



JSSE

Journal of
Social Sci-
ence Educa-
tion

2024, Vol. 23(1)

Edited by:
Reinhold Hedtke
Johan Sandahl
Andrea Szukala

Article

Students' participation in democratic school management: A systematic literature review

Inês Sousa^a, Elisabete Ferreira^a

^aCentre for Research and Intervention in Education, Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, University of Porto, Porto, Portugal

Keywords: educational policy; democratic management; high school; student participation; systematic literature review

- Empirical research on student participation in school management has increased significantly in recent years.
- Countries have local and specific education policies that define student participation in school management.
- Education policy defines places for student participation, but there are sociocultural barriers in the governance structure.
- Student participation in school management is mostly in student councils, through class representatives, and only as an advisory body.
- Students create new movements and initiatives, with practices beyond the conventional and formal at schools.

Purpose: To know and study the participation of young students and their voice in decision-making in their schools in a competitive education regulated by excellence. To understand if and how students are involved in the democratic management of schools, given that these young people are involved globally, with an active participation in society.

Design: A systematic literature review on student participation in democratic school management, identifying empirical studies from various countries with different theoretical frameworks and methodologies.

Findings: There are several democratic practices and experiences of student participation in schools, despite sociocultural barriers in some countries. However, the participatory and democratic discourses identified in schools, including those in educational policy, do not directly impact the possibilities for students to participate in decision-making.

Corresponding author:

Elisabete Ferreira, R. Alfredo Allen, 4200-135 Porto, Portugal. E-Mail: elisabete@fpce.up.pt

Suggested citation:

Sousa, I., & Ferreira, E. (2024). Students' participation in democratic school management: A systematic literature review. *Journal of Social Science Education*, 23(1). <https://doi.org/10.11576/jsse-6333>

Declaration of conflicts of interests: No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

 Open Access



1 INTRODUCTION

The association between democracy and education has been expressed since Dewey (1916) and Freire (1968/1981), considering that education is an important means to build a democratic society where everyone can participate, as a fundamental right of citizenship. It's important to emphasise that we don't think of education for democracy among processes of instrumentalisation, production and individuality, which civic education or education for citizenship in schools may be accentuating through the curriculum, with the aim of students developing skills and knowledge to be a democratic citizen in the future (Aly et al., 2022; Apple & Beane, 1995; Biesta, 2016). Democracy in the relationship and interaction between everyone, in the plurality and difference of points of view, within the management and internal organisation of schools.

The civic and political participation of young people has been constantly heralded in media and political discourse, including in the current *EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027*, with growing concern about the resources that need to be developed for all young people to participate in society (Council of the European Union & Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, 2021). Young people are involved and claim their right to active participation in society (Ribeiro & Menezes, 2022), but are the educational systems responding to public educational policies still resistant to democratic perspectives, where young students have a voice and influence in decision-making?

From this concern with the (im)possibilities for young people to participate in decision-making in the school context, a systematic literature review (SLR) was developed as part of the ongoing PhD in education sciences, which thinks about the opportunity to be in a *students' time*, considering their voices, their forms of autonomy and expressions of democracy in high schools, in the Portuguese educational system. The SLR aims to identify studies on student participation in the democratic management of schools, thus allowing the mapping of different opportunities, times and spaces for student voice in schools. In this way, it will be possible to understand the context of public policy production and international research regarding the possibility of hearing and listening to students' voice.

Research and scientific work is defined from a main starting point: the review of the state of the art – of literature in the research area – to be able to define and delimit a research problem (C. Hart, 1998). This can be readjusted as the research advances, but it is recognized that the literature review establishes the importance of the study, as well as the comparison with other studies already developed (Creswell, 2003).

However, the diffusion of scientific knowledge in the most recent information technologies, with large and growing databases, disseminated and made available in global terms, makes this task of literature review difficult. SLR has been validated as a research methodology since the 1990s (Boland et al., 2017). It is planned and methodically performed with the purpose of replication, transparency and rigour, but carries the warning that considering an SLR as the only approach to the literature review is very questionable and hides significant dangers for research (Boell & Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2015).

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Student participation is etymologically derived from the Latin *participare*, meaning the action or result of intervening, of taking part in something (Oxford University Press, n.d.). In Dewey's (1916) argument of a public school based on a democratic ideal, society adopts a type of education that provides individuals with "a personal interest in social relations and direction, and habits of mind that permit social change" (p.105). But it is questioned whether an educational system can be directed by the state, and yet manage not to be restricted, constrained and misrepresented.

In the discussion and articulation of a democratic school, we follow these assumptions as well as the Freirean perspective (Freire, 1968/1981) of education as a practice of freedom (Freire, 1967), considering education as a dialogue between teacher and student, where each builds their autonomy in the experiences and decisions they make: "a pedagogy of autonomy must be centred on experiences that stimulate decision and responsibility, that is, on experiences that respect freedom" (Freire, 2007, p. 107). Freedom and democracy go hand in hand in this pedagogy of autonomy, where the act of deciding is promoted through the freedom and responsibility of the student and the teacher's authority.

It is also considered essential to define democratic management, a concept widely included in discourse and policy norms in education. Despite the ambiguity of the expression democratic management in the organizational and administrative field – since the concept of democracy is more associated with action and execution, and less in the scope of direction or leadership (Lima, 1998) – the expression is considered to have a plurisignification: on the one hand, at the level of social representations and political, administrative, pedagogical, and academic discourses, and on the other, at the level of practices.

R. Hart (1992) refers to participation as a fundamental right of citizenship, a process of sharing decisions that affect one's life and life in the community. According to Lima (1988), participation is associated with the concept of democracy and is based on the power of the people, their interest and participation as the main actors in constructing a democratic society. Following the work of Carvalho (2017a, 2017b), it is considered important to have a concept of reflexive, critical and active participation to build real actors capable of taking an active role in the world; students as active agents in the construction of their own lives (Urbina-Garcia, 2019), and not just a climate of apparent participation and certain school hypocrisy (Ferreira, 2004, 2007, 2012, 2017). The need for schools to be organised democratically has been analysed by various authors, from Dewey (1916) to Freire (1967, 1968/1981), and for Lima (2021) democracy emerges "immediately around the participation of students, according to an active pedagogy that is defined as life and not only as preparation for life" (p.3). However, he draws attention to the contemporary obstacles faced by public schools, the obsession with and competition in school results and individual merit, and technical-rational directions and decisions. Dewey's conception of democracy (1916) cannot be applied to this new school, regulated by the logic of modernization, entrepreneurship, and excellence, since the meaning it confers requires favouring

cooperation between everyone rather than practice competition and personal interest, which are accentuating individualism above the common good.

