Democracy in EFL classrooms

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Abstract

In the simplest term, democracy may be defined as a set of views and standards towards freedom, however it includes an array of approaches which have been framed over the history of mankind. In short, democracy is the systematized form of freedom. A democratic country is not possible without the freedom of expression. Freedom of expression fosters publics to clearly put forward their demands on how the authorities should perform their duties. Thus, this study inquires the visionary underpinnings of third persons in a phenomenological custom. The data of the study were gathered through a questionnaire designed by Yildirim and Türkoğlu (2017) and semi-structured interview questions structured by the researchers. Through a mix method research design, this paper employed both qualitative and quantitative ways to collect the required data. 180 EFL prep-class students at a state university in Turkey participated in the study. 160 of the informants responded to the questionnaire while 20 informants answered the semi-structured interview questions. Convenience sampling, where the very first accessible data is employed, was utilized in the study. The findings of the study show that the need of democratic participation is felt in EFL classrooms. Related implications to raise the awareness of EFL students and teachers on democracy and democratic citizenship were given at the end of the paper.

1. Introduction

The merit of democracy occurs in the essence of human wisdom (Schmitter & Karl, 1991; Morlino, 2004). The human welfare is ingrained not only in exempting from shortage of food or money but also in being noted for personal dignity. Democratic standards and practices are extensively needed to fight against poverty. This is clearly attained by sharing wealth and power equally in that poor people in a country own more to express (Varshney, 2005). The concept of democracy was originally uttered in Greece nearly two thousand years ago (Raaflaub, Ober, & Wallace, 2007). Afterwards, democracy term in its contemporary form took too much time to emerge. The revolutionary–and ultimately victorious–occurrence of democracy as a dynamic practice of management was empowered by means of several recoveries. A democratic country is not possible without justice, equality, and the right of expressing ideas. Freedom of expression authorizes people to plainly put forward their needs, and it demands any requirement from authorities which ought to represent their responsibilities. In brief, it provides people

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with any vital right such as accommodation and food (Sunstein, 1995). At present, world leaders favor a strong economy instead of such virtues as human rights and democracy, and if they have to make a choice between a strong democracy and a strong economy, they prefer the latter one without hesitation. It is apparent that for most of us, the democracy concept is captivated in textbooks, dictionaries, or encyclopedias (Ulum, & Köksal, 2019). For many, democracy refers to solely one thing that is seen just in elections in which people vote for the authority to direct them (Katz, 1997).

1.1. Literature review

Throughout the history, one of the basic aims of the state schools has been to enhance the skills and engagement required proper citizenship in a democracy. However, though we own a socially grounded comprehension of how schooling can foster these democratic aims (Gutmann, 1987), we do not have enough idea about how teachers actually foster the growth of appropriate citizens for a strong democracy (Kahne, Rodriguez, Smith, & Thiede, 2000).

There are a number of studies about the relation between democratic concerns and social studies which focus on evaluating the influence of specific pedagogy on approaches towards democratic objectives. Such studies simply discover a moderate relation between participation in social studies classes and learners' perceptions, views, and participation patterns (Blankenship, 1990; Ehman, 1969; Hahn & Tocci, 1990). The effect of schools on political ideology is higher (Niemi & Junn, 1998). Such studies also appreciate the effect of diverse characteristics of curriculum and pedagogy. Discussion based courses, chances to take part in making decisions and classroom practices, a free atmosphere for students in stating their views, and debates on contradictory matters seem to enhance democracy, tolerance, global citizenship, and participation (Blankenship, 1990). The effects of such issues are generally based on the age, ethnicity, socio-economical state, and of students (Hahn & Tocci, 1990).

Social scientists have interpreted the meaning and value of democracy for a long while, as well as referring to its relation with education. There seems to be a universal view that the main duty of formal education is to foster and conserve democracy and democratic values. Further, teachers, authorities, and scientists state a spectrum of views based on the nature of this agenda and the practices schools employ to fulfill this mission (Kahne, Rodriguez, Smith, & Thiede, 2000).

