

## **HOW CAN WE GET THE INFORMATION ABOUT DEMOCRACY? THE EXAMPLE OF SOCIAL STUDIES PROSPECTIVE TEACHERS**

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### **Abstract:**

In this research, the information about democracy, which social studies prospective teachers have, and interpretation of the information sources are aimed. The research was planned as a survey research methodology and the participants were determined with criterion sampling method. The data were collected through developed open-ended questions from 192 social studies prospective teachers who continued 1. and 4. grades. According to obtained findings, the 1th and 4th grades participants' answers and their examples about democracy resemble to each other. It was concluded that, participants defined "democracy" with the concepts of "respect for human rights and freedoms", "self government of the public", and "equality". It was determined that; portion of approximately 90% of the participants did not read any scientific publication or book about democracy. The most obvious difference between two groups has emerged through almost half of the 4th grade prospective teachers who indicated there was no democracy in the school. 4th grade students could not explain enough about democracy, although they had taken lesson about democracy directly or indirectly, and this is evaluated as the courses which are taken in college is not able to serve to the purpose.

**Key words:** Democracy, Source of Information, Social Studies, Social Studies Prospective Teachers.

### **INTRODUCTION**

After people had started to live together in large masses in the earth, they tried to set up rules and brought a certain order. Until close to the present time, while there were managements of monarchy, which was generally dominated by one person, in process of time, the state regimes which include self government of the public, have taken the place of monarchy. Especially, when the 1. World War was over, the empires; including Ottoman Empire, have taken place in the dusty pages of history and instead of these empires, the forms of democratic governance, which based on notion's sovereignty, have emerged (Tonga, 2013).

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When the topic of democracy comes to mind, firstly people try to understand what the concept of democracy is. Democracy is a concept which consists of two words in Greek; 'demos'; it means 'public' and 'kratos' it means 'administration, rule'. Democracy is a regime, in which people determine and apply the rules, unlike the monarchy and aristocracy (Held, 2006). In this sense, democracy may be called as the power of the people, self government of the public. Hitherto, however many theories and statements have been made about democracy, there is no unity on the elements of democracy and common definition which is accepted by everyone (Vanhanen, 1997). There may be many reasons for fail to reach a unity of definition. Perhaps the most important of them is perceiving of the concept of democracy as good and nice by people, because of people's defining good and nice according to themselves or their politics that they have (Yeşil, 2002).

As a concept, democracy is the most commonly used concept in public. At the present time, it is the most preferred regime by countries. In this context, democracy may be defined as the regime which bases on people's sovereignty or ochlocracy which consists of proxies who representing the nations as a result of elections (Doğan 2007). The definition of the democracy as only self government of the public would be an incomplete description. Additionally, democracy is defined as 'a way of life' (Kahne, Rodriguez, Smith and Thiede, 2000; Dewey, 1938, p. 368 cited in Ferguson Patrick, 2012).

The concept of democracy has a structure that values people which includes right, freedom, equality, justice, brotherhood and believes the sanctity of human existence and human dignity (Duman, Yavuz and Karakaya, 2011). As understood from these definitions, democracy relates to moral values (Lipset and Lakin, 2004).

Unlike the authoritarian state, in democratic society, it is needed to various institutions which provide social, cultural, politic and economic participation for development of citizens, because the concept of democracy doesn't contain recession (Kovaks, 2009). Actually, this situation brings the concept of citizen participants. Individual' participation to the social issues or citizenship issues on local or national level as active is evaluated within democracy and citizenship (Westheimer and Kahne, 2002).

Many things which is accepted as important in human life starts in family and goes on in school. School is an important institution for children's adopt to the society and to discover their ability. The great tasks falls to the schools for the formation of democratic culture in the community and applying it in daily life (Duman, Yavuz and Karakaya, 2011; Tupper, 2009).

