

Values Lost in Society in the Eyes of Teachers

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Abstract

People's actions are governed by their values, beliefs, perspectives, and world views. There is so much diversity that everyone has or creates their own moral standards, principles, and values, making social cohesion difficult. We come to a dead-end when we evaluate different moral standards and value systems from the perspective of relativity and absoluteness. People acquire values first in the family and then at school. Therefore, teachers play a crucial role in helping students adopt values and moral standards. This study investigated teachers' views on values (especially lost values). This study adopted a qualitative research design (phenomenology). Data were collected using a semi-structured interview questionnaire developed by the researcher. The questionnaire consisted of six questions. The study sought answers to the following questions: What do teachers think about values and values education? What values do teachers think we have lost in society? Why do teachers think we have lost values in society? and How do teachers think we can get back the lost values? Participants viewed values as moral principles. They regarded values education as the type of education required for society to live in a healthy, harmonious, and peaceful way. They thought that we had lost the values of honesty, understanding, respect, etc. They believed that we had lost those values because of social media, changes in the institution of family, etc. They suggested that we provide students with values education courses and encourage school-family collaboration to get back the lost values.

Keywords: values, values education, teacher, semi-structured interview

1. Introduction

Philosophers, thinkers, scientists, and policymakers have reflected on the purpose and content of education throughout history. An essential goal of education is to turn students into good people. Raising good people is a moral issue. Good and bad and right and wrong behaviors and principles determine who a good person is. Morality is also the source of happiness. People can distinguish good and right from bad and wrong through correct interpretations and evaluations that they attribute to concepts. When people interpret values differently, it may cause social turmoil and unrest. Different moral standards and values cause a dead end when evaluated in the context of immutability and volatility. According to Kuçuradi (1995), the multiplicity of different worldviews and norms led to the idealization of pluralism, urging some thinkers of the second half of the century to argue that all views and norms were equivalent. Veugelers and Vedder (2003) argue that values are judgments based on what is good and what is bad, not personal preferences based on taste. Schwartz et al. (2001) define values as guiding principles and desirable goals in people's lives. Schwartz (1992) regards values as standard measures that guide people's emotions and behaviors. Values are the source of behaviors and help us develop insights to evaluate behaviors (Ekşi & Katılmış, 2016). Interacting with their students, teachers talk about values and find those values important (Veugelers, 2000).

Moral principles and rules vary across ages, societies, and people. Different moral principles and rules enable everyone to create their own standards and values. Different values and standards make social cohesion difficult. We come to a dead-end when we evaluate different moral standards and value systems from the perspective of relativity and absoluteness. Religious and cultural values are relative. Therefore, nations need shared values, such as a common language. People have both shared needs and values.

According to Kuçuradi (2016), attitudes are based on how people evaluate events, decisions, and behaviors. He regards the ability of human beings to evaluate as an information problem and a human problem. He specifies correct evaluations as evaluations that provide knowledge of the value of objects. Cevizci (2002) defines

morality as a set of determined and defined values. He adds that morality is a set of rules that reveal how we will keep those values alive and achieve our goals. To him, morality is also a customary way of life organized by beliefs, commands, prohibitions, norms, and values. According to Veugelers and Vedder (2003), values education is the teaching of social, political, cultural, and aesthetic values.

Children acquire values and morality first in the family and then at school. Therefore, teachers play a vital role in this process. Yiğittir and Öcal (2011) examined high school history teachers' views on values education (n=83). They found that the teachers wanted to teach their students the national and spiritual values of love for the country and nation, historical awareness, sensitivity to historical and cultural heritage, unity, respect, independence, respect for the National Anthem and the flag, and hard work. Ergin and Karataş (2014) conducted a case study on teachers' views on values education. They determined that the teachers considered values education useful but believed that the greatest challenge was limited time. Therefore, the teachers suggested that they provide values education as a separate course.

Güçlü (2015) used descriptive analysis to evaluate the results of studies in Turkey on values education. They have concluded that the studies focus on the effects of values education on children's social, cognitive, affective, and moral development. Studies have shown that researchers have focused on stories, sayings, *semahs*, newspapers, a hundred essential works, proverbs, cartoons, and prayers as materials used in values education. Yıldırım and Çalışkan (2018) stated that most social studies teachers (n=45) emphasized the importance of values education and maintained that they should execute values education thoroughly, not just operations on paper. Yıldırım and Çalışkan (2018) also added that social studies teachers did not use activities in values education but saw the social studies course as a values education course.

