



Predisposition of Teachers in Turkey for Democratic School as an Alternative School Type

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Abstract

This research aims to uncover the perceptions of classroom teachers regarding the concept of 'democratic schools,' which have emerged as an alternative to traditional educational institutions. To achieve this objective, researchers developed a semi-structured interview form. Insights were gathered from 20 classroom teachers working in public primary schools in four districts affiliated with Izmir Province, selected through maximum diversity sampling method. Data were analyzed using content analysis techniques. The primary findings obtained are: The characteristics of stakeholders associated with the democratic school in teachers' minds are largely consistent with the features found in existing democratic schools. 'Love and respect,' 'equality and justice,' and 'honesty' are the predominant values delineated by teachers in their conceptualization of the democratic school. Participants believe that decision-making in the school entails equal voting rights for everyone, and each individual is responsible for the decisions made. Most teachers envisage democratic schools as being rich in classroom materials and equipment. Participants envision a classroom climate in a democratic school as 'peaceful and joyful,' characterized by 'mutual respect among individuals.' More than half of the teachers conceptualize that there are no examinations or assessments in the envisioned democratic school. In contrast, some imagine the implementation of multiple assessments. In the minds of participating teachers, decisions concerning student graduation or progression to the next grade in the democratic school are determined by the teacher, contingent upon specific conditions being met. In managing discipline within the democratic school as perceived by participating teachers, methods such as 'establishing communication and collaboration,' 'applying problem-solving strategies,' and 'focusing on the student' are employed. Despite limited knowledge of, and lack of experience working in democratic schools, the majority of participant teachers demonstrated a considerable inclination an understanding of the democratic school in various aspects based on these findings.

Keywords: Alternative schools, Democratic education, Democratic school, Teacher

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Türkiye’deki Öğretmenlerin Alternatif Bir Okul Türü Olan Demokratik Okula Yatkınılığı

Özet

Bu araştırmada sınıf öğretmenlerinin, geleneksel okullara bir alternatif olarak ortaya çıkan “demokratik okul” hakkında ne düşündükleri ortaya koyulmaya çalışılmıştır. Bu amaçla araştırmacılarca yarı yapılandırılmış görüşme formu geliştirilmiştir. Bu form kullanılarak İzmir İline bağlı 4 ilçedeki kamu ilkokullarında görev yapan ve maksimum çeşitlilik örnekleme yöntemiyle seçilen 20 sınıf öğretmeninden görüş alınmıştır. Veriler içerik analizi tekniğiyle analiz edilmiştir. Elde edilen temel bulgular şunlardır: Öğretmenlerin zihinlerindeki demokratik okulun paydaşlarının özellikleri, mevcut demokratik okuldaki özelliklerle büyük ölçüde uyumludur. Sırasıyla “Sevgi ve saygı”, “eşitlik ve adalet” ve “dürüstlük”, öğretmenlerin zihinlerinde şemalandırdıkları demokratik okulun başat değerleridir. Katılımcılar, karar almada okuldaki herkesin eşit oy hakkı olduğunu ve alınan kararlardan yine herkesin sorumlu olduğunu düşünmektedirler. Öğretmenlerin çoğu, demokratik okulların sınıflarının materyal ve donanım açısından zengin olduğunu kurgulamaktadırlar. Katılımcılar demokratik okulda “huzurlu ve mutlu” ve “herkesin birbirlerine saygılı olduğu bir sınıf ikliminin bulunduğunu hayal etmektedirler. Öğretmenlerin yarısından fazlası kurguladıkları demokratik okulda sınav ve değerlendirme sürecinin bulunmadığını, bazıları ise çoklu değerlendirme yapıldığını kurgulamışlardır. Araştırmaya katılan öğretmenlerin zihnindeki demokratik okulda, öğrencilerin mezun olmasına veya bir üst sınıfa geçmesine, belirli koşulların sağlanması koşuluyla, öğretmen karar vermektedir. Katılımcı öğretmenlerin zihinlerindeki demokratik okuldaki disiplin sürecinde “iletişim ve işbirliği kurma”, “problem çözme yöntemi uygulama” ve “öğrenciye odaklanma” yolları kullanılmaktadır. Bu sonuçlardan hareketle, demokratik okulda görev yapmayı deneyimlememelerine ve çoğunun bu konuda bilgi sahibi olmamasına rağmen öğretmenler, birçok açıdan demokratik okula yatkın bulunmuştur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Alternatif okullar, Demokratik eğitim, Demokratik okul, Öğretmen

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1. Introduction

A modern culture or institution, draws upon the patterns of industrialization, technology, and economic advancement that have proliferated globally since the early 19th century. In modern systems, major formal establishments such as government bodies, corporations, universities, and schools pursue their objectives by utilizing humankind as a resource to prioritize production and development to the utmost degree. Individuals are expected to obey these institutions and play their respective roles in ensuring the smooth operation of this social machinery. Essentially, people do not manage institutions; rather, they are managed by institutions. Modern society is labeled as technocracy; the decision-makers are not human beings (democracy), but rather the merciless mechanical routines of the system (Miller, 2010). Examining the characteristics of mainstream schools among these mentioned institutions reveals a standardized, centralized, synchronized system where educational decisions are made by experts. Due to its intensive structure, it may be argued that these schools do not accommodate diverse thinking, beliefs, and learning characteristics, producing 'failed' individuals marginalized from society and perpetuating a repressive ideology (Kaya & Gündüz, 2015). Consequently, mainstream schools, in other words, traditional schools, have been questioned for over a century globally, not only by parents and educators but also by young individuals, due to all these aforementioned attributes.

Many studies conducted in Turkey affirm the negative situations concerning traditional schools. According to the results of the 'Monitoring the Student' Project conducted by the Manisa Provincial Directorate of National Education during the 2009-2010 academic year, it was determined that 477 students had run away from school. When asked why they did not attend school and felt the need to run away, a significant portion of these students stated that they skipped school because they were bored with their classes (89 individuals), encountered negative attitudes from teachers (57 individuals), and avoided school due to not completing their homework assignments (34 individuals) (Güçlücan, 2009).

Kayıkçı and Sayın (2010) determined that students attending secondary education institutions were moderately satisfied with their schools. Studies examining how students metaphorically conceptualize concepts related to school have revealed highly negative characterizations developed by students. For instance, in the research conducted by Kesik and Aslan (2020),

middle and high school students described their school happiness using negative expressions such as 'an obligation,' 'hopelessness,' 'dependency,' 'a state of loneliness,' 'a compulsory form of relationship,' and 'an expression of negative experience.' The same study highlighted students perceiving the absence of happiness in school and generally defining happiness in school as 'empty classes.' In other studies, students characterized school as 'a prison,' 'a racecourse,' 'a cage,' 'a boring place,' 'a country ruled by a monarchy' (Saban, 2008), 'a zoo,' 'hell,' 'a horror movie,' 'a robot,' 'a racetrack,' 'a grinder' (Aslan & Doğan, 2016). Additionally, students characterized being a student as 'captivity,' 'slavery,' 'imprisonment,' and 'a situation of being a guinea pig' (Saban, 2009).

Gömleksiz et al. (2008) examined the behavior of school administrators and teachers towards students in terms of children's rights in seven primary schools located in lower, middle, and upper socioeconomic environments. Findings from this research indicated that the students' right to receive education in clean, hygienic, and safe environments was not upheld. It was also revealed that teachers and administrators lacked knowledge and skills in management and discipline, leading to a general exploitation and violation of children's rights. The study observed instances where teachers and school administrators used humiliating words, struck students with sticks/rulers, behaved indifferently, pushed students, reprimanded them, kicked them, and slapped them before, during, and after ceremonies, as well as during breaks.

According to Akyol's study (2019), teachers working in private schools perceive that school principals demonstrate a semi-democratic style of management. In Yavuz's research (2023), middle school principals expressed that schools are not adequately democratic.

Research suggests the prevalence of a culture of fear in schools. Furthermore, the disciplinary system in traditional schools is fear-based, rooted in the belief that a child who does not experience fear cannot learn to be good (Mercogliano, 1998). Advocates of democratic education argue that individuals who experience oppressive education at a young age often carry the remnants of this oppression into adulthood, making it difficult for them to embrace participatory democracy or take an active role in participatory democracy later in life. Hence, proponents of democratic schools view the school as a democratic public space where individuals can experience collaboration, show respect for differences, and resolve conflicts

without violence or any violent elements (Neill, 1990). Therefore, democratic schools emerge as a solution at this juncture.