Specifically in Portugal, we have seen a rupture in the grammar of Portuguese schools, where secondary education has become compulsory for all (Portuguese Assembly of the Republic, 2009) and with the particularity of having a presence and vote on the governing bodies of public schools (Portuguese Ministry of Education, 2008) for all students from the age of 16. The extension to twelve years of compulsory schooling cannot just mean an exercise in preventing school dropouts (Matos, 2013), and it may be essential to understand what specific knowledge and social skills are being developed by all these students at the national level, considering the profile of students leaving compulsory schooling (Ministry of Education & Directorate-General for Education, 2017). The possibility of participation, representation and voting rights in the *general council* [the highest body in public schools] (Portuguese Ministry of Education, 2008) is also considered particular to high school, along with the definition of regular procedures for listening to these students and enabling their participation (Portuguese Council of Ministers, 2018).

Instigated by this framework of influences, it became essential to emphasise the importance of learning other realities and educational policies to identify different possibilities and initiatives for students in schools. In other words, we are interested in understanding the education systems of other countries, the development of the management of public secondary schools and the strategies for student involvement and participation in democratic decision-making in the school context.

3 METHODOLOGY

The SLR carried out serves to identify, summarize, and synthesise the findings of previous research. The planning and analysis steps of Boland, Cherry, and Dickson's (2017) model were considered, starting with planning the review and defining the review question and the protocol.

The main objectives of this SLR were to a) identify different concepts and theoretical perspectives adopted in other studies; b) understand and identify, in these articles, whether or not educational policies promote student participation in the democratic management of schools; c) identify the various methodologies and methods adopted; and d) map the opportunities for students to participate in and influence school decision-making which has already been investigated, as a form of democratic school management.

Thus, it was decided to guide this SLR with the review question: "What studies have been carried out on the participation of high school students in democratic school management?" In this way, it was possible to (1) understand the different concepts/theoretical references used to describe student participation and forms of democratic school management; (2) identify school practices associated with the conception/construction of democratic school management; (3) know which forms of school management/organisation have allowed/potentiated student participation in other countries; (4) identify which countries have carried out studies and published articles on this problem; (5) notice trends in

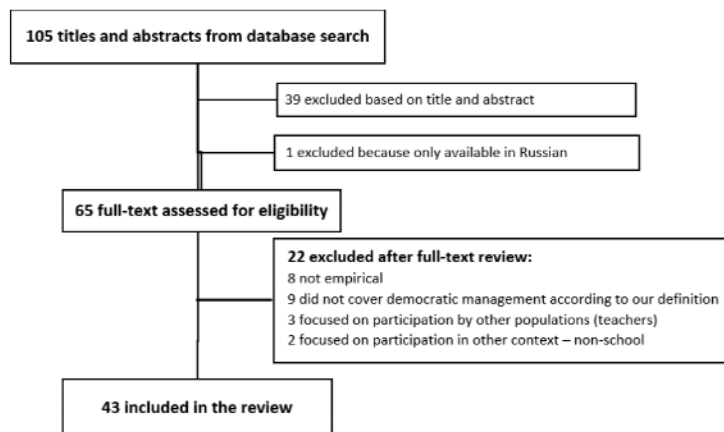
research in certain time periods; (6) understand the influence of educational policy on students' practices and experiences of participation; and (7) to understand how interest in this theme has evolved, according to the number of publications over time. This SLR included articles published in scientific journals in certain languages, as mentioned below. Other inclusion and exclusion criteria could lead to other results.

After defining the main review question and the specific questions which were intended to be answered and discussed through this SLR, it was essential to write the protocol, with the decision of the concepts/keywords: *Student participation* and *Democratic management* and *High School or secondary education*; in the databases: EBSCOhost, SCOPUS and Web of Science.

Regarding the inclusion and exclusion criteria, articles that met the following criteria were included: (1) articles published in peer-reviewed journals; (2) full texts in English, Portuguese or Spanish; (3) articles with empirical data, employing either qualitative or quantitative methodology; and (4) population: high school students. Articles with the following characteristics were excluded: (1) reviews, reports, news, conference papers, books, etc.; (2) texts in other languages not mentioned in the inclusion criteria (a text in Russian appeared, which had to be excluded, as it was not possible to understand it); (3) articles that are only literature reviews, without empirical data; (4) population: cases in which the participants were students from other study cycles (e.g., a study on childhood or higher education) or the study was on the family, or only referred to teachers or non-teaching staff. No time restrictions were placed since the aim was also to understand how the interest or need for research on this issue has evolved over time.

The search was performed on December 28, 2021, and 105 results were obtained, with publications between 2001 and 2020. To organise the information, the bibliographic reference manager EndNote was used to easily access the title and abstract for reading and analysis.

Initially, it was considered essential to read the titles and abstracts of these 105 as well as create an Excel spreadsheet to facilitate the organisation of the information, with different columns about relationship with the question/topic; main results; design and method; population and sample; and evaluation of relevance and criteria, rated 1–5. The evaluation from 1 to 5 is already a selection based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria. Of these 105 abstracts read, 65 references were considered relevant to answer the review question and to meet the inclusion criteria. After reading the full texts, accompanied by brief notes and important citations, an additional 22 articles were excluded as they did not meet the inclusion criteria. In the end, 43 articles were included in the review, according to the following diagram.

Figure 1. Diagram for the review article selection process

4 RESULTS

One of the first descriptive aspects that we consider essential to mention is the growth of the number of publications on this topic, which varied between one and three publications between 2001 and 2012, but has increased significantly in recent years, namely in 2014 (five studies) and 2019 (six studies).

