

# PERCEPTION OF DEMOCRACY IN EDUCATION DURING LATVIA'S INDEPENDENCE RESTORATION, 1988–1995

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## ABSTRACT

Democracy is under threat due to the massive dissemination and accessibility of information, increasing misinformation and false reporting. Any democratic society is based on participatory democracy and a dialogue between the people and their elected representatives. Youth involvement in the political processes is low – political participation in Latvia has declined over the last 20 years. The article aims to understand the transformation of the concept of democracy to gain insight into the interpretation of democracy in education in Latvia during the restoration of state independence from 1988 to 1995. The research question is how democracy was interpreted in education in Latvia during the transition period to the restoration of state independence from 1988 to 1995. Critical discourse analysis was used in this article by analysing educational periodicals and systematic literature analysis on interpreting the concept of democratic education. Findings reveal that in 1988, democracy in education was interpreted as a tool to guarantee the end of the ideology of the Soviet Union and as a symbol of freedom, whereas, from 1991 up to 1995, democracy emerged as not only a theoretical but also a practical system of governance in education with four active actors: teacher, child, family and society, of which the child was the central component.

**Keywords:** *content analysis, democracy, democratic education, democratisation, education reform.*

## Introduction

Democracy emphasises the role of individuals in governance and social interactions (Shapiro et al., 2024). It is a form of government, culture, and ethos, embodying a way of life that influences personal development and community participation (Dewey, 1966; Rogach Alexander, 2023). Democracy reflects an attitude of respect and equality and must be practised rather than imposed, aligning with humanistic goals and ongoing societal progress (Culp et al., 2023; Roberts, 2023). The author notes that “*democracy*” is defined in various ways across different sources, making contemporary consensus on the term elusive. Making a political system democratic, known as “*democratisation*” (Kauffman, 2023), involves introducing democratic ideas, restructuring foundations, and transitioning to democracy.

Democracy has inherent tensions, such as balancing majority rule with minority rights and managing effective governance in polarised environments, leading to contradictions between the people's will and its representation by the state (Rustighi, 2022). Discontent arises from the paradox of seeking greater participation while demanding efficient governance, a conflict exacerbated by historical shifts like the Cultural Revolution's focus on individual rights, the Market Revolution's economic growth and inequality, the Political Revolution's dismantling of social systems, and the Internet Revolution's role in increasing polarization (Shattuck, 2016).

Significant research has been conducted on the Latvian education system and educational sciences following national independence, providing a valuable foundation for exploring democracy within education (Ķestere, 2009; Ķestere et al., 2013; Ķestere, 2020). Research about the relationship between Soviet-era parenting and media (Procevska, 2006), and educational renewal in Estonia, with comparisons to Latvia and Lithuania (Sarv, 2020). Further research has focused on civic education reforms, civic engagement from pupils' perspectives (Čekse, 2021; Čekse et al., 2023), and youth involvement in democratic life in Latvia (Jonāne et al., 2022). This paper addresses a gap in the literature by exploring the interpretation of democracy within an educational context, offering a basis for future studies.

Educating young people in democratic processes is crucial, as programs designed to enhance democratic competencies in schools lead to higher levels of these competencies (Sant, 2019; Keating, Janmaat, 2016). Studies indicate that social sciences, politics, and democracy can enhance political efficacy, interest in politics, political trust, tolerance, anti-racism, and knowledge of political systems (Teegelbeckers et al., 2023). Youth political participation in Latvia has significantly declined over the past 20 years, with only 20% of individuals aged 18–30 actively engaged (Jonāne et al., 2022). The International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (IEA ICCS) in 2016 revealed that Latvian youth scored the lowest in civic education among Baltic Sea countries, with just 19% achieving A-level competence, compared to 43% in Estonia, 58% in Sweden and 53% in Denmark (Čekse, 2021). The IEA ICCS 2022 study found that only 47% of Latvian students view democracy as the best political system, and many lack an understanding of democratic threats, with 14% expressing that Latvia could become part of Russia or cease to exist (Čekse et al., 2023). Political leaders and education policymakers in Latvia must analyse these views to prevent future threats to democracy. The decline in youth political participation, low civic education scores, and limited understanding of democratic values among Latvian students underscore the urgent need to enhance democratic education and engagement to safeguard Latvia's democratic future.

