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## A COMPARISON OF SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS' VALUE PERCEPTIONS IN TURKIYE AND THE UK

*(Research article)*

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### Abstract

The purpose of this research is to compare value perceptions of secondary school students studying in Türkiye and the UK. In this study, the cross-sectional method was adopted. 249 Turkish students studying in the UK, and 253 students studying in Türkiye participated in the research. The Positive Values Scale developed by Huang and Cornell (2016) was used as a data collection tool. Since the research data were not normally distributed, in the analysis, such techniques as arithmetic mean, standard deviation and Mann Whitney U tests have been used. According to the findings, a statistically significant difference was found in favor of the students studying in Türkiye. Also, a statistically significant difference was determined in favor of female students studying in the UK in the concern for others factor. However, there were no statistically significant differences between the value perceptions of students in the UK and Türkiye in the overall scale and in its factors as far as gender was concerned. New researches comparing value perceptions of different samples can be done.

*Keywords:* Values, value perceptions, secondary school students

### 1. Introduction

In recent years, in parallel with the amazing developments in communication and technology, there are rapid changes in social life as well. These changes can contribute to the development of individuals and social life; however, they can sometimes cause social and moral problems, too. The rise of materialism, loss of respect for morality and human life, deterioration of civilization and families, increased fraud, extramarital births (Lickona, 1996), early marriage and teenage pregnancy, gender-based violence (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2022), suicide among young people, concerns about the increase in drug and alcohol use, murders and other forms of violence (Davis, 2006) have raised the role of values in ensuring the continuity and integrity of social life. As İltar (2020) stated, as inevitable results of national and global developments, values are at the top of motivational elements in dealing with issues affecting humanity, such as social, political, economic problems, epidemics, disasters, and so on.

Although there are several surveys about values done all over the World, there is still disagreement among researchers about the term values. Values are concepts related to personal or social preferences that are accepted “good” such as beauty, truth, love, honesty, loyalty and

so forth (Halstead, 1996). In other words, values are judgments based on the idea of what is good and what is bad. They are based on systematic ideas about how a person relates to his environment beyond personal preferences or tastes (Veugelers & Vedder, 2003). What's more, values guide behaviors. They form the basis for decision-making, evaluation of beliefs or actions. They are ideals or ways of life closely linked to personal integrity and personal identity (Halstead, 1996). Therefore, values are the beliefs directing lifestyles and societies. In other words, they are the priorities people attach to certain beliefs, experiences and objects when making decisions about what the individual and society should consider important (Hill, 2004, as cited in İter, 2020).

Values are classified according to the importance attached to them. The set of values formed by this classification acts as a system determining the priorities. In the same way, societies and individuals can be described by these value priority systems. What's more, values are structures that are open to change (Rokeach, 1973, as cited in Kuşdil & Kağıtçıbaşı, 2000). It is thought that values can change over time due to the fact that they are socially constructed, and they can change from one group or society to another as well (Halstead, 1996). On the other hand, two different societies may have the same values. Yet, there may be differences in the degree of importance they attach to them. For example, an Inuit society, like any other society, has cultural values of hospitality and loyalty between spouses. For the Inuit community, hospitality is a more important value than loyalty. However, in many other cultures, this is totally unacceptable. Likewise, in Christian tradition, mercy is a great value and precedes justice. On the contrary, socialism regards compassion as weakness, but it considers social justice as the supreme value. In addition, there may be differences in value judgments of different social circles or different generations within a culture itself. In sum, it cannot be said that values show a universal characteristic (Reboul, 1995).

On the other side, Schwartz, in his values theory, mentions universal aspects that potentially take place in the content of values. Universal values are related to the development of other values and the overcoming of selfish interests. Universal values include understanding, appreciation, tolerance and protection for the well-being of all people and nature. Equality, environmental protection, beauty, being in harmony with nature, broad-mindedness, justice, wisdom, peace and inner harmony can be cited as examples of universal values (Schwartz, 1994). Similarly, Maslovaty classifies values as "universal" and "non-universal". Universal values (such as justice) are values that concern all people, and non-universal values have individual aspects (such as religious obligations) that do not have a universal moral obligation (Maslovaty, 2003). Although values are classified according to their cultural and universal aspects, ultimately, the moral values have been a matter of debate since the dawn of humanity. In today's World, while there are almost no physical boundaries, values still live with people. Therefore, people should have global values called the "common language" along with their own cultural, local, values. Therefore, the biggest responsibility of educational systems is to help raise global individuals having global values (Cafu & Somuncuo, 2000).

