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## **A JOURNEY TO THE VALUES WITH PICTURE BOOKS: A RESEARCH ON THE VALUE ACQUISITION OF YOUNG CHILDREN**

*Research article*

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# A JOURNEY TO THE VALUES WITH PICTURE BOOKS: A RESEARCH ON THE VALUE ACQUISITION OF YOUNG CHILDREN

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## Abstract

The objective of this study is to evaluate the impact of picture books with values content on the value acquisition of children. The participants of this quasi-experimental study were comprised of 20 preschoolers and a preschool teacher. As the data collection tool, the “Value Checklist” was used for the selection of the books, the “The Scale for Preschool Social Values Acquisition” and “Values Rubric” were used in determining the social value acquisition of children. According to the research results, it was determined that the sessions based on picture books with values-content influenced the social value acquisition of children in a positive way. Accordingly, it is considered important to prefer quality picture books for the practical activities on value acquisition of small children.

*Keywords:* Picture books, preschoolers, social values, values, values education

## 1. Introduction

In the age of knowledge and technology, rapid changes have revealed the need for both individual and social values. The values that enable the individuals, who are the building blocks of the society, to come together and stay together to help communities to be stronger and more resilient (Uzmen & Mağden, 2002). In terms of social progress, it becomes important for individuals to acquire social values. As per educating individuals, who have acquired and implemented social values, significant roles fall on educational institutions.

Different perspectives have been developed on the concept of value by different disciplines. There is not a single universal definition of the value. The concept of value focuses on the human mind and action, individuals and cultural groups, or content and universal values (Johansson, Emilson & Puroila, 2018). In addition, the meaning and characteristics of the concept of value can vary across social characteristics (Davidov, 2010). Halstead and Taylor (2000) define value as the beliefs and principles that guide the behaviors, as the standards that can be used in the evaluation of actions as good or bad. Schwartz (2012) states that values are guiding principles for human life. Values are seen as social agreements linked to different social contents and open to various interpretations (Johansson & Thornberg, 2014). In different classifications of values, it is observed that social values are included (Naylor & Diem, 1987; Spranger, 2001). The values shared by society and shape society are considered social values (Naylor & Diem, 1987). Spranger (2001) reports that love and helping others is the basis of social values. Values such as justice, respect, and equality are also stated to be social values (Michaelis, 1988). Based on the idea that values can be structured in different social ways in different situations, this study focuses on social values (Johansson, Emilson & Puroila, 2018).

It is effective for individuals, who are social beings, to have social values in fulfilling their social duties and responsibilities and establishing a positive interaction with other individuals. It is a requirement to ensure a socially rich and stimulating environment for children to acquire social values (Sapsağlam, 2014). The first pieces of information about the

values at the center of social life are obtained in the preschool period (Uyanık Balat & Balaban Dağal, 2009). It is emphasized that early childhood years are a critical period, in which the values are acquired (Johansson et al., 2011; Powell, 2010). It is reported that children who acquire values from an early age will grow up as happy, productive, and confident individuals (Alpöge, 2011). Children need cognitive maturity to understand values through experience. The social-emotional skills required for children to understand themselves and others' feelings and cope with different moods are effective in the acquisition of values. In other words, value acquisition is directly associated with the areas of cognitive, social-emotional development of children (Dinç, 2011). Given that preschool education supports all areas of development for children, it can be said that value acquisition is an important component of the development process of the child and that educational institutions play a crucial role (Ülavere & Tammik, 2017).