The article aims to understand the transformation of the concept of democracy to gain insight into how democracy was interpreted in education in Latvia during the restoration of state independence from 1988 to 1995. 1988 laid the foundations for restoring Latvia's independence. In 1995, Latvia took significant steps toward aligning with European democratic standards by applying to join the European Union (EU) (Ārlietu ministrija, 2023) and becoming a member of the Council of Europe (Ārlietu ministrija, 2024a). These actions reflected Latvia's commitment to upholding fundamental values

such as human rights, democracy, and the rule of law. As the EU is founded on representative democracy, Latvia's decision to pursue EU membership implied a gradual adoption of EU standards, including those in education. This period marked Latvia's firm commitment to democracy and rejection of authoritarianism, making it a critical phase for understanding the development of modern democratic principles during the transition. The research question is: How was democracy interpreted in education in Latvia during the transition period to independence from 1988 to 1995?

## Historical background explained

Latvia was occupied by the Soviet Union from 1940 until 1991. Gorbachev's perestroika in 1988 initiated the path to Latvia's independence, introducing concepts like "*spontaneous democracy*" or "*self-democratization*" within the education system. The Soviet totalitarian regime, with its censorship and restrictions on free movement, isolated Latvian educators from contemporary educational advancements (Kestere, 2009; Kestere et al., 2013). In Soviet culture, education combined knowledge acquisition with attitude formation, ensuring students aligned with the regime's ideological goals (Procevska, 2006).

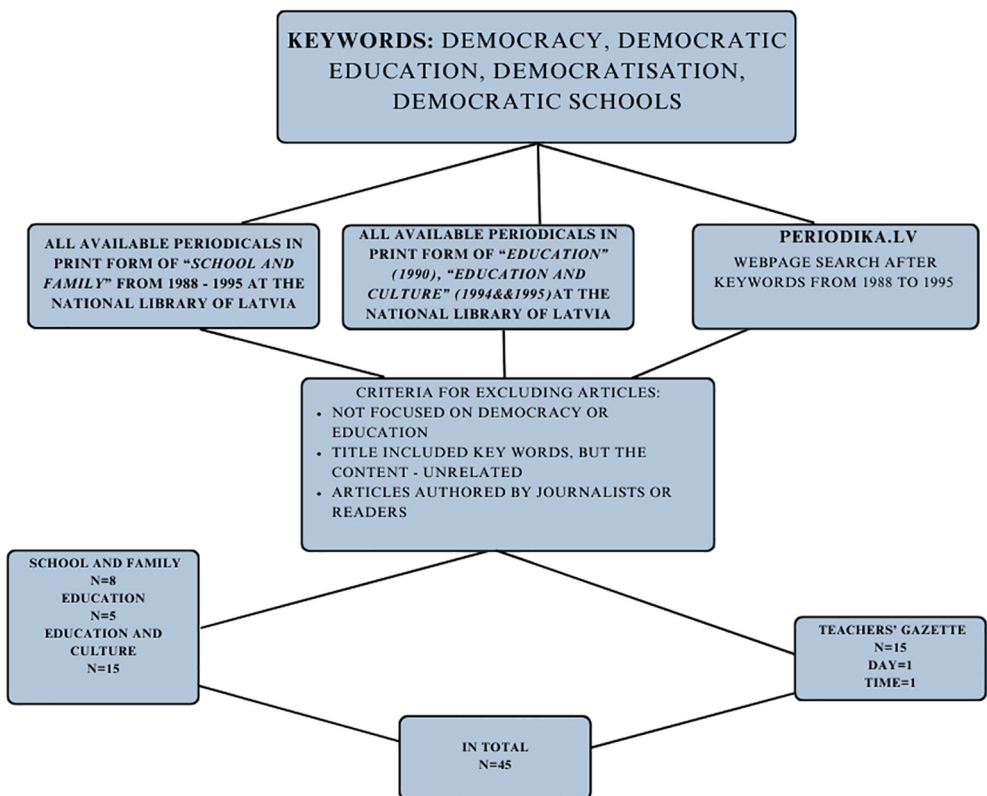
The Latvian desire to live according to Western traditions, to fight for freedom, and to emphasise Latvian culture were reasons for the revolution that resulted in the independence of Latvia in 1991 (Raudys et al., 2013). Then the education system underwent radical changes which included modernising, decentralising, and democratising schools and education, replacing Soviet ideology with Latvian traditions and values, removing political influences from the curriculum, offering more educational choices, and shifting management responsibilities from central authorities to local governments and individual schools. Reforming educational content became a crucial priority in the shift from a totalitarian socialist regime to a democratic and open society (Providus, 2004). Between 1991 and 1995, the Latvian education system was shaped by Western cultural influences – it was believed that it was a more advanced and progressive model, leading the government and local authorities to adopt and emulate Western political approaches and ideologies (Abens, 2020; Kestere, 2009; OECD, 2016).