This research aims to reveal the opinions of primary school teachers regarding the emergence of "democratic schools" as an alternative to traditional schools. The study intends to assess the extent to which teachers approach the characteristics of democratic schools mentioned in the literature. Moreover, this research provides insights into teacher inclinations towards democracy and democratic schooling. It has been deemed valuable to determine whether teachers have inclinations towards transitioning from traditional schools to democratic schools. Democratic schools can be considered the foundation of democratic societies. Undoubtedly, democratic schools require democratic teachers. Therefore, identifying the concept of a "democratic school" in the minds of teachers who apply democracy firsthand and serve as role models to students is crucial. The early years of schooling are pivotal in shaping children's attitudes and beliefs. Hence, gathering opinions from primary school teachers in this research has been particularly relevant.

On a global scale, there are democratic schools at the primary and secondary education levels. Yet, in Turkey, there is a scarcity of actual implementation of democratic schools as a genuine alternative type of education. Despite the increasing interest in the subject, there has not been a widespread inclination towards democratic schools as a subset of alternative education in Turkey. Undoubtedly, it cannot be overlooked that this inclination will unfold gradually over a period. (Gülen Morhayim, 2008) It is hoped that this research, by revealing the thoughts of primary school teachers regarding this type of school, can contribute to the discussions centering on democratic schools.

There is a significant body of research on the topic of democratic schools. Some of these studies include Akyol (2019), who examined the understanding of democratic schools among school administrators from the perspective of teachers. Yavuz (2023) delved into the practical applications and recommendations of school administrators regarding their understanding of democratic schools. Korkmaz (2014) investigated the realization level of a democratic educational environment within classrooms based on teacher perceptions, exploring the factors influencing this level and the barriers to implementing these criteria. Akpınar (2018) scrutinized the structural dynamics of the management style of a school claimed to be based on a

democratic understanding, drawing from the viewpoints of students, teachers, parents, administrators, and individuals associated with the school's environment in order to analyze how these dynamics affected the school's members and its surroundings. Dündar (2007) examined the philosophical foundations feeding the paradigm referred to as "alternative education" in the literature and its manifestation in school practices. Gök (2019) investigated learning experiences in an alternative primary school owned by parents, identifying the components that made it alternative, understanding how internal stakeholders perceived alternative learning environments, and exploring the challenges encountered in practicing alternative education. The current study approximates Gülen Morhayim (2008), utilizing student opinions, aiming to fill a gap in the field by investigating the conceptualization of democratic schools by teachers based on the characteristics of such schools. However, there has been no research encountered that explores teachers' conceptualization of a democratic school based on its characteristics. The intent is for this research to fill this void in the field. Additionally, it is the opinions of teachers working in traditional schools about democratic schools that will contribute to future similar studies and practices, providing valuable data for policymakers, administrators, and teachers in this regard.

1.1. Conceptual Framework

1.1.1. Democratic Education

Democratic education forms the foundation for alternative schools. It is centered on the individual, opening up a realm of freedom based on the right to choose. In such a democratic school, the educators' role is to facilitate the exploration by students of their individual interests and talents, encouraging their progression in those areas once discovered, and providing them with free workspaces within the school. It involves empowering students and other individuals within the school community. Philosophically, thinkers such as J. H. Pestalozzi, F. Freire, L. Tolstoy, A.S. Neill, R. Steiner, J. J. Rousseau, E. Froebel, I. Illich, J. Dewey, J. Holt, E. Goldman, and E. Ferrer have influenced the foundation of these types of schools during the Enlightenment era. Moreover, activists such as L. N. Tolstoy, O. Decroly, A. B. Alcott, A. Bastian, K. Haskins, and J. A. Beane have also played a role in this philosophical foundation (Gök, 2019).

Contemporary educational philosophy, as Dewey pointed out, asserts that "school is not a rehearsal for life, but life itself" (Sönmez, 2015). For future generations, it is not just about knowing democracy; rather, integrating it into daily life within the school, living democracy, will be an effective approach to understanding and developing democracy. Miller (1995) stated that educators who embrace contemporary approaches place freedom and the concept of democracy at the heart of their expectations in education.

Democratic education emphasizes the critical factors of pluralistic learning, establishing relationships between adults and children based on trust, respect, and equality, and utilizing democratic processes in discussions and decision-making mechanisms. This environment not only equips individuals with skills for self-learning and building relationships but also fosters personal and social awareness (Gülen Morhayim, 2008). Karakütük (2001) articulated the aim of democratic education as nurturing individuals who question and analyze according to an independent worldview, internalizing the rules and practices of democracy (cited in Hotoman, 2010).

Democratic education, as stated by Hotoman (2010), is acquired by experiences offered to students. Schools, as prototypes of society, are the places where democratic experiences ought to take place. Moreover, these schools, with their educated staff, possess the capability to develop democratic education through lived experiences. The absence of decision-making authority based on students' interests, desires, and needs in today's traditional schools, along with the lack of a democratic structure within the school, creates the need for democratic schools. In this context, it is believed that traditional, non-democratic schools will eventually be replaced by democratic schools in the future.

In Turkey, democratic education was first mentioned in the 4th Education Summit in 1949. However, despite the intention for democratic education to be among the goals in today's educational institutions in Turkey, it is believed that due to the generally undemocratic structures of schools, the desired education is not fully realized. This situation is clearly evident in research results conducted in recent years (Akyol, 2009; Aslan and Doğan, 2016; Gömleksiz et al., 2008; Kayıkçı and Sayın, 2010; Kesik and Aslan, 2020; Saban, 2008; Yavuz, 2023).

1.1.2. Democratic School

Hecht and Ram (2010) explain the developmental process of present-day democratic schools through three waves, also including free schools within the scope of democratic schools. Accordingly, they categorize the progressive education movement of the early 1900s as the first wave, the emergence of free schools in the 1960s as the second wave, and the development of democratic schools since the 1990s as the third wave.

Based on the foundations of democratic education, democratic schools are institutions centered around the student. They provide equal rights to students alongside other school stakeholders, allowing them the opportunity to make decisions for themselves and take on responsibilities. These schools are managed according to democratic principles. Hecht (2002) mentions pluralistic learning and curriculum that allow students in democratic schools to choose what they will learn, make independent decisions about their learning, and offer opportunities for self-directed learning. The relationship between the teacher and child is based on trust, and students, like teachers, have equal rights and participate in the decision-making process. Therefore, for a student who experiences democracy throughout their school life by practicing it, democracy will not remain confined to definitions or limited applications.

Democratic schools are established by a small number of parents and educators who are generally dissatisfied with the existing education system and aim to ignite the natural developmental process of children. These schools seek to provide students with the opportunity to have both the freedom and responsibility for their own education (Lathrop, 2005). They are not coincidental occurrences but conscious practices carried out by educators and other adults to integrate democracy into life (Apple and Beane, 1995; as cited in Gülen Morhayim, 2008).

According to Şahin and Turan (2004), democratic schools are institutions fundamentally based on values such as "freedom," "democracy," "trust," and "responsibility," where children shape their own education and are administrated in a democratic manner. Education in democratic schools is oriented toward democratic principles, providing individuals with a free space based on their own choices. In such schools, the duty of educators is to facilitate the expression of a child's desires and potential, encouraging, supporting, and granting authority to the child (Dündar, 2013).

These schools place the student at the centre, allowing freedom, and embodying democratic principles and values in their administration. Freedom is not merely a theoretical concept in democratic schools because a child attending such a school does not need to conform to the school; instead, the school should strive to adapt to the student (Mercogliano, 2006). Furthermore, an actively involving student in the administration of a democratic school learns the sense of responsibility through unconventional methods. As they learn these aspects, children also embrace democratic principles such as respect, freedom, equality, and so on (Lathrop, 2005).

Democratic schools are extensively covered in the literature, with sources detailing their definitions and characteristics (Hecht, 2002; Hannam, 2018; Korkmaz, 2014; Mercogliano, 2006; Lathrop, 2005; Dünder, 2013; Şahin and Turan, 2004). Generally, when defining or describing the characteristics of democratic schools, it can be said that they are an educational approach that respects human and children's rights, advocates for the involvement of all stakeholders in the school's governance processes and is a prerequisite for democratic education where all stakeholders have equal rights and students make decisions regarding their learning.

