



## An Analysis of High School Students' Participation in Decision Making Mechanisms in Terms of Gender \*

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### Abstract

The aim of this study was to analyze the distribution of male and female students' participation in decision-making mechanisms in high schools and the effect of gender on the reasons that lead to this distribution. Sequential explanatory design was, a mixed method design, was followed in the study. The participants were students in a high school offering mixed-gender education located in a city center in Turkey in the 2016-2017 academic year. 'Decision Making Mechanisms Form' was used to collect quantitative data and descriptive statistics techniques (i.e. frequency and percentage) were used to analyze the data. 'Electee Questionnaire' and 'Voter Questionnaire' have been developed in order to collect qualitative data. Descriptive analysis was used to analyse the data collected in this stage. The results showed that students did not have enough motivation to participate in decision-making mechanisms, there were fewer female students in both being the candidate and being the president/assistant/representative, the proportion of female students decreased as the level of representation in decision-making mechanisms increased, and there were problems in adhering to democratic election principles when selecting representatives at schools. The qualitative data analysis results suggested that students' purposes of being the representative were not in line with democratic values. Male students tended to prefer male candidates. Female students experienced problems both in the process of being the candidate and in the process of doing their job due to their gender. Students, mostly female students, did not make propaganda and did not use democratic propaganda methods. Students had gender stereotypes about women's participation in decision-making mechanisms. Female students are aiming to break down the patriarchal mindset by supporting female students in elections.

### Keywords

Gender  
Political participation  
Student participation  
Decision making  
High school education  
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## Introduction

Over the centuries, it has been believed that some people are superior to others and they should keep their leadership. Kings, emperors, pharaohs, feudal lords, and sultans were all obeyed by the general population. Over time, this innate superiority has changed in a way that it is, now, believed that all people have the same rights. There is no natural superiority in contemporary societies; however, women are usually excluded from this change.

Women's exclusion from decision-making and managerial positions have been discussed both within gender and democracy subject areas because both of these areas object to arbitrary power (Phillips, 2015). Gender is the meaning and anticipation that society and culture put into being women or men (Dökmen, 2014). The concepts of gender and sex are separated when it was understood that womanhood is a social fiction (Çakır, 2007). While sex qualifies biological and physical differences of the body, gender describes the psychological, social and cultural differences between women and men (Giddens, 2000). Due to gender stereotypes (meaning attributed to being a woman and a man by society) and gender roles (responsibilities attributed to women and men), women are expected to be involved in housekeeping and child care while men are expected to be responsible for working outside, bringing home bread, and protecting the family. Having the last word in family, taking positions in managerial positions in business life and taking place in politics and social life shows that men are seen as superior to women in decision making mechanisms. The difference between male and female participation in decision-making mechanisms is one of the most obvious indicators of gender inequality.

On the other hand, democracy is a form of life in which each individual equally participates in the formation of values of coexistence. People's individual behavior, not participating in issues that concern society, jeopardizes democracy (Soule, 2001). The way to democratize democracy is to increase the political participation (Doğanay, Çuhadar, & Sarı, 2007). Political participation is the legal behavior that is aimed at influencing the bureaucracy and political decision-making processes (Çukurçayır, 2006). Actions such as voting, participation in political debate and election campaigns, visiting a political party event or donating money to it, getting organized to solve local problems, signing petition, participation in rallies and demonstrations, participation in non-governmental organizations and participation in propaganda work are the main indicators of political participation (Çukurçayır, 2006; Doğanay et al., 2007).

The training of participating democratic individuals may be possible by participating in decision-making processes in the *family, society and school* (Kim, Flanagan, & Pykett, 2015; Torney-Purta, 2002a). The family is the main social environment which develops individuals' political orientation and involvement in decision-making processes (Kim et al., 2015). Studies show that in the family, men make decisions in important issues, and women make decisions in less important matters (Erbil & Pasinoğlu, 2004). In addition, it has been found that young and highly educated women are more effective in decision making within the family (Çimen, 2012; Erbil & Pasinoğlu, 2004). The low level of participation of women in cases of decision-making observed in the family remains similar in other social institutions. According to the results of the 2016 Global Gender Gap Report, Turkey's 'political empowerment' was ranked 113 in 144 countries (WEF, 2016). The rate of female deputies in the Grand National Assembly of Turkey is 14,57 % (TBMM, 2017a). The rate of female ministers on the cabinet is 7,4 percent (Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Başbakanlık, 2017). As a result of the 2014 Local Elections, the proportion of women is 2,9 percent in the mayoralty and 10,7 percent in municipal assembly (TÜİK, 2016). According to data from 2017, only nine of the 86 political parties in Turkey have female chairmen, and only one has a female co-chairman (Yargıtay Cumhuriyet Başsavcılığı, 2017). Nevertheless, when it is considered that women constitute the half of the population, the ideal representation level should be aimed to reach 50%. However, the ratios above show that women are at a symbolic level in decision-making mechanisms and are far behind the ideal level.

According to Dewey (1996), democracy is learned at schools and classrooms through allowing for applications that relate democracy with daily life. Although there are many applications of democracy, the most well-known and preferred practice is to vote (Doğanay et al., 2007). Students learn about political participation, which is a requirement of democracy, by being candidates and/or by voting (Yanıklar & Eryıldırım, 2004; Torney-Purta, 2002a).

