



Attitudes and Challenges on the Development of Democratic Citizenship in Albanian Schools

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Abstract

This study examines the transformative role of teachers in Albania's pre-university education system regarding the development of democratic citizenship. It analyzes professional attitudes, pedagogical practices, and institutional challenges affecting this process, focusing on teacher training and their capacity to cultivate students' civic competencies. Using a mixed-methods approach, the quantitative phase surveyed 1,705 Albanian teachers via Google Forms. This was integrated with qualitative methodologies, including semi-structured interviews, educational document analyses, and secondary research, to identify the drivers and barriers to integrating democratic civic education. The findings reveal high teacher awareness regarding the importance of citizenship development, with educators heavily valuing university education, training, and personal experience. Teachers advocate for greater youth involvement in decision-making. Prominent practices fostering democratic citizenship include group work, classroom debates, public discussions, and community projects. However, significant challenges persist, including a lack of material resources, low student interest, overloaded curricula, insufficient institutional support, and a deficit of specialized civic training. The paper concludes that expanding targeted training, supplying adequate didactic resources, and improving cross-curricular coordination are essential to strengthening teacher competencies. Ultimately, schools must foster a more supportive environment by organizing community-oriented practical activities and addressing contemporary topics to successfully build a sustainable democratic culture.

Keywords: Democratic civic education, transforming role of teachers, pedagogical practice, institutional challenges

1. Introduction

The development of democratic citizenship is a critical challenge for the Albanian education system, which aims to prepare younger generations for active participation in social life. Schools serve as primary institutions where students acquire not only civic knowledge but also the values, beliefs, and practical skills necessary for democratic engagement. Within this framework, the teacher plays a multifaceted role as a knowledge provider, a leader, a role model, and an instigator of critical thinking. In Albania's evolving democratic landscape, this role is both increasingly vital and complex.

1.1 Context and Core Concepts

Democracies rely fundamentally on the active participation, trust, and critical loyalty of their citizens. Education for Democratic Citizenship focuses primarily on democratic rights, responsibilities, and active engagement across the civic, political, social, economic, legal, and cultural spheres of society. As noted by Tamo (1999, p. 1): "A citizen cannot be just an ordinary member of the society. The citizen, from this point of view, is an active member of the human community, skilled to understand and perform the rights and responsibilities as a member of this community."

Consequently, this education serves as an invitation to exercise individual freedom within the boundaries of democratic laws and human rights, aligning closely with international frameworks such as those championed by the Council of Europe.

1.2 Current Challenges and Opportunities

In the Albanian context, civic education faces several structural and pedagogical barriers:

- A traditional lack of interactive teaching practices.
- Limitations in formal, specialized teacher training.
- Overloaded curricula and rigid institutional structures.
- Insufficient support from parents and the broader community.

Despite these problems, Albanian schools are increasingly utilizing active learning methods, such as debates, classroom discussions, role-playing, and group work alongside student school governance initiatives and educational projects. However, implementing meaningful change requires a solid baseline understanding of current classroom realities; without it, recommending future improvements or altering entrenched teaching styles remains difficult.

1.3 Study Objectives, Hypothesis, and Research Questions

This study aims to analyze how Albanian teachers understand, value, and implement democratic citizenship within their daily practices, as well as the institutional and pedagogical difficulties they face.

1.4 Hypothesis:

Teachers have an important impact on the development of the democratic citizenship of students through their professional beliefs, pedagogical practices, and approaches toward the challenges related to civic education.

To test this hypothesis, the study investigates the following four research questions:

1. What are the beliefs of teachers regarding the concept of democratic citizenship and its importance in student education?
2. What pedagogical practices do teachers use to promote democratic values in students?
3. What are the main challenges that teachers encounter in the implementation of education for democratic citizenship?
4. What strategies would help teachers to further develop democratic education in students?