What sets democratic schools apart from mainstream or traditional schools is their self-governing nature. In a democratic school, most of the management processes such as problem-solving, decision-making, planning, organizing, coordinating, communicating, and evaluating are carried out collectively by all members. All decisions concerning the community are made collectively by structures such as the school assembly, school council, or school meetings involving all members (Korkmaz, 2014).

In a democratic school, there are two fundamental aspects of education. The first aspect comprises self-governing and self-directed learning and education, devoid of coercion, competition, mandatory testing, and the fear of failure. Schools under democratic control will eliminate these irrelevant preparations and schoolwork. The goal here is to abandon the production of factory workers or soldiers by designing schools where children can freely think and make their own choices. The more critical second aspect, essential for living on a sustainable planet, involves a process dictated by democratic education principles, where respect for human rights prevails, and each member has an equal right to vote and participate in decisions. Disputes are resolved through judiciary committees (Hannam, 2018).

1.1.3. Basic Concepts of Democratic Education

Below, the concepts related to democratic education, such as "learning," "child," "teacher," "parent," "decision-making process," "discipline," "content," "teaching-learning process and assessment," and "graduation and success" are discussed.

1.1.3.1. Learning

The most enduring, effective, and profound learning is the learning desired by the student. The student selects their own activities and creates their own environment. Through this, the student learns perseverance, communication skills, flexibility, self-discipline, accomplishment, and enjoying life (Şahin and Turan, 2004). Hecht (2002) has pointed out that a child needs to pose questions such as "Where do I come from?" "Where am I?," "Where am I going?," "How will I get there?," and "How will I know I have arrived?" in order to make their own choices and manifest unique qualities through a personalized education.

Some children might enjoy studying through imagination, while for others, studying might be a nightmare. Some might see books as their main source of study, while for others, they might be sleep-inducing. These instances attest to the uniqueness of every individual on the planet. Hence, pluralistic learning constitutes the essence of democratic education. Pluralistic learning is a type of learning that acknowledges each student's uniqueness and provides them with equal rights to manifest their uniqueness (Hecht, 2002). In democratic schools, students should be able to determine what they need to learn based on their interests and desires, decide when and how they want to learn, and by whom they want to learn. In this context, autonomy is granted to the student while aiming to develop a sense of responsibility.

1.1.3.2. Child

Children possess unique qualities, and they require a democratic environment to bring these qualities to light. The innate curiosity for learning within a child should be encouraged in such a way that their inner drive is supported, their creativity nurtured, and ample opportunities provided for self-expression. In a democratic school, a child should be free, (Sönmez, 2015), responsible (Cüceloğlu, 2022), curious (Moulin, 2011), social and happy (Sönmez, 2015).

1.1.3.3. Teacher

The teacher serves as a role model in any setting, whether in a traditional school or a democratic school. In a democratic environment, the teacher can be considered the most crucial source in

demonstrating democracy through their experiences to the students. In other words, the teacher is not merely an information provider but is expected to be motivational, guiding, facilitating, and embracing democratic principles. They should be individuals who adopt and implement democratic principles. Additionally, in schools that implement the so-called Sudbury model, a democratic school model where children play a significant role in administration, the teacher needs to have good communication with students and facilitate learning. To achieve this, they should take on necessary roles beyond traditional teaching roles such as imparting knowledge and guiding students, as outlined by Ellis (2015).

1.1.3.4. Parent

Democratic schools are not only shaped by educators but also influenced by parents who hold a crucial position in their establishment, and they can play an influential role in instilling democratic attitudes and behaviors. Because these schools are not artificial spaces of freedom, parents, in addition to teachers and students, possess equal rights in their relationships with the school. According to Şişman (2010), it's expected that parents participate in school decisions, engage in school activities, and collaborate with other stakeholders within the school (as cited in Akpınar, 2018). It's acknowledged that parents, like other stakeholders, have equal rights within the school. However, if this right interferes with students' ability to make their own decisions to an extent that undermines their autonomy, it would contradict the foundational principles of a democratic school.

1.1.3.5. Decision Process

In democratic schools, students have a say in decisions related to themselves. A participant in decision-making processes becomes more empowered and requires less supervision. As a result, the student becomes more motivated, and the mechanism of identification comes into play (Bursalioğlu, 2019). In a democratic school, as mentioned by Hecht (2002), this process occurs through parliament, judicial committees, and executive committees, maintaining a democratic approach. For instance, at SVS (Sudbury Valley School), there is a school meeting held weekly where all stakeholders can contribute to the decision-making process (Ellis, 2015).

1.1.3.6. Discipline

In traditional schools and even in society, children are disciplined through fear (Mercogliano, 1998). However, in democratic schools, where there is freedom of expression, participation in

decision-making, the ability to make decisions about oneself, and taking responsibility, the need for supervision decreases.

At Sudbury Valley School (SVS), issues are resolved through the school's judicial system, involving students and school staff. There is no fear among students of their teachers or other school personnel. Students learn to resolve problems face-to-face and understand that justice applies to everyone (Ellis, 2015). Furthermore, in a democratic school, rewards are not based on externally imposed rules. Instead, when a student finishes their work, they experience intrinsic satisfaction, which is the best reward for them. External rewards can quickly turn into bribes (Neill, 1990).

1.1.3.7. Content, Learning-Teaching Process and Evaluation

At Sudbury Schools, within the framework of a natural educational approach, where there are no specific curriculums, standards, or exams, students direct their own studies. Traditional-style classes are rarely conducted and only based on student requests. The absence of a specific curriculum and standardized assessment signifies a departure from evaluating every student based on the same standards and aims to guide them towards self-assessment. A standardized assessment would contradict the philosophy of a democratic school (Ellis, 2015).

The learning-teaching process is primarily seen as a form of play. In democratic schools, activities most preferred by students include play and conversation. These schools aim to direct a child's energy for creativity and research towards learning. Village School, a democratic school, emphasizes the importance of play by stating, "If you don't play with something, you can't understand how it works" (Village School, n.d.).

1.1.3.8. Graduation and Success

In traditional schools, success is defined as achieving high grades in exams and being at the top of the class. However, the evaluation of what students have learned is often reliant on someone else (the teacher), and there may not be autonomy in self-assessment, leading to an undemocratic assessment process. In contrast, in a democratic school, students have a say in evaluating their own learning process.

At Summerhill, students move up to the next class through personal discussions. Meanwhile, at Sudbury Valley School, when a student feels ready to graduate, they are required to prepare a thesis demonstrating their readiness to become a responsible citizen in the community.

Students present this thesis to the school graduation committee, and if they receive at least 2/3 of the votes, they are eligible to graduate (Şahin & Turan, 2004; as cited in Gülen Morhayim, 2008). As observed, democratic schools display differences in their distinct democratic developments and unique learning processes.

In this research aiming to elucidate the concept of "democratic school" in teachers' minds, the following questions were addressed: What are teacher views on (1) stakeholders, (2) shared values, (3) decision-making processes, (4) teaching processes, (5) assessment processes, and (6) the concept of discipline in a democratic school.

2. Method

2.1. Research Model

In this study, the qualitative research model of phenomenology has been employed. Phenomenology represents a natural approach to defining the assumptions used to make sense of the everyday world. This model focuses on the meanings individuals construct based on their experiences of a particular phenomenon, and the data sources in this model typically involve individuals or groups (Creswell, 2021). This research delved into the tendencies of classroom teachers towards democratic schools, examining their perspectives on this educational model to some extent. Although the participants may not have experienced working in a democratic school, the assumption was based on the idea that they might consider the mentioned school to be the complete opposite of the traditional school they have experienced.

2.2. Target Group

The study group of the research consists of 20 classroom teachers working in state primary schools in the city center of Izmir, Turkey, selected using a maximum diversity sampling method (Table 1). Diversity was considered in the sample regarding the participants' gender, educational level, age, field of expertise, years of teaching experience, and the location of the school where they are employed.

Table 1.