The development of habits that continue in the political system, such as voting, being a candidate, participating in election work, can be explained by their participation in activities related to politics in the social institutions in which they are present during adolescence (Flanagan, 2003). Adolescence is the period in which individuals' world views, values and political orientations are shaped and political socialization is the fastest (Amna, Ekström, Kerr, & Stattin, 2009). Adolescents are signs of change in future democracy (Syvertsen, Wray-Lake, Flanagan, Osgood, & Briddell, 2011). Most of the adolescence period corresponds to the level of high school education within the education system. Based on the explanations above, adolescents' participating in the political activities in the school is important as it gives an idea about the practices of democracy in the future. As a result, in this study, the classroom presidency and the selection of the presidency of the school student council in the high school institutions were examined. In these two elections, students participate as electees and/or voters.

The development of pupils' awareness of electing and being electee depends on conducting elections regularly and properly at the school (Gömleksiz & Cüro, 2011). Research shows that students' participation in democratic electoral environments at school is a determinant of their political participation in adulthood (Flanagan, 2003; Flanagan & Levine, 2010; Niemi & Junn, 2005; Print, 2007; Saha & Print, 2010; Saha, Print, & Edwards, 2005; Torney-Purta, 2002a; Torney-Purta, 2002b; Torney-Purta, Lehman, Oswald, & Schulz, 2001). In a study conducted by Saha and Print (2010), it was found that the students who vote in the school elections feel that they are ready to vote when they are adults, there is an increase in their knowledge of politics, and they develop some skills such as participation in rallies for making politics or preparing slogans. In another study conducted by Torney-Purta (2002a), it was revealed that voting in elections in schools is effective in encouraging young people to vote in their future lives.

Taking part in decision-making mechanisms in schools provides students with positive contributions in many ways. It was seen that students who participated in decision-making mechanisms in high school years actively participated in politics during adulthood (Verba, Scholzman, & Brady, 1995). It has been found that disciplinary problems and substance addiction decrease, leadership skills are developed and academic achievement increases among students who participate in decision making mechanisms (Apple & Beane, 2016; Kirlin, 2002; Marsh & Kleitman, 2002; Mnubi, 2017). Among these students, improvements have been observed in their life skills, such as taking responsibility, communicating effectively, negotiating, organizing, working in collaboration, respecting different opinions, problem solving and compromising; and in their affective qualities, such as self-esteem, self-confidence and in their social status; and it was noted that they gain awareness of democratic processes (Mager & Nowak, 2012; Marriott, 2004).

Taking part in decision-making mechanisms at the school is more important for female students. In a study conducted in Tanzania, it has been observed that in areas where girls have problems such as dropping out of school and getting pregnant at an early age, taking part in school councils has reduced those problems. Students, especially the female students, have increasingly talked aloud about their own rights and interests (Mnubi, 2017). However, some gender-based discriminatory practices at school break girls' courage, prevent them from expressing themselves and participating in decision-making mechanisms (Apple & Buras, 2006; as cited in Apple & Beane, 2016; Duffy, Warren, & Walsh, 2001; Esen, 2013). Yet, for a gender-balanced distribution of decision-making mechanisms in the future; it is important for girls to acquire the skills necessary for politics in their educational life. In Flanagan and Levine's (2010) study it was found that individuals who were not provided enough opportunities and encouragement for their political participation in their educational life show low political participation during their young adulthood. Women who were unable to participate in decision-making

mechanisms in the school environment are at a more disadvantageous position in terms of the development of skills such as communication, organization, rhetoric and leadership, which are necessary for politics. Although the bases of the skills are laid down in the family, such skills are being reshaped, developed or retreated in the educational setting (Ayata, 2011). Female students' participation in decision-making mechanisms at school is important for their active participation in decision-making mechanisms, improving their skills through educational experiences, and increasing their level of representation. Also, it is important for female students to take part in decision-making mechanisms in schools to support their defense in other areas of their lives as well (Parker & Leithwood, 2000; Veugelers & Kat, 2003).

When the literature is examined, it was recognize that there are studies examining participation in decisions at schools (Mager & Nowak, 2012; Özcan & Şeren, 2014); studying student councils (Biçer, 2007; Ceylan-Uyanık, 2009; Doğan, 2008; Emir & Kaya, 2004; Gömleksiz, Kan, & Cüro, 2010; Güven, Çam, & Sever, 2013; Kıncal & Uygun, 2006; Özdemir, 2009; Tezgel, 2006); and dealing with school councils, school presidents and school elections (Alderson, 2000; Kabugi & Tanui, 2014; Marriott, 2004; Mpofu, 2003; Saha & Print, 2010). Mnubi (2017) mentioned school councils formed by paying attention to gender, but did not provide enough information on how this process was created and the support for girls and boys in this process. In studies examining participation in decision-making mechanisms at schools (Combat, 2014; Fuller, 2017; Kamara, 2017; Liang & Peter-Hawkings, 2017; Nichols & Nichols, 2014; Weiner & Burton, 2016), the dimension of school administrators has been examined but there was not a study in the literature investigating the participation of students in decision-making mechanisms in terms of gender. For this reason, the representation status in the decision-making mechanisms of high school students who will soon have the right to vote and be electee has been examined in relation to gender. This research is important for filling this gap in the literature. General Directorate of Women's Status (KSGM) stated in 2008-2013 National Action Plan that girls in education should be encouraged to take part in tasks such as classroom presidency and school representation in order to prepare for empowerment and decision-making processes (KSGM, 2008). This research is also important in showing how effective this incentive is. In addition, this study is significant because it shows whether the elections were made by democratic means, determines whether gender sensitiveness is shown in the elections for decision-making mechanisms such as classroom presidency and school student council presidency, identifies the rates of being the candidate and the selection rates of male and female students and provides an in-depth study of the causes leading to this situation.

