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The Effect of Community Engagement Activities on Students' Awareness of Veterans

Ayten Canaslan¹, Azmi Sönmez², Yarkın Özkütük³

¹Ministry of National Education, Türkiye, ²Student, Hacettepe University, Department of Industrial Engineering, Türkiye

acanaslan@hotmail.com, azmi37@gmail.com, yrkn03@gmail.com

Abstract. This study aims to determine the effect of community engagement activities on students' awareness of veterans. A phenomenological design, one of the qualitative research methods, was utilized in the study. Data was obtained through a semi-structured interview form, which was administered to the study group before and after the community engagement activities. The participants included a total of forty secondary school students, comprised of twenty males and twenty females, studying in the center of Ankara, Türkiye. The study examined students' perceptions of the concept of veterans, the opportunities provided to veterans by the state, and the adequacy of these opportunities. Additionally, students' perceptions regarding the initial intervention and treatment process for veterans after injury, society's perspective on veterans, and veterans' views on their experiences during the adaptation process to life and society were also explored. Furthermore, the knowledge levels of society about activities aimed at increasing awareness of veterans and their experiences, as well as perceptions of what can be done to aid veterans' adaptation to life and society, were examined and compared separately before and after the community engagement activities. Overall, the findings indicated that community engagement activities positively impacted students' awareness levels regarding veterans, with a notable increase in awareness linked to veterans' experiences during their adaptation to life and society.

Keywords. Veteran, Community Engagement Activities, Student

1. Problem Statement

Gazi is a word of Arabic origin defined as '(in Islam) someone who fought or battled against the enemy', 'an honorary title given to commanders or cities that defeated the enemy by demonstrating extraordinary usefulness', and 'someone who returned victorious' (TDK, 2018). In Turkish societies, the concept of 'gazi' has become synonymous with 'Alplik' before Islam and 'Veteran' after Islam (Köleoğlu, 2009). In Türkiye, the term 'veteran' is not only used as a title for those who are 'experienced soldiers, who participated in the war and returned alive' as in the West, but is also associated with historical, cultural, and religious concepts such as 'alplik', 'jihad', 'gaza', 'hero', 'patriot', and 'fighting for the sake of religion and homeland' (Hatun, 2018).

The role of the veteran in Turkish culture has always held significant importance. The fact that the esteemed leader Atatürk, from the moment he was bestowed the title of 'veteran'

by the Turkish Grand National Assembly following the victory at Sakarya in 1921 until he was granted the surname 'Atatürk' in 1934, exclusively used 'veteran' among his titles and signed his name with this designation is regarded as evidence that this title represents a cultural value, an inheritance passed down from our ancestors, and signifies continuity (Hoşoğlu, 2005). Veterans also perceive their status as a cultural value, the highest honor after martyrdom, a religious and national legacy from their forebears, and a commitment to the state and the nation (Yılmaz, 2004).

If we consider the studies and legal arrangements made by the state for veterans, since 2002, September 19 has been celebrated as 'Veterans Day'. In 2006, the Provincial Administration, followed by the Department of Martyrs' Relatives and Veterans, which has been operating under the Ministry of Family and Social Services since 2011, became the public institution responsible for veterans in Türkiye. Within the Turkish Armed Forces, there are the Martyrs/Veterans Processing Branch Directorate of the General Staff, as well as Martyrs/Veterans Processing Branch/Sections within the Force Commands and Gendarmerie General Command. Additionally, several non-governmental organizations, such as the 'Turkish War Disabled Veterans, Martyrs' Widows and Orphans' Association', 'Turkish Combat Veterans' Association', 'Turkish Armed Forces Mehmetçik Foundation', 'Turkish Armed Forces Solidarity Foundation', and 'Army Assistance Institution', also engage in activities for veterans (Köleoğlu, 2009). Alongside these institutions and organizations working for veterans, the state has granted certain rights to veterans. Within the framework of social policy, there are legal regulations concerning health, education, employment, salaries, tax reductions/exemptions, treatments and facilities for covering health expenses, as well as other social rights such as interest-free housing loans, access to social facilities, free entry to museums and archaeological sites, and rights extended to veterans' relatives (Karabulut, 2017).

Despite being acknowledged as a valuable part of Turkish society and the opportunities afforded by the state, the lives of veterans are never the same (Nurdoğan & Öztürk, 2018). Veterans face psychological disorders and emotions such as behavioral issues, depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, substance abuse, alcohol dependency, short-term memory loss, sleep disturbances, emotional dysregulation, suicidal thoughts, bipolar disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder, paranoid ideation, psychotic symptoms, irritability, introversion, aggression, pessimism, and feelings of helplessness (Ashrafioun et al, 2016; Britton et al., 2012; Foa, Hembree & Rothbaum, 2007; Frayne et al., 2008; Frayne et al., 2014; Hoşoğlu, 2005; Hougsnæs, Bøe, Dahl & Reichelt, 2016; Ilgen et al., 2010; Jacupcak et al, 2011; Kulka et al., 1990; Nelson Goff, Crow, Reisbig & Hamilton, 2007; Pietrzak et al., 2010; Price, Monson, Callahan & Rodriguez, 2006; Seal et al., 2011; Wisco et al., 2016; Yeşilkanat, 1999). Some veterans with physical and psychological health issues postpone seeking treatment because they perceive it as a sign of weakness. Particularly those with behavioral issues are hesitant to reveal their health concerns (Murphy & Fairbank, 2013).

