Teachers' Opinions About the Impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic on Values

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Abstract

Values are social acceptances that affect and guide behaviors and decisions in daily life. Developments in science and technology and natural or human disasters play an essential role in the maintenance or disappearance of the values in society. The COVID-19 pandemic, which appeared in December 2019 and became a global challenge, also influenced and changed individual and social values. This study aimed to determined teachers' opinions about the impact of the pandemic on values. This research was designed in terms of qualitative research methodology. The study sample consisted of 100 volunteer teachers from different primary and secondary schools in different provinces. The data were collected using interview forms and analyzed by using descriptive analysis methods. According to teachers' opinions, the values positively emphasized during the pandemic were patience, responsibility, helpfulness, self-control, respect, love, and friendship. The damaged values included justice, honesty, respect, and patience. The participant teachers suggested organizing activities that promote psychological support, education, empathy, patience, and communication to overcome the challenges related to values.

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INTRODUCTION

Values are social norms that guide behaviors and judgments about what is necessary, fair, and right in life. Our values are our essential human characteristics and the source of the strength and resilience that facilitates taking action to cope with everyday problems (MEB, 2018: 4). They can be considered standards or criteria that help people select and assess the behaviors, policies, events and decide what is good or bad, right or wrong (Schwartz, 2012: 4). Values have an important place in society's regular functioning, and they refer to the moral principles and beliefs accepted by the majority in a small group or community and reflect shared feelings, thoughts, goals, and interests (Yazar, 2019: 109).

The continuous transfer of social values across generations is vital for the survival of a community, so moral and values education has always been appreciated and embraced in all communities. Values are like joints between bones. They offer both interdependence and appropriate behaviors and actions. Social adaptation is only possible by recognizing the community's social values, making moral judgments, and behaving accordingly.

One of the standard features in the renewed curriculum of 2018 is the emphasis on values education. For example, one of the social studies course goals is to raise students who appreciate the significance and ways of being virtuous by adopting national, spiritual, and universal values. Furthermore, life sciences' goal is to raise students who know the fundamental values of family and society and make national, spiritual, and human values alive (MEB, 2018: 8). The underlined values are listed in the curriculums accordingly. The general and universal values accepted and maintained for years by many societies include leadership, honesty, morality, justice, responsibility, and helpfulness that can be considered an ideal person (Topal, 2019: 246). The "root values" in the curriculum of 2018 are justice, friendship, honesty, self-control, patience, respect, love, responsibility, patriotism, and helpfulness (MEB, 2018: 4).

Our values show what matters to us in life. We all have many values with different degrees of importance (e.g., success, safety, benevolence). A particular value can be meaningful for someone but not for another (Schwartz, 2012: 3). The source of values can be traced in one's social life and cultural experience (Tezcan, 2018: 5), and they can differ by the time, place, society, and experiences. Change is inevitable, and people can only have a good life thanks to the adaptation to changes. However, if it is a positive change, it is called *development*. Otherwise, it is considered degeneration or regression. According to Topal (2019: 246), values either disappear over time or can be protected and maintained by generations for years.

The intense effects of globalization on time and the environment lead to the rapid spread of both positive and negative outcomes in all societies (Karakaş, 2020: 545). In recent years, many countries, including Turkey, have had to cope with many natural and social crises, one of which is the Covid-19 pandemic today. The Covid-19 first appeared in Wuhan, China, in December 2019 and then rapidly spread to other countries. The World Health Organization declared a global pandemic on March 11, 2020, which led to many fundamental social life changes.

Most countries have had to take severe measures against the pandemic, which has affected personal and social life. Those measures included curfews, campaigns to stay at home, social distance, the prohibition of social gatherings, home-work and distance education practices, and closing schools, universities, and other public places such as café, restaurants (Wolf et al., 2019: 618). According to He and Harris (2020: 176), the Covid-19 pandemic potentially changes how we see the world, how we perceive and manage our lives. It also has positively or negatively affected the values.