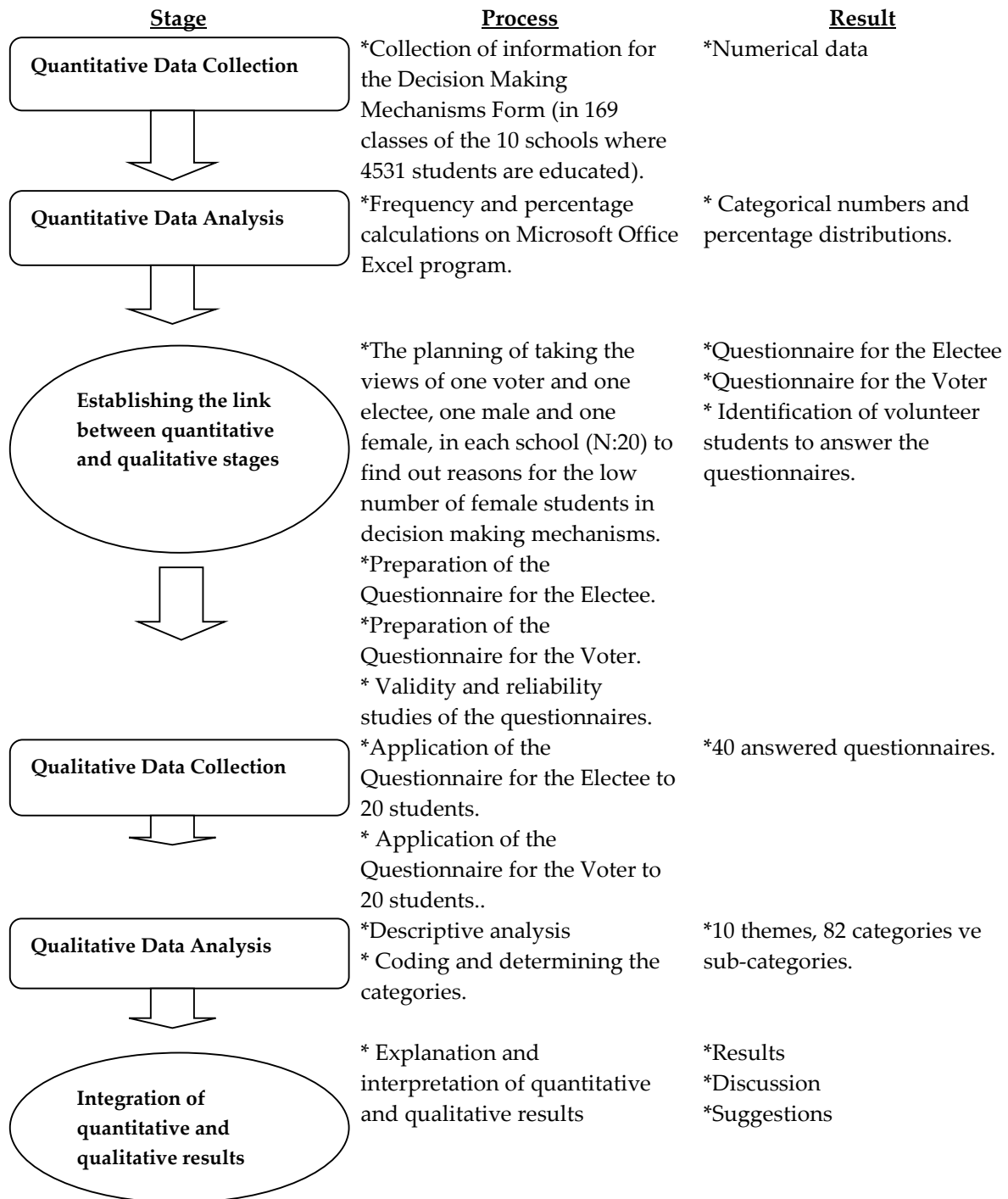
The aim of this research is to examine participation in decision-making mechanisms in state high schools that have mixed-gender education in a provincial center in terms of gender. For this purpose, the study addresses the following research questions:

1. What are the levels of participation in schools in democratic processes?
2. How is the nomination distribution for decision making mechanisms in relation to sex?
3. How is the distribution of participation in decision-making mechanisms in relation to sex?
4. What are the views of the electee students (class president/branch student representative/school student council president) on the influence of gender in the electoral process?
5. What are the views of the voting students on the influence of gender in the electoral process?

## Method

### *Research Model*

In order to find comprehensive answers to the research questions, a mixed method was used in the method variety. First of all, the current situation in the high schools with mixed gender education was determined by using the quantitative method and then, the causes of the emerging situation were tried to be determined by using the qualitative method. Thus, sequential explanatory design was used in the study. The use of this design in the study is illustrated in Figure 1.