This evolution in the number of published articles may reflect an increase in the relevance attributed to studies and scientific research focused on the participation of high school students in more democratic school management. It is also important to analyse the distribution in geographical terms, to understand which countries have carried out studies and published articles on this issue.

Table 1. Distribution of the studies carried out in the various countries.

Country	N	References
USA	13	(Bolmeier, 2006; DeFur & Korinek, 2010; Diera, 2016; Elemen, 2015; Kaba, 2001; Lac & Mansfield, 2018; Maxcy & Nguyen, 2013; Mitra, 2009; Osberg et al., 2006; Sippy & Belin, 2020; Smith, 2003; Sussman, 2015; Yonezawa & Jones, 2009).
United Kingdom	9	(Aston & Lambert, 2010; Davies, 2011; Elwood, 2013; Fielding, 2013; Frost, 2008; Jones, 2013; Tisdall & Davis, 2004; Warren et al., 2019; Wilson, 2009).
Sweden	3	(Andersson, 2019; Rönnlund, 2014; Thornberg & Elvstrand, 2012).
Spain	3	(Ceballos-Lopez et al., 2019; Rodriguez et al., 2016; Simó et al., 2016).
Germany	2	(Eckstein & Noack, 2014; Manzel, 2016).
South Africa	2	(Gamede, 2020; Mncube, 2008).
Australia	2	(Graham et al., 2019; Mayes, 2019).
Kenya	2	(Jwan et al., 2010; Mulwa et al., 2015).
Mexico	1	(Delgado, 2014).
Scotland	1	(Hulme et al., 2011).

Country	N	References
Brazil	1	(Falcão & Silva, 2020).
Lesotho	1	(Matsepe, 2014).
Hong Kong	1	(Leung et al., 2014).
Pakistan	1	(Tajik & Wali, 2020).
Austria	1	(Gamsjager & Langer, 2019).

According to Table 1, the predominance of studies in Anglo-Saxon countries is evident, specifically in schools in the United States of America (N=13) and the United Kingdom (N=9). These results come from the articles analysed according to the inclusion and exclusion criteria defined in the protocol.

4.1 Typologies of participation

Based on the reading and analysis of the studies, different types of participation can be identified, with the same definition being mentioned in some articles, as indicated in Table 2.

Table 2. Systematised list of the typologies of participation identified

Typologies of participation	References
Conventional and unconventional participation	(Andersson, 2019; Falcão & Silva, 2020; Rodriguez et al., 2016).
Student participation and consultation	(Frost, 2008; Graham et al., 2019; Hulme, et al., 2011; Rönnlund, 2014)
Direct and representative participation	(Falcão & Silva, 2020; Rönnlund, 2014)
Formal and informal participation	(Simó et al., 2016; Warren et al., 2019)
Participation of students in the operational and political dimension	(Falcão & Silva, 2020)
Objective and subjective conditions for participation	(Kaba, 2001)

One typologies distinguishes conventional and unconventional participation, where conventional refers strictly to voting and traditional forms of participation (Rodriguez et al., 2016). According to Andersson's definition (2019), formal student participation is organized and institutionalized in schools, such as class councils or school councils and collective decision-making forums. About the unconventional, it departs from pre-established patterns in regulations and operating rules (Falcão & Silva, 2020), based on the idea that students act to influence those who have decision-making power (Rodriguez et al., 2016).

Another typology of participation distinguishes between student participation and student consultation, signifying very different degrees of involvement and power (Frost, 2008). Student consultation is only a listening process, limited to responding to changes proposed by others, without opportunities to influence and contribute (Graham et al.,

2019; Rönnlund, 2014). On the other hand, in different forms of participation, what the students say, the opinions they transmit and the problems they point out are taken into account and influence the decision (Hulme et al., 2011).

Expanding this distinction between participation and consultation with students for practice and action in schools, Hulme et al.'s (2011) research concluded that school staff predominantly perceive student participation in terms of forms of consultation, with 73% associating student participation with "involving pupils in consultation or evaluation, including meetings, questionnaires to pupils, voting and assemblies", and only 37% associating it with participation in school council or pupil council activities.

The studies analysed also demonstrate a distinction between direct participation, where everyone has space and time to express themselves, and representative participation, where representatives of everyone's interests or needs are elected. In this sense, we consider Rönnlund (2014) perspective necessary, arguing that representation is a prerequisite for an inclusive and fair democratic practice, but that it is also necessary to look for systems that encourage all students to express their opinions (Rönnlund, 2014).

The typology of formal and informal participation distinguishes between participation in formal governing bodies (Simó et al., 2016; Warren et al., 2019); and participation via more informal paths, in the relationship between students, teachers and staff, for example (Warren et al., 2019), in collaborative processes in informal relationships (Simó et al., 2016).

Falcão and Silva (2020) define student participation as a principle of democratic management, distinguishing an operative dimension, through the presence of students in decision-making spaces, and a political dimension, where the group's participation in decision-making is effectively materialized, with influence on action.

From Kaba (2001) study, another distinction can be perceived, in this case, between objective and subjective conditions for the participation of students in decision-making. In these, the subjective conditions refer to what the students say about their participation – "feeling 'equal' on their LSCs"; and the objective conditions, which concern what is actually done – "[students] unhappiness with having partial votes, being outnumbered on their councils and feeling frustrated with the scope of their influence over policy decisions" (Kaba, 2001, p. 31).

4.2 Conceptions of democratic management

In the studies analysed, several conceptions of democratic management emerge, with references to the need to be thought of in the experience and daily practice of schools (Andersson, 2019; Diera, 2016; Wilson, 2009), and school management that allows the sharing of responsibility among all members of the educational community (Jwan et al., 2010) in participatory environments (Delgado, 2014) and the daily functioning of schools (Gamede, 2020). This is not limited to procedures, meetings and formal councils, "but it is a way [of] living and a form of relationship within the school community (...) democracy

is best learned by practising it in everyday life, in relationships in school and in classrooms" (Thornberg & Elvstrand, 2012, p. 45).