In addition to the losses of organ function and the psychological issues stemming from trauma, veterans also face challenges in adjusting to social life (Adler, Huffman, Bliese & Castro, 2005; Shephard, 2000). They encounter various adaptation difficulties, such as being unable to engage in psychosocial activities and lacking social approval, which leads to a loss of hope in themselves and the future, resulting in pessimism and unhappiness. Veterans without strong coping mechanisms and support systems often resort to negative coping strategies, such as anger and self-isolation; consequently, they struggle to overcome adaptation challenges and become alienated from both them and society (Hatun, 2018). The issues veterans face in

occupational, family, and social domains vary based on the severity of their disabilities. Those with significant functional loss experience greater difficulties (Hoşoğlu, 2005).

In addition to the segments of society that respect and value veterans, there are also those that exhibit negative behavior towards them. According to a study conducted by Yılmaz (2004), society does not attach great importance to the concept of veteranism and fails to show the necessary interest and respect for veterans; efforts to assist disabled veterans remain limited to individual support and are not embraced by the general public. Furthermore, society perceives veterans as helpless individuals, neglects them, and its view extends beyond mere pity. With the erosion of traditional societal values, respect and sensitivity towards veterans have diminished. The people around them do not make sufficient efforts to help reintegrate veterans into society. Approximately 12% of disabled veterans believe that society respects them adequately. This research indicates that the most significant challenges faced by disabled veterans include being forgotten, excluded, undervalued, ignored, disrespected, despised, and misunderstood by society. The support of veterans during their adaptation to social life has a positive impact on them (Blow et al., 2012; Hooyer, 2015; Laffaye, Cavella, Drescher & Rosen, 2008). Research also highlights the importance of the support provided. As government assistance, connections with other disabled veterans, family support, friendship, social support from a significant person in their lives, and professional psychological help increase, the quality of life for veterans improves, enabling them to accept their circumstances, gain independence, organize their lives, and socialize by engaging with society (Başçılar, 2017; Hatun, 2018).

As observed, veterans face numerous physical, psychological, and environmental challenges after their service, and the support from the state, society, and those around them play a crucial role in this process. Therefore, it is essential for society, particularly students as carriers and transmitters of cultural values, to maintain a high level of awareness regarding veterans as a social asset and the experiences they endure afterward. There are various in-class and extracurricular methods to enhance students' awareness on this topic. In the classroom, valuable insights can be gained through teachers' sharing and the curriculum, alongside extracurricular activities. According to the principles and procedures outlined in the Regulation on Social Activities of Educational Institutions by the Ministry of National Education, published in the Official Gazette on 12/9/2019 and numbered 30886 (MEB, 2019), social service activities aimed at fostering national, spiritual, moral, humanitarian, and cultural values across scientific, social, cultural, artistic, and sports domains will be included. From this perspective, it is believed that students' awareness of veterans can be heightened through community engagement activities, thereby allowing them to acquire national, spiritual, humanitarian, and cultural values. Furthermore, upon reviewing existing studies, no research was found that measured the impact of community engagement activities on students' awareness of veterans. This study aims to contribute to the field by investigating the effect of community engagement activities on students' awareness of veterans.

2. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to determine the impact of community engagement activities on students' awareness of veterans. In line with this objective, answers to the following questions will be sought:

1. How do students perceive the concept of veterans before and after the community engagement activities?
2. How do students view the opportunities provided by the state before and after the community engagement activities?

3. What is the students' perception of the adequacy of the opportunities provided by the state before and after the community engagement activities?
4. How do students perceive the initial intervention and treatment process for veterans after injury before and after the community engagement activities?
5. What are the students' perceptions of society's view of veterans before and after the community engagement activities?
6. What are the perceptions of students regarding the challenges veterans face in adapting to life and society after military service, before and after the community engagement activities?
7. Before and after the community engagement activities, what is the level of knowledge among students about studies aimed at raising societal awareness of veterans and their experiences?
8. What are the perceptions of students regarding the adequacy of studies conducted to enhance societal awareness of veterans and their experiences before and after the community engagement activities?
9. What are the perceptions of students about potential actions that can be taken to assist veterans in their adaptation to life and society as individuals, communities, and the state, before and after the community engagement activities?

3. Method

This section of the study includes research design, participants, data collection tool, data collection and analysis.

3.1. Research Design

The qualitative research method was employed in this study to assess the impact of social studies on students' awareness levels regarding veterans. The study utilized a phenomenological design, which leverages the experiences of a small number of participants to explore the issue in depth (Merriam, 2013). In this research, phenomenological design was chosen to thoroughly investigate students' awareness levels towards veterans and the influence of social studies on these levels. Consequently, this study is classified as descriptive research of the screening type, aimed at determining and analyzing the current situation.

3.2. Participants

In the study, the opinions of students attending secondary education institutions in Ankara province, Türkiye, were consulted. The criterion sampling method, a type of purposeful sampling, was employed to form the study group. According to Yıldırım and Şimşek (2006), the criterion sampling method involves including individuals who meet one or more predetermined criteria. The criterion considered for determining the study group in this research was the presence of students who volunteered to participate in community engagement activities for veterans.