1.5 Theoretical Approach to Democratic Civic Education

1.5.1 The Gap Between the Prescribed Curriculum and Classroom Implementation

One of the most critical challenges in realizing effective democratic preparation within schools lies in the execution phase of educational policies. Specifically, a primary theoretical and empirical challenge in the field of civic education is the persistent discrepancy between the intended (official) curriculum and the implemented one (Losito, 1999). This misalignment affects several dimensions, including the selection of instructional content (Asquini & Salerni, 1992a, 1992b; Agazzi & Berti, 1995), difficulties in achieving prescribed curricular objectives (Benesso & Berti, 1996), and the design of textbooks, specifically how effectively they link general educational themes to pupils' civic development (D'Antonis Onofri & Salerni, 1990; Bacceli, 1991; Lastrucci & Salerni, 1992a).

This gap between theory and classroom reality is not only an administrative oversight; rather, it manifests directly in daily pedagogical practices, where institutional expectations encounter individual constraints. In particular, the literature suggests that the actual time teachers dedicate to civic education is often less than what is mandatory in the official programs. This relies heavily on the individual teacher's personal "readiness" and willingness to engage with these sensitive subject matters (Losito, 1999, p. 7; Print, 2007).

However, blaming teachers' individual predispositions alone would understate the structural limitations imposed by educational systems themselves. This lack of time and personal readiness is often a direct symptom of a broader institutional framework that marginalizes the discipline. This curricular constraint and program overload are further underscored by the Eurydice network (2012), which notes that across many European countries, civic education lacks a distinct, specialized status and is instead integrated within the disciplines, a factor that often lessens its focus and complicates the acquisition of core theoretical knowledge (Eurydice, 2005).

The curricular difficulties and program overload faced by our schools are not unique; rather, they represent a well-known and documented issue across Europe by the Eurydice network itself, stemming from the interdisciplinary integration model.

1.5.2 The Transformative Role of the Teacher and the Shift in Pedagogical Paradigm

This shift in educational paradigms fundamentally redefines the classroom dynamic, placing a renewed emphasis on the teacher's responsibility. Within this context, teachers can no longer be viewed as passive transmitters of information; rather, they are key actors and transformative agents who teach both knowledge and models of democratic behavior (Kerr, 1999). Contemporary educational theories demand that civic education transcend the superficial recognition of political institutions, shifting focus toward developing active sensitivities to social justice, equality, and human rights (Osler & Starkey, 2006). For this process to be effective, global citizenship must move past abstract concepts and translate into tangible actions linked to justice and community service (Davies, 2006).

To bridge the gap between these abstract ideals of justice and the daily reality of students, the choice of pedagogical tools becomes important. Traditional rote learning proves insufficient for fostering such active citizenship. To fulfill this mission, regional and international literature strongly emphasizes the efficacy of active and participatory methods such as debates, simulations, group work, and community projects over traditional, teacher-centered instruction (Print & Lange, 2012).

However, translating these student-centered methodologies into practice often reveals a sharp friction between progressive theory and deeply ingrained educational structures, particularly in developing democracies.

Critical Synthesis: While the Council of Europe (2016) defines democratic civic competence as an intertwined triad of knowledge, attitudes, and skills, the implementation of these interactive methods in the Western Balkans (including Albania, Montenegro, and North Macedonia) frequently wrestles with institutional rigidity. Nevertheless, research confirms that active student participation is directly correlated with interactive methodology and grass-roots community engagement (Berisha, 2018;

Petrova, 2019; Jovanovic, 2020).

When carefully looking into the regional landscape, the data reflects both the immense potential of these methods and the systemic friction they cause when adopted at scale. Nationally, various pilot projects (e.g., UNICEF, 2018) have demonstrated that interactive methods significantly bolster students' empathy and critical thinking skills. However, this shift toward student-centered learning presents major systemic challenges for the teaching profession. It requires educators to master new forms of knowledge, adopt innovative methods, and build collaborative professional relationships with both colleagues and students (Ministry of Education and Sports, Quality Assurance Agency for Pre-University Education [ASCAP], & Council of Europe, 2023, p. 31). As sanctioned by Albanian curricular documents, the subject of citizenship naturally breaks traditional classroom "discipline" because it demands vibrancy, open debate, and the management of diverse student perspectives, thereby integrating naturally with other subject areas (Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth & Institute of Educational Development [IZHA], 2018).

