

The Effect of Creative Drama-based Activities on Acquisition of Values by 5-Year-Olds*

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Abstract

Values education is central to early childhood education. However, it rarely provides real-life opportunities to engage students. This study investigates the effect of creative drama in acquisition of values by preschoolers. Experimental design with a pre-post-test control group was used. The study group consisted of 44 children aged 5 to 5 ½ attending a public kindergarten in Turkey. For data collection, the Pre-School Values Scale Teacher Form, Parents Form, Student Form, and a Personal Information Form, and observations were used. Quantitative data was analysed using descriptive statistics, the Mann Whitney U Test, and Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test. Qualitative data was analysed using content analysis. There was a significant difference in both groups, with the experimental group showing significantly higher scores than the control group in the post-test. In teaching of values to preschool children, the activities based on creative drama proved more effective than the activities provided in the curriculum.

Keywords: Creative Drama, Preschool Education, Values, Values Education, Early Childhood

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INTRODUCTION

Values education is the process of transferring social and moral values in order to promote societal interdependence, happiness, and peace (MEB, 2010). The aim of values education is to ensure personality development and to protect the individual and society from immoral behavior by revealing the most positive traits within a child (Aydın & Akyol Gürler, 2014). Şen (2007) emphasizes that values are not innate; social roles are learned over time through imitation or modelling from the previous generation. Values education raises individual awareness of the responsibilities and duties of individuals towards each other.

Values education, which is based on complicated abstract concepts, should be taught by providing concrete experiences for children that invite active participation (Doğan Temur & Yuvacı, 2014; Altunay Şam, 2015; Yazar & Erkuş, 2013). Values education is more effective in early childhood; up to 80 percent of character development is completed in those early years and children's social environments expand rapidly during that time. Children learn by imitating adults and peers. Thus, in-school values education may turn values into habits. Several researchers have indicated that preschool children should be taught respect, peace, honesty, a loving nature, responsibility, collaboration, and empathy (Tillman & Hsu, 2000; Weed & Skanchy, 1996; Uyanık Balat et al., 2012). Yalar and Yanpar Yelken (2011) emphasize the need for activities such as gamification, case study, and drama in pre-school education. In addition, Köksal Akyol (2012) refers to the importance of drama activities wherein preschoolers are actively involved and learn through fun. Research in values education with preschoolers indicates positive results: a decrease in problematic behaviour (Viadero, 2003), social-emotional development (Öztürk-Samur, 2011), and increased empathy skills (Kahraman & Akgün, 2008). Because the preschool period represents a critical junction for acquiring basic knowledge and skills, preschool values education must be effective. Concrete examples, opportunities for real-life experience, and active participation all engage students in meaningful values learning contexts.

Creative drama refers to the restructuring of existing knowledge through the gamification of a situation. Drama is a learning process that develops children's creativity and imagination. It also helps develop cooperation (Aslan, 2008), social skills (Ökten & Gökbulut, 2015), social and emotional development (Gültekin, 2014), communication skills (Akoğuz, 2002), relationship maintenance skills (Ökten & Gökbulut, 2015), and self-control (Kara & Çam, 2007)—not to mention responsibility, self-confidence, and empathy. Drama allows children to recognize their feelings and body usage, and provides opportunities to learn about real-life scenarios through active participation and play. In this context, drama could be used to teach values to young students. However, there has been limited research conducted with preschool children on the effectiveness of this method.

Thus, the main research question of this inquiry is whether the creative drama method has a significant effect in teaching values to children between ages 5 and 5 ½. The goal of this research is to plan, implement, and evaluate creative drama-based activities for teaching values to preschoolers, with the ultimate aim of determining the effect of the creative drama method in acquisition of values by children at this age by comparing the activity plan applications based on creative drama method (henceforth, creative drama activities) and plans provided in the curriculum (Ministry of National Education, 2012; henceforth, curriculum-based activities).

Literature Review

Though various researchers indicate the importance of both creative drama and values education, there is a gap in the literature regarding the implementation of the former in conjunction with the latter. Below is an outline of the existing literature on each topic and their intersection.