In Turkey, one of the Turkish National Education Ministry policy is education of democracy. Generate of the stable, liberal and democratic society and carry this society to the future with democracy is aimed. In the school, it is tried to bring the sense of responsibility, thought of freedom, respect for others and to be tolerant skills to the students. In addition, many values which will be associated with democracy is tried to transfer to the students in the schools (Çiftçi, 2008).

In elementary and secondary schools, the head of the contributory lessons to the education of democracy is social studies in Turkey. Social studies lesson has taken its place at training program from 4th grade to 8th grade in the elementary schools. The most common definition of social studies, it is accepted that the aim of educating of good citizens (Barth, Barr and Shermis, 1978; Savage and Armstrong, 2000; Garcia and Michaelis, 2001; Dönmez, 2003). Here, it is seen to be emphasized to the students who have used their democratic rights and have embraced democracy in the concept of citizen. In some definitions, it is emphasized to the purpose of social studies aims educated citizens effectively 'democratic' (Ochoa-Becker and Engle, 2007), because generally the concepts which related to democracy takes part where at the place if citizenship education (Tupper, 2009). For this purpose, it is given place to various concepts, gains, values and skills in the social studies lesson for rooting of democracy in society and schools (MEB, 2005).

The topics, which are given to the students in various levels of education, related to the citizenship education can be summarized under these headlines; local and national government, election and politic institutions, judicial system, courts, providing security, education, democracy and participation, rights and responsibilities of citizens, pluralism, multiculturalism, diversity and social cohesion, national identity and patriotism, multiple citizenship; local, national and international citizenship, equality of opportunity, values, civic virtues and principles; prepare individuals for an unknown future (Halstead and Pike, 2006). Considering of these topics, the education of citizenship and the education of democracy are seen as complementary elements.

The cause of the perching of the various lessons into the training program for providing grip of democracy is, making principles of democracy livable communities. In Turkey, social studies lesson relates to democracy directly, with regard to the aims and values which are wanted to bring to the students. In this context, a large role falls to the teachers about democracy and internalization of the democratic values. Therefore, social studies prospective teacher's training that they have received from the university and their attitudes about democracy are important for students getting these values (Boyte and Fretz, 2010; Davis, 2010). Social studies prospective

teachers', who will do democracy or citizenship education activities, realistic data about democracy and their perspective of democracy will influence students adopting of democratic values. Both in Turkey and in international area, when the literature is examined, it is seen that; works about democracy is more the form of perceptions of democracy, the attitudes toward democracy and recognition of democracy. In terms of questioning sources of information related to democracy, it is thought that this study will close a lack in literature. Because of emergence of desired behavior about democracy, primarily, infrastructure of theoretical foundation requires stability.

### **1. METHOD**

In this research, the answer have been sought to the question of 'What is the information about democracy which social studies prospective teachers have?

Sub problems have been defined as follows:

- 1)How do social studies prospective teachers define the democracy?
- 2)What are the social studies prospective teacher's sources of the knowledge about democracy?
- 3)What are the examples of social studies prospective teachers' about democracy in their schools?
- 4)What are the given examples about democracy of social studies prospective teachers in their family?
- 5)How the social studies prospective teachers evaluate the importance of democracy in people's lives?

In this context, research is thought to be related to the problem statement, so it is designed as a survey research methodology.

### **Participants**

The participants group of the study consists of 1th and 4th grade social studies prospective teachers, who get in thanks to the way of criterion sampling among purposive sampling methods. The purpose of selection of 1th and 4th grade by criterion sampling is trying to define the effect of university education to the acquired knowledge of democracy.

**Table 1.** Information Related to Participations

Class	Gender		Total
	Male	Female	
1	35	57	92
4	44	56	100
Total	79	113	192

The participants group of the research consists of total 192 social studies prospective teachers; 35 males and 57 females from 1st grade social studies prospective teachers and 44 males and 56 females from 4th grade social studies prospective teachers. The prospective teachers that contributed to the research were selected from state universities in four different cities in Turkey.