1.5.3 Teacher Competence and Self-Efficacy in Instruction

The shift toward a more dynamic, participatory model of civic learning places a heavy premium on the educator's profile. The successful delivery of civic education is fundamentally conditioned by the degree of the teacher's professional competence. Teaching competence is defined as a complex structure of personal resources knowledge, skills, behaviors, and strategies that a teacher dynamically activates to effectively manage diverse classroom situations (Medley, 1980; Perrenoud, 1998; Tommy, 2005; Haddad, 2009; Al-Asadi, 2016). National standards reinforce this by requiring teachers to be competent in both their specific subject matter and the instructional methods they employ (Institute of Curriculum and Training, 2008), displaying a clear orientation toward interactive, student-centered pedagogies.

This institutional mandate for student-centered pedagogies has clear policy roots in the local context. Albania initially began with training and recommendations for interactive pedagogy in 2005, and three years later, in 2008, transformed this approach into a mandatory national standard for every teacher. The ultimate goal of establishing these rigorous teacher standards is to cultivate a specific set of outcomes in students, transforming them into active, informed members of democracy. Within the modern framework, civic competence is understood as an individual's capacity to integrate knowledge and skills in order to participate and act as a responsible citizen in society, based on the knowledge of major events and developments in national, European, and world history, a critical understanding of social, economic, and political structures, as well as an understanding of the concepts of global development and sustainability. (MAS, 2024, p. 22).

However, fostering such multidimensional citizenship in students requires more than just systemic regulations; it demands a deeper psychological preparedness from the educators themselves. Beyond the technical execution of methods (Sinani & Myteberi, 1997), recent studies highlight the critical role of self-efficacy among pre-service and early-career teachers. Bjorklund et al. (2020) revealed that a student teacher's perception of the relevance of their university preparation program is significantly and positively related to their teaching self-efficacy prior to entering service.

1.5.4 Continuous Professional Development: Formalism vs. Efficacy

The systemic push toward reforming civic education cannot rely solely on initial teacher training; it requires a sustained, career-long commitment to institutional support. To meet high educational standards in civic education, continuous professional development (CPD) serves as the central institutional mechanism (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Guskey, 2000). Professional development encompasses all structured learning activities pursued by teachers beyond their initial training, with the ultimate goal of improving student outcomes (Craft, 2000). In the Albanian legislative framework, Directive No. 16 (dated 28.07.2021) of the Ministry of Education sanctions continuous development as a legal obligation designed to update competencies and ensure quality educational

services mirroring parallel internal quality assurance obligations mandated at the higher education level (Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth, 2021, p. 91).

Yet, the existence of a legal and legislative framework does not automatically guarantee qualitative changes in the classroom. When professional development becomes a mere administrative requirement, it risks losing its transformative potential. However, the literature raises a critical warning regarding the formalism of these training programs. A critical perspective reveals that professional development is frequently abused and reduced to a bureaucratic exercise aimed solely at accumulating credits and certificates, failing to yield any real methodological shift in classroom environments (Mexhuani et al., 2008, p. 26). Additionally, teachers often lack the necessary professional autonomy and institutional backing to effectively embed complex civic themes into their daily lessons (Print & Lange, 2012).

To transcend this superficial administrative trap, educational systems must pivot toward higher-quality, balanced specialization models. To bypass this formalistic barrier, European models advocate for specialized university pathways (such as Master's programs in civic education offered by universities like the University of Strasbourg), which empower teachers across all disciplines to effectively integrate civic principles into their specialties (Vassiliou, 2012). Ultimately, continuous qualification must achieve an optimal balance between the theoretical/scientific needs of teachers and their practical, real-world experiences and self-evaluations (Shakaj, 2012).

This balanced approach to qualification highlights that democratic education cannot occur in isolation; it demands an open, collaborative school ecosystem. As concluded by the Council of Europe (2010) and Birzea et al. (2005), learning within democratic citizenship is a lifelong process that requires a dynamic school culture and the active coordination of a wide network of stakeholders (policymakers, parents, media, and NGOs). Within this ecosystem, the teacher remains the foundational reference point for modeling democratic interactions, attitudes, and values.