As shown in Table 1, the study group consisted of twenty male and twenty female students. Seven participants were in the ninth grade, thirteen in the tenth grade, twelve in the eleventh grade, and eight in the twelfth grade. Additionally, four participants were fourteen years old, fifteen were fifteen, twelve were sixteen, seven were seventeen, and two were eighteen years old. Care was taken to ensure that the participants in the study group had diverse characteristics, and participant multiplexing was utilized.

Table 1: Demographic information of the participants

Variables		n	%
Gender	Female	20	50
	Male	20	50
Class level	9 th grade	7	17.5
	10 th grade	13	32.5
	11 th grade	12	30
	12 th grade	8	20
Age	14	4	10
	15	15	37.5
	16	12	30
	17	7	17.5
	18	2	5

3.3. Data Collection Tool and Data Collection

The data were collected using a semi-structured interview form. This form was presented to experts in the field of educational administration prior to its application and was finalized based on their suggestions. Expert review is a strategy employed in qualitative studies to ensure internal validity (Merriam, 2013).

In the interview form, participants were asked about ‘students’ perceptions of the concept of veteran’ within the scope of the study's purpose; ‘students’ perceptions regarding the concept of veteran’; ‘their views on the opportunities provided to veterans by the state and the adequacy of these opportunities’; ‘their thoughts on the initial intervention and treatment process for veterans after injury’; ‘their perceptions of society's perspective on veterans’; ‘their insights into what veterans experience during their adaptation to life and society after military service’; ‘their level of knowledge about initiatives aimed at raising societal awareness of veterans and their experiences, as well as their perceived adequacy’; ‘their views on what can be done to assist veterans in adapting to life and society as individuals, communities, and the state’; and demographic characteristics were also collected.

The interview form was administered twice to the same participants, both before and after the community engagement activities. In both interview sessions, the questions from the interview form were posed, and the interviews were recorded through note-taking. During the interview process, care was taken to maintain neutrality and avoid facial expressions that could influence the participants. Coding was implemented to ensure the confidentiality of the identity information of the students whose opinions were solicited in the research. Accordingly, female students were assigned the abbreviation [F], male students were assigned [M], and each participant was given a unique number.

To assess the impact of community engagement activities on students' awareness of veterans, a slogan contest was held, resulting in the slogan ‘Loyalty to Veterans is Service to the Homeland’ taking first place. Three distinct activities were organized around this slogan. The first event, conducted after obtaining the necessary permissions, involved visiting veterans undergoing long-term treatment at Gülhane Training and Research Hospital following their initial intervention. The second event was a visit to veterans at the Bilkent Physical Therapy and Rehabilitation Center, where those with neurological, orthopedic, and rheumatological conditions that cause disability receive treatment after their care at Gülhane. During both visits,

students had the chance to converse with the veterans and learn about their experiences. The final activity involved inviting veterans to the school, where a ceremony took place with all participants present. The veterans were welcomed, a short theater performance themed around soldier farewells was presented, a poem written by the father of one of the students was recited, and videos featuring the students' siblings expressing their feelings towards the veterans were shown. Following this, veterans were invited to the stage, creating a discussion environment that included their thoughts on veterans, their experiences during treatment, the support provided by the state, societal attitudes towards them, and their expectations from society. Throughout this process, students were encouraged to ask questions they were curious about.

3.4. Data Analysis

The data collected in this study were analyzed using the phenomenological analysis method. Phenomenology is an approach that has primarily developed within existential psychology and seeks to understand how individuals perceive the events occurring around them (Özdemir, 2010). To achieve this, the data in this study underwent content analysis. Content analysis is a technique commonly employed in the social sciences (Büyüköztürk, 2011) and is used to group similar data within the framework of specific concepts and themes, organizing and interpreting them in a manner that is comprehensible to the reader (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2006).

After identifying the raw data, commonalities were found in the responses provided, and codes were generated. Based on these codes, themes and sub-themes were established. Subsequently, the frequency of the data within the identified themes and sub-themes was recorded. The themes, sub-themes, and frequencies obtained were interpreted descriptively, and examples from the participants were presented. The categories derived from the study were assessed by field experts outside of the research team to enhance validity.

4. Findings

As a result of the content analysis, the effect of community engagement activities on students' perceptions of veterans was analyzed by dividing them into themes. These themes were named as 'before and after the community engagement activities.'

4.1. Findings on students' perceptions of veterans before and after the community engagement activities.

Students' perceptions of the concept of veteran before and after the community engagement activities are given in Table 2.

Table 2: Students' perceptions of the concept of veteran before and after the community engagement activities.

Theme	Subthemes	Before community engagement activities <i>f</i>	After community engagement activities <i>f</i>
For the sake of his homeland and nation	The person who gave up his/her life/hero	22	15
	A person who was injured/lost a limb	4	14
	The person who devoted himself/ herself to the defense of the homeland/protector	2	6
	The person who gave up his/her psychology	1	9

The one who fought, the true owners of the homeland	-	1
The living martyr	-	2
The person who gave up his/her own welfare	-	2
The one who fought, the most valuable stories of society	1	-

The students' perceptions of the concept of veteran before and after the community engagement activities were categorized under a single theme: for the sake of their homeland and nation. This theme was explored through eight sub-themes: the person who sacrificed his life/hero, the person who was injured/lost a limb, the person who dedicated himself to self-defense/protector, the person who compromised his mental well-being, the true owners of the fighting homeland, the person who prioritized others over his own welfare, the person who fought, and the most valuable stories of society.

