

*Full Length Research Paper*

# A role model in light of values: Mahatma Gandhi<sup>i</sup>

Hakan Dündar<sup>1</sup>, Erdi Erdoğan<sup>2</sup> and Erdem Hareket<sup>2\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Department of Educational Sciences in the Faculty of Literature of Kyrgyzstan-Turkey Manas University, Turkey

<sup>2</sup> Department of Social Sciences and Turkish Education in the Faculty of Education of Kırıkkale University, Turkey.  
Department of Primary Education in the Faculty of Education of Kırıkkale University, Turkey.

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The non-violent, tolerant, pacifistic and humanistic manner of Mahatma Gandhi is a globally recognized fact. UNESCO's foundation of Mahatma Gandhi Institute of Education for Peace and Sustainable Development is one of the best examples that support this fact. In this study, it is aimed to present "Mahatma Gandhi", who is globally accepted as a role model with his personal characteristics, meaning and view of life, devotion to his beliefs, way of struggling with the problems he encountered, universal understanding of peace and tolerance, the value he attached to human beings, and his character, thus, from the values he possessed, to set forth an educational point of view. The study was conducted based on the method of document review in accordance with the qualitative approach to research. As a result of this study, it is assessed that Mahatma Gandhi accommodated in his personality many universal values such as love for his fellow humans, justice, peace, non-violence, tolerance, and freedom, and when faced with certain situations in his lifetime, exhibited an attitude that is compatible with his principles related to these values. In this context, it can be speculated that introducing and conveying Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy of life and the treasure of values he had to students via various educational activities and biographies can make the processes of education for peace and values more effective.

**Key words:** Universal values, values education, Mahatma Gandhi and values, peace education, social studies.

## INTRODUCTION

Peace is one of the universal values humankind has failed to grasp adequately and extensively, nor has he reflected it to his own life effectively. Because of this, there are still conflicts in many areas today (Abdi and Shultz, 2008), and individuals prefer means of offense with violence and pecuniary sources, instead of listening to the opinions of the other side, or creating intellectual common grounds. Our lacking of empathy and universal values become more obvious with these sorts of approaches. It is a bitter

truth known by societies that in the course of history, violence and conflict occur in certain areas in certain times like World War I and II. However, in the face of mundane issues, humankind continues to exhibit far away from peace and universal values, ignoring all these tragic events. When we look today, Syrian conflicts appear as best examples of this manner. Likewise, lots of people are dying or migrating due to conflicts worldwide. According to United Nations High Commissioner for

\*Corresponding author. E-mail: [erdem.hareket@gmail.com](mailto:erdem.hareket@gmail.com).

Refugees (2015), 65.3 million people forcibly displaced worldwide by the end of 2015. In this context, it is understood that people are prone and eager to categorize each other because of differences in attributes such as religious beliefs, sects, races, opinions, and worldviews, treating each other in ways that clash with culture of peace and universal values.

Regarding these matters, subjects of “education for values” and “education for peace”, which have become apparent in the field of education, and the importance of which cannot be discarded, attracts significant attention from educators (Harris, 2004). It stands an obvious fact that peace cannot prevail over the world in an instant, and cannot maintain its presence in the world. Therefore, prospective planning processes and educational activities are thought to be effective tools in relation to upbringing of world citizens who will contribute to continuity and prevalence of universal values. At this point, it should not be missed that education for values and education for peace are two important learning domains. Fountain (1999) describes education for peace as a process that makes children, youngsters, and adults prepared to prevent conflicts, and that requires knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values that provides development of understandings towards peace and peaceful solutions to conflicts.

Education for peace is both a strategy that achieves peace and an important method to prevent violence-based conflicts (Castro and Galace, 2010). Education for values, on the other hand, is the expression for conveying required values to contribute to universal peace and to exhibit moral behaviors through the moral context at schools and emphases in curricula (Yel and Aladağ, 2012).

