

## **The Effects of Children’s Rights and Democracy Education on Children’s Democratic Behaviors**

**Sevi Kent Kükürtcü**<sup>i</sup>  
Ministry of National Education

**Nefise Semra Erkan**<sup>ii</sup>  
İstanbul Gelişim University

### **Abstract**

This study aims to investigate the effects of early childhood Children’s Rights and Democracy Education on children’s democratic behaviors. The study group consisted of a total of 53 children (28 experimental, 25 control) aged between 60-72 months, who were attending two kindergartens affiliated with the Directorate of National Education in Kayseri. The study used the quantitative research method of pretest/posttest and control group quasi-experimental design. Data were collected by using the Democratic Behavior Scale developed by the researcher.

The findings showed that while no significant difference existed between the pretest scores of the experimental and control groups prior to Children’s Rights and Democracy Education, the posttest mean scores of the experimental group increased significantly after the training as compared to the control group. In addition, learning was shown to be permanent by the results of a retention test given to the experimental group one month after the program ended. The results showed that the children who participated in the Children’s Rights and Democracy Education program displayed higher and more permanent development than the control children in the democratic behavior, autonomous behavior, and knowing one’s rights subdimensions of the Democratic Behavior Scale.

**Keywords:** Early Childhood Education, Preschool, Human Rights Education, Children’s Rights Education, Democracy Education, Democratic Behaviors

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<sup>i</sup> **Sevi Kent Kükürtcü**, Ministry of National Education, ORCID: 0000-0001-7738-4274

**Correspondence:** sevikent@gmail.com

<sup>ii</sup> **Nefise Semra Erkan**, Prof. Dr., School of Health Sciences, İstanbul Gelişim University

## INTRODUCTION

As today's children will become tomorrow's leaders, we should teach them from early childhood with an educational approach similar to the one used in Children's Rights and Democracy Education, which focuses on their rights and equips them with responsible citizenship skills, as well as a culture of democracy (Akyüz, 2001; Atay, 2009).

Children's Rights and Democracy Education (CRDE) is based on the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which grants children individual rights and aims to transform them into respectful, open-minded, creative and sensitive individuals who respect human rights (Akyüz, 2001; Ay Zöğ, 2008). In order for children to become such individuals, they first need to know their own rights (Lundy, 2007; Özdemir Uluç, 2008). Item 42 of the CRC calls for the teaching of children's rights to children as well as adults. It is seen as a basic right for children to know their legal rights (Neslitürk and Ersoy, 2007; Washington, 2010; Uçuş, 2014; Seyhan and Cansever, 2015;346).

Early childhood is a determining period when children's physical, mental and social development is at its fastest. It is during this period that social skills such as cooperation, sharing, participation in group activities, expressing opinions in public and taking responsibility develop. Child-centered and early CRDE in line with children's developmental levels is an important step in empowering child citizens and sustaining democracy. With children's rights education in early childhood, children grasp the differences between wants, needs and rights, learn about abuse of children's rights, and realize how their actions may affect others. As children learn about their own rights, they also discover that these are valid for all children, and that they must treat others responsibly and respectfully. As they learn about democratic values such as empathy, sensitivity, respect, love, tolerance, cooperation, helpfulness and sharing, their social adaptation skills improve and they have less conflict with others. This, in turn, improves the classroom atmosphere. When they are able to express themselves freely in such an environment, children's self-confidence develops. They start to focus on "we" instead of "me" and their sense of belonging develops. In this way, children's communication skills and socio-emotional development are supported, and they take more responsibility at school and in the society (Covell and Howe, 2001; Ersoy and Neslitürk, 2007; Freidmann, 2013; United Nations, 2012; Özdemir Uluç, 2008).

At CRDE's core lies an approach which teaches children about life and helps them internalize their existence. If CRDE is not based on real life, it cannot fulfill its transformative role. It is more important to provide children with educational experiences to help them translate rights-related concepts and values into behavior, than teach democracy and human rights directly (Bulut Pedük, 2015). CRDE should be perceived as real life information, be implemented through participative age-proper classroom practices with the support of families, and span holistically from preschool to elementary, secondary, higher, disabled, gifted and informal education programs (Covell et al., 2008; Covell et al., 2010; Washington,2010; Şirin and Gülhan, 2011; Demirezen et al., 2013).

In recent years, children's rights education has gained increasing importance. However, the number of early childhood CRDE studies is rather limited in the literature. Further, many studies recommend that new ones be conducted focusing on the development of CRDE programs (Akman and Ertürk, 2011; Çakmak Güleç and Özdemir, 2006; Kızıltepe et al., 2014; Seyhan and Cansever, 2015; Washington,2010). Also, most CRDE studies seem to focus on the views or attitudes of elementary school children, teachers and parents (Campbell, 2011; Goldberg, 2008; Sutton, 2003; Dalton, 1999; Temple, 1998; Ruck 1994; Çarıkçı and Er, 2010; Dinç, 2015; Koran, 2015; Köse, 2009; Neslitürk and Ersoy, 2007; Yağan Güder and Yıldırım, 2014).

The limited number of studies focusing on children's rights education in the early childhood period and the failure of most existing studies to focus jointly on children's rights and democracy education convinced the researcher that the development of a CRDE program for early childhood was essential. The current study therefore contributes to the literature and sets a practical example for teachers. It is also worth noting that the data obtained from the study serves as a guide in the field of

preschool education and an example for future CRDE research. With an early childhood program, teachers do not only gain raised awareness about children's rights, but also develop an idea about the methods and techniques they may implement CRDE with. The program will also act as an example for teachers as they develop richer learning environments by using the information gained from the program.

