

An Analysis of Preschool Teachers' Democratic Determinations from the Perspective of Children's Rights¹

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Abstract

This study is a quantitative research aimed at examining preschool teachers' levels of democratic decisiveness and their attitudes toward children's rights. The study sample consisted of 230 preschool teachers working in Sakarya and its districts. The data collection instruments used were the **Attitude Scale toward Children's Rights** developed by Kepenekçi (2006) and the **Democratic Teacher Decisiveness Scale** developed by Yeşil (2010). Data analysis was conducted using SPSS 24.0, and parametric test techniques were applied.

The findings indicate that teachers' scores on democratic decisiveness and attitudes toward children's rights were generally at a moderate level. A weak negative correlation was found between democratic decisiveness scores and attitudes toward children's rights ($r = -0.321$, $p < 0.01$). When demographic variables were examined, democratic decisiveness scores showed a significant difference according to years of professional experience, while no significant differences were observed regarding gender, marital status, age, age group taught, or type of graduated institution. Attitudes toward children's rights did not show significant differences according to any demographic variable.

The results reveal that teachers possess theoretical knowledge about children's rights but do not fully translate this knowledge into classroom practices. While teachers showed positive attitudes toward the right to protection, they

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demonstrated insufficient sensitivity regarding participation, development, and the best interests of the child. This indicates a need to further support teachers' awareness of children's rights in behavioral terms.

The study provides a basis for recommendations to enhance teacher education programs and in-school practices concerning children's rights and democratic decisiveness. Future studies are suggested to examine factors such as parental attitudes, children's rights awareness, and teachers' stress-coping strategies.

1. Introduction

Children, while being the younger members of society, also represent its future. In this context, it is of critical importance that children are raised as individuals who contribute positively to society—not only for their own benefit but also for that of their parents and the communities in which they live. Their ability to become beneficial citizens largely depends on the experiences and learning opportunities they acquire from early childhood onward. Indeed, experiences gained during the early years play a fundamental role in determining what kind of individuals children will become and how they will participate in social life in the future (Oktay, 2005; Schweinhart, 2017).

Democratic determination refers to believing in the principles and requirements of democracy, defending these principles, and exhibiting a voluntary attitude toward the sustainable dissemination of democratic values. Democracy is defined as “a form of state organization and a way of life shaped according to human rights” (Ersoy, 2012). In this context, for the mechanism of social justice to function properly, democratic values must coexist and be sustained within the cultural fabric of society.

In a society governed by the rule of law, it should be aimed that citizens develop and live in a civilized manner; sharing, solidarity, tolerance, and a sense of belonging should constitute the fundamental elements of social life. Democratic societies embrace humanism—a human-centered understanding—and acknowledge that rights are grounded in human dignity. Therefore, the existence of a democratic environment necessitates the establishment of a social sphere in which different opinions can be freely expressed and discussed when necessary. The level of development of a country is closely related to the meaning attributed by its society to democratic values and the extent to which these values are put into practice (Ersoy, 2012).

The theory of human rights is based on the recognition of inherent, inalienable, and inviolable rights that encompass all individuals within the

realm of humanity. The origins of this understanding can be traced back to Ancient Greece, emerging as a result of philosophical approaches toward human nature. Although these early ideas did not yet exhibit the systematic characteristics of the modern theory of human rights, they are significant in that they drew attention to the nature and intrinsic value of the human being (Donnelly, 2007).

The concept of human rights, which was initially explained through divine sources, was later freed from its metaphysical foundations under the influence of the Renaissance and Reformation movements, becoming associated with reason and science and redefined within the framework of individual rights. In the modern era, human rights have been further enriched and gained new layers of meaning under the influence of humanist thought. Rights such as freedom of thought, freedom of movement and residence, the right to a fair trial, and equal treatment in relations with state institutions are fundamental human rights that individuals often benefit from in their daily lives—sometimes without even realizing it (Sargin, 2017).