The study aimed to determine teachers' opinions about the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on values and sought answers to the following questions:

1. According to the teachers, what are the values positively affected during the pandemic?

2. According to the teachers, what are the damaged values during the pandemic?

3. According to the teachers, what can be done to compensate for the pandemic's harmful effects on values?

In the literature, the majority of the researches on the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic were exclusively focused on physical health, and the number of studies on its effects on social life was limited (e.g., Delen Eryarsoy and Davazdahemami, 2020; Çobanoğlu, 2020; Dodonova and Dodonov, 2020; He and Harris, 2020; Öztek, 2020; Tabernero et al., 2020; Bavel et al., 2020; Karakaş, 2020; Wolf et al., 2020). However, there is no study addressing the effect of the pandemic on values. Scientific and technological developments and natural or human disasters play an essential role in maintaining or losing values in societies. Living conditions also have an impact on the importance attached to values. Societies can survive natural and social crises only by protecting their values. It is thought that this research will contribute to the studies in the field of values and value education.

METHOD

Research Model

It was a qualitative research aiming to reveal teachers' opinions on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on values (Yıldırım & Şimşek (2018: 41). defines qualitative research as "*a study in which qualitative data collection methods such as observation, interview, and document analysis are used, and qualitative procedures are followed to reveal perceptions and events realistically and holistically*." The most distinctive feature of qualitative research is that the researcher attempts to examine the events, facts, norms, and values from the target group's perspectives (Ekiz, 2015: 31). In the study, the phenomenology design, which aims to reveal and interpret individual perceptions about a phenomenon (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2018), was used.

Data Collection Instruments and Analysis

The researchers prepared a structured interview form to collect the data after making a literature review and pre-interviews with two social studies and three classroom teachers. The interview form was then checked by two experts in values and social studies education. Moreover, the final version was completed following the expert opinions and suggestions. The interview form consisted of five open-ended questions and two parts: demographic information and values. The online interview form was sent to WhatsApp groups, and those filled were analyzed. The data were analyzed using descriptive analysis techniques and categorized and interpreted accordingly. According to Yıldırım and Şimşek (2018), the inclusion of experts in the research process is one of the measures that increase the quality of the research. In order to ensure the internal validity of the research and to control subjectivity, two experts working on values education were provided to examine and verify the data, whether the expressions related to the values in the teachers' opinions reflect the values determined as the theme. In addition, the credibility of the research was increased by giving direct quotations from the teachers' opinions.

Study Group

The study group of the research was determined by easy sampling method. This method was preferred because it was difficult to reach volunteer teachers during the epidemic period. In phenomenological studies, data sources are individuals who experience the phenomenon that the research focuses on and can reflect this phenomenon (Büyüköztürk et al., 2016: 21). In this study, it was deemed appropriate to interview teachers with different assignments, branches and years of service, with the thought that it would clarify the details requested from the study. For this reason, 100 teachers were included in the sample. Table 1 shows the demographic information of the participant teachers.

Table 1. The demographic information of the participant teachers

Gender	n
Female	64
Male	36
Branch	**n**
Classroom teachers	55
Social studies teachers	12
Pre-school teachers	7
Turkish teachers	6
Math teachers	5
Religious Culture and Ethics Course	4
Special education teachers	3
School counselors	3
English counselors	3
Secience teachers	2
Occupational seniority	**n**
1-5 year	15
6-10 year	8
11-15 year	25
16-20 year	20
21 year and over	32
Total	**100**

Among the participants, 64 were female, and 36 were male teachers who voluntarily participated in the study. The majority of the participants were classroom teachers (55) and social studies teachers (12). Half of the teachers had ten years of seniority and professional experience in terms of service time.

FINDINGS

In this section, teachers' answers and quotations are shown in the tables below. Table 2 demonstrates the positively affected values during the pandemic.

