



Democratic environment in higher education: The case of a Turkish public university

Omer Caliskan^{a,*}, Sibel Akin^b, Cennet Engin-Demir^c

^a Department of Educational Sciences, Yozgat Bozok University, Yozgat, Turkey

^b Faculty of Education, TED University, Ankara, Turkey

^c Department of Educational Sciences, Middle East Technical University, Ankara, Turkey



ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Democracy
Higher education
Organizational culture
Undergraduate student
Turkey

ABSTRACT

This study describes the expectations of undergraduate students regarding the characteristics of a democratic university environment. It then goes on to explore whether there are any significant differences among the dimensions of democratic university environment, namely respect for ideas, participation in decision-making, and promotion of tolerance. Last, it examines the effects of certain variables (gender, student club attendance, newspaper reading, and home residence) on student perceptions of their university environment. The results showed that there was a significant difference among three dimensions of democratic university environment. In addition, gender, student club attendance, and home residence had significant effects on differing dependent variables.

1. Introduction

Democracy is acknowledged to be a “contested concept” (Gallie, 1950) whose characterization is elusive (Quaranta, 2018). What is commonly understood as ‘democracy’ includes elections and liberties (Canache, 2012; Carlin and Singer, 2011) that represent a part of the “minimal” conception of the term (Przeworski, 1999). Indeed, the level of societal demand for democracy and the boundaries of democratic standards vary depending upon the socio-political and economic context (Rowland, 2003). Inglehart and Welzel (2005) have demonstrated how the quality of democracy in a society is influenced by the basic values and beliefs of individuals, which vary across nations. Accordingly, more liberal and freedom-oriented values are said to breed democracy, and people in democracies who experience more self-expression values (i.e., autonomous human choice, liberal environment) are, in return, likely to have higher level of effective democracy (i.e., liberal democracy).

A number of empirically and theoretically validated variables have been studied regarding the forces that either enhance or inhibit the quality of a democracy in a society. Researchers have studied democracy in relation to such variables as geography, religion, modernization, and autocratic regimes (Gleditsch, 2002; Lipset, 1959; Przeworski, 1999; Ross, 2012), with the association between culture and democracy a particularly popular subject in the literature, especially with regard to the predictive role of cultural values in determining the model of

democracy extant in a society (Maleki and Hendriks, 2015).

The relationship between culture and institutions has been one of the most contested aspects of democratization research (Dahluam and Knutsen, 2017; Inglehart and Welzel, 2005), with two different approaches put forward to explain this relationship: the ‘institutional’ perspective and the ‘cultural’ perspective. According to the institutional perspective, society’s early democratic experience has more substantial causal influence on the mass values. In other words, once democracy is institutionally adopted in a country, the democratic values will be embraced at the same time. However, the existence of democratic institutions by name (e.g., parliament, election system) may not necessarily support the flourishing of democratic standards or values at a desirable level. The culture perspective, by contrast, considers the mass values of a society to have a stronger causal influence on the performance and quality of democracy; in other words, democracy simply cannot flourish without democrats, who are the generative source of democratic culture (Inglehart and Welzel, 2005).

1.1. Organizational culture, democracy and higher education

Levinson and Stevick (2007) define democracy with respect to the cultural dynamics that influence the political climate, arguing that the type of democracy that arises in a society is influenced by its cultural values. In emphasizing the importance of culture for the implementation of democratic education, they summarize the connection between

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: ocaliskanmail@gmail.com (O. Caliskan), sibel.akin@tedu.edu.tr (S. Akin), cennet@metu.edu.tr (C. Engin-Demir).

culture and education as follows:

Democracy is not an abstract system that can be dropped into any new context and be expected to function, nor is it a set of institutional arrangements that can be evaluated satisfactorily simply by examining a flowchart in a document. Democracy is rather the product of interaction, the interaction of a system and its institutions with the cultural context and the people who make it real. (Levinson and Stevick, 2007, p. 2)

In other words, while acknowledging role of institutions, the role of individuals and the philosophical underpinnings of the mass organization culture they create are considered to be more important for the establishment of democracy. In essence, without cultural as well as personal commitments to democratic principles, democracy in any organization or nation will survive in name only (Lee, 2016). For instance, in their research into the political culture of South Africa, Gibson and Gouws (2005) underscored tolerance, recognizing equality of all individuals, acknowledging education as a universal right, and respecting the judicial process as some of the cultural values that prompt individuals to form democratic political mechanisms in which these democratic cultural values can be promoted and protected. Given the role of culture and mass values in the democratization process, it can be suggested that variations in organizational culture among institutions in the same country may lead to different outcomes with regard to the democratic standards of an institution (Gibson and Gouws, 2005; Lee, 2016). Thus, a closer examination of the concept of organizational culture is warranted in any exploration of the democratic processes of institutions.

Organizational culture refers to shared or collective values, philosophies, assumptions, expectations, ideologies, beliefs, norms, and attitudes (Lund, 2003). Built one step at a time, organizational culture manifests itself in the forms of collaboration, trust, and learning among organizational members (Abdul Rashid et al., 2004). Through the construction of an appropriate culture environment, organizational members are encouraged to create and share knowledge (Holsapple and Joshi, 2001).

According to Schein (2004), organizational culture has three levels. The first level, 'artefacts', refers to the visible structural components of an organization and observable behavior of its members. The second level, 'values', includes beliefs, ideals, goals, aspirations, ideologies, and rationalization. The third level, 'assumptions', consists of perceptions, feelings, and convictions. Schein (2004) goes on to explain that these descriptions basically reflect the patterns of behavior of an organization, with the respective levels combining to create an organizational culture, which, in turn, affects the democratic standards of an organization.

