

# Democratic environments offered to children at school, in the family, and in society: the case of Turkey

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Received: 13 February 2013 / Accepted: 27 July 2013 / Published online: 17 August 2013  
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**Abstract** This research aims to investigate democratic environments offered to children in Turkey at school, in the home, and in society. A mixed method is a general type of research where qualitative and quantitative methods are used together. The researcher first collects quantitative and then the qualitative data. The study group in the research consisted of children in Kirsehir, a small city near the capital Ankara, in central Turkey. Democratic Environments scale and interview forms were used in the research. To analyze the obtained data, arithmetic averages, standard deviations, and percentages were calculated and multivariate analyses of variance conducted. The data obtained during interviews were analyzed through content analysis. Results show that even though Turkey accepts the Convention on the Rights of the Child, some problems remain associated with the democratic environment offered to children at school, at home, and in society.

**Keywords** Democratic environments · Children · Children's rights · Turkey · Family · Society

## 1 Introduction

The term *children's rights* refers to the special human rights that children should have in conformance with their developmental needs. The Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in order to protect children's rights internationally, became effective in 1990. The Convention on the Rights of the Child provides children with the rights to express their views and ideas freely (Articles 12 and 13); the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion (Article 14); the right to freedom of association and peaceful assembly (Article 15); and the right to keep their privacy from being compromised (Article 16; UNICEF, Türkiye). In addition to providing children with these rights, this convention created an awareness of children's rights around the world. Following the

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Convention, the number of studies on children's rights increased considerably both in Turkey and internationally (Alderson 2000; Akyüz 2001; Fernando 2001; Karaman-Kepenekçi 2006; Smith 2007; Ersoy 2009; Ejieh and Akinola 2009; Kop and Tuncer 2010; Merye 2012).

According to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, all individuals under 18 are children (Article 1). As of 2010, the population of Turkey was around 75 million, 25 % of which were in the age group of 0–14 years. Approximately 27 million people are in the age group of 0–18 years (TÜİK 2010). Turkey signed the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1990 and put it into effect in 1995. In addition, democratic education was approved as one of the fundamental principles of the Turkish National Education System (National Education Basic Law 1973). In addition through this article of law, in parallel with children's rights, democratic environments and education were established in schools.

Schools are completely centralized in the Turkish educational system. Textbooks and curricula are centrally determined by the Ministry of National Education. In addition, policies regarding classrooms, teachers, extracurricular and sports activities, and all administrative activities are decided upon by the school administration and even by the school principal. When children arrive at school, everything has been predetermined on their behalf and all rules are already in place. The children need only obey these rules.

Raising children as democratic individuals is not only the responsibility of schools; families also have a significant role to play in this regard. Throughout history, although family in Turkish society has formally changed (e.g., extended family, nuclear family), it has never lost its importance. The typical Turkish family, in relation to values and mentality, despite processes of change, still embodies traces of a historical background. Women, who are expected to show obedience and docility with respect to men who enjoy a higher status and who shoulder family responsibilities and carry authority in traditional Turkish families, share in this authority to a certain extent, but the male child occupies a better position than does the female child in terms of a gender gap (Çelik 2010). Furthermore, other undemocratic qualities of the Turkish family include the docility, obedience, diffidence, and dependency expected of children. Commands such as "Be quiet," "Don't talk," "Don't talk to your elders like that," and "Remember that you are a child" are generally the preferred forms of communication. Commendable qualities of the Turkish family structure in relation to democratic education include values such as strong family bonds and solidarity within the family, respect toward adults, love toward youth, and characteristics such as trust among individuals and raising children in an environment far removed from harmful addictions such as alcohol and drugs (Birsöz 1990, cited in Yeşil 2001).

Traditional Turkish society attaches great importance to the child. However, this does not mean making children democratically independent individuals but rather protecting them, making them dependent on the family and respectful to society. In Turkish society, children who usually keep quiet, who do not interfere with the activities of adults, and who always consult adults instead of acting independently are considered smart children. However, along with the process of rapid change in society, generation gaps may be experienced as children do not demonstrate expected behaviors.

