

Student Views on Classroom Representative Meetings in the Preparatory Program of a Turkish University

Bir Türk Üniversitesi Hazırlık Programında Yürütülen Sınıf Temsilcisi Toplantıları Hakkında Öğrencilerin Görüşleri

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Abstract

The present study intends to focus on the concept of “student voice” in higher education. Since democracy necessitates freedom and contribution, it cannot be underestimated that democracy can be maintained by the involvement of students in administration. The research conducted aims to shed a light onto the university students’ perception of “student voice” in university administration. Within this framework, classroom representatives of preparatory school elementary level students of a foundation university in Istanbul were analyzed. The data of the study were collected by focus group interviews and analyzed by content analysis using the qualitative analysis software Nvivo 10. According to the results, the classroom representatives consider themselves important and assume that their ideas are being valued. However, there are still some concerns about the future decisions of the administration in that some of their ideas might not be taken into account. They assume that the class representative meetings should be held more frequently to enable a more democratic university environment. The results of this study will be the basis for a larger scale study that includes the perception of more classroom representatives from different levels. In further studies the leadership style of the administrators will also be studied to find out the rationale behind the students’ attitudes towards the concept of student participation at the administration level.

Keywords: democracy, equality, freedom, student views, democratic university environment

Özet

Mevcut çalışma yükseköğretimde “öğrencinin sesi” kavramına dikkat çekmeyi hedeflemiştir. Demokrasi kavramı, özgürlük ve katkıda bulunmayı gerektirdiğinden öğrencilerin yönetime dâhil edilmesinin demokrasinin sağlanması yönünde önemli bir adım olduğu göz ardı edilmemelidir. Bu çalışma “üniversite yönetiminde öğrencinin sesi” kavramı hakkında öğrencilerin algısına ışık tutmayı hedeflemiştir. Bu çerçevede İstanbul’daki bir vakıf üniversitesi hazırlık sınıflarında başlangıç seviyesinde öğrenim gören sınıf temsilcileri çalışmaya dâhil edilmiştir. Odak grup görüşmeleri yapılarak mevcut veri toplanmış ve Nvivo 10 programı dâhilinde içerik analizi ile toplanan veri, analiz edilmiştir. Yapılan veri analizi sonucuna göre sınıf temsilcileri kendilerini önemli olarak tanımlamış ve fikirlerine değer verildiğini belirtmişlerdir. Ancak öğrenciler okul yönetiminin gelecekte alacağı kararlarda kendilerinin öne sürdüğü fikirlerden bazılarını dikkate almayacakları konusunda endişelerini dile getirmişlerdir. Daha demokratik bir üniversite ortamının yaratılması için sınıf temsilcisi toplantılarının daha sık yapılması gerektiğine inanmaktadırlar. Bu çalışmadan elde edilen sonuçlar farklı seviyelerde öğrenim gören daha fazla sayıda sınıf temsilcisinin katıldığı bir çalışma için alt yapı niteliğinde olacaktır. İleriki çalışmalarda öğrencilerin yönetime katılımı konusundaki algılarının temeli yöneticilerin liderlik türleriyle paralel olarak da incelenebilir.

Anahtar sözcükler: demokrasi, eşitlik, özgürlük, öğrenci görüşleri, demokratik üniversite ortamı

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Introduction

Democracy is defined as a system of government by the whole population or all the eligible members of a state, typically through elected representatives (ND, 2013). The term “democracy” is not only used as a political term in the present day. It is a common term used in different fields, one of which is education. As Dewey (2008) stated, education is a necessity for human beings from their birth to their death. Since a society consists of individuals, education can be considered as indispensable for the existence of communities. It opens the doors of a civilized society and is necessary for the well-being of individuals. Dewey considers education as a concept that is beyond the borders of politics. It is associated with life and experience. As an example, Plato’s revolutionary philosophy of education can be given. Plato’s ideal of democratic education is based on adherence of people in society to each other.

Various studies have underlined the fact that democracy is needed to make people express themselves freely. Once this atmosphere is maintained, individuals become more creative and productive (Zencirci, 2010.). A democratic school atmosphere is closely linked to a democratic administration where students and teachers can realize themselves. Therefore, “democracy” is related to what the administrators and educators understand from this concept. In the process of relating individuals to freedom, what individuals are not allowed to do should be regulated by laws, not by what they can do. In this way, individuals can have more freedom (Zencirci, 2010 as cited in Gülmez, 2001). In his study Zencirci (2010) examined 400 class teachers, 347 branch teachers and 90 administrators. It was found out that more than half of the branch teachers have a democratic tendency whereas more than half of the class teachers were found to have an autocratic tendency. Also, female class teachers were found to be more democratic than their male colleagues. Male branch teachers were found to be more democratic than their female colleagues. Among class teachers the difference between male and female teachers was found out to be significant. However, there was no significant difference between the genders of the branch teachers. In another study conducted by Çankaya (2010) school principals’ attitude towards democracy was studied. Most of the participants stated that collaboration, responsibility and trust have influence on their perception of democracy.