**Figure 1.** Steps in Research

A quantitative research methodology was followed in finding answers to the first three research questions and a qualitative research methodology was followed in order to answer the fourth and fifth questions (see Figure 1). The qualitative method provides researchers with rich and in-depth knowledge in identifying socio-cultural issues such as gender, and the issues related to these issues and the factors that cause these problems (Baş-Collins & Yıldırım, 2000). Details of the participants, data collection tools, and analysis of the data is provided below.

### ***Participants of the Study***

The study was conducted at 10 state schools offering mixed-gender education at the high school level of education in a provincial center in the central Anatolia Region in the 2016-2017 academic year. These schools are Anatolian High School (n=4), Vocational and Technical Anatolian High School (n=3), Science High School (n=1), Social Sciences High School (n=1) and Imam Hatip High School (n=1). There are a total of 4531 students including 2457 female and 2074 male students in the scope of the research.

The research was carried out on three study groups. The first working group consisted of 169 classrooms in 10 schools. Classes in which there are no female or male students and classes where classroom presidency is conducted by turns were not included in the research. The second working group consisted of 20 volunteering students electee (class president, branch student representative, school student council president), who were chosen from each of these schools as one girl and one boy. The third working group was formed by 20 voters who voted in the class presidential elections for the 2016-2017 academic year. These students were determined on a voluntary basis from each of these schools as one girl and one boy.

### ***Data Collection Tools and Data Collection Procedure***

**Form for Participation in the Decision-Making Mechanisms:** In this form, which was developed to collect quantitative data, information regarding the number of male and female students in classes, the genders of the class president, the vice president the branch student representative, the methods of determining these representatives and the genders of the candidates was focused. Data regarding this form were collected by the researcher by visiting 169 classes in the company of the vice principal at the school where the data is collected, during the guidance class, in line with the information provided by the class guide teacher and the students.

**Questionnaire for the Electee** There are seven open-ended questions in the questionnaire. In these questions, students' ideas on their purposes of being the president/representative, their qualities that they thought made them suitable for being the president/representative, what kind of support they have received during the nomination process, the effect of their gender on their nomination, gender-based problems they face in the presidency/representation process, and the participation of women in decision-making mechanisms were focused. This questionnaire was applied to 2 students from each school (one class president and one student representative), and to 20 students in total.

**Questionnaire for the Voter:** With the three questions in the questionnaire, students' ideas on the gender of the person they voted for, the reason why they voted for that person, the qualities that they thought made the person they voted for suitable for the presidency, and the participation of women in decision-making mechanisms were focused. This questionnaire was applied to a total of 20 students, as two students from each school.

For the validity of the questionnaires and form, all three of the data collection tools were presented to five experts, three of whom were experts in gender, and two in curriculum development and measurement and evaluation. The pilot study for the Questionnaire for the Electee was conducted with four students, two of whom were class presidents and two of whom were branch student representatives (one girl and one boy in each group). The pilot study for the Questionnaire for the Voter was conducted with four students (two girls and two boys who voted in the 2016-2017 classroom elections). As a result of expert opinions and pilot studies, necessary regulations were made in the questionnaires.

### *Data Analysis*

'Frequency' and 'percentage' were used in descriptive statistics for the analysis of data from the 'Form for Participation in Decision Making Mechanisms' and were presented in tables. Descriptive analysis were used for the analysis of data from the 'Questionnaire for the Electee' and 'Questionnaire for the Voter'. The following steps were taken to conduct the descriptive analysis: (i) The questions on the two data collection tools were set as the theme, and coding was planned to be done under these themes. (ii) The data were read twice, once in general and once in detail, and the categories that could arise were noted. (iii) The coding was done under the themes considering the gender variable, and then, it was examined whether the codes that might be related to each other could form the categories that had been noted. Some codes were merged under the noted categories, and new categories or subcategories were created from the combination of some other codes. (iv) In order to see whether there were any differences between male and female students and to be able to make inferences and explanations about the importance and impact ratings of the emerging categories, the frequencies for the codes were provided. Digitization of qualitative data by giving frequency increases the reliability of data, reduces bias and allows for comparison (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2008).

The validity (a) and reliability (b) studies for the qualitative data are as follows: (a1) The research has been triangulated both in data sources and data collection tools. The opinions of the electee ones and voters who could be the probing parties for the problems were received in order for the causes of the problem to be revealed. Participant confirmation about the findings were received from one female (electee) and one male (voter) student. (a3) Qualitative data collection and analysis processes were explained in detail and codes, categories and themes were presented and described by means of tables. (b1) The researcher re-coded the data four months after the initial coding. In the second coding, some new sub-categories were added and some codes expressed as long phrases were expressed in fewer number of words. (b2) Explanations of participants for each theme were presented directly as quotations. (b3) The opinions of an expert in the field of gender issues were taken for the consistency of codes, categories and themes. As a result of the expert's opinions, three sub-categories were added to the existing categories.

## **Results**

Findings aiming to search for answers to research questions are presented below in five subheadings.

### *1. Findings Related to Levels of Participation in Democratic Processes at Schools*

The information on the level of identifying the decision-making mechanisms by election that should be defined by election at schools is given in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Levels of Participation in Democratic Processes

<b>The Kind of Decision-Making Mechanism</b>	<b>By election (%)</b>	<b>Without Election (%)</b>
Class President and Classroom Vice President	78.1	21.9
Branch Student Representative	50.9	49.1
President of the School Student Council	100	-

When it was investigated whether or not democratic processes work when determining class president, vice president, branch student representative and school student council president in gigh school education institutions, it was seen that 78,1% of the class president and vice-president's appointment were made through elections while 21,9% were made by the appointment of the teacher or the assistant principal and by the classmates' suggestion. While 50,9% of the branch student representatives were determined through election, 49,1% were made by the appointment of the teacher or by the classmates' suggestion. In both cases, the most important reason for not holding elections was

that students were reluctant to be candidates. During the appointment of class presidents, there were no candidates in 18,9% of the classes, and while determining the branch representatives, there were no candidates in 32% of the classes. The school council presidents, however, were appointed through election in all schools.

