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Article

An Investigation of Democratic Awareness Among Secondary School Students of Different Grade Levels in a Project School: The Case of Bodrum

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Abstract: Studies on democratic awareness and its impact on society play a vital role in the adoption of democratic principles and the widespread acceptance of democratic values. In Turkey, the development of democratic awareness is influenced not only by historical and cultural elements but also by political, economic, and social factors. The secondary school period is a critical stage during which students shape their personal values and develop a sense of social consciousness. Numerous studies on democratic awareness have been conducted globally and continue to be pursued. In this study, a quantitative research design—specifically the survey model—was used to determine the level of democratic awareness among students. The research was carried out at Bodrum Anatolian High School, a designated project school located in Bodrum, Muğla. The study involved a total of 146 students from grades 9, 10, and 11. Data were collected using the “Democratic Awareness Scale.” The collected data were analyzed using SPSS 25.0 software. This study is distinct from others in that it explores democratic awareness within the context of a project school and compares students across different grade levels. In this respect, the study is a pioneering effort. The results revealed significant differences based on students’ grade levels and academic achievement.

Keywords: awareness; democracy; secondary education; SPSS

1. Introduction

The concept of democracy is defined in various ways across the literature. It is challenging to offer a singular, uniform definition, as one’s beliefs, socio-cultural context, and emotional stance influence their understanding of democracy (Laski, 1962:3). Research on democratic awareness and its societal implications plays a key role in promoting the fundamental principles of democracy and in encouraging the dissemination of democratic values within society (Ekinci, 2024). These studies aim to build, strengthen, and sustain democratic consciousness (Gündüz, 2022).

Scholars have focused on defining democratic awareness, identifying its components and developmental processes, exploring theoretical approaches, and examining its interaction with other social concepts (Cender, 2023). The influence of democratic awareness on various segments of society, institutions, and political processes is also a significant research interest (İnan, 2023). Historically, democracy originated in Ancient Greece as a form of governance based on the sovereignty of the people (Uluç & Kaan, 2022). Rooted in classical Greek traditions, democracy has evolved and manifested differently in various societies over time (Oktuay, 2024). It emerged as a response to governance models such as monarchy and aristocracy and has continued to develop through interaction with diverse ideological movements and social transformations, reaching its current meaning in modern contexts (Doğu, 2022).

Democratic awareness refers to individuals’ attitudes toward, understanding of, and consciousness about democracy and democratic values (Ekinici, 2024). It includes their ability to comprehend and support democratic institutions and processes and their commitment to democratic values. Moreover, it encompasses individuals’ responsibilities within society and their participation in democratic decision-making.

As a fundamental element of democratic societies, democratic awareness is critical for societal welfare and development (Şimşek & Karaduman, 2023). The formation of democratic awareness in children begins with family experiences. Encouraging participation within the family, allowing children to express their opinions, and involving them in decision-making processes contribute significantly to the development of democratic consciousness (Ekinici, 2024). In addition, experiences in school and classroom interactions shape this awareness. Teachers play a crucial role in this process. Creating a participatory educational environment and valuing students’ opinions supports the development of democratic awareness. It is essential to provide children with education on the significance and application of democratic values from an early age (Şahinkaya, 2022). Concepts such as consensus, respect, equality, and freedom can be taught through play-based activities. Schools and families play a central role in instilling democratic awareness in children (Yıldırım, 2022). For instance, student councils and extracurricular clubs can foster a sense of participation and responsibility.

