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## Democratic teaching learning practices: A research perspective

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### Abstract

*The present paper is based on a review of the literature related to democratic teaching and learning practices. It delves into the relationship between the social, cultural and political influences on education and the impact of education on society. Education is shaped by social life, like family, community and the state. Culture influences education by passing traditions, language and values through schools; state controls education through policies, laws, and funding, deciding what and how students learn. In return, education shapes society by improving knowledge, skills, and awareness among people. It helps people to take part in political decision and also brings social change. Emphasising democracy as a universally respected system, it emphasises the importance of raising awareness and understanding of democratic principles, especially in educational settings. The paper reviews educational theories that advocate for the promotion of democratic values and active participation in democratic processes in schools. Furthermore, the paper emphasises the role of schools in promoting democratic ideals such as equality, freedom, and political participation, thus making individuals responsible citizens. The paper highlighted significant gaps in the existing literature, offering avenues for future research. These gaps include the need for research examining the long-term impact of democratic education, the challenge of implementation, teacher preparation to effectively promote democratic practices, seeking diversity and inclusion in democratic classrooms, and student perspectives on democratic education. Furthermore, comparative research is needed on the different contextual factors that affect the effectiveness of democratic teaching and learning practices.*

**Keywords:** *democratic teaching learning practices; school culture; student participation; societal impact; teachers' role*

### INTRODUCTION

SDG-4 emphasised education for sustainable development, and researchers (Daher, 2019; Subba, 2014; Bentham, 2013; Zehadi & Jahan, 2025) have acknowledged the significance of developing a sense of critical citizenship, democracy, social justice, and human rights among students for sustainable development. Realising the requirement of critical citizenship among the citizens and meeting SDG-4, democratic teaching-learning practices are



becoming more important in today's education system. To this end, schools are not only places for gaining knowledge but also for learning values such as equality, freedom, and participation. Democratic practices in the classroom encourage students to actively participate rather than be passive listeners (Kieess, 2022; Zembylas, 2022; Angyagre, 2025). This article is based on a review of approximately 80 research articles and some books that focus on democratic teaching-learning practices in educational settings. The aim is to understand what has already been studied, find common ideas, and identify the gaps that need more research.

Education is the ladder for the welfare of any society. Society, people's way of life, and a country's political system greatly influence education. On the other hand, education also influences the development of society. Therefore, it is essential to strengthen the foundation of education for the well-development of society. Citizens around the world uphold the principles of democracy. However, to establish a democratic society, it is crucial to cultivate awareness among the people about democracy and its positive effects. The optimal approach to enlightening individuals about democracy is to integrate democratic education and governance within educational institutions (Alshurman, 2015; Nikolaou, 2021). Some critical educational theorists have argued that schools can play an important role in promoting alternative understandings of democracy and can thereby help to build a more democratic and just society (Sehr, 1997).

Democracy is a system that respects and influences social order since it brings to the fore individuals who can take an active part in their own lives. Additionally, democracy impacts society in various ways, like laws, economics, government structures and the daily life of people. In this way, democracy has enticed many societies into embracing democracy. The main aspects of democracy are fairness, justice, people being involved in different activities of society and politics, voting to make choices, avoiding violence to achieve goals, and finding compromises (Alshurman, 2015).

The schoolgoers' first societal experience comes in the schools (Bisland et al., 2009). This sparks a key point that the culture within a classroom significantly influences students' perceptions and behaviours regarding civil responsibility and democratic values. As literature suggests, the quality of democracy is intertwined with the quality of education (Biesta, 2007; Solhaug, 2018), and education has the potential to enable the creation of a 'culture of democracy' (Acemoglu et al., 2005). Realising the relationship between education and democracy, educators and researchers over the past twenty years have presented various ideas about the features of democratic education in different countries. These educators are particularly interested in how schools can help develop democratic cultures within a society. While some educators think of promoting democratic values and attitudes through the course contents, others put forward the idea of teaching the students to participate actively and constructively in the democratic processes (Roth, 2003). Consequently, as a means of option, student-centred pedagogy was introduced in diverse contexts globally because of its promises of making learning more democratic (Sriprakash, 2010) and potential to promote democratic citizenship among children and young people (Anderson-Levitt, 2003).