In supporting the development of individuals who have universal values and who are suited to attitudes required by culture of peace, it is needed of educators who will provide the education for values and peace to have the skills of reconciliation at an efficient level, and to convey these skills to individuals through the strategies and methods he/she thinks best. Especially, educators provide to teach building consensus way, instead of imposing (Johnson, 2006). Harris (2004) points out that peace educators must teach students peaceful processes such as negotiation, reconciliation, non-violent struggle, and agreements and laws that minimize violence. In support to this view, Demir (2011) states that “along with the importance of teachers’ creating an awareness of peace in students, it is also vital that they make them grasp human rights, the ability to make positive interpersonal relationships, and the dangers of war.” One of the most important aspects in inoculating students with universal values and culture of peace is using biographies as a tool in educational processes. According to Kaymakçı and Er (2012) biographies are defined as such: “A biography is a literary genre, which is written

objectively, basing upon documents, with the purpose of revealing the history of lives of people who have become popular and prominent with their works and behaviors in domains such as science, arts, literature, politics, and sports.”

It is predicted that, with the usage of biographies, both educational settings and the attitudes of students towards life will be enriched. It is speculated that, with the usage of biographies in educational processes, motivation of students will be enhanced, processes of taking popular people as models will emerge, and individuals will have the opportunity to acquire universal values and to shape their own values (Kaymakçı and Er, 2012). In the international arena, it is seen as a necessary and effective approach for attainability of the goals of education for values and peace and for creating a more livable world to use figures as role models, who have been appreciated and accepted by authorities, who have been embraced by peoples of the world, and who have obtained a permanent status in the history (Thakkar and Mehta, 2011). In this context, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, who is also known as Mahatma Gandhi, is seen as one of the important leaders who can set an example for societies, and can contribute to human life socially and politically. With his superior humanistic values, which he internalized and wished to become widespread, such as tolerance, respect, justice, non-violence, freedom, equality, and peace, Gandhi has contributed to world peace and drew the attention of the nations with his stance throughout his life. In this study, a brief section of Gandhi’s life has been touched upon, his opinions on education have been mentioned, and the values he promoted for peace and his opinions on these values have been included.

### **The purpose of this study**

In this study, we aimed to present “Mahatma Gandhi”, who is globally accepted as a role model with his personal characteristics, meaning and view of life, devotion to his beliefs, way of struggling with the problems he encountered, universal understanding of peace and tolerance, the value he attached to human beings, and his character, thus, from the values he possessed, to set forth an educational point of view. In light of this aim, we search for answer to these questions:

1. What are the non-violent methods used by Gandhi to struggle against external forces?
2. Which implications for peace and values can be found in Mahatma Gandhi’s educational remarks?
3. What kind of values can be found on Mahatma Gandhi’s personality?
4. How can educators benefit from Gandhi in the fields of education for peace and values?

## METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted based on the method of document review in accordance with the qualitative approach to research. Qualitative research is a realistic and integrated research process, which comprises qualitative data collection methods such as document analysis, observation, and interviews, and which aims to depict the existing facts without generalization (Büyükoztürk et al., 2013). When the related literature is reviewed, it is advised to perform a qualitative research especially when it is necessary to conduct an in-depth study (Creswell, 2014).

### The process of data collection and analysis

Patton (2014) indicates that qualitative findings consist of three ways of data collection, namely open-ended interviews, direct observation, and written documents. In this context, the qualitative data collection method which was benefited from was document review. With document analysis method, it is aimed to examine the written materials on the subject matter. Besides, Ulutaş (2015) points out that the approach of the researcher has a special importance in usage of documents as a primary or secondary material in research. In this study, Mahatma Gandhi's life, character, and opinions on various subject matters have been related to education for values and peace, and it was aimed to make certain educational deductions from this point on. For that, some documents which are related to Gandhi's life used by researchers. This process completed about a month. The each document' contents are examined in detail by three researchers with regards to values and peace training.

