

Teachers' Classroom Democratic Practices: Perceptions, Interpretations and Consequences

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Abstract

School is a miniature society where learners interact with each other during classroom practices. Teachers provide opportunities to students for active participation to make them responsible for socialization. They exercise democratic practices in classrooms to modify students' democratic thoughts to meet social demands of democracy. Present research aims to find out elementary schools' students' perceptions regarding teachers' classroom democratic practices. Quantitative research approach based on positivist paradigm was followed through conducting survey. Sample comprised 3600 respondents: 1260 male and 2340 female students from 6th, 7th and 8th grades randomly selected from 120 public sector elementary schools from three zones of Punjab Province: Northern, Central and Southern. Self-developed questionnaire consisted of 19 statements mode of 5-point Likert type options was used for data collection. Validity of self-developed questionnaire was confirmed through experts' opinion and reliability was assured by calculating Cronbach's Alpha score; .86. Data were analyzed using SPSS by calculating independent sample t-test and one way ANOVA. Findings showed significant difference that male teachers were practicing more democratic practices as compared to female teachers; urban schools' teachers were practicing more democratic practices as compared to rural schools' teachers and teachers teaching to 8th grade were practicing more democratic practices as compared to the teachers teaching to 7th and 6th grades students. Research recommends that teachers need to exercise democratic practices during teaching learning process in classrooms to make students participatory to meet the demands of democratic society.

Keywords: Democratic practices, explanatory practices, participatory practices, elementary level

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Introduction

Democratic society demands active, participatory, critical thinker and problem solver citizens with strong sense of justice (Kubow & Kinney, 2000; Perliger, Canetti-Nisim, & Pedahzur, 2006). Education develops participatory skills and competencies in individuals to meet demands of democratic society (Rowland, 2003). Education is an integral part of social, cultural and political framework with essential components of democracy; human rights, freedom, equality, and justice. Educational industries bear responsibilities to produce such dynamic and participative individuals for the society through democratic education with practices (Thornberg, 2010; Vinterek, 2010). Democratic education challenges conventional thinking and produces independent, analytical, reflective and questioning citizens through teaching principles and practices of democratic values (Sari, Sari, & Ötünc, 2008). Democratic values as equality, freedom of expression, respect for life, justice, cooperation, goodness, patience, responsibility, peace, searching for effectiveness and respect for diversity (Rowland, 2003). Democratic values are learnt through experiencing and practicing them in personal and social lives of individuals which are taught in the name of democracy (Hashimoto & Fukuda, 2011; Louis, 2003).

Schools play vital role in maintaining structured and formal educational programs. They provide platforms for teaching individual's rights and responsibilities for practicing democratic values inside and outside the classroom environment (Davies, Williams, Ymashita, & KoMan, 2006; Fielding, 2007; Knight, 2001; Thornberg & Elvstrand, 2012; White, Van Scotter, Hartoonian, & Davis, 2007). Studies reported that students' active participation in classroom practices during their stay at school in positively contribute to their development as democratic citizens (Morrison, 2008; Perry, 2009; Şişman, 2010; Torney-Putra, 2002). Teachers being significant component of formal educational programs, practice democratic values in classrooms for better exploration of democracy through participation and explanation (Kaya, Taşdan, Kop, & Metin, 2012). Teachers focus on students' centered education to build democratic culture through classroom practices and provide freedom of expression, respect for diversity and opportunities of participation to students. Teachers' democratic attitudes and behaviors towards democratic practices are considered more important in several researches (Dworkin, Saha, & Hill, 2003; Kaya, 2013; Yalcin, 2014). Teachers provide opportunities to students during democratic practices in classrooms to meet democratic values such as freedom of expression and participation, respect for diversity, equality and tolerance (Samanci, 2010; Tammi, 2013). Students pay more attention to the actions of their teachers and they are more open towards practices in classrooms. Effect of classroom practices and experiences at elementary level lasts longer (Sari, Sari, & Ötünc, 2008). Several studies focus on teachers' democratic practices in classrooms with regard to different variables such as, democratic classroom management and attitude towards

students' participation and students centered pedagogy (Kaya, 2013; Payne, 2017; Ustun, 2011). Teachers acquire democratic pedagogy for practicing democratic values to develop desired behavior in young learners under the shade of democratic classroom environment (Demir & Bedir, 2013; Louis, 2003).