The power struggles and social conflicts throughout history have laid the groundwork for the theory of human rights to evolve into an ethical system of values. At the core of this system lie universal principles such as respect, love, friendship, brotherhood, tolerance, solidarity, equality, and freedom. Human rights possess both individual and social dimensions. In accordance with the principle of the universality of law, these rights are considered fundamental, immutable rights that transcend the boundaries of time and place and encounter no legal barriers within written law (Gülmez, 2001).

Children's rights are defined as "a universal concept encompassing all the rights that every child in the world inherently possesses by law or by moral consideration, including the rights to life, development, education, health, shelter, and protection from all forms of physical, psychological, or sexual abuse." While children's rights serve multiple purposes, one of their fundamental aims is not only to guarantee the individual rights of children but also to ensure their active participation in social life. Children are granted civil, social, and cultural rights; however, a more reserved approach is generally taken regarding political rights. This distinction represents one of the key differences between children and adults (Musayeva, 2013).

One of the most significant indicators of a society's welfare and level of development is its attitude toward children. How children are treated and the extent to which they are vulnerable to neglect or abuse are regarded as important criteria in assessing the human development of a culture. Societies that provide children with a healthy developmental environment and attend

to their physical, mental, and emotional needs tend to experience greater progress and social stability.

However, it is not possible to claim that all children around the world benefit equally from these rights. The challenges children face vary according to social, economic, and cultural conditions. At the root of these issues lie structural factors such as the lack of full inclusion of children in social life, social inequalities, and economic insufficiencies. The advancement of societies on a civilized level is directly linked to the conscious and supportive attitudes of families toward children. Positive family approaches are of vital importance for the protection and development of children. Nevertheless, in today's world, political, social, and economic crises, along with societal instability, have become some of the most serious threats to children's well-being (UNICEF, 2012).

The protection of children's rights has emerged as a critical field that has gained priority on a global scale through both international conventions and national legislations, becoming one of the fundamental building blocks of education. In this regard, fostering awareness and attitudes toward children's rights is of great importance not only for enhancing the quality of educational processes but also for promoting the democratization of school practices (Aral & Gürsoy, 2001).

Measuring attitudes toward children's rights contributes to evaluating the effectiveness of studies conducted in the field and to developing tools aimed at understanding the general attitudes of society. In the literature, various scales and measurement instruments have been developed for this purpose. These tools, used across different studies, allow for the identification of attitudes toward children's rights and the examination of their relationships with various variables. In particular, research focusing on the attitudes of parents and teachers has yielded significant findings regarding children's perceptions of rights and the behaviors associated with these perceptions (Kepenekçi, 2006; Yeşil, 2010).

The representation of children's rights in educational settings is directly related to the concept of democratic education. In the democratic education approach, children's freedom of expression and their right to participate in decision-making processes are regarded as fundamental principles (Kavan & Özdaş, 2022). It is acknowledged that the knowledge and values transmitted to children affect not only their individual development but also the future formation of a society's cultural and social structure. Raising individuals who are responsible, conscious, and well-qualified is considered a key

element for ensuring social welfare and strengthening a democratic social order (Postman, 1995; Aral & Gürsoy, 2001).

In this context, it is emphasized that for children to contribute to society as active and responsible individuals, they must be aware of their civic responsibilities. The development of such awareness is possible primarily through children's recognition and internalization of the rights guaranteed under the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) (Howe & Covell, 2005).

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1989, defines children's rights as universal rights inherent to all children from the prenatal stage onward. These rights ensure that children live in well-being and happiness, are protected from all forms of psychological, sexual, and physical exploitation and neglect, develop as independent individuals, and are prepared to become responsible adults in the future. Rights such as shelter, health, education, and protection, as outlined in the CRC, constitute the fundamental legal and moral rights of children (UNGA, 1989).

Early childhood is a critical period in which an individual's mental, social, and physiological development occurs at the fastest pace, and the foundational building blocks of life are formed. During this stage, children acquire essential social skills such as sharing, cooperating, participating in group activities, and expressing their thoughts in social settings (Washington, 2010; Demirezen et al., 2013).