Regarding the concept of organizational culture in higher education settings, a case study by Tierney (1988) conducted in a state university identified the components of culture in higher education institutions as 'environment', 'mission', 'socialization', 'information', 'strategy', and 'leadership'. The author emphasized that these elements combine to generate a unique institutional culture through the interaction of institutional members over time. Given that dramatic differences may develop in the organizational cultures of higher education institutions, differences in democratic standards are likely to be observed as well.

While universities did not arise out of democratic compulsions, and the greatest achievements of universities are not entirely related with the progress of democracy, universities are assumed to play an important role in strengthening the quality of democratic practices through the enlightenment of citizens (Fiss, 2012). Bearing in mind Dewey's view that "education is not an affair of telling and being told, but an active and constructive process" (Dewey, 1916, p. 43), Bacon and Sloam (2010) built on Dewey's definitions of democratic education by positing three indicators that are required for a higher education institution to be characterized as democratic: institutional support, democratic ethos, and experiential learning. Institutional support refers

to public policy, university institutional culture (mission statements), and the provision of sources for civic engagement; democratic ethos includes an open university structure that allows for student input and feedback in the decision-making process; and experiential learning is associated with an interactive, student-centered approach to teaching. Similarly, Thomas and Hartley (2010) highlighted how higher education can reinforce democracy through practices such as teaching civics, current political controversies, and democratic skills; establishing deliberative places for active problem-solving; and modelling democracy through progressive practices.

The role of universities in strengthening democracy has also been stressed in policy documents. For example, alongside preparing students for the labor market, offering personal development, and supporting the development and maintenance of a broad, advanced knowledge base, "enhancing democratic awareness through the promotion of active citizenship" has been acknowledged by the Bologna Conference on Qualification Frameworks as one of four fundamental practices to be required of higher education institutions in order for them to be considered qualified (European Higher Education Area, 2005, p. 8).

1.2. The socio-political context of the selected university

This study was undertaken at Millennium University (a pseudonym), a public university located in Ankara, Turkey. The history of the selected university is unique in terms of the important role it has played in the ongoing process of democratization in Turkey since the 1950s. Founded in 1956 as a technological institute, at first, it was governed by a United Nations (UN) consultant, after which time prominent foreign administrative staff from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) took office. Millennium University possesses several unique characteristics that distinguish it from a typical public university in Turkey. Since its establishment, the medium of instruction has been English, and members of the faculty, which is relatively global in its composition, have been required to be capable of lecturing in English. Millennium University's highly qualified academic staff and liberal atmosphere have allowed it to maintain a reputation of excellence, and it continues to be regarded as a leading contributor to the nation in terms of scientific, economic, and social achievements. At the same time, with the flowering of political activism among university youth across the world in the 1960s (Altbach and Cohen, 1990), Millennium University became one of the centers of student protest in Turkey, both on and off campus, and as a longstanding site of active citizenship and resistance movements, the institution also has a reputation among Turkish society as a place of "defiance" (Çalışkan, 2015) that has been cultivated by the mass media (Caliskan, 2014).

The unique socio-political context to which its members are exposed sets Millennium University apart from other higher education institutions in Turkey, and the distinctive characteristics of the university's organizational culture may, through enculturation of its students, have an impact on their expectations regarding the characteristics of a democratic university environment and their perceptions of the democratic environment at their own university. Moreover, as one of the most competitive universities in Turkey, Millennium University attracts students who rank in the top tiers of the centralized university placement exam (Dayioğlu and Türüt-Aşık, 2007), and it is reasonable to expect these students to have the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary for participating in civic life (Akin et al., 2016) and thus strengthen existing democratic practices to a greater extent than their peers at other Turkish universities. Another student-related characteristic that may contribute to the cultural dynamics and subsequently shape the organizational climate of Millennium University is the fact that the majority of its students grew up in Ankara and various cities in the western part of Turkey (Dayioğlu and Türüt-Aşık, 2007) in middle-to-high socioeconomic status families, which could be expected to

influence the cultural capital of these students (Bourdieu, 1993) and support them in developing liberal attitudes and a wider view of democracy. In this regard, those students might have positive attitudes towards exercising their rights in the university setting (Akin et al., 2016) which takes an important place in Millennium University’s cultural dynamics that thereupon influence the organizational culture.

The idea that different organizational cultures manifested at different institutions of higher education may create different democratic standards, even in the same country, is embedded in the culturalist explanation of democracy and its emphasis on the role of culture in the formation of democratic standards (Inglehart and Welzel, 2005). Given its unique organizational culture, it may be expected that focusing on Millennium University could provide unique insights that are particularly enlightening for understanding how organizational culture might be influential in reinforcing democracy and strengthening the quality of democratic practices in higher education settings. Building on this assumption, this study addressed the following research questions:

- 1 What expectations do university students have regarding the characteristics of a democratic university environment?
- 2 Is there any significant difference among the dimensions of democratic atmosphere (respect for ideas, participation in decision making, and promotion of tolerance), as perceived by the students regarding their university environment?
- 3 What are the effects of certain demographic variables (gender, students club attendance, newspaper reading, and home residence) on university students’ perceptions of their university environment regarding respect to ideas, participation in decision making, and promotion of tolerance?

2. Methods

2.1. Study design

This study employed causal-comparative research design in order to determine the effects of existing differences among groups of individuals (Fraenkel and Wallen, 2006). Accordingly, the study explored whether selected independent variables (gender, student club attendance, newspaper reading, and home residence, see Table 1) had a significant effect on the dependent variables (respect for ideas, participation in decision-making, and promotion of tolerance) within the context of investigating the university students’ perceptions of their university environment. The present study also explored whether there was a significant difference among the university students’ perceptions of their university setting in relation to those three dimensions of democratic university environment.

Table 1
Descriptions of Variables.