A review of the literature in Turkey and other countries reveals that mainly school-related studies are available in relation to democracy and citizenship education (Crick 1998; Davies 1999; Kennedy 2001; Meihui 2000; Torney-Purta 2002; Westheimer and Kahne 2003; Kepenekçi 2003; Campbell 2004; Homana et al. 2006; Kan 2009). Research that includes the family, not school, as a resource for teaching democratic values is scarce in Turkey (Yesil 2001; Gündoğdu 2004; Konaş 2009; Gündoğdu and Yıldırım 2010; Baran 2010). Research considering the school, family, and society as a whole is even more limited.

However, outside school, children spend a considerable amount of time with their families. In addition to time with family and at school, children spend time within the community. Therefore, the education provided within this triangle where children live should be consistent. The democratic education provided at school and the democratic environment established in the home should be continued in society. Children need to enjoy the same rights that are granted to society at large. Children must understand the significance attached to them within their family, as well as at school and in society.

We may think that we are doing our best for our children by loving and protecting them and making what we consider to be the best decisions on their behalf. But what do the children think about this? The main purpose of this study was to determine the opinions of children in Turkey regarding the democratic environments presented to them at school, at home, and in society.

## 2 Method

In this research, a mixed method was used. The quantitative dimension of the research employed a survey technique. In the qualitative dimension of the research, a case study was used. As a survey model, focus group interviews were conducted.

### 2.1 Study group

The study group consisted of children from the city of Kirsehir, a small city near the capital Ankara in central Turkey. In general, families in this city have a moderate social economic status (SES). The city attracts attention due to the high achievement scores on student selection exams for secondary and higher education.

Maximum diversity sampling, a purposive sampling method, was used in this research. A sample group was selected from both urban schools and rural schools. A total of 454 children, 223 females and 231 males, participated in the study, of whom 38 % were 13 years old, 31 % were 14 years old, and 31 % were 15 years old. In addition, 60 % of the children's mothers were primary school graduates and 40 % were graduates of secondary school or higher. Furthermore, 45 % of the children's fathers were graduates of primary school or lower and 55 % were graduates of secondary school and higher. The monthly income of the children's families varied between 750–1,500 TL (\$400–800) (50 %) and 1,501–2,500 TL (\$801–1,400) (50 %). Finally, 60 % of the children attended schools in the city center and 40 % attended schools in rural areas.

*Qualitative dimension* Qualitative data in this study were obtained through a focus group interview. When selecting the children for the focus group interviews, different SES levels, gender differences, and different living locations were taken into consideration. The purpose of the study was explained to the teachers, and children were included in the research group with the teachers' help. A total of six children, three females and three males, joined the focus group interviews. Four of these children attended urban primary schools, whereas two of them attended schools in a village. The ages of the children ranged from 13 to 15.

### 2.2 Data collection tool

The Democratic Environments scale had a total of 47 items, with 39 being affirmative and 8 negative. The five-point Likert scale aimed to determine the democratic opportunities offered to children. Items were observed to cluster around three factors (democratic environments

at school, democratic environments in the home, democratic environments in society) as a result of factor analysis.

*Development phases of data collection tool* First, the literature was reviewed and an item pool of 59 questions was constructed. The scale was applied to a sampling group of 192 students – sixth, seventh, and eighth graders in Kirsehir – to provide a factor construct of the scale within construct validity. According to pilot application results, item-total correlations and coefficients of item discrimination of the scale items were assessed. Item-total correlations were expected to be positive and greater than 0.40. According to the results, items lower than 0.40 had to be excluded from the scale. Items with improper values of the item-total correlation coefficient (a total of 12 items) were excluded from the scale and an explanatory factor analysis was conducted on the remaining 47 items.

A Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) value and the results of a Bartlett test of sphericity were used to determine the conformity of the factor analysis sample size. Upon analyzing the data, the KMO value was found to be 0.918. This value is considered to be very commendable (Eroğlu 2009). Findings obtained upon analysis showed that the data set was appropriate for factor analysis.