As administrators are considered as a primary source of the problem solving process, a real involvement in problem solving and offering a solution to the problem is needed.

As democracy has become a common concept in education, there has been a change in the behavior of administrators as well. They have started to focus on local problems and try to find solutions for the problems of the students and their parents (Mutchler, 2011). In her study, Mutchler studied potential future administrators to understand their attitudes towards democracy in action. Reflective writings were assigned to the students to understand their views on the possible local problems of

the parents and other people who are not educators. Students were interested in interacting with people who were not educators and who were not engaged in education due to the fact that these people were able to perceive educational issues or problems from a different perspective. They also liked the idea of a safe environment in which they could exchange ideas freely with the people who were not in the field of education. They already knew that discussing ideas with others does not mean that they have to accept it. However, they knew that exchanging ideas is crucial and they were also aware that effective solutions can be found by consulting others and providing a democratic atmosphere. Many parents consider themselves as outsiders to the existing problems that their children have. By means of interacting with them, they were able to be given a chance to speak out. Involving parents in the process enabled them to become familiar with student needs and problems. This study can be considered as an initial step in shaping potential administrators' concepts of democracy and management. People who are not involved in the field of education are not the only group that is excluded from the decision making process, as different genders and people from different social classes can also be excluded from the decision making process, which is an important issue about democracy.

Carlile (2012), who was a teacher, developed a project where students could express their ideas about some issues related to democracy such as ethnicity and racism so that students could raise their voices as they took a step into the democratic school atmosphere. While their voices were being recorded with their permission, some of them were still hesitant and asked what the researcher was going to do with their recordings. They had the fear that something bad might happen if they told the truth. After their views were taken for the study, there were some attempts to maintain a democratic atmosphere where students' ideas were to be evaluated. However, none of these attempts were put into practice.

Smith (2003) also thinks that giving students the opportunity of freedom in their choices turns them into democratic citizens. In his article, he mentioned the student based governance system at Parker school in the U.S. While constituting the school laws, American laws were taken into consideration. Student voice was integrated into the decision making process and the judicial department was in charge of negotiation in case of disputes. In this way, people with different ideas could come to an agreement without any disputes. Parker school started applying the system with different concerns in their minds, such as counting on the students' ideas. It was highlighted that the students who were in student congress at Parker showed respect towards each other in the decision making process. One student explained briefly that freedom and student autonomy made their school special. In the study, it was also found out that when excessive freedom was given, the responsibility of the students increased respectively and this responsibility became a heavy burden on their shoulders. It means creating a democratic atmosphere in schools is a challenge as much as a necessity. However, in

many institutions student comments are considered as a treat to the institution. Students do not tend to question the institution. They just want to know why things are done in a certain way. They have reasonable expectations. That is the reason why new hierarchies should be set in schools in which students can consult and participate (Fielding & Rudduck, 2002).

In another geographic region, Lesotho located in Africa, student participation is not supported by administration. The school atmosphere was found out to be authoritarian. Learners had little or no power on decisions. They were aware of the fact that they did not have control over decisions. When they were not happy with their teachers, they did not have the right to complain about them (Morojele & Muthukrishna, 2011). When we move from Africa to South East Asia (i.e. Pakistan), successful democratic leadership practices and sharing were found out to be the key elements for the improvement of schools. When students learn in a better way, the solidarity among teachers improves too. As a result, there will be cooperation among administration, teachers and students. This kind of atmosphere can only be enabled through a democratic atmosphere (Saadi et al., 2009).

Though there are various studies about democratic decision making in schools, there is no clear evidence about what the outcomes of democracy in education are. In another study conducted by Kirkpatrick (1999) the reasons for making democratic decisions were explained. It is mentioned that in democratic organizations where there is consensus and cooperation, the leaders will be able to move on, unlike in strict hierarchical organizations in which the managerial staff is stable. In democratic management the common good is targeted instead of self-interest. Common good means giving students autonomy and this creates an atmosphere where people respect each other (Smyth 2006). Showing respect is an asset which is found in democratic settings. In school environments where a democratic atmosphere is established and where students would feel valued with understanding teachers guiding them, disciplinary problems are likely to decrease (Bear, 2010). The drop-out problem in schools with a serious disciplinary problem might be solved by respecting and caring for young people. Students having little or no voice at all might show resistance to learning. That explains why this issue should be studied in more detail. Also, teachers should feel flexible to mold their teaching on their own (Mitra et al., 2012). Students can only raise their voices in a teaching atmosphere where teachers make flexible decisions.

Biermann (2006), a gap year student who works for the English Secondary Schools' Association, claims that there are good examples of democratic applications that target young people's ideas and give importance to their decisions. Students in Greenford School are given the freedom to be involved in the decision process, such as deciding on the new curriculum. School councils are another way of establishing an atmosphere where students can have debates and try to find possible solutions to existing problems. School councils should not be restricted by the barriers of the

school's interference. Consultation is another way of reflecting student voice according to Biermann's study. It is suggested that student questionnaires, surveys, dialogues, interviews, feedback sessions can be beneficial for the consultation process. Teachers should not be the only means of transmitting information to the administration level. There should be a body representing students.

