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**Journal of Applied Sociology**

E-ISSN: 2322-343X

Vol. 32, Issue 2, No.82, Summer 2021, pp. 71-90

Received: 24.12.2019 Accepted: 13.10.2020

**Research Paper**

**Democracy and Education: Testing Rival Perspectives  
(A Comparative Study of Cross-national Data from 1970 to 2018)**

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**Introduction:**

The study of the relationship between the educational system and the political system has been one of the main concerns of sociologists in different eras (Bobba & Coviello, 2007). An important part of these studies has directly or indirectly emphasized the effective role of education in the emergence of democracy as one of the rudimentary conditions of democracy. Another part of studies has concluded that the relationship between education and democracy is inverse and democracies based on their internal logic have sought to make education a public good. Another view considers education as a factor of reproduction, both in the political system and in the class as an important element in preserving the status quo. Finally, another group of studies has attributed the relationship between education and democracy to a third factor -- economic infrastructure. In contrast to the mentioned studies, which believe in the relationship between education and governance, some studies reject the real relationship between these two constructs or at least parts of them. For example, Acemoglu et al. (2005) as well as Bobba and Coviello (2007) showed with some statistical controls and econometric methods that education and democracy are not related. Barro (1999, p. 170) also showed that relationships are different in terms of educational indicators and educational inequality. He showed that the average years of education of people aged 25 and over as well as the gender gap in the education of men and women aged 25 and over were not significant regarding the relationship between education and democracy. Also, Loot (1999) paradoxically showed that the high levels of authoritarianism, the high levels of democracy, and increasing opposition to sovereignty were associated with the high levels of educational spending. The second group of studies, namely the group regarding the lack of correlation between education and the political system especially democracy, is not widely accepted for various reasons. On the one hand, in theoretical discussions, theorists have paid attention to the relationship between these two variables in different ways, and almost few of them have rejected the existence of a relationship between these two variables. Besides, empirical studies have emphasized the existence of such relationships. Even in these studies, the lack of a relationship of some indicators has been considered, and researchers have talked about the methodological flaws of these studies. Therefore, the validity of such findings is questionable. According to these contradictory findings, the present study aims to investigate these theoretical and empirical claims using longitudinal data during the years 1970 to 2018 for 208 countries. The use of the longitudinal data can provide us with strong pieces of evidence for the rejection or approval of any of the above perspectives. So, the present study seeks to answer the question of the relationship between education and democracy in an attempt to investigate which could have a greater impact on the other. Does education have a reproductive role, or does democracy need the education to persist or both? Can the claim based on the superstructure status of education and democracy be confirmed?

**Material & Methods:**

The present study was cross-national research in which the unit of analysis was a nation (country), and the research hypotheses were tested using the secondary analysis of the existing data. Also, due to the longitudinal nature of the data, the average has been used in the analysis. The research

sample of the study included 208 countries in the world. The data were mainly taken from the reports of national and international organizations. The reliability of the data was described in detail by the relevant organizations. The validity of the data was also based on face validity so that the opinions of relevant experts were used.

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Ahmadi, H., Hemati, R. (2021). Democracy and education: testing rival perspectives (A comparative study of cross-national data from 1970 to 2018). *Journal of Applied Sociology*, 32(2), 71-90.



### Discussion of Results & Conclusions:

The main question of the research was the emergence of rivalry perspectives on the relationship between the type of political regime (degree of democracy) and education. The results confirmed the direct effect of education and democracy on each other. The asynchronous data showed that the degree of democracy had a greater impact on education. Also, the research findings did not confirm the views of reproduction theorists on the reproduction of each of the variables of democracy or education by the other. In addition, the role of class inequality in the spurious correlation between the two variables was not confirmed. Therefore, assuming the Gini coefficient as an indicator of class inequality, the view based on the superstructure relationship between the two variables was not confirmed.

Finally, the combined model of the effect of democracy on education through various variables was confirmed. According to this model, democratic governance, by reducing economic inequalities and redistributing wealth through a system of taxation and production of public goods, reducing the ratio of students to teachers in the classroom, and reducing students deprived of education significantly affected education and the educational system. Among these paths, the path of economic inequality was the weakest while the path of reducing students deprived of education or expanding public education was the strongest path of influence. Perhaps one of the main reasons why democracy did not lead to an increase in literacy by creating economic equality was the high tendency of capitalist countries towards democracy. The coexistence of democracy and capitalism as an economic system based on economic inequality has led such political regimes to seek the necessity of the continuation of democratic rule in other ways, one of which is to choose the path of improving school indicators. The school as a system for promoting democratic values as well as the values of the economic and political system in such countries can, on the one hand, help provide the workforce needed by the system while, on the other hand, promote low-cost and useful values of the democratic system. In general, the results showed that the relationship between democracy and education was more complex than can be explained by simple and reductionist analysis, so it is needed to pay attention to the mechanism of influence of intermediate variables that were examined in previous studies as occasional, separate, or cross-sectional. Some of these variables lie within the educational system or political mechanisms, and some are outside the system.

**Keywords:** Education, Democracy, Inequality, Educational Inequality.

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