Kesici (2008) conducted research to determine how to build democratic classrooms according to opinion of teachers. Research was qualitative in nature and semi-structured interview technique was used for data collection from teachers teaching in sixth, seventh and eighth grades in Turkey. Findings reveal that teachers who practice democratic values build democratic classrooms by giving equality of opportunities to students in participatory practices.

Turabik and Gun (2016) conducted research on sample of 530 students by administering democratic classroom management scale developed by Demirtaş (2004) in Turkey. Data were analyzed by conducting t-test and ANOVA. Findings show significant difference in opinion of male and female students regarding teachers' democratic practices in classrooms. Findings further showed that students' views were also significantly different according to their class level. Teachers focus democratic practices; explanatory and participatory activities; classroom's interactions, group activities, discussion, argumentations, dialogues, role play and simulation for democratic classroom environment (Karakütük, 2001). Democratic classroom is place where teachers fulfill students' needs, their participation is appreciated and their rights are guaranteed in safe and active learning environment (Edelstein, 2011). Democratic atmosphere in classrooms gives freedom of expression to students' ideas and solves their problems smoothly that positively affect students' perceptions and behaviors regarding democracy (Marri, 2005). Democratic practices; explanatory and participatory establish democratic culture in classroom (Pohan, 2003). Classrooms are communities for students to spend their time through participating in learning experiences. Students' individual choices, needs, abilities and educational objectives are focused during their stay in classrooms (Louis, 2003; Weimer, 2002; Yilmaz, 2009).

Participating in classroom activities plays important role to activate students in teaching learning process (Petress, 2006; Weaver & Qi, 2005). More participation of students in classroom practices decreases their memorization of content. They develop logical thinking including interpretation of facts, analysis of issues and synthesis of ideas. Students develop positive attitudes towards participatory democracy and become critical, thoughtful and reflective citizens who engage actively in public affairs for common goods (Campbell, 2009; ten Dam & Volman, 2004). Participation in classroom activities improve students' communication skills (Hashimoto & Fukuda, 2011), group collaborations and participation in community affairs (Girgin & Stevens, 2005). During

participation in classroom discussions, debates and dialogues students are more interested and motivated to listen others' comments and suggestions (Gülec & Balçık, 2009; Parker, 2010) become critical thinkers (Çekin, 2015; Kocoska, 2009) and self-reflected (Kuh & Umbach, 2004). They take responsibility for decision making, leadership and participation in democratic society through development of democratic skills and dispositions. Students' participation has real implications for their environment and clear connections to democratic values. Participatory practices provide opportunities for students to learn about negotiations, collaboration, conflict resolution and active participation in classroom decision making (Crone, 1997; Smith, 2007). Teachers explain and tell about working of political institutions, leaders' vision and importance of democracy to students. Teachers focus on students' centered education to build democratic culture through classroom practices and provide wide range of freedom and opportunities of participation. Crombie, Pyke, Silverthron, Jones and Piccinin, (2003) found that participation is essential for students' learning. Students get higher grades as their participation in class increases. There is agreement among democratic and pedagogic theorists that students learn best through active participation in class as compared to rote memorization. Students participate regularly in classroom practices. Findings were confirmed with several studies (Crone, 1997; Handelsman, Briggs, Sullivan, & Towler, 2005; Rowland, 2003; Sari, Sari, & Ötünç, 2008).