Variable	Description	%
Democratic university environment	Respect for ideas, participation in decision-making, and promotion of tolerance	–
Gender	1 = Female	51.70
	2 = Male	48.30
Student club attendance	1 = Attending	39.70
	2 = Not attending	60.30
Newspaper reading	1 = Regularly reading	86.90
	2 = Not reading	13.10
Home residence (refers to childhood residence)	1 = Metropolis	67.40
	2 = Other (small city, district, town, village)	32.60

2.2. Sample

This study was carried out at Millennium University, whose unique characteristics in terms of the wider socio-political context are explained above in Section 1.2. Of the 16,719 undergraduate students enrolled during the 2012/2013 academic year, 1074 students took part in this study. The participants were selected using stratified sampling to ensure that the study sample included students from each of the university faculties in the same proportions as their overall representation in the overall student population (Fraenkel and Wallen, 2006). Accordingly, the distribution of students according to faculty was as follows: Architecture, 4.94%; Arts and Sciences, 15.92%; Economics and Administrative Sciences, 14.71%; Education, 24.30%; Engineering, 40.13%. Moreover, the participants were involved from all classes of those faculties, including preparation, first, second, third, fourth, and fifth year.

The study received the approval of the Millennium University Human Subjects Ethics Committee, and all participating students gave their written informed consent. The data were collected by the researchers during the visits to the classes within one month in 2012–2013 academic year. Among nearly 2000 undergraduate students who were asked to participate in the study, 1074 students volunteered to be involved in the sample. Given this, the response rate was 53.70% (n = 1074). Of these, 51.70% (n = 555) were female and 48.30% (n = 519) were male. The participants’ age ranged between 16 years to 28 years and above. Demographical characteristics of the participants are presented in Table 2.

2.3. Data collection instruments

Data were collected through two instruments developed by the researchers: “Expectations about the Characteristics of Democratic University Environment Scale” (ECDUES) and the “Perceptions of Democratic University Environment Scale” (PDUES). The ECDUES contained 15 items and a 5-point Likert-scale for responses ranging from “completely disagree” (1) to “completely agree” (5), whereas the PDUES contained 13 items and responses ranging from “never” (1) to “always” (5).

Both instruments were developed based on the literature and with input from three experts from the field of educational sciences. Items were written, revised, and piloted with 245 undergraduate students who were selected from the same university. Results of Exploratory Factor Analysis for the ECDUES, including individual factor loading for each item on the scale, are presented in Table 3. As the Table shows, analysis yielded 15 items loaded on a single factor that accounted for 52.61% of variance and had a Cronbach’s Alpha reliability score of .92.

Results of Exploratory Factor Analysis for the PDUES, including factor loading for each of the individual items on the scale, are presented in Table 4. Analysis yielded 13 items loaded on 3 factors, as follows: Factor 1: “respect for ideas”, 6 items; Factor 2: “participation in decision-making”, 4 items; Factor 3: “promotion of tolerance”, 3 items. Cronbach’s Alpha reliability scores for Factors 1, 2 and 3 were .88, .87 and .62, respectively, with a score .89 for the total scale (see Table 4).

Table 2
Demographical Characteristics of the Participants.

Characteristics	n	%
Type of Faculty		–
Faculty of Architecture	53	4.94
Faculty of Arts And Sciences	171	15.92
Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences	158	14.71
Faculty of Education	261	24.30
Faculty of Engineering	431	40.13
Total	1074	

Table 3
Factor Structure and Item Loadings of ECDUES.

Scale	Items	Factor Loadings	% of Variance	Cronbach's Alpha (α)
One-Factor "Expectations about the Characteristics of Democratic University Environment Scale" (ECDUES)	Item 1	.83	52.61	.92
	Item 2	.87		
	Item 3	.85		
	Item 4	.68		
	Item 5	.67		
	Item 6	.78		
	Item 7	.83		
	Item 8	.38		
	Item 9	.64		
	Item 10	.80		
	Item 11	.35		
	Item 12	.42		
	Item 13	.78		
	Item 14	.63		
	Item 15	.76		

Table 4
Factor Structure and Item Loadings of PDUES.

Dimension	Items	Factor Loadings			% of Variance	Cronbach's Alpha (α)
		1	2	3		
Respect for ideas	Item 1	.71	-.03	-.03	46.40	.88
	Item 2	.63	-.00	.10		
	Item 3	.81	.05	-.10		
	Item 4	.68	-.06	.04		
	Item 5	.75	-.07	-.02		
	Item 6	.76	.05	.08		
Promotion of tolerance	Item 7	-.00	.05	.43	8.75	.62
	Item 8	.03	-.14	.71		
	Item 9	.17	-.27	.44		
Participation in decision-making	Item 10	-.03	-.80	.08	10.56	.87
	Item 11	-.01	-.85	.01		
	Item 12	.04	-.76	-.01		
	Item 13	.03	-.72	-.05		

2.4. Data analysis

Descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) were used to identify the characteristics of a democratic university environment as perceived by university students. One-Way Repeated Measures of Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was performed to explore whether differences exist in university student perceptions of the dimensions of a democratic university environment (respect for ideas, participation in decision-making, promotion of tolerance) with regard to their own university environment, and Two-Way Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) was conducted to examine the effects of paired variables (gender and student club attendance, newspaper reading and home residence) on these perceptions. Before the data analyses, the necessary assumptions were ensured in each analysis.

3. Findings

3.1. Descriptive statistics of student expectations regarding characteristics of a democratic university environment (ECDUES)

The overall mean score for student expectations regarding the characteristics of a democratic university environment was high ($M = 4.54, SD = .55$). Items with which students agreed most were as follows: "Gender equality should exist in a democratic university" ($M = 4.76, SD = .67$); "Individuals should feel secure in a democratic university" ($M = 4.74, SD = .63$); and "All individuals should have the right to access university opportunities in a democratic university" ($M = 4.74, SD = .63$). Items with which students agreed least were as

follows: "All processes should be based on written codes in a democratic university" ($M = 4.01, SD = 1.13$); "The more a student puts effort into her/his work, the more s/he becomes successful in a democratic university" ($M = 4.02, SD = 1.08$); and "The administrative body of the university should take the opinions of its members into consideration in a democratic university" ($M = 4.31, SD = 1.05$).

