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## Democratic Attitudes of Social Studies Pre-service Teachers

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**Abstract:** In modern world, it is expected from citizens to access and use information, think critically, respect to human rights and have democratic attitude. In this context, education has an important role. Education promotes democracy in two ways: At first, it enables a culture of democracy and second it leads to a greater prosperity. Individuals learn democratic attitudes and behaviors in their home environment and in schools. In educational systems which are democratic, democracy culture will develop. Because of this, the main aim of this study is to determine the democratic attitudes of social studies student teachers. This research was carried out with survey method. The attitude scale was used to fix democratic attitudes of social studies student teachers. The research group consisted of two hundred social studies student teachers who attended in four public universities in Turkey. The qualitative data of this study was collected through standardized open-ended interview questions. In the results of the study; according to gender, mothers' educational background and fathers' educational background, there was a meaningful difference between democratic attitude levels of social studies student teachers. Besides, the democratic attitude level of mothers and fathers having graduated from high schools was higher than the democratic attitude level of mothers and fathers having graduated from primary school. On the other hand, there wasn't a meaningful difference between any universities according to university variable.

**Keywords:** Democracy, democratic attitudes, social studies pre-service teachers, social studies

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## **Introduction**

Today, the word “democracy” has become one of the most frequently used word in our society. But, as we know democracy cannot be uniquely tied to a particular meaning and it evokes different things to different meanings. It has been called as a way of life (Dewey, 1938), a civic ideal (Crick, 2002), a synonym for equality (Tocqueville, 1835) and others like this. Hobbes, Locke and Kant considered democracy in relation with the concepts of freedom and autonomy. Liberalists like Rawls and Dworkin highlighted respect on fundamental rights (proprietary right, freedom of assembly and freedom of expression) related with the concept of democracy. And in communitarian idea, democracy is seen as participation and responsibility. According to Dewey (1903), “*modern life means democracy; democracy means freeing intelligence for independent effectiveness – the emancipation of mind as an individual organ to do its own work*”. The term “democracy” is generally used related to choice, accountability and the choosing subject (Devine, 2004). Also, democracy means direct ruling through the public or by the public. As Schou (2001) mentioned, democracy can be seen as one of the several answers to the problem of organizing society. In contemporary usage, democracy means a government chosen by people. This administration may be direct or indirect. The origin of democracy comes from Greek words demos (people) and kratein (to rule).

Democracy appeared in ancient Greek at first time. Athens democracy was the most important and famous one among other Greek democracies. It was accepted as the first model of participatory democracy. Today’s modern democracies are based on Athens democracy, also. The effect of democracy disappeared during Middle Age and it became a current issue with Reason Age. In 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century, the concept of modern democracy became popular. American Declaration of Independence and French Declaration of Human Rights are main components of the development of modern democracy.

In modern world, it is expected from citizens to access and use information, think critically, respect to human rights and have democratic attitude. In this context, education has an important role. Education promotes democracy in two ways: At first, it enables the culture of democracy and second it leads to a greater prosperity (Acemoğlu, et.al., 2005). And, education helps people by acquiring them a democratic culture. NGOs conducted some programs about civic education and in countries like Dominican Republic, Poland and South Africa these programs had meaningful effects on individuals’ knowledge, efficacy and support for democratic values. Effects of these programs increased with teaching methods which are more active (Finkel, 2003). Besides, there are relationships between active participation in voluntary organizations and democratic attitudes. According to Tocqueville, democracy in America emerged and developed with great number of Americans participating in numerous voluntary organizations (cited in

Dekker and Halman, 2003). Also, civic education has been considered as a way of learning democracy. For example, in Senegal it was found that both formal and informal education had effects on people's democratic attitudes. (Kuenzi, 2005). These effects of civics education are supported by other researches (Soule, 2000).

We are living in a country which is governed through the rules of the democracy. So, citizens' democratic attitudes are very important for the effectiveness of democratic principles because democracy can survive with people who have adopted democracy and democratic principles in their lives. Family and school have important roles in the development process of democratic attitudes. Although the importance of family in transmission process of democracy and democratic attitudes to new generations, it is seen that families are not competent about this issue (Üstün and Yılmaz, 2008). And, at schools, among the other courses, social studies course plays an important role in the training of citizens having democratic attitudes. Because of this, social studies teachers' attitudes gain more importance in this process. Teachers having positive attitudes about democracy can teach them to their students. For this reason, democratic attitudes of social studies pre-service teachers were investigated in this study. As stated by Doğanay (2009), development and sustainability of democracy have connections with citizenship and especially with characteristics of citizens. So, citizen's attitudes towards democracy are recurred, once again.