Target group information

Code	Gender	Teaching Experience (Year)	Education Level	District of duty	Knowledge about democratic school
Zübeyde	Female	30	Bachelor	Konak	No Knowledge
İlknur	Female	24	Bachelor	Konak	No Knowledge
Serap	Female	22	Bachelor	Karşıyaka	No Knowledge
Bahar	Female	23	Bachelor	No Knowledge	No Knowledge
Emine	Female	20	Bachelor	Karabağlar	Little knowledge
Filiz	Female	17	Master	Karabağlar	Little knowledge
Elif	Female	19	Master	Buca	No Knowledge
Baran	Male	25	Bachelor	Buca	No Knowledge
Kerem	Male	21	Bachelor	Karşıyaka	Little knowledge
Fatma	Female	24	Bachelor	Konak	No Knowledge
Yasemin	Female	23	Bachelor	Karşıyaka	Little knowledge
Nuray	Female	21	Bachelor	Karşıyaka	No Knowledge
Öykü Naz	Female	24	Bachelor	Buca	Has knowledge
Mehmet Ali	Male	31	Bachelor	Buca	Little knowledge
Mustafa	Male	18	Bachelor	Konak	No Knowledge
Murat	Male	34	Bachelor	Buca	Little knowledge
Erdem	Male	28	Bachelor	Karabağlar	No Knowledge
Aşlı	Female	32	Bachelor	Karabağlar	No Knowledge
Namık	Male	31	Bachelor	Buca	No Knowledge
Ayşe	Female	26	Bachelor	Karşıyaka	No Knowledge

As seen in Table 1, among the participants, 13 are female, and 7 are male. Three of the participants have been teaching for 20 years or less, nine for 21-25 years, two for 25-30 years, and five for 31 years or more. Two teachers hold a master's degree, while the remaining 18 teachers have completed their education at the undergraduate level. Seven teachers work in primary schools in Buca, five in Karşıyaka, four in Karabağlar, and four in Konak districts of Izmir, Turkey. Twelve of the participating teachers stated that they do not have knowledge about democratic schools, six have some knowledge, and two teachers mentioned that they have information about these schools.

2.3. Instrument

The researchers used a semi-structured interview form prepared by them as a data collection tool to determine the participants' views on the democratic school, or in other words, how inclined they were towards this particular school model. Each interview question was formulated to understand how teachers conceptualized the democratic school, starting with the

phrase "Let's imagine...". Expert opinions were obtained from four faculty members in the Education Administration Department of a public university, including four teachers who were also students in the Education Administration and Supervision master's program. Additionally, one faculty member from the Turkish Language Education Department reviewed the language aspects of the questions in the measurement tool. Following the feedback, after conducting a pilot study with four teachers using the finalized form of questions, the actual implementation took place. For instance, the second research question was formulated as follows:

"Let's imagine a democratic school. You notice a wall where the values of this school are written. What do you think are the values/values written here? Why? Could you explain? What demonstrates the existence of these values in this school? Could you provide examples?"

2.4. Data collection methods

Research data was collected during the last phase of the global Covid-19 pandemic when schools were closed in Turkey. As a result, face-to-face interviews could not be conducted. Instead, appointments were scheduled with teachers, and interviews were conducted via the internet with audio recordings. The duration of each interview was approximately 60 minutes. After transcribing the participants' responses, the written content was sent to their email addresses. Participants were asked to review the text and make any changes, deletions, or additions if they wished. Except for three participants, no alterations were requested in their responses.

2.5. Data analysis

The responses provided by the participants were analyzed using the content analysis technique. Content analysis involves a closer examination of the obtained data to reach concepts and themes that explain these data (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2008). Initially, all interview texts were read by two researchers, and the texts were categorized into themes and categories. Subsequently, the two researchers collaborated to compare the analysis results and reached a consensus. Different names were used instead of the participants' real names.

3. Result

In this section, the analysis results of the responses given by the teachers to the questions asked to determine their inclination towards democratic schools have been discussed.

3.1. Teachers' views on stakeholders in a democratic school

In order to obtain the opinions of the teachers regarding the stakeholders in a democratic school, they were asked the primary question, "When you hear the term 'democratic school,' what comes to your mind regarding the individuals in this school?" To elaborate on this question, participants were further asked, "How would you define a teacher? Why?", "How would you define a student? Why?", "How would you define a school administrator? Why?", "How would you define support staff? Why?", "How would you define parents? Why?", and "How would you describe the relationship between these individuals? Why?" The teachers' opinions regarding the stakeholders in a democratic school were grouped under six themes: "teacher," "student," "school administrator," "support staff," "parent," and "relationships among school stakeholders." Below are the presented themes along with the categories gathered under these themes, and some of the participants' views are explained directly through quotations.

Theme 1. Teacher: Teachers, in their perceptions of a teacher in a democratic school, mostly emphasized the qualities of being a "guide, facilitator, and encourager of critical thinking" (mentioned by 8 participants). They also mentioned characteristics such as being an "effective communicator" (6 participants), "open to innovation and development" (5 participants), "collaborative" (5 participants), "fair" (4 participants), "free" (4 participants), "democratic" (3 participants), "leader of the class" (3 participants), "versatile and intellectual" (3 participants), "role model" (1 participant), "competent in their field" (1 participant), "hardworking and responsible" (1 participant), "patient" (1 participant), and "observer" (1 participant).

Zübeyde, one of the teachers who expressed her opinion on this issue, said:

"The teacher knows how to listen. They observe well. They set an example for their colleagues and students. Because they themselves should be fair and democratic so that their surroundings are too. They don't make quick decisions; they listen to everyone and take them into account. They are patient. Because listening to everyone, everything, all the time is not easy. It is necessary to show students 'How can a democratic student be?', 'What does democracy mean?', 'How to be fair?' For instance, through elections..."

This emphasizes that the teacher working in a democratic school possesses effective communication skills, is fair, and is a democratic individual, showcasing these qualities through their actions.

Theme 2. Student: Teachers have expressed that the student in their minds within a democratic school setting is primarily seen as the most “free” individual (9 participants). Among the attributes of this particular student, they are also described as “self-confident” (7 participants), “responsible” (4 participants), “actively engaged in lessons” (3 participants), “problem solver” (1 participant), “happy” (3 participants), “effective communicator” (2 participants), “fair and egalitarian” (1 participant), and “mature” (1 participant).

Fatma, serving as a teacher for 24 years, indicated that the student in a democratic school in her mind as follows:

“The students are happy, their emotional states are positive, they don’t carry heavy backpacks, and they are free. There are no walls in the schoolyard. They run and play in a green, grassy area. There are places where animals are raised and plants are grown. Perhaps the children take on tasks in these places on a daily or hourly basis. In the cafeteria, they work on tasks that aren’t dangerous. No one follows behind them to pick up their trash. They are capable of doing their own work for the sake of individual equality and taking responsibility for themselves. They can self-regulate. Students can choose classes based on their interests and talents. They don’t spend too many hours on subjects they are not interested in. They don’t have fixed classrooms. They respect their teachers.”

With these statements, it is understood that Teacher Fatma emphasizes that in a democratic school, the student is not only free but also a happy, responsible, self-regulated, and respectful individual.

Theme 3. School administrator: More than half of the participating teachers have reported that in their perception of a democratic school, the school administrator embodies the characteristic of being “fair and egalitarian” (11 participants). Additionally, the teachers have envisioned other characteristics of the school administrator in the democratic school as follows: having a “participatory management approach” (7 participants), being a “facilitator and organizer of school operations” (6 individuals), an “effective communicator” (4 participants), “visible and accessible everywhere” (4 participants), a “guiding force,” “motivational and honoring” (3 participants), a “problem solver” (2 participants), possessing “merit” (2 participants), being

"responsible" (2 participants), "engaging and empathetic" (2 participants), "open-minded" (1 participant), "paternal/maternal" (1 participant), and an "effective observer" (1 participant).

Zübeyde, a teacher with 30 years of professional experience, described the manager of her democratic school as follows:

"The administrator takes into account all ideas from school staff; they don't act independently. They listen to everyone and implement their views because where there is democracy, the school should be managed together with teachers, administrators, and of course, students. We might not be able to see some things. What is discussed in the school should be communicated to higher authorities. The school administrator conducts meetings at the school to gather parents' opinions about practices in the democratic school. The school administrator frequently meets with students and teachers at the school. Planning for democratic practices is made together."

With these views, teacher Zübeyde underlined that the administrator of her dream democratic school is fair and egalitarian and also has a participatory management approach.

