

Perceptions of Social Values among Middle School Students

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to find out the perceptions of social values among middle school students with respect to several variables (gender, grade level, educational level of mother, and educational level of father). Data were collected from 242 students on a volunteer basis at a state school during the academic year of 2014-2015. The study was based on a descriptive screening model and data collection instruments were "Personal Information Form" prepared by the researchers and "Perceptions of Social Values Scale" developed by Bakaç (2013). Data analysis was conducted with the appropriate statistical techniques using IBM SPSS 21.0 Results of the study indicated that middle school students had positive perceptions of social values at the level of "definitely agree". The study also suggested that perceptions of social values among middle school students did not differ according to their gender but it differed according to grade level, educational level of mother, and educational level of father. Finally, several recommendations were put forth in light of the findings.

Keywords: Values education, social values, perception, social studies.

1. Introduction

Education aims to help individuals become more aware of their social and physical environments in every aspect of life and to change their viewpoints positively towards social and physical environments in the context of social values. Furthermore, it helps reflect these changes in attitude and values into behaviors and develop these behaviors into cognitive, affective, and psycho-motor qualities (Doğanay, 2012, p. 226). The basic goal of education is to train not only field experts, but also active citizens with good character and who accept value judgments of society (Ulusoy and Dilmaç, 2015, p. 1). Having a critical place in the formation of society, values have gained a greater role in education in recent years. Furthermore, values largely affect individuals' perspectives towards their lives and environment. Despite being an accentuated topic, it is hard to say that values have a common definition. Social values are abstract and cannot be quantified. Values can only be observed when they turn into behaviors. In this sense, a value is defined as "an abstract standard of determining the importance of something, an equivalent of something's worth, esteem" in its most general sense (Turkish Language Association, 1998, II: 538). Çelikkaya (1998, p. 168) defines value as all kinds of social, humane, ideological, or celestial based perceptions, cognitions, behaviors, rules, or esteems accepted, adopted, and sustained among a society, a belief, an ideology, or people. The relationship between values and individuals' emotions, thoughts, and behaviors is quite high. Shaped by individuals' choices and turned into beliefs by behaviors, values become standards related to individuals' behaviors and attitudes (Dilmaç, 2002, Yazıcı, 2006; Canatan, 2008; Turan ve Aktan, 2008; Akbaş, 2011).

Values are classified as individual values and social values. Social values are formed as a result of many years of cultural accumulation of societies and they take on an important role in forming societal identity. Unlike individual values, social values require being shared on a societal level and accepted by the individuals in the society (Canatan, 2008, p. 63). Under the concept of communitarianism, values can be said to include having a social identity, solidarity, trust, awareness of rights and responsibilities, patriotism, sharing, self-sacrifice, justice, accepting the supremacy of law, being able to cooperate with other individuals, and being able to develop emotional bonding with other individuals (Altıntaş, 2012, p. 34; Doğanay, 2012, p. 232). These values of a nation are passed down in the process of individuals' socialization (Likaj, 2013, p. 136). Everything in the society is affected by values and finds meaning according to the values in the society. Individuals internize the values of the group, culture, and society they belong to and they make these standards in their own lives (Dilmaç, Bozgeyikli and Çıkılı, 2008, p. 71). Values in a society can change in time and a value of a society or group is not necessarily a value of another society or group (Turan and Aktan, 2008, p. 231).

Possessing an important place in education, social studies emphasize the process that individuals mutually affect their environments and each other. This interaction in question includes affective realms, too. Individuals' personal and societal values affect this interaction (Doğanay, 2012, p. 230). Review of related literature revealed

that no studies, except for the one where Bakaç (2013) developed a scale to determine students' perceptions of social values, directly aimed at measuring middle school students' social values within the frame of values education, which has an important place in social studies curricula in terms of social values. Understanding how middle school students perceive social values and guiding their education in the light of research results are crucial for values education to reach its goals. Therefore, it is believed that the current study will contribute to the literature.

2. Purpose of the Study and Method

The general purpose of the study is to determine perceptions of social values among middle school students with respect to several variables (gender, grade level, educational level of mother, and educational level of father). Within the frame of this general goal, answers to the following questions were sought in this study:

1. How are the perception levels of middle school students of social values?
2. Do middle school students' total scores of perception of social values differ according to gender?
3. Do middle school students' total scores of perception of social values differ according to grade level?
4. Do middle school students' total scores of perception of social values differ according to mother's educational level?
5. Do middle school students' total scores of perception of social values differ according to father's educational level?

The study used descriptive screening model. The first reason for using the screening model is to enable the evaluation of the existing situation with regard to different variables. As stated by Yıldırım and Şimşek (2013), screening model enables the detection of a past or current situation.

The second reason for using the screening model is to enable an in-depth examination of the situation and generalizing the results obtained. According to Karasar (2012), screening model tries to describe the situation, individual, or object in question in its own terms and as it is. General screening models are used in large populations with the whole population or a group, example, or sample drawn from them to reach a general judgement about the population. In this study, political participation of teacher candidates are described with respect to several variables.

2.1. Study Group

Study group of the research consists of 242 voluntary students attending a state middle school.