However different discourses are perceived, namely, from the students themselves: "I think democratic school leadership is where a person respects and follows the rules. For students it means we should respect our teachers, be time conscious in the school and obey all the school rules (Students: C2-FGD2)" (Jwan et al., 2010, p. 257). These discourses, more focused on teachers' power, can build on traditional practices of adult hierarchy and authority (Osberg et al., 2006), thus building barriers to a democratic way of living, where responsible deliberation and cooperation could be encouraged through conflict resolution for democratic decision-making (Simó et al., 2016).

The study by Delgado (2014) defines different styles of culture of democracy at school, distinguishing between *democracy in simulation*, in which apparently it is only established on paper and rarely operationalized; *democracy in construction*, in schools where changes can already be perceived, but not all democratic assumptions have been achieved yet, due to limitations in the central organization of schools, lack of involvement of teachers or directors, etc.; and *democracy in consolidation*, where an effective transformation of strategies for active participation of all can be perceived, with innovative practices and even meetings at the regional level.

4.3 Discourses and influences of educational policy on student participation

Considering one of the specific objectives formulated for this SLR – understand and identify, in these articles, whether or not educational policies promote student participation in the democratic management of schools – it is essential to understand whether the authors of these studies, published in different years and countries, identify the promotion of student participation in educational policy. Regarding the studies carried out in the UK, in the discourses of students and teachers it can be seen that students are regularly consulted (Tisdall & Davis, 2004; Warren et al., 2019; Wilson, 2009), and there are educational policies that pay attention to the agency of children and young people, but at the risk of being interpreted only as yet more boxes to tick to fulfil the self-evaluation requirements, within an education system that increasingly exerts control over examinations and qualifications (Elwood, 2013; Frost, 2008).

In Scotland, the right of young people to have their voices heard appears in several policy texts, strengthening the position of citizenship education in the curriculum to provide "clearly defined rounded outcomes for young people; smoother transition between different stages of education; new choice, space and time within the curriculum for teachers to design learning to suit the needs of young people" (Hulme et al., 2011, p. 131). However, the students mistrust the effectiveness of participatory activities, raising questions about how participation incorporates the students into an existing framework established by adults (Hulme et al., 2011).

In the research undertaken in the USA, there are references to school-based

management (Kaba, 2001), creating Local School Councils in the case of Chicago, where the principal, parents, teachers, students and community members are present (Kaba, 2001). However, public policies tend to keep forms of control and containment of young people instead of creating spaces to include them in management and decision-making processes (Lac & Mansfield, 2018).

Also in the USA, the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) law is mentioned, which came into effect in 2002, but the obstacles created by normalization and accountability prevent processes of student participation in democratic management. The voices and particular needs of students are excluded – “Unfortunately, as NCLN and other governmental policies (...) have shaped the wants and needs of education, and of students in particular, students are left at the margins of decision making (...)” (Diera, 2016, p. 220).

On similar lines, the study by Gamsjager and Langer (2019) refers to the educational mandate in Austria, which involves democratic learning based on cooperation and partnership, with classroom participation experiences. However, “students have so far been largely neglected as school actors” (p. 69), with their participation predominantly as advice, information and application in informal opportunities for participation, usually in the classroom or in the school project.

In the case of Mexico, the Project of Pedagogical Renovation was initiated in several schools as an alternative model to lead and manage schools based on the democratic and equal participation of students, teachers, school leaders and parents. This project aimed at the equal participation of all stakeholders in decision-making. However, Delgado's (2014) article notes that many of the schools that took part in this project continued to struggle to establish a participative and collaborative culture, only partially creating the conditions for fully enabling the meaningful participation of all members.

In the Brazilian context, we can consider that there are educational policies that promote the principle of democratic management of public education through the creation and strengthening of student councils and school councils, ensuring conditions for their operation and “guaranteeing conditions for the autonomous operation of this collegiate body; and stimulating the participation of students in the formulation of political-pedagogical projects, school curricula, school management plans and school regulations” (Falcão & Silva, 2020, p. 5). Nevertheless, the discourses of school actors highlight that including these issues and strategies in the legislation is not enough to promote changes in the daily lives of schools, since they still see situations marked by authoritarianism.

About the state of affairs in South Africa, the study by Gamede (2020) and Mncube (2008) elucidates on a democratic government and a new relationship between the government and schools, establishing a School Governing Bodies (SGB) in law, where parents, teachers, and students are present; and the Representative Councils of Learners (RCL), democratically elected by the students, which are mandatory for all public schools. However, despite the institution of RCLs, “learners still experience difficulties in being fully involved in school governance in the rural areas, mainly as a consequence of their cultural background” (Gamede, 2020, p. 6). In contrast, in Lesotho, a small country embedded in

South Africa, students are not members of school councils, with parents representing the students (Matsepe, 2014, p. 192).

In South Africa, the barriers to and difficulties in student participation are a cultural consequence, while in Hong Kong it is the conservatism, authoritarianism, and paternalism of the government which does not encourage student participation in school governance (Leung et al., 2014). Similarly, in Pakistan (Tajik & Wali, 2020), systemic sociocultural barriers in a hierarchical school governance structure prevent students from having a voice in schools because they are considered immature and incapable.

In other studies in Kenya (Jwan et al., 2010; Mulwa et al., 2015), it appears that most schools had hierarchical and bureaucratic structures, preventing the participation of students and teachers (Jwan et al., 2010). Despite the reform of educational management in 2005, where the policy of transferring (some) authority to the district education councils was adopted, it is clear from the students' speeches that the decision-making process in schools needs to be more participatory. In this sense, student strikes, especially in secondary schools, have continued to increase (Mulwa et al., 2015).

Although this analysis only includes articles, published in different years and countries, we have seen how educational policy in other countries and their policymakers refer to democratic management in schools, encouraging democratic practices and student experiences and establishing spaces and times for their participation. However, in reality, despite being present and represented in the different decision-making spaces, students have few opportunities to influence the decision and little chance of meaningful participation with real effect.

