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Perceptions of democracy of foreign students studying at Mustafa Kemal University

Servet HALİ* and Fatih ÖZYURT

Department of Social Science Teaching, Faculty of Education, Mustafa Kemal University, Antakya, Turkey.

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In Turkey, foreign students are studying in most of the universities. On July 15, 2016, these students faced a treacherous coup attempt against democracy and were able to witness the Turkish people's reaction to the coup attempt. The aim of this study is to examine the views of foreign students studying at Mustafa Kemal University on democracy. In the literature, foreign students who studied in Turkey have been searched in terms of many variables, but because foreign students not seen in a study examining the perception of democracy, this research has seen momentous. The sample of the study composed of foreign students studying at Mustafa Kemal University. In this study, qualitative research was applied as a data collection method. The opinions of the students were taken with the interview form and the collected information was evaluated from the educational point of view. In this study, the descriptive survey model, which is one of the general surveying methods, is used. "The Perception of Democracy of Foreign Students" questionnaire was applied to measure the perceptions of democracy of foreign students in the university. By taking into consideration various variables, it is concluded that foreign students are sensitive about democracy and anti-democratic events.

Key words: Foreign students, democracy, sense of democracy, The Arab Spring.

INTRODUCTION

According to the definition, which is generally accepted and also included in the Turkish Language Association, the concept of democracy is a form of government based on the rule of the people. It is the administration of the representatives of the people, elected as the result of free elections and preferences (Doğan, 2001: 147). This concept coming from Latin is composed of the words "demos" meaning "people" and "kratos" meaning "sovereignty, power" (Gözübüyük, 2000: 22). It indicates that political power is in the hands of the people.

Abraham Lincoln described democracy during one of his speech in 1864 as "the administration of the people by the people for the people". "The principle of democracy requires the domination and possession of the nation, regardless of the means to exploit domination" said Atatürk (Tunç, 2008, 1115). Although democracy seems to be a simple definition of a few words, Dewey made a statement describing how much it could affect people, society, nations and countries. According to Dewey, democracy affects the culture of the society as well as

*Corresponding author. E-mail: s.hali@hotmail.com.

the industry, politics and education and it expresses itself in the attitudes and lives of people (Kaya, 2004: 2).

The emphasis on the form of government is often seen in the definitions of democracy. The people who will choose political power in the form of a rule based on people's sovereignty should have a free and independent will. Since democracy is based on the sovereignty of the people, the *sine qua non* must be the people. Within the public, the ideas and emotions, feelings of equality, justice, freedom and independence should be established. It should take place in every aspect of life and become a lifestyle. In democracy, the right to govern belongs not to a person, a family, a community or a crowd but the whole of the people. It is worth noting that equal and free individuals have it as a form of life, a way of thinking, a way of being and a moral understanding beyond the idea of democracy as a form of political management, which is described as the process of collective decision making and implementation (Özden, 2009: 162). It is stated that democracy is not a mere form of government but a way of life philosophy and life style. In this sense, democracy is a system that humanity cannot give up in terms of operability (Hotaman, 2010: 131). In order for democracy to become more functional, it is necessary to internalize democracy as a value and to live it in every aspect of life. Unfortunately, democracy does not work in all societies or the whole society in this way. Due to various reasons and various problems, democracy has never occurred, has been interrupted, or the level of democracy according to the definition of desired democracy has not been reached. When looking at an individual from the first moment of his birth until his death, s/he is born without knowing anything, but at the end of her/his life s/he has learned so many things and experiences. Any knowledge or experience that they learn are not to be underestimated because they cost the entire life of the individual. Raising an individual in democracy is a process like embroidery. This process starts in the family and continues in school, social environment and work life. The most functional method for the process of democracy in this way is education. There are many studies that explain the relationship between democracy and education in the world (Evans and Rose, 2006: 919; Harber and Serf, 2006: 988; McCowan, 2006: 460; Neuberger, 2007: 300).

John Dewey explained the link between democracy and education in his book "Democracy and Education". John Dewey used the philosophy of education to explain the link between democracy and education. Defending the necessity of a democratic education for the development of democratic society, Dewey emphasized the necessity of having an education that directs the life style of the individual and the use of appropriate methods for this education (Dewey, 1996: 85).

Voicing controversial topics in class, providing a discussion environment, learning of democratic concepts

such as equality, freedom, human rights, etc., is important in terms of the development of democratic values (Levitt and Longstreet, 1983: 144-145).