1.2. Critical pedagogy

Critical pedagogy is a credo employed in social and educational sciences. It develops and utilizes terms from critical theory and it associated practices to education field and anthropology. Pioneers of critical pedagogy refuse the view that knowledge is politically neutral (Gruenewald, 2003). Further, they suggest that education is an inherently ideological practice, whether the instructor admits that or not. Thus, teachers persist that democracy and social justice are not unrelated to the teaching and learning practices (Darder, 2003).

The aim of critical pedagogy is keeping freedom far away from injustice and despotism by means of raising critical awareness. Once it is attained, critical awareness motivates people to cause change in the environment. This is acquired by social critique to self-actualize (Giroux, 2020). The term critical pedagogy was initially put forward by Paulo Freire who fostered the concept in his master piece, Pedagogy of the Oppressed. Afterwards, the term globally accepted, forming a peculiarly effective ground in the United States. Moreover, it employed teaching to struggle against capitalism, racism, and sexism. Then, the term was fostered by academic journals such as Radical Teacher. While getting stronger, critical pedagogy made use of other terms such as postmodernism, post-colonialism, and feminism (Kincheloe, 2008).

Critical pedagogy is an instruction way to support learners in challenging any belief or ideology. In a similar vein, it is a practice to aid learners in attaining critical awareness (McLaren, 2002). In a way, critical pedagogy is comprised of habits of attitudes which go beyond the surface structure to find the deepest meanings. It challenges dominant ideologies, traditional stereotypes, and pure ideas to comprehend the social context (Wink, 2005).

1.3. Research questions

Accordingly, how democracy is being perceived in the EFL setting is the key point in this study. Thus, the following research questions were put forward:

How do EFL prep-class students perceive culture of democracy?

How do EFL prep-class students perceive democratic rights and equality?

How do EFL prep-class students perceive the duties and responsibilities democracy requires?

How do EFL prep-class students perceive democratic participation?

How do EFL prep-class students perceive global citizenship?

How do EFL prep-class students perceive democratic values?

2. Method

2.1. Research design

The aim of this study is to inquire Turkish EFL students' attitudes towards democratic citizenship and foster implications to enhance awareness of the related perceptions in EFL setting. In order to examine the conceptions, the present study employed phenomenography which is a qualitative research design in which people have the experience of something or conceive something. Ina similar vein, this paper probed the conceptual underpinnings of the informants in the phenomenological style. Like any other approaches to utilize philosophical phenomenology, the interpretative practice of phenomenographic study is very similar to that of grounded theory. It deals with an array of systematic inductive techniques to carry out qualitative research (Richardson, 1999).

2.2. Participants

180 EFL prep-class students from a state university in Turkey participated in the study. While 160 of them answered the questionnaire, 20 informants responded to the questionnaire.

2.3. Data collection procedures

The data of the study were gathered through a questionnaire designed by Yildirim and Türkoğlu (2017) and semi-structured interview questions designed by the researchers. Thus, this paper used both qualitative and quantitative ways to collect the required data based on a mix method research design. Likert-type scoring was employed for the scale: Strongly Agree (5), Agree (4), Unsure (3), Disagree (2), and Strongly Disagree (1). Findings from validity and reliability (Cronbach's Alpha) indicate that the scale used in this study is a confirmed scale with validity and reliability in detecting democratic citizenship attitudes. Cronbach's Alpha coefficient was utilized to find out if there was proof that the scale and each subscale were internally consistent. Cronbach's Alpha ranged between .60-.79 for the sub-scales. Further, it was .78 for the overall scale (Yildirim & Türkoğlu, 2017). Utilizing the literature through related articles and confirmed interviews, the researchers developed the semi-structured

interview questions. Kappa Coefficient for Intercoder Reliability was calculated for the coding reliability of the interview, and it was found that the coding process was highly reliable (K= .886, p<.001).

2.4. Data analysis

The results of the study are clarified based on the data gathered from the informants by means of data collection tools. They are classified under the titles of the sections of the questionnaire, besides the interview.

