Values Lost in Society in the Eyes of Academics

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Abstract

Although there are numerous studies and discussions about the concept of value, it is claimed to lack an objective basis. The concept of value is difficult to define from a single perspective because it relates to many disciplines, especially the social sciences. Philosophy, sociology, psychology, religious sciences, anthropology, and historical sciences have attributed different meanings to the concept of value. However, the fact that the concept of value is related to human behavior has been a common point in all disciplines of social sciences. Values are essential in terms of social sciences because they interpret human behavior (Ulusoy & Dilmaç, 2016). Therefore, this study aimed to determine what academics thought about the core values lost in society and what kind of solutions they offered to that problem. The sample consisted of 16 academics from Van Yuzuncu Yıl University/Turkey. The sample consisted of 12 men and 4 women. The study adopted a qualitative research design. Data were collected using a semi-structured interview questionnaire consisting of open-ended questions. The data were analyzed using descriptive analysis. The findings focused on participants' views of the concept of values, the values lost in society, values problems, and solutions to the lost values.

Keywords: values, academics, semi-structured interview, lost values

1. Introduction

Our attitudes, decisions, and behaviors depend on how we evaluate them. While the understanding of value lies based on our existence as a person in integrity with our relationships with people and ourselves, our interest in the actions of others and ourselves, our immediate environment, our age, and our connection with the past and the future, there is our understanding of human and what we expect from people and ourselves (Kuçuradi, 2016). People are born into groups and acquire social qualities through them. These groups transmit social knowledge and values to their members. Through their relationships with others, people learn social values, rules, norms, attitudes, habits, and skills (İçli, 2005, p. 117). People have been exposed to education and training throughout history. They have always accepted knowledgeable, resourceful, and educated people and have directed their relations with them by controlling and examining their behavior (Ulusoy & Dilmaç, 2016). According to Schwartz (1992), values are standard measures that guide one's emotions and behaviors.

According to Berkowitz (2011), values education (alternatively moral education or character education) helps young people develop prosocial tendencies and competencies and display high academic performance. Thornberg and Oğuz (2013) conducted a qualitative study on values education with 52 Swedish and Turkish teachers and determined that values education mainly was related to social norms and that there was a professional deficiency in this field. In their meta-analysis, Elbir and Bağcı (2013) have found that students do not know enough about values education. Ereş (2015) evaluated undesirable behaviors toward their social environment among adults with at least a bachelor's degree within character education and citizenship education. He found that adults showed undesirable behavior related to respect, compassion, and honesty in the context of character education, and undesirable behavior related to a sense of justice and responsibility in the context of citizenship education. Ergin and Karataş (2014) conducted a study with teachers and determined that family was one of the determining factors in values education and that the values taught by school and family conflicted. Kayıran and Bağçeci (2018) found that the most important values according to preschool teachers were honesty, patriotism, responsibility, justice, and respect for older adults and the environment. In Şahin (2019), preservice teachers emphasized that the primary goal of values education should be to turn students into good citizens. They also thought that active learning methods, being a model, and family cooperation would be effective in the learning process. In Ulusoy (2021), history teachers (n=30) stated that the history curriculum should include alternative activity examples instead of just

giving definitions and information, that materials should be provided free of charge by schools, that activities should be carried out to prevent peer bullying, and that there should be more activities and operations for women's rights. Most studies on values and values education focus on teachers and preservice teachers (Akan, 2021; Bayırlı, Doruk & Tüfekçi 2020; Çalışkan, Yıldırım, & Demirhan, 2021; Duban & Aydoğdu, 2016; Durdukoca Firat, 2019; Ekşi & Kaya, 2021; Kamer & Şahin, 2021; Katmış & Balcı, 2017; Kayıran & Bağçeci, 2018, Okumuş, 2021; Oğuz, 2012; Yazar, 2012; Yildiz-Göğebakan & Pala, 2021). However, there is limited research on academics. Therefore, this study focused on academics' views of values lost in society and their solutions to value problems. We think that this study will contribute to the literature. The opinions of academics are also of great importance. This study aimed to determine the thoughts of academicians about the values lost in society.