This study therefore aims to develop a “Children's Rights and Democracy Education Program” for the early childhood period and examine its effects on children’s democratic behaviors. Working with the question “What effect does children’s rights and democracy education have on children's democratic behavior levels?”, this study also seeks answers to the following sub problems:

1. What are the Democratic Behavior Scale equivalence levels of experimental (CRDE) and control group (non-CRDE) children?
2. Is there a difference between the Democratic Behavior Scale pretest - posttest scores of CRDE experimental and control groups?
3. Is there a difference between the Democratic Behavior Scale posttest mean scores of CRDE experimental and control groups?
4. Is there a difference between the Democratic Behavior Scale posttest - retention test scores of CRDE experimental group children?

## METHOD

This study, which aims to identify the effects of CRDE on children's democratic behaviors, used the quantitative research method of the control group, quasi-experimental pretest - posttest - retention test design (Karasar, 2010). Considering that randomly assigning students to sections in an educational institution would hurt the existing class structure and order, the study used convenience sampling to establish the experimental and control groups (Büyüköztürk et al., 2018). The dependent variable in research design was the “democratic behaviors” of 48-72 month-old preschool children. The independent variable, whose effect on children's democratic behaviors was being studied, was the “Children's rights and democracy education program”. The experimental group in the study undertook the CRDE offered by the researcher in addition to the regular preschool educational program, while the control group continued the regular preschool educational program implemented by their teachers.

### The Study Group

The study group consisted of two socio-culturally similar schools located in Melikgazi, Kayseri and the necessary permissions were obtained from the Directorate of National Education.

Experimental and control groups were determined based on the willingness of school principals and teachers to implement the education program. The study group included a total of 53 children, with the experimental group including 28 preschoolers aged between 60-72 months (14 female, 14 male), and the control group including 25 preschoolers aged between 60-72 months (11 female, 14 male). The demographic information of the study group, obtained with the permission of their families, are presented in Table 1 below.

**Table 1. Frequency Distribution of Participants' Demographic Information**

		Group				Total	
		Experimental		Control		n	%
		n	%	n	%		
Children's Sex	F	14	50	11	44	25	47
	M	14	50	14	56	28	53
	Total	28	100	25	100	53	100
Children's Age	60- 72 months	28	100	25	100	53	100
Duration of Preschool Attendance	1 yil	8	28	13	52	21	40
	2 yil	15	54	12	48	27	51
	3yil	5	18	0	0	5	9
	Total	28	100	25	100	53	100
Mothers' Age Bracket	25 and younger	0	0	0	0	0	0
	26-40	27	6	5	100	2	8
	41-60	1	4	0	0	1	2
	Total	28	100	25	100	53	100
Mothers' Educational Background	Elementary School	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Secondary School	0	0	0	0	0	0
	High School	3	11	8	32	11	21
	University	17	61	16	64	33	62
	Graduate	8	29	1	4	9	17
	Total	28	100	25	100	53	100
Fathers' Age Bracket	25 and younger	0	0	0	0	0	0
	26-40	24	86	24	96	48	91
	41-60	4	24	1	4	5	9
	Total	28	100	25	100	53	100
Fathers' Educational Background	Elementary School	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Secondary School	0	0	0	0	0	0
	High School	2	7	5	20	7	13
	University	21	75	19	76	40	76
	Graduate	5	18	1	4	6	11
	Total	28	100	25	100	53	100

### Data Collection Tools

The data collection tools used in the study were the Child-Family Demographic Information Form, Democratic Behavior Scale for 48-72 Month-Old Children, and the children's rights and democracy education program for 48-72 month-old children.

**Child-Family Demographic Information Form.** This form was prepared by the researcher in order to obtain demographic information and identify the characteristics of the study group. The form included questions about children's age and sex, and parents' age and educational background.

**Democratic Behavior Scale.** Aimed for use with 48-72 month-old children, the Democratic Behavior Scale was developed by the researcher to measure the effects of the 11-week CRDE on children's democratic behaviors. The scale was used as pretest, posttest and retention test.

**Children's Rights and Democracy Education Program.** This section presents information on the main philosophy of the CRDE and the program development process.

*The philosophy of the program.* The CRDE is designed in line with progressivism, reconstructionism and constructivism, which are based on pragmatist philosophy. The goal of CRDE is to achieve democratic individuals for a democratic society by making use of John Dewey's educational approach and methods. Dewey's approach renders students creative and dynamic. According to this approach, schools should equip students with problem-solving skills against all social life problems. Dewey saw creative problem-solution as a requirement of democracy. In line with these principles, the program takes into account individual and social differences, and offers activities that encourage students to construct knowledge by using active learning, creative problem-solving, questioning, and learning by doing and living (Bakır, 2007; Yeşiltaş and Kaymakçı, 2009; Aydoğdu, 2011; Yalçınkaya, 2013; Şeker et al., 2014; Demirel, 2015; Aybek, 2017).

*Program Design.* CRDE program design included the following stages in line with the Ministry of Education's Program Development Model (Demirel, 2015, p.57).