3. Results

3.1. Culture of democracy (CD)

Table 1. *Perceptions on culture of democracy*

Item	$\overline{x}$
7. The judicial system should not be affected by politics.	3.74
3. Political leaders should give privileges to their relatives.	1.53
1. I am prejudiced towards people who have different religion.	1.30
4. People should continue to support, even if the administration of their home country makes the wrong decisions.	1.25
2. I am prejudiced towards people who have different ethnic background.	1.23
6. Women should not enter politics.	1.17
5. The top of income earners should have more political power than the rest of the others.	1.10

As can be clearly observed in Table 1, the informants mostly accept the 7th item as The judicial system should not be affected by politics ($\overline{x}$= 3.74). Further, the 3rd item Political leaders should give privileges to their relatives ($\overline{x}$= 1.53) is somewhat agreed by the respondents. On the other hand, the pursuing items are totally disagreed by the participants: the 1st item I am prejudiced towards people who has different religion ($\overline{x}$= 1.30); the 4th item People should continue to support, even if the administration of their home country makes the wrong decisions ($\overline{x}$= 1.25); the 2nd item I am prejudiced towards people who has different ethnic background ($\overline{x}$= 1.23); the 6th item Women should not enter politics ($\overline{x}$= 1.17); and the 5th item The top of income earners should have more political power than the rest of the others ($\overline{x}$= 1.10).

3.2. Democratic rights and equality (DRE)

Table 2. *Perceptions on democratic rights and equality*

Item	$\overline{x}$
8. Every individual has equal rights.	4.78
9. Men and women are equal.	4.74
10. Every individual has equal voting rights.	4.50

One can simply understand from Table 2 that each item is totally agreed by the informants. In a similar vein, the 8th item Every individual has equal rights ($\overline{x}$= 4.78), the 9th item Men and women are equal ($\overline{x}$= 4.74), and the 10th item Every individual has equal voting rights ($\overline{x}$= 4.50) are all totally agreed by the respondents.

3.3. Duties and responsibilities (DR)

Table 3. *Perceptions on duties and responsibilities*

Item	$\bar{x}$
13. Every individual should take responsibility for himself and his community.	4.64
11. Every individual should contribute to national identity by protecting his or her own culture.	4.40
12. Every individual is responsible for protecting the natural, cultural and architectural heritage.	4.31
14. Good citizens should voluntarily take part in community services.	4.17

It may be clearly observed from Table 3 that while the 13th item is totally agreed by the respondents, the 11th, 12th, and 14th items are mostly agreed by them. That's to say, the 13th item Every individual should take responsibility for himself and his community ($\bar{x}$= 4.64) is totally agreed by the informants, while the following items are mostly agreed by them: the 11th item Every individual should contribute to national identity by protecting his or her own culture ($\bar{x}$= 4.40); the 12th item Every individual is responsible for protecting the natural, cultural and architectural heritage ($\bar{x}$= 4.31); and the 14th item Good citizens should voluntarily take part in community services ($\bar{x}$= 4.17).

3.4. Democratic participation (DP)

Table 4. *Perceptions on democratic participation*

Item	$\bar{x}$
15. Good citizens should participate in acts to improve human rights.	4.30
16. Good citizens should participate in acts to protect the environment.	4.25
17. Good citizens should participate in the peaceful protest against the government's wrong decisions.	4.22
18. The government has a responsibility to provide job guarantees to every citizen.	4.21

The informants mostly agree on the items related to democratic participation. In other words, they mostly agree on the following items on democratic participation: the 15th item Good citizens should participate in acts to improve human rights ($\bar{x}$= 4.30); the 16th item Good citizens should participate in acts to protect the environment ($\bar{x}$= 4.25); the 17th item Good citizens should participate the peaceful protest against the government's wrong decisions ($\bar{x}$= 4.22); and the 18th item The government has a responsibility to provide job guarantees to every citizen ($\bar{x}$= 4.21).