Many educators and politicians make lists of values that, according to them, are relevant to education. Although these lists are sometimes long, they are often composed of several basic values (Veugelers & Vedder, 2003). In fact, values unite around the basic values (UNESCO, 2005). For example, interest, compassion, fairness, freedom, honesty, reliability, integrity, respect, responsibility, tolerance and inclusion values in the Australian education system (Australian Government Department of Education, Science and Training, 2005); democracy, rule of law, freedom, accuracy, responsibility, tolerance, self-esteem, respect for dignity, respect for different beliefs and cultures, respect for public institutions, and contribution to society in the British education system are at the heart of educational practices (Department for Education [DfE], 2014). In the American education system, values of honesty, justice, responsibility, self-esteem and respect for others are considered as fundamental values of the "character education movement" (Lickona, 1996). Aiming to integrate values education with

technical and vocational education, UNESCO (2005) determined the values of harmony with nature, truth and wisdom, love and compassion, creativity, peace and justice, sustainable human development, national unity and global solidarity and global spirituality as fundamental values. Similarly, the “Association for Living Values Education International”, which is supported by UNESCO and does educational activities on values at an international level, has put basic human rights and respect for human dignity at the center of its educational practices (Association for Living Values Education International [ALIVE], 2004). In the same manner, the Turkish education system has determined the values of justice, friendship, honesty, self-control, patience, respect, love, responsibility, patriotism and benevolence, which are called the “core values” in the curriculum, as basic values (Ministry of National Education [MEB], 2018). In addition to these core values, in some courses in the Turkish education system, there are also values such as giving importance to family unity, freedom, equality, solidarity, trust, sharing, and sensitivity to the natural environment (Izgar, 2020). These value lists created for education can include universal values such as justice, respect, freedom, solidarity, as well as values such as the development of self-esteem, self-discipline, autonomy, learning empathy and learning to deal with criticism. These value sets in the educational programs and the pedagogical mission of schools are guides for teachers (Veugelers & Vedder, 2003), and teachers should actively promote them because they are the values that unite people, they bring people from different countries, cultures and ethnicities together (Struthers, 2017, p. 97).

Furthermore, it is expected that education systems equip students with moral values. However, one should be aware of the fact that the possible differences between universal and non-universal values in education systems stem from their cultural contexts (Maslovaty, 2003). Therefore, today's education systems should equip students with both their own cultural values (lifestyle, clothing, entertainment style, etc.) and also the universal values (honesty, responsibility, tolerance, justice, respect for the law, freedom of belief, etc.) accepted throughout the world. Thereby, global individuals who are at peace with their cultural values, who can internalize universal values, who can live happily in peace and who are tolerant will grow up (Cafo & Somuncuo, 2000).

Comparative studies may help show the differences and similarities of cultures with various value orientations (Coombs-Richardson & Tolson, 2005). However, in the literature, there are limited studies on values and values education that deal with education systems of different countries comparatively (Bhandari & Yasunobu, 2009; Çalışkan, Yıldırım & Kılınc, 2019; Halstead, 1996; Kaya, 2021; Sinha & Sayeed, 1979). For instance, Halstead (1996) has studied American and British approaches, making a cultural comparison to the education of values. The American education system enables students to participate actively in school life, and it puts importance on democratic education in preparation for citizenship. In English schools, on the other hand, values education is more closely associated with religion. Religious education is a compulsory part of English education programs and is at the heart of children's moral and spiritual development. The research done by Sinha and Sayeed (1979) compares value systems of Indian university students and their peers in America, Australia, Israel and Canada. This research revealed a large difference in the value systems of the participants.

Each country has different values depending on some background features, such as historical, social or cultural structure. It is inevitable that societies with the same cultural codes living in different countries will be, either positively or negatively, affected by the cultural structure of the country they live in.

