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DEMOCRATIC EDUCATION: HISTORICITY, MODERNITY, AND NECESSITY

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Abstract. This study examines the historical development, contemporary approaches, and societal importance of democratic education. The aim is to explain how the educational process is structured according to democratic principles and how this approach influences the development of individuals and society. Additionally, the article highlights the reciprocal relationship between education and democracy. Education should not only transmit knowledge; it must also create opportunities for students to develop independent thinking, social responsibility, justice, equality, and to internalize democratic values. Democratic principles must be transformed into a way of life and practically applied within the educational environment, integrating them into daily experiences. Education serves as a tool for spreading democratic values in society and aims to raise future generations according to these principles. This approach enables individuals to recognize their roles in society and acquire the necessary skills to participate in democratic processes. As a result, individuals become active, informed citizens who can contribute to the development of society. In the future, the democratic education approach may lead to the development of more inclusive, equitable, and sustainable education systems worldwide. The study uses comparative and historical analysis, along with philosophical and pedagogical theories.

Key words: training process, students, democratic values, democratic principles, justice, equality, pedagogical approach, social development.

Introduction. Education is one of the essential factors in the formation and development of a healthy society, enabling individual development and self-realization in society, as well as influencing social relations and civic responsibility. Throughout history, various approaches and methods have been proposed to achieve better outcomes in education. One of these approaches is the democratization of education. In recent years, the issues of democratizing education globally and developing it with an inclusive approach have come to the forefront.

Debates about the concept of democracy have existed for centuries. Democracy has always intrigued researchers, and this interest continues to this day. Although there is no precise definition of this concept, certain values within the framework of democracy, such as equality, freedom, popular sovereignty, and pluralism, are generally accepted. It should also be emphasized that the acquisition of these values by individuals is only possible through education. It is well known that the concept of democracy is etymologically derived from the Greek language: "Demos" (people) and "Kratos" (power or rule). Democracy represents the acceptance of the power and sovereignty of the people, reflecting the people's sovereignty.

As the latest form of governance proposed by humanity, democracy primarily embodies the principle of equal application of rights, rules, and values, and the respect for their integrity. Democracy is not only a form of governance but also accepted as a philosophy of life and a lifestyle. It is an approach that shapes people's thinking, behavior, and relationships in society. Democracy manifests itself not only in the organization of the state and government but also in the daily lives, choices, and decisions of individuals and society. As a lifestyle, democracy can only be attained through edu-

cation, training, and upbringing. A democratic lifestyle is learned and applied through democratic education. This is a process that ensures individuals internalize the principles of freedom, equality, mutual respect, and cooperation. Education transforms these principles into a part of everyday life, helping individuals recognize their own rights and the rights of others, and become just and responsible citizens. The primary goal of education is not only to create conditions for the development of the learner's creative nature but also to allow the internalization of democratic principles. This is based on the idea of enabling each individual to think freely, make decisions, and act independently. The application of democracy can only be achieved in schools, as schools are a miniature reflection of society, and it is within schools that future generations can adopt democratic values and principles. Currently, schools are regarded as a model of democratic schools. In this model, students not only acquire knowledge and skills but also develop vital abilities such as independent thinking, communication, making mistakes, and learning from them. The transformation of democracy into a way of life is possible not only within the school but also through the collective cooperation of all layers of society. Thus, democratic values become a daily practice in schools, and more equal, free, and just relationships are formed in all areas of society.

Individuals raised in schools that embody democratic values respect the opinions of others, are able to work in groups, understand their responsibilities, are responsible, patient, and tolerant, take initiative in making suggestions, and abide by the decisions of the majority. For the cultivation of individuals with these characteristics, it is essential to closely link the concepts of democracy and education. Education provides opportunities for individuals to realize themselves in life. The realization of these opportunities within a democratic educational environment is inevitable. Developing individuals' potential, imparting knowledge and skills, and ensuring their adaptation to society, adherence to social rules, and responsible, active participation in public life are possible in a democratic educational environment.

The concept of democratic education has played a significant role in the development of various pedagogical theories. Specifically, this concept is closely associated with the pedagogical approaches of experts such as John Dewey and Paulo Freire, as they emphasized that education should be based on the active participation of students, the development of independent thinking skills, and the promotion of democratic values.