In order to give students an opportunity to comment on educational issues, software was developed. CEQuery, with which students can comment on educational topics, is used to provide students with an opportunity to pass on their comments on various educational issues. Student comments on course design, structure, student administration, practical experience, feedback, expectations and marking were addressed by the academic staff of the university (Grebennikov & Shah, 2013, p.615). In this way, the deficiencies which are underlined by students are corrected.

In Whitman High School students were inquired through surveys and interviews and it was aimed to ensure student participation. One student explained the importance and opportunities that young people have when they are given power and authority (Mitra, 2006). Among the studies mentioned so far instances are given from schools in Pakistan, America, England and South Africa (Lesotho). However, as Dündar (2013) suggested in his study, there has been little research on student participation in the decision making process in Turkey. (p.853). In Dündar's (2013) study, in which she targeted university students, both the student council members and non-members participated in the study. Non-members felt more comfortable whereas members did not feel independent in the classroom. Both groups claimed that they did not have any authority in the administration. Council members stated that they felt themselves as a part of authority and that they represented teachers. Non-members saw the authorities as inapproachable but members claimed that they were always welcomed by the members of administration. Both council members and non-members agreed on the issue that students did not act actively in the decision-making process. However, members had a different approach in that it was the students' responsibility to defend their rights. Non-members described themselves as passive participants. (p.871). Both groups were aware that they had difficulties in expressing themselves. The council members thought that they had bonding with the teachers and administrators via regular meetings with the administration. They also became more social with council meetings and projects. The issue of ethics is another outcome of the study. Both council members and non-members highlight the importance of students' and instructors' responsibilities to maintain an ethical atmosphere in the university.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to present the perception of students who are actively engaged in the decision making process of administration. The School of Languages holds classroom representative (CR) meetings in every academic module, which con-

sists of seven weeks. This means five CR meetings are held in a year. In addition to CR meetings, students fill out module evaluation surveys at the end of each module. These applications are being held to integrate student voice into the decisions made by the administration level. Of these two applications, CR meetings will be studied in detail.

Teacher and instructor ideas are evaluated via questionnaires, surveys and interviews and their ideas have been considered as crucial incentives for a democratic school atmosphere. However, students have been neglected and underestimated. This might be due to the rigid structure of the Turkish education system that is based on vertical hierarchy. In the study conducted by Biggart (1977) it was pointed out that rigid hierarchy discouraged and demotivated peers at any level.

In the present study, it is aimed to improve the existing structure of class representative meetings in the light of the feedback received by the students. Their responses will be the basis for further improvements. The structure of the CR meetings can be taken as a role model for other institutions in higher education. The outcome of such applications based on student views will trigger motivation and students will be able to be engaged in administration more actively. In the current study the following questions are addressed and focused on:

1. What are the views of classroom representatives on CR meetings that are held on a regular basis?
2. What do classroom representatives think that needs to be done to improve CR meetings in order to enable a more democratic educational environment?

Method

The study was conducted with the qualitative approach. Focus group interview was used in data collection. A focus group is an effective tool to collect data due to saving time and it is also an incentive to initiate new discussions with new inspirations by the help of different perspectives of the participants (Gibbs, 1997). In the report of NOAA Coastal Services Center (2009) it was mentioned that focus group interview is distinctive because of the fact that it is conducted in less time with more participants compared to other research methods. A fixed design was used to conduct the study, and questions were asked following an order. An important disadvantage of a fixed design is that the researcher should stick to the questions and there should be a certain standardization in asking questions. It is also important to define the objectives of the study. What information is needed to reach the aims of the study and which part of the collected information is more important? During focus group interviews, the interviewees can help each other to perceive the meaning of the interview questions.

Research Group

The research was conducted at a foundation university in Istanbul, Turkey. 12 elementary level classroom representatives were notified by e-mail and 8 of them were

willing to participate in the research. All of the participants were elementary level students consisting of 5 males and 3 females. In order for the participants to answer the questions sincerely, their names were not used. Students were given random names like (Student A, Student B) when the results were interpreted.

Data Collection

Data were collected using convenience sampling due to the fact that the researcher was familiar with the elementary level students. 12 elementary level classes were notified about the focus group interview by e-mails. The university organizes CR meetings every module (once in seven weeks) regularly. There are five modules in an academic year and five CR meetings per year. The research group consists of only class representatives since they represent the expectations, ideas and comments of their classmates. Instructors inform the CRs before the meetings and remind them that they should take notes about each and every single comment from their classmates. Data were collected via focus group interviews with one focus group. 12 elementary class representatives were informed about the time and place of the interview and also about the details of the study. 8 of them attended the meeting. The focus of the interview was defined as “The perception of the class representatives about their influence on administrative issues.” A list of questions was asked to the administrative staff to find out more about the focus and structure of the CR meetings. After meticulous examination of the literature, interview questions were prepared and given to experts in the field. After receiving feedback on the interview questions, the answerability of the questions was tested with one class representative. As stated by Creswell (1998), it is important to allocate sufficient time to each participant. Throughout the interview, the students were recorded and fieldnotes were taken about their body language or facial expressions when they passed on their comments.