Table 2. The positively affected values during the pandemic

Positively affected values	f	%
Patience	65	26
Responsibility	48	19
Helpfulness	42	17
Self-control	34	13
Respect	20	8
Love	17	7
Friendship	10	4
Patriotism	7	3
Caring for family unity	5	2
Tolerance	2	1
Total	**250**	**100**

As seen in Table 2, patience (26%), responsibility (48%), helpfulness (42%), self-control (34%), respect (20%), love (17%), and friendship (10%) were among the positively affected values in the pandemic. Other values included patriotism, family unity, and tolerance.

When the teachers were asked to explain the reasons for the positive effects of the pandemic on specific values, they stressed that people had to spend more time together during the quarantine, they financially supported each other, especially the poor, and there were several attempts of Vefa

Support Groups and municipalities to meet the needs of the elderly (over 65). Some of the teacher quotations supporting these findings are presented below:

T4: *As people spent more time at home during the pandemic, they became aware of their home responsibilities. We have embraced the feeling of patience at home. We went out to work, and we patiently stayed at home for the rest of the time. As for helpfulness, I watched on TV that some municipalities helped people in need, especially lonely and older adults who could not go out in these difficult times. Yozgat Municipality is an excellent example of helpful municipalities.*

T6: *Social distance emphasized the worth of friendship; the long-term pandemic underlined the importance of patience; taking precautions not to infect anybody showed the importance of responsibility; and lastly, Vefa support groups positively affected philanthropy.*

T56: *I think the value of helpfulness should specifically be stressed considering the financial support of the Vefa groups for elderly individuals. The government's economic support to small tradespeople should also be mentioned. Besides, I think that social responsibility awareness increased as people started to pay attention to wearing a mask, keeping social distance, and cleaning. As for self-control, I can argue that staying at home for a long time positively affected our ability to provide isolation.*

T60: *Due to the curfews, the aids to the elderly and animals increased. Besides, there were attempts to raise respect for healthcare professionals.*

T78: *During the pandemic, people realized that their actions and behaviors influenced themselves and others, and big problems could not be overcome without cooperation.*

T90: *Staying at home for a long time taught us to be patient. We were generally alone and worried about our loved ones. Wearing a mask and keeping social distance improved our self-control. We miss our loved ones near and far. Distance education has also improved students' senses of honesty and self-control.*

The teachers' opinions about the damaged values due to the pandemic are given in Table 3:

Table 3. The damaged values during the pandemic

Negatively affected values	f	%
Justice	27	16
Honesty	23	13
Respect	21	12
Friendship	20	11
Patience	17	10
Self-control	16	9
Thriftiness	15	6
Responsibility	10	6
Patriotism	7	4
Helpfulness	7	7
Solidarity	6	3
Love	6	3
Total	175	100

As shown in Table 3, the damaged values were justice (27%), honesty (23%), respect (21%), friendship (20%), patience (17%), self-control (16%) and thriftiness (15%). Other damaged values included responsibility, helpfulness, patriotism, love, and solidarity.

When the participant teachers were asked to explain why the pandemic damaged certain values, they stressed the psychological problems due to quarantine and curfews, unwillingness to make prudent decisions, less communication and interaction, unemployment, and financial problems. Some of the teacher quotations are presented below:

T5: *Long-term homestay made people angry, and their self-control mechanisms deteriorated. If we mention the value of justice, it should be noted that the difficulties related to the distribution of financial supports and assistance and the privileges for specific groups and tourists have damaged the value of justice.*

T6: *Due to being closed at home for a long time, people became psychologically deteriorated and inclined to think destructively about past regrets. They started to behave anxiously, disrespectfully, and impatiently in the streets, shopping malls, and traffic.*

T30: *When we had to lead a sedentary lifestyle at home due to the pandemic, we became less tolerant. Our social relations decreased, and distant education led to less respect for teachers. Besides, if the government had not imposed a ban and penalties, people would have failed to apply quarantine and distance rules, which showed a lack of self-control skills.*

T38: *I think keeping social distance impaired friendship. I also guess that people withheld their help for fear of being infected. Unfortunately, it proved that the values of solidarity and friendship were damaged.*

T81: *Challenging conditions pushed some people to selfishness and egocentrism, which damaged the sense of love. The sense of respect was also damaged by those who did not obey the government's measures.*

