

# Innovation in Higher Education: Diffusion of Linguistic Democracy in Language Teaching

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## Abstract

The present study is a focus on the importance of linguistic democracy in English Language Teaching (ELT). The paper discusses the need for utilizing democracy in the educational practices in language teaching. The study is a qualitative case study. Data were collected using interviews, classrooms observations and fieldnotes. The present study examines the conceptions of three participants, university lecturers who were chosen from three faculties, on the role of democracy in language teaching. Additionally, the paper presents the impact of the lecturers' conceptions on their practices in classrooms. In accordance with the obtained data, it was observed that there is a limited knowledge on understanding the role of democracy in language teaching. This was clearly manifested in the classroom practices.

## Keywords:

Democracy, language teaching, education, equality, diversity, participation, choice, cohesion, case study.

## تجديد في التعليم العالي: نشر الديمقراطية اللغوية في تدريس اللغة

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## خلاصة البحث

إن هذه الدراسة تركز على أهمية الديمقراطية اللغوية في تدريس اللغة الانجليزية. يناقش البحث الحاجة لتطبيق الديمقراطية في الممارسات التعليمية. تتبع الدراسة المنهج النوعي لدراسة حالة – تم جمع البيانات عبر المقابلات – المشاهدات الصفية والملاحظات الحقلية. شارك في الدراسة ثلاثة مشاركين – أساتذة جامعيين تم اختيارهم من ثلاث كليات – تم بحث مفهومهم لدور الديمقراطية في تدريس اللغة – إضافة إلى ذلك وضحت الدراسة أثر مفهوم الأساتذة المشاركين على ممارساتهم التعليمية الفصلية. وفقا للبيانات التي تم جمعها اتضح أن هناك دراية محدودة لفهم دور الديمقراطية في تدريس اللغة – وقد كان ذلك واضحا في الممارسات الفصلية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الديمقراطية، تدريس اللغة، التعليم، المساواة، التنوع، المشاركة، الاختيار، الاندماج، دراسة حالة.

## . Introduction

### Understanding Democracy

The word "democracy" is derived from the Greek word "demos" or "people"; it can be defined as "government in which the supreme power is vested in people" (Ravitch & Viteritti 2001:34). In some societies, people directly practice democracy; in big societies, democracy is applied by people's elected agents. The word "democracy" is a well-known word. However, this concept is misunderstood and misused by dictators, single-party regimes and military leaders who claim the implementation of democracy. Despite the fact that the two terms "freedom" and "democracy" are used interchangeably, they are not synonymous. Democracy is considered a series of ideas and principles concerning freedom (ibid: 35; Grigsby 2005:165; Gurr 1980:221). Additionally, it includes all the practices and procedures that have been used during a long history. Democracy relies upon literate knowledgeable citizens who have access to information; thus, they are able to involve in the public life of their society and able to criticize any unwise or oppressive policy by their government. The elected representatives of the citizens depend mainly on uncensored idea, data and opinions. Moreover, citizens are able to practice free speech; they are openly and publicly able to express themselves in speech and writing. However, this puts democracy under a big challenge in which the government must create balance between freedom of speech and countering speech that encourage violence. The core of the democratic action is based on peaceful, active participation of citizens. Democracy is considered a process; it is a system of living and working collaboratively. This system demands a set of actions that includes cooperation, compromise and tolerance. Democracy is an

approach of believing that all people despite their differences are equal in rights (Green&Luehrmann 2004:2; Weiner 1967:20; Nyerere 1967:21; Mail 1992:40).

### II. Research Questions

1. What are the teachers' conceptions on the role of linguistic democracy in language teaching?
2. What is the impact of the teachers' conceptions on their practices in classrooms?