### 1.1. Literature Review

Values are specified as an integral part of the educational environment rather than being a separate component (Puroila et al, 2016). Thornberg and Oğuz (2013) define the values of education as a whole of activities in which children will learn and develop values. Preschool education institutions offer opportunities to express and discuss values for children in the daily education flow (Johansson, 2018). Preschool institutions include values such as love, equality, freedom, happiness, and righteousness (Halstead & Taylor, 2000). Sigurdardottir, Williams, and Einarsdottir (2019) report that the values, to which the preschool teachers pay the highest attention in their communication with children, are care, respect, and discipline. Values can be given to preschool children through the integration of different practices and by teaching methods and concrete experiences (Juutinen & Viljamaa, 2016; Şen, 2011). In the literature, there are previous studies conducted about the impacts of pre-school values education practices on social-emotional skills of children (Dereli İman, 2014; İbiş, 2017; Öztürk Samur, 2011), and value acquisition processes of children (Atabey, 2014; Erikli, 2016; Freeman, 2014; Yıldırım, 2018). In a study conducted in Thailand, Lee (2016) studied the impact of music activities on the character development of preschool children. Based on the interviews with teachers, it was concluded that music activities integrated with character development, which is comprised of totally six personal values such as caring, respect, courage, honesty, responsibility, and cooperation, positively influenced the social interactions of children and improved their capacity to cope with their daily life problems. In a study conducted by Özkan Kılıç and Özbek Ayaz (2018), the effect of the values education program on the awareness levels of 5-6 year-olds concerning values was determined. As a result of the study, it was determined that awareness levels of children concerning values increased after the values education program.

Children socialize by acquiring social rules and social values (Gander & Gardiner, 2007). Because social skills also include rules, they are related to values (Johansson, 2018). In children, having social values supports the development of their social skills such as self-expression, controlling emotions, understanding the feelings and ideas of others, and establishing healthy communications (Sapsağlam, 2014). It is considered that providing children with positive experiences and rich stimulus will be effective in acquiring social values for children. In this study, the effect of picture books will be examined on the acquisition of social values.

Children's literature is an effective tool that greatly shapes the value judgments of children by expanding their perspectives (Mürsepp 2010). Children's literature products reflect society-adopted behaviors and cultural/social values. Children's books play a great role in acquiring individual values about life and human reality as well as the values adopted by

society (Sever, 2007). It is stated that picture books are books that provide children with both visual and verbal experiences, in which both the pictures and text are of significance (Owens & Nowell, 2001; Russell, 1991). Picture books play the role of a socialization tool in transferring values to future generations (Gooden & Gooden, 2001).

Children's books enable children to gain awareness of universal and cultural values and to create attitudes towards social values (Karatay, 2011). Integrating values with the characteristics of children's books will help books become a dynamic moral guide (Cates, 2008). The value judgments in the picture books offer different perspectives on events. Young children identify with the characters in picture books and are influenced by the personality traits and behaviors of the characters. Children are also affected by characters in the implementation of the values (Çakmak Güleç & Geçgel, 2005). Therefore, it is important to choose qualified books for the value acquisition of children. The values contained in the books should be expressed effectively (Brynildssen, 2002; Purbani, 2009). The characters in the books should be good models for children and behave appropriately in a way that children can interpret. In addition, books should contain moral situations that children can describe (Helterbran, 2009; Q'Sullivan, 2004).

In the value acquisition of young children, apart from the selection of the books, the way books are presented to children and the nature of the activities conducted with the books are of great importance. For this reason, it can be discussed with children about whether the decisions and choices of the characters are correct. The children can be encouraged to think about situations they face in their lives similar to those of the characters. Various discussions and assessments of books allow children to integrate values in a concrete way (Çakmak Güleç & Geçgel, 2005; Lamme, Krough & Yachtmez, 1992). Picture books with values content allow children to create their own values and complete their moral development. As children listen to stories involving moral situations and values, they begin to understand the importance of values in life and develop a more comprehensive understanding of values (Narvaez, 2002). Picture books should include positive messages and social values to support the social development of young children. From this point forth, it is thought that the effect of sessions should be evaluated that are planned with qualified picture books in accordance with the developmental characteristics of children and that provides them concrete and original experiences.

## **1.2 Research Questions**

This research was aimed at examining the impact of sessions involving picture books with value contents on the social value acquisition of children. For this purpose, answers were sought for the following questions:

What are the levels of children concerning social values prior to the sessions of reading books with values content?

What are the levels of children concerning social values after the sessions of reading books with values content?

Is there a statistically significant difference between the levels of children concerning social values before and after the sessions of reading books with values content?

## **2. Method**

### **2.1 Research Design**

In this study, a one group pretest-posttest model was used. In this model, the assessment of a dependent variable before and after treatment. If the data show a statistically significant

difference between the pretest and posttest results, this difference is considered to be due to the treatment (Baştürk, 2012; Cranmer, 2017).