1. Needs analysis
2. Deciding on general goals
3. Deciding on the concepts, principles and skills in the field
4. Deciding on learning areas and corresponding objectives
5. Deciding on the themes included in the learning domain – Instructional activities- Measurement and evaluation
6. Obtaining expert views
7. Materials development
8. Submitting programs for approval
9. Implementing, monitoring and evaluating the program

1. *Needs Analysis* In the program development process, the researcher undertook needs analysis to ascertain whether there was a need for CRDE in addition to the existing preschool educational program (Arsal, 1998; Karacaoğlu, 2009). As an educator, the researcher used the unstructured natural observation technique to examine monthly plans and daily education flow in state schools during the 2016-2017 school year, and found that neither teacher plans nor their daily education flows adequately included children's rights training or democracy education. Previous studies also corroborate the researcher's observations (Washington, 2010; Akman and Ertürk, 2011; Seyhan and Cansever, 2015; Dinç, 2015).

The researcher also undertook literature review, evaluation of the existing program, and content analysis. She examined the CRDE literature, research in the field and the existing preschool education program. Following these, she started needs analysis with the Delphi method. A CRDE needs analysis questionnaire was designed driven by the information obtained from observations, the source review and content analysis.

Expert view was obtained from preschool education academics and teachers. After this, data were collected electronically from 82 participants by using the “Delphi Technique”. Of these participants, 53% stated that they did not have the necessary information to prepare CRDE activities. Ninety-eight percent agreed that “CRDE can be implemented in early childhood”. At the same time, 83% stated that they “make room for CRDE in their monthly plans”. However, CRDE activities were “limited to certain days or weeks” by 70%. Of the 82 participants, 94% believed that there was a need in early childhood for CRDE. Of these, 79% stated that such a program was necessary because studies focusing on this topic in early childhood were rare, 57% stated that the Ministry of Education program did not contain objectives in this topic, and 54% stated that sample CRDE activities were needed.

2. *Deciding on general goals.* General goals are determined in Turkey by the decision-makers in national education and define the characteristics of the ideal human expected by a given educational stage (Çelik, 2006; Sönmez, 2015). The general goals of Turkish national education and those of preschool education constitute the general goals of CRDE.

3. *Deciding on the concepts, principles and skills in the field.* The basic skills in the program reflect the framework of the convention for children's rights and democratic behaviors.

The principles of children's rights and democracy education are:

- Aiming for children to learn their rights
- Aiming to develop children's democratic behaviors
- Aiming to develop children's autonomy skills
- Putting the learner in the center as dictated by the constructivist approach
- Taking note of individual differences in educational activities
- Creating a democratic learning environment
- Defending freedom of speech, which is the basis of democracy, in all circumstances
- Being a role model for children by displaying democratic attitudes
- Teaching concepts and themes concretely and by considering children's developmental characteristics through educational activities
- Making use of opportunity education
- Recycling objectives for permanent learning
- Planning educational activities around children's daily lives, in line the principle of moving from near to far (Uçuş Güldalı, 2017).

4. *Deciding on learning domains and corresponding objectives.* As CRDE was being prepared, related objectives in the MoNE preschool educational program (2013) were found. Following this, new objectives were written for the aims not included in the MoNE program. As the researcher identified new objectives, she did a literature review and evaluated the developmental characteristics of 48-72 month-old children. Each CRDE objective was developed by ensuring that it contains a statement focusing on behavior, is measurable and observable. A hierarchical order was followed in the objective indicators in line with the Taxonomy Approach (from simple to complex, concrete to abstract, near to far).

5. *Deciding on the themes included in the learning domain – Instructional activities-Measurement and evaluation.* In CRDE, themes are developed in line with the Convention on Children's Rights and democratic behaviors. The themes and objectives in the program support one another. The researcher prepared 40 activities for the program for 48-72 month-old children. These activities include themes to teach children's rights and develop democratic and autonomous behaviors. As necessitated by the Convention on Children's Rights, these themes include the family and alternative care, peace, environment, democracy, avoiding discrimination, education and free time, participation, media and the internet, health and well-being, violence, gender equality. The themes included in the program to encourage the development of autonomous behaviors are self-recognition, self-confidence, communication, innovative thinking, problem-solution, democracy, participation in decision-making, and following rules. In order to develop democratic behaviors, program activities focused on the themes of empathy, cooperation, responsibility, patience, respect, tolerance, sharing, helpfulness, observing rules, participating in decision making, negotiating, and sensitivity. The activities were child-centered and constructivist. There were both small and large group work. In order to enable children to learn by living, a process-based approach was adopted. The hidden curriculum created by student interaction and the classroom environment was also considered in order to help children learn via their experiences in the process. The activities regularly recycled the program objectives, thus attempting to create permanent learning. Different learning methods and techniques were used in conjunction so that the activities would arouse children's curiosity and keep their attention alive. Considering the importance of affect in learning, the activities invited children to use their senses and gave them emotions such as excitement, curiosity, love and empathy within the process.

CRDE measurement and evaluation was two-fold. The initial evaluation took place at the end of each activity plan in the form of student self-evaluation and evaluation of the day, while the final one was completed by using the researcher's Democratic Behavior Scale, which aimed to discover the effects of the program on children's behaviors and was developed in line with the program objectives.