Theme 4. Support staff: Approximately half of the teachers have expressed that in their envisioned democratic school, the support staff is "responsible and hardworking" (9 participants). According to participating teachers, among the characteristics of the support staff in their envisaged democratic school, the second most mentioned trait is being "valued" (5 participants), followed by having "expertise in different areas" (4 participants), being "respectful, understanding, and loving towards children" (3 participants), and being "friendly and helpful" (2 participants). Additionally, one teacher each described the staff in the democratic school as "free," "democratic," and "happy."

Teacher Erdem, who has 28 years of professional experience, compared the assistant staff in the traditional school with the democratic school in his mind and expressed the following opinions on this subject:

"In traditional schools, the school staff perceives themselves as the least valued members because they feel like subordinates. For instance, their tasks are communicated to them in a commanding tone, orally. However, in a democratic school, they perceive themselves as crucial cogs in the wheel. They know that what they do is valuable. For example, ensuring the cleanliness and security of the school, etc."

Erdem teacher's observations indicate that within the current school organization, he believes that the school staff doesn't receive the deserved value. However, he mentions that in his envisioned democratic school, this situation is reversed.

Theme 5. Parents: The characteristic most frequently mentioned (12 participants) among the teachers participating in the study regarding the parents of a democratic school is "collaborative and supportive." More than a quarter of the participants envision the parents in the democratic school as an "equal component of the school." Other qualities attributed to these parents of the mentioned school include being "conscious and educated" (5 participants), "respectful and trusting of the teacher" (5 participants), and lastly, being "happy and peaceful" (1 participant) according to the expressions of the participants.

"Parents are always open to collaboration. They are not intrusive. They provide support to the school administration and teachers both financially and morally. They trust the expertise of the teacher. They are aware that they are one of the cornerstones of the school."

Aslı, like many other teachers participating in the research, has conceptualized that parents in a democratic school provide support to the school in every aspect.

Theme 6. Relationships among school stakeholders: Half of the teachers participating in the research suggested that stakeholders in a democratic school engage in communication based on "politeness, honesty, and trust." "Strong collaboration, interaction, and mutual assistance" ranked second (7 participants). Additionally, stakeholders in the envisioned democratic school, according to the participants, "value each other" (2 participants), establish "harmonious" (2 participants), and "friendly" (1 participant) relationships.

Mehmet Ali, expressing his thoughts about the relationships among individuals in a democratic school, highlighted the prevalence of positive human relationships by stating, *"Everyone, from the support staff to the teachers, from the students to the administrators, comes to school eagerly. This is because everyone trusts each other and acts extremely honestly towards one another. There is a sense of sharing among everyone. They are friends, companions..."* This underscores the presence of positive interpersonal dynamics within that context.

3.2. Teachers' views on the shared values of the democratic school in their minds

The teachers participating in the research were asked questions to understand the shared values of the democratic school they envisioned. They were asked, "Let's imagine a democratic school. You notice a wall where the values of this school are written. What do you think are the values/value written here? Why? Could you explain? What are the things that demonstrate the existence of these values in this school? Could you provide examples?" The shared values of the democratic school envisioned by the teachers were not thematically categorized; instead, these values were ranked in terms of their frequency from highest to lowest. According to this ranking, more than half of the teachers (11 individuals) emphasized that "love and respect" were adopted as values in the democratic school. Secondly, "equality and justice" (9 individuals) and "honesty" (9 individuals) were mentioned. Thirdly, "tolerance" (8 individuals), followed by "empathy" (7 individuals), "freedom" (6 individuals), "kindness and solidarity" (4 individuals), "peace and brotherhood" (3 individuals), and in the eighth place, "unity and togetherness" along with "responsibility" (2 individuals) were values perceived as adopted in the envisioned democratic school by the teachers. Additionally, one participant identified "happiness," "modernity," and "determination" as values adopted in the mentioned democratic school.

Baran, who mentioned that he does not have any theoretical knowledge about democratic schools, stated that the values adopted in the envisioned democratic school are "love, respect, tolerance, equality, and justice." He expressed, "Because these values are what we long for in the society we live in." Regarding the indicators of these values in the imagined democratic school, Baran teacher expressed the following view:

"Values are taught to students through exemplary situations, stage plays, and fictional scenarios. Participation of individuals in all kinds of school-related decisions is ensured. Thus, democratic elements are put into action. Students are given the opportunity to send the best message to each other as active individuals."

Namık, who indicated knowledge about democratic schools and possesses 31 years of teaching experience, expressed that the prominent values in the envisioned democratic school are 'rights and freedom,' 'honesty,' 'sincerity,' 'tolerance,' 'love,' 'respect,' and 'freedom.' As reasons for this

perspective, Namık mentioned, "Because these are essential qualities that a democratic person should possess."

3.3. Teachers' views on the decision process in democratic schools

To gather teachers' opinions regarding the decision-making process in a democratic school, they were asked the following questions: "Let's imagine you are in a democratic school. The school's notice board displays school rules. In your opinion, who decides what these rules will be, when, and how? Additionally, who is responsible for implementing the decisions? How and by whom is the implementation process of decisions monitored?"

After analyzing the teachers' views on the decision-making process in a democratic school, their opinions were categorized into six themes: "decision-makers for school rules," "timing of decision-making for school rules," "method of decision-making for school rules," "responsibility for implementing decisions," "controllers of decision implementation," and "method of overseeing decision implementation." These themes are presented below, along with their respective categories.

Theme 1. Decision-makers for school rules: Half of the participating teachers expressed that in their envisioned democratic school, decisions regarding rules were made by "all internal stakeholders of the school." Three teachers envisioned that in the democratic school, "students" were the decision-makers for school rules, while another three teachers mentioned that it was the "students and teachers" jointly determining these rules. Two teachers stated that in their envisioned democratic school, "every stakeholder" had a say in decisions related to themselves. Additionally, one teacher imagined that in the democratic school, the "Ministry of National Education (MNE)" was responsible for making decisions about school rules, and another teacher mentioned that it was the "MNE, school administration, and teachers" collectively deciding on these rules.

The opinion of a teacher, who expressed having no knowledge about democratic schools and has been teaching for 24 years, emphasized the involvement of all individuals in the school in decision-making in the envisioned democratic school.

"Decisions are made collectively by all participants: teachers, students, staff, and school administrators. These decisions are not made as if they were taken together... There are certain situations that are akin to the constitution of education. These are already established. Beyond these issues, teachers, administrators,

students, parents, and other staff share their opinions. All stakeholders are together. Something that doesn't occur to a parent about a certain issue might come to a teacher's mind. Everyone reflects their own perspective. Individuals in this environment know that they can freely express their opinions, feel safe, and won't be judged. In short, in the democratic school I envision, all members of the school participating in decision-making." (İlknur)

Theme 2. Timing for decision-making on school rules: More than half of the participating teachers (12 participants) expressed that in their envisioned democratic school, decisions about school rules are made "at the beginning of the academic year." Four teachers mentioned "at the beginning of the academic year and as needed," two teachers said, "as needed," one teacher stated, "at the establishment of the school and as needed," and one teacher mentioned "at the end of the academic year for the next academic year."

Filiz, a teacher who indicated having limited knowledge about the democratic school, like many other participants, conveyed that decisions about rules are made "at the beginning of the academic year." *She also mentioned, "However, these rules can be subject to change based on situations or needs that arise."*

Theme 3. Decision-making process for school rules: Nearly half of the participants (9 participants) expressed that in their envisioned democratic school, decisions are made by 'everyone coming together and having an equal say.' Four teachers responded with 'discussions in classes and consolidating decisions.' Three teachers mentioned 'by voting,' one teacher stated, 'based on scientific research,' another teacher mentioned 'under the guidance of a committee consisting of teachers and administration,' one teacher responded, 'according to decisions from the Ministry of National Education (MoNE),' one teacher mentioned 'by conducting surveys and discussing,' and yet another teacher stated, 'first discussing together and then voting.'

