

A Study on Primary Classroom and Social Studies Teachers' Perceptions of Moral Education and Their Development and Learning

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine teachers' perceptions of moral education, to what extent teacher education, both pre-service and in-service, prepared teachers to deal with morality and moral education in their professional classrooms through a cross-sectional survey research design. The data were collected through a questionnaire that included items on demographic background information and open-ended items that aimed at exploring the teachers's perceptions on the matter. The participants were a representative number of primary classroom teachers and teachers with different social credentials (N= 824) in 15 provinces of Turkey where high increasing population rates were observed based on national statistical data retrieved from the Turkish Statistical Institute. Findings showed that most teachers regarded moral education as essential and wanted to deal with it in their classes, yet they complaint that both in-service and pre-service preparation had given minimum pedagogical emphasis on this matter. Teachers thought that helping students acquire global values and leaving personel moral dispositions out of the class were important assets during formal education, whereas they urged a need on how to teach those values. Cooperation among schools, family, media, and people with whom learners were in a close relationship were found essential in the implementation of moral education.

Key Words

Morality, Moral Education, Teacher Education, Turkey.

"I think that any responsible individual who holds the following values is a moral person: respects others; tolerates differences, is peaceful and loving. Therefore, in shaping the society this education is important."

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The quote above is literally translated from the written responses of a thirty-year experienced female teacher. This quote provides the reader with an idea of a part of the conceptual framework and the overall findings of this study with respect to how teachers see the role of school or education in enhancing moral education. In addition, this paper explores whether teacher education, both in-service and pre-service, emphasizes on how to deal with moral education in schools in the development and learning of teachers.

There are several definitions of what morality is and who a moral person is. One definition can that be of Socrates who describes morality as being knowledgeable, and ignorance is the offspring of evil and bad (Akarsu, 1998; Önal, 2006). According to Kant, no one is born as good or bad, but moral education assists the process of raising a moral child (Yayla, 2005). Hançerlioğlu (1979) defines that morality has a dual meaning in the Turkish content: ethics and moral conduct. In the educational arena, Vy-

gotsky explained that an infant develops and learns with the number of interactions he or she conducts with the socio-cultural environment (Senemoğlu, 2004) and as a result when undertaking the concept moral education, it is obvious that the society has an important influence in the shaping of a moral person (Huffman, 1994 as cited in Revell & Arthur, 2007), especially, in early childhood years (Horn, Daddis, & Killen, 2008); whereas, Karakitapoğlu-Aygün and İmamoğlu (2002) evaluate these interactions as a thread. According to them, the society might create a powerful force on individuals to leave behind different aspects of individualistic characteristics that are inharmonious with the social values.

How about the role of formal education? When the research on moral education is examined, it can be seen that the school is an important institution in guiding students to be moral persons (Bryan, 2005; Klaassen, 2002; Lickona, 1991; Raulo, 2000; Şen & Akar, 2008). Additionally, the students' own moral advancement as the members of the society leads to establishing a social force which is powerful enough to reach higher moral processes within the society (Pehlivan-Ayдын, 2001). In other words, the interaction among the society, local culture and individual moral perception requires teaching of moral dimensions to advance a moral society (Pehlivan-Ayдын, 2001) that respects a multicultural stance (Dülger, 2002). Teaching of universal values provides broad moral perception for students beyond the available social and cultural values (Arsal, 2007) and Turkish teachers, teacher candidates and university students explain morality by attributing global values (Aksu, Engin-Demir, Daloglu, Yıldırım, & Kiraz, 2010; Esmer, 2002). Especially, global values such as respect, tolerance, and democracy can be taught to students effectively with the help of a hidden or formal curriculum (Akar & Temli, 2007; Arsal, 2007; Paykoç, 2007). As important role-models, teachers' behaviors and attitudes are very important since their actions affect students' actions permanently (Joseph & Efron, 2005; Ornstein & Hunkins, 1998; Pajaras, 1992). For these reasons, it is suggested that the teaching of moral values be included into the available or up-coming pre-service and in-service education programmes (Yayla, 2006).