1. *Obtaining expert views.* All of the 40 CRDE activities were evaluated by a total of 6 experts — two preschool teachers, one curriculum development academic with a PhD, two full professors and an associate professor in the field of preschool education. Following expert opinion, the activities were designed in line with the child-centered approach.
2. *Materials Development.* Out of the 40 program activities, 29 were developed by the researcher and 11 were adapted from the literature (MoNE O.Ö.E.P. Activity Book, 2013; Flowers, 2010; Sapsağlam and Ömeroğlu, 2016, Yalçın et al., 2012) .
3. *Submitting programs for approval.* Approval to implement the program was obtained from Hacettepe University Ethics Commission and Kayseri Provincial Directorate of National Education. Additionally, permissions were taken from the families of experimental and control group children.
4. *Implementing, monitoring and evaluating the program.* The pilot trial used 10 randomly selected activities from the program. During the trial, the activities were observed to be appropriate for the children's age group and also interesting for the children. Time needed was 40 minutes for integrated activities. The pilot trial did not necessitate any changes or revisions to the activities. The program was implemented in the kindergarten of an elementary school located in Melikgazi, Kayseri three days weekly for 11 weeks.

## Data Analysis

The data collection tools used in the study were the “Child-Family Demographic Information Form” and “Democratic Behavior Scale”. The demographic information obtained from the Child-Family Demographic Information Form was presented by using frequencies (f) and percentages (%). When analyzing the data from the Democratic Behavior Scale, the first step was to explore whether the pretest, posttest and retention test scores displayed normal distribution in each group to be compared. The Shapiro-Wilk Test was used for this purpose. The differences between the paired groups who were not normally distributed were examined with the Mann Whitney U test, while the differences between the dependent variables who were not normally distributed were examined by using the Wilcoxon Test. The significance level was set at 0,05, with  $p < 0,05$  showing a significant difference and  $p > 0,05$  showing its lack.

## FINDINGS

The findings concerning the subproblems of the study are presented below.

### 1. Findings about the Equivalence Levels of CRDE Experimental and Control Groups

Whether the democratic behavior levels of experimental and control groups varied statistically prior to CRDE was examined by using scores from the knowledge of rights, democratic behaviors and autonomous behaviors subdimensions, as well as the total score from the scale. In this way, the equivalence level of experimental and control groups was explored.

**Table 2. Mann-Whitney U Test Results of DBS Used as Pretest**

Democratic Behavior Scale		Mann-Whitney U test								
		n	$\bar{x}$	Median	Min	Max	sd	Mean ranks	z	p
Knowledge of Rights	Experimental	28	21	19	9	45	9,3	25		
	Control	25	23	22	9	42	9,3	28	-0,86	0,386
	Total	53	22	19	9	45	9,2			
Democratic Behaviors	Experimental	28	70	69	39	95	12,8	30		
	Control	25	63	67	35	89	14,1	23	-1,59	0,113
	Total	53	67	69	35	95	23,7			
Autonomous Behaviors	Experimental	28	33	33	17	49	8,5	28		
	Control	25	31	33	10	45	10	26	-0,60	0,550
	Total	53	32	33	10	49	9,2			
Total Score	Experimental	28	125	118	82	181	26	28,3		
	Control	25	117	124	67	174	30	25,4	-0,70	0,487
	Total	53	121	121	67	181	28			

In order to reveal the effects of CRDE, the Democratic Behavior Scale was implemented on experimental and control groups prior to implementing the educational program. The Mann Whitney U Test results of the pretest scores are presented in Table 2.

The findings show no significant difference between the Knowledge of Rights ( $z = -0,86$ ;  $p > 0,05$ ), Democratic Behaviors ( $z = -1,59$ ;  $p > 0,05$ ), Autonomous Behaviors ( $z = -0,60$ ,  $p > 0,05$ ) subdimension scores and the total Democratic Behavior Scale ( $z = -0,70$ ,  $p > 0,05$ ) mean scores of the

experimental and control groups. The analysis results showed that the democratic behavior levels of groups were similar, and any difference to occur in the democratic behavior levels would depend on the procedures implemented in the experimental and control groups.

## 2. Findings about the Democratic Behavior Scale Pretest - Posttest Scores of the Experimental and Control Groups

The Wilcoxon test performed to explore whether there was a significant difference between the experimental group's Knowledge of Rights, Democratic Behaviors, Autonomous Behaviors and total DBS pretest-posttest mean scores yielded the results given in Table 3 below.

**Table 3. Experimental Group Pretest-Posttest Wilcoxon Test Results**

Democratic Behavior Scale	Experimental group						Wilcoxon Test	
	n	$\bar{x}$	median	Min	max	sd	z	p
<b>Knowledge of Rights</b>								
Pretest	28	21	19	9	45	9,3	-4,46	<0,001
Posttest	27	43	45	34	45	3,0		
<b>Democratic behaviors</b>								
Pretest	28	70	69	39	95	13,8	-4,40	<0,001
Posttest	27	91	92	83	95	2,8		
<b>Autonomous Behaviors</b>								
Pretest	28	33	33	17	49	8,5	-4,35	<0,001
Posttest	27	46	48	39	50	3,5		
<b>Total Scores</b>								
Pretest	28	125	118	82	181	25,8	-4,54	<0,001
Posttest	27	181	182	164	190	6,9		

p<,05

Table 3 shows that, in the DBS Knowledge of Rights subdimension, the posttest mean scores ( $\bar{x}$ =43) of the experimental group were significantly higher than their pretest mean scores ( $\bar{x}$ =21) ( $z$ =-4,46;  $p$ <0,05). Similarly, in the Democratic Behaviors subdimension, posttest mean scores ( $\bar{x}$ =91) were significantly higher than pretest mean scores ( $\bar{x}$ =70) ( $z$ =-4,40;  $p$ <0,05). In the Autonomous Behaviors subdimension, posttest mean scores ( $\bar{x}$ =46) were significantly higher than pretest mean scores ( $\bar{x}$ =33) ( $z$ =-4,35;  $p$ <0,05). As for the total DBS mean scores, posttest mean scores ( $\bar{x}$ =181) were significantly higher than pretest mean scores ( $\bar{x}$ =125) ( $z$ =-5,54;  $p$ <0,005). The results show that the CRDE contributed positively to children's democratic behaviors.