This multi-stakeholder paradigm aligns directly with the latest strategic directives in the local educational context, which stress that civic learning must be rooted in external collaboration and the authentic voices of the youth. According to national guidelines, Education for Democratic Citizenship should be developed by establishing partnerships among stakeholders in education for democratic citizenship; by positively valuing the democratic cultures and lifestyles of youth, as well as the very expression and aspirations of students and young people to be heard, transforming this into the foundation of education for democratic citizenship; and by undertaking participatory research and the practical implementation of initiatives and innovations in the field of education for democratic citizenship, for curriculum development and training. (ASCAP, 2025, p. 33).

Ultimately, creating these external partnerships and honoring student voices requires a fundamental shift in how daily lessons are structured. Teachers cannot rely on traditional lecturing to meet these goals; they must operationalize these values through concrete pedagogical choices. As mandated by the core curriculum framework, competency-based teaching requires teachers to select diverse strategies, methods, techniques, and forms of work, as well as to organize learning experiences for students that integrate relevant knowledge with skills, values, and attitudes. (ASCAP, 2025, p. 111).

2. Methodology

2.1 Study design

This cross-sectional study was conducted during the time period of October 2024-October 2025.

2.2 Study setting and participants

The descriptive analysis of the sample, which included 1705 teachers, is provided a clear picture of the demographic and professional characteristics of the participants in the study. The teachers were chosen from the cities of Shkodra, Durrës, Elbasan and Korce, which are among the biggest cities of Albania and represent a relative high number of teachers from all level of education, from elementary

education level to the high school teachers. The teachers were randomly selected to be part of the study and were free to participate.

2.3 Instrument and data collection

In order to collect the data to fulfill the aim of this study, the team used an instrument based on the actual literature on this topic. The authors discussed in detail the questions and tested the final version of the questionnaire in a group of 20 teachers from the city of Kavaje, which is a city close to Durres. The questions were easy to understand and the answers were satisfiable.

The final version of the instrument consisted of four main sections, in order to explore the perceptions of teachers, preparation, practices and challenges related to Democratic Citizenship Education. The first section collected information on demographic and professional aspect, such as gender, age, professional qualifications, teaching experience, and education level where the teachers taught. The second section included the teachers' professional preparation for DCE, focusing on previous training, self-perceived readiness to integrate citizenship topics into their teaching hours, and the sources they acquired relevant knowledge. The third section assessed pedagogical attitudes and civic orientations by exploring the perceptions on the importance of civic competencies, their role in citizenship education, civic responsibilities, and a series of Likert Scales statements measuring beliefs about participation, democratic values, rights, responsibilities, and community engagement. The fourth session investigated classroom practices and challenges related to education implementation, such as teaching methods, strategies, barriers, desired formation, support needed, perceptions and the school activities on citizenship, desire to participate in such activities, and open ended questions that required from the teachers to offer their suggestions for improving citizenship education and to identify the key issues encountered during teaching practice.

2.4 Statistical analysis

For the quantitative phase of the study we used statistical methods to analyze the data collected, all responses were coded and were used in SPSS version 26 database. The data was analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistical methods. Frequencies and percentages were calculated for categorical values, whereas variables measured in Likert scale were done by Mean (M) and Standard Deviation (SD). To examine the relations between the categorical values, we used the Chi-Square (χ^2) test, while the strength of effect size was assessed using the Cramer's V coefficient. Statistical significance was for values of $p < .05$. The results were presented in tabular forms and interpreted in relation to the study objectives and literature on citizenship education.

For the qualitative phase, a purposive sampling technique was used to make sure that the selected teachers had relevant experience in citizenship education and were able to offer valuable information. Data were collected using a semi structured interview, from our students of master degree, trained before how to get information and put it into the online google forms. Statistical and qualitative analyses were conducted using specialized software designed for educational purposes. The qualitative data was analyzed by the thematic analysis, following the Brown and Clarke (2006) six step approach. This mix method approach facilitated the identification of key trends, the perception of teachers, and differences among groups, therefore providing a comprehensive understanding of the DCE inside the educational context.

2.5 Ethical Considerations

Participation in the study was voluntary and all participants were informed in advance about the purpose of the study, the nature of participation and the use of the collected data. Completing the questionnaire was considered an expression of informed consent to participate in the study.