3.2. PDUES dimensions - comparison of means

One-way repeated measures (within-subjects) ANOVA was performed to compare the mean scores of the three factors of the PDUES. Prior to the analysis, the sphericity assumption was checked to ensure whether the variances of the differences between all combinations of three conditions are equal (Tabachnick and Fidell, 2007). Because the assumption of sphericity was not met, the results of the analysis were checked based on the Huynh-Feldt values. The main effect of the dimensions of democratic university environment was significant, $F(1.95, 2090.78) = 117.27, p = .00, \eta^2 = .10$. Therefore, it was seen that 10% of the variance in the university students' perceptions of their university environment was explained by the three dimensions of a democratic university environment. In other words, there was a significant difference among the three dimensions of the selected university's environment, as perceived by the students (see Table 5).

To compare the factors of the PDUES, the alpha level was set at .016 by dividing .05 into three as there were three groups of comparison. Paired comparisons (Table 6) indicated the mean score for student perceptions of the "respect for ideas" at their university ($M = 3.23, SD = .85$) to be significantly higher [$t(1073) = 9.89, p < .016$] than the mean score for "participation in decision-making" ($M = 2.98, SD = .87$). The mean score for "respect for ideas" was also found to be significantly higher [$t(1071) = 16.36, p < .016$] than the mean score for "promotion of tolerance" ($M = 2.84, SD = .85$), whereas the mean score for "promotion of tolerance" was significantly lower [$t(1071) = 4.70, p < .016$] than the mean score for "participation in decision-making".

3.3. The effect of demographic variables on perceptions of a democratic university environment

3.3.1. Gender and student club attendance

Calculations performed prior to Two-Way MANOVA analysis indicated the assumption of multivariate normality has been violated; however, given that multivariate normality is sensitive to large sample size (Tabachnick and Fidell, 2007), data analysis proceeded with confidence. Depending on the homogeneity of covariance matrices, the analysis was checked with the Pillai's Trace values. Results of Two-Way MANOVA (Table 7) showed no significant interaction between gender and student club attendance in terms of the effect on students' overall perceptions of the democratic environment of the university [$F(3,1053) = 1.72, p > .05, n.s.$]; however, gender was found to have a small-to-medium significant effect (Cohen, 1988) on students' overall perceptions of the democratic environment of the university, explaining 2% of variance [$F(3,1053) = 6.20, p < .05, \eta^2 = .02$], and student club attendance was found to have a small significant effect (Cohen, 1988) on students' overall perceptions of the democratic environment of the university, explaining 1% of variance [$F(3,1053) = 4.14, p < .05, \eta^2 = .01$].

Table 5
ANOVA Results.

Source	SS	df	MS	F	η^2
Dimensions of democratic university environment	85.56	1.95	43.83	117.27*	.10
Error	781.47	2090.78	.37		

* $p < .05$.

Table 6
Paired Comparisons of Factors of a Democratic University Environment.

I (Factors of Democratic University Environment)	J (Factors of Democratic University Environment)	Mean Difference (I-J)
Respect for ideas	Participation in decision-making	.26*
	Promotion of tolerance	.39*
Participation in decision-making	Respect for ideas	-.26*
	Promotion of tolerance	.13
Promotion of tolerance	Respect for ideas	-.39*
	Participation in decision-making	-.13*

* $p < .016$.

Results of ANOVA following Bonferroni correction demonstrated that gender had a small significant effect (Cohen, 1988) on student perceptions of their university environment regarding promotion of tolerance, explaining 1% of variance [$F(1,1055) = 7.53, p < .016, \eta^2 = .01$], and a small-to-medium significant effect (Cohen, 1988) on student perceptions of their university environment regarding respect for ideas, explaining 2% of variance [$F(1,1055) = 18.53, p < .016, \eta^2 = .02$], whereas the effect of gender on student perceptions of their university environment regarding participation in decision-making was not statistically significant [$F(1,1055) = 4.58, p > .016, n.s.$]. Pairwise comparisons showed female students to have higher scores for their perceptions of the promotion of tolerance in their university environment [$(M = 2.92, SD = .83)$ and respect for ideas ($M = 3.35, SD = .81$)] in comparison to male students [$(M = 2.75, SD = .86)$ and ($M = 3.10, SD = .88$)].

With regard to student club attendance, ANOVA results found this to have a small significant effect on student perceptions of their university environment regarding promotion of tolerance [$F(1,1055) = 10.01, p < .016, \eta^2 = .01$], explaining 1% of variance, and pairwise comparisons revealed lower mean scores ($M = 2.73, SD = .86$) given to ‘promotion of tolerance’ by participants who attended student club activities as compared to those who did not ($M = 2.91, SD = .83$). However, student club attendance had no significant effect on student perceptions of their university environment regarding respect for ideas [$F(1,1055) = 1.23, p > .016, n.s.$] or participation in decision-making [$F(1,1055) = .01, p > .016, n.s.$].

3.3.2. Newspaper reading and home residence

Calculations performed prior to Two-Way MANOVA analysis indicated that the assumption of multivariate normality has not been met; however, given that multivariate normality is sensitive to large sample size (Tabachnick and Fidell, 2007), data analysis proceeded with confidence. With respect to the results, given that homogeneity of covariance assumption was met, the Wilks’ Lambda values were checked. Results of Two-Way MANOVA (Table 7) showed no significant

Table 7
Multivariate and Univariate Analyses of Variance for Respect for ideas, Participation in decision-making, and Promotion of tolerance, by Demographic Variables.