Table 4 shows the results of the Wilcoxon test performed to see whether a significant difference exists between the Knowledge of Rights, Democratic Behaviors, Autonomous Behaviors and total Democratic Behavior Scale pretest-posttest mean scores in the Control group.

**Table 4. Control Group Pretest-Posttest Wilcoxon Test Results**

Democratic Behavior Scale	Control group						Wilcoxon Test	
	n	$\bar{x}$	median	Min	max	sd	z	p
<b>Knowledge of Rights</b>								
Pretest	25	23	22	9	42	9,3	-1,15	0,251
Posttest	21	27	27	9	43	11		
<b>Democratic behaviors</b>								
Pretest	25	63	67	35	89	14	-1,61	0,107
Posttest	21	69	76	27	93	19		
<b>Autonomous Behaviors</b>								
Pretest	25	31	33	10	45	10	-1,80	0,070
Posttest	21	36	40	20	49	9		
<b>Total Scores</b>								
Pretest	25	118	124	67	174	30	-1,72	0,086
Posttest	21	132	138	51	183	36		

Table 4 reveals no significant difference between the Knowledge of Rights pretest ( $\bar{x}=23$ ) and posttest mean scores ( $\bar{x}=27$ ) in the control group ( $z=-1,15$ ;  $p>0,05$ ). In the Democratic Behaviors subdimension too, no significant difference existed between pretest ( $\bar{x}=63$ ) and posttest mean scores ( $\bar{x}=69$ ) ( $z=-1,61$ ;  $p>0,05$ ). Similarly, the Autonomous Behaviors subdimension pretest ( $\bar{x}=31$ ) and posttest mean scores ( $\bar{x}=36$ ) did not vary significantly ( $z=-1,80$ ;  $p>0,05$ ). Considering the total DBS mean scores, no significant difference was observed once again between the pretest ( $\bar{x}=118$ ) and posttest mean scores ( $\bar{x}=132$ ) ( $z=-1,72$ ;  $p>0,05$ ).

These results reveal that education based on the existing preschool educational program increases the democratic behavior levels of control group children, albeit not significantly.

### 3. Findings on the CRDE Experimental and Control Group Posttest Scores

The Mann-Whitney U test was performed to explore whether experimental and control group children's Democratic Behavior Scale posttest mean scores varied significantly. The results are presented below.

**Table 5. Mann-Whitney U Test Results of DBS Used as Posttest**

Democratic Behavior Scale		Group						Mann-Whitney U test		
		n	$\bar{x}$	Median	Min	Max	sd	Mean ranks	z	p
Knowledge of Behaviors	Experimental	27	44	45	35	45	3	3	-5,6	<0,001
	Control	21	27	27	9	43	10,7	12		
	Total	48	36	42	9	45	11,1			
Democratic Behaviors	Experimental	27	91	92	83	95	2,8	33	-4,9	<0,001
	Control	21	69	76	20	93	19,1	13		
	Total	48	81	89	20	95	16,7			

Autonomous Behaviors	Experimental	27	46	48	39	50	3,5	32	-4,5	<0,001
	Control	21	36	40	20	49	8,9	14		
	Total	48	42	43	20	50	8,2			
Total Score	Experimental	27	181	182	164	190	6,9	33	-5,0	<0,001
	Control	21	132	138	51	183	35,9	13		
	Total	48	160	177	51	190	34,2			

Comparing the experimental group children's posttest mean scores in the Knowledge of Rights ( $\bar{x}=44$ ), Democratic Behaviors ( $\bar{x}=91$ ), Autonomous Behaviors ( $\bar{x}=46$ ) subdimensions and the DBS total ( $\bar{x}=181$ ) mean score and the control group children's posttest mean scores in the Knowledge of Rights ( $\bar{x}=27$ ), Democratic Behaviors ( $\bar{x}=69$ ), Autonomous Behaviors ( $\bar{x}=36$ ) subdimensions and the DBS total ( $\bar{x}=132$ ) mean score, it was found that the scores of the experimental group in the subdimensions and the total scale were higher. In addition, the findings also showed that a significant difference in favor of the experimental group existed between the two groups' Knowledge of Rights ( $z=-5,6$ ;  $p<0,05$ ), Democratic Behaviors ( $z=-4,9$ ;  $p<0,05$ ), Autonomous Behaviors ( $z=-4,5$ ,  $p<0,05$ ) and DBS total ( $z=-5,0$ ,  $p<0,05$ ) posttest mean scores. These findings suggest that the CRDE implemented in the experimental group brought a significant increase in children's democratic behaviors.

#### 4. Findings on the CRDE Experimental Group Retention Test Scores

The Wilcoxon test results showing the relationship between the experimental group's Knowledge of Rights, Democratic Behaviors, Autonomous Behaviors subdimension scores and total DBS posttest-retention test mean scores are presented in Table 6.