According to the findings, students' perceptions of the concept of veteran were articulated thirty times before the community engagement activities and forty-nine times afterward. It is noted that participants referred to veterans as 'the person who sacrificed his life for the sake of his homeland and nation, hero' both before and after the community engagement activities.

Another finding revealed that the terms warriors, true owners of the homeland, living martyrs, and the person who prioritized others over his own welfare were mentioned after the community engagement activities. Additionally, while the phrase "the most valuable stories of society" was noted before the community engagement activities, it was absent afterward. Some participant expressions are as follows:

".... It refers to a person who sacrificed his welfare and comfort for his homeland and devoted himself entirely to its defense...." (M18).

".... For me, the concept of veteran is the title given to the true guardians of this homeland who risk their lives for its sake and fear nothing..." (F8).

"...It is when patriotic individuals who continue their professions to give their lives for their homeland without hesitating for a moment are injured or lose a limb due to conflict or similar circumstances..." (F20).

4.2. Findings on the opportunities provided by the state to veterans before and after the community engagement activities according to student perceptions.

Students' perceptions of the opportunities provided by the state to veterans before and after the community engagement activities are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Students' perceptions of the opportunities provided to veterans by the state before and after the community engagement activities.

Themes		Subthemes	Before community engagement activities <i>f</i>	After community engagement activities <i>f</i>
Facilities	Financial support and priority in public	Salary	6	6
		Free public transportation	3	14
		Priority in public institutions	2	2
		Employment	-	1

	Accommodation	-	1
Treatment Support	In hospital	-	6
	In rehabilitation center	2	9

Students' perceptions of the opportunities provided by the state to veterans before and after the community engagement activities were categorized into two themes: financial support/public priority and treatment support. Within the theme of financial support/public priority, the opportunities offered by the state were analyzed through five sub-themes: salary, free public transportation, priority in public institutions, job opportunities, and accommodation. In the treatment support theme, the state's opportunities were examined in two sub-themes: hospital and rehabilitation center.

According to the findings, the opportunities provided to veterans by the state were mentioned eleven times before the community engagement activities under financial support/public priority and twenty-four times afterward. Regarding treatment support, it was referenced twice before and fifteen times after the community engagement activities. While the most frequently mentioned opportunities were salary and wages prior to the community engagement activities, afterward, they included free public transportation, treatment in rehabilitation centers, salary, and treatment in hospitals. The opportunities most frequently cited by participants were particularly evident in the financial support/public priority theme.

Another finding indicated that the opportunities provided to veterans by the state were mentioned three times before the community engagement activities and thirty-nine times afterward. In addition to the increase in mentions of free public transportation and treatment in rehabilitation centers following the community engagement activities, job opportunities and treatment in hospitals were also noted. Some participant statements are as follows:

"...I know they offer free transportation and treatment. I believe these are good opportunities, but it would be better if veterans had someone to care for them..." (F17).

"...I understand that veterans receive a salary from the state and get financial assistance. However, these opportunities are inadequate given the work they have done and the dedication they have shown..." (M14).

"...I know they have priority access to public services like transportation and hospitals. I think the facilities are adequate, but some citizens lack the necessary sensitivity..." (M19).

4.3. Findings on the adequacy of the opportunities provided by the state to veterans before and after the community engagement activities according to student perceptions.

Students' perceptions of the adequacy of the opportunities provided by the state to veterans before and after the community engagement activities are presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Students' perceptions of the adequacy of the opportunities provided to veterans by the state before and after the community engagement activities.

Sufficiency status	Themes	Before community engagement activities	After community engagement activities
		<i>f</i>	<i>f</i>
	Sufficient	2	15
	Insufficient	16	13

Don't know

20

2

When the students' perceptions of the adequacy of the opportunities provided to veterans by the state before and after the community engagement activities were examined, the term adequate was mentioned twice before the community engagement activities, while it appeared fifteen times afterward. Additionally, the term inadequate was mentioned sixteen times prior to the community engagement activities, but only thirteen times afterward. Some participant statements are as follows:

"...It is enough, but we do not go and visit them, we do not value them enough, and even if we do, we are not enough to show it..." (M01).

"...Financial support for veterans is sufficient. However, moral support and opportunities are not enough..." (F04).

"...I think the opportunities provided by the state for our veterans are very few and insufficient. After all, our veterans have sacrificed their lives for us. We can never repay our debt to them, but we can show our gratitude with nice privileges and opportunities. I think the opportunities given to them now are insufficient..." (F15).

4.4. Findings on the first intervention and treatment process of veterans after injury before and after the community engagement activities according to student perceptions.

Students' perceptions of the first intervention and treatment process of veterans after injury before and after the community engagement activities are presented in Table 5.

Table 5: Students' perceptions of the first intervention and treatment process of veterans after injury before and after the community engagement activities.

Themes	Subthemes	Before community engagement activities <i>f</i>	After community engagement activities <i>f</i>	
First aid	By oneself or a friend	-	23	
	By paramedics	11	-	
Treatment	Helicopter transport	1	4	
	Subsequent process	Hospital treatment	7	9
		A painful treatment process	2	2
	Treatment in a rehabilitation center	2	9	

Students' perceptions of the initial intervention and treatment process for veterans before and after the community engagement activities were categorized into two themes: first aid and subsequent processes. In the first aid theme, treatment immediately following the injury was explored through two sub-themes: by themselves or their friends and by paramedics. In the subsequent process theme, treatment after the injury was analyzed through four sub-themes: helicopter transport, hospital treatment, rehabilitation center treatment, and a painful treatment process.