Teachers' opinions and ideas about what can be done and the measures to eliminate the pandemic's adverse effects on values are presented in Table 4:

Table 4. Thoughts and suggestions to improve the damaged values

Suggestions	f	%
Psychological support	29	18
Media events	27	17
Solidarity	21	13
Being patient	19	12
Values education	16	10
Social events	15	9
Developing empathy skills	12	8
Control and punishment	10	6
Sharing good examples	7	4
Activities to promote communication	4	3
Total	160	100

When teachers' responses about the alternatives to improve the damaged values were examined, it was determined that teachers made specific suggestions and underlined particular concepts such as psychological support (%18), media/social event (%17 / %9), solidarity (%13), patience (%12), , values education (%10), empathy (%8), control and punishment (%6), sharing good examples (%4) and organizing events to promote communication (%3). Some teacher quotations are presented below:

T15: *There are really useful and practical public service advertisements and announcements about healthcare in media and press. Good examples of those advertisements and announcements can be broadcast frequently.*

T18: *Because of the quarantine and curfews, people became psychologically distressed and unavailable. Anxiety, worry, fear… People should have psychological support in order to realize values again.*

T28: *I tried to write a small play about empathy, respect, self-control, and patience with my students, and they played it via "zoom program" for values education.*

T32: *We should organize campaigns to eliminate educational inequalities stemming from the pandemic and financially support our citizens.*

T52: *People should give up selfishness and should empathize with others. Families should get psychological support against divorce and depression. People should go to gyms or dieticians to lose weight. Unemployment rates should be decreased soon. Every citizen should be vaccinated. Thus, we can return to our normal life as soon as possible. Specific regulations and plans should be made to compensate for the educational gaps stemming from the pandemic.*

T67: *Activities for values education should also be planned in distance education lessons, and the families and students should be informed accordingly.*

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The Covid-19 pandemic has influenced all areas of social life, as well as personal values. The study results indicated that the pandemic positively affected the values of tolerance, responsibility, helpfulness, self-control, respect, love, and friendship. On the contrary, the damaged values were determined as values of justice, honesty, respect, friendship, tolerance, self-control, and prudence. In this sense, teachers thought that the pandemic affected certain values both negatively and positively.

Since the pandemic has led many people to worry about the health and safety of themselves and their loved ones, along with a large amount of distress and efforts, there can be changes in personal values for survival. According to Inglehart (1997), when the values related to financial welfare and security are disturbed, they become essential. In other words, the importance of values decreases in tranquility. For example, people realize the significance of freedom when their freedom is threatened, and they are desperate to protect it (Schwartz, 2012: 3). Therefore, people who suffer from poverty and social exclusion attach more importance to authority and security than those living in comfort and security (Daffin, 2012: 61). According to Bavel et al. (2020: 2), individuals adapt their values to specific conditions. Therefore, individuals attach more importance to the values of security, welfare, power, and self-management in the face of any threat. According to Dodonova and Dodonov (2020: 21), pandemics reveal the selfishness, egocentrism, and self-preservation behaviors inherent in human nature. Natural disasters, economic crises, and even wars lead people to unite, but pandemics have a different nature. They separate and isolate people by imposing feelings of fear and despair. However, solidarity is the essential and primary value for humanity. Since pandemics require a real struggle and collaboration to overcome, they directly trigger the feelings of social organization and solidarity in individuals and the masses. Protection from the short and long-term consequences of pandemics is only possible when everybody acts with a sense of responsibility towards others (Taştan, 2020: 20).

The transition to distance education due to the pandemic has resulted in disturbances in values education, as in other activities. During the pandemic, children had to spend more time on television, tablet, phone, and computer, which reduced communication and interaction among family members. It indirectly damaged the values education. From a positive sense, people have had time for themselves and their families thanks to the pandemic. Öztek (2020: 13) stressed that the family bonds gradually weakened significantly in cities due to the fast-paced modern life. In this sense, the lockdowns refreshed the family relationships during the pandemic. People had the opportunity to watch and

reflect on the events in different countries and learned to be patient, tolerant, and empathic. It is observed that the value of benevolence is positively correlated with the values of empathy and cooperation (Balliet et al., 2008; Schwartz, 1996). The value of empathy is characterized by self-transcendence, and empathic individuals are more likely to help others during a pandemic (Daffin, 2012: 70).