Individuals learn democratic attitudes and behaviors in their home environment and in schools. In democratic educational systems, democracy culture will develop (Davies, 1999). And, teachers' attitudes and behaviors about democracy are important in this process (Genç, 2006). Teachers' neurotic tendencies, self-actualization levels and social relationships have effects on democratic attitudes of them (Karahan, et.al, 2006). Students' and teachers' genders and students' families' socio-economic levels are also effective on democratic attitudes. Female students and teachers are more democratic than males (Sağlam, 2000). Pre-school and primary school periods are the most important grades for students to gain democratic attitudes ; therefore, pre-school and primary school teachers are effective. It was determined that the most critical period regarding individual development process in values education is childhood (Yeşil and Aydın, 2007). Student-centered education, democratic classroom management, effective teacher guidance, giving value to different ideas, the ability to awoken a democratic sensitivity and games related with democracy are some examples about democracy in education (Samancı, 2010). Democratic class environment affects learning positively and helps students to achieve democratic attitudes. In spite of the importance of teachers as stated in research of Duman and Koç (2004), in university, students thought that lecturers' democratic attitudes and behaviors were at middle and low levels. Besides, in a study that was done by Tekin et.al. (2009) it was seen that the democratic attitudes of students' teachers differ according to gender and mother and father education levels. Genç and Kalafat (2008) found that gender

and learning styles were effective on democratic attitudes' of student teachers but their grades, departments and mother's and father's educational statuses had no relationship with their democratic attitudes. In another study, Kömleksiz and Kan (2008) found that there was statistically meaningful relationship between student teachers' democratic attitudes and their departments, genders and parents' educational backgrounds. And in another study student teachers were found more democratic than teachers (Saracaloğlu, et.al., 2004).

According to the results of a study which was done by Demir (2003), female primary school students thought that their teachers were democratic but male students thought that female teachers were more democratic than male teachers. Primary school teachers' democratic attitudes differ with respect to their gender, seniority and school which they graduated (Taçman, 2006). Also, in the context of university level, female students were found more democratic than male students (Yanardağ, 2000; Büyükkaragöz, 1995). Besides, in primary school level, female students understand concepts related with democracy better than male students and their parents' educational backgrounds are also important (Kaldırım, 2005).

### **Problem Statement**

The primary aim of this study was to determine the democratic attitudes of social studies pre-service teachers.

### **Sub-Problems**

The main aim of this study is to determine the democratic attitudes of social studies student teachers. In the context of this aim, the following questions were asked:

1. Is there a difference between democratic attitudes scores and gender of social studies student teacher?
2. Is there a difference between democratic attitudes scores and university social studies student teacher?
3. Is there a difference between democratic attitudes scores and parents' educational backgrounds of social studies student teacher?
4. What are the social studies student teachers' opinions about democracy?

## **Method**

### **Data Collection**

This research was carried out with a survey method. The attitude scale was used to fix democratic attitudes of social studies student teachers. The research group consisted of two hundred social studies student teachers who attended in four public universities in Turkey. Personal data form and democratic attitude scale were used to collect data. Positive and negative fifty proposition in likert-type scale used point out the teachers' democratic attitudes. This attitude scale has questions on the democratic attitudes of teachers holding different educational degrees. The scale was developed by "Published for the Attitude Laboratory" and adapted to Turkish educational system by Gözütok (1995). This scale which is entitled as "Teacher Opinion on Democracy" was used in many countries in the world.

The qualitative data of this study were collected through standardized open-ended interview questions (Yıldırım&Şimşek, 2004). The questions were prepared by taking into consideration the aim, problem and sub-problems of the study. Questions in the draft version were investigated according to the congruity with the aim and realization of the same purpose. By the views of the experts, the final draft was prepared. The questions in final draft were prepared about the understanding of social studies student teachers' democratic attitudes.

Because of the aim of this study is to determine the participants' point of views and opinions about research subject, interview was selected as data collection method. Semi-structured interviews were the main tools of data collection. Each participant was interviewed individually at a time and place convenient for them. To compare the responses of participants, same questions were asked to all participants.

### **Research Field**

Two hundred social studies student teachers formed the research field.

### **Sample**

Sampling selection was done through easily accessible sampling method. Due to being cost effective and having the opportunity to study on acquaintance sample group (10 people), this method was chosen.