Three factors, with eigenvalues larger than two, were determined following the results of explanatory factor analysis (EFA). The eigenvalues for these three factors were established as 8.00, 2.64, and 2.26. The first factor alone explained 26.17 % of the total variance, and the three factors combined explained 46.63 % of the total variance.

When the items on the first factor were analyzed for content, they were observed to be related to Democratic Environment Offered at School (item 21), items on the second factor were found to be related to Democratic Environment Offered in the Family (item 16), and items on the third factor were found to be related to Democratic Environment Offered in Society (item 10). The values of the factor loadings of items were between 0.43 and 0.74. Cronbach's alpha reliability levels belonging to subdimensions were found to be 0.93, 0.90, and 0.88.

*Qualitative dimension* Interview forms consisting of six questions obtained from the scale items used for collecting quantitative data and subquestions associated with these six questions were used in the research. These questions aimed at a detailed investigation of children's views on the environments (school, home, and society) they were exposed to. Within the research validity–reliability activities, interview forms were presented to two experts in democratic education and four social studies educators. Additionally, pilot applications were conducted with two children. Upon expert review, the number of questions was reduced to six from eight and, as a result of feedback from the children, questions were rephrased to be clearer. Then interviews for the research were conducted. Data were obtained through semistructured interview forms in accordance with qualitative research techniques.

Interviews were recorded using digital devices and conducted in two sessions; thus, children had ample time to respond to questions. The first session lasted approximately 90 min, and the second session took 60 min. In total, a 150-min interview was recorded.

Examples of questions asked in the focus group interview are as follows: Do you think your family has a democratic environment? Are you consulted about the decisions made at your school?

### 2.3 Data analysis

In accordance with quantitative research techniques, data were coded and analyzed in SPSS version 15.0. To analyze the data collected in the research, arithmetic averages, standard devi-

**Table 1** Results of multivariate analysis of variance on student perceptions of the existence of a democratic environment at school, at home, and in society in relation to some variables

Resource	Dependent variable (democratic environment)	KT	SD	KO	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
Gender	At school	3.527	1	3.527	11.127	<b>0.001</b>
	At home	0.001	1	0.001	0.003	0.958
	In society	3.832	1	3.832	11.999	<b>0.001</b>
Age	At school	30.928	2	15.464	48.787	<b>0.000</b>
	At home	4.608	2	2.304	9.914	<b>0.000</b>
	In society	11.278	2	5.639	17.658	<b>0.000</b>
Educational background of mother	At school	2.463	5	0.493	1.554	0.172
	At home	1.519	5	0.304	1.307	0.260
	In society	1.651	5	0.330	1.034	0.397
Educational background of father	At school	12.187	5	0.554	1.748	0.051
	At home	5.239	5	0.238	1.025	0.432
	In society	5.862	5	0.266	0.834	0.683
Educational background of mother and father	At school	5.233	22	1.047	1.302	0.061
	At home	3.144	22	0.629	3.706	<b>0.020</b>
	In society	6.026	22	1.205	1.774	0.072
Gender and age	At school	1.811	2	0.905	2.856	<b>0.040</b>
	At home	0.174	2	0.087	0.375	0.688
	In society	0.054	2	0.027	4.085	<b>0.029</b>

Bold value indicates statistically significant difference ( $p < .05$ )

ations, and percentages were calculated and multivariate analyses of variance (MANOVA) conducted. To facilitate the interpretation of scale items, percentages of “strongly agree” with “agree” and “strongly disagree” with “disagree” were combined.

*Qualitative dimension* In accordance with qualitative research techniques, statements of children in the focus group interviews were recorded on an audio recorder, with their consent. These were then transcribed into written documents. Data obtained during interviews were analyzed through content analysis.

Following the collection of quantitative data, views obtained from the qualitative data were presented. These views were presented directly, and the presentation included codes instead of children’s names. For instance, FU1 means the first female student attending school at the urban location, and MR2 represents the second male student attending school at the rural location.

### 3 Results

As can be seen in Table 1, as a result of MANOVA on subdimensions, the gender variable shows a statistically significant difference in the dimension of the democratic environment at school ( $F = 11.127$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and in society ( $F = 11.999$ ,  $p < .05$ ). This shows that more males believe that a democratic environment exists. On the dimension of a democratic environment in the home ( $F = 0.958$ ,  $p > .05$ ), no significant difference was found based on gender.