Reliability & Validity

In qualitative research validity is related to the accuracy of the research results. The external validity is about transferring the results to similar groups. Internal validity is about the adequacy of the process which was followed in the process of reaching the results (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2011). In order to enhance internal validity interview questions were discussed with other instructors and the administration. Necessary changes were made in the light of their feedback and comments. The participants were made sure that confidentiality would be provided by keeping their personal details secret. To provide reliability, the research process was explained in detail so that it could be repeated. For internal reliability student responses were given and coded without any comments.

Analysis of the Data

The most crucial part of the focus group interview was the analysis part of it. There might be some possible problems as Smithson (2000) mentioned, such as dominant participants trying to override the conversation. In this case it is the researcher's duty to maintain a balance among the participators in the study. Having a moderator from a similar background, an instructor teaching English to elementary students, made it easier to analyze the data accurately. "As in other qualitative methods, focus group research requires an awareness of the contexts and the constraints on people's accounts of their lives, and an acknowledgement of the things which are left unsaid" (Smithson, 2000).

The data collected was scrutinized by content analysis, transcribed and coded via qualitative analysis software Nvivo 10. Codes were used to get an overall picture of the most frequently mentioned words and phrases which were tried to be associated with the responses of the participant. In parallel with the results analysis of the software, they were interpreted and commented on in accordance with the studies conducted in the field. Selective coding technique was used to revise the data and study the relationship between the codes collected by content analysis.

Findings

Within the framework of the study, the most frequently used 20 words were listed and codes were attributed to the frequently used words according to the connotations. As it is illustrated in Table 1 the most frequently used word, "student", is usually used in a context related to "student voice" so it is given as a separate topic. Another common word is "attention", which is placed under the category "being valued". "Meeting" is given under the category of "CR meetings", while "democracy" and "administration" are the other frequently used words. In brief, there are five categories which are "student voice", "being valued", "CR meetings", "democracy" and "administration".

Table 1. Distribution of the most frequently words

Word	Length	Count	Weighted Percentage (%)	Similar Words
Student's	10	13	1.12	Student's
Student	7	13	1.12	Student
Attention	7	13	1.12	Attention
I think	5	13	1.12	I think
I do not think	11	11	0.95	I do not think
Meeting	8	10	0.86	Meeting
Our	5	9	0.78	Our
It seems	7	8	0.69	It seems
When you say	7	8	0.69	When you say
Democracy	9	8	0.69	Democracy
As much as	5	6	0.52	As much as
Its influence	6	6	0.52	Its influence
Already	5	5	0.43	Already
Time	5	5	0.43	Time
Management	7	5	0.43	Management To the
Administration	5	5	0.43	Administration
A little	5	5	0.43	A little
To my mind	6	5	0.43	To my mind
I do not think	12	4	0.34	I do not think
It is not	5	4	0.34	It is not

Student Voice: One of the most frequently used words in the study, “student”, is given under the heading “student voice”. Some participants do not have an idea what “student voice in administration” really means. This might be because they are not familiar with the term “student voice”.

“Nothing comes to my mind when you say student voice”. Student B

“Student Voice” reminds some of the participants of “democracy” and “participating in administration”. When they were asked whether their voice had ever been taken into account by administration in their school life, a few of them stated that when they demonstrate against a situation, their ideas are valued. Some participants had been representatives before and they said that they did not really feel that they were part of the administration.

One student said

“In high school we wanted a separate class for the department that we wanted to study in. The administration did not accept our offer at first. However, after having reacted against their decision, they accepted our request”.

Student D.

On the other hand student E alleged that students ask for the rights that suit their purposes so, they should not be given too much autonomy in administration. When

student G shared his frustration because of an incident in which he did not feel supported by the administration staff, student E contradicted him, reminding him that he had been warned by his teachers, so he did not have the right to do such a thing. He insisted on his stance so he should accept the consequences. Student F explained the term “student voice” as the blossom of dreams. The CR responses show us that some of them were not familiar with the idea. However, they were happy to be given a chance so that their voices could be heard.

Student F

“I went out of the meeting room with a positive impression. We were approached in a friendly way and that is the way it is supposed to be.”

Being valued: Being valued is a very crucial issue raised by class representatives. According to one CR, student G,

“Administration should make students feel valued. Also, students should not give up saying what they want thinking that they are not valued. However, I accept that administration should not accept each and every demand of students. If students are undervalued, they will feel demotivated. On the other hand, it is a step forward to nominate class representatives and assemble them under a common objective.”