Since the radical educational reform and the enactment of the Law of Education in 1991, Latvia's education system has been significantly reformed to establish European and democratic principles. Reforms aim to replace ineffective systems with more effective methods, driven by the belief that changes in curricula, access, and outcomes will improve society and individual opportunities (Kestere, 2019). New teaching standards reflecting democratic values were introduced in 1992/1993 (Providus, 2004). Despite challenges during the economic instability of 1995–1996, reforms resumed with economic growth between 1996–1998, leading to further legal and curricular developments (OECD, 2001). In 2004, the "60/40" minority education reform required 60% of secondary school courses to be taught in Latvian, with 40% in Russian (Ivlevs, King, 2004). In 2016, the Ministry of Education and Science launched a reform to implement competency-based curricula, including fostering national patriotism through an integrated approach across various subjects (Čekse, 2021).

Additionally, becoming a member state of the United Nations and the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (further on UNESCO) in 1991 (Ārlietu ministrija, 2022), the European Council in 1995 (Ārlietu ministrija, 2024a), the European Union (Ārlietu ministrija, 2023) and NATO in 2004 (Ārlietu ministrija, 2024b) introduced democratic practices to Latvia, fostering the development of laws that supported, for instance, human rights, civic engagement, and the rule of law in education. Through the integration of these values into the curriculum and the encouragement of a democratic involvement culture at all educational levels, the alignment served to strengthen dedication to democracy.

## Methodology

This paper employs qualitative and conceptual history research, focusing on how the meanings of the social and political concept of “*democracy*” evolved from 1988 to 1995. While many approaches can explore historical developments from a language-centred approach, this approach analyses the dynamic changes in concept meanings throughout history (Rodriguez, Van Ruyskensvelde, (2023). Methods including content analysis (Bengtsson, 2016; Krippendorff, 2019) and hermeneutics (Crotty, 1998) were used in the research.



**Figure 1** Process of choosing and setting criteria for data extraction

The search strategy aimed to identify as many periodical articles relevant to the keywords *democracy*, *democratic education*, *democratisation*, and *democratic schools* as possible from 1988 to 1995 (see Figure 1). The focus was on articles written by teachers, education policymakers, ministers, or other education field workers. In the Soviet Union, media played a crucial role in education. People grew up with constant media exposure and were unfamiliar with life without radio and television. Media was integrated at all educational levels and valued as a teaching tool due to its extensive use and varied influence techniques (Procevska, 2006).

A total of 45 periodicals served as a basis for primary data by giving characteristics of the perception of democracy from 1988 to 1995. The author notes that periodisation is based on historical sources, highlighting that some democratic principles from 1988 may still be relevant in 1995, complicating clear distinctions between these periods.

