

Cognitive Fictions of Classroom Teachers about the Values They Possess: A Phenomenological Analysis*

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Abstract

The purpose of the present study is to examine cognitive fictions of classroom teachers about the values they possess. The study was designed with a phenomenological pattern, which is a qualitative research pattern. It was conducted with 20 classroom teachers who work in the central Yakutiye district of Erzurum who were chosen via criterion sampling method which is a purposeful sampling method. Data were collected with the repertory grid form based on the structured interview technique. Content analysis was used in data analysis. Two hundred cognitive fictions and 11 cognitive fiction groups were obtained at the end of the study. Among these groups, tolerance, trustability/honesty and diligence composed the main fiction group of many participants. Helpfulness, equality, sharing and social sensitivity groups were determined not to be main fiction group of any participant.

Key Words

Value, Classroom Teacher, Cognitive Fiction, Repertory Grid.

The concept of value is a topic which has been examined in many scientific fields such as economy, philosophy and psychology. For this reason, the paradigm that was created had an impact on the different definitions of the concept of value (Yılmaz, 2008). Schwartz (1994) defines value as the ideas which mobilize people; and the behavioral patterns which lead and guide them. Aspin (2007) gave a larger definition and considers values to be opinions, traditions, rules, purposes, products, practices, procedures or judgments that people accept, approve, cherish, prefer, show tendency, consider as important and practice. Values are also determinants of individuals' behaviors, evaluations, relations and many other social movements (Yılmaz, 2008). In this context, it can be said that the everyday life of

individual is affected by values in all their aspects (Gutman, 1982; Halstead & Taylor, 2000; Pakizeh, Jochen, & Maio, 2007; Schwartz & Sagie, 2000). When the definitions of the concept of value are taken into consideration, it can be said that values are focused on the criteria which appear in individuals' opinions, behaviors, attitudes and products (Şişman, 2002; Turan & Aktan, 2008).

Values which are main directives and determinants of individual behaviors are the qualifications which make individuals human beings and distinguish them from other creatures. They also have a great effect in determining limits of the movement area. Individuals decide what is good, correct and nice under the affect and in the light of values they possess (Özkan, 2008). In this context, it is important to know the type of acculturation and socialization teachers have experienced, namely to determine their system of values. A teacher should be a model for his students in terms of his attitudes and behaviors both inside and outside school. A teacher does not only give lessons in the classroom; he stands before his students displaying his character and personality (Aktepe & Yel, 2009; Veugelers, 2000) Schools and other educational institutions searching for an educational approach should not only focus on

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work efficacy, economic capacity and administrative skills but also on human values (Aspin, 2007).

The present study which aims to determine teachers' values via their cognitive fictions is based on the cognitive structure theory developed by Kelly (1955) and based on the perceptions of an individual instead of the common perceptions of a group of people. Cognitive structure theory is based on an individual's choices in different situations in order to obtain more detailed information about that person's cognitive perceptions. This necessitates considering individuals as a starting point for explaining the related concept instead of considering them as a purpose.

Using different structures in order to interpret the same subject results from the different personal structure systems that people possess. The similarities between a person's relations and their understanding of social subjects play a large role in the development and maintenance of their roles. The personal structures of individuals are dynamic as they are open to changes as a result of individuals' experiences (Ravenette, 2000).

Cognitive structure theory aims to reveal the phenomena which are present in individuals' psychological systems by means of their own tendencies that they have created in line with their purposes and experiences. This is because each individual develops a perception system which is the result of the interaction between an individual and the events he encounters; thus he is expected to make more valid estimations about real incidents and facts (Kelly, 1991). Moreover, similarities and differences which result from individuals' perception systems make it easier to understand a concept as they reveal personal perceptions of other people about the related concept (Adams-Weber, 2003).

Method

Research Design

The quantitative research method was used in the research since it was considered to be appropriate for the purpose of the research which aims to examine teachers' cognitive fictions. Qualitative research methods provide the opportunity to make a profound examination of problem states; and aim to comprehend a social or personal situation that has more than one point of view (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Richardson & Ginsburg, 1999). Accordingly, the phenomenological pattern, a qualitative research pattern, was used in the research. Phenomenological pattern was cho-

sen with the purpose of revealing teachers' points of view about the values they possess.

Participants

The study group consisted of 20 classroom teachers who were selected using the criterion sampling method which is a purposeful sampling method. The criterion for determining the study group was to choose teachers who had been working in the profession for 5 years and were of the same branch in order to minimize perceptual differences about values. The participants had an age mean of 35.25; and their seniority mean was 10.1.

Process

The research was completed in the following 5 phases; defining the phenomenon, preparing the data collecting instrument, data collecting, data analysis, providing validity and reliability.

Definition of the Phenomenon: The phenomenon was defined in this phase. The researcher tried to define the phenomenon; using the conceptual tools which are thought to reflect the phenomenon under inspection.