Most of the countries of the world are following democratic rule. So, for the development of a country and its society, we need to be aware of all citizens about democracy and take necessary actions to apply democratic practices in our day-to-day life. Management and development of society mainly depend upon the education system. Therefore, to create good citizens in a country, we need to develop the value of democracy in the educational system. Schools, colleges and universities are the platforms for students

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to develop their physical, mental, social and moral qualities. This could be possible if we create a democratic environment in the educational institutions.

### **Democratic education**

Democratic education creates awareness about democracy. In a democratic society, it should be open to all its citizens. It helps to build a healthy and congenial relationship between the teacher and the taught. Democratic education necessitates an educational system that allows students to have a choice in determining what they need in order to succeed. The essence of democratic practice lies in acknowledging the opinions of others and evaluating the broader implications of actions above self-interest, but also considerate of others' situations. To build a successful education system focused on personalised learning, it's important to understand that giving each student a chance to showcase their talents isn't neglecting excellence, but rather achieving it (Colville-Hall, 2000).

In a democratic education system, students get to take an active role in making decisions about their classrooms. This means they are involved in creating the class rules, planning what they will study, and deciding how their work will be evaluated. In a democratic approach to education, students have the opportunity to actively engage in decision-making for their classroom. This includes collaborating on establishing class rules, designing curricula, and developing assessment criteria. Other features of democratic education encompass a declaration of rights and duties, regular class gatherings, and classroom agreements (Gathercoal, 2000; Tabak & Karip, 2022). And all of these features encourage students' participation. In democratic schools, students have more say than in traditional ones. While in traditional schools, students' councils might only handle things like event planning or academic issues, in democratic schools, students are encouraged to help make rules, shape what they learn, decide schedules, even help pick teachers, and manage in budgeting (Grandmont, 2002).

In the democratic education system in today's era, students are given equal rights to make decisions regarding how, what, where, when and with whom they study. They were also given the authority to shape education and determine which rules and sanctions are necessary. This approach offers decision-making experiences to students who typically struggle to make their own choices, enabling them to take charge of their decisions (Styles, 2001; Angyagre, 2025). The ideology of democratic education asserts that the main goal of education is to establish a lifelong learning process. The globally valued approach supports the comprehensive development of an individual's personality. It fosters freedom and legitimacy, encourages respect for human rights, and enhances environmental and social responsibility (Hecht, 2002).

In a democratic approach, schools offer students a secure, non-threatening environment to practice their democratic skills and opportunities to cultivate and execute critical thinking and constructive dialogues. Instead of trying to outdo one another, they were encouraged to join hands and support each other in their learning endeavours (Collins et al., 2019). Educational programs with such principles indicate that achieving democracy in education is more than merely providing new information. It requires a variety of strategies, like cultivating critical thinking abilities and teamwork among students, along with creating an inclusive classroom environment where diverse viewpoints are welcomed and discussed. Educational programs based on these methods understand that teaching for democracy involves more than just giving students new information. They realise that the challenge includes helping students develop the skills and attitudes needed to participate in a democratic society. Education for democracy requires an ongoing process of 'changing

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the environmental, cognitive, and pedagogical contexts in which teaching and learning occur' (Gay, 1997).

Democratic education plays a great role in raising awareness about democracy. Through democratic education, students will get freedom in which they can express their views fearlessly, participate actively in many activities, and be involved in the decision-making process. Also, through this process, students learn how to develop and implement critical thinking and constructive conversation.

## Discussion

### *Review of research on democratic teaching learning practices*

Empirical evidence suggests that when democracy is practised as a way of learning and living in schools, it leads to astonishing success in the intellectual achievement of all students, from preschool through adulthood, and creates citizens who can lead satisfying and valuable lives (Glickman, 1998). Research shows that when schools adopt democracy as a way of teaching and living, students of all ages do incredibly well academically and grow into citizens who lead happy and meaningful lives (Gardner, et al., 1994; Joyce & Weil, 1996; Joyce, 1993; Lee, Smith, & Croninger, 1995; Leinhart, 1993; Newmann & Wehlage, 1995; Vygotsky & Cole, 1978; Nikolaou, 2021; Zehadi & Jahan, 2025).