Although they have some concerns about student voice being taken into account by university administration, they all said that it is a positive attribute of administration.

CR Meetings: There has been a concern of the students that the structure of the CR meetings has a kind of defense mechanism.

“CR meetings should not defend the administration. If the target is to get our ideas, we should be listened to more closely.” Student A

Another representative said that the meetings should be held more often.

“The system of the foreign languages program was clearly explained in the CR meeting.”

Another CR made a comparison with other universities,

“I have a lot of friends in other universities. We usually share our experience about our universities with each other. They do not have such a system in their universities.” Student C

“I left the meeting with very positive feelings.” Student E

“In the meeting it was explained that cases of illness would be tolerated in case of exceeding the absenteeism limit. This is a very positive attitude. We did not know that the administration had such a friendly attitude towards students. In the meeting we have heard about some of our rights for the first time.” Student F

“There should be at least 2 CR meetings in one academic module (7 weeks)”
Student G

Democracy: Democracy in all historic forms has played a crucial role in shaping public education (Provenzo, 2008). The influence of democracy on education is inevitable. When we look at the data collected by the students, most of the participants associated “democracy” with equality and the term “student voice” is closely related to the term “democracy”.

“Reaching large groups of people is only possible by “democracy.” Student A.

CR student C also related “democracy” to “student voice”. However, he says *“I have not seen a clear application of democracy in our university so far. There are some attempts, though.”*

Student F *“I do not think that democracy is applicable in education.”*

As it can be concluded from the CR excerpts, most of the participants related “democracy” with “student voice” and “equality”. However, they do not seem to be optimistic about its use and real meaning. They said that CR meetings are a kind of application of democracy in education but they do not think it is entirely applied.

Administration: Before meeting with the class representatives, the administrator and vice administrator of the school of languages were asked questions about the decisions that they had made. They have made a lot of changes in the structure of the preparatory program in accordance with student comments and demands. “CR meetings have been held regularly since the foundation of the university and student representatives also attend our staff meetings from time to time to see the decision making process of the instructors and administration. “Our objective is to do things that our students can benefit from academically.” Vice administrator.

CR comments on administration are as follows:

“I was in student congress in the last year of high school. I talk to my high school friends from time to time. They are in school congress and they say that they are given more autonomy than in previous years.” Student C.

From this comment it can be concluded that there has been a positive change in terms of integrating students more into administration.

Student E is very optimistic and content with the administration and their policy.
“It is impossible to give students unlimited freedom.”

Student G *“Administration should negotiate with students, decisions should be determined mutually.”*

Conclusion

It can be deduced from the participants' responses that some of them were not familiar with the concept of “student voice”. Their requests and demands were only taken into account when they demonstrated against a situation. Classroom representative meetings gave them a positive impression and they felt that they were being valued. However, they had a feeling that the administrators were defending their own ideas and students should be listened to more closely in order to provide real democracy. They also claimed that they had not heard of any other similar applications like CR meetings when they talked to their friends from other universities. When their views on “democracy” were asked for, they stated that it is the only way of reaching large groups. When the administrator and vice administrator were asked about the objective of the CR meetings, they said that these meetings had been held since the university was founded and that they aimed to benefit from students academically. Finally, when students were asked about their views on the administration of their previous schools, one of them said that he had a chance to get in touch with one of his friends from high school and he came to know that there had been a positive change compared to previous years. All in all, there were some certain positive steps towards democracy in the field of education.

Discussion

Student voice is a new concept in educational administration and there are only a few studies in our country (Dündar, 2013). There have been educational reforms in Turkey recently and some of these reforms are based on the needs and demands of the students. By conducting such studies, student participation in education will stand out.

Higher education is considered as a crucial step in people's lives. Since it gives students the confidence and ability to take responsibility for their own continuing personal and professional development;

- it prepares students to be personally effective within the circumstances of their lives and work;
- it promotes the pursuit of excellence in the development, acquisition and application of knowledge and skills (Stephenson&Yorke, 1998).

In higher education individuals start to explore their potentials and skills. Giving students a chance to become responsible for their own lives will prepare them for their future lives. Higher education molds students' future lives to a great extent. As a

result, their voices should be listened to more carefully and interpreted correctly. The present study is a pilot research to initiate the process of raising the topic of student voice. Attending CR meetings, instant feedback sessions and creating a “student voice survey” will bring new dimensions to the field. The current study can be applied to a larger group of classroom representatives in order to make it a role model for other institutions in higher education.