### III. Literature Review

#### A. Understanding Education

Education is considered a fundamental element in any democratic society. There is an explicit relationship between education and democratic values. The educational principles foster all democratic practices in any democratic society. Any positive social and political change lies in the hands of its educational citizens. The educational system must not be considered as a means of teaching students by an democratic government; all resources must be merely devoted to education. Knowing and fully understanding democracy starts in schools. Through different stages of education, people will realize the social and political arrangements and ultimately the true meaning of freedom (Ravitch&Viteritti 2001:11; Alexander 1995:59)

Life is a continuous process; it is a "self-renewing process". While physiological life is a continuous through nutrition and reproduction, social life is continuous through education. The transmission of communication is done in education; this communication is a system of sharing experiences. The necessity of formal teaching and learning increases with the complexity of societies whether in structure or resources. This proves that education is a necessity of life. The word "education" refers to a process of leading or bringing up. There is a direct outcome of this

process in the mind. Hence, education is considered a shaping, forming and molding activity. Education can be defined technically as a reconstruction or reorganization of experience. It has a direct impact on all stages of life because it can direct the path of all the subsequent experiences (Dewey 1930:28; Thomas 2013:32)

#### B. Education, Language and Democracy

Democracy represents a comprehensive view; it must be considered an associated mode of living rather than merely a view of political democracy. It must be strived for on all aspects of life; political, economic, educational, scientific, artistic, religious and familial institutions. Any democratic model in any society must be established in a literate and engaged citizens (Bacon 2010: 2). Literacy is considered a basic principal in building a democratic society. This democratic education can be reached by doing the following steps. Firstly, the education system must not provide only education for all citizens but take serious steps to give high level of education. Secondly, the educational system must give its citizens the power of freedom in selection and accomplishing their life projects; this will promote the growth of their individuality. Thirdly, any educational system that seeks to reaching a democratic level must expand the students' interests. The barriers between classes and creating a wide scope of interests must be broken to cover history, sciences, painting, music and literature (Chomsky 2000:13; Lambert 1998:3 ;Burnham 2004:29). Dewey (1938: 36) states a fundamental distinction between schooling and education. Schooling in itself does not lead to a democratic education. Schooling gives economic and vocational influence in the society. In his theory, Foucault (1995:150) stresses that the society includes highly complicated forms of

impediment that detain all kind of enforcement for the people in the society. In this circular detainment, the school's mission is to assist in amending this track. Hence, all the educational institutions target, in all the teaching and learning practices, must be to create a new freedom space, making it totally different from all the confinement centers in the society.

Language teaching is considered a significant site for creating democratic citizenship. There is a reciprocal relationship between democratic citizenship and studying language. The first site is in implementing curriculum that includes topics such as peace, gender, racism, social and cultural movements; such topics will stimulate students to indulge in debates and critical analysis (Callahan 1998:3). The second site, in which studying language is strongly connected with democratic citizenship, is the communicative methods used in language classes. Establishing communicative language classrooms will create learners who are able to express their point of view, construct ideas and reach new ways of thinking (Audigier 2000:26). The third site in which language learning is connected with democratic citizenship is studying culture. Studying other cultures will lead learners to elaborate different political and religious perspectives and ideological modes (Legendre 1998:16).

#### C. Conceptual Framework

The framework is on based five main concepts of democratic theory in education that were proposed by Perry (2009:11). The five concepts are equality, diversity, participation, choice and cohesion-as mentioned in diagram 1. This framework is an educational policy that must be followed to create a democratic education. Perry (ibid:11) considers these five concepts a criteria for designing,

