



The Effect of the Values Education Programme on 5.5-6 Year old Children's Social Development: Social Skills, Psycho-social Development and Social Problem Solving Skills

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to examine the effect of the Values Education Programme (developed for pre-school children) on the children's social skills, psycho-social development, and social problem solving skills. The sample group consisted of 66 children (33 experimental group, 33 control group) attending pre-school. The Values Education Programme was applied in the experimental group of 33 students, with session time lasting 30 minutes in each 11 week session. In this research the following was used in order to measure the dependent variables: Family Registration Form, Values Education Programme Assessment Interview developed by the researcher, Social Skills Evaluation Scale, Psycho-social Behaviour Scale for Pre-school Children (developed by the Turkish Psychology Association Committee on Pre-school), and the Wally Child Social Problem-Solving Detective Game Test. In the analysis process, descriptive statistics, t-test for independent groups, paired-samples t-test, frequencies, descriptive statistics, and typology analysis techniques were used. At the end of the values education programme, it was seen that the experimental group's social skills, psycho-social development, and social problem solving skills points rose from the pre-test towards the post-test and, that it increased at a significant pace compared to the control group's social skills, psycho-social development and social problem solving skills points. Also, after completing the three month training programme, it was found that there were no significant differences between the points of the experimental group's and control group's pre-test retention test. Conversely, parents indicate that values education program increased children's appropriate behaviours and decreased undesired the behaviours of children.

Key Words

Pre-school Period, Psycho-social Development, Social Problem Solving, Social Skill, Values Education Programme.

The pre-school ages of zero to six are critical years during which child development occurs the fastest. Physical development, psycho-social development and personality structure, which was founded during this early development period, will probably develop in the same direction in the further ages, rather than changing direction (Yavuzer, 1997).

The preschool period is one during which the child begins to gain their society's value judgments, behaviours and habits in accordance to society's cultural structure (Bilir & Bal, 1989). In this period children move from the caretaker/mother-father relationship established in the traditional home environment, to a relationship with

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groups, socialising among peers and interacting in the school environment. During the peer and environment interaction process (period), children gain a lot of positive and negative behaviour, attitudes and social ideas (Bronson, 2000; Davies, 2004).

These behaviours, attitudes, and ideas that children gain, form the basis of the children's value judgments. Although instruction related to values are learned through their lifetime, first instructions are gained during early childhood (Uyanık-Balat & Balaban-Dağal, 2009). Positive early experiences gained during early childhood serve as a basis, which is required for healthy development of following behaviour and idea processes (Gunnar & Barr, 1998). Children who adopt the values at an early age have self-confidence, can make their own decisions, solve their problems well, and this condition improves their happiness. If the individual fails to comply with the society's values, this may cause failure, exclusion from society and unhappiness (Alpöge, 2011). Social change, as well as advancements in science and technology, has shortened the time that family members spend together and has caused members to behave more independently. This change has required the educational institutions to support families in their duty to help children to gain values otherwise learned in a family environment (Alpöge, 2011). Transferring social values and attitudes to young generations in a school medium requires providing value education via systematic and regular activities in the school medium (Akbaş, 2004; Craig, 2009; Demirel, 2007; Nucci, 2001). Schwartz (1992) defines values as the guiding motivation and purpose that serve as instructive principles in individuals' lives. Furthermore, Schwartz (1999) qualifies value as *"a social actor which generally assists with the selection of behaviours, assessment of events and persons, explanation of behaviours."* According to Rokeach (1968) value is a relatively permanent feature that guides to individual's behaviours and decisions and reflects what is important for the individual. Values are the targets that the individual desires to accomplish during her/his lifetime. Acquisition of the values is related to academic motivation and eagerness, academic success, pro-social behaviour, caring for school, pro-social and democratic values, conflict resolution skills (Bacanli, 2006; Benninga, Berkowitz, Kuehn, & Smith, 2003), moral maturity, responsibility, self-sufficiency, self-control, self-respect, social skills, honesty and respect to the teacher (Kunduroğlu & Babadoğan, 2010; Noddings, 2005; Nucci, 2001).