Creative drama

There are many studies related to drama in the literature. However, only a few investigate the creative drama method in connection with values education (Can Yaşar & Aral, 2011). In their study, Akar Vural, Çengel, Elitok Kesici, and Güreş (2006) concluded that creative drama is a useful component of a values curriculum. Kaya, Günay, and Aydın (2015) noted that values education courses taught using the drama method increase students' awareness of values. Sözkese (2015) found that the "Values Education Program with Story-Based Creative Drama Method" caused significant differences in values development of children from pre-test to post-test, according to both mothers and teachers. Lastly, in a study by Erdem Zengin (2014), the creative drama method was used to teach values as a part of a 4th grade social studies curriculum. Creative drama-intensive activities were found to be more effective in improving students' attitudes than traditional teaching methods; the students participating learned tolerance and respect for feelings and thoughts. These findings offer groundwork for the current study, but none are focused specifically on early-childhood education or feedback from children, parents, and teachers.

Creative drama teaches skills such as researching, group problem solving, and creative thinking. It focuses on the learning processes rather than the results, offering flexibility for current curriculums' emphases on varying student interests and skillsets (Üstündağ, 1998). Creative drama in preschool—from imitation to creating a reality of action from a child's imagination—are important tools for children to disclose and express their inner world while also developing their thoughts and language (Güven, 2006). These skills tie closely to the effective teaching of values, according to researchers and teachers (Stephenson, 2005). Killeavy (2005) also found that early childhood education teachers prefer activities that are based on imagination and creativity, such as drama and role play, for values development.

Values Education

Researchers have studied the effect of values education across various contexts. For example, Öztürk Samur (2011) found that a values education program promotes the social and emotional development of six-year-old children attending nursery school. Keskin and Öğretici (2013) found that the activities within values education increased students' levels of awareness. Another study, by Dereli İman (2014), noted that children attending values education programs exhibit significantly higher average scores in social skills, psycho-social development, and social problem-solving skills. Similarly, Şirin et al. (2015) proved the Values Education Program useful in producing behavioral changes in six-year-olds. After the program, teachers reported positive achievements by both themselves and students. Finally, Tahiroğlu and Aktepe (2015) examined the effects of values education approaches on democratic perception and behaviors. They found that activities aligning with values approaches increase positive behaviors and contribute to the development of respect, tolerance, equality mindsets, and other democratic values, according to students and teachers.

These studies in the literature demonstrate that values education can have a positive impact; however, more research is needed on the best tools for instruction. Although there are many methods that can be used in value education, certain activities—role playing, drama, educational games, simulations, practical activities, cooperative learning, project studies, group work, and student-led research—are very effective in changing students' attitudes and behaviors (Halstead & Taylor, 2000). More research is also needed into how to implement these activities, particularly in early childhood education.

Preschool Values Education. Values education is considered a lifelong process (Altunay Şam, 2015). Foundational information about values is taught during preschool, then instruction about values continues until late adolescence (Uyanık Balat & Balaban Dağal, 2006). In preschool, societal values should be introduced to the child as children make their first significant contact with the world

outside their parents. Thus, teachers should create environments in which children can have experiences and encounter different materials in learning values. Additionally, preschool children, energized to learn, tend to imitate what they see, so attention must be paid to the models around them (Karakuş, 2015).

There has been a recent interest in values education at the elementary, middle, and high school levels. However, limited research has focused on values education in preschool. The existing studies focus on respect, helpfulness, justice, and sympathy (Akçay & Tunagur, 2017). The most frequently mentioned values in books are patriotism, sympathy, sensitivity, and solidarity (Kuş, Merey, & Karatekin, 2013).

METHODS

The current study was planned using an experimental model in order to determine the difference in acquisition levels of predetermined values by preschool children. In this model, the researcher generates data to determine the causal relationship between variables, here the use of creative drama instruction (Büyüköztürk, 2000). The experimental model requires comparison via experimental and control groups (Karasar, 2005), which in this case included the participating children and their immediate teachers and parents, who could observe any changes in behavior. The experimental group was taught with researcher-created activity plans based on the drama activities 2 hours weekly over 6 weeks in 2016-2017. A control group of the same demographic background was taught using the Pre-School Education Program Activity Plans by MONE, also prepared by the researcher.