The anonymity and confidentiality of the participants were guaranteed throughout the research process. No data that enabled the direct identification of individuals were collected and all information

was used only for research and scientific reporting purposes. The data were analyzed and reported in aggregate form, avoiding any possibility of identifying the participants or the institutions involved.

Participants had the right to withdraw at any time during the time of the study without consequences. During the implementation of the study, the principles of respect for the person, beneficence, non-maleficence and justice were respected, in accordance with international standards of ethics in scientific research (American Psychological Association, 2020; World Medical Association, 2013).

2.6 Limitations

This study presents several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the results. First, the data were collected through self-reporting instrument, which may influence the results due to social desirability bias and the tendency to give more positive answers. Second, the study relied on teachers' perceptions and did not include direct observations of teaching practices or objective measurements of their competences in the field of democratic citizenship education. Third, the cross-sectional design of the study limits the possibility of identifying cause-and-effect relationships between the variables studied.

3. Results

The study included 1705 teachers from four major cities in Albania. Shkodra (24.3%), Durrës Elbasan and Korça. Most of the teachers work in elementary education level, (46.5%), middle school (24.4%), kindergarten (22.3%), high school level (6.7%).

The sample was dominated mostly by women, with 89.3% and males only 10.7%. regarding the age group, 39.4% of the teachers belonged to the age group 50 years and older, followed by the age 41-50 years old with 34.7%. only 20.1% belong to the age group 31-40 years old and less than 6% are under 30 years old. Regarding the work experience, it follows the same trend, almost half of the sample, 49.1% have more than 20 years of work experience, 26.6% have 11-20 years, 15.1% have 5-10 years, and only 9.2% have less than five years of work experience.

As for the professional qualifications, most of the teachers have post graduate degrees, with 32.8% have professional master degree, 28.4% have scientific master degree, while 17.6 have only a bachelor degree. This shows that most of the teachers have advanced level of education and professional preparation.

The participants are mostly from the urban areas, with 82.2%, while only 18.8% are from the rural areas. This distribution suggests that the sample reflects the views of the urban area teachers, while the views of the teachers who work in the rural areas is less represented.

The data demonstrates that the main source of knowledge among teachers for civic education is personal experience, stated by 1022 teachers, secondly the university studies reported by 686 teachers, professional training stated by 560 teachers and literature studies by 438 teachers.

These findings suggest that teachers' knowledge of civic education is based mainly on practical experience and basic university education, while continuous professional development and self-education through literature have a more limited role. This result is in line with studies that emphasize the importance of professional experience in building teaching competences, but at the same time highlights the need to strengthen training opportunities and access to scientific resources to support the effective implementation of democratic citizenship education (Schön, 1983; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017).

Table 1.

The source of knowledge for DCE	Frequency
Personal experience	1,022
University studies	686
Professional training	560
Literature studies	438

The self-assessment results indicate that teachers report high levels of democratic civic attitudes across all evaluated dimensions. The highest mean score was recorded for the statement “My rights are important; so I should respect the rights of other individuals”, ($M=4.53$, $SD=0.82$), followed closely by “I believe it is my duty to respect laws and rules in society” ($M=4.52$, $SD=0.83$).

Teachers also demonstrated strong support for youth engagement in democratic processes, as reflected in the high rating of the statement “I believe that young people should be more actively involved in decision-making” ($M=4.43$, $SD=0.83$). Similarly, participants reported high levels of understanding regarding the importance of participation in decision-making ($M=4.30$, $SD=0.83$),

However, the lowest score was reported for the statement “I feel that I have influence over the decisions made in school” ($M=3.96$, $SD=0.95$), suggesting that although teachers hold positive attitudes toward democratic participation, they perceive more limited opportunities to exert meaningful influence on decision-making processes within their schools. A similar trend was observed regarding confidence in expressing opinions on issues related to justice ($M=4.11$, $SD=0.96$), which despite remaining positive overall, showed greater variability among participants.

Table 2.