4.4 Student Participation Experiences

In the studies analysed, different experiences of student participation are highlighted, with research that identifies practices of listening to the student's voice through their participation in the general council, student councils, or class representatives. However, others are also recognised, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Systematized list of students' participation experiences

Students' participation experiences	References
Student council/Student body	(Andersson, 2019; Diera, 2016; Fielding, 2013; Gamsjager & Langer, 2019; Jones, 2013; Jwan et al., 2010; Kaba, 2001; Maxcy & Nguyen, 2013; Mulwa et al., 2015; Smith, 2003; Tajik & Wali, 2020; Warren et al., 2019; Wilson, 2009)
Class representatives	(Andersson, 2019; Falcão & Silva, 2020; Jwan et al., 2010; Mulwa et al., 2015; Rodriguez et al., 2016; Smith, 2003; Tajik & Wali, 2020)
Participation in school governing bodies	(Falcão & Silva, 2020; Gamede, 2020; Hulme et al., 2011; Matsepe, 2014; Maxcy & Nguyen, 2013; Mayes, 2019; Mncube, 2008; Smith, 2003)

Students' participation experiences	References
Education psychology service	(Aston & Lambert, 2010)
Co-research projects	(Bolmeier, 2006; Wilson, 2009; Yonezawa & Jones, 2009)
Suggestion box	(Mulwa et al., 2015)
Classroom dynamics	(Bolmeier, 2006; Eckstein & Noack, 2014; Gamsjager & Langer, 2019)
Citizenship education	(Leung et al., 2014; Manzel, 2016)
Open forums (Students and teachers meetings)	(Jwan et al., 2010; Mitra, 2009; Mulwa et al., 2015)
Student teams	(Ceballos-Lopez et al., 2019; Mitra, 2009; Sippy & Belin, 2020)
Students voice network (inter-school)	(Frost, 2008; Sussman, 2015)
Participation in education policy	(Graham et al., 2019; Tisdall & Davis, 2004)
Participation in school reform	(Osberg et al., 2006)

In this predominance of student councils, it can be perceived that these may not be a form of power-sharing, but generally serve as an advisory body under the supervision of teachers (Gamede, 2020; Hulme et al., 2011; Leung et al., 2014; Manzel, 2016; Mayes, 2019; Mncube, 2008; Thornberg & Elvstrand, 2012). In reality, “student participation in practice is restricted to informal spaces and dependent on teachers' good will” (Gamsjager & Langer, 2019, p. 70), although the students affirm that they are heard in the councils and feel equal. But when asked about the effective influence they have on the decisions made, the discourses change: “They'll listen to you, sure they will, but that's it” (Kaba, 2001, pp. 28-29), “what we say does not make big difference” (Rönnlund, 2014, p. 109), “But when we suggest something, they're just not interested” (Simó et al., 2016, p. 187).

Some of the studies analysed refer to new school management bodies as other spaces for student participation (Smith, 2003; Tajik & Wali, 2020). According to Sussman (2015), there is no need for more groups or councils, but rather a bridge between students, teachers and management, in order to “develop a meaningful shared agenda, plan, and take action (...) improvement that keeps communication pumping through the circulatory channels that connect key committees to each other and to all staff and students” (Sussman, 2015, p. 124).

One of the strategies identified is the proposal of research projects for the students, where they identify problems in their schools, try to listen to the educational community (through focus groups, interviews with or surveys of other students, teachers, staff, etc.) and look for solutions that make sense for everyone (Maxcy & Nguyen, 2013; Sippy & Belin, 2020; Yonezawa & M. Jones, 2009). For example, in the study developed by Sippy and Belin (2020), students were responsible for an audit regarding school climate, due to the serious problem of school shootings in the United States of America (p.22).

From these studies, it can be seen that, although this right of children and young people to express themselves and be heard freely has been defined since the Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations General Assembly, 1989), there are still barriers and difficulties to the participation of students in the school context, sometimes with reduced and sporadic times and spaces for listening to students voice.

5 CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

This SLR reveals the persistence of a dominant culture led by teachers and a particular culture of resistance to student participation and involvement in school management and decision-making. This means more practices and experiences of non-participation of the students, where they are only present in the decision-making spaces or even excluded (Elemen, 2015; Gamede, 2020; Gamsjager & Langer, 2019), with few opportunities to exert influence and a passive political role (Andersson, 2019). This resistance, lack of participation, and exclusion can sometimes generate counter-discourses and student strikes (Diera, 2016; Mulwa et al., 2015).

Despite these examples and students' discourses of more autocratic than democratic management, with no *time for students*, this SLR provides information about other practices and experiences in schools, which challenge the *status quo* of power by the teachers in schools (Ceballos-Lopez et al., 2019), despite poor socio-economic conditions, geographical location, and barriers in centralized school governance (Tajik & Wali, 2020). New tracks for action emerge among various initiatives and movements of the students, with practices beyond the conventional, considering that it is not an exercise for the future – they are citizens of the present and not of the future (Rodriguez et al., 2016).

School governance has traditionally been marked by asymmetrical and regulatory dimensions of power, which restrict participation and autonomy for students in particular. Thinking about the participation, autonomy, emancipation, and expression of students in decision-making with teachers in their schools, the space of the traditional educational relationship is complexified and it is assumed that students have to be protagonists in their learning and more involved, informed and have a critical way of thinking at school – based on a pedagogy of autonomy (Freire, 1968/1981) with experiences that encourage decision-making, responsibility, and freedom, not as an exercise for the future, but in the present and everyday school life.

In this article, the relevance of this SLR is considered, allowing for different readings and analyses, but also considering it as a standard approach, which can be seen as problematic due to the replicable and mechanical search for results (Boell & Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2015). Thus, the SLR is used in the research as a technique, responding to a set of procedures and instruments and that will serve as a basis to further complexify the problematic under study with other literature reviews (Wanyama et al., 2021) without missing other articles/books which are relevant to it.