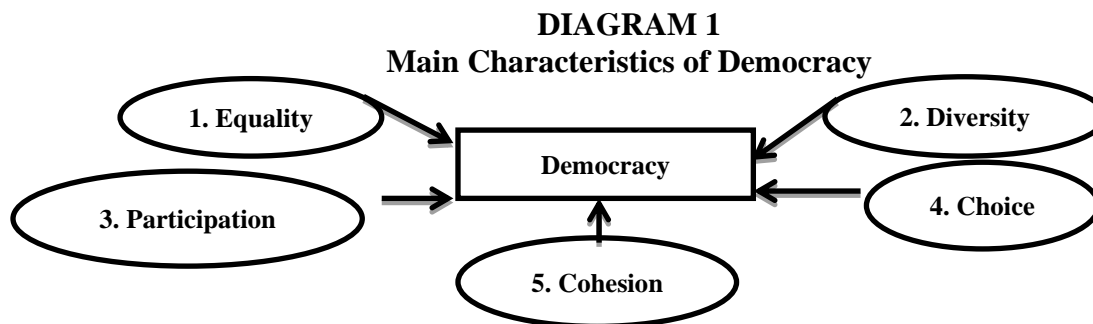
analyzing, evaluating and comparing different education policies. The first concept is equality; it is considered significant in maintaining that the social mobility is dynamic. It refers to the educational policy in giving all people equal opportunities to study and equal outcome in the educational process in teaching and evaluation. Additionally, on the micro-level the concept of equality is a critical criterion. Regardless of the student' nationality, gender and religion, they must be treated equally by their teachers. This must be manifested in the students' relations, the status of the teacher and the status of the students. Equality must be given for all students equally (Dewey 1938:18; McAninch 1999:65; Hansen 2002:270; Sorensen 1996:90). The second concept is diversity; it is an important concept as many societies confront the immigration issue. This concept refers to variations in opinions, lifestyles and modes of thinking. This can be seen in the students' various interests and academic characteristics. The concept of diversity can also be seen in the educational policy as it provides diverse educational services. In the educational micro-level, diversity can be seen in the students' diverse cultural backgrounds, different academic needs, and different personal interests. This diversity must be fostered by the teachers in class to consider all opinions and avoid treating different opinions as outsiders and show respect for all views. Diversity provides academic richness and intensifies the academic standards. Teachers must be trained to

The last concept is cohesion which is connected with solidarity and trust in the society. It creates strong bonds among the society's members. In the educational system, there are various programs that create cohesion among students, future citizens and minorities. In classrooms, the

reach this level of considering diversity in their teaching (Schultz 2007: 100; Perry 2009:20; Kymlicka 1995:170; Strong-Boag 1996:132; Giroux & McLaren 1986:223).

The third concept is participation. This concept can be seen in the educational policy in the involvement of stakeholders, teachers, parents and students in the funding and formation of education. Additionally, participation can be seen in the establishment of various unions and councils of teachers, students and parents in which they can present their opinions without any discrimination. In classroom setting, participation is critical since it is connected with the educational decision-making methodology and the students' self-determination process. This can be seen clearly in the students' evaluation of the teaching process which aid teachers in amending the pedagogical methodology. This concept of participation can lead students to reach the level of active learning rather than passively receiving and saving knowledge (Poduska 1996:118; Ladson-Billings 1998:10; Davies 2006:6; Sorensen 1996:89; Levin 1998:59). The fourth concept is choice; this concept refers to the students' right to choose the topics and subjects that interest them. This will lead them to have the freedom in expressing their own opinions. Additionally, students will respect their preferences and have self-determination in their life in the future (Hern 1996:111; Mercogliano 1998:85).

concept of cohesion must be practiced by teachers by giving the students the opportunity in participating, trusting each other and working for a goal. This means that students must accept their differences and accept each other



#### IV. Methodology

##### A. Qualitative Case Study

This study is a qualitative case study. Qualitative studies are concerned with fieldwork in which the researcher meets people in the site to make observations and records behaviors in the actual setting (Ragin 1997:30; Yin 2014:31). Because human behavior is influenced by the actual sitting, the researcher must conduct the study in real situations to make observations especially in education (Gulsecen&Kubal 2006:98). The procedures of a qualitative research is inductive that enables the researcher to make concepts, abstractions and hypotheses from the gained details.

##### B. Participants

Three participant are used in this study; lecturers from the university of Basra-Iraq. They were chosen randomly from three faculties. To avoid mentioning their real names, pseudonyms were used in the

Thus, the primary instrument is to make the data collection and finalizing the analysis; all these steps are done by the researcher without using questionnaires or machines. In this study, the data was collected from multiple sources: interviews, direct observations and documentation. To understand the teachers' understanding of linguistic democracy and its role in language teaching, several interviews were conducted. For comprehending the impact of the teachers' conceptions on their teaching practices, field observations and fieldnotes were used in this study

study. All the permissions were taken before starting the study. The full information of the participants and their background is mentioned in table.