	Multivariate		Univariate					
	F ^a	η^2	Respect for ideas		Participation in decision-making		Promotion of tolerance	
Source			F ^b	η^2	F ^b	η^2	F ^b	η^2
Gender (G)	6.20*	.02	18.53**	.02	4.58	n.s	7.53**	.01
Student Club (SC)	4.14*	.01	1.23	n.s	.01	n.s	10.01**	.01
G × SC	1.72	n.s						
Home Residence (HR)	3.89*	.01	.01	n.s	.72	n.s	5.95**	.01
Newspaper Reading (NR)	1.40	n.s	.04	n.s	.10	n.s	2.11	n.s
HR × NR	1.41	n.s						

Note. Multivariate F ratios were generated from Pillai’s statistic for G x SC; from Wilk’s statistic for HR x NR ^aMultivariate (G, SC) $df = 3, 1053$; ^bMultivariate (HR, NR) $df = 3, 1058$; ^bUnivariate (G, SC) $df = 1, 1055$; ^bUnivariate (HR, NR) $df = 1, 1060$. ** $p < .016$.

interaction between home residence and newspaper reading in terms of the effect on students’ overall perceptions of the democratic environment of the university [$F(3,1058) = 1.41, p > .05, n.s.$]. Moreover, newspaper reading alone was not shown to have any significant effect on students’ overall perceptions of the democratic university environment [$F(3,1058) = 1.40, p > .05, n.s.$]. However, home residence was shown to have a small significant effect on students’ overall perceptions of the democratic environment of the university, explaining 1% of variance [$F(3,1058) = 3.89, p < .05, \eta^2 = .01$].

One-way ANOVA with Bonferroni correction indicated that home residence had a significant small effect on student perceptions of their university environment regarding promotion of tolerance [$F(1,1060) = 5.95, p < .016, \eta^2 = .01$], explaining 1% of variance, but no significant effect on the dimensions ‘respect for ideas’ [$F(1,1060) = .01, p > .016, n.s.$] or ‘participation in decision-making’ [$F(1,1060) = .72, p > .016, n.s.$]. Pairwise comparisons revealed students raised in metropolitan centres gave lower mean scores to their university for ‘promotion of tolerance’ ($M = 2.78, SD = .85$) than students from small cities, outlying districts, towns, and villages ($M = 2.95, SD = .82$).

4. Discussion

The findings of this study showed the students of Millennium University to have rather high expectations regarding the characteristics of a democratic university environment, with gender equality considered to be the most important element of such an environment. The emphasis on gender equality is not particularly surprising given the wider context of national and supranational indicators in relation to gender equality in Turkey, where women’s participation in political, economic, and social life is comparatively low. For example, women constitute only 17.5% of all members of the Turkish parliament (TBMM, 2019) and have the lowest workforce participation rate (33.6%) of any Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) country (OECD, 2017), and Turkey is ranked 69 out of 187 countries in the Gender Inequality Index (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2018) and 131 out of 144 countries in the Global Gender Gap Index (World Economic Forum [WEF], 2017). The fact that Millennium University accepts only students who score in the top 1% on the national university placement exam (Dayioğlu and Türüt-Aşık, 2007) suggests that the student body is composed of individuals who possess the essential knowledge and skills about the importance of democratic society, including strongly positive attitudes towards gender equality. The liberal attitudes, high expectations in relation to gender equality, and cultural capital of these students may also be expected to have been influenced by their having grown up in families with middle-to-high socio-economic status in metropolitan areas in the western part of Turkey (Dayioğlu and Türüt-Aşık, 2007).

In addition to gender equality, a sense of security was also considered by participating students to be an essential aspect of a

democratic university environment. This finding may be related to the socio-political tension and instability experienced in Turkey over the past few years in general (Emil, 2018; Gokturk et al., 2018; Mccarthy, 2017; Oğuzlu, 2008; Usul, 2014) and at Millennium University in particular, where arrests of students for allegedly participating in illegal activities and restrictions on student festivals and protests on campus have unavoidably created an atmosphere of repression (Caliskan, 2014; Karasulu, 2014). Especially for students who do not want to be judged or discriminated against on the basis of their ideas, practices, or differences, a sense of security at the university, both in the classroom and in the wider campus setting, may have become a growing concern (Gall, 2019).

The item on the ECDUES with which students agreed least was that “All processes should be based on written codes in a democratic university” – although the score for this item was still above 4.00 (out of 5.00) had the lowest level of agreement of all items on the ECDUES. Other items with relatively low mean scores included the statements, “The more a student puts effort into her/his work, the more s/he becomes successful in a democratic university” and “The administrative body of the university should take the opinions of its members into consideration in a democratic university.” It is possible that these items received relatively low ratings because they were perceived to be more administrative rather than personal in nature, whereas items such as gender equality and security were perceived as more threatening on a personal level.

In terms of the overall perceptions of students regarding the democratic nature of the Millennium University environment (PDUES), the mean score was around average (3.02 out of 5.00). Regarding the three dimensions of a democratic university environment, the mean score for ‘participation in decision-making’ was also close to average (2.98), whereas the score for ‘respect for ideas’ was above average (3.23), and the mean score for ‘promotion of tolerance’ was below average (2.84). The differences among mean scores for the three dimensions were statistically significant, with ‘respect for ideas’ scored significantly higher than both ‘participation in decision-making’ and ‘promotion of tolerance’, and ‘participation in decision-making’ also significantly higher than ‘promotion of tolerance’. It is possible that the higher scores represent student perceptions of ‘respect for ideas’ and ‘participation in decision-making’ as more directly related to them on an individual level, whereas ‘promotion of tolerance’ may be perceived as more organizational in nature. Moreover, the significantly higher mean score for “respect for ideas” as compared to “participation in decision-making” may be reasonably attributed to the more action-oriented nature of the latter. That is, “participation in decision-making” requires taking deliberative actions (Locke et al., 1986) by students, whereas the “respect for ideas” is felt without any fixed conditions. In this respect, it is important to acknowledge that the organizational structures of Turkish universities are highly centralized (Çelik and Gür, 2014; Yavuz, 2012). This, in turn, might have a considerable impact on student perceptions as to how much leeway they are allowed for engaging in participatory activities.