#### **Data Collection Tool**

Using of the open-ended question form was preferred in terms of prospective teacher's comfortable responds and collecting data about sub-objectives and problem statement of the research. Open-ended questions have been created in accordance with problem statement of the scope of the research, and then, opinions have been taken from two field experts and one assessment and evaluation expert to getting valid and reliable information. The final shape was given to the questions in accordance of the feedbacks from the experts.

#### **Data Analyses**

The tools which was developed, primarily applied to a pilot group of 30 people and the responses were evaluated. After the filling of the forms by prospective teachers as required, bases practice was adopted. Before applying the study, the objectives of the study were distributed to those, who wanted to contribute on a voluntary basis. The data of this study were collected from social studies prospective teachers in 2012-2013 academic year. Descriptive analysis were given out on the obtained data. Firstly, the forms, which were obtained from the application were tested and 20 paper which apparently filled haphazardly were excluded from the analysis. Answers for each question were written on the table, and then the answers which were thought to be related to each other were combined into the themes. Created themes have been presented to the expert opinions, with consideration of the feedback from experts. Some parts of the study have been presented to the social studies educators in the International

Symposium II (Aksaray-Turkey, 24-26 April 2013), for validity and reliability, and considering of the contribution from educators, final shape was given to the analysis.

## 2. RESULTS

### The Answer of the Students Studying at the 1<sup>th</sup> Grade

*Table2.* Participants' Definitions of Democracy

Category	f	%
1. Respecting the human rights and freedoms	50	45,9
2. Equality	27	24,8
3. Self government of the public	23	21,1
4. Decision of the majority	9	8,2

The questions of: "What is democracy for you? What comes to your mind when you hear the word of democracy?" are asked to the prospective teachers. Participants have answered that the notion of democracy is more about human rights and freedoms. Among these rights and freedoms, freedom of thought and expression are included in most of the answers. The other answers are about equality and self government of the public. Finally, it is pointed out by the participants that definition of democracy is about the decisions that the majority must take.

*Table 3.* The Information Resources about the Participants' Knowledge on Democracy

Category	f	%
1. Participants who read scientific publication or book	3	3,3
2. Participants who read no publication	89	96,7
3. What I learned before	90	

The questions of: "How did you obtain the information that you presented on democracy? Have you read any book or scientific journal about democracy?" are asked to the participants. Except three prospective teachers, the rest of the participants expressed that they haven't read any book or scientific publication about democracy. The prospective teachers stated that their knowledge on democracy is based on the courses they have taken in the school and hearsay information. These answers are collected under the theme of "What I learned before" which has been stated frequently.

**Table 4.** The Example of the Participants Related to Democracy in Family

Category	f	%
1. Co-decision	49	51
2. Respecting the human rights	24	25
3. Equality	11	11,5
4. There is no democracy in my family	12	12,5

The question of: “What examples can you give regarding democracy in your family? is asked to the participants. The prospective teachers’ answers about democracy are mostly based on the theme of “co-decision”. For example, they have stated that if something is going to be bought for the house or they will go on a holiday, they take the decision all together and for them, this could be an example of democracy. In the other answers, 24 prospective teachers have emphasized that respecting the human rights is mostly about democracy under the titles of freedom of thought and expression. It’s also stated that regarding all of the family members as equals is about democracy, too. In addition, 12 of the participants stated that there is no democracy in their families.

**Table 5.** The Examples of the Participants Related to Democracy at Schools

Category	f	%
1. Respecting the human rights and freedoms	39	39
2. Vote	30	30
3. I am beginner, I have not seen anything yet	14	14
4. Equality	10	10
5. There is no democracy at the school	7	7

The question of: “What examples can you give regarding democracy in your school? is asked to the participants. The prospective teachers said that there is respect for human rights and freedoms in their schools. The freedom of expression is again among the most common answers in this part of the conversation, too. Moreover, the elections of the school representative can serve as an example of democratic attitude for the participants. While 14 prospective teachers are emphasizing their inexperience at school as they are newcomers, 10 prospective teachers stated that regarding students as equals at the school can be an example of democracy. 7 prospective teachers said that there is no democracy at the school because they couldn’t sufficiently exercise their rights and freedoms.