Declarations	N	Mean	SD	Min	Max
I understand the importance of participation in decision-making	1705	4.30	0.86	1	5
I think it is my duty to respect laws and rules in a society	1705	4.52	0.83	1	5
I like to participate in activities that help the community	1705	4.30	0.83	1	5
My rights are important; thus, I should respect the rights of others	1705	4.53	0.82	1	5
I feel that I have an impact on the decisions taken in my school	1705	3.96	0.95	1	5
I feel safe to express my opinion for issues of justice	1705	4.11	0.96	1	5
I think that young people should be more active in decision-making	1705	4.43	0.83	1	5

The findings indicate that classroom discussions are the most frequently used strategy for promoting Democratic Citizenship Education reported by 75.4% of the participants ($n = 1286$). Group projects and collaborative activities were the second in ranking, used by 66.6% of the participants, in the same line with the actual literature emphasizing that discussion, conversation and learning in groups are the most effective ways to develop civic and democratic competencies (Torney-Purta et al., 2001; Council of Europe, 2018).

Almost half of the teachers (50.1% $n=855$), reported using simulations of real-life situations, such as debates or electoral processes, demonstrating an effort to connect learning with authentic experiences and democratic practices. In addition, 41.2% of the teachers ($n=702$) stated that they use technology and the internet into their teaching hours. Previous studies have shown that experiential learning methods and digital tools can enhance student engagement and support the development of skills required for active participation in democratic life (European Commission/Eurydice, 2017).

The least used method was traditional teaching, based mostly on teacher’s explanations, reported only by 18.9% of the respondents ($n = 322$). This result suggests a clear orientation toward the more active methods and student-centered methodologies, which are more appropriate in promoting democratic values, critical thinking and civic participation (Johnson & Johnson, 2014).

Table 3.

Strategies and teaching methods	Yes	No
Traditional teaching (classroom explanations)	322	1383
Use of technology and internet	702	1003
Simulations of the real situations (elections, debates)	855	850
Projects and group activities	1136	569
Discussions in classroom	1286	419

The collected data show that the most commonly implemented pedagogical practices for the Democratic Citizenship Education are classroom debates, reported by 57.5% of the sample (n=981), and work group reported by 56.1% (n=956).

A considerable portion of teachers also reported engaging students in community-based projects (44.4%), while simulations of democratic processes such as elections and debates were used by 40.2% of the total sample. These approaches are considered particularly effective because they offer for the students experiences of democratic participation and civic engagement in the practical context (Torney-Purta et al., 2001).

The least used practice reported was the involvement in student government activities, which was reported by 24.1% of the teachers (n = 411).

According to the Council of Europe, democratic citizenship education is most effective when students are involved actively in discussions, debates, and authentic participation in democratic activities. Similar to this perspective, the findings from Torney-Purta et al (2001) demonstrates that interactive classroom practices are positively associated with the development of students' civic knowledge, attitudes and skills.

Table 4.

Supporting pedagogical practices	Yes	No
Group work	956	749
Classroom debates	981	724
Simulations (elections, public debates)	686	1019
Governmental activities of students	411	1294
Community projects	757	948

The findings indicate that the teachers that have received specific training in citizenship education report significantly higher levels of preparedness for integrating Democratic Citizenship Education topics into their teaching compared with those who have not received such training. Throughout the levels of education, the proportion of teachers who rated themselves as "well prepared" or "very well prepared" was higher among trained teachers.

The difference was particularly pronounced in primary education, where 51.3% of the trained teachers reported feeling "very well prepared" compared to only 18.5% of those without training. A similar pattern emerged in lower secondary education where 36.1% of the trained teachers reported the highest level of preparedness, compared to only 10.0% of untrained teachers.

Statistical analyses confirmed that these differences were significant across all educational levels; preschool education ($\chi^2 = 28.88$, $p < .001$), primary education ($\chi^2 = 105.34$, $p < .001$), lower secondary education ($\chi^2 = 65.96$, $p < .001$) and upper secondary education ($\chi^2 = 17.22$, $p = .002$). Values of Cramer's V vary from 0.28 to 0.40, indicating that a moderate to relatively strong effect of training on teachers' perceptions of professional preparedness.

In general, the association test was statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 222.80$, $p < .001$), while the effect size (Cramer's V = 0.36) demonstrated a substantial relationship between participation in training and perceived preparedness for teaching Democratic Citizenship Education. The findings support international evidence emphasizing the important role of continuous professional development in strengthening the competencies of teachers in implementing democratic citizenship education in teaching practice (European Commission, 2018; Reichert & Torney-Purta, 2019).