According to the findings, the initial intervention and treatment process for veterans after injury was referenced eleven times before the community engagement activities and twenty-three times afterward, with twelve mentions before and twenty-four after the activities. The first intervention most frequently cited by participants was the first aid administered by paramedics prior to the community engagement activities, while the first aid provided by

themselves or their companions was noted after the activities. Another finding indicated that the intervention and treatment process for veterans after injury was mentioned twenty-three times before the community engagement activities and forty-seven times afterward. Additionally, after the community engagement activities, references to helicopter transport, hospital treatment, and rehabilitation center treatment became more prevalent. Some participant statements are as follows:

"...The initial intervention is carried out by the refugees themselves, as they find themselves in conflict and war zones. In the subsequent process, they receive both mental and physical treatments..." (F16).

"...Once the doctor administers first aid, they are transported to hospitals equipped with the necessary resources based on their condition..." (F02).

"...As they are trained in first aid, either their peers or they themselves intervene. The treatment occurs at the rehabilitation center..." (M03).

4.5. According to the students' perceptions, the perceptions of society towards veterans before and after the community engagement activities.

The students' perceptions of society's view of veterans before and after the community engagement activities are presented in Table 6.

Table 6: Students' perceptions of society's perspective on veterans before and after the community engagement activities.

Themes		Subthemes	Before community engagement activities <i>f</i>	After community engagement activities <i>f</i>
Society's point of view	Positive view	Conscious and sensitive approach	1	4
		Feeling of gratitude and love	7	8
		Feeling proud	6	1
		Valuing	4	3
		Seeing as a hero	3	1
		Respecting	7	10
		Exhibiting the behavior of protecting veterans	2	1
		Feeling indebted	-	1
	Negative view	Disrespectful behavior	-	9
		Pity	2	2
		Rude behavior	-	3
		Violence	-	1
		Contempt / Disdain	-	5
		Ignoring / Not caring	6	7
	Insincere behavior	-	2	
	Unconscious approach	-	5	

Students' perceptions of society's view of veterans before and after the community engagement activities were categorized into two themes: positive and negative. In the positive view theme, society's perspective on veterans was explored through eight sub-themes: conscious and sensitive approach, feelings of gratitude and love, pride, valuing, seeing as a hero, respect, exhibiting protective behavior towards veterans, and feeling indebted. In the negative view theme, society's perspective on veterans was analyzed through eight sub-themes:

disrespectful behavior, pity, rudeness, violence, contempt, disregard, insincerity, and an unconscious approach.

According to the findings, society's view of veterans was expressed positively thirty times before the community engagement activities and twenty-nine times afterward, while negative expressions occurred eight times before and thirty-four times after the activities. It is evident that the themes most frequently articulated by participants were in the positive view category before the community engagement activities but shifted to the negative view category afterward. Another finding revealed that society's perspective on veterans was mentioned thirty-eight times before the community engagement activities and sixty-three times afterward. Additionally, following the community engagement activities, expressions of disrespectful behavior, rudeness, violence, contempt, insincerity, and unconscious approaches were included, apart from expressions of pity and indifference. Some participant statements are as follows:

"Society loves veterans and looks at them with pitying eyes, but veterans don't like it. And some people in our society are rude and sometimes even violent to veterans who ride public transportation for free. I think this is very wrong behavior because veterans put their lives on the line for our safety and well-being, but we consider a bus fare too much for them" (F05).

"I learned that some people are not respectful towards veterans and some people are very respectful" (M17).

"They value and respect them, but some people despise them" (F11).

4.6. According to the perceptions of the students, the findings related to the veterans' experiences in the process of adaptation to life and society after veteranship before and after the community engagement activities.

The perceptions of the students about the veterans' experiences in the process of adaptation to life and society after veteranship before and after the community engagement activities are given in Table 7.

Table 7: Students' perceptions of veterans' experiences in the process of adaptation to life and society after veteranship before and after the community engagement activities.

		Before community engagement activities	After community engagement activities		
Themes	Subthemes	<i>f</i>	<i>f</i>		
Experiences in the process of adaptation to society	Physical				
		Difficulty caused by disability	-	8	
		Psychological attrition	5	5	
		Being proud of oneself	5	5	
	Psychological		Inability to accept the disability	-	17
			Getting used to it over time	-	7
			Timidity	-	1
			Unhappiness	-	1
		Sense of loneliness	-	1	
Environment	Disrespectful attitudes of people	-	3		

Students' perceptions of the adaptation process of veterans to life and society, both before and after community engagement activities, were categorized into three themes: physical, psychological, and environmental. In the physical theme, the challenges posed by disabilities experienced by veterans during the adaptation process were examined in one sub-

theme. The psychological theme was explored through seven sub-themes: psychological wear and tear experienced by veterans, self-pride, difficulty in accepting/ignoring the disability, gradual adaptation over time, timidity, unhappiness, and feelings of loneliness. Lastly, the environmental theme addressed the disrespectful attitudes of others in one sub-theme.