Through such experiences, children are better prepared to become active members of a democratic society in adulthood (Akın, 2021). In Turkey, the development of democratic awareness is shaped by political, economic, social, historical, and cultural factors (Serenli, 2024). Since the early 20th century, various political and social transformations have influenced democratic consciousness. Issues such as political instability, economic inequality, and ethnic or religious tensions have affected this awareness (Oktuay, 2024). Additionally, the roles of media, the education system, civil society organizations, and levels of political participation are critical in shaping democratic awareness (Yılmaz, 2024). In Turkey, the reinforcement of democratic awareness can be achieved through strengthening human rights, social peace, trust, and civic participation (Korkmaz & Çilingir, 2021). The secondary school period is a crucial developmental stage during which students form their personal values and societal awareness (Karakurt, 2024). This stage significantly influences the kind of individuals they will become in the future (Şengün, 2023). Therefore, fostering democratic awareness among students at this age is fundamental for establishing a healthy and sustainable democratic society (Çepni, 2020). As a result, future generations are more likely to become conscious, responsible, productive, and engaged citizens. The relationship between democratic awareness and education highlights the essential role of education in shaping individuals’ understanding of democracy. Education fosters comprehension and development of key democratic values.

Through schools and institutions that promote democratic education, individuals are encouraged to adopt democratic attitudes and participatory behavior. Such education also increases awareness of societal issues and supports active citizenship. Thus, education plays a formative and decisive role in the societal impact of democratic awareness. The knowledge and skills acquired through education contribute significantly to the strengthening of democracy (Akseli, 2024; Çelik, 2024). Studies on democratic awareness continue to be conducted on a global scale. Table 1 presents selected international studies conducted in recent years on democratic consciousness. A review of the related literature shows that investigating democratic awareness in Turkey can contribute meaningfully to raising awareness. This study distinguishes itself by focusing on democratic awareness among secondary school students in a project school and comparing different grade levels. In this regard, it is considered a pioneering work.

Table 1. t-Test Results for the Comparison of Democratic Awareness by Gender.

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean (X̄)</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Democratic Awareness	Male	80	58.70	18.99	1.17	.243

Variable	Gender	N	Mean (X)	SD	t	p
	Female	66	55.27	15.68		

*p<.05.

2. Research Methodology

In this study, a quantitative research design—specifically the survey model—was employed to determine the level of democratic awareness among students. The research was conducted at Bodrum Anatolian High School Project School, located in the Bodrum district of Muğla province. The study included a total of 146 students from grades 9, 10, and 11. Among the participants, 80 were male and 66 were female students. As the data collection tool, the “Democracy Awareness Scale” developed by Alkan (2011) was utilized. The scale was designed to measure students’ awareness of democracy and consists of 24 items along with 6 demographic questions. All items in the scale are positively worded. The internal consistency reliability coefficient of the scale was determined to be 0.90, and factor loadings were found to range between 0.37 and 0.69 (Akan, 2011). Necessary permissions were obtained for the use of the scale, and all ethical principles were followed throughout the data collection process. The data obtained from the study were analyzed using the SPSS statistical software (version 25.0). To determine whether the scale scores followed a normal distribution, both the Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests were applied. In cases where the data exhibited normal distribution, the paired samples t-test was used for dependent groups, and the independent samples t-test was used for independent groups.

When the data did not follow a normal distribution, the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test was used for dependent groups, while the Mann-Whitney U Test was employed for independent groups. Additionally, a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to compare democratic awareness levels across the 9th, 10th, and 11th grades.

When significant differences were identified through ANOVA, post hoc tests were applied to determine between which groups these differences occurred. The significance level for all statistical analyses was set at 0.05.

During the data collection process, data were obtained based on voluntary participation, personal information was kept confidential, and the data were used solely for scientific purposes. Through these procedures, students’ levels of democratic awareness were evaluated using a scientific and systematic approach.

3. Results

This section presents the results obtained from the SPSS 25.0 analysis of students’ democratic awareness levels. The findings are displayed in tables and interpreted through statistical methods to identify whether there are significant differences based on various variables.

3.1. Comparison of Students’ Democratic Awareness by Gender (Independent Samples t-Test)

As shown in Table 1, an independent samples t-test was conducted to determine whether students’ democratic awareness scores differed by gender. The mean democratic awareness score of male students was 58.70 (SD = 18.99, n = 80), while that of female students was 55.27 (SD = 15.68, n = 66). The result of the analysis revealed no statistically significant difference between male and female students in terms of democratic awareness (t = 1.17; p = .243). Since the p-value exceeds the threshold of 0.05, it is concluded that gender does not have a significant impact on democratic awareness scores.