Many educators make a direct connection between democratic theory, values, beliefs and education. Goodlad (2000) discussed that education within a social and political democracy emphasises the inseparable link between education and democracy. Dewey (1916) stated that for democracy to thrive, people must learn what it means and how to take part in it. Democratic schools are places where teachers and students work together, make decisions together, create communities for learning, welcome diverse perspectives, and promote fairness and understanding even when there are disagreements (Nikolaou, 2021). Schools serve as crucial hubs for structured and formal education, offering opportunities to teach individuals about their rights and duties in upholding democratic values both within and beyond the classroom setting (Davies et al., 2006; Fielding, 2007; Knight, 2001; Thornberg & Elvstrand, 2012; White et al., 2007, Murtaza & Akber, 2019). Democratic schools prioritise systems and methods that allow student perspectives to be recognised and respected. This enables every student to advocate for their rights and individual liberties as human beings (Apple & Beane, 2007). Democratic education aims to empower students as independent, analytical thinkers (Freire, 1970; Shor, 1992; Veugelers, 2007). While democratic education supports students in understanding their own rights and freedoms, it also aims to broaden their awareness of different cultures and perspectives (Apple & Beane, 2007; Freire, 1970; Sanahuja et al., 2020).

According to Mursell (1955), the school helps students learn how to deal with issues in a democratic society. Teachers and students work together to decide what to learn, solve problems, and make things better when they face challenges. By talking about problems and working together, students and teachers aim to make things better for everyone (Janak, 2013). Educational approaches that encourage students to analyse issues within wide societal frameworks, develop their skills for critical investigation, engage them in constructive dialogue to understand diverse perspectives, and take action for social justice are instrumental in preparing the future generation for the challenges of modern pluralistic democracies (Sleeter, 1996; Gay, 1997; Sehr, 1997; Banks, 1997; Marullo & Edwards, 1999). Encouraging student empowerment is a key aspect of putting democratic education into action. When teachers empower students to express themselves and recognise their own

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needs, it enables students to actively participate in the democratic practices that are part of everyday happenings within the classroom and school.

Teaching students important democratic skills like how to interact well with others, think critically, and debate effectively was key to starting a democratic classroom. But it was equally important to give students the freedom and opportunity to put these skills into practice. This ongoing practice was essential for maintaining a democratic atmosphere in the classroom (Collins et al., 2019). In a democratic classroom, teachers meet students' needs, value their participation, and ensure their rights in a safe and lively learning setting (Edelstein, 2011). Encouraging a democratic atmosphere in classrooms allows students to freely express their ideas and resolve their issues effectively, leading to positive changes in how they view and engage with activities related to democracy (Marri, 2005).

Classrooms serve as communities where students engage in learning activities, focusing on their unique choices, needs, abilities, and educational goals (Louis, 2003; Weimer, 2013; Yilmaz, 2009; Murtaza & Akber, 2019). Taking part in classroom activities plays a significant role in engaging students in the teaching-learning process (Petress, 2006; Weaver & Qi, 2005). Research studies evidence that when students actively engage in classroom activities throughout their school experience, it enhances their growth as democratic citizens. (Morrison, 2008; Perry, 2009; Şişman & Taşdemir, 2010; Torney-Putra, 2002). When students are more involved in classroom activities, they tend to memorise less and instead develop better logical thinking skills. This includes interpreting facts, analysing issues, and combining ideas (Sousa & Ferreira, 2024). They also gain a positive view of participatory democracy, becoming more critical. Thoughtful and reflective citizens who actively participate in public affairs for the benefit of everyone (Campbell, 2009; Ten Dam & Volman, 2004). Participatory methods in classrooms offer students the chance to learn negotiation, collaboration, conflict resolution, and actively engage in making decisions within the class (Crone, 1997; Smith, 2007; Murtaza & Akber, 2019).