Gaining values effects children's social development process. Social development processes comprise of psycho-social development, social skills and social problem solving skills. Accordingly, individuals gaining social development processes affect their social development (Caprara, Barbaranelli, Pastorelli, Bandura, & Zimbardo, 2000; Webster-Stratton, 1990). Social skills are important learned behaviours for starting and maintaining interactions with others (Westwood, 2007). Social skills require the child to gain the skills to meet other individuals' expectations successfully, such as achieving positive interaction, communication, listening to other individuals, maintaining attention, and following instructions (Gresham, 1997). Psycho-social development is the process of improvement of the individual's awareness to social stimulants and norms and obligations of group life. As a consequence, the individual conforms with others in her/his culture. In this process, individuals learn values, behaviours and beliefs which ensure that they will be members of a group through their lifetime (Gander & Gardiner, 1998). As for social problem solving, it is described as "self-operating cognitive and behavioural processes during individual's defining or finding effective solution methods of the problems encountered in daily life, or complying with them." The word "social" in social problem solving emphasizes that problem solving is a "problem solving process which occurs when encountered with the problem in real world" (D'Zurilla & Nezu, 1982, 1990, 1999; D'Zurilla, Chang, & Sanna, 2003; D'Zurilla, Nezu, & Maydeu-Olivares, 2004). The age during which they are sensitive to social development, and is critical for gaining problem solving skills, is between ages 5-6 (Caprara et al., 2000). Individuals who cannot gain social development characteristics are alienated by their peers, exhibit antisocial behaviours, and have behaviour problems (Fantuzzo, Manz, & McDermott, 1998; Malecki & Elliot 2002; Miles & Stipek, 2006). Children who cannot gain these skills during the pre-school period continue to exhibit negative behaviours and encounter problems such as skipping school, committing crime, addiction, being unable to maintain social relations, using violence against other individuals and abusing them (Carpenter, Shepherd, & Nangle, 2008; Wang, Sandall, Davis, & Thomas, 2011), experiencing disciplinary problems, and developing school anxiety and phobia (Berkowitz & Bier, 2004; Davin, 2007) in their further lifetimes. It is exhibited that Values Education Programmes structured in accordance with universal values increase the

individual's social skills (Bacanli, 2006), pro-social and democratic values acquisition (Brooks & Kann, 1993), self-sufficiency, and self-respect significantly (Benninga et al., 2003; Kunduroğlu & Babadoğan, 2010; Trout, 2008).

One of the aims of the systematic education given in pre-school institutions is to help children gain social skills, psycho-social behaviour and problem solving skills in daily life. Social skills, psycho-social behaviour and social problem solving skills can be provided to children in the pre-school period with basic values such as sharing, being respectful, and being patient, which are supportive for establishing and maintaining interaction with other individuals (Craig, 2009). Deficiencies of children in their social development are due to not learning positive social behaviour in the social scenarios or conditions they encounter, or because they do not have sufficient experience to exhibit positive behaviour (Webster-Stratton, 1999).

It is thought that, via a Values Education Program, children will be able to learn positive social behaviours and they will have sufficient opportunities to apply these behaviours. Moreover, when the related literature is examined, it is seen that studies about values education devoted to pre-school children are limited. For this reason, in this study, the effect of the values education programme on children's social skills, psycho-social development and social problem solving skills during the pre-school period - in which value judgments begin to form - is investigated.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to analyse the effect of the Values Education Program prepared and implemented by a researcher for pre-school children upon the social skills, psycho-social development and social problem solving skill levels of children attending pre-school education.

Method

Research Design

This study was planned as an experimental model. In this study, quasi-experimental design with a pre-test and post-test control group was used. This was a component of the experimental designs. This model was preferred because this study attempted to make comparisons in terms of social skills, psycho-social development, and social problem solving skill levels between children who were in the experiment

group (in which being able to choose, honesty, respect, cooperation, responsibility, fairness, friendship, being peaceful, love, solidarity values were intended), and the control group (in which this programme was not used). Experimental design provides opportunities to make comparisons like this (Büyükoztürk, 2005, 2007; Fraenkel & Wallen, 1993; Karasar, 2010). Quasi-experimental design was used in this study because research groups consisted of two pre-school classes which were created by the school administration before starting the research (Büyükoztürk, 2005, 2007). A pre-test was conducted before the implementation process, as well as a post-test after the implementation, and finally, a retention test was taken after three months.

Universe and Sampling (Research Groups)

In the study, the research group consisted of a total of 66 children who were 5.5-6 years old ($X_{\text{old}}=5,8$), who attended two different private pre-schools in Eskişehir. The experimental group included 33 children who participated in the Values Education Programme, and the control group was composed of 33 children.