## 2.2 Participants

The population of the study was comprised of a teacher and five-year-old children, who were attending an independent kindergarten serving under the Directorate of National Education in a province in the inner Aegean Region of Turkey. The study group was determined by random sampling method and it comprised a teacher and 20 children, 5 years old enrolled at an public preschool serving under the provincial Directorate of National Education in the inner aegean region of Turkey.

Among the participant students, 50% were females and 50% were males; 40% were found to be the first child in the family, 40% were the last child, and 20% were in the middle among siblings. In addition, 35% of children's mothers were 29 years and under, 60% were between the ages of 30-39, and 5% were 40 years and older; 20% of the mothers were determined to be the graduates of primary schools, 45% were high school graduates, and 35% were university graduates, while 20% did not work, 40% had a professional occupation and 40% were working as civil servants.

As per the fathers of the children; 15% of the fathers were 29 years and under, 65% were between the ages of 30 and 39, and 20% were 40 years and older; 10% were found to be graduates of primary school, 35% of high school, and 55% were university graduates; 20% were workers, 30% were civil servants and 50% were self-employed. The teacher graduated from the preschool education department and had a professional experience of 12 years.

## 2.3 Instruments

As data collection tools in the study, "Personal Information Form" was used to collect general information about children such as gender, the number of siblings, birth order, pre-school education, "The Values Checklist" developed by Akyol (2012), the "The Scale for Preschool Social Values Acquisition" developed by Atabey (2014) and "Values Rubric" developed by Ada (2016) were used. The Values Checklist prepared by Akyol (2012) was used in the selection of picture books that were used in the research. The checklist consists of two parts. The first part is comprised of general information about the book, and the second part consists of the values contained in the book. The checklist includes a total of 24 values in 3 different groups: personal, interpersonal, and social values. 1 point is given in the values checklist for each value in the books examined, and 0 point is given for each value that is not included.

"The Scale for Preschool Social Values Acquisition" consists of five sub-dimensions (love- tolerance, respect, responsibility, cooperation-solidarity, and kindness) and 19 items. Within the scope of the validity of the Preschool Social Values Acquisition Scale, content validity and construct validity analyses were conducted. The content validity rate of the scale was determined as .99, and the factor analysis concluded that the scale had a five-factor and 19-item structure. Additionally, it was concluded that the results of t values for factor analysis were over 1.96, the regression values varied from .19 to .63, accordingly, regression coefficients and t values were determined to be significant, and the model was verified. According to the results of the test-retest reliability analysis carried out within the scope of reliability, it was concluded that the correlation coefficient for the entire scale was 0.95 and all of the correlation coefficients were significant at 0.01 level. When the KR-20 reliability coefficient was calculated for the scale, it was determined as 0.82 for the love-tolerance sub-dimension, 0.85 for the respect sub-dimension, 0.78 for the responsibility sub-dimension, 0.75 for the cooperation-solidarity sub-dimension, 0.83 for the kindness sub-dimension, and

0.88 for the total scale. According to these results, it was concluded that the entire scale had a high level of reliability (Atabey, 2014).

Values Rubric consists of a total of two parts, the first part comprising of demographic information of children and the second part comprising of the teacher views on children's value acquisitions. In the second part, there are 65 three-point rubric questions to determine the acquisition levels of children concerning responsibility, love, tolerance/respect, cleanliness, and solidarity.

## **2.4 Materials**

In accordance with the values checklist, a total of 100 picture books were examined which were obtained from the bookstores in the city center and from the libraries of independent preschool institutions functioning under the Directorate of National Education in the provincial center where the research was conducted. It was determined that the distribution of the values contained in the examined books varied between 14% and 82%. Books in the top 24 of the values-based ranking list were used within the research.