Teachers, being a significant component of formal educational programs, practice democratic values in classrooms for better exploration of democracy through participation and explanation (Kaya et al., 2012). Teachers prioritise student-centred education to foster a democratic culture through classroom activities, promoting freedom of expression, respect for diversity, and opportunities for student participation. Several studies emphasise the significance of teachers' democratic attitudes and behaviours in facilitating democratic practices (Dworkin et al., 2003; Kaya, 2013; Yalcin, 2014). During democratic classroom practices, teachers afford students opportunities to embody democratic values such as freedom of speech and engagement, respect for diversity, equality, and tolerance (Samanci, 2010; Tammi, 2013). Teachers who act as positive role models of democratic behaviours and practices in the classroom are crucial for developing democratic citizens (Louis, 2003; Larsen & Mathé 2023). They assist students in understanding and practising democratic principles, contributing to their social development (Beane, 2005; Goodlad, 2000; Knight, 2001; White et al., 2007).

Students closely observe their teachers' actions and are receptive to classroom practices. The Impact of these experiences in elementary school tends to endure over time. Numerous studies have explored teachers' democratic approaches in classrooms, including aspects such as democratic classroom management, attitudes toward student participation, and student-centred teaching methods (Sari et al., 2008). Many studies have focused on how teachers promote democracy in classrooms. They have explored things like how teachers manage classrooms democratically, how they feel about students participating, and teaching methods that put students at the centre (Kaya, 2013; Payne, 2017; Ustun,

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2011). Teachers learn democratic teaching methods to instil democratic values and encourage positive behaviour in young students within a democratic classroom environment (Demir & Bedir, 2013; Louis, 2003).

The above studies revealed that democratic practice helps in the intellectual achievement of students, creates good citizens in future, through which they will lead towards satisfying and valuable lives. Schools provide platforms for teaching individuals rights and responsibilities for practising democratic values, also leading children to grow and develop their abilities, which is needed for smooth living in a democratic society, empowering students to use their voices and to identify their needs. So, the teacher should provide opportunities to the students to engage themselves and to participate in democratic practices within the classroom and in school, through which students will actualise and exercise democratic practices. They develop logical thinking, such as interpretation of facts, analysis of issues, and synthesis of their ideas; develop positive attitudes to become critical, thoughtful and reflective citizens.

## CONCLUSION

In a democratic society, schools play a vital role in teaching individuals about democratic principles like equality, freedom and justice. Schools are where children first learn about democracy by living and interacting a democratic environment. Teachers are key influencers in this progress, as they guide students through the curriculum. They demonstrate democratic values both inside and outside the classroom. Inside the classroom, where students engage in learning, teachers act as role models by displaying democratic behaviours. They provide opportunities for students to practice democratic values like freedom of speech, participation, respect for differences, and fairness. This helps students understand and embrace democratic citizenship. Students will actualise and exercise democratic practices with the help of teachers in educational institutions, and that will be helpful for their social development.

Based on a detailed analysis of the research on democratic teaching and learning practices presented, several potential gaps and areas for future research can be identified: Numerous research studies have shown the immediate benefits of democratic practices in schools, such as increased student engagement and critical thinking. Research that focuses on the long-term impact of such practices should also be conducted. Research should be conducted on the impact of democratic education on students who passed out from the schooling system in terms of their behaviour, values, civic engagement, etc.

Although the research on the benefits of democratic teaching and learning practices has been discussed, there is little research on the challenges and barriers to the successful implementation of such strategies. Future studies could explore practical challenges if it's up to teachers and administrators to incorporate democratic principles into their classrooms and schools. While some research studies emphasised the importance of teachers as role models for democratic practices, little attention has been paid to how to better prepare and support teachers to implement democratic practices. Research should be conducted on the appropriate pedagogical practices for promoting democratic values in teacher education institutions.

Many of the studies discussed above emphasised the importance of diversity and inclusion in democratic classrooms. In-depth studies on how democratic practices can address issues like equity and social justice need to be explored. While existing research tends to focus on the role of teachers in promoting democratic practices, little attention is

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paid to students' own perspectives and experiences. Research needs to be conducted on the perception of students about the practice of democracy in and outside the classroom. While the literature reviewed provides insights from a variety of contexts, there is a lack of comparative research examining the effectiveness of democratic teaching and learning practices in different cultural, socioeconomic and educational contexts. This may provide insight into deciding the factors that contribute to the successful implementation of democratic practices.

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