Patrick (2003: 1-12) pointed out the importance of discussions for the teaching of democracy with an effective education in the school environment, and that the current events should be allowed by the teacher to an open classroom environment.

To gain the value of democracy to individuals or societies is with education. The basic condition for becoming a democratic society is a democratic education (Hotaman, 2010: 130). Education is an act of teaching the knowledge, skills, value, culture and language required in life or in society to enable individuals to gain a place in social life. The first place where education is given is family. Therefore, democracy education starts first in the family. It is a paradox that individuals who are not asked for ideas and who are raised under oppression whose decisions are not respected behave in accordance with democratic life. According to Dewey, ideally, democracy requires a highly educated people who are aware of the social tasks and responsibilities of political life. Otherwise, as Plato says, when the education of the public is insufficient, the insatiable desires of the leaders who are not bound by certain principles can easily transform democracy into demagoguery and despotism (Hotaman, 2010: 132). We cannot give individuals certain abilities or a certain level of intelligence. But as we can teach individuals how to hold the pen, we can teach skills, or values such as respect, love, friendship, benevolence, in every branch of life, as an example to give them the correct behavior. Democracy is one of these values. Each individual is responsible in the society to gain the value of democracy. A democratic family can behave democratically to the individual, but when an individual is in a queue in the market and sees someone who breaks the queue and the market employee allowing it, the individual may experience contradictions about democracy and this may have a negative effect on his later years (Köylü, 2001: 135).

At the point of democratization process as a country, the democratic system, such as a chain, is a democratic society, while the democratic society constitutes a democratic family and the democratic family constitutes a democratic individual. It is seen that democracy as a political regime, a way of life and value is becoming increasingly established in the management, society and individual dimension (Özpolat, 2010: 10).

If democracy culture and democratic values left as it is learned in the family and if it cannot be transferred to schools and education, it is similar to a building with a foundation of half. A second phase of the culture of democracy in the family is to continue education of individuals in schools (Orhan, 2013:20). What is important here is that teachers, principals and deputy directors of the schools, and even the other employees of

the school should be aware of their duties and responsibilities in the education of democracy. When the name of the work is education, education is not only an action carried out by teachers, but it is more global. School workers should also be a part of this action (Kaya, 2004: 71). Beyond the differences and inequalities of people in the school environment, the idea that they are equal in terms of dignity and that they should be treated equally in a legal and political sense should prevail. In this sense, equality in education does not mean that everyone should be placed in the same schools of similar quality, but equal effort is made to ensure that individuals are developed and succeeded in line with their abilities. The aim of these ideas is to educate the ideal citizen. The ideal citizen is the individuals who have absolute independence regarding judgements. The citizenship of the individual can be measured effectively by the degree of control of his/her own life. But in this context, participation is not a random activity, but a conscious act of citizens. In this context, democracy does not mean the administration of the people or the masses. Because the masses make noise, and while working, citizens consciously make reconciliation. The existence of an idealized and reconciled democracy depends on well-educated citizens who know and guard their rights. Ideal citizens follow the ideal path of education (Demirbolat, 1999: 230).

The introduction of a culture of democracy in Turkey follows a period in the last period of the Ottoman Empire following the developments such as the 1839 the Imperial Edict of Gulhane, 1876 First Constitutional Monarchy and 1908 the Ottoman Basic Law. The full transition to democracy has been literally with the foundation of the State of the Republic of Turkey. In order to reach the level of contemporary civilization, especially in the field of politics after the transition to democracy in other areas have been included in the work. In the name of the settlement of democracy, especially in education, different applications were made (Kaya, 2004: 70). In recent years, both in terms of country policy and the development of relations with the Turkic Republics, students are accepted, and universities are opened.

With the development of technology, communication and communication networks have become a small place in the fields such as communication, culture, economy, education and sports, although the world does not change as a face measurement. The change in globalization is reflected in the field of education. The common market understanding that emerged in every field has also existed in education. The important product of the education market is the circulation of foreign students. According to the OECD report in 2013, the number of international students has doubled between 2000 and 2011 in the world. Today, there are approximately 4.5 million higher education students. A Japanese student can receive education in the US and a

Mongol student in Turkey. The dimensions of this student circulation have reached such a point that this situation has turned into an economic sector for some countries. According to the data of the US Department of Commerce in 2000, the contribution of foreign students at higher education level to the US economy increased to the fifth rank in the service sector (Kıroğlu, 2010: 26). According to the same report published by OECD in 2013, the highest number of international students is from China, India and Korea. Asian students account for 53% of all students studying abroad. It is also stated in the report that countries have increased their interest in making them interesting and demand of the countries and making them more attractive (OECD, 2013).