Table 5.

Educational levels	Training	Very little %	Little %	Sufficient %	Well %	Very well %	X ² (df = 4)	P	Cramer's V
Preschool	No	8.1	15.0	21.9	41.3	13.8	28.88	<.001	0.28
	Yes	2.2	3.7	24.6	38.1	31.3			
Primary	No	2.6	8.4	15.4	55.2	18.5	105.34	<.001	0.36
	Yes	1.3	1.3	8.0	38.0	51.3			
Lower secondary	No	4.2	18.8	27.2	39.8	10.0	65.96	<.001	0.40
	Yes	0.6	1.9	16.1	45.2	36.1			
Upper secondary	No	11.0	17.1	29.3	28.0	14.6	17.22	.002	0.39
	Yes	0.0	9.1	12.1	33.3	45.5			
Total		3.5	8.9	17.9	43.0	26.7	222.80	<.001	0.36

The results indicate that teachers encounter several challenges that affect the implementation of Education on Democratic Citizenship. The most frequently reported is the lack of material resources, stated by 53.7% of the respondents (n = 915).

Another important issue stated was the lack of specialized training, reported by 44.8% of the teachers (n = 763), followed by the low interest of the students (42.9%; n = 731) and program load (39.7%; n = 677).

In contrary, lack of time is the least reported problem, reported by only 19.6% of the teachers, (n = 334).

These findings are similar to the international contemporary literature, which identifies the pedagogical resources, and the professional development of the teachers, as one of the most important factors for the successful implementation of the Democratic Citizenship Education (Eurydice, 2017; Council of Europe, 2018).

Table 6.

Main challenge	Yes	No
Program Load	677	1028
Low interest of the students	731	974
Lack of specific training	763	942
Lack of time	334	1371
Lack of material resources	915	790

The results further show that teachers consider regular professional training to be the most important strategy for strengthening democratic citizenship education, as reported by 65.3% of the participants (n = 1114). Similarly, 61.6% of the teachers (n = 1051) believed that increased availability of teaching resources would make a substantial contribution to the further development of democratic citizenship among students.

Coordination with other school subjects was identified by 42.8% of the teachers (n = 729), indicating that a considerable proportion of participants view democratic citizenship as a cross-curricular competence that should be integrated across different areas of learning. In contrast, only 27.7% of the teachers (n = 472) considered support from school leadership or the wider community as a strategy, suggesting that this form of support is perceived as less influential than professional development and access to pedagogical resources.

These findings are in line with the international evidence, highlighting teacher competencies and availability of educational resources as the most influential factors in the effective implementation of democratic citizenship education in schools (European Commission/Eurydice, 2017; Reichert & Torney-Purta, 2019).

Table 7.

Main challenges	Yes	No
Regular trainings	1114	591
Didactive resources	1051	654
Support from community, school directory	472	1233
Coordination with other subjects	729	976

4. Discussion

The findings of the study revealed that the primary source of teachers' knowledge regarding democratic citizenship education is their own professional experience, followed by university studies, whereas professional training and scientific literature were reported as less frequently used sources.

These findings suggest that the development of teachers' competencies in democratic citizenship relies primarily on practical experience rather than formal professional development mechanisms. The results are consistent with Schön (1983), theory of reflective practice, which emphasizes the central role of professional experience in the development of pedagogical competence.

However, contemporary research argues that addressing the challenges of modern democracies requires not only experience but also continuous professional development and access to evidence-based knowledge (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017).

The fact that scientific literature was reported as the least frequently used source may indicate partial disconnect between academic research and educational practice, showing the need for effective mechanisms to facilitate knowledge transfer from research into teaching practice.

The study results demonstrated very high levels of democratic attitudes among teachers, particularly regarding respect for human rights, adherence to the laws and rules, and also civic duties. Participants showed especially strong agreement with the principles of mutual respect for rights and importance of civic engagement.

These findings also suggest that teachers possess a strong foundation of democratic values, which represents an essential prerequisite for promoting democratic citizenship among students. According to the Council of Europe's Framework of Competencies for Democratic Culture, respect for human dignity, human rights, and democratic participation constitute fundamental components of citizenship education (Council of Europe, 2018).