### Gandhi and independent non-violent education

Who could have known that a person who was born in India in 1869 was to re-write the history of India? Born in Porbandar, Gandhi, after his death, has left an India who has its rights, and has set an example for other colonial states. As a result of this struggle, he received appreciation and praise from politicians, scientists, and sections of society with high influence at the time. His unassuming attitude in the face of all these was one of the important pieces of his character. Especially his understanding of "non-violent struggle", thanks to his emphasis on his unwillingness against situations like war, which clash with human dignity, has drawn a huge amount of attention. Having gone to London to study Law in 1888, Gandhi returned to India in 1891, after his proficiency exam. Trying to work as a lawyer for two years after he had arrived to his country, Gandhi made one of the most radical decisions in his life and went to South Africa. The racist mentality he encountered here was very influential on the shaping of Gandhi's personality. The effect of the environment on the shaping of character, which is also elaborated in educational

processes, was observed with Gandhi pretty explicitly, as well. Following these circumstances, Gandhi organized the Natal Indian Congress in order to defend the rights of Indians (Carter, 1995). Returning to India in 1915 after 21 years of struggle in South Africa, with his character and values shaped back in South Africa, Gandhi started his struggle in his own country. This struggle, indeed, was to be based on the principles of Satyagraha and Ahimsa.

The understanding of Satyagraha and Ahimsa, which was going to leave its trace on history, meant reaching the truth without violence, and a passive resistance without fight and violence in the process. According to Gandhi's understanding of Ahimsa, violence was not a phenomenon that can be considered within the measurements of retaliation. Violence could not be responded with violence, and cruelty, with cruelty, and this mentality constituted Gandhi's philosophy of passive resistance. As Malik et al. (2011) states, Gandhi had a strong belief in passive resistance (Ahimsa), and it was his decision to neutralize the motives for violence. The philosophy of Satyagraha, on the other hand, involves an approach strongly tied with the understanding of Ahimsa. In this context, the philosophy of Satyagraha can be defined as a philosophical view that represents a non-violent stance without waging a war, yet with love and determination against evil and cruelty, by holding on to the fact of truth. At this point, it can be said that definitions attributed to the understanding of Ahimsa are derived from the philosophy of Satyagraha. Faithful to this understanding, Gandhi stood against imperialism with non-violent actions such as hunger strikes and the Salt March, being a light of hope for other nations on the intellectual basis. As a result of these actions, Gandhi managed to be backed by the Indian people, proceeding on his way to remove the colonial mentality in his country with a massive support. The impact of his hunger strike increased day by day; the British took a step back, reckoning that Gandhi could die in consequence of this strike, leading the people of India towards a rebellion. These events are only one example of that his character was framed with the value of determination.

Mahatma Gandhi struggled against the colonial mentality not only in politics, but also in the areas of education and culture. One of the points he stood against in the field of education was the educational activities of the British in their Indian colonies. Gandhi considered the educational system established by the British in India as an assimilating activity and a psychological assault. Even though he respected the language and works of art of the British, he explicitly criticized the educational system and activities of them in India. Envisioning that the United Kingdom aimed for cultural assimilation in India, Gandhi stated that especially that the individuals being raised in accordance with the British educational system, and that speaking English is considered an honoring behavior is one of the most apparent signs of this (URL1). Having

become his basic philosophy, Satyagraha and Ahimsa approaches also shaped his thoughts and attitudes on the field of education. At this point, it is seen that he placed emphasis on the violence-based mentality at schools. Gandhi stated that even in schools where there was no apparent violence setting or a violent output, there were or could be various kinds of violence. He pointed out that, especially with the authority to grade in hand, teachers could suppress, embarrass, and threaten students. Gandhi criticized the formal educational process from a standpoint expressing that teachers could do violence-oriented acts with body language (Allen, 2007).

Gandhi pointed out that the purpose of education was not only to create informed minds, but it should also reveal enlightened souls (URL1). This opinion finds place for itself in contemporary educational systems. In many educational systems, students are still seen as an information storage device, and raised destitute as to both having universal values and daily life and social life competencies, beside cognitive skills. In countries with this mentality, the only goal of individuals are defined as achieving criteria of success in various examinations and having a status in society by using their knowledge. It is predicted that the continuance of this mentality will improve individuals from the aspect of knowledge, but come short of values and character development, thus, according to Gandhi, causing education to fail to reach one of its fundamental goals.