Participants

The study group consisted of preschool children (aged 60 to 66 months) attending a kindergarten in the central town of Gümüşhane province, Turkey. The experimental group comprised 22 students; another 22 students were selected for the control group. The study activities covered the values of friendship, responsibility, honesty, cooperation, sharing, and respect.

There were 9 female participants (40.90%) and 13 males (59.10%) in the control group. The education demographics of their mothers were as follows: 7 were graduates of primary school (31.82%), 8 high school education (36.36%), and 7 higher education (31.82%). Mothers of 18 of the participants were housewives (81.81%); 4 were public servants (18.18%). As for fathers: 3 pupils had fathers who had completed primary education (13.63%), 7 high school (31.81%), and the remaining 12 had completed higher education (54.54%). Of them, 9 fathers worked as public servants (40.90%) and 13 were employees in the private sector (59.10%).

The experimental group had 12 female participants (54.54%) and 10 males (45.45%). Eight participants' mothers were graduates of basic education (36.36%), 10 high school (45.45%), and 4 higher education (18.18%). The mothers of 20 of the participants were housewives (90.90%); 2 were public servants (9.09%). As for fathers, 3 participants' fathers had a primary education (13.67%), 9 graduated high school (40.90%), and the remaining 12 had a higher education (45.45%), with 7 fathers serving as public servants (31.81%) and 15 working in the private sector (68.18%).

The activities were conducted by two separate teachers. The teachers of both groups are similar in variables of marital status, parental status, education, employment status, and background in drama education. The teacher in the experimental group was 35 years old and the teacher in the control group was 33 years old. The experimental group teacher had been teacher for 7 years, the control group teacher for 6.

Data Collection and Analysis

First, necessary permissions were obtained from the Provincial Directorate of National Education. Then, teachers and parents were informed about how to fill in the scales and sample forms were provided to the groups. Both groups were informed about the significance of the study. It was explained to both parents and teachers (at pre-test and post-test) that they must complete the form separately with objective and honest observations.

Data was collected using the Personal Information Form prepared by the researcher and the Scale for Children Aged 5 to 6 developed by Neslitürk and Çeliköz (2015). The latter instrument was arranged to allow use of Preschool Values Scale Parents Form, Teacher Form, and Student Form. Each sub-scale was designed to measure the values of respect, responsibility, honesty, cooperation, sharing, and friendship, which were covered during in-class activities. Teachers and parents were asked to answer the scale based on the observations they made for the children.

The Personal Information Form covers details about participants such as gender, education status of their parents, and their parents' profession. The form includes 5 questions in total. The Family and Teacher Forms are 3-point Likert scales (yes-sometimes-no) containing 30 items, worded in both positive and negative statements to indicate the frequency of a behavior related to the values.

In addition, naturalistic observation by the researcher was used. The first author was a participant observer in both groups and observed all activities. Observation protocol was used to collect data. Protocol included descriptive notes based on the observation made and the researcher's reflective notes (Creswell, 2013).

The data obtained from the participants were coded and then analyzed in SPSS 16.00 by the researcher. The statistical studies included frequency and percentage values. The Mann Whitney U test was used to compare pre-test scores between groups. In addition, the Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test (WSRT) was used to find any significant difference between pre-test and post-test scores obtained by parents, teachers and students in the experimental group.

Validity and Reliability

The validity check of the scales used in this study was completed by the authors who developed them (Neslitürk and Çeliköz, 2015). They used content validity, construct validity, and predictive validity as criterion. For content validity, the scale was examined by five field experts and necessary corrections were made according to their comments. The items were judged as able to measure the values of responsibility, respect, cooperation, friendship/close friendship, and sharing in children 5 to 6. Construct validity was achieved through exploratory factor analysis. Lastly, predictive validity of the forms was checked by comparing the participant children's age and gender variables. The teacher form was administered to 110 teachers of children of 5 to 6 years old, and the Parents Form was given to families of the same children (110 people). Then, factor analysis was performed using SPSS. Answers from respondents were graded as 2 for *yes*, 1 for *sometimes*, and 0 for *no*. The negative items were reverse coded (Neslitürk and Çeliköz, 2015).