The concept of democratic education has been extensively explored both philosophically and pedagogically. The first to introduce the theory of "Democratic Education" was John Dewey, who sought to elaborate on this topic in many of his works, particularly in his book *Democracy and Education*. This work stands as one of the key resources emphasizing the strong link between education and democracy. According to Dewey, education is the most essential means for individuals to actively and consciously engage in society. His concept of democratic education not only focuses on the acquisition of knowledge but also aims to develop the skills, values, and attitudes necessary for students to play an active role in society. Dewey views democracy not merely as a political system but also as a way of life. The core values of this way of life include freedom, responsibility, equality, justice, and active participation in society. Education plays a crucial role in instilling these values in students, preparing them to find their place in society in the future. For Dewey, it is only through education that democracy can be fully realized. Education is the most important means of imparting the fundamental principles and values of democracy to students. Through this process, core democratic values such as freedom, equality, and justice are fostered within society. Paulo Freire, in his work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, highlights the close relationship between education and democracy. He emphasizes that education should go beyond merely transmitting knowledge; it must also foster critical thinking, collaboration, and the development of skills that enable individuals to become freer and more just members of society. According to Freire, education should not merely focus on knowledge transfer; rather, it must transform individuals into more liberated and conscious beings.

Today, the concept of democratic education continues to evolve and adapt to contemporary needs. One of these approaches is learner-centered education, which encourages students to be more actively involved in their learning processes and to choose their educational paths. Another important approach links education with social justice and equality issues. Democratic education is seen as a tool that helps promote human rights and ensures equal opportunities for different social groups. In the current world, education plays a significant role in addressing challenges such as the technological revolution, global economic changes, and the refugee crises caused by wars. In this context, democratic education serves as a means to ensure that different societal layers and cultural groups have equal access to opportunities. Literature underscores that democratic education is vital for ensuring that future generations live in a more equal and tolerant world.

Throughout history, democratic education has been based on various philosophical and pedagogical theories and, in modern times, has developed into a more extensive and multifaceted approach. Historically, this approach has aimed to strengthen the principles of equality and freedom within the realm of education. Contemporary research indicates that democratic education goes beyond academic knowledge; it also addresses important issues such as social responsibility, human rights, and social justice. In the future, this approach will likely lead to more inclusive, equitable, and sustainable education systems worldwide.

Thus, our aim is to examine in detail how the concept of democratic education has historically developed, how it has been enriched with new approaches in the modern era, and how these approaches are crucial for societal development. Furthermore, we aim to explore the significance of these approaches in enhancing the quality of education and ensuring active participation in social and economic life.

Main part. One of the conceptual pillars of the modern education system is the democratization of education. Democratization involves the cultivation of free-thinking in learners, the expansion of powers and freedoms in the organization and management of education on a state-societal basis, and the enhancement of the autonomy of educational institutions (Məmmədov, İmamverdiyeva, & Şixəliyeva, 2015: 935). Democratization of education liberates schools from authoritarian-administrative pedagogical methods, ensures a precise evaluation of the human factor, and treats it as the subject of the educational process. The culture of the new era is a culture of reason (Məmmədov et al., 2015: 935), and democracy itself is built on reason. Democratic education is an approach that emerges from the interrelation of the concepts of democracy and education. This approach encompasses two aspects (Doğan, 2004: 178).

1. *Democracy in Education:* This perspective emphasizes the use of education as a means to teach democratic principles (freedom, equality, justice, respect for others, etc.) to individuals. That is, these principles should be taught to students in the educational system, internalized by them, and applied in their lives. This reflects the idea that the purpose of education is to impart knowledge about democracy.

2. *Democratic Education:* In this aspect, the educational process itself is structured according to democratic principles, aligning teaching methods, content, and programs with democratic values. The education system and teaching methods must be in harmony with the principles of democracy, meaning that education itself must be democratic.

The connection between the adoption of democracy and the level of education highlights the interdependence and mutual influence of these concepts (Özden, 2005: 141). Thus, in a society with a high level of education, democratization progresses more quickly, while in a society where democracy exists, the level of education is typically higher. Education is crucial for the development and long-term sustainability of democracy. People must not only learn about democracy and democratic values theoretically, but also through education, and apply these values in their lives. Education is the primary tool for the transmission of democratic behaviors and principles to future generations and for the development of society (Harber & Mncube, 2012: 104-120)

Education should focus on revealing the knowledge and abilities that individuals are born with and can develop. Furthermore, it should assist individuals in better understanding reality and generating new ideas and concepts using their intellectual and reasoning abilities. Each individual should receive education based on the abilities that dominate their spirit (Bakır, 2015: 92). This means that education should be tailored to the individual's unique capabilities and potential. Since people have different strengths, these differences must be acknowledged in the educational process, ensuring that everyone develops according to their specific talents. This is only possible within a democratic educational environment.