## Data Analysis

The data were analyzed with statistical techniques. T-test was used to examine if differences between democratic attitudes and sexuality of the student teachers existed. One way ANOVA was used to analyze the other sub-aims data. Data were subjected to the SPSS Programme for the analysis.

The quantitative data were analyzed by establishing codes and themes. The data collected by standardized interview forms are transmitted to computer and its descriptive and content analyzes were done. Each interview was audio-taped and transcribed verbatim. Interview transcripts were analyzed through inductive qualitative data analysis methods. Once all interview transcripts were coded individually line by line with low-level or open codes, categories were created based on the similarities and differences among codes (Patton, 2002). To ensure the credibility of the findings, the data analysis process for every interview, two researchers carried out transcript independently and the results were compared.

## Findings

### Relationships between Democratic Attitude and Gender

**Table 1: t-Test Results about Relationship between Democratic Attitude and Gender**

	N	X	Standard Deviation	T	P
Female	106	39.15	2.45	3.26	.001
Male	94	30.80	2.30		

According to gender variable, there was a meaningful difference between democratic attitude levels of social studies student teachers ( $t=3.26$   $P=0.001<0.05$ ). When we looked at means of democratic attitude levels of male student teachers' was 30.80 while female student teachers' democratic attitude levels means was 39.15.

### Relationships between Democratic Attitude and University

**Table 2: Results about Relationship between Democratic Attitude and University**

	KT	SD	KO	F	P
Intergroup	16.730	4	3.490	0.564	0.537
In-group	3242.002	267	5.023		

According to university variable, there wasn't a meaningful difference between any universities (F=0.564 P=0.537>0.05).

**Relationships between Democratic Attitude and Mother's Educational Background**

**Table 3: Results about Relationship between Democratic Attitude and Mother's Educational Background**

	KT	SD	KO	F	P
Intergroup	34.620	3	20.320	2.768	0.030
In-group	2245.821	268	5.010		

According to variable of mothers' educational background, there was a meaningful difference between democratic attitude levels of social studies student teachers (F=2.768 P=0.030<0.05).

**Table 4: Distribution of Educational Background Groups' that Show the Difference's Source**

	Mother's Educational Background	Difference of Means	P
Primary School	High School	0.8742	0,046
	University	0.5245	0.386
High School	Primary School	-0.8823	0.046
	University	-0.3267	0.604
University	Primary School	-0.5047	0.386
	High School	0.3546	0.046

It was found that, the democratic attitude level of mothers was higher than that of the mothers who were graduated from primary school.

**Relationships between Democratic Attitude and Father’s Background**

**Table 5: Results about Relationship between Democratic Attitude and Father’s Educational Background**

	KT	SD	KO	F	P	
p	Intergrou	182.272	3	85.54	10.438	0.000
	In-group	2043.218	268	5.847		

According to variable of fathers’ educational background, there was a meaningful difference between democratic attitude levels of social studies student teachers (F=10.438 P=0.000<0.05).

**Table 6: Distribution of Educational Background Groups’ that Show the Difference’s Source**

	Father’s Educational Background	Difference of Means	P
Primary School	High School	0.8742	0,012
	University	0.5245	0.000
High School	Primary School	-0.8823	0.012
	University	-0.3267	0.002
University	Primary School	-0.5047	0.000
	High School	0.3546	0.002

It was found that the democratic attitude level of fathers graduated from high schools was higher than that of fathers graduated from primary school.

## **Social Studies Student Teachers' Opinions about Democracy**

Democracy is a life style. A democratic person should use democratic principles in every side of her/his life. When we asked the opinions about democracy of the social studies pre-service teachers, “*freedom, tolerance and equivalence*” are reflected at first. We have seen that, they identify democracy only with governmental procedures. Almost all of them (9 students) mentioned that “*democracy was a governance type that people governed themselves through representatives*”. For example participant with code P4 said that, “***Democracy is a governance type. We live in a democratic country. Everybody is free and equal.***” These statements might be interpreted as they could not correlate democracy with human life because they didn't say anything else except with governance at first glance.