3.5. Global citizenship (GC)

Table 5. *Perceptions on global citizenship*

Item	$\bar{x}$
20. I follow international developments.	4.18
19. I follow international events.	4.08
23. I communicate with people in other countries.	3.81
22. I actively participate in democratic practices in society.	3.61
24. I participate in groups of people from different countries.	3.59
21. I take part in community services to experience citizenship responsibilities.	3.54

As it is displayed on Table 5, the respondents mostly agree on the items related to global citizenship. Likewise, they mostly agree on the following items on global citizenship: the 20th item I follow international developments ($\bar{x}$= 4.18); the 19th item I follow international events ($\bar{x}$= 4.08); the 23rd item I communicate with people in other countries ($\bar{x}$= 3.81); the 22nd item I actively participate in democratic

practices in society ($\bar{x}$= 43.61); the 24th item I participate in groups of people from different countries ($\bar{x}$= 3.59); and the 21st item I take part in community services to experience citizenship responsibilities ($\bar{x}$= 3.54).

3.6. Values of citizenship (VC)

Table 6. *Perceptions on values of citizenship*

Item	$\bar{x}$
25. I put myself in other people's place even who are from another country.	4.53
28. The differences based on ethnic culture are wealth.	4.50
27. I respect other people's speaking their mother tongue.	4.48
26. I am tolerant of different opinions.	4.44
29. I see myself as a global citizen.	4.29

One can easily understand from Table 6 that the informants totally agree on the 25th I put myself in other people's place even who are from another country ($\bar{x}$= 4.53), as well as the 28th item The differences based on ethnic culture are wealth ($\bar{x}$= 4.50). Further, the participants mostly agree on the successive items: the 27th item I respect other people's speaking their mother tongue ($\bar{x}$= 4.48); the 26th item I am tolerant of different opinions ($\bar{x}$= 4.44), and the 29th item I see myself as a global citizen ($\bar{x}$= 4.29).

3.7. Interview Results on Democracy

Table 7 illustrates the responses of the informants on culture of democracy, democratic rights and equality, duties and responsibilities, democratic participation, and global citizenship. Further, as it is clearly understood from the table, remarks of students are given for each theme.

Table 7. *Views on Democracy*

Theme	Component	#	Remarks of Informants
Definition of democracy	Equality	16	Democracy means equality. Both males and females are equal. Everyone has a free will. People should not be differentiated for their viewpoints. Everyone has the freedom of speech. Cultures may be different from each other, but every culture deserves respect.
	Free will	6	
	Respect	6	
	Lifestyle	4	
	Justice	4	
	Freedom of speech	2	
	Cultural variety	2	
	Human rights	2	
	Democracy culture	2	
	Opposing privileges	2	
Rights and equality	Right of equality	20	For me, democratic rights and equality mean that everyone is equal and has democratic rights without considering their religion, ethnicity, or language.
	Free will	6	
	Freedom of speech	4	
	Justice	4	
Duties and responsibilities	Voting	12	The most important duty is to vote for political leaders as well as following the process of voting. Further, as a woman living in this country, it is my responsibility to react to views
	Claiming rights	8	
	Fighting against injustice	6	
	Being a good citizen	2	
	Respecting diverse views	2	

	Following democratic principles	2	and decisions which eliminate equal opportunities and which develop gender bias.
	Using social media	2	
	Preserving democracy	2	
	Preserving Ataturk's principles	2	
Participation	Joining related projects, campaigns, and activities	10	I try to join projects, campaigns, and any peaceful activity that support democracy. Further, while claiming my own rights, as well as others', I never miss elections.
	Freedom of speech	4	
	Full participation	4	
	Claiming rights	4	
	Voting	4	
	Trying to be a good citizen	6	
Global citizenship	Representing my social role	4	In order to be a global citizen, I firstly try to be a good citizen in Turkey. Besides, I follow social issues through internet. Lastly, I share global viewpoints which support human rights.
	Respecting human rights	2	
	Not available	2	
	Not a proper global citizen	2	
	Following social issues	2	
	Active use of internet and social media	2	
	Sharing global viewpoints	2	