Baran, who stated that he has no knowledge about a democratic school and has been teaching for 25 years, shared the following comprehensive opinions regarding the decision-making process about what rules should be followed in the envisioned democratic school:"

"There is a platform where teachers, students, administrators, and auxiliary staff come together. This can be referred to as the 'school council' or 'school executive committee.' A democratic school is a living organism. In a traditional school meeting, auxiliary staff might bring tea, but in a democratic school, a

representative of the auxiliary staff takes part in the school executive committee. Everyone expresses their opinions through pluralistic participation. There are representatives from every subject group, every class, and every group within the school, and they ensure active participation. They gather at the beginning of the year. This meeting is crucial. All activities to be carried out throughout the year are planned here. Whenever needed, rules will be revised. Teachers can provide ideas to students regarding school rules. However, if students do not embrace these ideas, they are not implemented. When making decisions about school rules, students' opinions are considered more important. Students serving on the committee present ideas from their classes to the executive committee. Teachers refine these ideas to make them workable and implementable."

Tema 4. Responsible parties for implementing decisions: More than half of the participating teachers (12 participants) indicated that in the envisioned democratic school, "all stakeholders of the school" are responsible for implementing the decisions made. Four teachers specified "students" as responsible for implementing decisions in the school. Three teachers in their envisioned democratic school suggested that "each stakeholder in decisions concerning themselves" bears responsibility, while one teacher has mentioned that a "committee consisting of teachers and class representatives" is responsible for implementing decisions.

Similar to most participants, Ayşe expressed that in her envisioned democratic school, *"Everyone in the school is responsible for the decision made."* Likewise, Erdem teacher has stated, *"Just as everyone is involved in making decisions, everyone in the school is responsible for their implementation."*

In contrast, Öykü Naz, who claims to have knowledge about democratic schools and has been teaching for 25 years, offered a different opinion regarding the responsible parties for enforcing rules in the democratic school she envisions. She stated, *"Students adhere to the rules they establish themselves. Teachers and school administrators jointly set rules regarding the functioning of the school, and they adhere to these rules. It is easier and more satisfying for everyone to abide by rules they themselves have established."*

Theme 5. Supervisors of implemented decisions: Half of the 20 participating teachers in the research have indicated that in their envisioned model of a democratic school, "all stakeholders" of the school supervise the implementation of decisions. Two teachers have mentioned that it is supervised by "teachers, class representatives, and school representatives," while another two

teachers have stated that a "committee consisting of teachers and class representatives" or "teachers and students" oversee the implementation of decisions. One teacher each suggested that in the democratic school construct, the implementation of decisions is supervised by a "committee consisting of teachers and student representatives," "students, teachers, and school management together," or solely by "students." Lastly, another participant teacher mentioned that decisions in the envisioned democratic school are subject to self-regulation.

Regarding the question of who supervises the enforcement of rules in the envisioned democratic school, Öykü Naz teacher expressed the following views:

"Through self-control, everyone monitors themselves. Moreover, they can also alert each other. For example, because both teachers and students jointly determine the rules regarding the functioning of the class, teachers also abide by these rules. If teachers violate these rules, students can caution them."

On the other hand, Mustafa, who declared having no knowledge about democratic schools despite an 18-year professional experience, emphasized a hierarchical supervision model in his envisioned democratic school: *"During the process of implementing decisions, the teacher supervises the students; the school principal, the teacher, and other staff members; and the Provincial Director of National Education supervises the school principal."* This indicates a hierarchical oversight based on a top-down approach.

Theme 6. Method of supervising the implementation of decisions: One-fifth of the participating teachers in the research expressed that in their envisioned democratic school, the implementation of decisions is supervised through "students monitoring each other." Three teachers mentioned "self-regulation," three teachers referred to "teachers guiding students in terms of supervision," two teachers suggested "democratic supervision," two teachers mentioned "everyone warning each other when there's a mistake," and one teacher stated "compliance with decisions made by the Ministry of National Education (MoNE)" as forms of oversight.

Fatma, a teacher with 24 years of teaching experience who mentioned having no knowledge of democratic schools, shared the following thoughts regarding how compliance with rules is monitored in her envisioned democratic school: *"During the process of implementing decisions, everyone is an overseer in ensuring adherence to the decisions. They comply with the rules because they want to (referring to the students). If a student notices a rule that a teacher isn't following, they can alert*

them. The response of 'You're a child, you would not understand' is not possible. There is both self-regulation and everyone monitoring each other in this school."

3.4 Teachers' views on the teaching process in democratic schools

To gather the opinions of teachers about the teaching process in a democratic school, they were asked the primary question: 'Imagine being appointed as an administrator in a democratic school. You've observed classrooms during lessons. Explain the learning environment in these classrooms?' Additionally, to elaborate on this main question, participants were asked closing questions such as: 'What is the physical environment of the classrooms like?', 'What is the atmosphere or climate in the classrooms like?', 'How are the student-student and student-teacher relationships?', 'What do teachers do regarding the subject being taught?', 'What do students do related to the subject being taught?', 'What teaching methods and techniques are used in class? How are they determined?', and 'Who determines the subjects, teaching methods, and techniques? Why?'

The analysis revealed that teachers' views on the teaching process in a democratic school are categorized into six themes: 'physical arrangement of the classroom', 'classroom atmosphere', 'role of the teacher', 'role of the student', 'teaching methods and techniques', and 'decision-makers regarding the subject and teaching methods'."

Theme 1. Physical layout of the classroom: Nearly three-quarters of the participating teachers expressed that in their envisioned democratic school, "there is adequate material and equipment in the classroom." More than three-quarters of the participants mentioned that the classroom in the envisioned democratic school is "spacious and comfortable." Additionally, some teachers mentioned that these classrooms include "individual lockers" (3 participants), "resting corners/cushions" (3 participants), "sports and art areas" (3 participants), "digital publications" (3 participants), and "libraries" (3 participants). Three teachers stated that there is "a small class size" in these classrooms. Some mentioned that in their envisioned democratic school classrooms, there is an "in-class laboratory" (1 participant), "pets and potted plants" (1 participant), "reading corners" (1 participant), and "glass doors" (1 participant), indicating "minimalistic arrangements" (1 participant), the notion that "classrooms can change according to the lesson" (1 participant), and that they are "like a home environment" (1 participant).

Elif, a teacher with 19 years of experience who admits to having no knowledge about democratic schools, described her perceptions of the physical state of classrooms in a hypothetical democratic school:

"The classroom has a low number of students, and it is well-equipped with materials and technology. It's spacious, orderly, with dominant light colors, and receives plenty of sunlight. Moreover, it's a classroom with few students. Additionally, there are pets and potted plants inside, creating a comfortable, home-like atmosphere."

Theme 2. Classroom atmosphere: Among the participants, seven teachers described the classroom atmosphere as "peaceful and joyful," while four emphasized "mutual respect among everyone." Additionally, three teachers found it "a bit noisy," and two perceived it as "liberating." Another two teachers indicated it "inspired curiosity." Other opinions included the classroom being "positive" (1), "enthusiastic" (1), "creative" (1), and having a "democratic" (1) environment.

Zübeyde, one of the teachers who claimed to lack knowledge about democratic education, shared her thoughts on the classroom atmosphere in her imagined democratic school: *"The children are happy. They willingly engage in lessons with pleasure. The classroom isn't chaotic, and it's not a place where everything is forbidden. It might get a bit noisy because the kids voice their thoughts."* (She smiles slightly).

Theme 3. The teacher's role: Approximately half of the teachers imagine that in democratic schools the teacher 'comes prepared for the class (9 Teachers), a quarter perceive them as 'guide-mentors,' three participants mention they are 'accessible to every student,' two teachers depict them as 'knowledgeable/well-equipped,' and another two noted that they 'nurture curiosity.' Furthermore, in the concept of a democratic school, teachers have roles such as 'motivating students' (1 person), 'fostering collaboration' (1 person), 'providing opportunities for students to express themselves' (1 person), and 'ensuring students come prepared for class (1 person).

Öykü Naz, a teacher with 25 years of experience, who admitted to having limited knowledge about democratic schools, described the teacher's role in the educational process in her imagined democratic school: *'The teacher guides students on the subject to be learned. They conduct joint research in the classroom. Students share the work they have brought beforehand.'*

Theme 4. The student's role: Among the teachers participating in the research, the most frequently mentioned roles for students in the envisioned schema of a democratic school's educational process were being "eager and curious learners" (5 participants) and being "inclined towards peer teaching" (5 participants). Some teachers expressed that in such a school, students are "active participants in lessons" (3 participants), "researchers" (3 participants), "prepared for lessons" (3 participants), "responsible for their own learning" (3 participants), "experiential learners" (3 participants), "problem solvers" (3 participants), and "planners of their own learning process" (3 participants).