It is seen that, in Gandhi's understanding of education, there is more to societal highlight rather than individuality. In this mentality, one of the most important goals of education is to provide not only individual development, but also an elevation for society. Social elevation shall abolish the distinction of social classes in the country, therefore, neither shall the number of millionaires distant to society increase, nor shall people at hunger threshold appear (Bala, 2005).

In a sense, education shall fulfill the task of a tool that approximates social classes to one another, and that ensures equality. This approach shows us the significance of social equality in the process of construction of bright individuals, thus, of bright societies. As a yield of political fluctuations in India, and with Gandhi's contribution, Wardha Scheme of Education was held in 1937. One of the fundamental reasons of the gathering of the Scheme was that the British educational system in India did not respond to the country's needs. For this reason, in order to create a new reform in education within the framework of Gandhi's ideals as to education, one of the main goals of the Scheme came to be determining the basic areas for change.

The decisions made at the resolution can be listed as (Singla, 2013);

1. Country-wide compulsory and free education.

2. Productive education, suitable to territorial needs.  
3. The native language as the language of education.<sup>1</sup>

Turning out to be a hand of India reaching towards its episode of independence, Gandhi became a guiding factor with his ideas in educational transition processes. Remarking that national independence could not be won with struggle only in the field of politics, Gandhi pointed out that cultural preservation and freedom were only two of the stages that could bring about independence. Beside advocating the non-violent paradigm in educational processes, he also underlined the necessity of employing and internalizing fundamental universal values. In the next chapter of the study, it is aimed to depict universal values, which Gandhi had in his character, and tried to impose people around him in every chance.

### Gandhi's treasure of values

In an era when fundamental changes in technological developments, political reforms, social developments, and social life forms have serious indications, the change and development of individual, who is the building block of society, is inevitable. In this process, informal areas do not seem to be sufficient in order for individuals to achieve a universal world view, to structure his own principles and values sturdily and protect them, to gain the skill to question, criticize, and evaluate the values and mentality of his nation, to have a basis for personality and identity, and to see himself as a world citizen. In this context, it is vital for educators, educational settings, and the content of curricula presented to students in these settings to be qualified as to the formation of moral values, identity and development of personality, and acquisition of values. From this point of view, it is of great importance for nations that aim to raise citizens of world who have a universal understanding of peace, who adopt democratic values and approaches, who can avoid egocentric ideas, who take behaviors with libertarian, true, and honest, who are sensitive and respectful to differences, who love and value people as they are instead of categorizing them according to their religions, languages, or races, to perform applications that are thought to be different and with a higher value of efficiency in processes of education for values and in formal educational activities related to it. One of these applications is, beyond doubt, the usage of biographies in educational setting and in the acquisition of skills related to education for values and peace.

When the matter is Mahatma Gandhi, the first one of those universal values to occur is "humanity." Gandhi

<sup>1</sup> It was thought that cultural assimilation could be prevented by giving up on English language in educational processes.

stated that all his life and struggles was focused on humanity (Prabhu and Rao, 1967). On this subject, Gandhi expressed that love was the subtlest force in the world, and it is seen that this person, who was a treasure of values on his own, and who, with his statement, *"Where there is love, there is life,"* is recognized to have equal level of love for every human being in the world, would be a precious example as to love prevailing over the world, people of different nations loving each other, and a love-based mentality being adopted. Thus, when approaches in accordance with the "Gandhi's Philosophy" are employed in educational settings and approaches, it is considered more likely to raise individuals who love the people of the world, and himself, indeed. In this process, Gandhi is thought to be an effective role-model in educational processes. Right along with his universal humanity, it is seen that another value in Gandhi's treasure of values is "justice." As a person with a motive as, "Rather than swerving to injustice and being followed by all people, stay with justice and be alone," Gandhi, who always acted with the philosophy of seeing it necessary to demonstrate a just attitude in the face of situations and conditions encountered, is thought to be an appropriate role-model in raising righteous individuals who have internalized a sense of justice. With activities performed in schools and classrooms, and with processes of education for values, it can become possible to create schools shaped in the axis of culture of justice. We can understand the weight Gandhi put on the value of justice from this text he used to repeat every morning (Reca, 2013):