Tulunay Ateş (2017) investigated the effect of values education activities on positive characteristics that students were expected to acquire. First, they examined 55 master's and Ph.D. theses on values education. Second, they included the data of 21 experimental studies on the effects of values education on primary, secondary, and high school students. Their results have shown that the values education in Turkey is successful as it helps students acquire the positive characteristics that they are expected to acquire. Elbir and Bağcı (2013) examined 21 Ph.D. and master's theses on values education. Most of those studies have emphasized that teachers and preservice teachers should be informed about values education because they do not internalize it adequately. There is also a large body of research on teachers' views on values education (Coombs-Richardson & Tolson, 2005; Kozikoğlu, 2018; Kozikoğlu & Bekler, 2019; Kuloğlu, Yaşar, & Özer, 2021; Pekdoğan & Korkmaz, 2017; Öztürk & Dilmaç, 2016; Willemse, Lunenberg, & Korthagen, 2008; Yılmaz & Yılmaz, 2017).

First, parents and then teachers help children recognize the importance of values. The study sought answers to the following questions: What do teachers think about values and values education? What values do teachers think we have lost in society? Why do teachers think we have lost values in society? and How do teachers think we can get back the lost values?

2. Method

This qualitative study was conducted in the 2019–2020 academic year and adopted phenomenology as the research design. Phenomenology aims to investigate the phenomena that are not entirely foreign to us but that we cannot fully grasp the meaning of (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2002).

2.1 Study Group

The sample consisted of 25 teachers working in different branches and cities in Turkey.

Table 1. Sociodemographic characteristics

Participants	Gender	Age (years)	School-level	Work experience (years)	Branch
P1	Woman	24	High school	2	Guidance and Psychological counseling
P2	Woman	33	High school	10	Health service
P3	Woman	39	Middle school	5	Religious culture and moral knowledge
P4	Man	40	High school	15	History
P5	Man	39	Middle school	13	Science
P6	Man	35	High school	10	Health service
P7	Man	46	Middle school	23	Social studies
P8	Man	48	Middle school	48	Music
P9	Man	29	Primary school	29	Classroom teacher
P10	Man	38	Middle school	14	Turkish teacher
P11	Man	33	High school	11	Philosophy
P12	Man	52	Primary school	23	Classroom teacher
P13	Woman	42	High school	15	Music
P14	Woman	28	High school	5	Guidance
P15	Woman	28	Primary school	6	Classroom teacher
P16	Woman	30	Primary school	5	Classroom teacher
P17	Woman	25	Primary school	1	Classroom teacher
P18	Woman	38	Preschool	13	Preschool
P19	Man	40	High school	15	Philosophy
P20	Man	53	Primary school	30	Classroom teacher
P21	Woman	26	High school	3	Classroom teacher
P22	Man	49	Middle school	25	Science
P23	Woman	26	Primary school	26	Classroom teacher
P24	Woman	23	Primary school	1	Classroom teacher
P25	Man	28	Primary school	5	Classroom teacher

As shown in Table 1, the sample consisted of 12 women and 13 men. Thirteen participants were 24–35 years of age, while twelve participants were 36–50 years of age. Participants were high school (n=9), middle school (n=6) or primary school teachers (n=9). Eleven participants had 5–10 years of work experience. Seven participants had 11–20 years of work experience. Seven participants had more than 20 years of work experience. Ten participants were classroom teachers. Other participants were Turkish, philosophy, science, music, history, preschool, religious culture and moral knowledge, or guidance and psychological counseling teachers.

2.2 Data Collection Tools

The data were collected using a semi-structured interview questionnaire developed by the researcher. The questionnaire consisted of six open-ended questions. First, the researcher conducted a literature review. Second, she consulted two experts for comprehensibility and relevance. Third, she revised the questions based on expert feedback.

The interview questionnaire consisted of the following questions:

- 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 Collection and Analysis

The study was conducted in the 2019–2020 academic year. Participation was voluntary. The data were collected face-to-face or through written forms. Some interviews were completed with audio records, while the others were completed with interview forms. All participants were emailed the data collection forms. All the interviews were examined, and each participant was assigned a code (P1...P25). Female participants were assigned the codes of WP1, WP2, etc., while male participants were assigned the codes of MP3, MP4, etc. The data were analyzed using descriptive analysis. The data were themed according to the questions, and direct quotes were used. The findings were evaluated and interpreted inductively.