**Table 6. Experimental Group Posttest Retention Test Wilcoxon Test Results**

Democratic Behavior Scale	Experimental group						Wilcoxon test	
	n	$\bar{x}$	median	min	max	sd	z	p
<b>Knowledge of Rights</b>								
Posttest	27	43,5	45	34	45	3,0	-0,3	0,755
Retention Test	27	43,3	45	35	45	3,3		
<b>Democratic Behaviors</b>								
Posttest	27	91	92	83	95	2,8	-0,3	0,004
Retention Test	27	93	94	83	95	2,9		
<b>Autonomous Behaviors</b>								
Posttest	27	46	48	39	50	3,5	-1,5	0,123
Retention Test	27	48	50	38	50	3,0		
<b>Total Scores</b>								
Posttest	27	181	182	164	190	6,9	-1,9	0,060
Retention Test	27	184	187	172	190	5,5		

The experimental group's Democratic Behavior Scale posttest and retention test mean scores showed that there was no significant increase in the retention ( $\bar{x}=43,3$ ) and posttest ( $\bar{x}=43,5$ ) scores in the Knowledge of Rights subdimension ( $z=-0,3$ ;  $p>0,05$ ). In the democratic behaviors subdimension,

a significant increase existed in the retention test ( $\bar{x}=93$ ) ve posttest ( $\bar{x}=91$ ) mean scores ( $z= -0,3$ ;  $p<0.05$ ). In the experimental group's Autonomous Behaviors subdimension, there was an insignificant increase in the retention ( $\bar{x}=48$ ) and posttest ( $\bar{x}=46$ ) mean scores ( $z= -1,5$ ;  $p>0.05$ ). Finally, the experimental group's DBS total mean scores also showed an insignificant increase in the retention test ( $\bar{x}=184$ ) and posttest ( $\bar{x}=181$ ) mean scores ( $z= -1,9$ ;  $p>0.05$ ). These findings suggest that the CRDE which was implemented retained its positive effect on children's democratic behaviors. This is to say that the effect of the CRDE on experimental group children's democratic behaviors continued beyond the program.

## DISCUSSION

The CRDE is a child-centered program including activities to develop the knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviors necessary for children to gain a culture of democracy. Starting the CRDE in early childhood when learning is at its fastest is essential for Human Rights Education to reach its goals and for the formation of modern and democratic societies. After the CRDE, which was implemented in the experimental group in addition to the current preschool educational program, the experimental group posttest mean scores in the Knowledge of Rights subdimension ( $\bar{x}=43$ ) were significantly higher than pretest mean scores ( $\bar{x}=21$ ) ( $z=-4,46$ ,  $p<0,005$ ).

The DBS Knowledge of Rights subdimension measures children's awareness levels of the CRC's protection, development and participation rights. This finding overlaps with the findings of Washington's study regarding the development and implementation of a Family Involvement Children's Rights Education Program. Washington (2010) concluded in his study that experimental group children gained awareness of CRC with the help of the program. Pettman et al. (1986) developed a program to teach human rights to preschoolers and grade 1-4 students and emphasized that human rights training and human values may be taught through objective methods. Also, Decoene and De cock (1996) concluded in a children's rights educational program for 3-12 year-old children that there is a mutually increasing relationship between children's values regarding general rights. Similarly, Covell and Howe (1999) developed a children's rights educational program and found that children who received children's rights education had more comprehensive and accurate children's rights information than those who did not receive similar education, and that these children embraced minority children more than others. In studies conducted at different levels of education, it was seen that children's rights education increased children's awareness of their rights (Golberg, 2008; Covell and Howe, 2001; Uçuş, 2014; Demirezen et al., 2013; Torun and Duran, 2014; Kaymak Özmen et al., 2014; Hareket, 2015; Hareket, 2018).

As can be understood from these research findings, experimental group children who took part in the training program had increased awareness of their rights to live, develop and be protected. Baydar and Yazıcı (2015) aimed to determine 60-72 month-old children's perceptions of children's rights in their study, and found that the majority referred to the development right in their statements, while more than half mentioned the right to live, and almost half mentioned the protection right. Baydar and Yazıcı's findings support the view that rights education should start in early childhood. In a study evaluating preschool teachers' views about children's rights, Kor (2013) found that teachers thought the items in CRC mentioning the rights of life, development, health and education can help develop awareness in early childhood children. Also, Ruck (1994) examined the development of children's personal decisiveness and their perceptions of care and protection rights, and found no relationship between increasing care, protection questioning skills, and age. Quennerstedt (2016) observed the daily activities of a group of children aged between 1 and 3 years in order to examine how they acquired the laws of human rights in the preschool education environment. He concluded that children's behaviors were frequently concerned with human rights and defined children's rights in three different domains: belonging, effect and equality.

Özdemir Uluç (2008) stated that“ if children's rights education is successful, children's awareness of their rights and their interest in the protection and promotion of children's rights will definitely increase”. In the early childhood period, as children perceive the concept of rights in a self-

centric way and through concrete realities, they need to be provided with a democratic education program that will enable them to turn democracy and human rights information into values, behaviors and attitudes (Neslitürk and Ersoy, 2007; Özdemir Uluç, 2008; Washington, 2010; Uçuş, 2014; Seyhan and Cansever, 2015).