The findings also revealed that classroom discussions, group work, collaborative projects, simulations of democratic processes are among the most commonly employed teaching practices. In contrast, traditional instruction based mainly on information transmission is used considerably less frequently.

The results represent a positive indicator for the development of democratic citizenship, as the international literature consistently emphasizes that democratic competencies are most effectively developed through active and participatory learning approaches. According to Torney-Purta et al. (2001), classrooms characterized by dialogue, discussion, and collaboration contribute significantly to the development of critical thinking, tolerance and civic participation.

Furthermore, the relatively widespread use of simulations and community-based projects suggest that many teachers are attempting to establish meaningful connection between curricular content and real-life democratic experiences. This is particularly important because democratic citizenship education is considered most effective when students are given opportunities to experience and practice democracy in authentic context.

One of the most interesting findings of the study relates to the relatively low level of use of students' government activities compared with other pedagogical practices. Only a small portion of teachers reported active involvement in these structures. This result suggests that the potential of student self-governance as a tool for democratic education has not yet been fully utilized. International literature argues that real participation of students in the representation and decision-making processes is among the most important factors contributing to the development of active citizenship

and social responsibility (UNESCO, 2015).

Statistical analyses showed a strong and significant relationship between participation in professional training and self-preparedness for teaching the subject of democratic citizenship. across all educational levels, trained teachers reported higher levels of professional competence than those who were not trained.

The same results are noticed in the current literature, which consider professional development as one of the most important factors for the quality of education in the field of democratic citizenship. According to the European Commission (2018) and Reichert & Torney-Purta (2019), trainings not only affect the increase of professional knowledge, but also in the self-esteem of the teachers to talk about topics related to democracy, civic citizenship, and human rights. The affect size reported in the study show that the effect of training is not only statistically significant, but also practically valuable for the improvement of teaching quality.

The results indicated that the main challenges in the implementation of democratic civic education relate to the lack of material resources, lack of specialized trainings, low interest of the students and the load of program. These findings are similar to the reports of Eurydice (2017) and European Council, which identify the pedagogical resources and professional development as critical factors for the success of democratic citizenship education.

Another key element revealed from our study is the fact that the lack of time is the least reported issue, suggesting that the main problem is not necessarily related to time available, but with the quality of professional and institutional support that the teachers receive for DCE implementation.

In the same line, the majority of teachers identify regular training and the availability of didactic resources as the most important measures for improving democratic citizenship education. This result shows a high coherence between the challenges identified and the solutions that teachers themselves propose, providing clear orientations for policymakers and institutions responsible for the development of the education system.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, it is recommended to strengthen the professional development of teachers in the field of Democratic Citizenship Education, by providing specialized training and integrating this topic into ongoing professional development programs. Trained teachers feel significantly better prepared to integrate democratic citizenship into the teaching process.

At the same time, it is necessary to improve the availability of didactic resources and pedagogical materials, as their lack was the most reported challenge by participants. Providing practical guides, digital materials and structured activities would support the more qualitative implementation of DCE in schools.

It is also recommended to consolidate active teaching methods, encouraging more frequent use of debates, community-based projects, simulations of democratic debates and collaborative activities, which resulted among the most used and most effective practices for the development of civic competences.

To strengthen the democratic culture in school, it is suggested to increase the opportunities for the participation of teachers and students in decision-making processes. In particular, the role of student governments and representative structures, which resulted among the least used practices, should be strengthened.

It is also recommended to increase student engagement through activities related to real community issues and concrete experiences of civic participation, while addressing the relatively low interest reported by some teachers.

Finally, democratic citizenship should be treated as a cross-curricular competence, promoting coordination between subjects and closer cooperation between the school, the family and the community, so that democratic values and practices are reinforced as part of the overall school culture.

6. AI Use Statement

The authors declare that artificial intelligence tools were used during the preparation of this manuscript. Specifically, AI-assisted tools were used for linguistic editing, and clarity improvement. The intellectual content, analysis, interpretation of results, and final approval of the manuscript remain the sole responsibility of the authors.

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