3.2. Comparison of Students’ Democratic Awareness by Grade Level (ANOVA and Tukey Post-Hoc Test)

As shown in Table 2, a one-way ANOVA was conducted to examine whether students’ democratic awareness levels differed significantly by grade level. The results indicated statistically significant differences among the three groups (p < .001). The 10th-grade students had the highest

mean democratic awareness score ($X = 62.717$, $SD = 18.939$), followed by 11th graders ($X = 58.421$, $SD = 16.431$), while the 9th graders had the lowest average score ($X = 49.188$, $SD = 13.687$). These findings suggest that grade level has a notable impact on students' democratic awareness.

Table 2. ANOVA Results for the Comparison of Democratic Awareness by Grade Level.

Variable	Grade Level	N	Mean (X)	SD	p
Democratic Awareness	9th Grade	48	49.188	13.687	<.001
	10th Grade	60	62.717	18.939	
	11th Grade	38	58.421	16.431	

Table 3. Tukey Post-Hoc Test Results for Democratic Awareness by Grade Level.

Grade Comparison	Mean Difference	SE	df	t	p (Tukey)
9th vs 10th Grade	-13.529	3.237	143	-4.180	< .001
9th vs 11th Grade	-9.234	3.630	143	-2.544	.032
10th vs 11th Grade	4.296	3.466	143	1.240	.432

As presented in Table 4, the Tukey post-hoc test was used to further explore the differences among grade levels. The analysis revealed a statistically significant difference between 9th and 10th grade students ($p < .001$), indicating that 10th-grade students had significantly higher democratic awareness scores (Mean Difference = 13.529). Similarly, a significant difference was found between 9th and 11th grade students ($p = .032$), with 11th graders also scoring higher. However, no statistically significant difference was found between 10th and 11th grade students ($p = .432$). These findings suggest that students' democratic awareness tends to increase starting from 9th grade and stabilizes after 10th grade.

Table 4. ANOVA Results for the Effect of Family Income on Democratic Awareness.

Variable	Income Level (TRY)	N	Mean (X)	SD	df	p
Democratic Awareness	0–20,000	8	63.875	17.183	3	.625
	20,001–40,000	31	55.065	19.155		
	40,001–60,000	45	58.067	15.487		
	60,001 and above	62	56.661	18.441		

3.3. Comparison of Students' Democratic Awareness by Family Income Level (ANOVA)

As presented in Table 4, an ANOVA was conducted to examine whether students' democratic awareness levels differed based on their families' income levels. The analysis revealed no statistically significant difference among the four income groups ($p > .05$). Although students from families earning 0–20,000 TRY had the highest mean score ($X = 63.875$), and those from families earning 20,001–40,000 TRY had the lowest ($X = 55.065$), these differences were not statistically meaningful ($df = 3$, $p = .625$). This suggests that family income does not have a significant impact on students' levels of democratic awareness.

3.4. Comparison of Students' Democratic Awareness by Parental Education Level (ANOVA)

As shown in Table 6, an ANOVA was conducted to determine whether students' democratic awareness levels varied according to their mothers' education levels. The analysis indicated no statistically significant difference among the groups ($p = .659$). The mean scores ranged from 53.333 (primary education) to 58.625 (postgraduate education), but these differences were not significant.

This finding suggests that the mother's level of education does not significantly influence students' democratic awareness.

Table 5. ANOVA Results for the Effect of Mother's Education Level on Democratic Awareness.

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Mother's Education Level</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean (X)</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
Democratic Awareness	Primary Education	24	53.333	14.649	3	.659
	Secondary Education (High School)	58	58.672	17.327		
	University	56	57.000	17.835		
	Postgraduate (Master/PhD)	8	58.625	26.392		

Table 6. ANOVA Results for the Effect of Father's Education Level on Democratic Awareness.