When the effects of demographic characteristics on student perceptions of the dimensions of a democratic university environment were considered, this study found female students to perceive their university environment as one that promoted tolerance and respect for ideas to a higher degree than male students. This finding may be due to perceptions of female students of Millennium University as manifesting a greater awareness of gender issues in an environment that is more accommodating than the wider social and cultural context of Turkey, where the patriarchal structure is strongly felt and has been widely reported on in policy documents (UNDP, 2018; WEF, 2017) and in research papers (Bahar, 2018; Fisher, 2018). Moreover, female students, who may be at a disadvantage vis-a-vis males within the overarching patriarchal structure of the country (Engin and Pals, 2018), may have a greater appreciation for the context of respectful coexistence created for various minority groups (e.g., Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender,

Intersex [LGBTI] groups) and other student communities with differing world views (i.e. liberal vs conservative) at Millennium University that may not exist at other universities in Turkey.

In contrast to the effect observed on the dimensions of ‘respect for ideas’ and ‘promotion of tolerance’, gender had no significant effect on student perceptions of their university environment regarding ‘participation in decision-making’. This finding is unsurprising considering that the issue of active participation in decision-making either for females or males has been a global concern (Kahne and Spote, 2008; Sloam, 2014). As highlighted earlier, the top-down decision-making processes and relative lack of autonomy in the Turkish higher education system (Çelik and Gür, 2014) are quite obvious and likely place restrictions on males as well as females in terms of participation in decision-making.

In terms of student club attendance, students’ perceptions of their university environment regarding the promotion of tolerance were significantly affected, with the perceptions of students who participated in a student club scoring lower on promotion of tolerance than those students who did not participate in a club. It is plausible that students who attend club activities are exposed to a wider number of different settings within the university and thus more aware of the promotion in tolerance, which may in turn be lowly attributed to the relatively democratic atmosphere provided by Millennium University.

With regard to how home residence affects student perceptions of their university as constituting a democratic environment, to have a significant effect on the dimensions, no significant effect was observed on either the dimension ‘respect for ideas’ or ‘participation in decision-making’. However, the ‘promotion of tolerance’ was rated lower by students raised in a large metropolitan setting as compared to those who grew up in small cities, outlying districts, towns, or villages. In a large urban environment, individuals are more likely to be exposed to an extensive array of diverse stimuli that provide opportunities for accruing greater amounts of cultural, social, and economic capital (Bourdieu, 1993) and are thus likely to have higher expectations regarding democratic practices in general and the promotion of tolerance in particular than individuals who were raised in smaller, more provincial or rural settings. This, in turn, would explain the lower score for ‘promotion of tolerance’ among students raised in a metropolis as compared to other students.

Lastly, the findings of the study revealed that newspaper reading had no significant effect on students’ overall perceptions of their university environment as democratic or on any of the individual dimensions of a democratic environment. Despite the former assumption of the media as a powerful agent in societal transformation (Johnson, 2001), in the face of relentless pressure, restrictions, and threats, the media has, in fact, evolved into a corporate entity for the construction of alternate truths that serve the agendas of those who hold political, economic, and social power, rather than the common good of ordinary citizens (McChesney, 2015). In its weakened state, the media in Turkey cannot be said to play a role in raising the democratic expectations of individuals within organizations or society at large (Akser and Baybars-Hawks, 2012), and it is therefore unsurprising that newspaper reading did not have a significant impact on student’s perceptions of the environment of Millennium University in terms of respect for ideas, participation in decision-making, or promotion of tolerance.

5. Conclusion and implications

Overall, the findings of this study indicated that students of Millennium University found their university environment neither highly democratic nor undemocratic, with a mean score of 3.02 out of 5.00. However, considering Turkey’s poor performance on the Economist Intelligence Unit’s (2019) Democracy Index in the area of civil liberties shared, with a score of only 2.34 out of 10.00, student perceptions of Millennium University place it squarely above the country as a whole. Moreover, this difference supports the ‘cultural perspective’ that emphasizes mass values and organizational culture in

the formation of democratic values (Inglehart and Welzel, 2005). Given that organizational culture includes the values, assumptions, expectations, beliefs, ideologies, and norms shared by organizational members (Schein, 2004), it is reasonable to conclude that Millennium University formed its distinctive environment together with the socio-political dynamics it experienced since its establishment (Çalışkan, 2015), with the combination of elements creating an exceptional culture through the interaction of students over time (Tierney, 1988). More specifically, Millennium University can be said to possess the components (*institutional support, democratic ethos, and experiential learning*) suggested by Bacon and Sloam (2010) required for describing a university as democratic. For instance, with the exception of Bosphorus University (Resmi Gazete, 2016), Millennium University is the only public university in Turkey that requires future faculty members to complete a PhD or post-doctoral education abroad, and although the requirement is ostensibly put forward to ensure faculty members to be able to teach in an environment where the medium of instruction is English, this policy undoubtedly results in their experience of diversity and multi-cultural environments abroad that allows them to bring liberal values back to the Millennium University campus. Moreover, because English is the medium of instruction, international students from different ethnic backgrounds are attracted to the university, which hosts some of the highest numbers of foreign students of any university in country (Higher Education Council, 2018), thereby creating a heterogeneous campus environment that offers students the opportunity to experience diversity. In comparison to most other Turkish universities, Millennium University is able to accommodate various student communities with differing world views, whether social or political, who are able to live together in peaceful coexistence. The institutional policies in place since the early days of Millennium University may be viewed as supporting democratic practices. Since its foundation, as mentioned earlier, the biggest student protests and movements regarding almost all social issues in Turkey have taken place at Millennium University (Çalışkan, 2015). The word “revolution” that welcomes you when you enter the historical stadium located at the center of the campus is perceived as the symbol of the progressive stance of the university’s students.