*"I promise myself this when I wake up every morning: I shall fear no one on earth, but conscience. I shall acquiesce in justice from no one. I shall demolish injustice with justice, and if it persists on resistance, I shall respond to it with my whole existence."*

Gandhi supported his thoughts kneaded with humanity and sense of justice with his manner against war and violence, and his attitude towards universal peace (Biswas, 2015). Placing human dignity into the core, Gandhi stated, *"Every murder or other sorts of damage left to someone else is a crime against humanity, no matter with what reason,"* expressing that violence is a non-human behavior (Kripalani, 1969). Gandhi, who has made a global fame with his peaceful approach to events and problems, and his reconciliatory understanding of solution, is obviously an effective role model in processes related to education for peace and in conveying to individuals the approaches related to the universal value of peace, especially with his remark, *"The power produced by non-violence is certainly superior to all of the weapons produced by human skills."* Moreover, Gandhi did not only act with the thought of non-violence, he also expressed that violence was multi-dimensional, and that

individuals encounter violence without even noticing it. Whereas, many people who have studied as to defining and occurring of violence generally concentrated on the physical aspect, Gandhi also revealed the implicit violent behaviors in schools (Allen, 2007).

Another important value that comes to mind alongside Gandhi is "tolerance." Adopting a tolerance-centered manner with both religion and thought, and demonstrating this in every opportunity, Gandhi stated that tolerance is the greatest of powers. Gandhi emphasized that tolerance, which he thought was a factor gaining individuals spiritual intuition, was as far away from fanaticism as the south and the north poles (Gandhi, 1955). In this context, Gandhi is predicted to be a guide on tolerance when it comes to raising individuals who have an understanding of tolerance and who adopt and universally internalize this culture, designing the activities to be performed in educational settings, and determining the content and goals related to the processes of education for values. Gandhi predicated that, on one hand, with the establishment of values such as peace, love, and respect in the society, the culture of coexistence would develop, while on the other hand with system of values being upside down and values themselves corroded, social disasters would occur. He thus, codified this situation under "the seven deadly sins" that would ruin individuals and societies. These seven deadly sins are as follows (Tarhan, 2012):

1. Wealth without work.
2. Pleasure without conscience.
3. Knowledge without character.
4. Commerce without morality.
5. Science without humanity.
6. Worship without sacrifice.
7. Politics without principle.

Having struggled for freedom of people of India, Gandhi had a character identified with freedom. Gandhi put a respect-based emphasis on other livings and their lives with his statement, *"Freedom has never meant 'doing everything one wishes',"* towards the value of freedom. He related his understanding of democracy with the value of freedom, opining, *"Democracy is established with non-violence, providing equal freedom for everyone"* (Gandhi, 1955). At this point, it is assumed that Gandhi and experiences in his sort would be significant guides in raising individuals who acquired the value of respecting other livings and their rights, and in generating educational settings where respect is predominant, and gaining students this value. Mahatma Gandhi was a performer of the understanding of non-violence in every aspect of life (Biswas, 2015). He was criticized even by his supporters because of this mentality. Longing to alienate humankind from the violence-based mentality, Gandhi became one of the defenders of the value of

peace, expressing this publicly with his manners and thoughts. One of the most important examples of this can be seen in his attitude towards the developments between Hindus and Muslims. Gandhi did not abandon his mentality formed with peace in center in Hindu-Muslim conflicts, supporting Muslims intensely and struggling for peace without violence (Barnabas and Clifford, 2012). Compromising nothing with his thought system and character against all of the attempts of outer factors, Gandhi shaped and even changed the intellectual structure of many people.