In the mind of teacher Elif, the student in the educational process of a democratic school possesses these qualities and roles: *"Students eagerly anticipate gaining knowledge about the subject they are learning. They exchange ideas with each other. They teach one another. They are definitely not in a passive state."*

Another teacher who claimed to have some knowledge about democratic schools remarked, *"The student conducts research on the subject to be learned. They come to class with information and various visuals. They actively participate in class. There is consistent activity within the classroom."* (Mehmet Ali)

Theme 5. Teaching methods and techniques: The majority of teachers participating in the research (16 individuals) indicated in their minds that in a democratic school setting, "all methods and techniques are used depending on the situation." Additionally, responses such as "active learning" (4 participants), "learning by doing or experiencing" (1 participant), and "question-answer techniques" (1 participant) were also noted among the participants.

Aslı, who has been teaching for 18 years, envisions the teaching methods and techniques used in a democratic school as follows:

"Methods like reading, writing, and demonstrating are used. There is no fixed curriculum; opportunistic education is provided. Lessons can be conducted through doing, speaking, acting out, playing games, etc., depending on the events happening at that moment. Fundamental skills such as interpretation, reading comprehension, storytelling, and basic arithmetic operations are focused on."

Theme 6. Subject matter and decision makers regarding teaching methods and techniques: In their envisioned democratic school setting, 7 participants stated that the decision maker regarding the subject matter and teaching methods and techniques is the "teacher," while 6

participants indicated "teachers and students together." Additionally, responses such as "teacher groups" (1 participant), "Ministry of National Education" (1 participant), "educational environment in the school district and teachers" (1 participant), and "teachers from lower grades, teachers from upper grades, and students together" were provided by teachers.

Serap, a teacher, expressed her thoughts on who decides on teaching methods and techniques in a democratic school: *"Teachers and students decide on teaching methods and techniques together."*

Another teacher shared their perspective on this matter: *"The teacher decides on teaching methods and techniques using their expertise."* (Bahar)

3.5. Teachers' views on the evaluation process in democratic schools

The views of teachers regarding the assessment process in a democratic school were determined by asking them the main question, 'Could you describe how the assessment process of students works in a democratic school?' Additionally, to help them answer this question more comfortably, they were asked follow-up questions: 'How are practices related to exams, homework, and grading implemented in this school?' and 'Could you explain the process of students moving on to the next grade and graduating in this school?' As a result of the analysis, teachers' views on the assessment process in a democratic school were categorized into two main themes: 'practices related to exams and grades' and 'the process of students advancing to the next grade and graduating.' The following are the details of these themes and categories."

Theme 1. Practices related to exams and grades: More than half of the teachers mentioned that in their envisioned democratic school, there is "no presence of exams and assessment processes." Almost half of the participants stated that "students' developmental progress is assessed through observation." One-fourth of the participating teachers indicated that in their envisioned democratic school, there are practices involving "multiple assessments (such as observation, portfolio presentations, project preparations, etc.)," while two teachers mentioned "self-assessment by students." Additionally, one teacher expressed that in the democratic school they envisioned "only practical exams," while another teacher emphasized that "assessment is observation-based for the first three grades and oral examination-based from the fourth grade onwards." Another teacher in their imagined democratic school indicated that "multiple-choice exams are not administered."

Bahar, who stated that she has no knowledge about democratic schools, provided the following response:

"In my imagination of a democratic school, there are no exams. The teacher assesses students by observing them in class, evaluating whether they fulfill their responsibilities like projects and assignments. The assessment is aimed at helping students complete their deficiencies. The evaluation is based on students' achievements rather than grades or exams. Unlike our current schools, multiple-choice exams are not administered as soon as a student starts first grade." (A painful smile appears on her face).

Theme 2. The process of moving up to upper class and graduating: In the process of transitioning to higher grades and graduation within the researched context, four participating teachers in a designed democratic school have stated that "students' progress to the next grade based on the achievement of learning outcomes as determined by the teacher." Three teachers articulated that, in these schools, "the teacher decides based on the level of achievement reached by the students," while another three conveyed that "there is no repetition of grades." In the envisioned democratic school setting, decisions regarding whether students move to the next grade or graduate involve varied perspectives: "The teacher decides in consultation with the opinions of parents and support staff" (1 respondent), "After conducting a process evaluation, the teacher, school administration, and parents jointly decide" (1 respondent), "The teacher decides by considering the opinions of group leaders within the class" (1 respondent), "The teacher decides based on portfolio presentations and student development" (1 respondent), "The teacher, guidance counselor, and family collectively decide" (1 respondent), "The family and teacher decide together" (1 respondent), "The teacher prepares a report about the student, and a committee makes the decision" (1 respondent), "The guidance counselor decides based on competencies outlined in the curriculum" (1 respondent), and "Subject-area teams (teachers teaching the same class and subject) make the decision" (1 respondent).

Emine, who claims to have some knowledge about democratic schools, indicated the teacher's decisive role by stating, *"In the democratic school I envision, the teacher decides on students' progression to the next grade or graduation based on the progress shown from the beginning to the end of the academic year."* Emine's statement emphasizes the teacher's authority in making decisions regarding students' advancement and graduation in this imagined democratic educational setting.

3.6. Teachers' views on the disciplinary process in democratic schools

Teachers were asked the question, "Imagine you are a teacher in a democratic school. What is done regarding students exhibiting unwanted behaviors in your school? Can you describe?" Teacher perspectives on the disciplinary process in a democratic school were categorized into three themes: "establishing communication and collaboration," "implementing problem-solving methods," and "focusing on the student." These themes and categories highlight the emphasis on fostering communication, employing problem-solving techniques, and maintaining a student-centered approach within the disciplinary process envisioned in a democratic school.

Theme 1. Establishing communication and collaboration: More than half of the participating teachers in the study indicated that in their perception of a democratic school environment, the resolution of disciplinary issues (students' unwanted behaviors) involves "establishing open communication." Seven teachers mentioned "developing collaboration with parents," while five teachers reported "seeking assistance from experts (psychiatrists, psychologists, school counselors, etc.)." One teacher highlighted the significance of communication and collaboration in overcoming students' unwanted behaviors.

"Teacher talks to the student about their unwanted behavior, attempting to understand the issue. If the teacher cannot come up with a solution, they collaborate with the guidance counselor. They conduct a joint visit to the family with the guidance counselor and the classroom teacher. They work more closely with the problem to resolve it." (Yasemin)

Theme 2. Implementing problem-solving methods: Nearly half of the participating teachers envisioned a scenario where, when students exhibit unwanted behaviors, there is a focus on "investigating the root cause of these behaviors." Two teachers mentioned "conducting observation and monitoring," while another two teachers mentioned "organizing corrective activities for unwanted behaviors." One teacher highlighted "establishing an internal monitoring mechanism" and another teacher mentioned "creating a crisis management team" within the school.

Baran, a teacher with 25 years of experience in classroom teaching, emphasized in his perception of a democratic school that addressing the source of potential unwanted behaviors

rather than just the issue itself is crucial, emphasizing the potential for effective solutions to stem from this approach.

"When the student exhibiting unwanted behavior is not present in the classroom, informational activities are conducted with other students regarding the negative behaviors displayed. Investigations into issues occurring in the home environment are carried out, aiming to delve into the root cause of the problem. School psychologists may be required to regulate these relationships. If these students persist in their negative behaviors, a meeting involving the participation of families can be arranged. A mechanism for internal oversight can be established under the school's executive board. Meetings with the family of the student displaying unwanted behaviors can be organized to devise a plan for sustaining a healthier and more democratic environment within the school."

Theme 3. Focusing on the student: Two teachers, in their envisioned democratic school setting, mentioned that when students exhibit unwanted behaviors, there is a focus on "developing empathy in students." Two other teachers emphasized "reinforcing positive behaviors of students." Additionally, two teachers highlighted "empowering students to set rules and monitor each other." One teacher mentioned "granting students more responsibility," while another teacher pointed out "the teacher warning the student exhibiting unwanted behavior." One teacher described a cycle of "valuing the student-warning-punishment-reward." Another teacher highlighted "unconditional love and patience shown to students."

Teacher Emine emphasized in her perception of a democratic school that the primary solution pathway when a student exhibits unwanted behavior revolves around showing them warm attention and care.