## Results

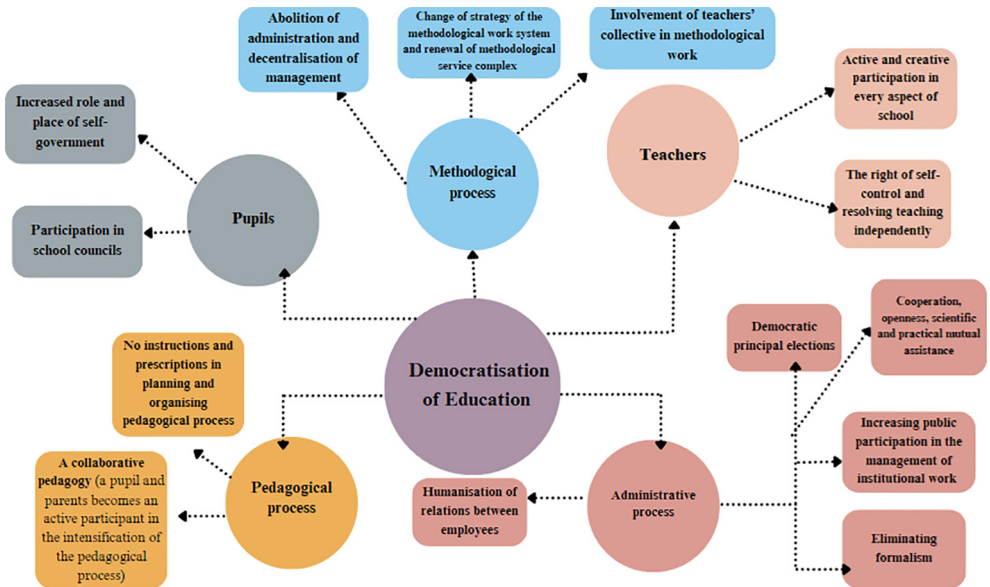
### Interpretation of democracy in 1988–1989

In 1987, Latvia held the Teachers' Congress, which is seen as a shift in pedagogical thought, focusing on democracy, decentralisation, and curriculum diversification, but active education reform began in 1988 in Latvia and was called “reordering” (“pārkārtošana” in Latvian) of the education system (Puškarevs, 1988). New principles of education were human values in education and the right of parents to choose the direction of their children's education; democracy as a way of life and a part of education, not just a political movement; a national curriculum; preservation of the national cultural heritage; and the need for an open society, especially in the field of education; values-based teacher professionalism and involvement in educational interest groups and from 1989–1991, the foundations were laid for an independent Baltic education law and curriculum (Sarv, 2020; Ķestere et al., 2013).

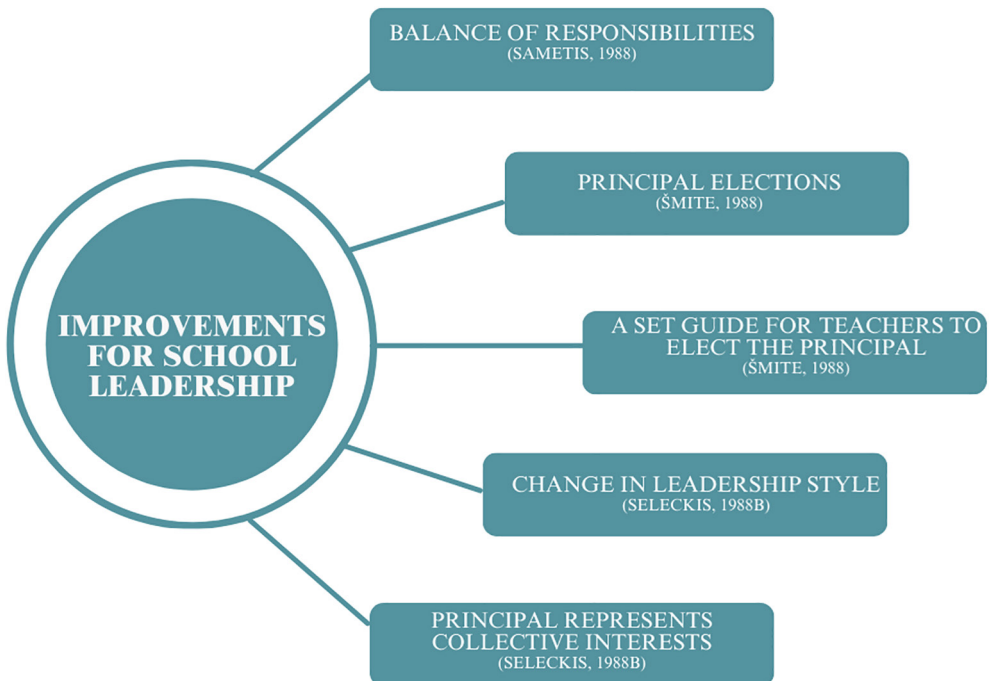
The term “*democratisation*” was used to describe changes in the educational process towards democracy in 1988 and 1989. Figure 2 displays the author's created map of the concept of “*democratisation*” with five dimensions and typical characteristics for the given period.