In relation to age, there was a statistically significant difference in the dimension of a democratic environment at school ( $F = 48.787$ ,  $p < .05$ ), in the home ( $F = 9.914$ ,  $p < .05$ ), and in society ( $F = 17.658$ ,  $p < .05$ ). This means that fewer older students thought they were exposed to a democratic environment at school, in the home and in society.

The educational background of the mother and father individually did not show a significant difference in relation to a democratic environment provided in the home or in society, whereas the interaction between the mother's education and that of the father accounted for a significant difference in the democratic environment ( $F = 3.706$ ,  $p < .05$ ) at home. In other words, students whose parents had attained a higher level of education thought that their home environment was more democratic.

The interaction between the variables of gender and age resulted in a significant difference in the democratic environment experienced at school ( $F = 2.856$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and in the home ( $F = 4.085$ ,  $p < .05$ ). This means older and female children thought the environment they were exposed to at school and in society was less democratic.

According to Table 2, 44 % of the students stated that they were not consulted regarding school rules, 51 % stated that they were not consulted on the books to be bought for the school library, and 40 % stated that they were not consulted on seating plans in the classroom. Regarding treatment of students, 44 % agreed that all students at the school were treated equally. Half of the students (51 %), on the other hand, stated that the school had an authoritarian structure.

Table 2 shows that students also had positive opinions regarding the democratic environment at school. For instance, 72 % of the students stated that the school environment was safe and teachers treated students with tolerance. Additionally, 73 % of the students stated that they had the self-confidence to embark upon projects at school, and 68 % said that their school respected children's rights.

### 3.1 Qualitative findings

According to the data obtained through the focus group interview, all students ( $n = 6$ ) stated that there were problems related to the democratic environment at school. The students stated that a fully democratic environment did not exist, students were treated differently depending on certain traits (e.g., academic, socioeconomic), administrators did not take students' opinions into consideration, students cannot actively participate in making-decision, setting rules, and making a seating plan at school, only a few meetings were held for social club activities, and for school senate, students voted only once, and no other activities were organized. One student who indicated that there was a problem with the democratic environment at school said, "I feel there is some kind of unfair treatment at school. For instance, even on the first grade level, there is unfairness when forming the classes. After fifth grade, the best students are put in one class and the worst ones are put in another class. In that class, you don't feel valued. The value of the two classes is different. For me, this is a major problem" (FU1). Another student, talking about participation at school, stated, "Since we are children, school administrators do not consider our opinion on any issue. Once, we as a class wrote a petition to the Ministry of Education. Our school has two buildings; building B is older and we think it might be dangerous since it is not earthquake-proof. However, they did not respond to us" (MU3).

Students' opinions supported the quantitative findings with respect to the democratic environment at school. The following statements were made regarding the democratic environment at school: "I think I am safe at school. Violence or serious fights do not take place at

**Table 2** Percentage (%) distribution of student responses to items regarding democratic environment at school

Democratic environment at school	Strongly disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Undecided (%)	Strongly agree (%)	Agree (%)	$\bar{X}$
1. Rules at school are made in consultation with us	24	20	19	18	19	2.88
2. We are consulted on the books to be bought for the library	29	22	17	18	14	2.63
3. We are consulted on the use of the school's financial resources	25	21	19	16	19	2.77
4. We cannot comfortably express our opinion of the school to school administrators	17	19	19	20	25	3.18
5. We are not consulted on the seating plan in the classroom	19	21	14	15	31	3.11
6. We, together with the teachers, decide on the principles, rules, and activities of social clubs	16	16	20	20	28	3.33
7. The majority opinion is considered at this school	14	13	20	27	26	3.52
8. Things are run in a fair way at our school	13	13	22	23	29	3.52
9. I can comfortably communicate suggestions to the school administration	15	14	23	23	26	3.39
10. All students at our school are treated equally	21	14	20	19	25	3.17
11. Administrators and teachers often trust students	10	9	22	26	33	3.80
12. We have a safe environment at school	7	9	13	29	43	4.13
13. Our teachers show tolerance toward us	4	6	17	33	39	4.24
14. Students trust each other	7	15	29	24	24	3.53
15. Students show tolerance toward each other	13	16	26	26	19	3.33
16. Our school respects human rights	7	6	23	29	35	4.03
17. Our school respects children's rights	5	8	19	29	39	4.10
18. We have an environment of cooperation at our school	8	12	28	23	30	3.67