Instruments

Family Participation Form: The form was created by the researcher, utilizing Algöpe's (2011), Rokeach's (1973), Schwartz's (1992), Uyanık-Balat and Balaban Dağal's (2009) values education studies. The form requested the families to enumerate 20 values in order of importance an priority, including: being peaceful, friendship, being respectful, love, independence, being righteous, honesty, making selections, helping each other, being merciful, being successful, being clean, cooperation, responsibility, being happy, being patient, courage, kindness, being universal, and sharing. They were also requested to state whether they approved of their children's participation in the Education Programme and whether or not they would participate in the family participation activities.

Interview Form for Evaluation of the Values Education Programme:

The form was created by the researcher in order for the families to evaluate the Values Education Programme that was applied to their children. It asked the following questions: "Did the education programme help your child to develop/change their behaviour positively? If so, which behaviours did your child develop?," "Did the education programme decrease undesired

behaviours in your child? If so, which undesired behaviours decreased?”, “Which activities did you enjoy in family participation during the education programme?”, “During the education programme, which activities did you dislike, participate in involuntarily as a family?”

Social Skills Evaluation Scale: The scale was developed by Avcıoğlu (2003) to identify social skills in 4-6 year old children. The scale was filled out for 4-6 year old children by their teachers. In the scale, social skills were measured in nine dimensions: interpersonal skills, controlling anger and adaptation to changes, coping with peer pressure, self-checking, results accepting, listening, purpose building, task completion, and verbal description skills. The exploratory factors indicated that accounted for the variance and item loadings are respectively: (.77-.44, 13.27%; .82-.58, 12.07%; .87-.52, 9.33%; .66-.45, 8.49%; .84-.47, 6.36%; .67-.41, 5.20%; .63-.54, 4.71%; .79-.56, 4.52%; 65-45, 4.13%). The Cronbach's alpha internal consistency coefficients were .98, the Spearman Brown coefficients were .89, and test-retest reliability coefficient was .83 for the total scale. Exploratory factor analysis identified nine factors accounting for 68.08 of the variance for scale (Avcıoğlu, 2003).

Psycho-social Behaviour Scale for Pre-school Children: The Psychological Observation Form for Pre-school Children was developed by the Turkish Psychology Association Committee (Türk Psikologlar Derneği Okul Öncesi Komisyonu, 1998) with pre-school children. The scale was filled out for pre-school children by their teachers. In the scale, the process of social psychology observation was measured in eight dimensions. In this study, Psycho-Social Behaviour Sub dimensions were used. The Cronbach's alpha internal consistency coefficients were .89 for total scale and .87 for Psycho-social Behaviour Sub-dimensions (Türk Psikologlar Derneği Okul Öncesi Komisyonu, 1998).

Wally Child Social Problem-Solving Detective Game Test: The test developed Webster-Stratton (1990) and adopted Dereli-İman (2013). The test was developed from Spivak and Shures' (1985) Pre-school Problem Solving Test, and Rubin and Krasnors' (1986) Child Social Problem-Solving Test by Webster-Stratton (1990). The test is an assessment of both the qualitative and quantitative dimensions of a child's social problem solving ability. Exploratory factor analysis identified two factors accounting for 46.53% of the variance for social problem solving for adults and social

problem solving for peers. Social problem solving for adults for 18.22% of the variance and item loadings ranged from .47 to .72, while social problem solving for peers accounted for 28.31% of the variance and item loadings ranged from .58 to .78. At the same time, upper-lower group mean differences were conducted and for 15 items and upper-lower group mean differences were significantly all of the items. The goodness-of-fit statistics for the CFA of the items confirmed the view that two-factor model was a good fit to the data ($X^2=211.13$; $sd=89$; $X^2/sd=2.37$; $GFI=.91$; $AGFI=.88$; $CFI=.96$; $RMSEA=.05$; $SRMR=.01$). The Cronbach's alpha internal consistency coefficients were 0.88(total scale), .73 (Social problem solving for adults) and .86 (Social problem solving for peers). The Spearman- Brown coefficients were 0.80 (total scale), .75 (Social problem solving for adults) and .81 (Social problem solving for peers). The test-retest reliability coefficients for the full scale, social problem solving for adults and social problem solving for peers were .87, .84, and .81, respectively (Dereli-İman, 2013).