Preparation of the Data Collecting Instrument: The instrument was prepared in accordance with the repertory grid technique based on the structured interview technique (Karadağ, 2011). This technique, created by Kelly (1955; 1991), aims to determine individuals' main cognitive fictions by means of words which define them. The sample data collecting instrument which was prepared by considering the repertory grid form and presented to participants is given in Table 1.

Data Collecting: Repertory grid form was administered to all the teachers in the study group by the researcher. Before the teachers were given the form the researcher presented a sample form and made some explanations. Then, he asked the participants to grade from 1 to 5 the values of teachers with 3 positive characteristics and 3 negative characteristics whom they knew personally. In this phase, the participants were informed about the repertory grid technique and asked to encode the teachers possessing the 3 negative and 3 positive values on the form. Then, the teachers were asked to write down a distinctive characteristic of one of these teachers they determined.

Data Analysis: Content analysis was used in the data analysis. The main activity in the content

analysis is to bring similar data together within the framework of certain concepts and themes. In the present research, only the positive cognitive fictions produced by the participants were included in the calculation by considering the two-way structure of the repertory grid technique. Negative cognitive fictions were excluded from the calculation. Accordingly, main fiction groups were formed by taking into account the similar and common features of positive cognitive fictions that the participants produced. The range of cognitive fictions obtained from each participant were taken into consideration; and the total of the first cognitive fiction scores was multiplied by 10 in order to determine the cognitive fiction groups featured in the research. The total of the second cognitive fiction scores was multiplied by 9; and this operation continued until the total of cognitive fiction scores was multiplied by 1 (Ok & Cross, 2003). Then, the scores of each cognitive fiction obtained were totaled within their main fiction group; thus, the main fiction groups of participants were determined.

Providing Validity and Reliability: The preparation of the assessment instrument by the participants is an important factor which increases the validity of the assessment instrument prepared in qualitative studies (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006). In this context, all the data related to the value concept were prepared by participants in the current research. Moreover, all the processes of the research (pattern, study group, preparation of data collecting instrument, data collecting and formulas used in the research) were stated in detail. The cognitive fictions produced by the participants were given without any commentary for the reliability of the research; and they were examined by teachers and experts in the educational administration field. The Miles and Huberman (1994) reliability formula was used in determining the fiction groups where participants' cognitive fictions were going to take place; and a consistency of 92% was provided. Furthermore, all the mathematical operations used in the research were recalculated by another researcher; and the data were finalized after the same results were obtained.

Results

A total of 200 cognitive fictions were produced by the classroom teachers who participated in the research. It was determined that the cognitive fictions produced most by the participants were; hardworking (n=8, 4%), respectful (n=8, 4%), tolerant (n=8, 4%), honest (n=8, 4%), patient (n=7, 3.5%), critical (n=7, 3.5%), patriotic (n=7, 3.5%), trustable (n=6, 3%) and helpful (n=6, 3%). It was also determined

that the participants gave less importance to the following cognitive fictions; organized (n=2, 1%), objective (n=2, 1%), altruistic (n=2, 1%), sincere (n=2, 1%), generous (n=1, 0.5%) and open-minded (n=1, 0.5%).

The 200 cognitive fictions produced by the participants were included in 11 cognitive fiction groups. These cognitive fiction groups are presented in Table 2 with the scores showing the importance of each fiction for the participant. It was determined that 200 cognitive fictions, according to the fiction groups, showed distribution at the levels of tolerance (n=43, 21.5%), diligence (n=31, 15.5%), trustability/honesty (n=28, 14%), being scientific (n=18, 9%), responsibility (n=16, 8%), innovativeness (n=14, 7%), social sensitivity (n=14, 7%), being compromising/democratic (n=10, 5%), helpfulness (n=9, 4.5%), sharing (n=9, 4.5%) and equality (n=8, 4%).

When the distribution of participants according to cognitive fiction groups as shown in Table 3 is examined, it is seen that the most produced cognitive fictions are; tolerance (n=19, 14.6%), diligence (n=19, 14.6%) and trustability/honesty (n=15, 11.6%). It is also seen that equality (n=8, 6.2%), sharing (n=8, 6.2%) and being compromising/democratic (n=8, 6.2%) fiction groups were less preferred by the participants.

The cognitive fiction groups which were obtained by adding up relative importance scores of cognitive fictions produced by each participant are presented in Table 4. Even though the participants produced cognitive fictions in more than one cognitive fiction group; the fiction groups where they were dominant were highlighted in gray; and the relative main fiction groups were determined.

When the main fiction groups were examined, it was determined that the participants main fiction groups were; tolerance (n=6, 30%), trustability/honesty (n=5, 25%), diligence (n=3, 15%), being scientific (n=2, 10%), responsibility (n=2, 10%), being compromising/democratic (n=1, 5%) and innovativeness (n=1, 5%). Helpfulness, equality, sharing and social sensitivity were not in the main fiction group of any participant.