In conclusion, this SLR has brought us to a point of arrival, allowing us to identify some types of student participation in school governance. At the same time, it has consolidated

the critical view proposed by reinforcing the importance of promoting policies that favour freedom, responsibility and autonomy for students in the management of their schools, emphasising greater articulation and communication between teachers/students and school management. Overall, it has become clear that the problem persists and that, with some nuances in the various countries, in the present and students' daily school lives, their democratic participation in the decisions of their schools remains incipient and commonplace, without recognising their influence on decisions, which raises new questions and calls for more systematic study.

REFERENCES

- Aly, A., Blackmore, J., Bright, D., Hayes, D., Heffernan, A., Lingard, B., Riddle, S., Takayama, K., & Youdell, D. (2022). Reflections on how education can be for democracy in the twenty-first century. *Journal of Educational Administration and History*, 54(3), 357-372. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00220620.2022.2084052>
- Andersson, E. (2019). The school as a public space for democratic experiences: Formal student participation and its political characteristics. *Education, Citizenship and Social Justice*, 14(2), 149-164. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1746197918776657>
- Apple, M. W., & Beane, J. A. (Eds.). (1995). *Democratic schools*. Alexandria, Va.: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Aston, H. J., & Lambert, N. (2010). Young people's views about their involvement in decision-making. *Educational Psychology in Practice*, 26(1), 41-51. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02667360903522777>
- Biesta, G. (2016). *Beyond learning: Democratic education for a human future*. New York: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315635811>
- Boell, S., & Cecez-Kecmanovic, D. (2015). On being 'systematic' in literature reviews in IS. *Journal of Information Technology Education: Research*, 30(2), 161-173. <https://doi.org/10.1057/jit.2014.26>
- Boland, A., Cherry, M. G., & Dickson, R. (2017). *Doing a systematic review*. London: SAGE.
- Bolmeier, E. C. (2006). 6 Steps to pupil participation in democratic school control. *Clearing House: A Journal of Educational Strategies, Issues and Ideas*, 79(5), 198-201.
- Carvalho, M. J. d. (2017a). *A decisão na escola: Um jogo de racionalidades* [Decision-making at school: a game of rationalities]. Santo Tirso: Whitebooks.
- Carvalho, M. J. d. (2017b). Democracia em crise na escola pública portuguesa? [Democracy in crisis in the Portuguese public school?]. In L. Lima & V. Sá (Eds.), *O governo das escolas: Democracia, controlo e performatividade* [School governance: Democracy, control and performativity] (pp. 195-212). V. N. Famalicão: Edições Húmus.
- Ceballos-Lopez, N., Calvo-Salvador, A., & Haya-Salmon, I. (2019). Student consultation strategies as a lever for school improvement. Results of a collaborative study. *Cultura Y Educacion*, 31(4), 780-813. <https://doi.org/10.1080/11356405.2019.1656937>
- Council of the European Union, & Representatives of the Governments of the Member States. (2021). *Conclusions of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments*

of the Member States meeting within the Council on strengthening the multilevel governance when promoting the participation of young people in decision-making processes 2021/C 241/03. Brussels: Council of the European Union. [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52021XG0621\(01\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52021XG0621(01))

Creswell, J. (2003). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed method approaches*. London: SAGE.

Davies, P. M. (2011). Student participation in school ICT policy-making: A case of students as researchers. *Management in Education*, 25(2), 71-77. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0892020611399609>

DeFur, S. H., & Korinek, L. (2010). Listening to student voices. *Clearing House: A Journal of Educational Strategies, Issues and Ideas*, 83(1), 15-19. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00098650903267677>

Delgado, M. L. (2014). Democratic leadership in middle schools of Chihuahua Mexico: Improving middle schools through democracy. *Journal of International Education and Leadership*, 4(1).

Dewey, J. (1916). *Democracy and education: An introduction to the philosophy of education*. New York: Macmillan.

Diera, C. (2016). Democratic possibilities for student voice within schools undergoing reform: A student counterpublic case study. *Journal for Critical Education Policy Studies*, 14(2), 217-235. <http://www.jceps.com/archives/3094>

Eckstein, K., & Noack, P. (2014). Students' democratic experiences in school: A multilevel analysis of social-emotional influences. *International Journal of Developmental Science*, 8(3-4), 105-114. <http://dx.doi.org/10.3233/DEV-14136>

Elemen, J. E. (2015). Students' high school organizational leadership opportunities and their influences on academic achievement and civic participation. *Journal of Research in Education*, 25(2), 4-18.

Elwood, J. (2013). The role(s) of student voice in 14-19 education policy reform: Reflections on consultation and participation. *London Review of Education*, 11(2), 97-111. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14748460.2013.799807>

Falcão, N., & Silva, S. (2020). Student's participation in upper secondary school management: Approaches to the reality of the school system in the state of Amazonas. *Revista Tempos e Espaços em Educação*, 13(32), 18. <https://doi.org/10.20952/revtee.v13i32.13168>

Ferreira, Elisabete (2004). A autonomia da escola pública: A lenda da estátua com pés de barro [The autonomy of the public school: the legend of the statue with feet of clay]. *Educação, Sociedade & Culturas*, 22, 133-152.

Ferreira, E. (2007). A hipocrisia reina nas escolas: A propósito da autonomia e da tomada de posse dos jovens na escola [Hypocrisy reigns in schools: on school autonomy and youth empowerment]. In C. Leite & A. Lopes (Eds.), *Escola, currículo e formação de identidades: estudos investigativos* [School, curriculum and identity formation: investigative studies] (pp. 73-92). Porto: ASA.