### 2. Findings about the Distribution of Candidates for Decision-Making Mechanisms by Sex

The rates of candidates for elections by sex are given in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Being the Candidate in Elections by Sex

Elections	Candidates					
	Female		Male		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Class President / Vice President Election	181	43.1	239	56.9	420	100
Branch student Representative Election	109	42.4	148	57.6	257	100
School Student Council President Election	77	45.6	92	54.4	169	100
<b>Total</b>	367	43.4	479	56.6	846	100

Table 2 shows that 43,1% (n=181) of the students who were candidates for the election of class president and vice-president were female students and 56,9% (n=239) were male students. In the election of the branch student representative; 42,4% of the candidates were female students and 57,6% were male students. The students who were the candidates in the election of the Presidency of the School Student Council were the students who were chosen as branch student representatives. 45,6% of the students who were candidates for the presidential election of the School Student Council were female students while 54,4% were male students. In total, the rate of female candidates was 43,4% while this rate was 56,6% for male students. This finding shows that male students were more eager than female students to be candidates for elections.

### 3. Findings on the Distribution of Participation in Decision-making Mechanisms by Sex

Table 3 shows students' distribution of participation in decision-making mechanisms by sex.

**Table 3.** Distribution of Participation in Decision-making Mechanisms by Sex

Decision-making Mechanisms	Female		Male		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Class President	80	47.3	89	52.7	169	100
Classroom Vice President	70	42.2	96	57.8	166*	100
Branch Student Representative	77	45.6	92	54.4	169	100
School Student Council President	2	20	8	80	10	100

\*No information was available for vice presidents in three of the classes.

Table 3 shows that in terms of participation in decision-making mechanisms except for the school student council president, there was not a big difference between male and female students, but still, the male students outnumbered the female students. Although the total number of female students (n=2457) was more than that of male students (n=2074) in the schools, this situation was not reflected in their participation in decision-making mechanisms.

Although democracy is a system that gives priority to equality, this equality was not observed in the representation of male and female students in the school student council presidency. Although the rate of female students in the schools was 54,2%, female students' rate of being the school council president was only 20%.



#### 4. Findings Related to the Opinions of the Electee Students on the Effect of Gender During the Election Process

**Table 4.** The Opinions of the Electee Ones on the Effect of Gender during the Election Process

Themes and Categories	Electee		
	Female	Male	Total
	n	n	n
<b>1.The purpose of being the president/representative</b>			
To manage the class	6	5	11
To achieve class order	2	3	5
To silence the class	2	3	5
Be helpful to the school	-	2	2
<b>2.Features held to be the president/representative</b>			
Leadership	4	5	9
Self-confidence	2	2	4
Effective Oratory	2	1	3
Entrepreneurship	2	-	2
Sociability	2	-	2
Frankness	1	-	1
Being solution-oriented	1	-	1
Having a sense of responsibility	1	-	1
Understanding	1	-	1
Helpful	1	-	1
Quiet	1	-	1
Respectful	1	-	1
Dominant	1	-	1
Predictive	-	1	1
Critical	-	1	1
Decided	-	1	1
Disciplined	-	1	1
Charismatic	-	1	1
Firm	-	1	1
Brave	-	1	1
Honest	-	1	1
Patient	-	1	1
<b>3.Supporting Participants in Presidency/Representation</b>			
Male and female friends	4	6	10
Female friends	5	-	5
Parents	1	1	2
Male friends	-	1	1
<b>4.The Effect of Gender on Being the President/Representative</b>			
Not effective	6	9	15
Effective	4	1	5
<i>Positive effect</i>	2	1	3
<i>Negative effect</i>	2	-	2

Table 4. Continued

Themes and Categories	Electee		
	Female	Male	Total
	n	n	n
<b>5.The Effect of Gender on the Problems Experienced During the President/Representative</b>			
Not effective	7	10	17
Effective	3	-	3
<i>Negative effect</i>	3	-	3
<b>6.Propaganda in the Candidacy Process</b>			
Not making propaganda	7	5	12
Making promises	3	2	5
To gain the confidence of voters by introducing oneself	-	2	2
Building sincere relationships	-	1	1
<b>7.Opinions on Women's Participation in Decision-making Mechanisms</b>			
<b>7.1. They should participate</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>7.1.1. Those who identify some features with women</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>8</b>
<i>They succeed because they think in detail</i>	3	4	7
<i>They act by considering the future</i>	1	-	1
<b>7.1.2. Those with an equitable and rights-based approach</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>6</b>
<i>They should due to equality</i>	3	2	5
<i>To break down the structure of patriarchal thought</i>	1	-	1
<b>7.2. They should not participate</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>6</b>
<i>Women can't do politics</i>	1	2	3
<i>They act emotionally</i>	1	1	1
<i>They can't make deductions</i>	-	1	1

The students expressed that their purposes of being the president/representative were to manage the class, to achieve class order, to silence the class, to be helpful to the school. The words of only two male students (to be helpful to the school) coincided with democratic values. There was no significant difference between the students' purposes to be the president/representative by sex.