According to the findings, while the physical experiences of veterans in the adaptation process were not mentioned prior to the community engagement activities, they were referenced eight times afterward. Psychological experiences were noted ten times before the community engagement activities and thirty-seven times afterward. Although environmental experiences were not mentioned before the community engagement activities, they were cited three times afterward. It is evident that the theme most frequently highlighted by participants is the psychological theme, both before and after the community engagement activities. The most commonly mentioned expressions included difficulty in accepting/understanding the disability, challenges posed by the disability, and gradual adaptation over time.

According to another finding, while the experiences of veterans in adapting to life and society after veteranhood were mentioned ten times before the community engagement activities, they were referenced forty-eight times afterward. Additionally, prior to the community engagement activities, only psychological wear and self-pride were noted, whereas after the activities, expressions of inability to accept or familiarize with the disability, gradual adaptation, timidity, unhappiness, and loneliness were included. Furthermore, two distinct themes emerged based on expressions of disrespectful attitudes and the challenges posed by disability. Some participant statements are as follows:

"...Initially, they perceive their situation as unusual, but they eventually adjust to it, even if it proves challenging..." (M08).

"...Despite facing some difficulties, the honor and pride of being a veteran sustain their resolve and keep them standing..." (F10).

4.7. Findings on the students' level of knowledge about the studies conducted to increase the level of awareness of the society about veterans and their experiences before and after the community engagement activities.

The students' understanding of the studies aimed at raising societal awareness about veterans and their experiences before and after community engagement activities is presented in Table 8.

Table 8: Students' level of knowledge about the activities carried out to increase the level of awareness of the society about veterans and their experiences before and after the community engagement activities.

Activities Conducted	Themes	Subthemes	Before community engagement activities	After community engagement activities
			<i>f</i>	<i>f</i>
	Official ceremonies	Veterans Day	1	4
		Social responsibility projects	-	1
	Social Activities	Activities in schools/ Veteran visits	6	11
		Research	-	1

Aid campaigns	1	1
Conferences	1	1

The students' knowledge level regarding the activities aimed at raising societal awareness about veterans and their experiences before and after community engagement activities was assessed across two themes: official ceremonies and social activities. The theme of official ceremonies was explored through one sub-theme, Veterans Day, while the theme of community work was analyzed through five sub-themes: social responsibility projects, school activities/veteran visits, research, aid campaigns, and conferences.

According to the findings, the level of societal knowledge about the activities designed to enhance awareness of veterans and their experiences was noted once before the community engagement activities in the context of official ceremonies and four times afterward. In terms of social activities, it was mentioned eight times prior to the community engagement activities and fifteen times following them. The most frequently cited activities by participants were the visits to veterans in schools, both before and after the community engagement activities.

Another finding revealed that participants referenced official ceremonies and social activities aimed at increasing societal awareness of veterans and their experiences nine times before the community engagement activities and nineteen times afterward. Furthermore, Veterans Day and school visits to veterans were mentioned more frequently after the community engagement activities, while social responsibility projects and research were noted for the first time. Some participant statements are as follows:

“The most significant example for me is the event organized by our school. I discovered things I hadn't known about veterans. I believe all schools should host such activities because if we learn when we are young, we can pass that knowledge on to the next generation...” (F03).

“...Ceremonies take place on Veterans Day...” (M13).

4.8. Findings on the adequacy of the studies conducted to increase the level of awareness of the society about veterans and their experiences before and after the community engagement activities according to student perceptions.

Students' perceptions of the adequacy of the studies conducted to increase the level of awareness of the society about veterans and their experiences before and after the community engagement activities are presented in Table 9.

Table 9: Students' perceptions of the adequacy of the studies conducted to increase the level of awareness of the society about veterans and their experiences before and after the community engagement activities.

Themes	Before community engagement activities	After community engagement activities
	<i>f</i>	<i>f</i>
Sufficiency status	Sufficient	2
	Insufficient	29
	Don't know	10

When examining the students' perceptions of the adequacy of studies aimed at raising societal awareness about veterans and their experiences before and after community

engagement activities, it is noted that the term "adequate" was mentioned once prior to the activities and twice afterward. Furthermore, regarding their perceptions of the inadequacy of these studies, the term "inadequate" was cited twenty-two times before the activities and twenty-nine times afterward. Another finding revealed that participants frequently used the term "inadequate" both before and after the community engagement activities. Some participant comments include:

“.... *There is no study I know of, and my lack of knowledge highlights the inadequacy of the studies...*” (F01).

4.9. Findings on what can be done in the process of adaptation of veterans to life and society as individuals/society/state before and after the community engagement activities according to student perceptions.

Students' perceptions of what can be done in the adaptation process of veterans to life and society as individuals/society/state before and after community engagement activities are presented in Table 10.

Students' perceptions regarding the adaptation of veterans to life and society as individuals/society/state before and after community engagement activities were examined across three themes: community engagement, psychological support, and financial support. In the community service theme, nine sub-themes were identified: public awareness-raising activities, social activities, education in schools, public service announcements, veteran visits, seminars/conferences, organizing trips, making newspaper news, and creating special areas for veterans. The studies related to the psychological support theme were explored through nine sub-themes, including showing love/respect/valuing, not despising, making them feel like heroes, treating them as normal individuals, acting sincerely, not leaving them alone, providing psychological counseling services, caring for veterans, and offering moral support. The financial support theme was examined through one sub-theme: financial aid.