Research conducted by Kuş (2014) to explore the democratic practices in classroom environment in Turkish educational institutions. Sample of the research consisted of 454 respondents; 231 boys and 223 girls having different age and socio-economic status. Research was mix-method in nature. Researcher used self-developed questionnaire based on 5-point Liker type scale consisted of three parts; school, home and society to collect data from students. Qualitative data were collected by administering self-developed interview protocol based on six sub-questions. Items of interviews were focused regarding democratic practices in classroom environment. Instrument was pilot tested on small sample of respondents. Reliability of questionnaire was calculated by applying Cronbach's Alpha scores; .930. Quantitative data were analyzed in SPSS calculating mean, Std. Deviation, MANOVA whereas qualitative data were analyzed by applying thematic analysis. Results of quantitative data report significant difference between students' gender and school ($F(1, 453) = 11.127, p < .05$), gender and home ($F(1, 453) = .003, p < .05$), and gender and society ($F(1, 453) = 11.999, p < .05$); Students' age and school ($F(1, 453) = 48.787, p < .05$), age and home ($F(1, 453) = 9914, p < .05$), age and society ($F(1, 453) = 17.658, p < .05$). Findings of qualitative data report that students were facing problems while practicing democratic practices in classrooms.

Head of the institutions were less taking interest implementing of rules, poor sitting arrangement in classrooms, teachers' favoritism towards students were producing hurdles in implementing democratic practices in classrooms. Teachers focus on democratic practices for students in classrooms to make them democrats. Explanatory and participatory practices are ways to produce sense of democracy to meet demands of democratic society. There is less practices of democratic values in Pakistani educational Institutions. Government develops curriculum, design textbooks, hire qualified teachers and conduct teachers' training workshops to train them according to needs of democratic society but ultimate outputs are less satisfactory (Ahmad, 2004; Nayyar & Salim, 2003). Students are real observers of their teachers regarding practices of democratic values in classrooms. This research focuses to explore male and female students' perceptions of 6th, 7th and 8th grades regarding their teachers' participatory and explanatory democratic practices in classrooms working in rural and urban public sector elementary schools of Punjab province.

Research Methodology

Present research aimed to find out students' perceptions about teachers' classroom democratic practices in elementary schools of Punjab province. The research was Quantitative in nature based on positivist paradigm. The survey was conducted to collect data from respondents. Population of research comprised of all enrolled students of 6th, 7th and 8th grades from public sector elementary schools of Punjab province. Multi-stage simple random sampling technique was used to select respondents of research from three zones of Punjab Province: Northern, Central and Southern. Six districts: Rawalpindi, Attock, Lahore, Hafizabad, Bahawalpur and Lodhran were selected; two districts from each zone. Researchers randomly selected 120 public sector elementary schools; from 60 rural and 60 urban localities; 20 schools from each selected district of Punjab Province. Total 3600 respondents: 1260 male having 35 % and 2340 female with 65 % were randomly selected from selected schools. Researchers administered self-developed *Questionnaire for Students on Teachers' Classroom Democratic Practices* for data collection. Questionnaire consisted of 19 statements mode of 5-point Likert type responses; always, frequently, sometimes, rarely and never. Questionnaire is important device used for data collection from respondents (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001). Validity of self-developed questionnaire was confirmed from experts' opinion. Questionnaire was pilot tested on randomly selected small sample of 400 elementary schools' students; 200 male and 200 female from District Jhang. Pilot study is essential element of research design refers to small description of large level research (Hundley, Milne, Leighton-Beck, Graham, & Fitzmaurice, 2000; van Teijlingen, Rennie, Hundley, & Graham, 2001). Overall reliability of questionnaire was calculated by applying Cronbach's Alpha score; .86 and factor wise reliability of questionnaire was also confirmed by calculating Cronbach's Alpha scores given below.

Table 1

Reliability Statistics

<i>Sr.</i>	<i>Factors name</i>	<i>Cronbach's Alpha</i>	<i>N of items</i>
1	Explanatory practices	.881	13
2	Participatory practices	.821	6

Researchers personally distributed 3600 copies of questionnaires among respondents focusing ethical considerations: informed consent, anonymity, physical and psychological harms during data collection.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Following section consisted of data analysis and its interpretation. There were 19 statements of questionnaire mode of 5-point Likert type options. Data were analyzed in SPSS applying independent sample t-test and one way ANOVA.