When literature on moral education is examined there is evidence that one cannot separate an individual's cognitive development from one's moral development (LePage, Darling-Hammond, & Akar, 2005) and the environment one lives in

(Akar, 2010; Freedman, Sears, & Carlsmith, 1989; Noddings, 2006). While some researchers underline moral education from an inner understanding (Wren, 2008), others underline the importance of common social values (Carr, 1998), and others state that morality may vary dependent on circumstances and combine one's moral understanding to inner and outer imposes (Mischel & Schoda, 1995). Due to its complexity, it is suggested that moral education be undertaken in formal school contexts, and teachers and administrators are highly recommended to receive education on moral education (Samuels & Casebeer, 2005) during their professional development and learning because there is evidence that schooling influences a child's moral development positively (Barone, 2004; Fitzmaurice, 2008; Hardy, 2008; Hayes & Hagedorn, 2000) and it has an important mission on the moral development of a child ranking second after the influence of the family (Şen & Akar, 2008).

Although formal schooling is regarded as an important influence on the moral development of the child, there is little research that attempts to answer whether teachers have acquired the necessary skills and knowledge to create classroom environments that touch on moral education aspects, and their attitudes and beliefs towards moral education.

Purpose and Significance

The purpose of this study was to measure to what extent the primary school teachers found moral education an important component in their teaching practices, and tried to understand teachers' perceptions and attitudes towards moral education. In pursuit of this purpose, the study also attempted to understand the readiness level of teachers in undertaking moral education in their classes and to what extent pre-service or in-service training facilities that deal with moral education are in line with teachers' teaching credentials in their professional lives.

Method

To examine the perceptions and attitudes of primary school teachers a survey design was used to collect both quantitative and qualitative data. The survey design was used to explain a case requiring investigation without intervention (McMillian & Schumacher, 2006). In this section, the sample, instrument, data collection and data analysis procedures are respectively described.

Sample

The sample of this study was selected from the national statistics data set (Türkiye İstatistik Kurumu [TÜİK], 2006) taking into consideration the provinces that were subjected to highest immigration rates within all regions for the purpose to reach a heterogeneous population. Number of schools in each province was listed based on Ministry of National Education data (Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı [MEB], 2006). Within each province selected schools were randomly and proportionately selected among private and public primary schools to reach an equal proportion. Participants were teachers teaching grades 1 to 8 were reached in clusters for each school assigned. In other words, to reach the teacher sample a cluster sample technique was chosen, and from each school 11 teachers were administered the survey questionnaires in self-glueable envelopes. The clusters of teachers held the following credentials: Social Studies (n=2), Religion Culture and Moral Knowledge (n=2), Human Rights and Citizenship Education (n=1), and Primary Classroom (n=4) teachers. About 1100 surveys were administered and a return rate of 74.9% was reached. The sample consisted of 824 participants in total. Table 1 shows the gender distribution of the sample in which male teachers construct 60% of the entire sample; two of the participants did not indicate their gender.

Table 1.
Gender Distribution

	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>
Male	499	60.56
Female	323	39.20
Total	824	99.76

In addition, demographics indicate that the mean total for teaching experience was 11.53 years (SD=9.54), and about 50% of the participants received an undergraduate degree from several faculties that mainly were graduates of Education Faculties (Table 2).

Table 2.
Undergraduate Degree and Gender Distribution

Gender		Faculty of Education	Institute of Education
		Male	236
	Female	169	34
Total		405	96

Instrument

The survey questionnaire consisted of both closed-ended and open-ended items and was developed in several phases. First informal interviews with five teachers were realized to understand and explore how they coped with moral education in their professional lives and the impact of moral education they received during pre-service and in-service education on their classroom experiences. Based on the experiences of teachers, and some literature review on morality and moral education, a survey questionnaire was developed and mainly its content validity was validated with field experts in several areas whom were one guidance and counseling professor, two curriculum and instruction professors, one philosophy professor and one PhD candidate in sociology, and one experienced teacher. Also, field experts voluntarily reflected on the survey's face validity to have a more reader-friendly instrument after the piloting process. Next, after pilot testing the survey with 34 volunteer teachers minor changes related to wording of items were realized. Consequently, the survey consisted of 17 items trying to explore demographic information and to what extent teachers perceived they were responsible of moral education; whether teacher candidates should be trained to conduct moral education; and what topics or methods on moral education were considered needs during teachers' pre-service and in-service training.