Table 10: Students' perceptions of what can be done in the process of veterans' adaptation to life and society as individuals/society/state before and after the community engagement activities.

Themes		Subthemes	Before community engagement activities <i>f</i>	After community engagement activities <i>f</i>
Activities that can be done	Community engagement	Public awareness raising activities	8	14
		Social activities	4	2
		Training in schools	-	2
		Public service announcement	-	1
		Veteran visits	3	10
		Seminar/Conference	6	4
		Organize excursions	-	2
		Making newspaper news	-	1
		Opening special spaces for veterans	-	1
Psychological support		Showing love and respect, Valuing	6	9
		Non-contempt	3	3

	Making the veteran feel like a hero	-	1
	Approach as a normal individual	-	5
	Behaving sincerely	-	1
	Do not leave alone	2	1
	Providing psychological counseling services	1	4
	Caring for veterans	-	1
	Moral support	7	1
Financial support	Financial assistance	5	-

According to the findings, in the theme of community engagement as a means of aiding veterans' adaptation to life and society, both as individuals and as part of the community and state, it was referenced twenty-one times before community engagement activities and thirty-seven times afterward. In the theme of psychological support, it was noted nineteen times prior to the community engagement activities and twenty-six times following them. Lastly, while the theme of financial support was mentioned five times before the community engagement activities, it was entirely absent afterward.

Another finding revealed that the activities facilitating veterans' adaptation to life and society, both as individuals and as part of the community and state, included the expressions of community engagement, psychological support, and financial support, which were mentioned forty-five times before the community engagement activities and sixty-three times afterward. Additionally, expressions such as providing education in schools, public recognition, organizing trips, generating newspaper coverage, creating special areas for veterans, making them feel like heroes, treating them as ordinary individuals, acting sincerely, and caring for veterans, which were not mentioned before the community engagement activities, were referenced for the first time afterward. Some participant statements are as follows:

"... They can be given moral support; we can meet with them and chat with them and help with their psychological and physical processes. We can also work to raise public awareness... (F07).

"...They should be treated with more respect; we should approach them with respect and love by thinking and remembering what they have done for us... (M09).

"...They should be treated the same way we treat normal people. We should visit them often..." (M12).

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The aim of this study is to determine students' awareness levels regarding veterans and the impact of community engagement activities on these levels. To achieve this, students' perceptions of the concept of veterans, the opportunities provided to veterans by the state and the adequacy of these opportunities, the initial intervention and treatment process for veterans after injury, society's perspective on veterans, veterans' perceptions during their adaptation to life and society post-service, their knowledge of initiatives aimed at raising societal awareness about veterans and their experiences, and the perceptions of what can be done by individuals, society, and the state to support veterans' lives and their reintegration into society were examined separately before and after the community engagement activities. Overall, the findings indicated that community engagement activities positively influenced students' awareness levels regarding veterans, leading to an increase in their understanding.

Before and after the community engagement activities, students primarily defined the concept of a veteran as someone who sacrificed his/her life for the sake of his/her homeland and nation, viewing them as heroes. In addition to these descriptions, terms such as individuals who suffered injuries, those who dedicated themselves to defense, protectors, individuals who sacrificed their mental well-being, the true owners of the homeland, those who prioritized the welfare of others, and the most valuable narratives of society were included. The results indicate that following the community engagement activities, students' perceptions of the concept of a veteran expanded, incorporating phrases such as individuals who fought for their homeland and nation, the true owners of the homeland, living martyrs, and those who sacrificed their own welfare.

Students' awareness of both financial support and priorities in the public sector, as well as the treatment support provided to veterans by the state, increased following the community engagement activities. Compared to before these activities, their knowledge of free public transportation and treatment at the rehabilitation center improved, along with their awareness of job opportunities, accommodation, and the treatment process in hospitals. There was also a shift in their perception of the adequacy of the facilities provided. Prior to the community engagement activities, half of the participants expressed no opinion on this issue, whereas almost all participants shared their views after the activities. Additionally, there was a notable increase in the number of students who deemed the facilities sufficient. This indicates that students are now more informed about the opportunities offered by the state; in other words, their awareness has grown.

After the community engagement activities, students' understanding of the initial intervention and subsequent treatment process for veterans following injury improved. While students indicated that first aid was administered by paramedics before the activities, they reported that they or their friends provided first aid afterward. This change demonstrates that students have gained knowledge about how first aid is administered post-engagement. Furthermore, in comparison to the period before the community engagement activities, it was observed that students began using terms like helicopter transport, hospital treatment, and rehabilitation center treatment more frequently after the activities. This illustrates that students' awareness of the treatment process following first aid has increased.

According to the students, society holds both positive and negative views on veterans. The results indicate that prior to the community engagement activities, students perceived society's perspective on veterans as predominantly positive. However, following these activities, they reported a significant shift towards a more negative view. This suggests a change in students' awareness of societal attitudes towards veterans. Notably, some students believe that society respects veterans, while others feel the opposite, asserting that society behaves disrespectfully towards them. Before the community engagement activities, students thought that society approached veterans with awareness and sensitivity, expressing gratitude, love, and respect, feeling proud of them, valuing them, viewing them as heroes, and demonstrating protective behavior. Conversely, students later expressed that society pities veterans and shows a lack of care for them. In addition to their earlier statements, students believe that after the community engagement activities, society displays positive behaviors such as feeling indebted to veterans, while also exhibiting negative behaviors like approaching veterans insensitively, being disrespectful, insincere, and rude, as well as inflicting violence and showing disdain. Yılmaz's (2004) research yielded contradictory findings; it noted that while society respects veterans, there are also significant indications of disrespect. Similar themes of pity and indifference towards veterans were also observed in this study. These results suggest that while

some members of society are conscious and sensitive towards veterans, others remain insensitive and unaware.