The study findings indicated that the value of justice was affected both positively and negatively during the pandemic. The participant teachers explicitly mentioned those who had to live and work in unfavorable conditions environments and were unable to access health services. They also emphasized the unfair delivery of aids and supports. Those all negatively influenced the value of justice. People also witnessed that the virus did not distinguish between the poor and rich, and the meaning of life was better understood. They recognized the importance of cooperation and solidarity rather than hostility and separation, and they learned that the problems could only be solved by collaboration (Öztek, 2020: 13).

The concept of "social distance" has shaped our behaviors during the pandemic. The participants expressed that one of the most important reasons that changed our values was staying away from our loved ones, that is, social distance. Delen, Eryarsoy, and Davazdahemami (2020: 7) described social distance as a general term that includes different intervention types, such as case isolation, school closure, quarantine, remote work, and reducing social contact in public places. Social distance has led to the rediscovery of the values of love and respect. Since older adults are more vulnerable to the virus, the fear and anxiety of losing them also have increased interest, love, and respect for them. The societies in which there are traditional family structures and family bonds and social solidarity are thought to be tighter than western societies have been practical and functional to meet the needs of the elderly and those in need of care (Taştan, 2020: 39).

Regarding the reasons of positive and negative effects of the pandemic on values, the teachers stressed certain situations such as anxiety disorders due to the quarantine, reluctance to uphold precautionary decisions, decrease in communication and interaction, dysfunctional procedures of aid campaigns, the rising rates of unemployment despite the governmental regulations, quarantine and social distance rules for particular age groups, and the problems of family communication. Teachers recommended receiving psychological support, improve the values of empathy, patience, and solidarity, generalize values education, and organize online activities and events to eliminate the negative impacts of the pandemic on values.

Internet and technology use has grown considerably during the pandemic. Since face-to-face communication was limited, people chose to meet their needs through social media, smartphones, and the internet. It can be inferred that the effects of media tools on values are notable in this sense. According to Yazıcı (2019; 144), media imposes a negative effect on values as media organizations' primary goal is to increase commercial profit instead of protecting social interest and values. It can be observed that they often broadcast legal but immoral shows that do not consider social values. In this sense, the participant teachers suggested raising awareness through effective public service announcements, educational programs, and aid campaigns in the media.

The Covid-19 pandemic has confronted humanity with great challenges and unexpected death and, therefore, showed the worth of life and health. Indeed, we have remembered that life is full of surprises, a natural event or disaster can completely change our lives, and that our existence and survival depend on protecting nature and the ecosystem. When we locked ourselves in our biggest shelters, our homes, we realized that we did not need many things to be happy. We also appreciated the importance of being with our loved ones and the values of friendship, cooperation, unity, and solidarity (ASBÜ, 2020: 5). According to J. Shapiro, "The pandemic will be over, and we will eventually leave our homes. However, when it comes, we will be ashamed of how we behaved and want to forget what we did (Dodonova and Dodonov, 2020: 21). The Covid-19 pandemic will be referred to as one of the turning points in human history. Today, the whole world wishes to overcome the pandemic with the least damage, which will continue to affect economically, sociologically, and

psychologically (Taştan, 2020: 40). According to He and Harris (2020: 176), the human tragedy of lost lives, broken families, and communities, along with the economic and social changes due to the pandemic, will remain in our memories for a long time and be passed on to future generations.

Suggestions made based on the results of the research are as follows:

- Values education that has been neglected in distance education should be integrated into the online curriculum.

- Individuals should be financially encouraged to receive psychological support.

- Online counseling activities/webinars should be organized to improve family communication.

- Awareness of values should be created through the media.

- Quantitative research can be conducted to examine the effect of the pandemic process on values.

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