Table 2

Independent sample t-test regarding teachers' democratic practices by gender and schools' locality

<i>Sr.</i>	<i>Variables</i>		<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
1	Gender	Male	1261	62.273	9.803	3598	1.51	.05
		Female	2339	62.811	10.421			
2	Locality	Rural	1800	61.994	10.053	3598	3.70	.02
		Urban	1800	63.251	10.331			

Table 2 depicts that independent sample t-test was applied to compare male and female elementary schools' students' perceptions regarding teachers' democratic practices in classrooms. There was significant difference between male and female teachers' classroom democratic practice, $t(3598) = 1.51, p < .01$; female teachers were practicing more democratic practices ($M = 62.81, SD = 10.42$) as compared to male teachers ($M = 62.27, SD = 9.80$) and teachers' locality, $t(3598) = 3.70, p < .05$; teachers teaching in urban schools were practicing more democratic practices ($M = 63.25, SD = 10.33$) as compared to rural schools' teachers ($M=61.99, SD=10.05$).

Table 3

Independent sample t-test regarding teachers' explanatory and participatory practices by gender and locality

<i>Factors' name</i>	<i>Variables names</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	
Explanatory practices	Gender	Male	1260	40.194	7.641	3598	4.06	.02
		Female	2340	41.312	8.013			
	Locality	Rural	1800	40.80	7.733	3598	0.88	.02
		Urban	1800	41.04	8.067			
Participatory practices	Gender	Male	1260	22.079	4.094	3598	3.91	.02
		Female	2340	21.492	4.413			
	Locality	Rural	1800	21.18	4.366	3598	7.22	.01
		Urban	1800	22.21	4.197			

Table 3 depicts that independent sample t-test is applied to compare male and female elementary schools' students' opinion regarding teachers' explanatory and participatory practices in rural and urban elementary schools of Punjab province. There was significant difference between male and female teachers' explanatory practices, $t(3598) = 4.06, p < .05$; students have the opinion that female teachers were practicing more explanatory practices ($M = 41.31, SD = 8.01$) as compared to male teachers ($M = 40.19, SD = 7.64$) and there is significant difference between teachers' classroom participatory practices in rural and urban localities, $t(3598) = .88, p < .05$; teachers working in elementary schools from urban locality are practicing more explanatory practices ($M = 41.04, SD = 8.07$) as compared to rural schools' teachers ($M = 40.80, SD = 7.73$). Interpretation further report significant difference between elementary schools' students' opinion regarding their male and female teachers' classroom participatory practices by, $t(3598) = 3.91, p < .01$; male teachers are practicing more participatory practices ($M = 22.08, SD = 4.09$) as compared to female teachers ($M = 21.49, SD = 4.41$) and urban schools' teachers are practicing more participatory practices ($M = 22.21, SD = 4.197$) as compared to rural schools' teachers ($M = 21.18, SD = 4.37$).

Table 4

One Way ANOVA regarding teachers' democratic practices teaching in 6th, 7th and 8th grades

	<i>Sum of Squares</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Mean Square</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
Between Groups	3179.294	2	1589.647		
Within Groups	371960.295	3598	103.437	15.368	.001
Total	375139.590	3600			

Table 4 reflects significant difference between elementary schools' students' opinion regarding teachers' classroom democratic practices teaching in 6th, 7th and 8th grades, ($F(3598) = 15.368, p < .01$). Further difference is explored between teachers' classroom democratic practices teaching in 6th, 7th and 8th grades by applying Tukey Post Hoc test.

Table 5

Tukey Post Hoc test regarding teachers' democratic practices teaching in 6th, 7th and 8th grades

(I) Class	N	M	SD	(J) Class	MD (I-J)	SE	p
8th	1400	63.77	10.41	7th	2.13119*	.40010	.001
				6th	1.56565*	.42122	.001
7th	1200	61.64	9.58	8th	-2.13119*	.40010	.001
				6th	-.56554	.43559	.194
6th	1000	62.20	10.51	8th	-1.56565*	.42122	.001
				7th	.56554	.43559	.194

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

Table 5 depicts significant difference between elementary schools' students' opinion regarding teachers' classroom democratic practices teaching in 8th and 7th grades ($p = .001$), 8th and 6th grades ($p = .001$) and found no significant difference between teachers' classroom democratic practices teaching in 7th and 6th grades ($p = .194$). Thus teachers of 8th grades were practicing more democratic practices ($M = 63.77, SD = 10.41$) as compared to teachers teaching in 6th ($M = 62.20, SD = 10.51$) and 7th grades ($M = 61.64, SD = 9.58$).