Research in the literature emphasizes that, in order for individuals to effectively exercise their rights, they must first be aware of these rights. Awareness of rights is a prerequisite for transitioning to a pluralistic mindset, which constitutes one of the foundations of a democratic society. In this context, it is highly important for individuals to develop a mentality that embraces democracy and internalizes the concept of human rights. Democracy and human rights are interconnected and complementary concepts. Learning these concepts at an early age and reflecting them in daily life contributes to the early adoption of democratic values among young children (Yaşar, 2008).

Children's rights education aims not only to make children aware of their own rights but also to raise them as responsible, self-confident, and conscious citizens. In this regard, children's rights education holds great significance for democratic societies in fostering enlightened and participatory future generations (Howe & Covell, 2005; Uçuş, 2013; Yavuzer, 2006).

Teachers play a highly decisive role in shaping children into qualified adults in the future. In the educational process, teachers are expected not only to transmit knowledge but also to internalize values, embody these values in their own lives, and serve as role models for their students. Considering that education provided during early childhood shapes a child's personality development and forms the foundation for a lifelong learning process, the importance of teachers' attitudes toward children's rights becomes even more pronounced.

The primary aim of this study is to examine the level of democratic determination among preschool teachers from the perspective of children's rights. The study seeks to reveal the extent to which teachers consider children's rights in their classroom practices, how they reflect democratic values in educational settings, and the relationship between these two variables. By shedding light on teachers' attitudes and behaviors, the research aims to contribute to the strengthening of a democratic culture in preschool education and the enhancement of awareness regarding children's rights, thereby informing educational policies and teacher training programs. In this context, the present study specifically aims to investigate the relationship between preschool teachers' levels of democratic determination and their attitudes toward children's rights.

2. Methodology

2.1. Research Design, Population, and Sample

For data collection, a suitable random and unbiased sampling method was employed, comprising 230 preschool teachers working in the central and district branches of the Sakarya Provincial Directorate of National Education. The reason for using a random and unbiased sampling method during the research process was to prevent any potential bias and to ensure that the sample could be most accurately representative of the population (Canbazoglu-Bilici, 2019). Additionally, the use of an appropriate sampling method provides the researcher with advantages in terms of time, effort, and cost efficiency. The demographic distribution of the study groups is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Distribution According to Demographic Variables

		n	%
Gender	Female	215	93,5
	Male	15	6,5
Marital Status	Married	178	77,4
	Single	52	22,6
Age	20-25	14	6,1
	15-30	45	19,6
	30-35	69	30,0
	35-40	66	28,7
	40-45	26	11,3
	45-50	4	1,7
	50 and above	6	2,6
Age Group	3 years old	13	5,7
	4 years old	58	25,2
	5 years old	159	69,1
Years of Service in the Profession	1-5 years	34	14,8
	6-10 years	73	31,7
	11-15 years	78	33,9
	16-20 years	36	15,7
	21 years and above	9	3,9
Type of Graduated School	Faculty of Education	185	80,4
	Faculty of Science and Letters	3	1,3
	Vocational School	21	9,1
	Other	21	9,1
Workplace	Adapazarı	51	22,2
	Akyazı	10	4,3
	Arifiye	13	5,7
	Erenler	32	13,9
	Ferizli	4	1,7
	Geyve	11	4,8
	Hendek	19	8,3
	Karapürçek	5	2,2
	Karasu	6	2,6
	Kaynarca	7	3,0
	Kocaali	8	3,5
	Pamukova	8	3,5
	Sapanca	9	3,9
	Serdivan	34	14,8
	Söğütü	9	3,9
	Taraklı	4	1,7

Analysis of the demographic characteristics of the participants revealed that 93.5% were female, 77.4% were married, 30% were aged between 30 and 35, 69.1% taught in the 5-year-old age group, 33.9% had 11–15 years of professional experience, 80.4% were graduates of a Faculty of Education, and 22.2% were employed in Adapazarı.