## Conclusion

In this study, based on the importance of usage of biographies in education for values, it was aimed to explain Mahatma Gandhi and his views, who was a role-model in education for peace and values. Perhaps the most important goals of education for values is providing society with a culture of coexistence. This goal being met depends heavily on popularizing the democracy culture and internalizing fundamental democratic values. Education for values is about the ethical qualities a person needs to have in order to be a virtuous human. Therefore, qualities of a virtuous person can be considered as the values that need to be taught individuals in family and educational institutions (İmamoğlu and Bayraktar, 2014). Education for values has become one of the building blocks of contemporary educational systems. By means of education for values, the minds, hearts, and hands of individuals will grow mature and independent. This process of maturation and independence is vital to both the society and individuals. One first needs to realize and analyze his own values, admit that others, too, do not have to share these values, see the differences and similarities between values of his own and of others, and understand the roots of these values (sociological, cultural, political, economic, historical, religious, etc.). Only this way can freedom, peace, justice, diversity, and solidarity, which are the foundations of a democratic society, be possible (Doğanay et al., 2012).

One of the discussion topics in education for values is which values are to be taught, and how. The first values to come to mind in teaching individual and universal values related to education for values are love, respect, and peace. Another two questions concern by whom these values are to be taught, and how they are to be taught. It is vital and highly effective for everyone to teach values formally through approaches of teaching values at school, usage of role-models being in the first place. Gandhi is a person who can be employed as a role-model, and who can be followed with biographies and case studies in school settings for formal education for values. Mahatma Gandhi defines education as “the

expression of the best things in the soul, mind, and body of a human and a child.” Thus, education is the basis of the development of personality from all moral, mental, and emotional dimensions, and this basis solidifies with the values acquired (Kumar, 2015). Gandhi states, “If we want to achieve real peace in this world, we need to start with children,” and connects the structuring and preserving permanent peace with integration of behaviors, skills, and values of the posterity with peace (Johnson and Johnson, 2012; Asija, 2013).

Gandhi and his discourse and behaviors can be benefited from in activities and lessons on teaching of values such as love, respect, tolerance, and justice, and mainly, peace at schools. In values analysis and explicit teaching of values, Gandhi’s discourse can be used as activities and worksheets. Students can be given project papers, covering Gandhi and universal value of peace as a course subject. In the Research Project of Citizenship Education Policies (Cogan and Derricott, 2000; Doğanay et al., 2012), 182 experts from nine countries were asked about the global tendencies of the 21st century, and which qualities these tendencies require citizens to have. Participants listed the virtues and values a 21st century citizen should have under nine headings:

1. Approaching problems as a member of the global society.
2. Working in collaboration with others, and taking responsibility for the roles and responsibilities of others in society.
3. Understanding, accepting, and tolerating cultural differences.
4. Systematical and critical thinking.
5. Solving conflicts in amicable means.
6. Adopting an environment-friendly way of life.
7. Respecting and defending human rights.
8. Attending actively in each and every aspect of life.
9. Using information technologies.

In addition to that these properties listed above are the shared goals of contemporary educational systems, their correct and active usage constitutes the fundamental goal of education for citizenship and values. Gandhi’s life story and the thought system he presented shall be efficient in forming these properties sturdily in individuals. To that end, it should be conformable to present parts of Gandhi’s life and discourse to students with activities, as well as that teachers and educational program managers make use of Gandhi’s discourse in educational planning activities in order to create a positive school climate. In this study, it has been aimed to sample values and education for values with the focus on Gandhi. However, in teaching values, along with the usage of both biographies and literary products, figures raised in World and in Turkish territory, such as Mevlana Celaladin-I Rumi, Yunus Emre, Dalai Lama, Martin Luther King,

Hodja Ahmet Yesevi, Lao Tzu, can be used as examples in order to reflect a connection with culture.

### Conflict of Interests

The authors have not declared any conflict of interests.

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