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Father's Education Level</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean (X)</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
Democratic Awareness	Primary Education	29	51.241	13.179	3	.130
	Secondary Education (High School)	57	60.702	18.327		
	University	53	56.623	18.634		
	Postgraduate (Master/PhD)	7	56.714	15.510		

As presented in Table 7, ANOVA analysis was also performed to examine the effect of the father's education level on students' democratic awareness. The results showed no statistically significant difference among the groups ($p = .130$). Although the highest mean score was found among students whose fathers had completed high school ($X = 60.702$), the differences were not significant. These findings indicate that the father's education level does not have a meaningful effect on students' democratic awareness.

Table 7. ANOVA Results for the Effect of Academic Achievement on Democratic Awareness.

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Academic Achievement Level</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean (X)</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
Democratic Awareness	41–60 (Moderate)	4	61.500	11.958	2	.015
	61–80 (Good)	55	62.309	17.010		
	81–100 (Very Good)	87	53.690	17.483		

* $p < .05$.

3.5. Comparison of Students' Democratic Awareness by Academic Achievement Level (ANOVA and Dunnett Post Hoc Test)

As shown in Table 7, the ANOVA analysis revealed a statistically significant difference in students' democratic awareness levels based on their academic achievement ($p = .015$). When examining the mean scores, students with moderate academic achievement ($X = 61.500$) had higher democratic awareness scores than students in the "very good" category. Students in the "good" category ($X = 62.309$) also had relatively high scores, while those in the "very good" category had the lowest average ($X = 53.690$). These findings suggest that higher academic performance does not necessarily correlate with higher democratic awareness, and in some cases, students with moderate success levels may display greater democratic consciousness.

As presented in Table 8, a Dunnett post hoc test was conducted to evaluate pairwise comparisons. The results indicated that there were no statistically significant differences between students with "moderate" achievement and those with either "good" or "very good" academic performance in terms of democratic awareness ($p > .05$ for both comparisons). Although the ANOVA suggested an overall difference among groups, the post hoc analysis shows that these differences are not statistically robust across all pairs.

Table 8. Dunnett Post Hoc Test Results for the Effect of Academic Achievement on Democratic Awareness.

<i>Comparison (Reference: Moderate)</i>	<i>Mean Difference</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p (Dunnett)</i>
Good (61–80)	0.809	8.911	0.091	.984
Very Good (81–100)	-7.810	8.799	-0.888	.448

3.6. Comparison of Students’ Democratic Awareness by Parenting Styles (ANOVA and Tukey Post Hoc Test)

As shown in Table 9, an ANOVA was performed to evaluate the effect of parenting styles on students’ levels of democratic awareness. The results indicated a statistically significant difference among groups ($p = .026$). The highest mean democratic awareness score was observed among students whose parents had a “permissive-lenient” style ($X = 66.833$), followed by “overprotective-anxious” ($X = 60.125$), “authoritarian-strict” ($X = 56.846$), and “democratic-tolerant” ($X = 53.952$). These findings suggest that students’ perceptions of their parents’ child-rearing styles are meaningfully related to their democratic awareness. Notably, the “permissive-lenient” style was associated with the highest awareness levels, while the “democratic-tolerant” style showed unexpectedly lower levels. This indicates that the impact of parenting on democratic awareness may involve complex dynamics, warranting further investigation.

Table 9. ANOVA Results for the Effect of Parenting Styles on Democratic Awareness.

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Parenting Style</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean (X)</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
Democratic Awareness	Authoritarian-Strict	13	56.846	17.860	3	.026
	Permissive-Lenient	18	66.833	14.909		
	Overprotective-Anxious	32	60.125	19.429		
	Democratic-Tolerant	83	53.952	16.672		

* $p < .05$.

Table 10 details the results of the Tukey post hoc test conducted to explore specific group differences among parenting styles. A statistically significant difference was found only between the “permissive-lenient” and “democratic-tolerant” styles ($p = .024$), with students from permissive households exhibiting significantly higher democratic awareness. No other pairwise comparisons yielded significant results. These findings underscore the potential influence of parental attitudes on students’ democratic development. In particular, while democratic parenting is generally assumed to promote democratic values, the data here suggest that a permissive approach may be perceived by students as fostering greater democratic awareness. This counterintuitive outcome highlights the need for deeper exploration of how students interpret and internalize different parenting behaviors in relation to democratic thinking.