One of the books containing the values of kindness, cooperation-solidarity, "Lütfen de Ejderha Ejo", was written by Niyal Akmanalp and illustrated by Huban Korman. The picture book comprised of 17 pages. The main character of the book is the little and cute Dragon Ejo, who doesn't know how to say please and thank you. One day he goes for a ride, he takes the book of the dinosaur by force by blowing fire "Vuff" and without saying please, and takes an egg of the chicken lady, who is going her home with her eggs, by blowing fire "Vuffff", without saying "can you please give me an egg?". Later, Ejo encounters a boy who waters a flower. Ejo says "Hey, kid, give me the hose and I'll water it up". The child murmurs "I didn't hear you saying please". Ejo gets angry, blows his fire "Vuffff", but the boy sprays water at Ejo with the hose in his hand and puts out the fire coming out of his mouth. Ejo tries, but he cannot blow fire again. He so much wants to water the garden and says, "Please, can I water the flowers?", "Sure, let's water it one by one," the boy says. Ejo thanks the boy and the two of them water the garden for hours and play games.

The activities prepared with picture books were planned to ensure the active participation of all children, and the acquisitions and indicators were used that are involved in the Preschool Education Program (2013) of the Ministry of Education. The activities were interactive reading, storytelling, story completion, story creation, story drawing. Additionally, rhymes, finger games, riddles, and dramatizations were also used during the activities (MoNE, 2013). Activities were evaluated by three different experts, two in preschool education and one in the Turkish language, in terms of certain criteria such as suitability of the acquisitions and indicators, adequacy of learning processes, suitability, and adequacy of the materials used. Based on the critique and suggestions of the experts, necessary revisions were made to the activities.

## **2.5 Data Collection**

After gaining the necessary permissions from the Provincial Directorate of National Education, voluntary consent forms were obtained from the families of the children in the study group and the teacher. Preschool Social Values Acquisition Scale was applied by the researcher as a pretest to children in the study group. The scale was applied to the children in a quiet room separated from the educational environment with tables and chairs suitable for children to have their attention and motivate them. Before the implementation of the scale, a game was played together to make the child feel more comfortable and then the implementation stage started. Values Rubric was implemented by the teacher of children consisting of the study group.

After pretests were performed, activities prepared by the researcher through picture books with values content were applied to the children two days a week for eight weeks. After the activities were completed, the posttest was administered to the children under the same conditions as the pretest, and the Values Rubric was filled by their teacher.

## 2.6 Data Analysis

In this study, descriptive statistics were used such as frequency and percentage in order to evaluate the demographic characteristics of children. As the conclusion of the normality test of scores obtained from the scale and rubric (Shapiro-Wilk Test); Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test was used for intra-group comparisons since the values were normally distributed. In the interpretation of the results, the significance level was accepted as 0.05, denoting that there is a significant difference if  $p < 0.05$ , and there is not a significant difference if  $p > 0.05$  (Büyüköztürk et al, 2012).

## 3. Results

Table 1. *Wilcoxon signed-rank test of children concerning pretest and posttest results of the scale for preschool social values acquisition*

| Sub-dimensions                                | N  | Mean  | Median | Min.  | Max.  | sd   | Wilcoxon signed-rank test |        |
|---|----|-------|--------|-------|-------|------|---------------------------|--------|
|   |    |       |        |       |       |      | z                         | p      |
| Love-Tolerance sub-dimension pretest          | 20 | 1,35  | 1,00   | -     | 3,00  | 0,88 | -3,9                      | 0,0001 |
| Love-Tolerance sub-dimension posttest         | 20 | 3,60  | 4,00   | 2,00  | 4,00  | 0,60 |                           |        |
| Respect sub-dimension pretest                 | 20 | 1,70  | 1,00   | -     | 4,00  | 1,03 | -3,66                     | 0,0001 |
| Respect sub-dimension posttest                | 20 | 3,50  | 4,00   | 2,00  | 4,00  | 0,69 |                           |        |
| Responsibility sub-dimension pretest          | 20 | 2,55  | 2,50   | -     | 5,00  | 1,50 | -3,44                     | 0,0001 |
| Responsibility sub-dimension posttest         | 20 | 4,65  | 5,00   | 3,00  | 5,00  | 0,67 |                           |        |
| Cooperation-solidarity sub-dimension pretest  | 20 | 1,15  | 1,00   | -     | 3,00  | 0,88 | -3,69                     | 0,0001 |
| Cooperation-solidarity sub-dimension posttest | 20 | 2,75  | 3,00   | 1,00  | 3,00  | 0,64 |                           |        |
| Kindness sub-dimension pretest                | 20 | 1,50  | 2,00   | -     | 3,00  | 0,89 | -3,79                     | 0,0001 |
| Kindness sub-dimension posttest               | 20 | 3,00  | 3,00   | 3,00  | 3,00  | -    |                           |        |
| Total pretest                                 | 20 | 8,25  | 8,00   | 4,00  | 16,00 | 3,46 | -3,69                     | 0,0001 |
| Total posttest                                | 20 | 12,85 | 13,00  | 10,00 | 14,00 | 1,18 |                           |        |