Özet

Giriş

Demokrasi nüfusun ya da devletin belirli şartları yerine getiren tüm üyelerinin oluşturduğu sistemdir (ND, 2013). Demokrasi hayatımızın birçok alanında olduğu gibi eğitim alanında da oldukça önemlidir. Dewey'nin (2008) belirttiği gibi eğitim, insanın doğumundan ölümüne kadar gereklidir ve tüm tarih boyunca demokrasinin toplumların eğitimlerinde önemli bir rolünün olduğu görülmektedir (Provenzo, 2008)

Birçok çalışma demokrasinin insanların kendilerini özgürce ifade edebilmeleri için gerekli olduğunu vurgulamaktadır. Demokrasi bireylerin neleri yapabileceklerini belirten kuralları değil neleri yapamayacaklarını belirten düzenlemeleri içermelidir (Gülmez, 2001). Böyle bir ortam oluştuğunda bireyler daha yaratıcı ve üretken hâle gelmektedir (Zencirci, 2010). Demokratik bir eğitim ortamı öğrenci ve öğretmenlerin kendilerini özgürce ifade ettikleri demokratik bir okul yönetimi ile yakından ilgilidir. Zencirci, 2010 yılında yaptığı araştırmada 400 sınıf öğretmeni ve 90 yöneticiden yarıdan fazlasının otokrat (zorba) yönelimli olduğunu, kadın sınıf öğretmenlerinin erkek meslektaşlarından daha demokratik olduğunu ortaya koymuştur. Çankaya da (2010) çalışmasında okul yöneticilerinin demokrasiye karşı tutumlarını incelemiştir. Çoğu katılımcı; işbirliği, sorumluluk ve güvenin demokrasinin algılanması üzerinde büyük etkisi olduğunu ifade etmiştir.

Günümüzde okul yöneticileri, problem çözme merkezi konumunda oldukları için öğrencilerin ve velilerin yaşadıkları problemlere ve okuldaki demokratik sürece odaklanmaya başlamışlardır (Mutchler, 2011). Mutchler okul yöneticilerine yönelik yaptığı çalışmada okul yöneticilerinin demokrasiye yönelik tutumlarını incelemiştir. Ayrıca veliler ve öğrencilerden yansıtıcı günlük tutmalarını istemiş ve eğitim problemlerine farklı açılardan bakmıştır. Bu günlükler velilerin öğrencilerin problemlerine kendilerini yabancı hissettiklerini göstermiştir. Bu nedenle yöneticiler, velileri de eğitim sürecine dâhil ederek demokratik bir yönetim ortamı sağlamışlardır. Ayrıca öğrenci velilerinin yönetim kararlarına dâhil edilmesinin eğitim alanının dışında kalan sosyal sınıfların da eğitim sürecine katkı sağlaması açısından oldukça önemli olduğu görülmüştür.

Aynı şekilde Carlile de (2012) çalışmasında öğrencilerin kendilerini ve fikirlerini özgürce ifade ettikleri bir proje geliştirmiştir. Proje kapsamında öğrencilerin sesleri

kaydedilmiştir. Seslerinin kaydedileceği kendilerine bildirilmesine rağmen öğrenciler doğruyu söylerlerse kötü şeyler olacağından korktuklarını belirtmişlerdir. Smith (2003) ise öğrencilere kendilerini ifade etme fırsatı vermek amacıyla Amerika’da bir okuldaki öğrencileri kongre üyesi yapmıştır. Öğrencilerden oluşan bu kongrede kararlar fikir birliği ile alınmaktadır. Amerika’daki Parker Okulu gibi bazı okullarda bu tür uygulamalar yapılırsa da bazı eğitim kurumlarında öğrenci fikir ve yorumları kurum açısından bir nevi tehdit olarak algılanmaktadır. Hâlbuki öğrenciler sadece işlerin nasıl yürütüldüğünü öğrenmek istemektedirler. Bu yüzden öğrencilerin danışacakları ve çekinmeden katılım sağlayacakları yeni yapılanmalar ve hiyerarşik düzenler oluşturulmalıdır (Fielding&Rudduck, 2002).

Afrika Losotho’da öğrencilere karar verme ve seçim yapma fırsatının tanınmadığı bir okulda yürütülen bir çalışmada, okul yönetimi öğrenci katılımını desteklenmediği için otoriter okul ortamının oluştuğu sonucuna varılmıştır. Bu okulda öğrencilerin öğretmenlerinden memnun olsalar da fikirlerini açıkça dile getiremedikleri gözlemlenmiştir (Morojele&Muthukrishna,2011).

Güneydoğu Asya’ya (Pakistan) bakıldığında ise başarılı liderlik uygulamalarının olduğu görülür. Bunun nedeni öğrencilerin, okul yönetiminin ve öğretmenlerin iş birliği yaptığı demokratik eğitim ortamının sağlanmış olmasıdır (Saadi ve diğ., 2009).

Kirkpatrick (1999) demokratik kararlar vermenin önemini şu şekilde belirtmiştir: Fikir birliği ve iş birliğinin olduğu demokratik eğitim örgütleri; hiyerarşik düzenin katı olduğu ve yöneticilerin sabit olduğu örgütlerin aksine daha hareketlidir. Bu tür örgütlerde kişisel çıkarların aksine ortak fayda hedeflenir. Ortak fayda, öğrencilerin bağımsız hissetmelerini sağlar ve bu da insanların birbirlerine saygı duyduğu bir ortam oluşturur (Symth, 2006). Saygı göstermek demokratik ortamın en önemli özelliklerinden biridir. Eğitimcilerin öğrencilere rehberlik ettiği, öğrencilerin kendilerini özgürce ifade ettikleri bir eğitim ortamında disiplin problemleri de azalmaktadır (Bear, 2010). Bu nedenle öğretmenler, öğrencilerine bu özgür ortamı sağlamalıdır (Mitra ve diğ., 2012).