2.2. Data Collection Tools

During the research process, two different quantitative data collection instruments were employed. To determine preschool teachers' attitudes toward children's rights, the Attitude toward Children's Rights Scale developed by Kepenekçi (2006) was used. To measure teachers' democratic determination, the Democratic Teacher Determination Scale developed by Yeşil (2010) was utilized.

2.2.1. Attitude toward Children's Rights Scale

The scale used in this study was designed as a five-point Likert-type scale. The response options on the scale are “Strongly Agree,” “Agree,” “Undecided,” “Disagree,” and “Strongly Disagree.” The scale consists of a total of 22 items addressing children's four fundamental rights: developmental, survival, participation, and protection rights. Responses are scored from 1 to 5 in the same order, with higher scores indicating a more negative attitude. Among the items, 19 are positively worded, while 3 are negatively worded. The negatively worded items are found in items 2, 14, and 15, and these were reverse-scored. The minimum possible score on the scale is 22, and the maximum is 110.

Karaman-Kepenekçi (2006), in her study on the validity and reliability of the scale, reported that it has a single-factor structure. The item-total correlation coefficients of the scale's items ranged between .32 and .61. The internal consistency coefficient (Cronbach's Alpha) was found to be .85, and the split-half reliability coefficient was determined as .77.

2.2.2. Democratic Teacher Determination Scale

The scale is a five-point Likert-type scale, with responses coded as 1—Never, 2—Rarely, 3—Sometimes, 4—Often, and 5—Always. Developed to determine teachers' level of determination in exhibiting democratic behaviors in classroom teaching practices, the scale consists of 69 items.

For the validity study of the scale developed by Yeşil (2010), KMO values and Bartlett's test statistics were calculated using the collected data. Subsequently, factor analysis was conducted, and item-total correlations as

well as discriminative power (t-test) were determined. Within the framework of the reliability study, internal consistency levels and the ability to produce stable measurements were tested. A significance level of $p < 0.005$ was considered sufficient for the analyses. As a result of the analyses, the KMO value of the scale was found to be 0.936, and Bartlett's test was significant at $p < 0.001$. The items of the scale were grouped under a single factor. Item-test correlations and discriminative powers of the items were found to be significant ($p < 0.005$). Furthermore, examining the relationships between evaluations of 139 students at two different time points revealed significant correlations for each item ($p < 0.005$), indicating that the scale is capable of providing stable measurements.

2.2.3. Research Process and Data Collection

The research process was conducted over a period of approximately four months. In the initial phase of the study, the researcher personally visited the relevant schools and, with the support of the school administrations, provided preschool teachers with a detailed explanation of the study's purpose and significance. Data were collected immediately from teachers who were available to participate, while a second visit was scheduled one week later to collect data from those who were unable to participate during the first visit, thus completing the data collection process.

Throughout the study, the voluntary participation of all participants was prioritized, and any form of coercion or guidance was strictly avoided. Prior to the implementation, the relevant Provincial Directorate's approval was presented to all teachers and school administrations, and it was clearly stated that participants could withdraw from the study at any stage without providing a reason. Additionally, during all phases of the research process, questions raised by participants were carefully addressed by the researcher, and all procedures were conducted in accordance with ethical principles.

2.3. Analysis of the Collected Data

The analysis of the collected data was conducted using SPSS 24.0. Scale scores were calculated, and skewness and kurtosis coefficients were examined to determine the suitability of the data for normal distribution. Skewness and kurtosis values between +3 and -3 are considered sufficient to indicate a normal distribution (Groeneveld & Meeden, 1984; Moors, 1986; Hopkins & Weeks, 1990; De Carlo, 1997).