Data Collection and Analysis

Surveys, with the help of the Education Directorate in each province, were administered in schools to teachers in cluster samples. All participation was conducted on a voluntary base and participants were provided with closed envelopes. All participating teachers in each school put the smaller envelope in a researcher-addressed envelope and a mailing service collected them from the schools upon. Descriptive data were run by the first two authors and reported in descriptive statistics in means, standard deviations, and percentages. Qualitative data, on the other hand, were subjected to content analysis; data analysis process was subjected to peer debriefing among the authors (Erlanson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993). The data were analyzed by the researchers separately and discussed until reaching an agreement (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2005) to contribute reliability and the validity of this study as suggested by Maxwell (1996). Content analysis yielded three categories as shown in Table 3.

Table 3.
Categories and Themes

Category	Theme
1.	
Importance of moral education	1.1 Importance of social perspectives
	1.2 Target model
	1.3 Role of school
	1.4 Importance of personal perspective
2. Teacher development and learning	2.1 Content of moral education curriculum
	2.1.1 The concerns on content
	2.1.2 Content in teaching
	2.1.3 Monitoring the teaching process
	2.2 Teacher effectiveness and quality of education
	2.3 Teachers as a role-model
	2.4 Family and Environmental factors
	2.4.1 Family education
2.4.2 Environmental factors	
3. Suggestions for moral education curriculum	3.1 Teacher qualification
	3.2 Values education
	3.3 Socio-cultural structure
	3.4 Media and morality
	3.5 Religion and morality
	3.6 National education

Results

The results of the study are presented in line with the categories emerged, namely, importance of moral education, teacher development and learning, and suggestions for moral education curriculum.

Importance of Moral Education

In response to the item trying to expose to what extent the participants feel moral education is important, most of the participants (n=721; 88.5%) reported they thought moral education was very important, while only few (n=4, 0.5%) found it unimportant. As for why the participants think that moral education was important, analysis of the open-ended item yielded the following themes: the role of school, course content, its impact on society, and impact on individual, developing sensitive individuals in society, family and social milieu issues, and teacher effectiveness and quality of education.

Moral education was regarded as a part of the formal education and it was regarded indispensable, and therefore, *the role of school* was to provide for students not only with academic skills and knowledge but also moral education so that students

could internalize and acquire those values. The role of school could range from collectivist development to individual development.

The *impact of moral education* on the society was described as follows. The role of the school was to offer education that enabled students to become problems-solvers. Especially, through moral education societal problems could be hindered and easily solved (f=53). Through moral education students would be raised in security and this might reflect on the economy that leads to economic development as an important social contribution. The teacher was expected to be a role model, especially, in the way they acted in the society.

The impact of moral education on the individual could be listed as a way to hinder or get rid of domestic problems; a positive contribution on human development; a means to bring employment satisfaction and happiness, and similar issues that contribute to the society and humanity. The way that moral education might contribute to *develop sensitive individuals* was dealing with sensitiveness towards global values such as honesty and trustworthiness, respect, responsibility-taking, humaneness, and similar values including sensitiveness to national values. The role of *moral education on family and milieu* could be described as increased responsibility towards the family. While many participants believed that the role of moral education started with the family but should not be left to families alone. Most of the participants underlined the importance of moral education through formal education because distracters such as the media might impose contradictory values compared to the values of the society. Yet, there was a tendency among few teachers in that they did not trust in families in how they might inhibit values that might contradict to the ones they tried to impose on in schools. Yet, teachers did not report what values those were, but many participants saw *the moral education curriculum* as an important component in formal education, and many reported their concerns about the content of the curriculum. Teachers reported that content should be independent from a biased perspective or a political or a religious tendency. Findings indicated that any content selected need to reflect a common or agreed upon values that are distant from political or religious biases while issues of social-cultural matters could be a way of looking at moral education curriculum content. So, teachers needed to deal with global moral values and character education, and built awareness among their students to develop an understanding for cultural differences.