İngiliz Ortaokullar Birliği’nde çalışan bir öğrenci olan Biermann (2006) okul müfredatı oluşturmada öğrencilerin söz sahibi olduğu Greenford Okulu’nu örnek vererek bu okulda diyaloglar, görüşmeler, geribildirim seansları ile öğrencilerin seslerini duyurduğunu ifade etmiştir. Whitman Lisesi de bu tarz uygulamaların yapıldığı bir eğitim ortamıdır. Burada eğitim gören bir öğrenci de Biermann gibi, öğrencilere verilen güç ve otoritenin öğrenciler açısından ne kadar önemli olduğundan bahsetmiştir (Mitra, 2006).

Öğrencilerin yönetime katılımını sağlamak ve demokratik bir ortam elde etmek amacıyla bir veri tabanı geliştirilerek CEQuery adında bir yazılım hazırlanmış ve öğrencilere eğitim konularıyla ilgili yorum yapma imkânı sunulmuştur. Bu yazılımın kullanıldığı üniversitede akademisyenler ders tasarımı, yapısını, tecrübelerini, geribildirimlerini, beklentilerini ve notlamalarını paylaşılmaktadır. Bu sayede eksiklikler

de giderilmektedir (Grebbennikov & Shah, 2013). Biggart'ın (1977) çalışmasında belirttiği gibi katı hiyerarşik düzende olan bir eğitim ortamı öğrencilerin cesaretini kırar ve motivasyonunu düşürür.

Buraya kadarki kısımda Pakistan, Amerika, İngiltere ve Lesotho (Güney Afrika) gibi ülkelerdeki demokratik okul uygulamalarından bahsedilmiştir. Ancak Dündar'ın (2013) çalışmasında belirttiği üzere ülkemizde bu konuda yeterince araştırma bulunmamaktadır. Bu nedenle Dündar, üniversite öğrencilerini hedef alarak konsey üyesi olan ve olmayan öğrencilerle bir çalışma gerçekleştirmiştir. Üye olanlar da olmayanlar da aynı doğrultuda görüşlerini bildirmişler ve karar verme sürecinde aktif olarak bulunamadıklarını belirtmişlerdir. Oysaki bu tür girişimlerde önemli olan öğrencilerin karar sürecine dâhil edilmesidir.

Yöntem

Çalışma nitel yaklaşımla, odak grup görüşmeleriyle yürütülmüştür. Odak grup çalışması zamandan tasarruf sağlayan bir veri toplama yöntemi olmasının yanı sıra katılımcıların değişik bakış açılarını ortaya koymalarına fırsat sunduğu için etkili bir veri toplama yöntemidir (Gibbs, 1997). NOAA Hizmet Merkezi'nin (2009) odak grup görüşmesi raporuna göre odak grup görüşmesi, diğer araştırma yöntemlerine nazaran daha az zamanda daha fazla kişiyle görüşme yapılmasını sağlaması açısından diğer yöntemlerden ayrılmaktadır. Bu nedenle araştırmamız İstanbul'da bir vakıf üniversitesinin hazırlık programında öğrenim gören ve başlangıç seviyesi sınıflarında okuyan 5 erkek, 3 bayan sınıf temsilcisi ile yapılan odak grup görüşmeleri çerçevesinde yürütülmüştür. Araştırma soruları belirli bir sıra içinde sorulmuştur. Ayrıca yabancı diller yüksekokulu müdür ve müdür yardımcısına da sınıf temsilcisi toplantılarının amacı ve genel yapısı sorulmuştur. Creswell (1998) tarafından da belirtildiği gibi öğrencilere yeterli zaman vermek çok önemlidir. Bu nedenle her bir katılımcıya sorunun cevabını düşünebilmesi için yeterli zaman verilmiştir.

Çalışma odak grup görüşmeler çerçevesinde yürütüldüğü için Smithson'un (2000) belirttiği gibi katılımcılardan biri veya birkaçının konuşmaya yön vermeye çalışması durumu söz konusu olabilir. Böyle bir durumda araştırmacının görevi katılımcılar arasında bir denge kurmaktır. Görüşmelerimizde de bu denge sağlanmıştır. Toplanan veriler içerik analizine göre kodlanmış ve kodlama için Nvivo 10 programı kullanılmıştır. Çalışma boyunca çalışmanın geçerliliği ve güvenilirliği sağlanmaya çalışılmıştır. İç geçerlilik sonuca ulaşırken izlenen sürecin yeterliliği ile ilgilidir (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2011). İç geçerliliği sağlamak için görüşme soruları diğer öğretim görevlileri ve bölüm yöneticileri ile tartışılmıştır. Alınan geribildirim ve yapılan yorumlar ışığında sorularda gerekli değişiklik ve düzenlemeler yapılmıştır. Çalışmanın tekrar edilebilmesini ve güvenilirliğini sağlamak için araştırma süreci detaylarıyla verilmiştir. İç güvenilirliği sağlamak amacıyla araştırmacının yorum ve fikirlerine yer verilmemiştir.