- Ferreira, E. (2012). *(D)Enunciar a autonomia: Contributos para a compreensão da génese e da construção da autonomia escolar* [(D)Enunciate autonomy: contributions to the understanding of the genesis and construction of school autonomy]. Porto: Porto Editora.
- Ferreira, E. (2017). Em volta do governo das escolas as autonomias credíveis [Credible autonomies around school governance]. In Licínio Lima & Virgínio Sá (Eds.), *O governo das escolas: Democracia, controlo e performatividade* [School governance: Democracy, control and performativity] (pp. 41-60). V. N. Famalicão: Edições Húmus.
- Fielding, M. (2013). Whole school meetings and the development of radical democratic community. *Studies in Philosophy and Education*, 32(2), 123-140. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s11217-010-9208-5>
- Freire, P. (1967). *Educação como prática da liberdade* [Education as the practice of freedom]. Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra.
- Freire, P. (1981). *Pedagogia do oprimido* [Pedagogy of the oppressed]. Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra. (Original work published in 1968)
- Freire, P. (2007). *Pedagogia da autonomia: Saberes necessários à prática educativa* [Pedagogy of autonomy: knowledge necessary for educational practice]. São Paulo: Paz e Terra.
- Frost, R. (2008). Developing student participation, research and leadership: The HCD student partnership. *School Leadership & Management*, 28(4), 353-368. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13632430802292308>
- Gamede, V. W. (2020). Cultural implications for learners' effectiveness as governors of schools in rural South Africa. *South African Journal of Education*, 40(3). <https://www.ajol.info/index.php/saje/article/view/199780>
- Gamsjager, M., & Langer, R. (2019). Democracy learning as failing template for establishing student participation for school improvement: A participatory case study within a secondary school. *Research in Education*, 103(1), 68-84. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0034523719845011>
- Graham, A., Bessell, S., Adamson, E., Truscott, J., Simmons, C., Thomas, N., Gardon, L., & Johnson, A. (2019). Navigating the ambiguous policy landscape of student participation. *Journal of Education Policy*, 34(6), 789-811. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02680939.2018.1527945>
- Hart, C. (1998). *Doing a literature review*. London: SAGE.
- Hart, R. (1992). *Children's participation: From tokenism to citizenship*. Florence: UNICEF International Child Development Centre.
- Hulme, M., McKinney, S., Hall, S., & Cross, B. (2011). Pupil participation in Scottish schools: How far have we come? *Improving Schools*, 14(2), 130-144. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1365480211406880>
- Jones, S. (2013). Co-operation: The antidote to isolated misery. *FORUM: for promoting 3-19 comprehensive education*, 55(2), 227-244. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2304/forum.2013.55.2.227>

- Jwan, J., Anderson, L., & Bennett, N. (2010). Democratic school leadership reforms in Kenya: Cultural and historical challenges. *Journal of Educational Administration and History*, 42(3), 247-273. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00220620.2010.492962>
- Kaba, M. (2001). "They listen to me... but they don't act on it": Contradictory consciousness and student participation in decision-making. *High School Journal*, 84(2), 21-34.
- Lac, V. T., & Mansfield, K. C. (2018). What do students have to do with educational leadership? Making a case for centering student voice. *Journal of Research on Leadership Education*, 13(1), 38-58. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1942775117743748>
- Leung, Y. W., Yuen, T. W., Cheng, E. C., & Chow, J. K. (2014). Is student participation in school governance a "mission impossible"? *Journal of Social Science Education*, 13(4), 26-40. <https://doi.org/10.2390/jsse-v13-i4-1363>
- Lima, L. (1988). *Gestão das escolas secundárias: A participação dos alunos* [High school management: student participation]. Lisbon: Livros Horizonte.
- Lima, L. (1998). *A escola como organização e a participação na organização escolar: Um estudo da escola secundária em Portugal (1974-1988)* [The school as an organisation and participation in school organisation: A study of high school in Portugal (1974-1988)]. Braga: University of Minho.
- Lima, L. (2021). Democracia e educação: Dewey em tempos de crise da educação democrática [Democracy and education: Dewey in times of crises in democratic education]. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 29, 1-16. <https://doi.org/10.14507/epaa.29.5881>
- Manzel, S. (2016). Competence for democracy: Participation and decision-making in classroom interaction. *Citizenship, Social and Economics Education*, 15(1), 15-27. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/2047173416657627>
- Matos, M. (2013). *JOVALES: Jovens, alunos, ensino secundário* [Youth, students, high school]. Porto: CIEE/Livpsic.
- Matsepe, M. W. (2014). Democratic involvement of students in high school governance in Lesotho. *Educational Research and Reviews*, 9(7), 192-198. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5897/ERR11.055>
- Maxcy, B. D., & Nguyen, T. S. (2013). The case of Rivera elementary school: The politics of collaboration. *Journal of Cases in Educational Leadership*, 16(3), 47-61. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1555458913498478>
- Mayes, E. (2019). Reconceptualizing the presence of students on school governance councils: The a/effects of spatial positioning. *Policy Futures in Education*, 17(4), 503-519. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1478210317739468>
- Mitra, D. L. (2009). Strengthening student voice initiatives in high schools: An examination of the supports needed for school-based youth-adult partnerships. *Youth & Society*, 40(3), 311-335. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0044118X08316211>
- Mncube, V. (2008). Democratisation of education in South Africa: Issues of social justice and the voice of learners? *South African Journal of Education*, 28(1), 77-90.