Process

Before applying the Values Education Programme, a contact meeting was organised with the parents of the children belonging to the control group. In the first part of the form, of the 20 values existing in the family participation form, the parents were requested to mark 10 items that they wanted/ desired to be given/delivered to their children. By considering the value rankings of the parents of children from the experiment group, and in accordance with the classroom teachers' opinions, the researcher has decided to include 10 values to the Values Education Program: making selection, honesty, respect, cooperation, responsibility, justice, friendship, being peaceful, helping each other, and love. The children in the experiment group received the Values Education Program, which consisted of 33 sessions in 11 weeks, with each session lasting 30 minutes, while the children in the control group continued to receive traditional education without the inclusion of the programme curriculum. Scales were applied before the education program, after the education program, and 3 months after the education programme. At the end of the education programme, the families in the experiment group were assessed the Interview Form for Evaluation of the Values Education Programme.

Data Analysis

SPSS 15.0 was used in order to evaluate the data which was collected by the scales employed in the research. The data regarding social development levels was analyzed through descriptive statistics, *t*-test for independent groups, and paired-samples *t*-test. Significance levels of .01 and .05 were predicated in these analyses. Encoding of data obtained from the Values Education Programme Assessment Interview was performed to reflect similarities and differences, and themes bringing the codes together were found (Tavşancıl & Aslan, 2001). The frequencies and percentages of the encoded data were calculated.

Results

In the study, significant differences were found between the social skills, psycho-social development and social problem solving skills at pre-test and post-test points with the experiment group. It was determined that social skills, psycho-social development and social problem solving skill levels of the children who participated in the Values Education Programme (experiment group) were significantly higher than the children who did not participate in the education programme (control group). There was not a significant difference between the social skills, psycho-social development and social problem solving skills at pre-test and post-test points of the control group. In the research, the participants and non-participants of the Values Education Programme were assessed a retention test 3 months later. There was not a significant difference between social skills, psycho-social development and social problem solving skills between the post-test and retention-test for the children who participated in the Values Education Programme.

In the study, parents of the children who participated in the Values Education Programme were assessed the Interview Form for the Evaluation of Values Education Programme, in order to receive their opinions about the Values Education Programme. When examined, the opinions of the parents belonging to the experiment group about values education indicated that, after the education programme, the children “communicate with the family members more frequently,” “share their toys much more than before,” “apologise when they make a mistake,” “choose the clothes they want to wear,” “keep their room less messy,” “when they are not permitted to make/do something,

they shout/cry less than before,” “[are] offended at their friends less frequently” and “exhibit less aggressiveness.” Moreover, parents indicated that in the education programme, they mostly liked “to speak/communicate with their children while applying the activities,” “to play games with their children” and “to receive letters about the issues taught in the classroom.” Conversely, they indicated that it was not easy for them “to participate in or attend the group meetings” and “to take time off for performing activities with their children.”

Discussion

In the study, children ages 5-6, who are attending a pre-school education, were applied the Values Education Programme which was delivered systematically via programmed activities (including family participation), in order to support their psycho-social development, social skills and social problem solving skills. The values education programme was found to be effective in improving the 5-6 age group children’s psycho-social development, social skills and social problem solving skills. Moreover, this positive effect was found to remain/exist after 3 months. The cause of Values Education Programme being effective in children’s psycho-social development, social skills and social problem solving skills may be due to the programme’s ability to teach children positive social behaviours and to find opportunities to apply the behaviours they had learned. The research findings are compatible with Lowter’s (2004), Crowter’s (1995), Battistich, Watson, Solomon, Schaps, and Solomon’s (1991) Kam, Greenberg, and Walls’s (2003) Miller, Kraus, and Veltkamp’s (2005), Battistich, Schaps, Watson, Solomon, and Lewis’s (2000) findings. However, the research findings are not compatible with Gökçek’s (2007) and Bonnie’s (2000) findings.

In the study, families of the children who received values education stated that their children’s appropriate behaviours increased, and undesired behaviours decreased. The existence of activities utilizing family participation in the Values Education Programme may have affected children’s social development, since children were encouraged to practice the values, and families became role-models by exhibiting behaviours in accordance with these values. The study findings are compatible with Battistich et al.’s (2000) research findings.

Consequences of the Values Education Programme may be evaluated by applying the programme to

individuals from different socio-cultural levels and different sample groups via the same method and techniques. Seminars and meetings may be organised for families in order to model this behaviour for their children, and to support them to gain desired values. Research may be conducted in order to investigate the factors that affect value acquisition. Teachers may be supported in classroom applications of the Values Education Programme by providing faculty with training regarding the structure and application of the curriculum in the classroom.

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