According to student perceptions, veterans face physical, psychological, and environmental challenges during their adaptation to life and society after military service. Initially, students recognized only the psychological struggles veterans encountered in this process before engaging in community activities; however, after these activities, they acknowledged not only psychological issues but also physical and environmental challenges. Before the community engagement activities, students believed that veterans were solely psychologically affected in this transition and felt proud of them. Yet, following the community engagement activities, students reported that, in addition to these psychological conditions, veterans also experienced feelings of inability to accept their disabilities, a gradual adjustment to them, timidity, unhappiness, and loneliness. Furthermore, veterans face physical difficulties stemming from their disabilities and encounter disrespectful attitudes from those around them. When evaluating the overall experiences of veterans during the adaptation process, it becomes evident that the most prevalent issue is the struggle to accept their disabilities and the sense of alienation. These findings indicate that after the community engagement activities, students' awareness of veterans' post-service lives and their adaptation to society significantly increased. Another noteworthy outcome is that the most substantial shift in students' awareness after the community engagement activities pertains to the challenges veterans face in adapting to life and society. Research indicates that veterans, in particular, often experience psychological issues such as trauma, fatigue, anger, self-isolation, and difficulties in societal integration (Hatun, 2018; Hoşoğlu, 2005; Yeşilkanat, 1999). The situations faced by veterans due to their environment are also reflected in the circular signed by Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, the Prime Minister at the time, stating that “...disabled veteran personnel are subjected to different practices in their workplaces, and from time to time, they encounter words, attitudes, and behaviors that undermine the honor of being a veteran, with their health status and physical deficiencies often overlooked when tasks are assigned.” (Republic of Türkiye Prime Ministry, 2005).

Following the community engagement activities, students' awareness of the official ceremonies and social initiatives aimed at raising societal awareness about veterans and their experiences increased. After these activities, students mentioned the activities/veteran visits in schools more frequently, while social responsibility projects and research were referenced for the first time. This outcome indicates that community engagement activities positively impact students' awareness of initiatives designed to enhance societal understanding. Furthermore, students expressed that both before and after the community engagement activities, the adequacy of these studies was lacking, with a notable increase in expressions of inadequacy following the activities.

Students believe that psychological and financial support can be offered alongside community engagement activities to help veterans adapt to life and society as individuals, communities, and states, both before and after these activities. Notably, there is a significant increase in statements regarding raising public awareness, veteran visits, expressing love and respect, valuing veterans, and providing psychological counseling services following the community engagement activities. Furthermore, for the first time after these activities, suggestions included providing education in schools, public service announcements, organizing trips, creating newspaper articles to raise awareness, establishing special areas for veterans, making them feel like heroes, treating them as ordinary individuals, being sincere, and caring for them. Another noteworthy finding is that while financial aid was mentioned before the

community engagement activities, it was not referenced at all afterward. These results indicate that veterans require social work and psychological support more than material assistance. Conversely, these findings suggest that community engagement activities enhance students' awareness of the efforts that can be made to assist veterans in their adaptation to life and society as individuals, communities, and states. The studies by Başçılar (2017) and Hatun (2018) demonstrate the positive impact of state support, the backing of those around them, and professional psychological support on veterans' quality of life, enabling them to accept their circumstances, live independently, and socialize within society. Consequently, community engagement activities have heightened students' awareness of veterans.

6. Recommendations

- This study concluded that community engagement activities effectively enhanced students' awareness of veterans. Following the community service, students' understanding of the concept of a veteran, the opportunities provided to veterans by the state, the initial intervention and treatment processes for veterans after injury, society's perspective on veterans, the experiences of veterans in adapting to life and society post-service, the initiatives aimed at raising societal awareness about veterans and their experiences, and potential actions to support veterans' reintegration into life and society as individuals, communities, and the state all increased. The Ministry of National Education, the Ministry of Family and Social Services, the Ministry of National Defense, and the Higher Education Institution can implement community engagement activities, social projects, research, and training to sustain the conceptual and spiritual dimensions of veteranism within our cultural values, thereby enhancing awareness not only among students but also throughout society regarding veterans. It is essential to ensure that these practices are comprehensive and ongoing.

- As a result of this study, it was observed that community engagement activities in schools effectively raised awareness about veterans. These activities can be utilized more effectively to instill various values within schools.

- In various countries abroad, veterans wear a badge that allows them to be recognized by everyone, leading the public to treat them with special regard due to their service. At airports, subways, shopping malls, and stations, announcements are made to inform others that a veteran is present. An officer is assigned to accompany and assist them, making the veteran feel important and valued. Similar practices could be implemented in Türkiye to enhance the prestige that veterans deserve in society.

- This study examined the effect of community engagement activities on students' perceptions of veterans using a qualitative research design. Future research could explore this topic through different research designs.

- In this study, community engagement activities were organized to bring students and veterans together. Further research could investigate the impact of such activities on veterans.

7. References

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