Both female and male students expressed that skills such as leadership, self-confidence and effective oratory were important to be the president/representative. Entrepreneurship, sociability, frankness, being solution-oriented, responsible, understanding, helpful, quiet, respectful and dominant were the qualities expressed only by the female students whereas being predictive, critical, determined, disciplined, charismatic, firm, brave, honest and patient were the qualities specified only by the male students. This finding suggests that girls and boys have characteristics specific to their own gender stereotypes. One of the male students' statements about this subject is as follows:

*The fact that I am honest, highly self-confident and patient. (m)*

When the responses of people who supported students during their candidacy for presidency/representation were examined, half of the students expressed that they were supported by female and male friends, and two of them expressed that they had support from their parents. In addition, five girls were supported only by female friends, while one boy was supported by only male friends. This finding suggests that students tend to support their same-sex candidates. The statement of the student who stated that he received support from her same-sex friends during the nomination process is as follows:

*The number of candidates in class was low. The patriarchal boys did not want me to be president, girls wanted. (f)*

When the effect of gender on being class president/branch representative was investigated, the majority of the students stated that there was no effect of their sex for their being the class president/branch representative. Two female students stated that their sex had a positive effect because they were supported by other female students. The reason why female students supported their fellows was the fact that they wanted to work with a class president who could understand them. A male student stated that he was mostly supported by boys and stated that his sex had such a positive effect. Those who stated that their sex had a negative influence were only female students. A female student explained this situation as follows:

*There was a negative effect of my sex. Some boys did not vote for me saying 'would that be you who would support us if we were to have a fight?' (f)*

As the responses show, there is a perception among the students that the people from the opposite sex will not understand or support each other.

The analysis of whether students' gender had an effect on the problems they experienced when they were working as class president/branch student representative suggested that all of the male students and the majority of the female students were not affected by sex. In addition, three female students stated that their sex had some negative effects on their problems and one of them explained the reason for this situation as follows:

*I think that my sex has a negative effect on my presidency. There are many who think like 'how can a girl solve our problems'. They do not do anything I want. They do not care about my words or warnings. Boys are always in competition against girls, and there are a lot of conflicts. (f)*

While female students consider themselves solution-focused (see Table 4), male students think that women will fail to solve men's problems. In addition, the fact that the expression of girls who are expected to obey due to gender stereotypes are ignored by men is an indication that girls' authority is not taken into consideration even if they are in a competent position. The question "what kind of propaganda did you do during the nomination process?" was answered by seven female and five male students as "I did not make propaganda". Both male and female students expressed that they made some promises in the elections. The two male students stated that he gained the voters' trust by introducing himself and a male student stated that he established intimate relationships. These findings show that most of the students - especially female students - do not give enough importance to elections by not making propaganda and do not generally make use of the methods of democratic propaganda.

When the electee students were assessed for their opinions about women's taking part in decision-making mechanisms, eight female and six male students stated that women should take part in decision-making mechanisms. Eight of these students, however, justified these desires by identifying them with gender stereotypes (as women think in detail; they act in the future). Therefore, these thoughts are not based on gender equality. Only six students (4 females, 2 males) expressed an equality and rights-based approach to women taking part in decision-making mechanisms. An electee student who adopted a rights-based approach, as she said, expressed that:

*They definitely should. This is one of the reasons I have become the president - to destroy the idea that male dominance in management is constant - because every individual has the right. This individual cannot be separated as male or female. An individual is always an individual. (f)*

Six students, on the other hand, stated that women should not take part in decision-making mechanisms thinking that they are emotional, cannot use reasoning skills, and cannot do politics. The most important point about this finding is that the two of them are female students who have taken part in decision-making mechanisms in their environment. One of these students said:

*Women can't do politics. I think women can hardly use reasoning because they use their heart when making decisions; they are emotional. But I think that a politician must use the mind. (m)*

### 5. Findings Related to the Opinions of the Voters about the Effect of Gender on the Election Process

**Table 5.** Opinions of the Voters Regarding the Effect of Gender on the Election Process

Themes and Categories	Voters		
	Female	Male	Total
	n	n	n
<b>1.The sex of the person who was voted for and the reason for voting</b>			
<b>Male</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>14</b>
<i>Having leadership skills</i>	2	2	4
<i>Being logical</i>	1	1	2
<i>Being authoritarian</i>	-	2	2
<i>Able to find solutions</i>	-	2	2
<i>Being helpful to the class</i>	-	1	1
<i>Able to silence the class</i>	1	-	1
<i>Being patient</i>	1	-	1
<i>Being trustworthy</i>	-	1	1
<b>Female</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>6</b>
<i>Being experienced</i>	2	-	2
<i>Having good relationships with teachers</i>	-	1	1
<i>Being reliable</i>	1	-	1
<i>Being authoritarian</i>	1	-	1
<i>Being close friends</i>	1	-	1
<b>2.The effect of gender on the vote</b>			
Not effective	8	7	15
Effective	1	2	3
<b>3.Opinions on women's taking part in decision-making mechanisms</b>			
<b>3.1. They should</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>3.1.1. Those with an equality and rights-based approach</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>4</b>
They are equal	1	1	2
They have the right to do so	1	1	2
<b>3.1.2. Those who identify some features with women</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>5</b>
They are organized	2	-	2
They are successful	1	-	1
They are tolerant	-	1	1
They are delicate	-	1	1
<b>3.2. They should do so in line with certain criteria</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>
Pay attention their emotions	-	1	1