Reliability of the Preschool Values Scale Teacher and Parents Forms by checking the internal consistency coefficients and applying the equivalent split. For the Teacher Form, Cronbach's Alpha coefficient was found to be 0.91; equivalent split reliability coefficient was 0.86. The coefficients were calculated as 0.89 and 0.84 for the other form (Neslitürk and Çeliköz, 2015). All were within the acceptable range.

RESULTS

Pre-Test Group Comparisons

The experimental and control group were each given the Pre-School Values Scale as pre-test to determine whether the groups have a similar demographic profile. The results show that the arithmetic average of the students in the experimental group was 19.54. The average was 17.68 for the control group, signalling no significant difference between mean ranks ($p=.330$; $p > 0.05$) and thus similar demographics.

To compare whether experimental and control groups shared similar values skill levels at the time of the pre-test, we ran the Mann Whitney U Test. Mean score for the parents in the experimental group was 39.27 (SD= 4.77); it was 40.59 (SD= 3.34) for the control group, signalling no significant difference between mean ranks ($p = .303$, $p > .05$). Thus, there was no significant difference between experimental and control groups in pre-test findings of the Preschool Values Scale for Parents.

Considering the teachers' views on their students values, the results showed that the mean score in the experimental group was 41.81 (SD=2.63), 40.18 (SD=4.66) for the control group, signalling no significant difference between mean ranks ($p=.161$; $p > 0.05$). Thus, there is no significant difference between experimental and control groups in pre-test findings of the Pre-school Values Scale for Teachers.

Pre and Post-Test Comparison Results

The Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test showed significant differences (between pre- and post-test Parent Form results in the experimental group ($p=.03$; $p<0.05$). In other words, the differences observed by parents in acquisition of values by children after implementation of the activities was significant. In the Teacher Form for the experimental group, the WSRT also yielded a significant difference INFO ($p=.002$; $p<0,05$). Finally, the WSRT results for the Student Form showed a significant difference INFO ($p=.000$; $p<0.05$). Based on these results, the creative drama activities was determined to be effective in values education according to the parents, teachers, and students.

The MONE curriculum (control group) was also found to be effective across parents, teachers, and students. The WSRT found a significant difference (ADD INFO HERE) between pre- and post-test results on the Parent Form ($p=.004$; $p<0.05$). In the teacher form, scores changed from INFO to INFO according to WSRT, also indicating a significant difference ($p=.04$; $p<0.05$). The WSRT found that there was a significant difference (INFO) in the Student Form for the control group as well ($p=.001$; $p<0.05$).

Post-Test Group Comparisons

Table 1 demonstrates the comparative results of the Mann Whitney U Test performed on post-test scores (Parent Form) of the experimental and control groups. The results show that the average scoring by the parents in the experimental group is 46.14 (SD= 4.09), compared to 39.00 (SD= 3.95) in the control group, signalling a significant difference between mean ranks ($p=.036$; $p<0.05$). Thus, there is a significant difference between experimental and control groups in post-test findings of the Preschool Values Scale. This suggests that the educational activities in the experimental group proved to be more effective by parents.

Table 1. Post-Test Scores from Pre-School Values Scale Parents Form

Pre-School Values Level	Group	M	SD	Mean Rank	Rank Sum	Z	P
	Experimental		46.14	4.09	13.44	86.00	-2.145
Control		39.00	3.95	12.38	99.00		

Table 2 demonstrates the comparative results of the Mann Whitney U Test performed on post-test scores (Teacher Form). The average score in the experimental group is 47.31 (SD=2.13), compared to 42.86 (SD=1.88) for the control group, signalling a significant difference between mean ranks ($p=.029$; $p<0.05$). This indicates that the creative drama activity led to the higher gains in the post test.

Table 2. Post-Test Scores from Pre-School Values Scale Teacher Form

Pre-School Values Level	Group	M	SD	Mean Rank	Rank Sum	Z	P
	Experimental		47.31	2.13	12.29	79.50	-2.450
Control		42.86	1.88	11.31	143.50		

Table 3 demonstrates the comparative results of the Mann Whitney U Test performed on post-test scores (Student Form). The average score of students in the experimental group is 31.36 (SD=5.75); it is 23.18 (SD=6.98) for the control group, signalling a significant difference between mean ranks ($p=.002$; $p<0.05$). Thus, there is a significant difference between experimental and control groups' post-test scores in the Pre-school Values Scale across all three sub-scales (parent, teacher, and student).