In exploring the concept of a democratic university environment within the context of organizational culture, this study focused on the unique case of Millennium University, and the results should be interpreted with caution. The unique cultural dynamics of any university is likely to generate an organizational climate specific to that institution through which student perceptions may be shaped. Drawing on these implications, similar studies can be conducted at other universities to learn what students who experience different organizational cultures consider to be the standards for judging a democratic environment and how they perceive the democratic environment of their universities.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

Acknowledgments

This work was supported by the Institutional Research Fund granted by the university where this study was carried out (Grant number: BAP-1-05-02-2012-006).

References

Abdul Rashid, Z., Sambasivan, M., Abdul Rahman, A., 2004. The influence of organizational culture on attitudes toward organizational change. *Leadersh. Organ. Dev. J.* 25 (2), 161–179.

Akin, S., Caliskan, O., Engin-Demir, C., 2016. Civic engagement among university students: case of a Turkish public university. *Cukurova Univ. Fac. Edu. J.* 45 (2), 301–330.

Akser, M., Baybars-Hawks, B., 2012. Media and democracy in Turkey: toward a model of neoliberal media autocracy. *Middle East J. Cult. Commun.* 5 (3), 302–321.

Altbach, P.G., Cohen, R., 1990. American student activism: the post-sixties transformation. *J. Higher Educ.* 61 (1), 32–49.

Bacon, M., Sloam, J., 2010. John Dewey and the democratic role of higher education in England. *J. Polit. Sci. Educ.* 6 (4), 336–352.

Bahar, H.I., 2018. Patriarchy, gender inequality and criminal victimization of women in Turkey. In: Carrington, K., Hogg, R., Scott, J., Sozzo, M. (Eds.), *The Palgrave Handbook of Criminology and the Global South*. Palgrave Macmillan, UK, pp. 931–945.

Bourdieu, P., 1993. *Sociology in Question*. Sage, London.

Canache, D., 2012. Citizens’ conceptualizations of democracy: structural complexity, substantive content, and political significance. *Comp. Polit. Stud.* 45 (9), 1132–1158.

Carlin, R.E., Singer, M.M., 2011. Support for polyarchy in the Americas. *Comp. Polit. Stud.* 44 (11), 1500–1526.

Cohen, J., 1988. *Statistical Power Analysis for the Behavioral Sciences*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers, New Jersey.

Caliskan, M.E., 2014. Death of Turkish Boy Hurt in Protests Triggers Fresh Unrest. Reuters. (Accessed 5 May 2019). <https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-turkey-protests-idUKBREA2A0YF20140311>.

Çalışkan, N., 2015. ODTÜ Tarihçe (History of ODTÜ): 1956-1980. Propaganda Yayınları, Ankara.

Çelik, Z., Gür, B.S., 2014. Yükseköğretim sistemlerinin yönetimi ve üniversite özerkliği: Küresel eğilimler ve Türkiye örneği [The governance of higher education systems and university autonomy: Global trends and the case of Turkey]. *J. High. Educ. Sci.* 4 (1), 18–27.

Dahlum, S., Knutsen, C.H., 2017. What counts as evidence? Panel data and the empirical evaluation of revised modernization theory. *Br. J. Polit. Sci.* 47 (2), 473–478.

Dayıoğlu, M., Türüt-Aşık, S., 2007. Gender differences in academic performance in a large public university in Turkey. *High. Educ.* 53 (2), 255–277.

Dewey, J., 1916. *Democracy and Education: an Introduction to the Philosophy of Education*. Macmillan, New York.

Economist Intelligence Unit, 2019. Democracy Index 2018: Me Too? Political Participation, Protest and Democracy. Democracy2018 (Accessed 1 May 2019). https://www.eiu.com/public/topical_report.aspx?campaignid=Democracy2018.

Emil, S., 2018. Can world-class universities really exist in Turkey? In: Rabossi, M., Joshi, K.M., Paivandi, S. (Eds.), *In Pursuit of World-Class Universities: A Global Experience*. Studera Press, New Delhi, pp. 239–269.

Engin, C., Pals, H., 2018. Patriarchal attitudes in Turkey 1990–2011: the influence of religion and political conservatism. *Soc. Politics Int. Stud. Gen. State Soc.* 25 (3), 383–409.

European Higher Education Area (EHEA), 2005. Bologna Conference on Qualifications Frameworks. (Accessed 1 May 2019). http://www.ehea.info/media.ehea.info/file/Qualifications_framework_Copenhagen_2005/27/8/050113-14_General_report_578278.pdf.

Fisher, D.G., 2018. Gender equality and its heterogeneous impact on the incarceration of women in Turkey. *Int. J. Law Crime Justice* 52, 165–175.

Fiss, O.M., 2012. The democratic mission of the university. *Albany Law Rev.* 76 (1), 543–560.

Fraenkel, J.R., Wallen, N.E., 2006. *How to Design and Evaluate Research in Education*. The McGraw-Hill Companies, New York.

Gall, C., 2019. Spurning Erdogan’s Vision, Turks Leave in Drove, Draining Money and Talent. *New York Times* (Accessed August 15 2019). <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/01/02/world/europe/turkey-emigration-erdogan.html>.