Consequently, determining value perceptions of Turkish students studying abroad and comparing them with the students studying in Türkiye is important in the preparation of educational materials for students studying in foreign countries on how to teach values to maintain the cultural structure to which they belong in the country where they live.

Additionally, it is thought that findings of this research are important for conveying the same feelings and maintaining unity. However, since the grade levels and ages of secondary school students studying in the UK do not overlap with the grade levels and ages of secondary school students studying in Türkiye, class level and age were not included as variables in the research. That's why, this research aiming to determine and compare the value perceptions of secondary school students living in Türkiye and the UK tries to answer the following questions.

- Do value perceptions of secondary school students in Türkiye and the UK vary according to their gender?
- Do value perceptions of secondary school students in Türkiye and the UK vary according to the country they live in?

## **2. Research Method**

### **2.1. Research Model**

This research aims to compare secondary school students' perceptions in Türkiye and the UK about values. The cross-sectional survey method, the most commonly used survey method, has been adopted as the research design (Singh, 2007, p. 65). Cross-sectional surveys can be regarded as a snapshot giving a picture of the topic the researcher wants to study. They have some advantages, too. For instance; they are flexible, relatively quick to conduct and relatively cost-effective (Connelly, 2016). What's more, surveys help researchers make inferences. For the reasons mentioned, in this research, studying the perceptions of secondary school students in Türkiye and the UK about values, the cross-sectional survey method has been adopted.

### **2.2. Population and Sample**

The population and the sample are thought to have a critical role on the quality of any research. Since it makes it easier for readers to understand the data, identifying the study population clearly is of great importance in any research. Next, the question of how many individuals should be reached for the research disturbs many researchers. The sample size is, most of the time, one of the important concerns of the researcher in any study. Therefore, the researcher should determine the sample size at the very beginning of the study (Yılmaz, 2019, p. 8-9). However, while doing comparative researches, especially between countries, there are a lot of problems researchers may encounter. To illustrate, the participants, especially the ones abroad, may be unwilling to participate and so, the researcher may not get the desired number of responses from the sample; the researcher may not get in contact with his/her colleagues easily or they may also be unwilling to help. That's why collecting data from participants in another country is very exhausting for researchers. Similarly, in this research it is nearly impossible for the researchers to determine the exact population and sample size in the UK. For this reason, in this research, convenience sampling, also known as the incidental sampling, method has been adopted. Convenience sampling can be described as a non-random sampling method in which members of the population are selected for the purpose of the research, whether they meet certain research criteria like proximity, availability, accessibility or willingness (Farrokhi & Hamidabad, 2012, p. 785). Since it is extremely hard for a researcher from Türkiye to gather data from the UK, in this research, the reason for deciding on the convenience sampling method is accessibility. The researchers are also aware of the fact that in researches that adopt convenience sampling methods, the sample size should be large enough to get stability in the research results (Ferber, 1977, p. 57). Table 1 below shows the demographic information of the participants.

Table 1. *Demographic Information of Participants*

		Students in	
		Türkiye	The UK
Gender	Male	106	140
	Female	147	109
The Average Age		12,33	12,62

### 2.3. The Data Collection Tool and Data Collection

The Positive Values Scale, consisting of 9 items and 2 factors, has been developed by Huang and Cornell (2016). The “Personal Conviction” factor consists of three items (1, 3 & 4) and the “Concern for Others” factor consists of six items (2, 5, 6, 7, 8 & 9). Participants of the study were 39364 secondary school students from 423 public schools. The Cronbach’s Alpha has been found to be ,81 for the “Personal Conviction” factor and ,86 for the “Concern for Others” factor. The Cronbach’s Alpha for the overall scale is ,92. In sum, it is highly reliable. In the scale, students are asked to respond to the question “How important are these values to you?” The two-factor scale is in 6-point Likert type and consists of “not important, slightly important, somewhat important, definitely important and extremely important” response options. Additionally, there are no reverse coded items in the scale. The score to be obtained from the items in the scale is between 1 and 6. Therefore, the lowest score that can be obtained from the scale is 9, and the highest score is 54. The score for a factor is obtained by dividing the score obtained from the related items to the number of items in the factor.