**Table 6.** The Ideas of the Participants Related to the Importance of Democracy

Category	f	%
1. Protection of human rights	44	42,7
2. Social order	37	35,9
3. Principles of democracy are not adequately adopted in life.	14	13,6
4. Decision of the majority	8	7,8

Finally, the questions of: “Is democracy important according to you? Can you explain it by providing the reasons?” are asked to the prospective teachers going on studying at the first grade. The prospective teachers stated that democracy is important because it enables the ideas of the majority to come forward about the protection and development of the human rights and social order. It is also stated by 14 prospective teachers that the democracy is important but the principles of democracy are not adequately adopted in life.

#### The Answer of the Students Studying at the 4<sup>th</sup> Grade

**Table7.** Participants’ Definitions of Democracy

Category	f	%
1. Respecting the human rights and freedoms	41	35
2. Self government of the public	36	30,8
3. Equality	25	21,4
4. Co-decision	9	7,7
5. Election	6	5,1

The questions of: “What is democracy for you? What comes to your mind when you hear the word of democracy?” are asked to the prospective teachers. The prospective teachers studying at the fourth grade described the notion of democracy in the framework of respecting the human rights and freedoms. 36 prospective teachers have emphasized the self-government of the public and stated that in the other definitions, democracy is about equality, co-decision and election notions.

**Table 8.** The Information Resources about the Participants’ Knowledge on Democracy

Category	f	%
1. Participants who read scientific publication or book	17	17
2. Participants who read no publication	83	83
3. What I learned before	80	

The questions of: “How did you obtain the information that you presented on democracy? Have you read any book or scientific journal about democracy?” are asked to the 4th grade prospective teachers of social studies. When the answers have been examined, 17 prospective teachers have read books about democracy as it stated in their answers. 9 of these 17 prospective teachers stated that the books they have read about democracy were the common course books used in the class. In addition, it is clearly stated that 83 percent of the prospective teachers haven’t read books related to democracy. That’s why; the resource of the definition of prospective teachers about democracy, are formed by newspapers, internet and education received at the school. Consequently, this category is called as “What I learned before” too.

**Table 9.** The Examples of the Participants Related to Democracy in Family

Category	f	%
1. Co-decision	45	45
2. Freedom of thought	24	24
3. There is no democracy in my family	22	22
4. Equality	9	9

The question of: “What examples can you give regarding democracy in your family? is asked to the 4th grade social studies prospective teachers. The participants’ answers about democracy are mostly based on the theme of “co-decision”. They have stated that there is democracy in their houses thanks to freedom of thought. Moreover, 9 participants have emphasized that regarding all of the family members as equals would be an example of democracy. 22 participants stated that they haven’t experienced democracy in their houses adequately.

**Table 10.** The Examples of the Participants Related to Democracy at Schools

Category	f	%
1. There is no democracy at my school	42	42
2. Respecting the human rights and freedoms	24	24
3. Vote	20	20
4. Equality	7	7
5. Co-decision	7	7

The question of: “What examples can you give regarding democracy in your school?” is asked to the 4th grade social studies prospective teachers. 43 participants have stated that there is not enough democracy in their schools. The examples given by the participants about democracy at schools

are collected under the framework of respecting human rights, voting, equality and co-decision.

**Table 11.** The Ideas of the Participants Related to the Importance of Democracy

Category	f	%
1. Protection of human rights	41	41
2. Social order	24	24
3. Principles of democracy are not adequately adopted in life.	15	15
4. Equality	11	11
5. Self-government of the public	9	9

Finally, the questions of: “Is democracy important according to you? Can you explain it by providing the reasons?” are asked to the prospective teachers going on studying social studies at the 4th grade. Participants have assessed the importance of democracy from the perspectives of protecting human rights, maintaining the social order, equality and self-government of the public. Moreover, 15 prospective teachers said that democracy is important but there are problems with the practices of it.