Table 2. Skewness and Kurtosis Values and Reliability Coefficients

	n	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	ss
Democratic Determination Score	230	63,00	100,00	89,03	7,69
Attitude toward Children’s Rights	230	22,00	42,00	26,60	4,31

Before beginning the analysis, 22 outliers and incompletely filled scales in the dataset were excluded from the study. Examination of the distribution characteristics of the data revealed that the skewness and kurtosis coefficients for each variable fell within the range of -3 to +3. Based on this finding, it was concluded that the dataset exhibited a normal distribution.

Due to the normal distribution of the data, parametric test techniques were employed during the analysis. To determine whether scale scores differed according to demographic variables, independent samples t-tests and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) were conducted. The t-test was used for demographic variables with two categories, while the ANOVA was applied to compare variables with three or more categories ($k > 2$).

3. Findings

3.1. Correlation Between Teachers’ Democratic Determination Scores and Attitude Toward Children’s Rights Scores

Table 3. Correlation Analysis Between Preschool Teachers’ Democratic Determination Scores and Attitude Toward Children’s Rights Scores

		Democratic Determination Score	Attitude toward Children’s Rights
Democratic Determination Score	r	1	
	p		
	n	230	
Attitude toward Children’s Rights	r	-,321	1
	p	0,000	
	n	230	230

A weak negative correlation was found between the democratic determination score and the attitude toward children’s rights score ($r = -0.321$).

3.2. Regression Analysis to Determine the Effect of Teachers' Democratic Determination Scores on Their Attitudes Toward Children's Rights

Table 4. Regression Analysis Examining the Effect of Teachers' Democratic Determination Scores on Attitudes Toward Children's Rights

Independent Variable	Dependent Variable	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	p	R ²
		B	Standard Error	Beta			
Attitude toward Children's Rights	Constant	42,635	3,143		13,563	0,000	0,103
	Democratic Determination Score	-0,180	0,035	-0,321	-5,119	0,000	

Model:
F=26,202
p=0,000

The regression model established to examine the effect of democratic determination scores on attitudes toward children's rights was found to be statistically significant ($F = 26.202$, $p < 0.05$). According to the analysis results, democratic determination scores have a negative effect on attitudes toward children's rights ($\beta = -0.321$). It was determined that 10% of the variance in attitudes toward children's rights is explained by democratic determination scores.

3.3. Democratic Determination Scores and Attitudes Toward Children's Rights by Gender

Table 5. Differences in Democratic Determination Scores and Attitudes Toward Children's Rights by Gender

	Gender	n	Mean	ss	t	p
Democratic Determination Score	Female	215	89,05	7,77	0,152	0,879
	Male	15	88,73	6,53		
Attitude Toward Children's Rights	Female	215	26,72	4,34	1,495	0,136
	Male	15	25,00	3,64		

The analysis results indicated that there was no statistically significant difference in democratic determination scores and attitudes toward children's rights based on gender ($p > 0.05$).

3.4. Analysis of Differences in Democratic Determination Scores and Attitudes Toward Children's Rights by Marital Status

Table 6. Analysis of Differences in Democratic Determination Scores and Attitudes Toward Children's Rights by Marital Status

	Gender	n	Mean	ss	t	p
Democratic Determination Score	Female	178	89,20	7,46	0,622	0,535
	Male	52	88,44	8,47		
Attitude Toward Children's Rights	Female	178	26,57	4,25	-0,203	0,839
	Male	52	26,71	4,56		

According to the analysis results, no statistically significant difference was found in democratic determination scores or attitudes toward children's rights in terms of marital status ($p > 0.05$).

3.5. Analysis of Differences in Democratic Determination Scores and Attitudes Toward Children's Rights by Age

Table 7. Analysis of Differences in Democratic Determination Scores and Attitudes Toward Children's Rights by Age

	Age Range	n	Mean	ss	F	p
Determination Behavior Score	20-25	14	86,93	6,99	1,443	0,221
	15-30	45	88,02	7,20		
	30-35	69	89,25	7,36		
	35-40	66	88,59	8,78		
	40 and above	36	91,47	6,71		
Attitude Toward Children's Rights	20-25	14	26,71	5,06	0,271	0,896
	15-30	45	26,89	4,96		
	30-35	69	26,51	4,73		
	35-40	66	26,24	3,49		
	40 and above	36	27,06	3,79		

Age does not have a significant effect on either the democratic determination or the attitudes toward children's rights among preschool teachers. Although slight differences in mean scores are observed, they are not statistically meaningful.