Table 6

One Way ANOVA regarding teachers' explanatory and participatory practices teaching in 6th, 7th and 8th grades

Factor		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
Explanatory Practices	Between Groups	2251.210	2	1125.605135	18.199	.01
	Within Groups	222468.909	3598	61.84845968		
	Total	224720.120	3600			
Participatory Practices	Between Groups	1206.813	2	603.406881	33.022	.01
	Within Groups	65726.763	3598	18.27266159		
	Total	66933.577	3600			

Results of table 6 report significant difference between elementary schools' teachers' explanatory, ($F(2, 3598) = 18.199, p < .01$) and participatory practices, ($F(2, 3598) = 33.022, p < .01$) teaching in different grades. Tukey Post Hoc test was applied to explore difference between teachers' classroom democratic practices teaching in 6th, 7th and 8th grades.

Table 7
Tukey Post Hoc test regarding teachers' explanatory and participatory practices teaching in 6th, 7th and 8th grades

Sr. #	Factors name	(I) Class	(J) Class	N	M	SD	MD (I-J)	SE	p
1	Explanatory Practices	8th	7th	1400	41.55	8.08	1.739880	.309	.001
			6th				0.163714	.326	.615
		7th	8th	1200	39.81	7.33	-1.739880	.309	.001
			6th				-1.576166	.337	.001
2	Participatory Practices	6th	8th	1000	41.38	8.17	-0.163714	.326	.615
			7th				1.5761666	.337	.001
		8th	7th	1400	22.22	4.14	.39131*	.168	.020
			6th				1.41914*	.177	.001
7th	8th	1200	21.83	4.38	-0.39131*	.168	.020		
	6th				1.02783*	.183	.001		
6th	8th	1000	20.80	4.34	-1.41914*	.177	.001		
	7th				-1.02783*	.183	.001		

*. The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.

Table 7 depicts significant difference between teachers explanatory practices teaching in 8th and 7th grades ($p = .000$), no significant difference between teachers' explanatory practices teaching in 8th and 6th grades ($p = .615$) and found significant difference between teachers' explanatory practices teaching in 7th and 6th grades ($p = .001$). Research concludes that students have opinion about their teachers teaching in 8th grades are practicing more explanatory practices ($M = 41.55$, $SD = 8.08$) as compared to teachers teaching in 6th grade ($M = 41.38$, $SD = 8.17$) and 7th grade ($M = 39.81$, $SD = 7.33$). Results further portray significant difference between teachers' explanatory practices teaching in 8th and 7th grades ($p = .020$), 8th and 6th grades ($p = .001$) and 7th and 6th grades ($p = .001$). Results further show that teachers teaching in 8th grade are practicing more participatory practices ($M = 22.22$, $SD = 4.14$) as compared to teachers' teaching in 7th ($M = 21.83$, $SD = 4.38$) and 6th grades ($M = 20.80$, $SD = 4.34$) of public sector elementary schools of Punjab Province.

Discussion

Educational institutions in democratic societies shoulder responsibility to educate individuals in adopting democratic values. Schools provide platforms to practice democratic values. Teachers are the persons with capacity to have an impact on children as practitioners of the curriculum. Teachers practice democratic values in schools at macro level and in classrooms at micro level (Rowland, 2003). Classroom is place where students interact with each other during teaching learning process. Teachers being positive role model with democratic behaviors and practices in classrooms are important to develop democratic citizens (Louis, 2003). Teachers provide opportunities to students during democratic practices in classrooms to meet democratic values such as freedom of

