistence according to the principles of citizenship as conceptualised by the authors.

E. Focus on dialogue as a definition and function, as it achieves order, harmony and coexistence, and works to prevent violence.

F. Present the concept of citizenship in relation to democratic life and introduce the institutions of the state and their functions. It is worth noting that the institutions to which children are introduced at this stage can be divided into two types: service institutions and what is known in Marxist terminology as the repressive apparatus of the state.

#### **Fabricated discourse:**

In the textbook, citizenship is first defined as "the attribute of a citizen who has rights and responsibilities imposed by his or her affiliation to his or her homeland" (Fifth Year Textbook, p. 31).

In a secondary definition, citizenship means "working together as one family, making our country a safe place, and embodying the qualities of a good citizen by being responsible for ourselves and our actions, keeping our surroundings clean, obeying traffic signals, wearing seat belts, donating clothes and toys to those in need, spreading peace, smiling at others, refraining from using vulgar language and controlling our temper, helping the elderly and showing compassion to the young" (Fifth Year Textbook, p. 31).

#### **Citizenship in the textbook seems to be defined as**

- Working together as a family to achieve security for the nation.
- Embodying the qualities of a good citizen, characterised by a set of social, ethical and behavioural values that govern relations with others.

In this sense, citizenship is collective work based on unity, as implied by the analogy of the family. The ultimate goal is the security of the nation. This is how the authors see the concept of citizenship. However, one might ask whether this representation is merely superficial and an oversimplification of the concept presented to children, or whether it actually alludes to a deeper issue in the local context, related to the ongoing debate on citizenship in the Arab context with its specific historical, cultural and political circumstances.

The first notable observation in analysing the proposed concepts of citizenship in the educational discourse is the presence of a confusion of meaning, with an overlap between citizenship and moral education. The question that arises strongly here is why there is a link between the family, which signifies kinship, blood ties and affinities, and other culturally and socially charged terms that embody the collective spirit of Algerians and serve as the basic unit of the social system, and citizenship, which refers to the relationship between the individual and the state, and also refers to "civil rules to which everyone is subject, regardless of tribal, political, racial or religious loyalties" (Abdul Nasser Saleh Al-Yafi, 248).

Of course, the answer will not be a secret, because in our Algerian society, the family is considered the fundamental unit of the social system. Despite the recent changes and the trend towards individualism, there is an attempt to fragment collective identities into individual ones, indicating a growing sense of individuality. This is evident in many studies.

It seems that this link has been made in an attempt to construct a 'family citizenship' to overcome the existing discrepancy and difference between the two concepts. The authors propose a citizenship based on the principles of the family and its social and cultural symbolism in Algerian society. Despite the declining influence of tribal values and the dominance of the nuclear family model over the extended family model, as well as the changing dynamics within the family, "inherited systems remain strong, especially when there is a structural difference between cultural registers" (Abdul Nasser Saleh Al-Yafi, 248). In fact, what has been constructed is deeply rooted in the collective mindset of the authors and society, representing a historical product that expresses the depth of our affiliations.

This metaphorical representation has created a fabrication of the concept of citizenship, which is linked to the perceptions and representations of the authors, reflecting confusion and fear of the absolute metaphor. This has led to an attempt to localise or domesticate this notion of citizenship within the local context.

This constructed and complex position raises several questions related to the specific meanings that intersect with Western notions of citizenship, such as individualism and freedom, among others.

For example, how can individual freedom be constructed in a context where family, kinship and tribe play a significant role in the lives of individuals?

Can it be a mere metaphor or reproduction of Western individual freedom, or can it be tailored to Algerian specificities and linked to the characteristics of the society?

This perception and general understanding also leads to another, more complex question related to modernity in Algerian society. Many sociologists and psycho-sociologists, such as Mhamed Boukhobza, Hawari Adi and Djamal Gharid, have addressed this issue. Although they have different perspectives on the details, they agree that there are two systems: a modern system influenced by Western modernity, and another traditional system rooted in the historical affiliations of Algerian society, which is "constantly improving itself and absorbing various forms of modernity" (Adel Boutadjine, p. 39).

Citizenship is not just a theoretical concept or a social practice; it is an attitude that develops in individuals as societies develop and seek to promote human progress within them.

From this perspective, being vigilant in writing civic education texts for students becomes a strategic endeavour that requires specialised scientific intervention to overcome confusion and incorporate an attempt to ground it in local specificities. This involves researching local characteristics, reviewing the scientific heritage and the reformist and revivalist literature that has existed in our context for centuries. Unfortunately, this aspect is often missing in most local studies of the manifestations of citizenship in textbooks.

#### References:

- [1] Kamal, Abdelatif. "Education for Citizenship". Centre for Arab Unity Studies, Beirut, 2012-1.
- [2] Al-Yafi, Abdul Nasser Saleh. "The Debate on Citizenship, Family and Tribe in the Arab Context: The Gulf as an Example." In *Additions*, Issues 41-42, 2018.
- [3] Boutadjine, Adel. "The traditional social system as an obstacle to social change: A reading of Suleiman Madhar's 'Social Violence in Algeria.'" In *Al-Tamkin Al-Ijtima'i Journal*, Issue 2, 20-22.
- [4] Bickel, Jean-François. "Meanings, history and renewal of citizenship." In *Gérontologie et Société*, no. 120, vol. 30, 2007.
- [5] Rocher, Guy. "Textbooks and social transformations." *Les Classiques des Sciences Sociales*, Chitoumi, Quebec, 2006.
- [6] Ministry of National Education, Book in Arabic Language - Islamic Education - Civic Education, First Grade Elementary, National Office for School Publications, Algeria, 2016-2017.
- [7] Ministry of National Education, Book in Arabic Language - Islamic Education - Civic Education, Second Grade Elementary, National Office for School Publications, Algeria, 2016-2017.
- [8] Ministry of National Education, Civic Education, Third Grade Elementary, National Office for School Publications, Algeria, 2017-2018.
- [9] Ministry of National Education, Civic Education, Fourth grade, National Office for School Publications, Algeria, 2017-2018.
- [10] Ministry of National Education, Civic Education, Fifth Grade Elementary, National Office for School Publications, Algeria, 2019-2020.