In democratic education, schools must adhere to the principle of equal opportunities for individuals from different ethnic backgrounds, religious beliefs, and economic statuses, without any discrimination. The elimination of these differences and the provision of true freedom can only be achieved in this way. Therefore, equality of opportunities is an inseparable principle of education (Brubacher, 1962: 345). In democratic education, the role of schools is to create an environment where students from different social classes can freely express their abilities under equal conditions, ensuring that they become more confident and independent (Bakır, 2015: 92). All schools must systematically address not only the health, nutrition, and happiness of each student but also the educational inequalities caused by socio-economic conditions (Sahlberg, 2018: 121). The best way to ensure democracy and well-being in society is to provide equal and fair education to all children. This situation develops not only students' academic knowledge but also their self-confidence and entrepreneurial qualities, which are crucial for them to take stronger and more independent steps in life. Without such an environment, individuals may struggle to understand the changes around them and their consequences, potentially leading to passive reactions to social problems and a lack of engagement in change (Dewey, 2020: 383). Here, the principles of justice and equality complement each other, although they have distinct differences. Equality aims to provide the same thing to everyone, while justice emphasizes supporting individuals according to their specific needs. Equality in the educational process implies providing the same environment to everyone without considering individual needs, whereas justice requires providing different support to students with varying needs. The dynamo of school development is justice (Sahlberg, 2018: 121). Justice entails addressing the different needs and potentials of students, creating the individual conditions necessary to support the development of each student. Pasi Sahlberg, in his book *Finnish Model in Education*, outlines two key strategic elements for ensuring justice in education. First, it is the creation of a curriculum tailored to the needs of the school and the specific requirements of the students by the teachers. Such a curriculum meets the potential and varying needs of students, supporting their development. Second, it is the continuous accessibility of professional learning and development for teachers and administrators. This strategy involves providing ongoing training, courses, and opportunities for experience exchange, which ensures that teachers and school administrators can adapt to the latest educational innovations and methods. This contributes to the improvement of educational quality, ensuring that everyone has the same opportunities for development.

Ensuring justice and equality in democratic education also supports the overall development of society because each individual is provided with the conditions to realize their potential. Growing up in non-democratic environments reduces individuals' ability to play an active and constructive role in society, which can lead to the deepening of social problems. Therefore, every society must possess democratic thinking in order to understand its present condition, shape its future, and develop a better future for individuals (Dewey, 2019: 138).

Education, as a tool that allows both individuals and society to realize themselves, should be free from any totalitarian or monolithic ideology. Otherwise, it cannot fulfill its purpose and becomes a mere tool for a specific ideology (Dewey, 2000: 182). Therefore, the education system must go beyond teaching and applying a single ideology; it must present various perspectives and shape individuals into free thinkers who create their own choices and values. In democracy, the goal is for individuals

to understand their position, skills, and rights from the past to the future, to enlighten themselves, and to realize their full potential. Therefore, a democratic state must create conditions for individuals to enjoy freedom and development both individually and within society, supporting them in this path through education.

The democratic education approach began to take shape in the 19th century, but its roots trace back to much earlier periods, particularly to Ancient Greece and Rome. The concept of education in those times certainly differed from the modern understanding of “democratic education.” While their vision of education may not have fully aligned with modern principles such as equal rights, freedom, and social justice, the philosophical ideas of the era reflected notions similar to the core principles of democratic education. The educational philosophies of the thinkers of that period, and their ideas about self-development through education, can be considered as early precursors to contemporary democratic education.

In Ancient Greece, Socrates’ educational approach was primarily based on dialogue, critical thinking, and equality. He supported the idea that everyone should think independently and correctly formulate their own ideas. Socrates used the Socratic method, a question-and-answer technique, to encourage people to think deeply. This approach aligns with democratic education, where it is vital for everyone to express their thoughts and ideas. Plato, on the other hand, argued that education should serve the creation of an ideal and elitist society. Aristotle, in his *Nicomachean Ethics*, emphasized that education should guide individuals toward happiness and ethical living, while also responding to societal needs by fostering active and responsible citizens and developing their individual skills. These ideas are also considered foundational for democratic approaches to education. Roman philosophers such as Marcus Tullius Cicero and Seneca emphasized the importance of education for fostering ethical and thoughtful individuals. According to Seneca, education should focus on developing the inner nature and morality of the individual.