The influence of democracy on education was marked by increased autonomy for schools and teachers, promoting innovation and modern teaching methods (Pliners, 1988). School democratisation was viewed as both a goal and a mechanism to ensure lasting educational reform (Piebalgs, 1988). This shift emphasised prioritising individual needs over departmental interests, fostering diversity in academic content and methods, and transforming pedagogical relationships into a cooperative and dialogical system (Skolotāju Avīze Nr. 36, 1988a).

Changes in school leadership were necessary (see Figure 3), with principal elections as key to democratisation. However, challenges arose due to the need for more precise guidelines, and it was suggested that elections should only occur in schools with stable environments to avoid biased outcomes (Šmite, 1988; Pliners, 1989).



**Figure 2** Educational Democratisation in 1988 and 1989 (Elksne, 1988; Skolotāju Avīze Nr. 12, 1989, Šmite, 1989)



**Figure 3** Key Reforms for Enhancing School Leadership

To address past authoritarian practices and promote equal opportunities, democracy in education was emphasised as essential. Higher education facilitated the development of creative curricula, student councils, and faculty autonomy (Plaude, 1988; Puškarevs, 1988; Pikulis, 1988). Democracy and humanism were seen as intertwined, requiring gradual development supported by moral, legal, and cultural frameworks (TASS, 1988). Schools were regarded as critical environments for fostering a democratic culture characterised by mutual respect, where pupil councils played a crucial role in teaching governance and decision-making. Although students initially lacked management expertise, the focus was on empowering them to make decisions, express themselves, and learn from their experiences. Democracy was also viewed to enhance educational quality and reduce bureaucracy and dogmatism (Pliners, 1988; Jagodins, 1988b; Seleckis, 1988a; Seleckis 1988b). The article “*Only One Method, Only Democracy* (Jagodins, 1988b), gives the reader a direct, specific, and non-negotiable sense of the text. The language used in the text includes some emotionally solid words and phrases, such as “*pain*”, “*because the fate of our land depends on their future arrangement*”, “*faith of our country*”, and “*I beg*”.

Democracy was seen as *the hope for freedom and empowerment* within academic institutions, focusing on openness and broad democratic development as the path forward for the new school system (Skolotāja Avīze Nr. 50, 1988b; Jagodins, 1988a). In the article by Jagodins (1988a), the term “*democratic principles*” was invoked when choosing a child’s native language for education. Suppose parents wanted their child to be educated in Russian. In that case, it should be allowed as a democratic right, including the creation and use of textbooks in both Russian and Latvian to support this inclusion.

It was argued that democracy involved the wisest dedicating their efforts to the welfare of others. Nevertheless, the authoritarian style remained prevalent in education, highlighting teachers’ lack of practical skills to implement democratic teaching (Skola un Ģimene, 1988). Authoritarian schools emphasise the collective’s role, contrasting it with individuality in a democratic society (Jurs, Pelnēna, 2022).

## Interpretation of democracy in 1990

The Declaration “*On the Restoration of Independence of the Republic of Latvia*” laid the foundations of democracy and defined Latvia as an independent and democratic republic, where the state’s sovereign power belongs to the people of Latvia and the Saeima was elected by universal, equal, direct, and secret suffrage in 1990 (Bleiere, 1996). School associations, school councils, subject associations and education associations were active in 1989–1991, serving as an example of the democratisation of school governance. The period 1987–1991 has been referred to as the Third Awakening: new curricula and standards, textbooks, methodologies, and alternative pedagogies were developed in Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia (Sarv, 2020).

In 1987/88, the notion of *democracy was a metaphor*, and the public had a weak, somewhat idealistic understanding of the nature and practical application of the term due to a lack of shared knowledge and democratic experience. The understanding of

democracy developed rapidly in the following years as Western literature became available and people cooperated and joined in joint activities to understand the nature and processes of democracy. In 1989/90, democratisation was not just a *keyword* and a *goal* but a *practical method for rebuilding the education system* (Sarv, 2020).