The posttest mean scores in the Democratic Behaviors subdimension of DBS ( $\bar{x}=91$ ), which was implemented on experimental group children after the CRDE, were significantly higher than the pretest mean scores ( $\bar{x}=70$ ) ( $z=-4,40$ ;  $p<0,05$ ). The democratic behaviors subdimension measured social development behaviors that every human being needs for the development of a democratic culture, such as obeying rules, participating in decisions, cooperation, sharing, helping others, respect and tolerance. Democracy education, starting at home and continuing at school, is an essential element to raise individuals with a democratic culture. Erwin and Kipness (1997) claim, “*democracy can be clearly understood in the early childhood period as a value.*” According to Kuş, Sönmez and Karatekin (2011), democracy education is a whole consisting of parts such as the family, environment, school, management style and culture, and democracy is a value that can best be learned through living. Therefore, teachers must make sure that they act as role models so that children experience democracy through a democratic method, classroom interaction and climate in the instructional process. Mapiasse (2007) studied the effects of a democratic classroom climate on students’ participation and learning output, and concluded that a democratic climate has important effects on student participation, interpretation skills and the concept of citizenship. Subba (2014) pointed out in a study that democratic ideals such as equality, freedom and justice are given to individuals at school; teachers are a crucial factor in this; democracy education can help shape children into citizens who will defend democracy in the future; and therefore it needs to take place as early as possible. Sundawa (2015) concluded that using the classroom as a democracy laboratory has a powerful effect in improving students’ democratic skills and that teachers play an important role in helping students develop a democratic character at school. Bulut Pedük (2015) emphasized the importance of educating children via democratic attitudes in a democratic environment and giving them responsibilities in children's rights education. Özdemir Doğan (2017) studied effective children's rights education with classroom teachers. The teachers believed that students should be taught their rights and responsibilities through active participation and learning by doing; that a school culture needs to be built; and that children must learn not only about their rights but also about their responsibilities. Lowry (2002) stated that democracy is a moral behavior and claimed that democracy education will provide equality in the classroom and facilitate problem-solution.

The Autonomous Behaviors subdimension of the DBS implemented on experimental group children after the CRDE showed that their posttest mean scores ( $\bar{x}=46$ ) were significantly higher than pretest mean scores ( $\bar{x}=33$ ) ( $z=-4,35$ ;  $p<0,05$ ).

The DBS Autonomous Behaviors subdimension measures the levels of behaviors in the social and cognitive development area, such as asking questions, doing research, solving problems, initiating and maintaining conversation, voicing opinions, and defending one’s own and other people’s rights, which every individual needs to possess for a democracy culture to flourish. In a democratic society, individuals should learn ample and diverse information about political, social and cultural issues, not just from their immediate environment but from diverse sources. This is related to the development of autonomous learning skills which are essential to a democratic culture (COE, 2016).

Societies with a democratic culture can only be formed if their members are raised as free-thinking, expressive, decision-making, questioning, critiquing, researching, problem solving, self-confident and autonomous individuals who have a realistic view of themselves. Raising individuals with these traits is only possible through an education that promotes democratic culture and starts in early childhood, an important stage in children's character development (Yılmaz and Ölçer, 2018). Democracy education equips individuals not only with the necessary attitudes and behaviors to engage actively with the society, but also with autonomy and social skills necessary to identify and pursue their own goals. Ak (2016) contends that democracy in preschool means children being able to make decisions about their own lives. With a democratic approach, children come to understand themselves

as they contribute to the social and group consciousness. This improves self-efficacy, self-development, self-experience, self-responsibility, and self-control skills (Dürr,2005; Elkatmış,2007). On the other hand, high student autonomy encourages children to develop their self-regulation and decision-making skills and increase their motivation level. Becoming a lifelong learner connotes high student autonomy (Yılmaz and Ölçer, 2018).

Yavuz (2016) writes that student autonomy also means that the student is the subject in the decisions made in their learning process. According to Ölçer and Yılmaz (2019), autonomy is the ability to be aware of one's self, to think freely and decide, to put one's decisions into action, to act independently and sincerely, and to make choices. Individuals' behaviors such as feeling confident about their choices, resisting peer and parent pressure while displaying appropriate social responsibility, having control over their behaviors, feeling self-confident, and being able to make decisions without getting socially affected depend on the development of autonomous behaviors (Yılmaz and Ölçer, 2018). An autonomous individual is not scared to show their presence and defend themselves when necessary. Autonomous individuals know what they want and how they can get it, thus having control and responsibility over their lives. Autonomous individuals are aware of their own wants, and they make it known to others through their behaviors that they have the "right to choose" (Ersoy Kart and Güldü, 2008).

According to the competencies for a democratic culture model, autonomous learning skills are necessary for individuals to organize and evaluate their own learning according to their own needs, with their own guidance and no help from others. Individuals with autonomous learning skills can identify their own learning needs and reach the sources they need to fulfill these needs. They test the resulting information for bias and manipulation. They then process it with their own skills, attitudes and values. They evaluate the learning strategies used and make conclusions by using new information and new learning strategies (COE, 2016).

The CRDE emphasized the development of autonomous learning skills in children, and activities were planned to support children's learning within this process. The results showed that the CRDE benefited children's autonomy behaviors.