Table 1 includes the Wilcoxon signed-rank test results in terms of the pretest and posttest scores of the children in the study group concerning the Preschool Social Values Acquisition

Scale. According to Table 1, comparing the pretest-posttest results of the mean scores of the love-tolerance, respect, responsibility, cooperation-solidarity, and kindness sub-dimensions, it was observed that the posttest mean scores were statistically significantly higher ( $p < .05$ ). According to this result, it can be argued that the processes prepared with picture books have an impact on the social value acquisitions of children.

Table 2. *Wilcoxon signed rank test of children concerning pretest and posttest results of the scale for preschool values rubric*

| Rubric scores   | N  | Mean   | Median | Min.  | Max.   | sd    | Wilcoxon signed rank test |        |
|-----------------|----|--------|--------|-------|--------|-------|---------------------------|--------|
|                 |    |        |        |       |        |       | z                         | p      |
| Rubric pretest  | 20 | 75,20  | 72,50  | 67,00 | 104,00 | 9,36  | -3,92                     | 0,0001 |
| Rubric posttest | 20 | 114,80 | 113,50 | 94,00 | 132,00 | 10,10 |                           |        |

Table 2 includes Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test results in terms of the pretest posttest scores of children in the study group concerning the Values Control Rubric. According to Table 2, comparing the pretest posttest scores, it is observed that the posttest means scores are significantly higher ( $p < .05$ ). According to the teacher's view, it can be stated that the activities applied with picture books have an impact on the value acquisition processes of children.

#### 4. Discussion

Picture books, which are enriching children's experiences and highly stimulating in personal, social, cultural, and aesthetic development, are one of the most natural sources to be used in values education. Picture books affect the socialization processes of young children by providing models that they can identify with (Sever, 2007). Therefore, it can be said that picture books can be used in values education (Tyra, 2012).

As a result of this study, which aimed at examining the impact of picture books with values-content on children's value acquisitions, it was found that the posttest mean scores of love-tolerance, respect, responsibility, cooperation-solidarity and kindness sub-dimensions of the Preschool Social Values Acquisition Scale were statistically significantly higher than the pretest mean scores ( $p < .05$ ). It was determined that activities prepared with picture books with values content had an impact on the social value acquisition of children. While preparing the activities, the acquisitions and indicators of different development areas in the MoNE (2013) were used. It was determined that the MoNE (2013) included social values such as responsibility, respect, solidarity, trust, love, tolerance, freedom, equality, friendship, and justice (Aral & Kadan, 2018). During the activities, learning processes were embodied using materials such as puppets, picture story cards, puppet scenes, and visual stimuli that are appropriate to the development and interest levels of children. In addition, certain processes such as interactive reading method, story completion, story creation, and story-drawing were systematically included in the activities. It is considered that all these processes positively affect the social value acquisitions of children in the study group. In a study conducted to examine the impact of social values education program on social values acquisition of children attending kindergarten, Atabey and Ömeroğlu (2014) prepared Turkish, leisure time, play and movement, music, reading and writing, science and mathematics, drama, and art activities using picture books in the social values program, and it was concluded that the program was effective. Kiranlı Güngör and Bostan Güzel (2017) concluded that the egg

practice, which was used for developing the sense of responsibility in the young children, storytelling, and drawing picture activities carried out with books imbued with responsibility value improved the perceptions of children concerning the responsibility value. The studies were similar in terms of partial usage of picture books during certain activities developed for the value acquisition of children; however, books with values-content were not used as a whole.