2. Method

This study adopted a qualitative research design (phenomenology) to determine what faculty members working in different fields of Van Yuzuncu Yıl University/Turkey thought about the values lost in society. Phenomenology focuses on phenomena that we know but do not have an in-depth and detailed understanding of. We encounter phenomena in various forms, such as events, experiences, perceptions, orientations, concepts, and situations. Phenomenology aims to investigate the facts that are not entirely foreign to us but that we cannot fully grasp the meaning of (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2006, p. 72). The data were collected using a semi-structured interview questionnaire. The data were themed according to the questions, and direct quotes were used where necessary. The findings were evaluated and interpreted inductively.

2.1 Study Group

The sample consisted of 16 academics of different ages and professional seniority working in different fields of Van Yuzuncu Yıl University from Turkey.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics

Participants	Gender	Age (years)	Title	Field
P1	Man	27	Research Assistant	Social sciences
P2	Man	39	Research Assistant	Social sciences
P3	Man	28	Research Assistant	Educational sciences
P4	Man	32	Research Assistant	Social sciences
P5	Woman	34	Dr. Faculty Member	Natural sciences
P6	Woman	36	Dr. Faculty Member	Educational sciences
P7	Man	39	Dr. Faculty Member	Social sciences
P8	Woman	33	Dr. Faculty Member	Social sciences
P9	Man	40	Associate professor	Social sciences
P10	Man	37	Associate professor	Natural sciences
P11	Woman	34	Associate professor	Natural sciences
P12	Man	50	Associate professor	Educational sciences
P13	Man	44	Professor	Social sciences
P14	Man	54	Professor	Educational sciences
P15	Man	62	Professor	Natural sciences
P16	Man	43	Professor	Natural sciences

As shown in Table 1, the sample consisted of 12 men and four women. Participants were research assistants (n=4), dr. faculty members (n=4), associate professors (n=4), or professors (n=4). Participants were academics in social sciences (n=7), natural sciences (n=5), or educational sciences (n=4).

2.2 Data Collection

The data were collected using a semi-structured interview questionnaire developed by Koç (2022). The questionnaire consisted of six open-ended questions checked by two experts at the educational sciences department:

The questions developed by Koç (2022) were as follows:

1)   What does the term "value" mean to you?

2)   What does "values education" mean to you?

3)   What values do you think we have lost the most?

4)   What are the greatest value problems you encounter in daily life?

5)   Why do you think we have lost some values in society?

6)   How do you think we can get those lost values back?

2.3 Data Analysis

In line with the purpose of the research, it was carried out in order to make sense of the semi-structured interviews. The study was designed with the voluntary participation of the participants. The data were collected face-to-face or through written forms. Each interview took about 20-25 minutes. Some interviews were completed with audio records, while the others were completed with interview forms. The audio recordings collected as data were transferred to the electronic media as text. All the interviews were examined, and each participant was assigned a code (P1…P16). The data were analyzed using descriptive analysis. The data were themed according to the questions, and direct quotes were used where necessary. The data were read again by the researchers and the themes created were compared. The findings were evaluated and interpreted inductively. The interview questions were based on the questions that developed by Koç (2022).

3. Results

Table 2. Participants' responses

What does the term "value" mean to you?
Social rules and standards (8)
Characteristics that make one virtuous (4)
Moral rituals (1)
Faith and culture (1)
Personal behavior (1)
Value judgments (1)
What does "values education" mean to you?
Teaching the customs, traditions, rules, and values accepted by society (5)
Raising people's awareness (2)
The process of raising individuals (2)
The process of turning moral rituals into behavior (2)
Making human (1)
Cultural heritage (1)
Comprehensive education (1)
Uncertainty (1)
People living together as a community (1)
What values do you think we have lost the most?
Honesty (9)
Respect (8)
Justice (6)
Responsibility (5)
Credibility (4)
Love (4)
Cultural values, customs, and traditions (2)
Understanding (2)
Humility (2)
Empathy (1)
What are the greatest value problems you encounter in daily life?
Lack of respect for each other's rights and lack of mutual respect (8)
Self-seeking (title, position, money, power) (1)
Intergenerational conflict (1)
Intolerance (1)
Absence of religious values in practice (1)
Not doing to others what one expects others to do to them (1)
The culture of living together (1)