Gallie, W.B., 1956. Art as an essentially contested concept. *Philos. Quart.* (1950) 6 (23), 97–114.

Gibson, J.L., Gouws, A., 2005. *Overcoming Intolerance in South Africa. Experiments in Democratic Persuasion*. Cambridge University Press, UK.

Gleditsch, K.S., 2002. Expanded trade and GDP data. *J. Conflict Resolut.* 46 (5), 712–724.

Gokturk, S., Kaymaz, O.S., Bozoglu, O., 2018. Experimenting with internationalisation in troubled times: the critical case of Turkish higher education. *J. High. Educ. Policy Manag.* 40 (6), 566–582.

Higher Education Council, 2018. Yükseköğretim bilgi yönetim sistemi [Higher education information management system]. (Accessed 10 March 2019). <https://istatistik.yok.gov.tr>.

Holsapple, C.W., Joshi, K.D., 2001. Organizational knowledge resources. *Decis. Support Syst.* 31 (1), 39–54.

Inglehart, R., Welzel, C., 2005. *Modernization, Cultural Change, and Democracy: The Human Development Sequence*. Cambridge University Press, UK.

Johnson, K., 2001. Media and social change: the modernizing influences of television in rural India. *Media Cult. Soc.* 23 (2), 147–169.

Kahne, J.E., Sporte, S.E., 2008. Developing citizens: the impact of civic learning opportunities on students’ commitment to civic participation. *Am. Educ. Res. J.* 45 (3), 738–766.

Karasulu, A., 2014. ‘If a leaf falls, they blame the tree’: scattered notes on Gezi resistances, contention, and space. *Int. Rev. Sociol.* 24 (1), 164–175.

Lee, C.T., 2016. *Ingenious Citizenship: Recrafting Democracy for Social Change*. Duke University Press, North Carolina.

Levinson, B.A., Stevick, D., 2007. *Reimagining Civic Education: How Diverse Societies Form Democratic Citizens*. Rowman Littlefield, Maryland.

Lipset, S.M., 1959. Democracy and working-class authoritarianism. *Am. Sociol. Rev.* 24 (4), 482–501.

Locke, E.A., Schweiger, D.M., Latham, G.P., 1986. Participation in decision making: When should it be used? *Organ. Dyn.* 14 (3), 65–79.

Lund, D.B., 2003. Organizational culture and job satisfaction. *J. Bus. Ind. Mark.* 18 (3), 219–236.

Maleki, A., Hendriks, F., 2015. The relation between cultural values and models of democracy: a cross-national study. *Democratization* 22 (6), 981–1010.

- McCarthy, A.T., 2017. Non-state actors and education as a humanitarian response: role of faith-based organisations in education for Syrian refugees in Turkey. *J. Int. Humanit. Action* 2 (1), 1–9.
- McChesney, R.W., 2015. *Rich Media, Poor Democracy: Communication Politics in Dubious Times*. University of Illinois Press, New York.
- OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development), 2017. *Employment: Labour Force Participation Rate, by Sex and Age Group*. (Accessed 1 April 2019). <https://stats.oecd.org/index.aspx?queryid=54741>.
- Oğuzlu, T., 2008. Middle easternization of Turkey's foreign policy: Does Turkey dissociate from the west? *Turk. Stud.* 9 (1), 3–20.
- Przeworski, A., 1999. Minimalist conception of democracy: a defense. In: Shapiro, I., Hacker-Cordón, C. (Eds.), *Democracy's Value*. Cambridge University Press, New York, pp. 22–55.
- Quaranta, M., 2018. The meaning of democracy to citizens across European countries and the factors involved. *Soc. Indic. Res.* 136 (3), 859–880.
- Resmi Gazete [Official Government Gazette], 2016. *Bosphorus University Undergraduate Education Regulation*. (Accessed August 25 2019). <http://www.resmigazete.gov.tr/eskiler/2016/06/20160611-2.htm>.
- Ross, M., 2012. *The Oil Curse: How Petroleum Wealth Shapes the Development of Nations*. Princeton University Press, New Jersey.
- Rowland, S., 2003. Teaching for democracy in higher education. *Teach. High. Educ.* 8 (1), 89–101.
- Schein, E.H., 2004. *Organizational Culture and Leadership*. Jossey-Bass, San Francisco.
- Sloam, J., 2014. 'The outraged young': young Europeans, civic engagement and the new media in a time of crisis. *Inf. Commun. Soc.* 17 (2), 217–231.
- Tabachnick, B.G., Fidell, L.S., 2007. *Using Multivariate Statistics*, fifth ed. Pearson/Allyn Bacon, Boston.
- TBMM (The Grand National Assembly of Turkey), 2019. *Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi milletvekilleri dağılımı: Cinsiyete göre dağılım* [The Grand National Assembly of Turkey: Gender-based distribution]. (Accessed 1 April 2019). https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/develop/owa/milletvekillerimiz_sd.dagilim.
- Thomas, N.L., Hartley, M., 2010. Higher education's democratic imperative. *New Dir. High. Educ.* 152, 99–107.
- Tierney, W.G., 1988. Organizational culture in higher education: defining the essentials. *J. Higher Educ.* 59 (1), 2–21.
- UNDP (United Nations Development Programme), 2018. *Gender Inequality Index*. (Accessed 1 May 2019). <http://hdr.undp.org/en/composite/GII>.
- Uşul, A.R., 2014. Is there any hope on the revival of EU–Turkey relations in the “new era”? *Turk. Stud.* 15 (2), 283–302.
- WEF (World Economic Forum), 2017. *The Global Gender Gap Report*. (Accessed 1 May 2019). http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2017.pdf.
- Yavuz, M., 2012. Neden yükseköğretim reformu [Why higher education reform]? *J. High. Educ. Sci.* 2 (3), 1–5.