**TABLE 1**  
**PARTICIPANTS' BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Name	Field	Level of Education	Graduation Faculty
Fiona	English	Doctorate degree (PhD)	Faculty of Arts
Karl	English	Doctorate degree (PhD)	Faculty of Education

## V. Findings

To assess the lecturers' perception on linguistic democracy in language teaching, the first research question: "What are the teachers' conceptions on - the role of – linguistic democracy in language teaching?"- was divided into two sub-questions:

i. What is your perception of the word "linguistic democracy" in other words "what comes to your mind when the word "linguistic democracy" is mentioned?

For Anna, "I directly think about having many political parties and that I am free according to my beliefs to join any party". While Karl commented, "Well, I believe that this word "democracy" means that people are equal to one another. All citizens are treated equally and fairly by the government". Fiona's understanding was different: "for me democracy means safety. It is to be safe from any violence and any crime by the government or any party".

ii. What is your understanding of the main characteristics of linguistic democracy in language teaching?

For the second sub-question, the lecturers Anna and Fiona mentioned, "I think it refers to providing the basic needs and necessities of life". Karl said, "I believe that the main characteristics of democracy are connected with regular elections".

Through the collected data by using interviews, observations and field notes, I noticed that there is a lack of understanding the meaning of linguistic democracy in language teaching; poor information inhibits teachers' implementation of democracy in their classrooms. This was apparently manifested in their teaching practices.

## VI. Discussion

In the light of the results, it is clear that there is a lack of understanding the meaning of linguistic democracy in language teaching. The focus of the educational program is on the content courses and on evaluation. Teachers have limited knowledge on the role of linguistic democracy in language teaching because they concentrate on the content courses. This point is consistent with what was mentioned by Dewey (1927:5) in his stress on the significant link between education, language teaching and democracy; education and language teaching will have positive effects on the whole society by making visible link with democracy. Dewey (ibid: 5) states that education in democracy "represents a broadly based and lifelong embrace of learning". Many scholars confirm the powerful effect of the whole educational system in connection with increasing the teachers' knowledge (Cochran-Smith 2006:120; Hansen 2008:12; Sockett 2008:45; Hatano&Oura 2003:27; Williamson McDiarmid& Clevenger-Bright 2008:134; Hagger& McIntyre 2006:85).

The educational system must seek to uncover knowledge that could be critical in the development of the educational process especially in language teaching; the criteria must be to equip teachers with interdisciplinary knowledge. This will transform the overall orientation of education as new genres will emerge in which more systematic attention is given to understanding the importance of linguistic democracy in language teaching. Additionally, the results showed lack of understanding the main characteristics of linguistic democracy in language teaching. The treatment must be considered under two headings: student teaching and teacher teaching.

The former should include applying all the components of democracy and linguistic democracy in education and language teaching; this can be done by considering it the basis of successful teaching, exploring new paths and developing a different approach in application. This finding is congruous with numerous researchers who understood the importance of reshaping the students' understanding of democracy and linguistic democracy (Munck 2014:2; Behrouzi 2005:114; Cohen 2002:35; Davies &Lundholm 2011:81).

The latter should include an approach that can familiarize teachers with the main characteristics of democracy and linguistic democracy in education. This approach cannot be effective without having sufficient background information concerning democracy. What can make this approach unique is to introduce teachers to democracy through a series of training strategies to hone their understanding on democracy in education. This point is in agreement with what was emphasized by many researchers who stressed that the teachers' broad knowledge on democracy can help students to realize democracy from different perspectives and demonstrate this understanding in their actual learning sitting- in classrooms (Stengel 1997:590). Teachers will be able to understand what is involved in becoming democratic in classrooms. Furthermore, they will be able to discuss and apply the principles of democracy which involves participation and equity issues in classrooms.

## VII. Conclusion

In conclusion, it is significant to look at democracy and linguistic democracy from different lenses. Regardless of being a familiar concept for all people, this concept must be implemented as part of all pupils' education. It cannot be sufficient to develop standards and teaching methods as the

educational system is not implementing the concept of democracy in education generally and linguistic democracy in language teaching specifically. The first step in this implementation is training teachers by using special educational programs concerning democracy; this can enrich teachers to alter their instruction methods. Higher education institutions must play a strong role in disseminating democracy in education. This step will significantly change the educational culture.

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