In the current study, it was concluded that, following the sessions applied with the picture books with values content, there were increases in the levels of children concerning social values such as love-tolerance, respect, responsibility, cooperation, and kindness. One of the important contributions this study makes to the literature is the determination of children's picture books with values content and the conclusion that books are effective in the acquisition of all social values. It is thought to have positive effects on the process that the characters in the picture books used in the study have different social values and reflect these values to their behaviors. Cengiz and Duran (2017) noted that young children adopt values more easily by exemplifying the characters in the books and improve their perspectives about themselves and the world. In a study conducted by McNamee and Mercurio (2007), it was reported that the characters of picture books who are created for young children to acquire the values of kindness and solidarity should feature a character that can show empathy and is ready to share. From this point forth, it can be said that the characters in the books should present different perspectives that will bring richness to the lives of children.

In this study, it was determined that the levels of children's social values increased based on the value control rubric filled by the teacher following the sessions of reading books with values content. In a study examining the attitudes and views of preschool teachers towards values education, Kozikoğlu (2018) concluded that teachers had a positive attitude towards values, that they thought the values of respect, love, honesty, cooperation/solidarity, sharing, responsibility, tolerance, and cleanliness should be given to children, and that they rather conducted drama, play, and story activities for children to acquire values. In the study conducted by Karakaş (2015), it was reported that, in values education, preschool teachers rather used language activities, storytelling, story completion, and discussion on stories and values, through visual and auditory materials, and they stated that rather concrete processes are needed in values education. In the literature, it is observed that previous studies are emphasizing that preschool teachers have positive views on values (Haslip, Allen Handy & Donaldson, 2019; Sigurdardottir, Williams & Einarsdottir, 2019; Long & Köse, 2017). In this study, the views of the teacher supported the fact that reading activities have an impact on the social value levels of children, which is one of the improvements that this study contributes to the literature.

In the literature, previous studies are concluding that the values education programs prepared in different values contents have a positive impact on the value acquisition of young children (Asar, 2019; Lush et al, 2016; Sigurdardottir & Einarsdottir, 2016; Juutinen & Viljamaa, 2016). In addition, although there are numerous previous studies on the impact of values education with drama method (Ada, 2016; Kaya & Antepi, 2018; Topbaşı, 2006), it was observed that the number of the previous studies examining the impact of children's picture books on the value acquisition is quite limited. Preschool teachers stated that in the books, which will be used in values education, the content should integrate with children's personal experiences and the books should reflect the situations that children encounter in their lives. Additionally, they noted the importance of discussions and sharing ideas with children after book reading sessions (Court & Rosental, 2007). Strategies that can be used during reading books are also said to be effective (Zeece, 2009). It is thought that, in this

study, the use of different methods and techniques in activities prepared with the children's books with values content materialized the value acquisition process.

Besides its contributions to the literature, this study, which discussed children's books with values content, has also limitations. The checklist used in the identification of children's picture books, the number, and content of children's picture books, the study group, and the measurement tools that determined the social value acquisition of children can be accepted as the limitations of this study. The scope of the activities used in this study, which depends on a relatively small study group and reaches positive results, can be expanded in order to achieve more common results. Additionally, it is considered that sharing the books used within the scope of the study with parents, teachers, and field experts will contribute to the academic studies on this issue as well as helping social studies.

## **5. Conclusion and Recommendations**

Early childhood is a critical period when children begin to discover and internalize social values. Therefore, the writing of picture books with social value contents will positively affect the dimensions of social development, such as children's communication skills and the development of peer relationships. In this study, it was concluded that reading activities based on children's books with values content positively affect the social value acquisition process of children. According to this result, it can be said that, in applied research studies that address the value acquisition of young children, the focus should rather be on children's literature products. In addition, considering the distribution of values in the books examined in this study, authors, illustrators, publishers of children's books should be encouraged to prepare children's picture books with different values.

Further research studies can be planned to examine the views of children, parents, and teachers in determining qualified children's picture books to be used in values education. In-service trainings can be organized to guide preschool teachers to have awareness concerning the impact of children's picture books on social value acquisition and to plan studies on this issue. In order to support the value acquisition of children, teacher-family cooperation can be provided and families can be guided about activities with books including values content at home.

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