Tasks of general education reform were set, such as providing opportunities for young people to become spiritually active, acquiring pragmatic knowledge and skills, gradually changing the teaching methodology and ensuring the inheritance of Latvian and world cultural and historical values. In addition to the above, a system of three documents was established: *the model regulations*, which established the school's right to develop its curriculum in consultation with the local authority and the school council; *the model lesson plans* (setting out the school's responsibilities, such as which subjects to teach, for how long, and regulating the teaching load of pupils) and *educational standards*, which set out the school's responsibilities – why, what and how much needs to be taught (Kalniņš, 1995).

More articles about the opposing sides of democratisation in education appeared in the periodicals in 1990 (see Figure 4). Despite all the positive aspects, it was believed that the education mechanism was still old in 1990, and the education system was far from democracy. For example, the article “*The Game of Democracy is Over*” (Ruskulis, 1990) includes expressiveness and metaphors (“*the land of happiness*”) and personification (“*the power slips from the hands*”), suggesting a vivid and emotionally charged critique of the democratic process. The wording consists of formal and informal words and exclamations such as “*Enough, the game of democracy is over!*” Also, a rhetorical question: “*But where is the surprise word “to work”?*” Moreover, aposiopesis, which is a symbol of silence where the imagination may finish the ending, can be seen in the text: “*So far, that I think, democracy even is moving away because it is impossible to see it...*”. These literary devices might be used to convey the disillusionment or failure of democracy, portraying it as an elusive ideal (“*the land of happiness*”) and illustrating the loss of control or authority as democracy fails to deliver on its promises (“*the power slips from the hands*”). It reflects a critical perspective on the outcomes of democratisation efforts, emphasising the gap between democratic ideals and reality.

Society was in denial about the improvements offered, demanding something more democratic, but political leaders could not deliver it. For example, history lessons were required instead of music lessons, but there was lack of teachers of the subject and no textbooks (Meiere, 1990). Furthermore, the democratisation was hampered by insecurity, over-regulation, isolation in pedagogy, limited global awareness, and management errors. However, establishing councils in municipalities, districts, and schools served as a positive example of democratisation, with discussions on enhancing the roles of school conferences and pedagogical councils in staff development (Šmite, 1990).



Category	Subcategory	Description
Challenges in Implementation	Lack of Teacher Preparedness	Teachers lacked the practical skills and understanding necessary to effectively teach democratic principles (Meiere, 1990).
Nostalgia for Soviet System	Loss of Structure and Effectiveness	Increased autonomy in teaching under democracy perceived as leading to a decline in structure and effectiveness compared to the Soviet era (Sametis, 1990).
Barriers to Democratisation	Insecurity and Over-Regulation	Democratisation efforts were hindered by insecurity, over-regulation, and isolation in pedagogy, along with management errors (Šmite, 1990).
Critique of Inaction	Lack of Genuine Reform	Society criticized the old system but failed to create meaningful changes, merely altering titles and positions without substantive reform (Meiere, 1990).
Public Disillusionment	Waning Enthusiasm	Public enthusiasm for democracy faded due to frustrations with leadership disagreements and the complexities of reform (Klišāns, 2018).
Systemic Issues	Fragmented Responsibilities	Need for centralization of education policy under a single ministry to avoid unnecessary overlap and inefficiency (Seleckis, 1990).

**Figure 4** Opposing Aspects of Democracy in Education in 1990

Seleckis (1990) wrote in *“The Time for Concrete Action is Approaching”* that until 1990, the main direction of the Latvian people was to criticise and analyse past mistakes. However, it was time to build a new education system actively. The existing education system needed to be replaced entirely with a new one, requiring changes such as restructuring and integrating subjects, translating textbooks, training teachers in psychology, and addressing the significant lack of material resources (Meiere, 1990). The language used in the article is emotional and rich in imagery, comparing the education system in 1990 to *“(…) a house that needs a good foundation and a good roof ridge, but not just pretty bricks, you need to think about how the bricks fit into the overall façade of the house”*. The article asks the reader questions such as *“Why? How can Latvia take action to receive advice from wise experts?”* to give the reader a sense of dialogue and presence. The author tried to inspire the reader to take an active role and get involved in the new educational system with words like *“a crucial time of change”* and *“(..) transformations must be aimed at unleashing people’s dormant energy and stimulating activity and initiative”*.