The adaptation of the scale into Turkish has been done by Arslan (2018). Cronbach’s Alpha has been found ,88 for the Turkish version of the scale. The Turkish version consists of two factors as in the original scale. Both the scale developers (Huang & Cornell, 2016) and Arslan (2018), who adapted the original scale into Turkish, performed confirmatory factor analysis for their scales. In order to collect data, a questionnaire was created, and by means of Google forms, the data collection started in Türkiye and the UK, simultaneously. Participants of the study in the UK have been asked to complete the questionnaire developed by Huang and Cornell (2016) and participants of the study in Türkiye have been asked to complete Turkish version of the questionnaire adapted by Arslan (2018). Since the forms allow no missing values, all of the participants completed the form thoroughly.

### 2.4. The Data Analysis

Choosing the appropriate analysis is always crucial for researchers. Since the data are not normally distributed, non-parametric tests have been adopted for the analysis of the data. In the analysis, such techniques as arithmetic mean, standard deviation and Mann Whitney U tests have been used. In order to be able to decode response options, numerical values ranging between 6 and 1 have been assigned to the response options.

For the evaluation of the arithmetic mean intervals; (6–1=5) options have been determined according to the calculated interval coefficients (5/6=0,83). Since 5 cannot exactly be divided by 6, the intervals have been calculated by rounding. Accordingly, the evaluation intervals are given in Table 2 below.

Table 2. *Grouping Based on Interval Coefficients*

Score Intervals	Level of Perception
1,00–1,83	Extremely Low
1,84–2,66	Very Low
2,67–3,49	Somewhat Low
3,50–4,32	Somewhat High
4,33–5,15	Very High
5,16–6,00	Extremely High

### 3. Findings

To begin with, arithmetic means and standard deviations calculated to determine value perception levels of the participants has been presented in Table 3 below.

Table 3. *Perception Levels of Students of Values*

Türkiye			The UK			
N	$\bar{X}$	S		N	$\bar{X}$	S
147	4,71	1,09	Female	Personal Conviction	4,48	,94
	5,14	,90		Concern for Others	5,15	,74
	4,99	,87		The Positive Values Scale	4,93	,69
106	4,81	1,09	Male	Personal Conviction	4,43	1,16
	5,16	,96		Concern for Others	4,76	1,06
	5,05	,97		The Positive Values Scale	4,65	1,01

When the arithmetic means are reviewed considering the grouping based on the interval coefficients in Table 2, it is clear that both male and female secondary school students studying in the UK have high level of perceptions in the overall scale and in its factors. Likewise, female secondary school students studying in Türkiye have high level of perceptions in the overall scale and in its factors. However, while male secondary school students have high level of perceptions in the overall scale and in the personal conviction factor, they have extremely high level of perception in the concern for others factor. Accordingly, it can be concluded that secondary school students both in Türkiye and the UK successfully internalize values in all of the dimensions.

The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, which was done to find out whether the data were normally distributed, showed that the data were not normally distributed both in the overall scale and in any of its factors ( $p < 0,05$ ). Consequently, the researchers used non-parametric tests in the analysis of the data. The results of the Mann Whitney U test, one of the non-parametric tests, done to determine whether value perceptions of secondary school students studying in Türkiye differ, according to gender variable, are shown in Table 4 below.

Table 4. *Perceptions of Secondary School Students Studying in Türkiye according to Gender*

Türkiye	Gender	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	U	p
Personal Conviction	Female	147	123,84	18205,00	7327,00	,41
	Male	106	131,38	13926,00		
Concern for Others	Female	147	125,74	18484,50	7606,50	,74
	Male	106	128,74	13646,50		
The Positive Values Scale	Female	147	123,64	18175,50	7297,50	,38
	Male	106	131,66	13955,50		

Table 4 shows that, value perceptions of male and female students studying in Türkiye differ neither on personal conviction and concern for others factors nor on the overall scale ( $p>0.05$ ). Considering these findings, it can be stated that value perceptions of male and female students studying in Türkiye are similar.