It is easily observed from Table 7 that the informants successively hinted on the following components while defining democracy in their own words: Equality (f= 16); Free will (f= 6); Respect (f= 6); Lifestyle (f= 6); Justice (f= 4); Freedom of speech (f= 2); Cultural variety (f= 2); Human rights (f= 2); Democracy culture (f= 2); and Opposing privileges (f=2). Table 7 also clarifies that the informants declare such components as Right of equality (f= 20), Free will (f= 6), Freedom of speech (f= 4), and Justice (f= 4), while referring to democratic rights and equality. Moreover, while mentioning duties and responsibilities of democracy, the informants utter the following elements Voting (f= 12), Claiming rights (f= 8), Fighting against injustice (f= 6), Being a good citizen (f= 2), Respecting diverse views (f= 2), Following democratic principles (f= 2), Using social media (f= 2), Preserving democracy (f= 2), and Preserving Ataturk's principles (f= 2). Besides, when stating democratic participation, the informants express the successively pursuing views Joining related projects, campaigns, and activities (f= 10), Freedom of speech (f= 4), Full participation (f= 4), Claiming rights (f= 4), and Voting (f= 4). Lastly, the informants declared the following viewpoints while mentioning global citizenship: Trying to be a good citizen (f= 6); Representing my social role (f= 4);   Respecting global human rights (f= 2); Not available (f= 2); Not a proper global citizen   (f= 2); Following social issues (f= 2); Active use of internet and social media (f= 2); and Sharing global viewpoints (f= 2).

4. Discussion

One of the fundamental goals of EFL or ESL settings is to foster learners' communicative competence. In order to achieve this, learners are required to learn how to utilize language to attain social objectives such as comprehending and uttering social messages besides interacting with other

society members. Foreign language learning cannot be confined only to acquiring the four language skills. It also has to deal with the function language owns in activating social relationships, social values, human virtues, and democracy related dimensions to foster specific practices and discourses. Language forges and is forged by society, and it embodies knowledge, identity, and human relationships. Further, language is structured by the power ideologies create (Moss, Barletta, & Chamorro, 2015). Having these aspects in mind, this present study hints on the relationship between language and democracy which constitutes a fundamental part in human life.

In his commentary, El Karfa (2007) discussed the significance of promoting democracy and citizenship characteristics in foreign language settings all over the world, as well as in Morocco. He argued that teacher training, classroom practices, course content, and learner-teacher roles can foster such social characteristics as compassion, responsibility, equality, tolerance, and respect. Further, he puts forward that a student-centered setting in which group work, interaction, and participation exist pursues such values. In the present paper, such citizenship values and democracy related features were also included as the core content of the study.

In order to discover if English teachers in Jordan employ democracy techniques in their courses, Al-Zubi (2018) represents a classroom management framework to be employed in EFL instruction through having EFL teachers utilize democratic practices to form the learning setting. With this in mind, he formed a "Democracy Scale" for the degree of using democracy culture in EFL settings as a data collection tool. Further, he suggested some implications such as employing technology in EFL settings and doing similar studies to find out about learner attitudes towards practicing democracy in EFL settings. Rather than developing such a scale, the present study employs a similar instrument designed by Yildirim and Türkoğlu (2017).

In their case study which is grounded on the first-year course included in the EFL Teacher Education program, Glas and Cardenas-Claros (2013) state that learners actively take part, make instant relations with Chile's facts and attain strong interpretations for their future career. They represent a double phase pedagogical proposal for ELT in order to promote intrinsic motivation and democratic endorsement by means of a blend of significant cultural compounds derived from the contemporary English cultures and independent learning, containing technology-aided learner involvement and self-reflection. In the present study, such issues as active participation and democratic empowerment are also emphasized.