Turkey is also a country that accepts foreign students. In particular, Turkey accepts students from other Turkic states and relative communities. In addition to the students coming from other Turkic states, Anatolia has always been a place of migration since the history of the continents as it is located on the connection roads of the continents. Especially recently, as a result of developments in the Middle East with the Arab Spring, Turkey has made numerous effects of hosting asylum seekers arriving. There are also many students who want to get away from the turmoil in their own country. The total number of foreign students studying in Turkey with a government scholarship is 15,220. Among the countries with the highest number of students, the number of Syrian students is 1841 and the number of students with Afghan nationality is 1197. These numbers are the number of students at higher education level. Even though the majority of the students are from Middle Eastern countries, the Turkic Republics and neighboring countries, there are students from all around the world. In Turkey, there are students from 151 different countries (MEB, 2017: 232; Parlak and Şahin, 2015: 67, Seydi, 2013:221).

METHODOLOGY

Statement of problem

The traitor coup attempt experienced in Turkey on July 15 had a negative impact on all the people living in Turkey and also affected foreign students studying here. This study was carried out in order to examine the views of foreign students studying in Turkey on this coup attempt in order to examine their views on democracy and the problem sentence of the study is as follows: What are the views of foreign students about democracy? The answer to this question was sought by taking into account the age, gender and departmental variables of the students.

Aim and importance of research

Turkey has experienced periods of instability in terms of democracy. Coup d'etat that took place in Turkey, foreign intervention and coup attempts are the leading cause of this instability. Once again, an attempt was made to sustain an

Table 1. Results of t-test analysis according to the gender variable of foreign students.

Group	N	\bar{x}	Ss	Sd	t	p
Female	43	99.37	14.321	76	-1.274	0.206
Male	35	104.14	18.735			

$p > 0.05$

Table 2. ANOVA test analysis result according to the age variable of foreign students.

Variable	Group	N	\bar{x}	Ss	Source of Variance	Sum of Squares	Sd	Avg. of Squares	F	P (ANOVA)
Age	18-20	31	103.03	9.61	Between groups	370.96	3	126.65	0.455	0.715
	21-23	34	100.15	22.84	Inter groups	20607.53	74	278.48		
	24-26	8	105.25	7.88	Total	20987.49	77		-	
	27-29	5	107.80	6.72	-	-	-		-	
	Total	78	61.78	-	-	-	-		-	$p > 0.05$

instability through the coup attempt and tragedy carried out on July 15, 2016, but the Turkish people did not relive the past events and intercepted conflicts and the coup attempt was prevented. This study was carried out in order to reveal the perceptions, opinions and thoughts of foreign students at Mustafa Kemal University who witnessed such an environment on democracy. When the literature is examined, many studies on democracy have been put forward. There are studies in Turkey that show the perceptions of democracy in schools, in different age groups or in various regions and regions. In addition, although many studies on foreign students have been conducted, the perceptions of democracy have not been studied. The study is considered important in this respect.

Study group

The study group consists of foreign students studying at Mustafa Kemal University in the spring term of 2017-2018. 89 foreign students of a total of 247 studying at the MKU have been reached. The questionnaire of 11 students was considered to be incorrect or missing, and the remaining questionnaires completed by 78 students have been evaluated. Of the 78 students included in the study, 44 were female and 34 were male (Table 1).