3. Results

This section addressed the results regarding participants' responses to the questions, what does the term "value" mean to you? What does "values education" mean to you? What values do you think we have lost the most? What are the greatest value problems you encounter in daily life? Why do you think we have lost some values in society? and how do you think we can get those lost values back?

What does the term "value" mean to you?

This section addressed the results regarding participants' responses to the question, "What does the term 'value' mean to you?" Most participants defined values as "moral principles" and "responsibilities for the self, people, and society." The following are some quotes:

"Values are each society's own beliefs, behaviors, and moral principles." (WP1)

"Values are the moral and social principles of society." (WP3)

"Values are the elements that a nation has and make that nation a nation. Such values as love, loyalty, justice, mercy, and brotherhood keep a nation alive. No matter how economically strong a nation is, it cannot find any peace if it has lost these values. Values education is also important in this respect. Values should be presented with the responsibility of role-modeling within the framework of being a living example. To me, values education means instilling those values by being a living example. In other words, its affective dimension is important." (MP5)

"Values are the principles that determine people's behaviors and attitudes." (WP6)

What does "values education" mean to you?

This section addressed the results regarding participants' responses to the question, "What does 'values education' mean to you?" Participants' responses were grouped under the themes of "education necessary for social peace," "being a role model," and "efforts to ensure that children acquire values."

The following are some quotes:

"Values education is an important education that we need to provide everyone with to make sure that society can lead a healthy, harmonious, and peaceful life." (WP1)

"I don't think that decorating boards, telling topics, reading poems, and watching videos do much for values education. The most important factor in values education is how exemplary parents, teachers, and administrators are. Cognitive studies can be helpful." (MP5)

"Values education is gaining values and transforming them into behavior because values affect one's personality and behavior." (WP6)

What values do you think we have lost the most?

This section addressed the results regarding participants' responses to the question, "What values do you think we have lost the most?" Most participants stated that we had lost the values of honesty, understanding, helpfulness, and respect.

The following are some quotes:

"I believe that we have lost honesty and justice. The family is the smallest unit of society, and I think that we have lost honesty starting from the family. Parents and teachers have not been able to comprehend what honesty is. Besides, few people appreciate justice." (WP3)

"Children don't respect adults, and students don't respect their teachers anymore." (MP5)

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

This section addressed the results regarding participants' responses to the question, "What are the greatest value problems you encounter in daily life?" Most participants stated that they encountered lies, injustice, irresponsibility, and violence in daily life.

The following are some quotes:

"Injustice, lies, impudence, intolerance..." (WP3)

"Lack of respect for the old, breach of courtesy, lying, lack of trust among family members, lack of trust among people living in cities, social intolerance..." (MP5)

"People don't adopt values and don't know anything about them." (WP6)

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

This section addressed the results regarding participants' responses to the question, "Why do you think we have lost some values in society?" Participants noted that we had lost some values in society due to consumer society, disrupted family relations, mistakes in child-rearing practices, social media, and globalization.

The following are some quotes:

"People look at things differently and have changed their priorities. We've turned into a selfish consuming society. Mistakes in child-rearing practices, and unpleasant shows on social media, TV, and other social platforms." (WP1)

"The biggest factor is that the family, which is the core of society, has come to the point of extinction. Healthy parents mean healthy kids, and healthy kids mean healthy parents. Broken relationships and a lack of love and respect between family members have finished the family. The second most important factor is school, but schools provide insufficient education. Training is more important than education for schools, and mistakes in the education system have caused our values to be lost." (WP3)

"Weakening of social ties, globalization, misuse of media and social media." (WP24)

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

This section addressed the results regarding participants' responses to the question, "How do you think we can get those lost values back?" Most participants' recommendations were "providing students with values education courses," "raising parents' awareness," "social media restrictions," and "school-parent cooperation." Some participants' recommendations were "using the Internet correctly," "being role models," "principle centrism," "political steps to prevent polarization," and "measures to prevent unemployment."