3.6. Differences in Democratic Determination Scores and Attitudes Toward Children's Rights According to the Age Group Taught by Teachers

Table 8. Differences in Democratic Determination Scores and Attitudes Toward Children's Rights by Age Group Taught

	Yaş	n	Mean	ss	F	p
Democratic Determination Score	3 yaş	13	84,92	11,79	2,984	0,053
	4 yaş	58	88,07	7,75		
	5 yaş	159	89,71	7,15		
Attitude Toward Children's Rights	3 yaş	13	29,00	4,93	2,487	0,085
	4 yaş	58	26,07	3,40		
	5 yaş	159	26,60	4,51		

According to the analysis results, teachers' democratic determination scores and their attitudes toward children's rights did not show a statistically significant difference in relation to the age group they teach ($p > 0.05$).

3.7. The Variation of Democratic Stability Scores and Attitudes Toward Children's Rights by Length of Professional Experience

Table 9. Differences in Democratic Determination Scores and Attitudes Toward Children's Rights in Terms of Years of Professional Experience

	Years of Professional Experience	n	Mean	ss	F	p
Democratic Determination Score	1-5 years	34	84,79	8,30	4,994	0,002*
	6-10 years	73	89,14	7,88		
	11-15 years	78	89,51	7,51		
	16 years and above	45	91,20	6,02		
Attitude Toward Children's Rights	1-5 years	34	27,88	5,27	1,369	0,253
	6-10 years	73	26,68	4,95		
	11-15 years	78	26,23	3,58		
	16 years and above	45	26,16	3,41		

* $p < 0,05$

According to the analysis findings, democratic determination scores show a statistically significant difference in terms of years of professional experience ($p < 0.05$). Examination of the mean scores indicates that teachers with more than 16 years of professional experience have higher levels of democratic determination compared to those with 1–5 years of experience.

In contrast, attitudes toward children's rights do not show a statistically significant difference with respect to years of professional experience ($p > 0.05$).

3.8. Differences in Democratic Determination Scores and Attitudes Toward Children's Rights According to the Type of Graduated School

Table 10. Differences in Democratic Determination Scores and Attitudes Toward Children's Rights by Type of Graduated School

	Type of Graduated School	n	Mean	ss	t	p
Democratic Determination Score	Faculty of Education	185	89,08	7,74	0,220	0,826
	Others	45	88,80	7,54		
Attitude Toward Children's Rights	Faculty of Education	185	26,31	4,03	-789	0,07
	Others	45	27,80	5,21		

According to the analysis results, democratic determination scores and attitudes toward children's rights did not show a statistically significant difference based on the type of school from which the teachers graduated ($p > 0.05$).

4. Discussion

In this study, scales whose validity and reliability have been previously established, which have meaningful counterparts in the literature, and which were developed by two field experts were utilized. Continuity is fundamental in scientific research; conducting similar studies across different populations and samples enhances the generalizability of the findings and demonstrates an increased level of awareness among teachers regarding the subject matter. Within the context of this experimental study, reaching a sample of 230 valid teacher responses provided opportunities to engage with new teachers,

administrators, and stakeholders in Sakarya and its districts, while also yielding significant insights for discussing current issues relevant to the field.

During early childhood, teachers' democratic attitudes and determination toward children directly contribute to raising individuals who, in later life, uphold democratic values, are aware of their rights, and assume responsibility for protecting those rights. Education on rights and justice is regarded not only as a cognitive process but also as a comprehensive educational domain that fosters the development of proactive skills such as sharing, cooperation, social interaction, and collaborative abilities (Öztürk & Doğanay, 2017).