"Communication is crucial. The teacher ensures that the student realizes the consequences of their actions and encourages empathy. But first and foremost, the teacher loves the student. A child who feels loved will abandon unwanted behaviors. (...) The teacher remains determined and patient with the student. If the behavior doesn't change over time, seeking expert help is an option."

4. Discussion and Conclusion

Our findings suggest that teacher perceptions of educators in a democratic school align with terms such as "guiding," "facilitating critical thinking," and "effective communicator." Neill (1990) emphasized the importance of teachers having good communication with students and facilitating learning. According to Dünder (2013), in democratic schools, there is free space

based on individual preferences. Here, educators are tasked with helping children express their potential and desires; encouraging, supporting, and empowering them in this regard.

Teachers in our study expressed that for students in a democratic school, the most prominent qualities were "free," followed by "confident" and "responsible." The concept of freedom is inherent in democratic schools and is considered the most natural right of students, never to be infringed upon (Neill, 2012). Kant (2020) asserts that instilling a sense of freedom in individuals, who are the only beings in need of education, is of utmost importance. The organizational definition of the International Democratic Education Network (IDEN, 2017) explicitly acknowledges the student's freedom to choose. Furthermore, the concept of student freedom emerging from the ideas of Illich, Dewey, and Neill is becoming evident in today's democratic schools. In our research, it is heartening and consistent with the literature that teachers working in traditional schools have views aligning with the perception that students are free in a democratic school setting.

The majority of teachers in our study reported that in the democratic school, the school administrator is "fair and egalitarian." Akyol (2019) indicated that teachers expect a manager demonstrating a democratic leadership style to maintain an equal distance from all school employees, to distribute tasks fairly, and to be able to provide unbiased and accurate evaluations. Hence, it can be suggested that our findings align Akyol's results.

According to the views expressed by teachers in their perceptions of auxiliary staff in a democratic school, the most frequently identified characteristics were being "responsible and hardworking" and "feeling valued." In one study, it was observed that in a school operating with a democratic approach, auxiliary staff (such as the school cook) had active roles in the school's management and administration. They had rights and roles such as participating in decision-making meetings, contributing to the meeting agenda, voting for advocated ideas, objecting to opposing thoughts and suggestions, engaging in discussions, and making proposals (Akpınar, 2018). Based on this finding, it is reasonable to propose that auxiliary staff in a democratic school would feel valuable as they are both hardworking and responsible and possess equal rights with other school stakeholders.

The most frequently cited attributes among the parents of a democratic school, as indicated by the participating teachers, were being 'collaborative and supportive' and being 'an equal

component of the school.' In fact, it has been revealed that parents who are members of the school's management board and association in a school identified as operating under a democratic framework play roles in the administrative decision-making processes of the school. These roles encompass activities such as overseeing school renovations, managing the school's finances, organizing events, inviting guest speakers to the school, arranging meetings, providing necessary support, and generating alternative solutions to immediate issues encountered by the school (Akpınar, 2018). This finding also demonstrates that parents in a democratic school are collaborative and supportive contributors to the school and are regarded as equal stakeholders. It can be said that the research outcomes are consistent with the findings of our study.

In our research, more than half of the teachers have conceptualized the democratic school as having values such as "love and respect" are embraced, as are "equality and justice" and "honesty." However, it was found that the value of "freedom," which is an important value in democratic schools, ranked lower in priority. In Hofstede's (1984) study determining cultural dimensions, it emerged that Turkey has feminine values. Indicators of feminine culture include valuing individuals and interpersonal relationships and prioritizing the overall quality of life (Sargut, 2001). The feminine characteristic of Turkish culture leads to an emphasis on avoiding conflict and placing importance on societal equality and consensus. While individual freedom is considered important at an individual level, the emphasis on human relationships might have pushed the value of freedom, which could potentially create conflict, to a lower priority in people's minds. This observation suggests a partial alignment between the literature and the findings of our research.

According to another finding of our research, the majority of participating teachers perceive that decision making lies with "all internal stakeholders of the school," where "everyone comes together and has an equal say". It is known that in every democratic school, there exists a meeting system in the decision-making process. All participants can bring forth topics to these meetings (Mintz, 2003). Indeed, Freire (2001) emphasized that the participation of individuals in making decisions that concern them is a fundamental condition of democratic education and that respecting human rights to decision-making is an ethical obligation. Hence, it can be inferred that the conceptualizations of decision-making processes in a democratic school by the

teachers who participated in our research are in harmony with the functioning of these processes in existing democratic schools.

In the democratic school, the vast majority of teachers envisioned "adequate materials and equipment in the classroom," and that the classrooms are "spacious and comfortable." These results suggest that participating teachers working in state schools have negative feelings due to insufficient resources and the physical unattractiveness of the classrooms (Kaplan, 2016; Korkmaz, 2013). About half of the teachers mentioned that in the democratic school, the teacher "comes prepared for the lesson." This finding may infer the teacher's role in transmitting knowledge. However, in a democratic school, the teacher's role is not merely about transmitting knowledge but rather facilitation. Grille (2003, 01.11.2021) expressed that in democratic schools, teachers take on a much more passive role. To this point, the responsibilities of teachers involve establishing a trust-based relationship with students, identifying the areas where students' curiosity lies, directing this curiosity—and even passion—towards an educational direction, and assisting in the students' intellectual development.

The most frequently cited views regarding the student in the democratic instructional process were "willingness and curiosity to learn" and "inclined towards peer teaching." These results align with the relevant literature (Korkmaz, 2013). Nearly all teachers mentioned that in class, "all methods and techniques are used depending on the situation." This response appears consistent with the application of a democratic school. Regarding the decision-maker concerning the subject matter, instructional methods and techniques, the majority identified the "teacher" as the primary decision-maker, followed by "teacher and students together." This perception contradicts the characteristics of a democratic school and the principles of progressive educational philosophy.

When examining teachers' perspectives on the assessment process in their envisioned democratic school, it was observed that the majority of participants imagined that there were no exams in the democratic school setting. Secondly, they conceptualized that "students' developmental progress is assessed through observation," which aligns with the principles of a democratic school model. According to Miller (2010), the success of education is not truly measured by test scores. The value of learning is more related to the quality of life experienced by individuals rather than the quantity of correct answers provided on test questions.

Conversely, the significant majority of teachers in their envisioned democratic school schema mentioned that the decision of whether students should progress to the next grade or graduate - under certain conditions - is made by the teacher. This perception does not seem to align with the literature.

In Summerhill, there exists self-discipline and self-regulation (Neill, 1990). Teachers in democratic schools mention that students coming from traditional schools, initially characterized as problematic, often exhibit behaviors involving violence. Rare occurrences of fights or bullying in the democratic school are resolved through group consensus during meetings where students and teachers express their feelings, thoughts, and proposed solutions (Balme, 2006; cited in Gülen Morhayim, 2008). In our research, teachers proposed strategies for maintaining discipline, such as open communication with students in terms of communication and collaboration, developing partnerships with parents, and seeking expert help. These solutions seem similar to existing alternative school practices. Furthermore, among the findings of our research, addressing unwanted student behaviors include identifying the source of these behaviors through observation, monitoring, organizing corrective activities for unwanted behaviors, establishing internal monitoring mechanisms at school, and creating a crisis management team. This indicates that these conceptualizations are akin to approaches found in democratic schools such as Summerhill School (Neill, 1990).

4.1. Implications of Research and Limitations and Suggestion

In conclusion, it can be said that the opinions of the participating teachers regarding the conceptualized democratic school largely resemble existing practices in democratic schools. In other words, although all participants had experience working in traditional schools, and the majority lacked prior knowledge of democratic schools, it's evident that the participating teachers were largely inclined toward the mentioned school model. However, further research is needed to ascertain the extent to which teachers exhibit attitudes and behaviors aligned with the principles of a democratic school in practice. Based on these findings, it would be beneficial for the authorities of the Ministry of National Education and experts in the field to plan and implement coordinated efforts for the transition from traditional schools to democratic schools. This study is limited to the views of primary school teachers in the province of Izmir. Investigating the same subject based on the opinions of educators working in primary,

secondary, and tertiary education institutions in different regions across Turkey could be beneficial. Additionally, intercultural comparisons can be made on this topic.

5. References

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