Table 10. Tukey Post Hoc Test Results for Parenting Styles and Democratic Awareness.

<i>Comparison</i>	<i>Mean Difference</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p (Tukey)</i>
Authoritarian vs. Permissive	-9.987	6.267	142	-1.594	.386
Authoritarian vs. Overprotective	-3.279	5.663	142	-0.579	.938
Authoritarian vs. Democratic	2.894	5.136	142	0.564	.943
Permissive vs. Overprotective	6.708	5.073	142	1.322	.550
Permissive vs. Democratic	12.882	4.477	142	2.877	.024*
Overprotective vs. Democratic	6.173	3.583	142	1.723	.316

4. Conclusion, Discussion, and Recommendations

An analysis of the results obtained from this study indicates that there is no statistically significant difference in democratic awareness levels among secondary school students based on gender. This finding is consistent with previous studies in the literature (Dudu, 2016; Duman, 2010, 2015; Ektem Sönmez & Sünbül, 2011; Elkatmış & Toptaş, Gündüz, 2016; Özbey & Sarıçam, 2018; Yazıcı, 2011). However, when examining democratic awareness in relation to grade level, it was observed that 9th grade students had the lowest average score, while 11th graders showed a moderate level. Notably, the difference between 9th and 10th graders was statistically significant, with 10th graders demonstrating higher democratic awareness. A similar significant difference was found between 9th and 11th graders, again in favor of the higher grade level. However, no significant difference emerged between 10th and 11th graders, suggesting that democratic awareness increases up to 10th grade and then plateaus. These results provide an important insight into the developmental trajectory of democratic awareness across educational stages. Regarding family income, the findings indicated no significant differences in students' democratic awareness based on economic background. This outcome supports the results of Özbek (2017), who also found no relationship between income level and democratic awareness. Similar conclusions were reached in other studies (Özdemir, 2019; Kaldırım, 2005).

Likewise, the educational levels of parents—both mothers and fathers—did not significantly affect students' democratic awareness levels. This aligns with the findings of Akan (2011), reinforcing the notion that parental education alone may not predict students' democratic orientation. Interestingly, academic achievement was found to have a statistically significant relationship with democratic awareness. Specifically, students with moderate or good academic performance exhibited higher levels of democratic awareness compared to those with very high academic performance. This result mirrors the findings of Özbek and Sarıçam (2017), suggesting that moderate achievers may have greater opportunities or motivations to engage with democratic values. In terms of parenting styles, the analysis revealed that the "democratic-tolerant" parenting style did not produce the highest democratic awareness among students—as might be expected—but rather, students from "permissive-lenient" households reported the highest levels. While a significant difference was found between these two styles, other comparisons among parenting categories were not statistically significant.

These results suggest that the role of parental attitudes in shaping democratic awareness is complex and multifaceted. Previous research has also emphasized the importance of family communication and education in the development of children's democratic awareness (Topuz, 2022). Children exposed to democratic practices within the family environment tend to develop a stronger understanding and internalization of democratic values (Öztürk, 2020; Öztürkcan, 2021). The approach of parents toward democracy directly affects their children's interest and engagement with democratic concepts, implying broader implications for societal development. Therefore, more detailed investigations into the influence of parenting styles on democratic awareness are necessary to support societal change and the widespread adoption of democratic consciousness (Gökoğlu, 2022). In conclusion, fostering democratic awareness is crucial for the development of societies.

To enhance this awareness from an early age, educational initiatives should be implemented systematically under the guidance of national education frameworks. Democracy-related topics and courses should be more prominently included in the curriculum. Students should be actively involved in school decision-making processes to create democratic school climates. A participatory management approach will contribute positively to democratic development among students.

Finally, the observed relationship between academic success and democratic awareness invites further research. Additionally, comparative studies involving broader national samples or international contexts could offer valuable insights into how democratic awareness develops across cultures and education systems.

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