The most effective method for children to internalize the concept of rights is through experiential learning via a trial-and-error process. Education in justice aims to help children become aware of their rights within certain boundaries and to develop consciousness regarding the exercise of these rights. As children's knowledge in this area increases, the behavioral changes observed during the educational process become more pronounced and measurable (Öztürk & Doğanay, 2017).

The study conducted by Kor (2013) demonstrates that providing justice education to children in a positive and effective manner increases their awareness and engagement. Similarly, Bulut-Pedük (2015) emphasizes the importance of transparency in rights education, highlighting that granting students responsibilities within the classroom supports the learning process.

Research indicates that university students' attitudes toward children's rights are not significantly influenced by their participation in certification programs or courses (Doğan et al., 2014; Merey, 2013; Yaşar-Ekici, 2014). Similarly, Leblebici and Çeliköz (2016) found no differences in attitudes between pre-service teachers who had read the Convention on the Rights of the Child and those who had not. In contrast, a study conducted by Kepenekçi and Baydık (2009) revealed that the knowledge levels of special education students regarding children's rights had a significant and positive effect on their attitudes toward these rights. The discrepancy between these findings and other studies may be attributed to differences in sample groups and variations in participant characteristics.

Overall, it can be observed that participation in education, courses, or certification programs does not create a significant difference in teachers' attitudes toward children's rights. Attitude is defined as a psychological tendency that consistently reflects an individual's feelings, thoughts, and behaviors toward a specific phenomenon or concept (Kağıtçıbaşı, 1998). In this context, the fact that the measurement instruments used in the studies

primarily assess affective and behavioral dimensions rather than knowledge levels may explain why no significant differences are observed based on participation in educational programs.

In the study conducted by Sadıkoğlu and Topsakal (2017), it was noted that children's awareness of the concept of rights gradually increases through education and that academic research in this area shows an upward trend. It was emphasized that authentic learning experiences implemented in the early stages of basic education would be effective in developing children's awareness of their rights, and that all individuals interacting with children—including families and teachers—should be involved in this educational process.

In some studies conducted with pre-service teachers, it has been found that democratic attitudes significantly differ according to variables such as gender, university, department, maternal education level, income level, and number of siblings, whereas no significant differences were observed based on paternal education level. In the present study, however, it was determined that teachers' democratic determination scores did not significantly differ according to gender, marital status, age, or professional seniority. This discrepancy between findings may be attributed to the difference in experience levels between pre-service and in-service teachers; after entering the profession, individuals' perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors regarding democratic values are likely to change under the influence of professional experience, school environment, and institutional culture (Yılmaz & Gömleksiz, 2011).

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1. Results

This study was designed based on a quantitative research approach and aims to determine the levels of democratic determination and attitudes toward children's rights among preschool teachers. A total of 252 preschool teachers participated in the quantitative phase of the study; after excluding incomplete, erroneous, or invalid responses, the final analysis included valid data from 230 teachers. The data collection instruments employed were the Democratic Determination Behavior Scale and the Attitudes Toward Children's Rights Scale. The study sought to answer the question, "To what extent do preschool teachers demonstrate positive attitudes toward children's rights?" The analysis results indicated that teachers' attitudes toward children's rights were generally at a positive level.

The research findings indicate that teachers' attitudes toward children's rights do not exhibit statistically significant differences based on demographic variables such as age, professional experience, or type of institution in which they work. Similarly, teachers' educational level was found not to have a determining effect on their attitudes toward children's rights. Teachers who graduated with a degree in the relevant field or received pedagogical training demonstrated attitudes comparable to those of teachers with vocational school or other educational backgrounds, which is consistent with previous research findings (Aral & Gürsoy, 2001; Howe & Covell, 2005).

In the study, the observed negative relationship between democratic decision-making scores and attitudes toward children's rights may be attributed to the measurement instruments being developed for the primary school level or for older age groups. Nevertheless, it was assumed that participants provided conscious and truthful responses to the scale items (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2018).