Values not turning into attitudes and behaviors (1)
Selfishness (1)
Why do you think we have lost some values in society?
Digitization, social media (6)
Education (3)
Family-school conflict (3)
Self-interest (2)
Globalization (2)
How do you think we can get those lost values back?
Family awareness and education (7)
Using cultural elements (2)
Media awareness
Education (5)
Using fairy tales and stories (2)
Welfare state (1)
Creating positive value judgments (1)

3.1 What Does the Term "Value" Mean to You?

Participants' responses to the first interview question were analyzed and grouped based on similarity. To most participants, the term "value" meant social rules and standards and virtuous aspirations. To the others, it meant moral rituals, personal behavior, faith and culture, and value judgments. The following are some quotes:

"To me, the term 'value' means all the nonverbal rules that are necessary to live together and to transform a person into a social being. For example, think about a person living alone in nature; his only value is survival, but people have come together and created communities and made their lives easier by living as a community and sharing work, so those values have now turned into unspoken laws that keep that society alive." P6

"We can think of anything like ideas, faith, and culture as values that help one interpret, resolve, and manage all situations that one encounters" P11.

"It's the way one acts according to some basic criteria and standards…or they [values] are the principles that guide our lives." P12

3.2 What Does "Values Education" Mean to You?

Participants' responses to the second interview question were analyzed and grouped based on similarity. Most participants thought of values education as teaching the customs, traditions, rules, and values accepted by society. Some participants regarded values education as raising people's awareness and turning students into good individuals. They also emphasized that values education involved uncertainties. Some others associated values education with the process of turning moral rituals into behavior, people living together as a community, making humans human, and comprehensive education. The following are some quotes:

"Values education is turning students into people with strong characters." P5

"I think that the term 'values education' has its limits. If the so-called values differ, which of them are we to teach? It is the social values or universal values?... I think that the concept of values education has uncertainties." P3

"Values education is the teaching of customs, traditions, and rules accepted by society…" P16

3.3 What Values Do You Think We Have Lost the Most?

Participants' responses to the third interview question were analyzed and grouped based on similarity. Most participants stated that they thought that we had lost the values of honesty, respect, and justice. Other participants noted that they thought that we had lost the values of responsibility, credibility, love, traditions, customs, understanding, humility, and empathy. The following are some quotes:

"I don't think people respect each other anymore. I think that there are more and more people who look out for their own interests and so lose their values of credibility and honesty" P4

"We've lost credibility these days. It's just abandoned social and family life." P9

"I think that we've lost the values of justice, merit, sensitivity, family order, and responsibility. Coexistence, respect for differences, and public interest, which are expressed as democratic values, have also been almost

forgotten." P13

3.4 What Are the Greatest Value Problems You Encounter in Daily Life?

Participants' responses to the fourth interview question were analyzed and grouped based on similarity. Most participants stated that the greatest value problems they encountered in daily life were the lack of respect for other people's rights and the lack of mutual respect. The other participants noted that the greatest value problems they encountered in daily life were intolerance, absence of religious values in practice, not doing to others what one expects others to do to them, the culture of living together, values not turning into attitudes and behaviors, and selfishness. The following are some quotes:

"People are intolerant. There is an illusion of honesty in society. Love has been a commodity in the capitalist system. Violence due to lack of love and respect." P1

"Any kind of self-seeking (title-position, money, power) has trumped credibility, honesty, and friendship." P7

"Selfishness, self-interest, short-term advantages, lying for deception, and pulling a trick on others… intergenerational conflict, absence of religious values in practice" P8