expression and participation, respect for diversity, equality and tolerance. Teachers help students in actualizing and exercising democratic practices for their social development. Present research was focused to find out students' perceptions regarding teachers' classroom democratic practices. Literature reveals about importance of practicing democracy in various studies (Beane, 2005; Goodlad, 2002; Knight, 2001; White, Van Scotter, Hartoonian, & Davis, 2007). Findings of research reveal significant difference between male and female students' perceptions regarding their teachers' classroom democratic practices, $t(3598) = 3.70, p < .01$. Results of present research contradict with the findings of other studies (Demirtaş, 2004). Present research shows that female students have the opinion that their female teachers are practicing more democratic practices ($M = 62.81, SD = 10.42$) as compared to male students ($M = 62.27, SD = 9.80$). Findings of present research are similar with the findings of other research in which female students found their teachers more democratic as compared to male students (Kaya, Taşdan, Top, & Metin, 2012; Young & Calafate, 2007). But findings of present research also contradict with findings of other studies. Findings obtained from these studies focus that male students had perceptions that their teachers were practicing more democratic practices in classrooms to enable students to benefit from their interests, existing knowledge, and abilities (Davies, 1999; Devine, 2002; Fjeldstad & Mikkelsen, 2003; Kasanda, Lubben, Gaoseb, Kandjeo-Marnga, & Campbell, 2005; Raby, 2005). Findings claim significant difference between teachers' classroom democratic practices working in schools of rural and urban communities (Kubow & Kinney, 2000; Pryor & Pryor, 2005). Findings of present research show significant difference between teachers' democratic practices regarding their schools' localities. Teachers teaching in urban schools, practicing more democratic practices ($M = 63.25, SD = 10.33$) as compared to rural schools' teachers ($M = 61.99, SD = 10.05$). Results of present research are similar with findings of other studies (Akin & Ozdemir, 2009; Pohan, 2003; Print, Ørnstrøm & Nielsen, 2002; Rainer & Guyton, 1999). It was found in this research that the perceptions of students about their teachers' classroom democratic practices vary according to their class level. According to findings of research, 8th grade students find their teachers practicing more democratic practices in classrooms ($M = 63.77, SD = 10.41$) as compared to teachers teaching in 6th grade ($M = 62.20, SD = 10.51$) and 7th grade ($M = 61.64, SD = 9.58$). Findings of present research are similar to the findings of other studies (Kaya, Taşdan, Top, & Metin, 2012). Because students of higher class level are more mature, obey classroom rules and do not conflict with their teachers. Findings of some studies contradict with findings of present research that teachers' teaching in lower grades practice more democratic practices in classrooms as compared to higher grades (Crone, 1997; Hashimoto & Fukuda, 2011; Gülec & Balçık, 2009; Louis, 2003; Rowland, 2003; Sari, Sari & Ötunc, 2008).

Conclusions and Recommendations

The research was conducted to explore male and female elementary schools' students' perception, interpretations and consequences regarding their teachers' classroom democratic practices working in public sector elementary schools of Punjab. Research concludes significant difference between male and female teachers' classroom democratic practices. Female teachers were practicing more democratic practices as compare to male teachers. Female teachers are more friendly, caring and social in relation with their students and make strong bonding with students in classrooms. They take more interest in classroom practices and encourage their students to become more participative in domestic and community affairs. Research also concludes that teachers working in urban localities are practicing more democratic practices as compared to rural schools' teachers. Urban schools' teachers are more social and have better resources and opportunities to indulge their students in classroom practices. Students in rural schools are also more active, participatory have strong sense of democracy to deal community affairs. Teachers teaching at elementary level in 8th class practice more democratic values as compared to 7th and 6th class because students of higher classes are mature enough to maintain positive relation with their teachers and do not dare to conflict with their teachers. So, senior students practice more democratic values during their stay in classrooms as well as in their social lives. Research recommends that teachers need to democratize their pedagogy during teaching along with their classroom practices to make students democrats. Teachers education programs need to focus on training of their teachers to develop their democratic attitude according to social demands of democratic society, so that they may focus on democratic practices in classrooms.

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