Findings from the attitude scale indicate that teachers place a high level of importance on children's right to protection and hold strong beliefs regarding the necessity of safeguarding children from neglect, abuse, and various forms of violence. Moreover, teachers were observed to demonstrate sensitivity in classroom practices concerning these issues (UNICEF, 2019). However, the insufficient inclusion of children in decision-making processes related to their learning and the lack of adequate information provided about activities suggest that the principle of "education-supported participation," a crucial dimension of the right to participation, is not fully implemented in practice (Hart, 1992; Lundy, 2007).

The limited provision of information regarding activities further suggests that children's participation is insufficient in terms of the principles of transparency and informativeness, while the lack of equal opportunities for all children indicates that the principle of inclusivity is not fully upheld. Additionally, teachers' failure to provide feedback following activities and to involve children in assessment processes points to the incomplete implementation of the principle of accountability in practice.

When the findings are evaluated holistically, it is evident that teachers possess a high level of theoretical knowledge regarding children's rights; however, they experience difficulties in fully translating this knowledge into classroom practices. Nevertheless, teachers demonstrate a positive tendency toward creating child-friendly learning environments through consideration of children's opinions and decisions, as well as engagement in voluntary and respect-based practices. Furthermore, teachers' high level of engagement

with statements concerning children's right to protection, along with their sensitive behaviors in this regard, indicates that they adopt a conscious attitude toward safety, security, and risk awareness.

In conclusion, the research findings indicate that teachers place a high level of importance on non-discrimination and children's right to protection. However, they demonstrate insufficient sensitivity in areas such as the right to participation, the right to life and development, and the principle of the best interests of the child. This suggests that teachers' awareness of children's rights largely remains at the cognitive level and requires further reinforcement in behavioral and practical dimensions.

Ensuring children's active participation in decision-making processes, considering their opinions, and internalizing the principles of transparency, justice, and equality within educational environments underscore the importance of supporting teachers through continuous professional development opportunities. In this context, teacher education programs should be restructured not only to deliver theoretical knowledge but also to promote pedagogical approaches centered on children's rights, participatory classroom practices, and the establishment of rights-based learning environments. Such an approach would strengthen teachers' awareness of children's rights at the attitudinal and behavioral levels and contribute to the more effective implementation of democratic values within educational settings.

5.2. Recommendations

Examination of the attitudes and perceptions of school administrators, guidance counselors, support staff, and other school personnel regarding children's rights may contribute to a comprehensive assessment of rights-based awareness within educational institutions.

Identification of demographic, professional, and socio-cultural variables that influence educators' cognitive awareness of children's rights can provide a valuable empirical basis for the development of education policies.

Investigating the relationship between teachers' practices in upholding children's rights within the classroom and children's awareness of their rights can elucidate the impact of teacher behaviors on rights-based learning processes.

Assessing the influence of both parental and teacher attitudes on children's awareness of rights can offer significant insights into how children's rights can be supported within the context of home-school collaboration.

Analyzing the relationship between teachers' stress management strategies and their orientation toward protecting and supporting children's rights can contribute to understanding the role of emotional resilience in rights-based educational practices.

Incorporating children's rights-themed courses and content into the curricula of the Ministry of National Education and higher education institutions can support pre-service teachers in developing rights-based awareness during their professional formation.

Conducting qualitative and quantitative studies that consider the family context and evaluate children's democratic attitudes and behaviors based on parental observations can illuminate the reflections of children's rights education within the home environment.

Developing practical training and guidance programs for teachers that demonstrate how children's rights can be supported in classroom practices can facilitate the dissemination of rights-based pedagogical approaches.

Organizing seminars, workshops, and in-service training programs aimed at enhancing the awareness of all school stakeholders—including administrators, teachers, parents, and support staff—regarding children's rights can lay the foundation for the development of a holistic rights culture within the school ecosystem.

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