The following are some quotes:

"I think that all students should be provided with values education courses and practices. We should raise parents' awareness of values and make sure that they also adopt them. We should impose some restrictions on social platforms and improve the shows." (WP1)

"Schools should cooperate with parents and provide them with training on values." (WP3)

"We should make sure that everybody uses the Internet the right way. We should also teach everybody that each society has its own values and that everybody has different values depending on where they live. Schools should offer values education properly and provide students with visits and observations to make sure they understand values better." (WP4)

"Being a role model is important. The establishment of virtues depends entirely on the interaction of people with each other. Children imitate their parents. Teenagers are affected by the behavior of others around them. College students are affected by the school atmosphere... So, we need family schools to provide prospective parents with training on values and their role in character development. We should pay attention to teacher-parent relations. Parents shouldn't undermine the values taught by teachers. So, we should give up on training-centered curricula. Schools should not only ensure cognitive performance but also indoctrinate children with values and virtues. Long-term studies should be performed to raise the public's awareness of values, and authorities should be patient when it comes to implementing those strategies. Strategies shouldn't change from person to person. They should be based on principles. Principles shouldn't change even if those who teach them are replaced by new ones." (MP5)

"Knowing about values, recognizing shortcomings, doing practices in schools to ensure that students adopt values, and putting in effort into raising adults' awareness of values..." (WP6).

"We should pay attention to values education. Politicians should take steps to prevent polarization. People should be told about the importance of respect and understanding. Authorities should find a solution to unemployment..." (MP7)

"Administrators, educators, and students... We should raise everybody's awareness of values..." (MP8)

"Students shouldn't be passive carriers of information. We must provide students with a life-centered and rational education system to turn them into people who process knowledge and put it into practice. We must abandon curricula that only encourage students to develop academic skills and make them compete with each other. We must replace those curricula with new ones, which focus on skills, help students develop professional skills, and respect social values. Middle school students take 40 hours of classes per week. These classes should not focus solely on academic abilities. Teachers should perform extracurricular activities, such as patient visits,

helping, and cleaning, to allow students to come into contact with social values.” (MP9)

4. Discussion

This study determined what the terms “value” and “values education” meant to teachers, 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 those lost values back. Participants associated values with principles. Balcı and Yanpar Yelken (2010) also found that teachers used such expressions as price, importance, benefit, value, criterion, compensation, measure, cost, and value to explain the concept of value.

Our participants believed that education and role models played a key role in helping children adopt values in society. Yıldırım and Çalışkan (2018) stated that most social studies teachers (n=45) emphasized the importance of values education and maintained that they should thoroughly execute values education, not just operations on paper. Yıldırım and Çalışkan (2018) also added that social studies teachers did not use activities in values education but saw the social studies course as a values education course. Thornberg and Oğuz (2012) argue that teachers should be good role models to help students acquire and internalize values. Öztürk and Dilmaç (2016) found that visual arts teachers had more positive attitudes towards values education as they received more training on it. Sezer (2021) determined that middle school teachers used role models, case studies, drama, and story-telling to teach their students about values.

Most of our participants thought that we had lost the values of understanding, honesty, and solidarity in society. Sezer (2021) found that middle school teachers believed that students should adopt the values of honesty, solidarity, respect, understanding, justice, patriotism, responsibility, and hard work.

The value problems our participants encountered in daily life were lies, injustice, irresponsibility, and violence.

Participants believed that we had lost some societal values due to social polarization, unaware parents, consumer society, social media, globalization, parental mistakes, and the lack of mutual respect.

Participants recommended family schools, political steps (to prevent polarization), unemployment prevention measures, and top-to-bottom monitoring of education to get back the values we had lost in society. Ogelman and Sarıkaya (2015) determined that preschool teachers emphasized the importance of awareness-raising practices for teachers and added that preschool curricula should offer courses on values. They also stated that teachers should be provided with materials and training related to values education. Balcı and Yanpar Yelken (2010) reported that most teachers’ explanations of values emphasized their place in social life and their role in socialization and personality development.

In conclusion, teachers focus on principles when thinking about values. Principles are critical because they guide people’s attitudes and behaviors. Values education plays a key role in turning values into behaviors. Teachers emphasize the significance of role models in ensuring that children adopt values. They think that the values of honesty, understanding, cooperation, and respect are mostly lost in society. The value problems they encounter most in daily life are lies, injustice, irresponsibility, and violence. To them, we have lost those values because of consumer society, disrupted family relations, mistakes in child-rearing practices, social media, and globalization. Most teachers believe that values education courses, family awareness, social media restrictions, and school-family cooperation are key to getting the lost values back, while others believe that we can get the lost values back if we can use the Internet properly, become role models for children, focus on principles, and take political steps to prevent polarization and unemployment.

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