3.5 Why Do You Think We Have Lost Some Values in Society?

Participants' responses to the fifth interview question were analyzed and grouped based on similarity. Most participants noted that digitalization and social media were the reasons why we had lost some values in society. The other participants remarked that family-school conflict, globalization, self-interest, and education were other reasons for losing some societal values. The following are some quotes:

"Mass media, and artists and intellectuals being a bad example to society" P2

"We've lost justice…when that happens, you also lose accountability, so nobody assumes responsibility. People are turning into selfish and cunning individuals who do not understand one another. Even self-judgment has something to do with an inner justice mechanism." P8

"Rapid social change. Not making children aware of boundaries in the context of values. New generation parents cannot connect with their children 0-5 years of age. But those kids need to learn the boundaries." P14

3.6 How Do You Think We Can Get Those Lost Values Back?

Participants' responses to the sixth interview question were analyzed and grouped based on similarity. Participants believed that we could get the lost values back through family awareness and education, teacher education, media awareness, and a welfare state. They also stated that we could get the lost values back if we used fairy tales and stories and cultural elements and created positive value judgments. The following are some quotes:

"We should create positive value judgments and integrate them into courses. Students should turn them into reflexes." P13

"An all-out education campaign by conscious parents and educators at a very early age. To raise social awareness through studies where the subject is discussed and examined in depth…" P14

"We should restructure teacher training. Politicians should use a constructive and value-focused language. The media should be more sensitive to moral values. We should stop airing shows that undermine values." P13

4. Discussion

This study addressed academics' views of values lost in society. The data were collected from 16 academics, who were asked six questions about values. The study investigated what "value" and "values education" meant to academics, what values they thought we had lost the most, what were the greatest value problems they encountered in daily life, why they thought we had lost some values in society, and how they thought we could get lost values back.

To most participants, the term "value" meant social standards and virtuous aspirations. According to Schwartz (1992), values are the standards and measures that guide people's feelings, thoughts, and behaviors. To some participants, the term "value" meant moral rituals, personal behavior, faith and culture, and value judgments.

Most participants believed that values education was the teaching of customs, rules, and values accepted by society. Thornberg and Oğuz (2013) also reported that Swedish and Turkish teachers thought that values education were related to social norms. Şahin (2019) found that preservice teachers believed that the goal of values education was to turn students into good citizens. Some of our participants associated values education with raising people's awareness and turning students into good people. One participant stated that values education involved some

uncertainties. Some participants associated values education with living together as a community, making human, comprehensive education, and turning moral rituals into behavior.

Most of our participants argued that we had lost the values of honesty, respect, and justice. Some participants believed that we had lost the values of responsibility, credibility, love, traditions and customs, understanding, humility, and empathy.

Most of our participants noted that the greatest value problems they encountered in daily life were not respecting other people's rights, self-seeking, intergenerational conflict, intolerance, absence of religious values in practice, not doing to others what one expects others to do to them, the lack of a culture of living together, values not turning into attitudes and behaviors, and selfishness. Yazar (2012) found that the lives of preservice teachers were primarily led by spiritual values, followed by material/economic values, religious values, social values, and other values. Tay (2009) reported that preservice teachers considered self-realization, success, socialization, and peace to be the most important values. Yazar and Erkuş (2013) determined that preservice teachers thought that we should teach children the values of respect, love, and sharing.

Most participants considered digitalization and social media to be the cause of losing values in society. Some participants regarded self-interest as the reason for losing values in society. Bayırlı, Doruk, and Tüfekçi (2020) found that teachers saw the problems regarding values education as of application-origin, teacher-origin, pedagogical-origin, and environment-origin.

Participants stated that we could get the lost values back by using fairy tales and stories and cultural elements and creating positive value judgments. Some participants noted that we could get the lost values back through family awareness and education, media awareness, teacher education, and a welfare state. Yazar (2012) reported that preservice teachers believed that parents should be trained about values because family played a crucial role in adopting values.

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