When the students were asked 'who did you vote for in the class presidential elections?' and 'why did you vote for that person?' it was seen that fourteen students (5 girls, 9 boys) voted for male students and six students (5 girls, 1 male) voted for female students. This finding suggests that while female students do not care about sex while voting, male students tend to vote for their fellowmen. It has been expressed that the reasons why students have voted for male candidates are that males have leadership skills, and they are useful to class members, able to silence the class, reliable, logical, patient, authoritative and able to find solutions to problems. Some students' expressions on this subject are as follows:

*Because she is able to silence the class. (f)*

*Because he is a logical person. (f)*

*He can handle the class as he is a mature person in terms of his identity and personality, and he is organized. (m)*

The reasons for students indicating that they voted for female candidates included that those candidates were experienced, their relationships with their teachers were good, and they were reliable, authoritarian and close friends. Some students' statements on this issue were as follows:

*She has a good relationship with teachers. (m)*

*I thought she would be the most appropriate person for this job, and she had done it before. (f)*

*Because she is a close friend of mine. (f)*

Students give importance to experience and communication skills for female students to be presidents although they give importance to having leadership skills, being rational and oppressive for male students to be presidents.

When the students were asked 'was the sex of the candidate effective when the class president/branch student representative was appointed?', most of the students (n=15, f:8, m:7) answered that it was not. Two male students responded that 'it was', while a female student expressed her thoughts in the following way:

*Of course, it was effective. I voted for the person who was my fellow to break down opposing ideas. (f)*

As this finding shows, it can be said that female students aimed to destroy the structure of patriarchal thought by supporting their kind.

When asked the question 'What do you think about women's involvement in politics and decision-making mechanisms', all voters expressed their opinion that they should participate. However, they used statements supporting gender stereotypes while justifying their views. An equality and rights-based approach existed in the justification of only four students (f:2, m:2).

### **Conclusion, Discussion and Suggestions**

The results of the present study showed that almost one out of five appointments of class presidents/vice presidents and almost half of the appointments of branch student representatives at schools were completed without elections. The most important reason for this situation was that students are reluctant to be candidates. There were no candidates in approximately one out of five class presidential elections and about one-third of branch student representative elections; the presidents, vice presidents and branch student representatives in such cases were determined by teachers and vice principal of schools. Based on these data, it can be said that the students' awareness of their rights was low. In order to make democratic education reach the desired level, firstly, school administrators and teachers need to internalize the democracy culture and make it a way of living (Apple & Beane, 2016; Gözübüyük-Tamer, 2011); and then, teachers and school administrators need to encourage students to participate in democratic processes. Democracy is not a self-fulfilling mechanism that can be learned spontaneously without any effort (Kuş & Çetin, 2014). The reason for why there were fewer candidates for branch student representation can be that branch student representation elections, which are included in Democracy Education and School Councils Project, began to be implemented at schools in 2004 (TBMM, 2017b); and the consciousness for the implementation of these elections has not fully been formed. In addition, the fact that democracy at schools is perceived as a formal democracy, and that the electee person is not effective in decisions taken at school can be explained by the fact that they become candidates just to realize the election procedures. Thus, the use of the views of the branch student representatives and the head of the school student council while making decisions in schools may contribute to the preference of this task by the students. It can be suggested that students should be encouraged to become candidates and the importance and authorities of the branch student representative and the school council president should be explained to the students in detail. Also, in classes where there are no candidates, the teacher can alternately apply presidency over a certain

sequence (e.g. class list) instead of determining the president. Thus, students who experience the presidency may be more willing to become the president.

In both the class president and the branch student representative elections, four of the approximately 10 students who were candidates were female students. The reason why there were fewer female candidates although there were more female students than male students in classes could be that female students have low confidence in their leadership skills. Research shows that female students internalize the gender stereotypes about that they are emotional and weak (Acar-Erdol & Gözütok, 2017); and thus, they cannot make progress in the hierarchical levels (Neale & Özkanlı, 2010). Therefore, it can be suggested showing leading women who are respected in the society as a role model in order to increase the self-confidence level of female students about their leadership skills.

In terms of participation in the decision-making mechanisms, 47,3% of the class presidents and 42,2% of the class presidencies were female students. Although the number of female students in high school education institutions is more than the number of male students, their participation in decision-making mechanisms is less. Similarly, in Esen's (2013) study, it was found that class presidency/representation and school presidency were separated on the basis of sex. Even though in research conducted (Çuhadar, 2006; Gürbüz, 2006; Kuş & Çetin, 2014), it has been found out that female students perceive democracy more accurately than male students, it can be concluded that female students' inadequacy in decision-making mechanisms is influenced by the fact that women in family and community life have no say while taking decisions. Another finding of this research is that as the level of representation in decision-making mechanisms increased, the number of female students decreased. Female students constitute 45,6% of branch student representatives, but this rate is only 20% in the school council presidency. The representation levels of female students are further reduced in Provincial Presidency. When the list of 14<sup>th</sup> Period Provincial Presidents of Turkish Student Assembly was examined, it was seen that the rate of female students was 14,8%. The four students in Turkish Council of Presidency are males (Ministry of National Education [MEB], 2017). The low level of involvement of female students in student councils, which are influential in the concept of the importance of election and voting of students (Gömleksiz & Cüro, 2011), may cause inadequate representation of women, who constitute half of the community life, in decision-making mechanisms in the future. It may be suggested that girls should be encouraged to participate in decision-making mechanisms and to make propaganda for the elections of the school council presidency in order to avoid this situation in the future.