**Table 2** continued

Democratic environment at school	Strongly disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Undecided (%)	Strongly agree (%)	Agree (%)	$\bar{X}$
19. We have an authoritarian structure at our school	27	24	31	10	8	2.34
20. I do not feel oppressed at school	10	11	15	25	37	3.82
21. I have the self-confidence to undertake projects at school	8	7	13	31	42	4.16

school” (MR1). Another student says about the environment of trust at school: “My teachers usually trust me since I am responsible and I do not disappoint them. However, I cannot comment on the administration because I do not talk with them often” (MF3).

As shown in Table 3, students generally consider their home environment democratic. Regarding trust, 93 % of students stated that their families trusted them, that they had a safe home environment, that their families were accepting of them, and that family members were accepting of one another. On a more antidemocratic note, it is worth remarking that 35 % of students said they could not comfortably express their opinions at home.

### 3.2 Qualitative findings

According to the qualitative data obtained through the interviews, students ( $n = 4$ ) stated that often their home environment was democratic. Students who indicated that their home environment was democratic said they did not experience serious unfairness in the home, their parents trusted them, they felt safe at home, and the family had an environment of cooperation and respected children’s rights. One student had this to say about democracy in the home: “I think in general my home environment is democratic. Although sometimes they pay more attention to my younger sibling, I am not treated unfairly” (MR2). Another student says about trust at home: “My mom trusts me a lot. I tell her when I’m leaving school. If I am late, I call her. However, my dad worries some because of my age and gender” (FU2).

Students who indicated that their home environment was not democratic said that their father was the authoritarian figure in the family, that an authoritarian structure prevailed at home, that their opinion was not considered, and that some issues were not discussed. Students who expressed their opinions on this matter said, “My family is a monarchy. My dad never consults with us; whatever he wants goes. Our opinions are not considered” (MR2). Another student said, “I do not have much self-confidence in my family since my mom tells me not to ask for things she would not allow. Therefore, I am not given much opportunity to state my opinion” (FU1).

As can be seen in Table 4, 70 % of the students stated that they could express their opinions in society, 77 % stated that people around them trusted them, and 67 % stated that everyone was equal and that there was no gender discrimination. In addition, 20 % of the students stated that children’s views were not considered and only adults’ opinions were taken into account. Finally, 30 % of the students stated that they felt oppressed in society.



**Table 3** Percentage (%) distribution of student responses to items on the dimension of democratic environment in the home

Democratic environment in the home	Strongly disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Undecided (%)	Strongly agree (%)	Agree (%)	$\bar{X}$
22. Rules in the home are set in consultation with me	5	3	11	20	61	4.47
23. I am consulted about economic decisions at home	8	8	16	28	41	4.05
24. I am free to wear whatever clothes I want	10	8	10	22	50	4.10
25. I cannot express my opinion (view) comfortably at home	22	12	8	17	41	3.46
26. Everyone is equal at home; there is no gender discrimination	4	3	6	15	73	4.62
27. My family trusts me	2	1	4	14	79	4.81
28. I have a safe home environment	1	1	5	13	80	4.81
29. My family is accepting of me	1	1	5	19	75	4.81
30. In my family, we trust each other	2	1	6	16	76	4.80
31. In my family, we are accepting of each other	2	1	4	19	74	4.79
32. My family respects children's rights	2	2	9	24	64	4.70
33. My home environment is one of cooperation	3	1	14	26	56	4.55
34. My family supports me when I want to participate in cultural and sports activities	2	2	12	25	59	4.59
35. My family has an authoritarian structure	41	23	15	7	14	2.31
36. I do not feel oppressed at home	7	4	8	16	64	4.37
37. My family trusts me and gives me responsibilities	3	3	7	18	69	4.65