At the end of 1990, the upsurge in Latvian society began to fade somewhat. This decline in public enthusiasm highlighted the challenges of transitioning to democracy, as

societal expectations clashed with the realities of leadership disagreements and the complexities of educational reform.

### **Interpretation of democracy in 1991–1992**

After gaining independence, democratisation, decentralisation, cultural revival, and humanisation of Latvia were the most critical changes in the education system (Sarv, 2020). By 1992, the governance of the education system was reorganised, defining the functions of the Ministry of Education and Science, municipalities, and school boards. The number of school board staff was reduced, officials were elected to the boards, and their functions were changed. State education inspectors were charged with monitoring compliance with legislation and implementing national education policy in district education institutions. The inspectors were to liaise between the educational establishments, the municipality, and the Ministry of Education (Kalniņš, 1995).

Between 1991 and 1992, Latvia introduced a system allowing students to select subjects and courses and implemented a new method for assessing secondary school students' achievements. Educational standards were established in primary education in the 1992/93 academic year. The government promoted the creation of private schools, fostering competition. In higher education, decentralisation and democratisation efforts led to transforming universities into autonomous public institutions, approving their constitutions, and introducing private entrepreneurship in the sector (Kalniņš, 1995). It was believed that education contributes to the democratisation of society. Learning democracy was seen as acquiring specific capacities and skills: the ability to cooperate and communicate, tolerance and acceptance, gender equality, acceptance of people with special needs, and different religions by emphasising these skills because communities live in a multicultural environment (Ķestere, 2009) while exchanging experiences abroad in education as in other democratic societies.

The concept of a democratic education system was characterised by viewing each child as an individual and in the centre of education, focusing on their emotional world, and rejecting authoritarian teaching methods. This perspective was gaining significant acceptance in society. How children were treated became the foundation of educational philosophy, distinguishing humane and democratic approaches from totalitarian and autocratic pedagogy (Albrehta, 1992).

1991–1992 marked a significant transformation in Latvia's education system, integrating democratic principles, decentralisation, and cultural revival. These reforms emphasised individualising education, fostering democratic skills, and transitioning from authoritarian methods to a more humane and inclusive approach, laying the groundwork for a modern, democratic society.

### **Interpretation of democracy in 1993–1994**

In 1993, the Ministry of Education and Science was established in Latvia to have a central administration, subordinate, and supervisory bodies. Furthermore, a new system of assessing pupils' achievements was introduced in primary education, and educational

standards were introduced in general secondary education (Kalniņš, 1995). Nevertheless, the education system was still in chaos due to acquiring freedom and an uncertain future, stating that the education level was lower than before World War II, especially for youth. Little funding was allocated to education, and there were teachers' strikes (Gžibosvka, 1993). The education system had gained freedom and was undergoing self-democratization, but educators and policymakers were uncertain how to utilise this newfound autonomy effectively. Emphasis was placed on democratic education in which each child's inner world and potential are as significant as any other individual's (Grundulis, 1993), underscoring the importance of recognising and nurturing their unique capabilities.

The reorganisation of the education administration in 1994 marked a significant step in refining the structure of the ministry, allowing for a more evident division of responsibilities between national policymaking and strategy development (Kalniņš, 1995), aiming to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of educational governance in Latvia. The foundational principles of education in 1994 integrated values such as humanity, democracy, and individualisation with creativity, national identity, professionalism, and scientific rigour, reflecting a commitment to traditional and modern educational ideals (Vaivads, 1994).

"*Centre for the Development of Democracy*" (further on CDD) promoted democracy to protect and empower children within families, advocating for its education among children, parents, teachers, and social experts (Tūna, 1994). The "*Civil Knowledge in Latvian Schools*" course taught democratic skills through experiential learning, focusing on active participation and new classroom methods to reshape school content and format (Catlaks, 1995a), underscoring the crucial role of education in fostering democratic values within society, emphasising active participation and experiential learning to cultivate informed and empowered citizens.

Democracy, which entailed equality and representation, was not universally realised. By 1994, some schools lacked school councils, and efforts to involve students in director elections were unsuccessful. However, it was permissible for pupils to be represented on school councils to democratise school life and learning. Students needed to be prepared for a democratic society, and both schools and teachers had responsibility for the learning process (Ginote, 1994). Teachers' willingness to work with pupils, parents, and the municipality was crucial.