### 3. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Nowadays, social studies teachers are the first ones who will teach and introduce the importance of democracy to the children within the framework of citizenship consciousness. In this study, the knowledge that social studies prospective teachers have, resources of these knowledge, examples they have given about democracy both at school and in family and their regard on democracy are examined.

According to the results of the examination, the 1st and 4th grade social studies prospective teachers have used the same expressions for democracy and given similar examples. For example, both the 1st and 4th grade prospective teachers defined democracy with the notions of respecting human rights and freedoms, self-government of the public and equality. In the research, Kuş (2012), it has been found out that: when democracy is mentioned among students, they utter the notions of election, equality and freedom. In addition, Thianthai (2012) has found out that the democracy perception of students is mostly focused on election and voting, rights and freedoms and notions of equality and justice. In Tonga’s (2013) research, it is showed that the act of giving elections as an example when democracy is mentioned among students; has got similar conclusions with the research.

On the other hand, it is confirmed that 90 percent of the participants haven’t read any book or scientific journal about democracy. Even if these classes have been taught with the help of some books, participants couldn’t even give these books as an example. In a research, conducted by Sağlam,

Suna and Çengelci (2008), prospective teachers have evaluated the activities, made in Education Faculty during the education process under the topic of getting students a reading habit, negatively. In addition, in the research conducted by Kuş and Türkyılmaz (2010), it has been found out that the social studies prospective teachers read so few books. It has been regarded as a major problem as well in the other researches, conducted in different universities in Turkey on reading habits, that the social studies prospective teachers couldn't have gained a reading habit (Demir, 2009).

Furthermore, the collecting of the answers of social studies prospective teachers under the title of "What I learned before" is drawing attention of people. The prospective teachers stated that they have defined democracy thanks to the education gained from their teachers or lecturers in the high school and at the university. The important point in this situation is: is the education given either by teachers or lecturers is enough for democracy's definition? As it has been stated in the research conducted by Sarı and Sadık (2011); in most of the schools of the prospective teachers, there were not any activities about democracy and in schools of the prospective teachers saying that there were activities about democracy; they were only conveying information about democracy. However, Pass (2007) emphasized that in order to support a democratic society, the activities made in schools are really important for students.

In both the 1st and the 4th grade participants' examples of democracy, it is possible to see that they have come to an agreement on the themes of "co-decision" and "freedom of thought". It is possible to deduce from this situation that families are important social institutions for children to participate in democracy and adopt it (Coley and Sum, 2012).

In terms of the democracy examples at schools (at the universities), almost half of the 4th grade participants have given the answer of there is no democracy in schools. Whereas 1st grade classes think that the examples of respecting human rights and freedoms and voting are democratic, the ones from the 4th grade, stating that there is democracy, associate respecting human rights and freedoms with democracy.

In the last question, prospective teachers, explained the importance of democracy in people's lives with the notions of protecting human rights and social order. Although they have stated the importance of democracy, a few of the participants, pointed out the problems about the practices of democracy.

The answers given by Social Studies prospective teachers, especially the ones received from the 4th grade prospective teachers were not as expected. It can be accepted that the prospective teachers of the 1st grade don't have adequate knowledge of democracy. However, social studies

prospective teachers, studying at 4th grade, take classes such as “Civics or Democracy and Human Rights”, which are directly related to democracy, as well as classes including democracy indirectly. Although prospective teachers take so many classes, as mentioned above, they still don't have enough knowledge about democracy and this situation arouses questions about; whether those classes achieve their objective or not.

It is thought that this negative situation will constitute negation for the students as well in the future because the prospective teachers become teachers without interiorising democracy. Also, it has been seen that the education taught in the universities: are not enough, especially, in terms of reading books and scientific journals. The prospective teachers, who hasn't gained a reading habit and doesn't like reading, cannot possibly help the students to gain a reading habit. Turkish Republic which is on the way of becoming a democratic state needs social studies teachers in these issues in order to reach the intended level. It's thought that, with well-educated teachers, who have interiorised democracy, democracy will take place faster.

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