### 3.3 Qualitative findings

According to the qualitative findings obtained from interviews, students ( $n = 3$ ) stated that their society was democratic, but some students ( $n = 3$ ), on the other hand, stated it was not. Regarding the democratic environment in society, students stated that they were treated unfairly, that they had self-confidence in society, and that people helped each other during difficult times. Students who thought that the social environment was a democratic one said, "I live in a small city; therefore, I think people's rights are not ignored very much and everyone is treated equally. However, in larger cities this might be different" (MR2). Another student

**Table 4** Percentage (%) distribution of student responses to items regarding the existence of a democratic environment in society

Democratic environment in society	Strongly disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Undecided (%)	Strongly agree (%)	Agree (%)	$\bar{X}$
38. Children's opinions are not considered in our society	39	21	20	10	11	2.22
39. I can comfortably state my opinion (view) in society	4	8	19	27	43	4.16
40. Only adults' opinions are paid attention to in our society	37	25	19	8	11	2.13
41. Everyone is equal; there is no gender discrimination in our society	8	6	19	25	42	4.06
42. People around me trust me	3	4	17	25	52	4.41
43. Society is a safe environment	9	8	23	22	38	3.85
44. People in society trust one another	8	11	26	26	29	3.74
45. People in society respect children's rights	7	13	22	27	31	3.76
46. We have an environment of cooperation in society	8	12	23	26	31	3.72
47. I feel oppressed in society	16	13	17	17	37	3.49

**Table 5** Averages related to subdimensions

Subdimensions	$\bar{X}$	Ss
Democratic environment at school	3.36	.6577
Democratic environment at home	4.20	.5048
Democratic environment in society	3.40	.6221

said, "I think we have tolerance in our society, people around me trust me, and I can tell them my opinions" (FR1).

Students who did not believe their society was very democratic stated that their views were not considered because they were younger, and they said there was gender discrimination. One student said, "In my opinion, men and women are not equal in our society. Girls cannot comfortably do anything men can do. For instance, I have never heard anyone comment on men's clothes; however, everyone has something to say about what girls wear" (FU3).

Table 5 shows the averages of answers given by students in response to subdimensions. The mean ( $\bar{X} = 3.36$ ) of students' opinions regarding the democratic environment at school corresponds to "Neither agree nor disagree." The mean ( $\bar{X} = 4.20$ ) of opinions regarding the democratic environment at home corresponds to "Agree"; the mean ( $\bar{X} = 3.40$ ) of students' opinions regarding the democratic environment in society corresponds to "Neither agree

nor disagree.” Thus, it can be asserted that students agreed that there was a democratic environment at home, whereas they were uncertain about the democratic environment at school and in society.

As for the averages of responses regarding subdimensions, it may be concluded that students were unsure of the adequacy of the democratic environment at school or in society, but they thought that the democratic environment within the family was “adequate.”

#### 4 Conclusion and discussion

The research results show that children’s perceptions of the democratic environments at school, at home, and in society differ with respect to independent variables. For instance, perceptions of the extent to which school and society are democratic vary with respect to gender. Female children think that school and society are less democratic than do male children. This means that female children’s democratic attitude levels are higher and not met at school and in society. Many studies have demonstrated that female children’s democratic attitudes are on higher levels (Torney-Purta et al. 2001; Doğanay 2008; Doğanay and Sari 2009; Karatekin et al. 2010).

For the age variable, perceptions of the extent to which the school, home, and societal environments are democratic reveal a significant difference. As children get older, they perceive those environments to be less democratic. In other words, older children state that fewer democratic opportunities are open to them than do younger children.

Interactions between parental education levels affect perceptions of a democratic environment. As parents attain ever higher levels of education, children’s home environments grow more democratic.

The interaction between gender and age affects the perception of democratic environments at schools and in society. Older and female children think that their exposure to democratic environments is diminished.