Table 4 shows that tolerance ($\sum_k^n k=4782$), trustability/honesty ($\sum_k^n k=3196$) and diligence ($\sum_k^n k=3844$) main fiction groups were in the first 3 ranges in terms of the total scores obtained from the main fiction groups relative importance scores; and tolerance ($\bar{x}=251.7$), responsibility ($\bar{x}=236.4$) and trustability/honesty ($\bar{x}=213.1$) were in the first 3 ranges in terms of means.

Discussion

Values serve as a basic principle for evaluating behaviors, individuals and incidences (Collins, Steg, & Koning, 2007). Values, which are effective on the decisions of individuals, are fundamentally abstract; however they can be observed or perceived in the behaviors of individuals (Karaköse & Altınkurt, 2009). Values serve as a guide for individuals in displaying different behaviors and attitudes (Gutman, 1982); and show them the way they should behave (Parks & Guay, 2009). For this reason, values have attracted the attention of researchers during a very long time (Lee, Soutar, & Louviere, 2008) and the examination of values in human sciences has always hold an important place (Turan & Aktan, 2008).

The present study aims to determine the values that classroom teachers have through their cognitive fictions. Repertory Grid technique was used and 200 valid cognitive fictions were obtained. It was determined that participants emphasized mostly the values such as diligence, tolerance, honesty, patience, criticism, patriotism, confidentiality and helpfulness. When the studies on teachers' values are examined, it is seen that teachers have similar values however their level of importance are different (Başol & Bardakçı, 2008; Carr, 1991; Firat, 2007; Kupermintz, 2003; Korthagen, Lunenberg, & Willemsse, 2005; Sezgin, 2006; Silfver, 2007; Taşdan, 2010; Tirri & Husu, 2007; Yılmaz, 2009; Winter, Newton, & Kirkpatrick, 1998).

Two hundred cognitive fictions obtained in the research were categorized in 11 cognitive fiction groups: tolerance, confidentiality/honesty, diligence, being scientific, responsibility, reconciliatory/democraticness, innovativeness, helpfulness, equality, sharing and social sensibility. Among these categories, tolerance, confidentiality/honesty and diligence were determined to be the main dominant fiction groups. It was also observed that equality, sharing and social sensibility were not the main dominant fiction groups of any participant. When the studies on the "value" concept are examined, it is seen that the results are similar and they even complete each other however they are not independent from each other (Dönmez & Cömert, 2007; Erdem, 2003; Güngör, 1998; Kirschenbaum, 2000; Schwartz & Boehnke, 2004). When it is considered that values can differ from one individual to another, it can be said that the values observed in the participants of the study support the literature.

When the cognitive fictions (e.g. patience, sincerity, sociability) are examined, it is thought that

the values that teachers indicated may take place in more than one category or in a different category. However, values cannot be considered separately. A definitive borderline cannot be drawn between the values and their content can change over time (Varol, 2011). It can be said that such ontological features of values may have been effective on these results. The necessity of change in values is related to the individual adaptation to the constantly changing world (Yılmaz, 2008).

Lin (2002) determined that the order of values that teachers have changes as their age and seniority increase. He determined that in the first years of their profession, the basic value of teachers was responsibility; and in the following years this was replaced by the justice value. It was also found out that value order of teachers working in public schools and private schools were different. Responsibility, honesty and justice were determined to be the main values in public schools; while responsibility, sincerity and love were determined to be the main values in private schools.

The studies on teachers' values show that the frequently emphasized values are responsibility, honesty, justice and confidentiality (Sezgin, 2006; Taşdan, 2010). In the current study, the researcher tried to determine teachers' value fictions for their colleagues whom they know in person. However, what is more important is not the individual values of teacher; however their common values in their schools. Reconciliation among teachers in terms of values can help in generating common criteria in education applications (Tokmak, 2009). Such a reconciliation is also important as it would increase the responsibility and confidence among teachers in schools (Chapman, 1999; Moller, 1999; Triska, 2007).

Thornberg (2008) states that value education is given in a reactive, unplanned and unconscious way. For this reason, schools should present choices concerning the formation and maintenance of new generations' values and adaptation to new values by creating a common area of share; and present the cause and effect relation which requires these choices (Ekşi, 2003). It can be said that the individual values that teachers have can gain functionality with this awareness.

It can be said that the featuring values in the 200 cognitive fictions and 11 fiction groups created in the study (tolerance, confidentiality/honesty, diligence, and responsibility) are in parallel with other studies. It is essentially important to know the values that teachers indicated. The examination of values which serves to determine individuals' world

views allows us at least to understand their present attitudes and behaviors; and predict their future behaviors (Aktay, 2008). For this reason, it is thought that the Repertory Grid technique used in the study can provide a new interpretation for value studies. However, conducting studies for finding out the reasons of preferring these values can provide more detailed and profound information about the values which are desired to be kept alive in schools.

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