In the 17th century, the English philosopher John Locke’s *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* reflected democratic principles, such as equal education for all children, social justice, independent thinking, personal freedom, human development, and the role of individuals in society. Locke argued that education should be based on democratic principles, highlighting social justice, individual freedom, and personal responsibility. He famously stated, “A sound mind in a sound body” (Lock, 2020: 340) underscoring the importance of integrating both rational thought and physical health in education. Locke’s belief in the harmonious development of both body and mind aligns with the principles of democratic education, which prioritize equal educational opportunities and holistic development.

In the 18th century, the French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s *Emile, or On Education* explicitly laid out the core principles of democratic education. Rousseau argued that the primary goal of education and upbringing should be to support the individual’s freedom and natural development. According to him, the purpose of education should be to cultivate young people’s natural abilities, potential, and independent thinking. Rousseau believed that “education should align with the inner nature of the individual” (Rousseau, 2019: 768) and his educational theory, emphasizing “personal freedom” and “natural development,” is clearly in line with democratic education, which promotes both natural education and societal education.

The systematic development of democratic education can be traced back to the mid-19th century. John Dewey further developed the democratic education approach and, in his work *Democracy and Education*, emphasized that education is the cornerstone of a democratic society. According to Dewey, the purpose of education is to ensure that individuals grow up to be free and responsible citizens. Dewey argued that education should not just be the transmission of knowledge, but must also be connected to social life. His theory has played a significant role in the development of modern pedagogical approaches, particularly in understanding the importance of democracy, education, and socialization. Dewey’s student-centered approach to education forms the core of democratic education, and it remains a widely adopted pedagogical approach today.

In contemporary times, various democratic education approaches are shaping the development of education and society, playing a vital role in the formation of democratic citizens. Some of these key approaches include: *Experiential Learning*: This approach focuses on learning through experiences, allowing students to acquire life-relevant knowledge. Experiential learning theory seeks a balance between theory and practice, encouraging students to develop their knowledge through real-life experiences. *Critical Thinking*: Democratic education promotes independent thinking, encouraging students not just to accept knowledge, but to ask questions and think critically. This approach fosters an environment where students are encouraged to critique the status quo and generate new ideas. *Individualized Approach*: This approach takes into account each student's individual needs and interests, allowing them to realize their potential. In democratic education, individualized learning helps students learn at their own pace and in their preferred style. *Equality, Justice, and Inclusivity*: Democratic education ensures equal opportunities for individuals regardless of gender, race, class, or other differences. This approach fosters an inclusive environment where every individual has the opportunity to realize their potential and ensures the protection of equal rights in society. *Social Responsibility and Activism*: Students are taught not only personal responsibility but also social responsibility. This approach encourages students to engage with social issues, align with principles of equality and justice, and become active citizens contributing to the betterment of society. *Active Participation and Collective Decision-Making*. Democratic education encourages student involvement in the educational process. Students value not only the teacher's ideas but also the ideas and decisions of their peers. This approach enhances collective cooperation and mutual respect, with students solving tasks and problems based on reflective thinking and imagination. The teacher, in this model, acts as an organizer of the learning process (Mahmudova, 2018: 311).

In the modern era, democratic education aims to contribute to societal development and the establishment of equality and justice. Issues such as inclusivity, active student participation, student-centered approaches, individual and collective responsibility, equality, and human rights form the foundation of contemporary educational approaches. These approaches aim to foster citizens who contribute to the advancement of democratic societies.

Conclusion. Based on the points discussed in the article, the relationship between education and democracy plays an indispensable role in the development of society. The democratic education approach ensures not only the transmission of knowledge but also the adoption of essential values such as independent thinking, social responsibility, and mutual respect by individuals. Education also allows society to develop based on democratic values and ensures that future generations are raised in accordance with these principles.

In today's education systems, the teaching of democratic principles such as equality, freedom, and human rights is increasingly important. These principles demonstrate that education is not only vital for individual development but also for the overall development of society. Education provides individuals with the tools they need to find their place in the world and to grow as responsible and active citizens.

Finally, the further development of education and democracy should be seen as a means of promoting peace and progress, not only at the national level but also globally. To achieve this, more attention must be given to education systems, ensuring that education is strengthened with democratic values.

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