Data collection and analysis

Before starting the study, 14 foreign students were enrolled in short compositions in order to determine the readiness levels of foreign students about democracy and to measure their literacy levels in Turkish. It was observed that the students mentioned about 15 to 20 different concepts related to democracy. After it was understood that the students had enough knowledge to do research on democracy, the survey preparation process was started. As a first step, a questionnaire consisting of 58 items was formed. The questionnaire is divided into two parts. The first part consists of demographic variables (age, gender, department, etc.) with personal information and the second part consists of questions about measuring the perceptions of foreign students studying at Mustafa Kemal University about democracy. After taking the opinions of four faculty members who have done their PhD in this field, the items of the questionnaire were checked in terms of

contradiction by the faculty members in the Turkish Teaching Department and applied to the students group of 12 for the validity and reliability of the questionnaire within the frame of pilot study. As a result of the analyses, the reliability coefficients of the 29 items of the draft questionnaire consisting of 58 items were low and these items were excluded from the survey. After reviewing the remaining items, another pilot study was conducted again and validity and reliability of the questionnaire were calculated and a 29-item questionnaire with a Cronbach Alpha coefficient of 0.88 was finalized. The questionnaire was transferred to SPSS 22 program and the results were tabulated and interpreted. The general evaluation of the scale used in the research is as follows (Sarigöz et al., 2016; Dönger et al., 2016):

$$SA = \frac{EYD - EDD}{SS} = \frac{5 - 1}{5} = 0.8$$

where SA: Range of Option, EYD: Highest Value, EDD: Lowest Value, SS: Number of Options.

- 1.00 - 1.80: I strongly disagree
- 1.81 - 2.60: I do not agree
- 2.61 - 3.40: I am undecided
- 3.41 - 4.20: I agree
- 4.21 - 5.00: I strongly agree

In this study, the descriptive survey model, which is one of the general surveying methods, is utilized. The general surveying model is a method of screening on the literature or a group or sample taken from it, in order to make a judgment about the population in a universe of many elements and data. (Karasar, 2010: 79).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

When the results of independent groups t-test analysis according to the gender variable of the foreign students who participated in the study in Table 2 were examined, it

Table 3. ANOVA test analysis result according to the department type variable of foreign students.

	Group	N	\bar{X}	Ss	Source of Variance	Sum of Squares	Sd	Avg. Of Squares	F	p (ANOVA)
Department	Medical Fac.	9	101.75	7.50	B/w Groups	2000.40	11	200.04	0.699	0.722
	Arts and Sci. Fac.	11	95.27	16.78	Inter Groups	18895.92	66	286.30		
	Architecture Fac.	4	101.50	14.06	Total	20896.32	77	-	-	
	FEAS	9	103.00	10.67	-	-	-	-	-	
	Edu. Fac.	22	101.50	13.66	-	-	-	-	-	
	Agri. Fac.	5	99.80	13.70	-	-	-	-	-	
	Medic. V.S.	5	98.20	8.59	-	-	-	-	-	
	Med. Ser. V.S.	6	117.80	47.19	-	-	-	-	-	
	Antakya V.S.	6	102.33	7.94	-	-	-	-	-	p>0.05

was seen that there was no statistically significant difference between the mean scores of female and male students ($t=-1.274$; $p>0.05$). According to these results, it can be said that there is no statistically significant difference between male and female students' perceptions of democracy and therefore gender difference does not have any effect on the perception of democracy.

According to the age variable of the foreign students who participated in the study, Table 3 shows that there was no statistically significant difference between the female students and male students according to the age variable [$F = 0.455$; $p > 0.05$]. Therefore, it can be said that perceptions of foreign students belonging to different age groups towards democracy are equal or similar.

When Table 4 is examined, there is no statistically significant difference between the students in different departments according to the department type variable of the foreign students who participated in the research [$F=0.699$; $p>0.05$]. Therefore, it can be said that the perceptions on democracy of foreign students studying in different departments are similar or closer to each other.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The aim of the study was to determine whether the gender variable has a significant difference on the democracy perceptions of foreign students attending the university. According to the findings of the study, it is concluded that the gender variable has no effect on the perceptions of democracy of foreign students. However, from the interviews, it can also be concluded that male students are more interested in the subjects of democracy in the countries where foreign students come from. In order to increase the awareness level of both male and female students, it can be suggested to re-examine the education programs for all researchers. Regarding the research conducted by Kaya et al. (2012), it was revealed that there was no significant difference

among the opinions of undergraduate students in regards to the democratic attitudes and behaviors of academic staff.