The total DBS mean scores of the experimental group after CRDE showed that their posttest mean scores ( $\bar{x}=181$ ) were significantly higher than their pretest mean scores ( $\bar{x}=125$ ) ( $z=-5,54$ ;  $p<0,005$ ). Regarding the retention test mean scores in the experimental group, no significant increase occurred in the Knowledge of Rights ( $\bar{x}_i=43,3$ ;  $\bar{x}_s=43,5$ ) and Autonomous Behaviors ( $\bar{x}_i=48$ ;  $\bar{x}_s=46$ ) subdimensions and the total score from the scale ( $\bar{x}_i=184$   $\bar{x}_s=181$ ); however, a significant increase was detected in the democratic behaviors subdimension ( $\bar{x}_i=93$ ;  $\bar{x}_s=91$ ) ( $z=-0,3$ ;  $p<0,05$ ). These findings suggest that the positive effects of CRDE on children's democratic behaviors retained their permanence and continued after the program.

CRDE aims to raise 21st century citizens and is based on the theory of multiple intelligences. It therefore strives to serve the nature, characteristics and strengths of each individual in the group; encourages children's curiosity and love for learning; is process-oriented rather than product; is innovative; and taps into students' critical thinking skills. It encourages the values of sustainability and environmental responsibility, as well as participation in society and multiculturalism. The program aims to raise independent, responsible, cooperative, self-aware, sensitive and empathetic individuals with respect for differences.

With its roots in constructivism, the program was developed by using a rights-based approach, which brings together the components of the instructional process, method and materials. It does not ask children to memorize information; rather, it encourages them to learn by doing, to construct, make meaning, interpret and transfer their knowledge when necessary.

Play-based activities have priority, and cooperative educational events in which children work towards a shared goal in pairs and teams are organized. These educational activities are evaluated

together with children, encouraging them to express their feelings and thoughts and to compliment their peers when necessary. Their needs and expectations for future educational events are elicited. Naturally, a program in which children learn by doing, living and having fun in a positive classroom atmosphere with close child-teacher relationships led to an effective process both for the researcher and the children. In an attempt to review children's rights education studies at preschools, Topsakal and Sadıkoğlu (2017) examined studies in preschool education and preschool curricula. They concluded that a very limited number of studies focused on children's rights education in preschools; a rights education program based specifically on children's rights was necessary in preschool education; children's rights education was also necessary for families, teachers and all other individuals that come into contact with children; and there is a need for high-quality scientific studies.

This CRDE program development study is among the few in Turkey that focus jointly on early childhood and children's rights and democracy education. The results showed that the program was appropriate and effective in the early childhood period. It is therefore expected to provide an example to early childhood teachers and researchers.

## CONCLUSIONS

The aim of this study was to examine the effects of an early childhood CRDE on children's democratic behaviors. In order to do so, the researcher developed a CRDE program and implemented it on an experimental group of children for 11 weeks. The results are listed below. The effects of CRDE were analyzed by implementing the Democratic Behavior Scale developed by the researcher on experimental and control groups as pretest, posttest and retention test.

1. Prior to CRDE, no significant difference existed between the pretest scores of experimental and control groups. Based on this, it was concluded that experimental and control groups' democratic behavior levels were similar in all subdimensions (knowledge of rights, democratic behaviors, autonomous behaviors). As the total score from the scale was also similar in the two groups, it was decided that any future difference in the democratic behavior levels could be attributed to the procedures to take place.
2. The posttest mean scores of the experimental and control groups after CRDE showed that the former scored significantly higher in all subdimensions and the total scale.
3. The DBS pretest and posttest mean scores in the experimental group after CRDE revealed a statistically significant increase in all subdimensions and the total scale.
4. The DBS pretest and posttest mean scores in the control group after CRDE showed no statistically significant increase in any of the subdimensions or the total scale.
5. The DBS posttest and retention test mean scores of the experimental group revealed no significant increase in the knowledge of rights or autonomous behaviors subdimensions, a statistically significant increase in the democratic behaviors subdimension, but none in the total mean scores from the scale.

## Recommendations

Recommendations for research:

- In this study, 60-72 month-old preschoolers underwent an 11-week children's rights and democracy education program which was developed by the researcher to instil democratic behaviors in early childhood. The program was confirmed to have a positive effect on 60-72 month-old children's democratic behaviors, and its effectiveness with other age groups awaits further examination.

- Children's rights and democracy education may be tested for its effects on the democratic behaviors of children from different socioeconomic and sociocultural backgrounds and with different developmental characteristics.
- In this study, children's democratic behavior levels were examined with the help of the DBS completed by preschool teachers. As the scale is also fit for parent use, children's democratic behavior levels may also be studied based on parent views, therefore allowing an exploration of children's democratic behavior levels through their families' observations.

#### Recommendations for practice:

- The study showed that the 11-week Children's Rights and Democracy Education program had positive effects on children's democratic behaviors. The implementation of this program may be made widespread by cooperating with the National Education Directorates.
- Preschool teachers may be offered in-service training sessions and seminars on children's rights and democracy education in early childhood in order to guide them as they develop activities and practices to support children's knowledge of their rights and democratic behaviors.
- Children's development is greatly influenced by family attitudes, behaviors and knowledge levels. Therefore, families may be trained in teaching their young children to display rights-based democratic attitudes and behaviors, and in this way support the development of democratic behaviors in them.
- In the national literature, there is a need for sources on children's rights and democracy education in early childhood. Publications may target training academics, teachers and families in "Children's Rights and Democracy Education in Early Childhood". In order to benefit children, illustrated children's rights and democracy books and activity handbooks may be written, and children's rights workshops may be organized.

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