When we reminded them democracy in class environment, they stated that in a democratic classroom there was a freedom for everybody. All of students had a chance to say their opinions and teachers had listened to them. But there were not any statements which contained “*equality among students, schools role in gaining democratic attitude, teachers' role model statute, etc*”. We can give a student teacher's (T7) following statement as an example: “***In a democratic class environment teacher must listen to all students' opinions and also students must listen each other. Everybody could feel themselves free***”. Besides, there were student teachers (4) who thought that, democracy might cause discipline problems in class environment as each child wanted to do their picks and it might cause to a chaos in the classroom. A student teacher (code with T5) said that “***Students might want to get everything done which they desire. And class discipline is damaged, because of this***”.

Social studies student teachers participated the opinion that social studies course was an important course in teaching democracy to children. And all of them thought that other courses did not have any contribution in this process. For example a student teacher (code with T2) said that, “***I think the most important course for democracy and democratic attitude is social studies. Because citizenship is in the context of the social studies and we learn democracy through this course. Others courses are not important as the social studies.***” However all courses are important in teaching democracy and bringing democratic attitude in school environment. So, all teachers have duties in this process. But, when we interpreted our participants' opinions, we understood that they weren't aware of this reality. Besides, all of the participants thought that studying in the social studies department brought them good characteristics towards democracy and if they studied in another department they wouldn't got them. For example, student teacher with code 1 mentioned that, “***Studying in the social studies department has positive effects on me. I learned lots of things about democracy ad democratic process. Also, it has been made a lot of contribution to my democratic attitude***”.

## **Discussion**

In this study, democracy is neither conceptualized as a governmental system of representation nor a set of guaranteed rights such as voting. Instead, it is a way of living and a way of communicating with others. Democracy does not belong to a particular group. It is the ground between groups and is tested by their interactions. If we seek to foster a democratic attitude within our students, we need to find ways to inspire that mutual respect and potential of freedom in our classrooms (Olbrys, 2004).

Democracy envisions a citizenship committed to democratic values such as liberty, equality, freedom of expression, tolerance of diversity and due process of law. People often claim that they believe in the democratic values, but, some people are unable or unwilling to apply the same principles to concrete situations (Usui, 2008). We can see the same situation in our participants' statements. When we asked them their opinions about democracy, they pointed out positive views towards it. But, they also mentioned their fears, such as it might cause indiscipline in class environment. Besides, when we looked at their democratic attitude scale results, we understood that they were not democratic in real life conditions.

Democratic development and the maintenance of democracy require that all citizens participate actively in society. Because of this, all citizens have been democratic regardless of their gender. But, according to the results of researches related with democratic attitude (Sağlam, 2000; Genç and Kalafat, 2008; Kömleksiz and Kan, 2008; Demir, 2003; Taçman, 2006; Yanardağ, 2000; Büyükkaragöz, 1995; Kaldırım, 2005), gender is an important variable in this context. Our studies' results are same as those researches according to the gender variable. Female student teachers are more democratic than males.

We didn't find a meaningful difference between democratic attitude and university variables. It could be interpreted as universities were successful in teaching democratic students and because of this students' attendance to a university affected student teachers' democratic values in similar levels.

Parents' educational backgrounds are important variables in democratic attitudes of people. When we looked at the studies about democratic attitude we found that there was a relationship between them (Tekin et.al., 2009; Kömleksiz and Kan, 2008; Kaldırım, 2005). Besides, we found similar results in our study. According to the results, student teachers whose parents graduated from high school were found more democratic than student teachers whose parents graduated from primary school. So, we can say that education is important in gaining democratic attitudes. And, a democratic person brings up democratic children.

In general, we can say that school and family are the most important factors in bringing up democratic children. If we can foster the relationship between school and family, children will be more democratic than their current situations.

### **Results and Suggestions**

The results of the study being done to determine the democratic attitude levels of the social studies student teachers and their views about democracy can be summarized as follows:

1. According to gender variable, there was a meaningful difference between democratic attitude levels of social studies student teachers.

2. According to university variable, there wasn't a meaningful difference between any universities.

3. According to variable of mothers' educational background, there was a meaningful difference between democratic attitude levels of social studies student teachers

4. Mothers' being graduated from high schools' democratic attitude level was higher than that of teachers' being graduated from primary school.

5. According to variable of fathers' educational background, there was a meaningful difference between democratic attitude levels of social studies student teachers.

6. The democratic attitude level of fathers being graduated from high schools was higher than that of fathers' being graduated from primary school.

In the light of the findings of the study following suggestions can be made:

1. This study restricted with only four universities, so similar studies can be conducted at different universities.

2. Similar studies can be conducted at different levels of education.

3. Similar studies can be conducted at different departments of universities.

4. Similar studies can be conducted to determinate the cases in different countries.

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