Education was vital in transitioning from communism to democracy, as it needed to foster democratic principles within society. This involved creating and applying methods to cultivate a democratic culture, recognising that a newly declared democracy takes time to mature (Andersons, 1994). Improving education required clear guidelines on integrating democratic values into primary schooling. A democratic school emphasises dialogue between students and teachers, blending science, art, tradition, and creativity and integrating religious and secular perspectives with broader societal engagement (Sevčenko, 1994). Democracy was essential for a balanced education, protecting youth, and upholding dignity.

## Interpretation of democracy in 1995

Society still lacked a clear understanding of democracy and its processes – for some, it was seen as disorder and chaos. In contrast, others expected it to bring immediate prosperity. Critics argued that the complexity of democracy led to confusion and misunderstandings, contrasting with the explicit purpose of Soviet education (Tomašūns, 1995). Therefore, people needed examples of good practices from countries where democratic principles worked successfully (Grunte, 1995b), signalling the acceptance and perception of democratic principles did not happen in one moment but was a continuous process.

Youth must be allowed to learn about the history and development of their country, their rights and responsibilities, and the opportunities to participate in public and school administration (Catlaks, 1995b); for example, councils and various types of boards continued to be implemented as an example of democracy at school (Brice, 1995). Pupil parliaments, with pupils electing representatives through secret ballots, using one of three proposed models: municipal, Latvian electoral, or majoritarian (Masule, 1995), were proposed to address school issues and teach democracy by helping students understand that not all problems stem from teachers or administration (Vītols, 1995), but are also shaped by student involvement.

Positive development in the understanding of democracy included introducing civics courses, student self-government, and debate programs. Discussions on whether democratic values and critical thinking were being taught appeared (Muižnieks, 1995). Developments of criteria for educational work in a democratic country were required: motivational diagnostics, criteria for pupil-teacher communication, and criteria for the dynamics of the pedagogical process. To strengthen the requirements for educational work, sufficient funding was needed; teachers needed to be responsibly involved, and pupils needed to be actively engaged (Grunte, 1995a).

The “Civic Education Project” (CEP) and “National Democratic Institute” (NDI) played critical roles in reforming Latvian universities to cultivate future democratic leaders (Grunte, 1995a). American influence extended to civil sciences, with the CDD promoting democratic understanding and publishing materials on democracy and the market economy (Berga, 1995; Catlaks, 1995b). The “USA Studies Centre” at the University of Latvia offered resources and training, while civics education, covering socio-political topics, was introduced in schools in 1995, supported by teacher training (Grunte, 1995d; Catlaks, 1995b). Democracy required protection by informed and active citizens, with education emphasising the need for students to understand democratic principles and take political responsibility (Berga, 1995). In this context, “*analysis*” replaced “*control*” (Grunte, 1995c), reflecting trust in the professionalism of educators.

By 1995, critical achievements in democratising Latvia’s education system included introducing an applied research and development program, quality control measures, and establishing school accreditation and final inspections (Kalniņš, 1995). However, challenges persisted due to teachers’ reliance on outdated Soviet training and a shortage of curricula for previously politicised subjects like history (Abens, 2020). Democratic

education focused on forming parents' councils, integrating schools into local communities, and promoting student participation and respect for diverse opinions.

## Conclusions

The democracy in Latvian education from 1988 to 1995 evolved significantly during the country's transition to independence. Initially interpreted as a metaphorical ideal of freedom, openness and autonomy, democracy gradually became an interpretation of a practical framework for educational reform, emphasising decentralisation, individual rights, and public involvement. The reforms aimed to counteract past authoritarian practices, promote equality, and integrate democratic principles into governance and curriculum. However, the transition faced complex challenges, including outdated teacher training, limited resources, and lingering authoritarian attitudes. The emphasis on the child's core values emerged. Democracy fostered humanistic values, individual rights, and social responsibility. The transition involved a shift from authoritarian practices to democratic, emphasising individualisation and active participation in educational processes.

Despite obstacles, by 1995, Latvia had made substantial progress in embedding democratic values in its education system, laying the foundation for a more inclusive and participatory approach. Further research is needed to explore how these early reforms have continued to shape Latvian education in the years since.

## Author Note

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