In his document analysis, Macías (2013) refers to specific dimensions to be dealt with while considering the inclusion of critical pedagogy in EFL settings. Thus, he reviews and disputes the most connected matters as to the interpretation of critical pedagogy, the role of critical pedagogy in education, foreign language and critical pedagogy, practices of critical pedagogy, the function of the educator, and integration of critical pedagogy into school setting. Lastly, he clarifies critical pedagogy as a way requiring teaching and learning approaches that are against the traditional language learning settings which do not bear any transformational impact on students. In the present study, such features of democracy as critical thinking and participatory approach in EFL setting have also been hinted on.

5. Conclusions

This study aimed to examine the views of EFL learners on democracy. The findings of the study show that (a) the participants developed a rich culture of democracy; (b) they are aware of such terms as democratic rights and equality; (c) they know the duties and responsibilities that democracy requires; (d) they are aware of the need of democratic participation; (e) they somewhat represent the characteristics of a global citizen; and (f) they own the needed democratic values. In a similar vein, most of the informants see themselves as global citizens and they express that they try to be good citizens while representing their social role in the society. They respect diverse religions, cultures, ethnicities,

identities, and beliefs while hinting on the need of equality and freedom of speech in the society. Additionally, they emphasize the importance of taking responsibility for democracy by initially voting in the elections. They also support the view of participating in acts to improve human rights by claiming both their and other people's rights. While trying to be global citizens, they use internet or social media to be aware of global issues and events. Furthermore, they appreciate human rights within a global perspective.

4.1. Implications for EFL Classrooms

Critical pedagogy is an educational theory which aims to build a progressive and democratic culture by means of education. Therefore, the study put forward precious advice for EFL classrooms in promoting ways to develop the critical thinking skills of EFL students (Subba, 2014; Ördem & Ulum, 2019). In future studies, participatory approach can be used in foreign language education by utilizing the assumptions of critical pedagogy even if definite intellectual conflicts may be encountered in foreign language classroom settings since a democratic attitude already brings about disputes through which dynamic education can be employed and enhanced.

5. Ethics Committee Approval

The author confirms that this study does not need ethics committee approval. (Date of Confirmation: 16.30.2020)

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Yabancı dil olarak İngilizce sınıflarında demokrasi

Öz

Demokrasi aslında özgürlükle ilgili düşünce ve normlar topluluğudur, fakat aynı zamanda tarih boyunca oluşturulmuş bir takım süreç ve yöntemleri de içerir. Kısacası demokrasi kurumsallaşmış standart bir özgürlük biçimidir. Demokratik bir topluluk, konuşma hakkı olmadan mümkün değildir. Konuşma özgürlüğü, insanlara devlet kurumlarının sorumluluklarını nasıl yerine getirmeleri gerektiği konusundaki taleplerini açıklamalarını sağlar. Buna göre, bu çalışma, fenomenolojik bir gelenekte öğrencilerin kavramsal temellerini incelemektedir. Araştırmanın verileri Yıldırım ve Türkoğlu (2017) tarafından tasarlanan bir anket ve araştırmacı tarafından tasarlanan yarı yapılandırılmış görüşme soruları ile toplanmıştır. Karma yöntem araştırma tasarımına dayanan bu çalışma gerekli verileri toplamak için nitel ve nicel araştırma tekniklerinden yararlanmıştır. Çalışmaya gönüllü olarak Türkiye'de bir devlet üniversitesinde okuyan 180 yabancı dil olarak İngilizce öğrencisi katılmıştır (anket için N = 160 ve görüşme için N = 20). Araştırmada, mümkün olan ilk veri kaynağının ilave bir gereklilik olmadan kullanıldığı bir örnekleme türü olan, Uygunluk Örnekleme Yöntemi kullanılmıştır. Çalışmanın sonunda yabancı dil olarak İngilizce öğrencilerinin demokrasi ve demokratik vatandaşlık konusundaki farkındalıklarını artırmaya yönelik çıkarımlar sunulmuştur.

Anahtar sözcükler: demokrasi; demokratik vatandaşlık; yaklaşımlar; yabancı dil olarak İngilizce, yabancı dil olarak İngilizce sınıfları

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