- Mulwa, D. M., Kimosop, M. K., & Kasivu, G. M. (2015). Participatory governance in secondary schools: The students' viewpoint in Eastern Region of Kenya. *Journal of Education and Practice*, 6(30), 59-65.
- Osberg, J., Pope, D., & Galloway, M. (2006). Students matter in school reform: Leaving fingerprints and becoming leaders. *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, 9(4), 329-343. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13603120600895338>
- Oxford University Press. (n.d.). Participation. In *Oxford Learner's Dictionary*. Retrived January 10, 2023, from <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/participation?q=participation>
- Portuguese Council of Ministers (2018). Decreto-Lei n.º 55/2018, 6 de julho: Estabelece o currículo dos ensinos básico e secundário e os princípios orientadores da avaliação das aprendizagens [Decree-Law No. 55/2018, 6 July: Establishes the curriculum for basic and secondary education and the guiding principles for the assessment of learning]. *Diário da República*, 1.ª série, N.º 129, 2018-07-06. https://www.dge.mec.pt/sites/default/files/Curriculo/AFC/dl_55_2018_afc.pdf
- Portuguese Ministry of Education (2008). Decreto-Lei n.º 75/2008, de 22 de abril: Aprova o regime de autonomia, administração e gestão dos estabelecimentos públicos da educação pré-escolar e dos ensinos básico e secundário [Decree-Law No. 75/2008, 22nd April: Approves the regime of autonomy, administration and management of public establishments for pre-school education and basic and secondary education]. *Diário da República* 79/2008, Série I de 2008-04-22, pp. 2341-2356. <https://dre.pt/dre/detalhe/decreto-lei/75-2008-249866?ts=1673308800034>
- Portuguese Ministry of Education, & Directorate-General for Education (2017). *Perfil dos alunos à saída da escolaridade obrigatória* [Profile of students leaving compulsory education]. https://www.dge.mec.pt/sites/default/files/Curriculo/Projeto_Autonomia_e_Flexibilidad_e/perfil_dos_alunos.pdf
- Portuguese Assembly of the Republic (2009). Lei n.º 85/2009, 27 de agosto: Estabelece o regime da escolaridade obrigatória para as crianças e jovens que se encontram em idade escolar e consagra a universalidade da educação pré-escolar para as crianças a partir dos 5 anos de idade [Lei No. 85/2009, 27 August: Establishes the regime of compulsory education for children and young people who are at school age and establishes the universality of pre-school education for children from 5 years of age]. *Diário da República*, 1.ª série — N.º 166 — 27 de Agosto de 2009.
- Ribeiro, A. B., & Menezes, I. (2022). Youth participation and citizenship education: An analysis of relations in four European countries. *Journal of Social Science Education*, 21(1), 4-32. <https://doi.org/10.11576/jsse-1454>
- Rodriguez, M., Kohen, R., Delval, J., & Messina, C. (2016). From democratic school to civic and political participation. *Cultura y Educacion*, 28(1), 99-129. <https://doi.org/10.1080/11356405.2015.1120449>

- Rönnlund, M. (2014). Justice in and through Education? Students' participation in decision-making. *Journal of Social Science Education*, 13(2), 104-113. <https://doi.org/10.4119/jsse-695>
- Simó, N., Parareda, A., & Domingo, L. (2016). Towards a democratic school: The experience of secondary school pupils. *Improving Schools*, 19(3), 181-196. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1365480216631080>
- Sippy, E., & Belin, R. (2020). Students as education partners: Kentucky student team bridges school policy and practice. *Learning Professional*, 41(1), 20-23.
- Smith, M. (2003). Authentic student voice in school governance: Developing responsible democratic citizens. *American Secondary Education*, 31(3), 36-65.
- Sussman, A. (2015). The student voice collaborative: An effort to systematize student participation in school and district improvement. *Teachers College Record*, 117(13), 119-134. <https://doi.org/10.1177/016146811511701312>
- Tajik, M. A., & Wali, A. (2020). Principals' strategies for increasing students' participation in school leadership in a rural, mountainous region in Pakistan. *Improving Schools*, 23(3), 245-263. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1365480220923413>
- Thornberg, R., & Elvstrand, H. (2012). Children's experiences of democracy, participation, and trust in school. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 53, 44-54. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.ijer.2011.12.010>
- Tisdall, E. K., & Davis, J. (2004). Making a difference? Bringing children's and young people's views into policy-making. *Children & Society*, 18(2), 131-142. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/chi.816>
- United Nations General Assembly (1989). *General Assembly resolution 44/25 of 20 November 1989: International Convention on the Rights of the Child*. United Nations.
- Urbina-Garcia, A. (2019). Methodological strategies to listen to children's voices: A systematic critical review. *Revista Colombiana de Educación*, 1(77). <https://doi.org/10.17227/rce.num77-9650>
- Wanyama, S. B., McQuaid, R. W., & Kittler, M. (2021). Where you search determines what you find: The effects of bibliographic databases on systematic reviews. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 25(3), 409-422. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13645579.2021.1892378>
- Warren, E., Bevilacqua, L., Opondo, C., Allen, E., Mathiot, A., West, G., Jamal, F., Viner, R., & Bonell, C. (2019). Action groups as a participative strategy for leading whole-school health promotion: Results on implementation from the INCLUSIVE trial in english secondary schools. *British Educational Research Journal*, 45(5), 979-1000. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/berj.3547>
- Wilson, L. (2009). Pupil participation: Comments from a case study. *Health Education*, 109(1), 86-102. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/09654280910923390>
- Yonezawa, S., & Jones, M. (2009). Student voices: Generating reform from the inside out. *Theory Into Practice*, 48(3), 205-212. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00405840902997386>

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work was funded by the European Union, through the European Social Fund, and by national funds, through the Portuguese Foundation for Science and Technology, IP (FCT), under the doctoral research grant no. 2021.06911.BD, under the supervision of Professor Elisabete Ferreira (FPCEUP, CIIE). It was also supported by the FCT under the strategic funding awarded to CIIE [grants no. UIDB/00167/2020; and UIDP/00167/2020].

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES

Inês Sousa, PhD student in Education Science (FCT funded, 2021.06911.BD) at the Centre for Research and Intervention in Education, Faculty of Psychology and Education Sciences, University of Porto (CIIE-FPCEUP). She is developing the project "*Student Times: Voices, Autonomies and Democracy in the Student Profile in Secondary Schools*". Her research has focused on: school administration and management; school leadership; school autonomy; educational policy; youth participation; and youth studies. At CIIE, she participates in IDEAFor - Identity, Democracy, School, Administration and Training group.

Elisabete Ferreira, PhD in Educational Science. Professor at FPCEUP and a full member of CIIE. Co-Head of IDEAFor - Identity, Democracy, School, Administration and Training group. Co-coordinator of CIIE's strategic area 'Pedagogical Management and Democratic Participation'. Research Prize *SPCE - Porto Editora* 2011. Member of the Board OBVIE. Member of the governing bodies of FPAE. Member of the External School Evaluation Team (IGEC). Author and co-author of several articles and national and international publications. Main research interests: educational and school administration, organization, management, and decision-making process; public education policy, educational leadership, and school improvement; studies on autonomy, schools and students, democracy, global citizenship, and human rights; mentoring in higher education; cooperation, training and development in education and social justice.