When the opinions of the electee students on the effect of gender during the election process were examined, it was seen that there was no significant sex-based difference in the students' purposes of being the president or the representative, their purposes did not overlap with democratic values, and they want to be the president due to a desire of power. However, the attitudes of the participants in democracy should be protesting something that they find unfair, and challenging stereotypes like social classes, gender, race, and disability (Apple & Beane, 2016). These ideals were not found in the purposes of being the president of the students except for two students. For the solution of this problem, students may be asked to write a 'motivation letter' during the candidacy process. Written letters can be assessed by a commission created by the students and students with democratic aims can be made candidates.

The characteristics that the students think make them suitable for the presidency/representation are in line with gender stereotypes. In the process of being nominated for the elections, while male students were mostly supported by friends of both genders, girls were most supported by their female friends. The reason for this was that male students did not support female candidates due to their perception that their problems cannot be solved by girls. This result may be the reason why girls were less likely to be candidates than boys.

Only female students experienced problems due to their genders both in becoming the president/representative and in the problems encountered while performing this task. It was found out that even if girls were in authority, their authority was not adopted by male students. In Özkanlı and White's (2009) study with senior management in universities, it was revealed that men did not face

difficulties while rising to managerial positions, but women did. When these two researches are evaluated, it is seen that different stakeholders in education (student, teacher, manager) have experienced a similar gender regime in decision-making mechanisms.

Most of the students - predominantly female ones - do not give importance to elections by not making propaganda, and those who make propaganda do not use democratic propaganda methods. This result may explain the low rate of female students becoming the president/representative. It can be concluded that the reason why girls do not make propaganda is that they are hesitant to take the initiative. UNICEF (2003) revealed that as a consequence of the restriction of the behavior of the girls and the suppression of their behavior in school, they avoid behaviors that draw attention to them, being involved in decision-making processes, asking questions and participating in discussions. In order to solve this problem, it can be suggested that by organizing debate activities in schools, especially girls should be encouraged to explain their own opinions and different opinions.

Most students have gender stereotypes about the participation of women in decision-making mechanisms. There are significant differences among the electee female students about women's participation in decision-making mechanisms. There are those who are aiming to change patriarchal structure by taking part in decision-making mechanisms, as well as those who see women as inadequate to take part in decision-making mechanisms. Gender-based problems experienced by electee female students can be effective in their thinking that women cannot succeed in decision-making mechanisms. The participation of girls in decision-making processes and their relation to politics are weakened by the use of rewards and punishment methods in various learning processes. In such environments, girls can internalize these thoughts by thinking that politics is not according to them; it is a 'male thing' (Ayata, 2011). In order to destroy these gender stereotypes internalized by the students, it may be suggested that the examples of female politicians such as Benazir Bhutto, Indira Gandhi, who are successful leaders in countries where women's rights are limited and their achievements can be taught.

When the opinions of the voters on the effect of gender during the election process were examined, it was found that female students did not take a sexist approach in voting while almost all male students preferred their fellows. However, they did not have an awareness of this preference of theirs (the number of male students who voted for a male candidate: 9/10, the number of male students who said that they were not influenced by the sex of the candidate: 7/9). This result also explains why the ratio of female students in the presidency/representation is low. In a study conducted by Arar (2014) at a high school in Israel, it was seen that both males and females supported male candidates. As a reason for this, it was shown that girls were considered emotional while voting and that the physical appearance of men was a criterion for voting.

While students consider qualities such as leadership and being repressive and rationale to be important that male president/representative candidates should possess, female candidates are expected to possess qualities such as experiences and communication skills. The female students who vote, aim to destroy the structure of patriarchal thinking in decision-making mechanisms by supporting females. Although the voters seem to be more positive than the electee ones about women's participation in decision-making mechanisms, when grounding this situation, they do not have an approach based on rights and equality, but on gender stereotypes. In the research by Güven et al. (2013), one of the problems experienced in the execution of 'Democracy Education and School Council Project' was expressed as having adopted the patriarchal family structure of the students.

This research is limited to the data collected from the mixed-gender state high schools in a province in the Central Anatolia Region. Therefore, it is not possible to generalize the findings to all of Turkey. For future research, it can be suggested that by using appropriate sampling techniques, data could be collected throughout Turkey and private high schools could also be included. Another limitation of this study is that as decision-making mechanisms, class presidency, vice presidency of class, branch student representation and school student council presidency determined by student elections in schools were examined. In other researches to be done, the processes of participation in all

decisions at schools (instructional decisions, administrative decisions, social clubs, student councils, etc.) can be examined in terms of gender. In this research, although the focus was on the relationship between the participation in decision-making mechanisms at schools and gender, it was also found that electoral practices in schools are done without taking democratic principles into consideration, students are reluctant to be candidates and their aims of being the president do not coincide with democratic values. For future research, it may be suggested examining the protection of democratic principles in practices of democracy in schools.



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