As a result of preliminary preparations and questionnaire application to foreign students, it was observed that there was no statistically significant difference between the perceptions of democracy according to their faculties, gender, age and education. In the survey, many concepts related to democracy were mentioned and it was tried to determine whether or not democracy did express what it meant to students and whether they thought about it positively or negatively. Although we are concerned that students may be affected by the events in the world and in Turkey in the recent years and that they have negative thoughts about democracy, it has been observed that foreign students who have been selected by Turkey do not have negative thoughts. In the study conducted by Aydemir and Aksoy (2010) with the aim of determining the democratic attitudes of students studying at Faculty of Education at İnönü University in relation to some variables, a significant difference was found between the gender and democratic attitudes of the students. Regarding the results of this study, it has been interpreted that it could be due to the effect of women's more emotional and sensitive nature than men in general. In addition, the effect of gender on having democratic values may be arose from the effect of women's positive discrimination in social life. In recent years, it has been interpreted as the effect of publishing defending women's rights and giving positive emphasis on women's place in social life as well as the fact that the state has made women's rights an official policy (Kontaş et al., 2016). In the study conducted by Elkatmış and Toptaş (2015), it can be concluded that the gender variable is not significant enough to reflect democratic attitudes. In his research, Kepekçioğlu (2015) found out that female students' perception of justice and democracy are higher than the male students' perception. Considering this study, it can

Table 4. The distribution of foreign students in the 2016-2017 academic year according to faculties.

S/N	Faculties and Vocational Schools	Number of Students	Countries	Number of Students
1	Tayfur Ata Sokmen Medical School	40	Turkey	63
2	Faculty of Science and Literature	25	Syria	120
3	Veterinary School	1	USA	1
4	Faculty of Architecture	12	Austria	1
5	Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences	16	Azerbaijan	14
6	Faculty of Education	33	Bulgaria	2
7	Physical Therapy and Rehabilitation V.S.	1	Germany	5
8	Faculty of Dentistry	6	Iran	5
9	Faculty of Agriculture	10	Iraq	2
10	Hatay Health Vocational School	10	Netherlands	1
11	High school of Physical Education and Sports	3	Jordan	1
12	Hatay Vocational School of Health Services	30	Canada	1
13	Antakya Vocational School	32	Palestine	2
14	Vocational School of Art and Design	6	Turkmenistan	10
15	Kırıkhan Vocational School	6	Afghanistan	4
16	Reyhanlı Vocational School	7	Somalia	2
17	Hassa Vocational School	2	Yemen	2
18	Samandağ Vocational School	2	Kirghizstan	3
19	Yayladağı Vocational School	2	Albania	1
20	Graduate School of Natural and Applied Sciences	1	Egypt	2
21	Institute of Social Sciences	1	Uzbekistan	2
22	-	-	Russia	1
23	-	-	Kazakhstan	1
24	-	-	Guinea	1
	Total	247	Total	247

Source: MKU Student Affairs Office <http://www.mku.edu.tr/files/b95140c9-56b2-48a3-a13a-9154fa045fc0.pdf>

be concluded that female students believe that it is important to use many rights in social life and these evaluations of young people have been found to be effective in differentiating the perception of justice. In the study conducted by Karadeniz et al. (2017) on the democratic attitudes of the students studying at a vocational school, there was no significant relationship between the students' perceptions of the instructors' democratic attitudes and behaviors, and gender and class variables. The fact that lecturers do not discriminate between their students can be interpreted as a satisfactory result in every respect. The literature showed that although many studies about democratic attitudes and the perception of democracy has been conducted, there are very inadequate research on foreign students studying in Turkey in that sense. In order to make the study more comprehensive and valuable, it is possible to suggest that researchers should be made awareness-raising about the perception of democracy and the events in the world. Furthermore, it is suggested that students who have positive ideas about democracy should benefit more from Turkey as a result of this study.

The findings of the study showed that there is no difference in the knowledge of the students about democracy according to the faculty variable and between the groups that the study works on. In the study conducted by Sarı and Sadık (2011) on the perception of democracy of prospective teachers studying at Faculty of Education, it was concluded that measures should be taken for democratization of university life from student representative selection processes to leisure time activities and from the way of students' communication with academic staff to students' participation in decision making process at all levels in order to establish a culture where the implicit program of the department, faculty or campus is adopted as a way of life for democracy. Therefore, it is understood that there is no effect of departments on the subject of democracy in higher education, the students in all departments are sensitive about democracy and also they are sensitive to anti-democratic applications. However, it can be evaluated that there are differences in perception due to political socio-cultural differences from the management forms of the countries where the students live. Based on the

results of the research, it can be suggested to conduct new studies in accordance with the management structure and general structure of each country in which the students belong.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors have not declared any conflict of interests.

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