Sonuç

Çalışma çerçevesinde en sık kullanılan 20 kelime listelenmiş ve bunların cümle içinde hangi şekilde geçtiğiyle ilgili bağlantılar kurulmuştur. Buna göre en sık kullanılan “öğrencinin sesi” kavramıyla bağlantılı olarak kullanılan kelime “öğrenci” kelimesi olmuştur. Sık kullanılan diğer kelime “değer verilmek” kategorisinde “ilgi gösterme” olarak belirlenmiştir. “Toplantı” kelimesi “sınıf temsilcisi toplantısı” kategorisinde yer almaktadır. Özetle, “öğrencinin sesi”, “değer verilmek”, “sınıf temsilcisi toplantısı”, “demokrasi” ve “yönetim” en sık kullanılan beş kategori olarak belirlenmiştir. Katılımcıların bazıları “öğrencinin sesi” hakkında hiçbir bilgilerinin olmadığını belirtmiştir. Ayrıca bazı öğrenciler istek ve taleplerinin ancak bir şeye karşı tepki gösterip direndikleri zaman dikkate alındığını dile getirmişlerdir. Öğrenciler, sınıf temsilcisi toplantılarının kendilerine değer verildiği hissini uyandırdığından bahsetmişlerdir. Ancak yine de öğrencilerin daha yakından dinlenmesi gerektiğini savunmuşlardır. Yönetimin kendi fikirlerini savunduğu görüşünü savunan sınıf temsilcisi “yönetim kendi görüşlerini savunma mekanizması yaratmadan ve öğrencileri daha fazla ön plana çıkararak dile getirirse” gerçek demokrasiden söz edilebileceğini belirtmiştir. Diğer üniversitelerden arkadaşlarıyla görüşenler diğer üniversitelerde bu tür uygulamalara pek rastlanmadığından bahsetmiştir. Öğrencilere demokrasi hakkındaki fikirleri sorulduğunda öğrenciler demokrasinin geniş kitlelere ulaşmanın tek yolu olduğunu söylemişlerdir. Liseden bir arkadaşıyla görüştüğünü söyleyen bir sınıf temsilcisi ise orada da benzer uygulamalara yer verildiği bilgisine ulaştığını ve bunun da demokrasi yönünde atılan önemli bir adım olduğunu belirtmiştir.

Tartışma

“Öğrencinin sesi” eğitimde yeni bir kavramdır ve ülkemizde bu kavramın önemi ile ilgili çalışmaların sayısı oldukça azdır (Dündar, 2013). Son dönemde ülkemizde önemli eğitim reformları yapılmış ve bu reformlar öğrencilerin istek ve taleplerine dayandırılmıştır.

Yükseköğretim insanların hayatlarında çok önemli bir adımdır ve yükseköğretim:

- Öğrencilerin kişisel ve mesleki gelişimlerine devam edebilmeleri için öğrencilere gerekli sorumluluk ve güveni verir,
- Öğrencileri yaşam çevrelerine ve işlerine etkin biçimde hazırlar,
- Yeni bilgilere ulaşılması, uygulamaların yapılması ve geliştirilmesinde mükemmeliyet sağlamayı hedefler (Stephenson & Yorke, 1998).

Yükseköğretim öğrencilerin potansiyel ve yeteneklerini kullanmaları açısından oldukça önemlidir. Yükseköğretim, öğrencilere kendi yaşamlarını biçimlendirme için şans vererek onları geleceğe hazırlar. Bu yüzden öğrencilerin sesleri daha yakından dinlenmeli ve öğrencilerin söylemek istedikleri doğru yorumlanmalıdır. Mevcut çalışma, eğitimde demokrasinin önemini kavrama yönünde bir pilot çalışma olarak düşünülebilir ve bu çalışma genişletilerek eğitim kurulu geneline uygulanabilir. Böylece ülkemizde bu tarz çalışmaların sayısı artacak ve öğrenciler seslerini daha rahat ifade edebileceklerdir.

Appendix

Interview Questions

1. What does “democracy” remind you of?
2. What does the concept of “student voice” remind you of?
3. Do you think that students should get involved in the administration level?
4. How do you think a democratic atmosphere can be maintained in an educational environment?
5. What are your general views on CR meetings that are regularly held by the school of languages of your university?
6. Do you believe in some changes in near future according to student needs?
7. Were there any democratic applications in your previous schools that are based on student view? If yes, what is your opinion of such applications?
8. Do you have any other suggestions about CR meetings?

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