Teacher Development

The participants were asked if they had had attended any seminar or course on moral education, and more than eighty-four percent of the participants disagreed that they attended a course on moral education during pre-service education, and about more than ninety percent reported that they did not attend any seminar during in-service education. Both parties thought that the amount of moral education they undertook was rather insufficient to understand how to deal with moral education and how to cope with moral dilemmas in the school context. Most of the participants, therefore, thought that pre-service education ought to be included into the teacher education curriculum so that teacher candidates knew how to deal with moral education in their prospective professional lives. On the other hand, in-service education was also valued by participants. The training was expected to provide emphasis on teacher competencies preliminary in an ascending level, next values education, socio-cultural structure, the media and morality, religion and morality, and citizenship education were revealed. Teacher competencies included skills such as methods and techniques in dealing with moral education, knowledge about developmental stages, professional ethics, and effective interpersonal skills. In addition, an important number of participants emphasized values education as an important component for development. For instance, teachers wanted to learn how they could teach or provide learning opportunities to undertake global values, respecting cultural, ideological or religious differences and other issues such as human rights and building empathy.

Suggestions for Moral Education Curriculum

As referred to before, most of the participants ($n=593$; 79.6%) were positive about a course dealing with moral education pedagogy during pre-service teacher education as they believed teachers needed to be a role model ($n=100$) in this area. Participants suggested that a moral education curriculum was a hot issue to be discussed and a common understanding ($f=68$) needed to be prioritized. For instance, they underlined their reservations based on several issues such as moral reflection of the moral understanding of the majority ($f=33$), religious beliefs ($f=32$), and political views ($f=29$). Therefore, they urged that content needed should reflect global values ($f=50$) alongside with socio-cultural values ($f=36$) that reflected national values. Yet, some participants revealed their concerns

about the media that might mislead the students in the type of moral understanding that might contradict with the ones schools wanted to instill on them.

Discussion and Conclusions

This study tried to examine how primary classroom and social sciences teachers perceive the importance of moral education on the development and learning of students, and how they perceive that either pre-service or in-service has equipped them with the essential knowledge and skills to undertake moral education in their classes. Findings yielded that participant teachers valued dealing with moral education in their classes and accepted moral education as an indispensable part of the formal program.

Based on data analyzed, the researchers concluded that teachers, except for few of them, wanted to deal with moral education in their classrooms, yet, they thought that they were not sufficiently equipped to do so as moral education was little emphasized during their pre-service education as well as during their in-service training. Also, the researchers found that moral education that the teachers wanted to instill in their classrooms was about helping students learn global values such as honesty and respect to differences. We found a great similarity in the result of this study and in Clayton's (2005) and Lee's (2004) studies in terms of concern on emphasizing teachers' own values in the classes. The participants in the above study were concerned about imposing teachers' values on to students. They suggested that pre-service and in-service education should include moral education curriculum content which should not be dependent on political or religious issues, but should emphasize global values mainly, and raise awareness of socio-cultural differences. In this regard, the implications for teacher education was that the teacher education curriculum should include how to deal with the moral development of the students in their professional classes through building awareness of the methods and techniques that may be helpful for classroom practices.

Creating a moral learning environment where the students feel respect for their class-mates' different ideas (Pritchard-Paolitto, 2001) and enhancing students' moral development require teachers' theoretical information and practice (Kohlberg & Mayer, 1972), indicating that effective teachers are not only qualified in their teaching fields but also in personal development and education (Yaşar, 2007).

The findings of this study show that teachers' endeavors to train students to become moral people were highlighted beyond training them to become academically successful people, and although both were crucial, a difference was set between instruction and education. Teachers in this study stressed that effective education includes moral education. Overall, these conclusions were found to be in line with the education policy in the Constitution (MEB, 2010) and teachers' expectancies were in line with the development process based on the Bologna Declaration.

As a conclusion, it is important to highlight that the findings of this study are limited to responses provided on a survey questionnaire, the researchers suggest that further research shed more light on how teachers with different credentials, especially in math and sciences, deal with moral education through in-depth ethnographic research.

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