Table 3. Post-Test Scores from Pre-School Values Scale Student Form

Pre-School Values Level	Group	M	SD	Mean Rank	Rank Sum	Z	P
	Experimental		31.36	5.75	14.25	28.50	-3.026
Control		23.18	6.98	10.66	202.50		

Observations

The values education activities implemented in the control group did not produce much interest. The children were mostly engaged and had fun during games; however, they remained passive in other activities and looked shy in table-top activities. Particularly during the Turkish-Language Activities, a story was read but some children paid no attention and thus gave no response to comprehension questions.

Conversely, children in the experimental group seemed interested and curious during classroom activities that required their active participation. Every child used body language or expressed themselves verbally in the animation process; every child also voiced opinions or answers regarding the value being covered during the evaluation phase. In addition, the costumes and materials used during animations in the experimental group received much attention; even the quietest student was willing to wear the costumes. Similarly, the children enjoyed the warm-up and preparations for musical games or improvisations and seemed encouraged, ensuring motivation in the whole group.

Author observations were also in line with post-test results. Some children in the control group had difficulty making sense of the abstract values and developing positive examples of the positive behavior being modelled. Certain control group students did not show responsibility and respect for peers when the teacher was not in the classroom. This suggests that the students in the

control group were not able to put the values into practice and internalize them. In addition, introverted students were passive and quiet during classroom activities. In the experimental group, the improvisation practices proved that the children were able to produce a lot of original thoughts, creative ideas, and strong problem-solving solutions. The students were able to describe the mood of a character during role-play and reported awareness about the importance of sight as a result of a role-play involving the dramatization of a blind person. Children in the experimental group identified with their character and warned other children about behaviors of that specific character in connection with everyday situations. For example, the cartoon “Untidy Lemon” illustrated the consequences of untidy behavior. The child playing this role reminded his peers that they could get into trouble if they are untidy. Finally, in post-activity evaluations (carried out in the form of questions and answers), the students sometimes seemed uninterested; however, they showed much more active participation and enjoyed integrated assessments including games or art.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The results of the current study indicated that while both creative drama and more traditional MONE lessons had a positive effect on student values acquisition when applied twice a week for 6 weeks, creative drama was more effective according to parents, teachers, and students. A significant difference was found between pre-test and post-test results of the experimental group across all forms. These results are backed by the literature. Doğan Temur and Yuvacı (2014) found that values could be learned more easily in classes run by teachers who use more varied methods and teach the themes of values in a staged pattern. They recommended the use of theatre, drama, and real-life examples.

Though the results show that the creative drama program was more effective than the alternative control group activities, the students in the control group did learn through primarily various table-top activities; whereas the other group used the Creative Drama method only. The extent of hands-on activities (i.e., learning by doing and experiencing) may have played a large role in the relative success of the creative drama curriculum; future research could compare two systems that are closer in terms of student engagement. In addition, the demographics were limited to students of similar backgrounds from the same school. The effectiveness of this method in teaching values to preschoolers should also be studied in relation to various variables (parents’ education level, socio-economic status, gender, number of siblings, etc.).

The conclusions of this study are in line with current trends in teaching methods. The literature provides examples of how preschool creative drama has a positive influence in many areas of development. It is advisable to use creative drama to achieve meaningful and lasting learning—especially about abstract concepts such as values—in young learners at the preschool stage. Karakaş (2015) found that preschool teachers often use traditional activities in values education; nevertheless, they state the need to convert abstract values into concrete activities. Training programs may help bridge the gap between desire and methods. Therefore, we suggest that books and educational materials containing creative drama activities in values education be prepared to offer real-life experiences and “learning by doing” to preschool learners. Furthermore, considering the importance of family as the cradle of values education, families should also be trained on creative drama and values education—and informed about the activities at school to this end—so that consistency can be reached between the education provided at home and school.

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