Many studies conducted in various countries show that having children actively participate at school and providing children with a democratic environment positively contribute to their progress as engaged citizens and to their political participation (Council of Europe 2005; Davies et al. 2006; Morrison 2008; Perry 2009; Şişman 2010; Torney-Purta et al. 2001). However, this study shows that there are some issues with respect to the democratic environment offered to children in Turkey. For instance, approximately half of the children stated that they were not consulted regarding the books to be bought for the library, setting rules, and making a seating plan at school. Furthermore, half of the children said that there was an authoritarian structure at school. Qualitative findings support the quantitative findings. During the focus group interview, the children stated that a democratic environment was not adequately offered to them at school, children were treated differently depending on their personality traits (e.g., academic, socioeconomic), administrators did not consider students’ views, and their active participation was not adequately encouraged at school. In fact, this is the situation not only in Turkey. Although almost all countries approved the Convention on the Rights of the Child, both in Eastern and Western countries, a democratic environment has not been adequately established. For instance, Thornberg and Elvstrand (2012) conclude in their study conducted in Sweden that children’s active participation at school is suppressed on several levels. Studies conducted in other countries also showed that administrators and teachers made decisions on school policies and students were not given many opportunities to participate (Davies 2000; Devine 2002; Raby 2005; Fjeldstad and Mikkelsen 2003).

Students were observed to have positive views of the democratic environment offered at school. For instance, most children stated that they believed that school was a safe environment and that they had the self-confidence to undertake projects at school. The family is the first environment where democratic behaviors must be learned and practiced.

Children in this study stated that they were exposed to a democratic environment maximally in the home. For instance, almost all children stated that their families trusted them, that their home environment was safe, and that their family was accepting of them. According to the results of the Research on Family Structure conducted by the Turkish Statistics Institute (TUİK 2006), one-third of those participating in the research stated that decisions related to children in the home were made with the contribution of all family members. Rasuly-Palczek (1996) states that the most significant aspects defining the functions of Turkish families are not physical ones but within-family relationships, cooperation, and mutual assistance.

However, it was revealed through the focus group interviews that in the present study no family provided a democratic environment. During the focus group interviews, the children expressed both positive and negative views with regard to within-family democracy. Some children stated that the father was an authoritarian figure in the home, that there was an authoritarian structure within the family, that their views were not sought out, and that some issues were not discussed. Other studies conducted in Turkey confirmed this as well. A United Nations Development Programme (2008) report reflects that children's within-family participation is slightly problematic and that the younger children are and the poorer the family SES, the less the participation. Karatekin et al. (2013) indicate in their study that there is a difference in within-family democracy depending on the region in Turkey.

In this study, it can be concluded that children have a positive opinion on some issues related to the democratic environment offered to them and a negative opinion of other issues related to that environment. Positive opinions include the following: three-fourths of children are free to state their own opinion in society, people around children trust them, and everyone is treated equally with no gender discrimination. Negative opinions, on the other hand, include the following: one-third of students feel oppressed in society and children's views are not taken into account, only adults' opinions are considered. During the focus group interviews, on the other hand, students expressed negative views of the democratic environment in society. Children said, with examples, that there was no gender equality in society, and children's opinions were not taken into account because they are young. As in all societies, in Turkey, children are much loved; however, this love in adults does not translate into respect for children. There are some encouraging aspects related to children's participation in the social arena. Other studies conducted in Turkey show that children's right to participate is nonexistent except in the adoption of the Convention (Şahin and Polat 2012; Polat 2005).

In conclusion, even though Turkey as a country accepts the Convention on the Rights of the Child, some problems exist in relation to the democratic environment offered to children at school, at home, and in society. In view of these results, the following suggestions are made:

Instead of making decisions through one channel, an inclusive administration style should be adopted in educational institutions. Particularly on all issues related to children, children's active participation at school should be encouraged. Regulations on education should not only be established for courses and curriculum. Regulations aimed at forming a democratic school culture and practice of these should also be put in place.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child, while being recognized and ratified by states, should be put into practice in our daily lives. Social awareness of the Convention should be

raised through activities organized for families and children. The love of children and the intuitive protection toward children by families in Turkish society should evolve into respect for children's decision-making abilities as well.

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