The results of the Mann Whitney U test performed to determine whether value perceptions of secondary school students studying in the UK differ, according to gender variable, are shown in Table 5 below.

Table 5. *Perceptions of Secondary School Students Studying in UK according to Gender*

UK	Gender	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	U	p
Personal Conviction	Female	109	124,30	13549,00	7554,00	,89
	Male	140	125,54	17576,00		
Concern for Others	Female	109	140,01	15261,00	5994,00	,00
	Male	140	113,31	15864,00		
The Positive Values Scale	Female	109	134,97	14711,50	6543,50	,05
	Male	140	117,24	16413,50		

Table 5 shows that, while value perceptions of male and female students studying in the UK differ neither on personal conviction nor on the overall scale ( $p>0,05$ ), it differs, in favor of female students, in the concern for others factor ( $p<0,05$ ). As a result, it can be inferred that female students are more concerned about others than males.

The results of the Mann Whitney U test performed to determine whether value perceptions of secondary school students differ, according to the country variable, are shown in Table 6 below.



Table 6. *Perceptions of Secondary School Students Studying in Türkiye and the UK*

	Country	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	U	p
Personal Conviction	Türkiye	256	275,64	69737,00	25391,00	,00
	The UK	246	226,97	56516,00		
Concern for Others	Türkiye	256	271,41	68666,00	26462,00	,00
	The UK	246	231,27	57587,00		
The Positive Values Scale	Türkiye	256	278,20	70383,50	24744,50	,00
	The UK	246	224,38	55869,50		

Table 6 shows that, value perceptions of students studying both in Türkiye and the UK differ, in favor of students studying in Türkiye, in the personal conviction, concern for others factors and in the overall scale ( $p < 0,05$ ). Depending on these findings, it can be stated that secondary school students studying in Türkiye have higher levels of value perceptions, they concern for others more, and they have more personal convictions compared to the secondary school students studying in the UK.

#### 4. Discussion and Conclusion

This study aims to compare value perceptions of Turkish secondary school students studying in the UK, and secondary school students studying in Türkiye. Values have an important place in the formation of individuals' personality, identity, behaviors, thoughts, attitudes, perspectives, judgments, shaping their lifestyles, individual and social life (Güven, Kaya, & Akkuş, 2014). Some of the concepts related to values can be listed as honesty, taking responsibility and so on (Gunnoe, Hetherington, & Reiss, 1999). According to the research results, value perceptions of secondary school students studying in the UK and Türkiye are mostly very high in personal conviction (telling the truth, to admitting mistakes, doing the right thing) and concern for others factors (treating others with respect, respecting the views of others, helping others, being kind, making the world a better place, obeying the law) and in the overall scale.

The fact that secondary school students studying in the UK and Türkiye have a high perception of the above-mentioned values show that they have internalized these values and have a positive attitude towards individuals or situations. On the other hand, values education taught at schools in both countries, and the cultural structure of the society they belong to may also have an effect. In order to teach individuals a positive value such as empathy, respect, responsibility, sharing and helping each other, they must first be taught to value themselves and other people (Veisson & Kuurme, 2010, cited in Kaya, 2021).

Values such as honesty, admitting mistakes, taking responsibility, respecting people, helping others, being kind, trying to make the World a better place, obeying the law (Huang & Cornell, 2016) are the basic human values that are important in both countries and should be internalized by individuals. Huang and Cornell (2016) stated that, in addition to reflecting a good character structure, a strong commitment to values was regarded as a means of both a positive school climate and reducing undesirable behaviors such as bullying. In their study with university students, Coşkun and Yıldırım (2009) attribute the high level of students' perception of values to the fact that the students are at peace with the social structure and the strong dynamics forming the integrity of the social structure.

According to the results, as far as the country variable is concerned, there is a statistically significant difference in favor of students studying in Türkiye in the two factors (personal conviction, concern for others) and in the overall scale. It can be inferred that perceptions of positive values, level of concern for others and personal convictions of secondary school students studying in Türkiye are higher than secondary school students studying in the UK. It is thought that cultural differences between countries may have an impact on this result. In a similar vein, Ültanır (1992) concluded that personal values of students who have lived abroad are lower than those who have not. Çalışkan, Yıldırım, and Kılınç (2019) found in their study, in which they compared value judgments of students from different social backgrounds in the same country, that levels of responsibility and tolerance differ depending on cultural background and gender. Bhandari and Yasunobu (2009), in their study on value structures of societies (Buddhist, Christian and Muslim) in different Asian countries, determined that value judgments of societies with different beliefs are also different from each other. Kaya (2021) also compared value perceptions of Turkish students and Syrian immigrant children living in Türkiye, and found that the value perceptions showed a statistically significant difference in favor of Turkish students.

Considering the research findings, according to gender, it can be stated that there is no statistically significant difference between male and female students studying in Türkiye in personal conviction and concern for others factors. Similarly, according to the research findings of Yılmaz, Avşaroğlu, and Deniz (2010), in which value preferences of teacher candidates were studied, they found no statistically significant differences in value preferences as far as gender variable was concerned. However, in the value research done by Sarı (2005) on teacher candidates, it came out that males have higher value levels than females. It can be concluded that the reason for this difference is the fact that the participants have a higher level of educational background. As educational levels of individuals increase, some changes may occur in their value perceptions. In the study done by Polat and Çalışkan (2013), while the mean scores of female secondary school students in the factors of achievement, benevolence, universalism, self-direction, security and conformity differed significantly compared to male students, there were no statistically significant differences between the mean scores in other value factors, as far as the gender variable was concerned.

Moreover, gender roles are influenced by culture, too. The culture of a society contains attitudes and values that are considered appropriate for men and women (Ersoy, 2009, p. 214). It was found that while there were no statistically significant differences in perceptions of secondary school students studying in the UK in personal convictions factor, according to the gender variable, there was a significant difference in favor of female students in the concern for others factor. As well as the fact that immigrants are more concerned about others due to their own situations and the fact that girls internalize cultural and familial values more than boys (Göka, 2006) might have an effect on the fact that female students are more concerned about others than males. In Dilmaç's (1999) study on values education, it came out that while there were no statistically significant differences between the pre-test scores in the scale in terms of gender, there was a significant increase in the post-test scores in favor of female students. In Akbaş's (2004) study, it was determined that female students attained democratic and basic values at a higher level than male students. In her study, Uyguç (2003) determined that there is a difference between male and female university students in terms of the degree of importance they attach to values, and that female students attach more importance to values such as equality, social approval, helpfulness, kindness and friendship than male students. On the other side, the fact that women are relatively more emotional than men help them gain basic human values such as benevolence, responsibility, respect and love (Yıldırım & Akpınar, 2016). However, in the study of pre-service teachers' value perceptions done by Dilmaç, Bozgeyik, and Çıkılı (2008), it was concluded that there was a statistically significant

difference in favor of male teacher candidates in universalism, self-direction and power values factors.

Values of societies have a unity within themselves. The ability of people to adapt to the society in different countries is closely related to their internalization of this unity. Turkish people living in different countries maintain their cultural structures and pass them on to future generations. Recently, comparative studies have been carried out on various social structures in different countries. Findings of this study, which aims to find out and compare value perceptions of secondary school students in the UK and Türkiye, are similar to other studies in the literature.

In this study, value perceptions of Turkish secondary school students living in the UK and secondary school students studying in Türkiye have been compared. Although there are differences in value levels of students with a common cultural background studying in different countries, it has been determined that the value perceptions of secondary school students in both countries are mostly high. Another important result of the study is that the level of value perceptions is not influenced much by the gender variable, which is partially compatible with the literature.

## **5. Suggestions**

- New researches comparing value perceptions of students living in different countries can be done.
- According to the findings of the research, there is a statistically significant difference in value perceptions of students studying in Türkiye compared to their peers in the UK. It is recommended to do researches to reveal the source of this difference and organize some activities to improve value perceptions of Turkish students studying in England.
- In order to determine the factors affecting value perceptions of people, living in different countries, with the same cultural background, longitudinal studies can be done.
- In addition, it is recommended to do researches to find out value perceptions of Turkish people living abroad, and the factors affecting their perceptions.

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