2.2. Data Collection

Data were collected using the "Personal Information Form" prepared by the researchers including questions about gender, grade level, educational level of mother, and educational level of father and "Perceptions of Social Values Scale" developed by Bakaç (2013). Information regarding "Perceptions of Social Values Scale" is given below:

The scale's calculated KMO fit value is 0.812. Bartlett Sphericity Test calculated for the same data is 3.260 and significant at the level of 0.05 ($X^2_{276} = 3.260$). The coefficient of KMO being 0.81 suggests that sample size is very good and the Bartlett test result revealing the existence of correlation among scale items show that the obtained data set is suitable for exploratory factor analysis. Bartlett test shows whether the variables are related at a sufficient level. A p value lower than the significance level of 0.05 reveals that the relationships among variables are high enough to conduct factor analysis. Items 1 to 19 turn out to form "Positive Perceptions towards Social Values". Loadings for Factor 1 vary between .387 and .734 and account for 25.69% of the total variance. It is understood that the items grouped under Factor 2 are appraised as negative by students, so it is named "Negative Perceptions towards Social Values". Factor loadings vary between .540 and .691 and account for 10.33% of the total variance. Reliability analyses for 23 items produced a Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficient of 0.86. Furthermore, reliability coefficient for Factor 1 was found to be 0.88 and reliability coefficient for Factor 2 was found to be 0.72 (Bakaç, 2013, p. 306-308).

The Cronbach's Alpha level obtained in this study with the current study group was calculated as .88. In addition, reliability coefficient for Factor 1 was found to be 0.91 and reliability coefficient for Factor 2 was found to be 0.80.

2.3. Data Analysis

In this study using the screening model, perceptual scores of middle school students towards social values were examined with descriptive statistics. Statistical analyses of the data obtained were conducted via IBM SPSS 21.0 software and the significance level was accepted as [$p \leq .05$]. Scale scores of the participants were examined with independent samples t-test for gender differences and with independent samples single factor variance analysis (One-Way ANOVA) for differences in terms of grade level, educational level of mother and educational level of father. When significant differences were detected as a result of the analyses, homogeneity of variances was

checked first. Then, when the variances were homogeneous, Scheffe test of multiple comparison tests was used to determine which groups differed.

3. Results and Interpretation

3.1. Perception Scores of Middle School Students towards Social Values

First of all, the study sought answer to the question “How are the perception levels of middle school students of social values?” Perception scores of middle school students towards social values were examined with descriptive statistics. Table 1 displays data about middle school students’ perceptions of social values, mean scores of their answers to scale items, and standard deviations.

Table 1. *Perceptions of social values among middle school students*

Number of students (N)	Arithmetic mean (\bar{X})	Standard deviation (Sd)	
242	96.81	15.32	
	Scale Items	\bar{X}	Ss
	1. Family protects us from bad people and bad situations.	4.66	.93
	2. We should protect our health both physically and psychologically.	4.59	.88
	3. Respect is learnt in family.	4.56	.94
	4. Future is brighter for societies interested deeply in science.	4.07	1.10
	5. We should not diverge from honesty even if we end up harmed.	4.35	1.07
	6. Everyone should be conscious of their responsibilities.	4.56	.82
	7. We should be in solidarity in happy days, too.	4.45	.95
	8. For a healthy life, we should watch over others’ health as well.	4.08	1.19
	9. We should not talk behind people’s back.	4.37	1.14
	10. One should be honest himself/herself for another to be honest with him/her.	4.48	.99
	11. Humans should be more sensitive towards other living creatures.	4.34	1.00
	12. Healthy people are happier.	3.77	1.32
	13. Country is not guarded only by fighting at the battlefield.	4.47	1.00
	14. Beauty is everywhere, but needs to be seen.	4.17	1.16
	15. Beauty is in work that one does with diligence.	3.92	1.19
	16. If there were no solidarity, there would be no society.	4.25	1.03
	17. People who fulfill their responsibilities become more successful.	4.40	1.03
	18. Life becomes more difficult for people who do not fulfill their responsibilities.	4.13	1.16
	19. Hardworking people are more beneficial for their country and nation.	4.20	1.16
	20. We do not always have to act honestly to get what we want.*	3.21	1.56
	21. Only scientists should be involved in science.*	3.85	1.47
	22. People being sensitive towards each other makes things harder.*	3.84	1.52
	23. We can act dishonestly if others are dishonest.*	3.57	1.59

*Reverse coded items

According to analysis results at Table 1: The item with the lowest ($\bar{X}=3.21$) mean score was “We do not always have to act honestly to get what we want” (Item 20). The item with the highest ($\bar{X}=4.66$) mean score is “Family protects us from bad people and bad situations” (Item 1). Middle school students perception total scores are at the level of Definitely Agree for 13 items ($4.20 < \bar{X} \leq 5.00$), Agree for 9 items ($3.40 < \bar{X} \leq 4.19$), and undecided for 1 item (Item 20; $2.59 < \bar{X} \leq 3.39$). Besides, mean score of the middle school students participating in the study is $\bar{X}=96.81$. It is understood from these data that perceptions of middle school students towards social values are generally at the level of Definitely Agree.

3.2. Findings related to the variable of gender

The study sought answer to the question of “Do middle school students’ total scores of perception of social values differ according to gender?” For this purpose, independent samples t-test was conducted to find out whether middle school students’ perception scores differed in terms of gender. Results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Middle school students' perception of social values mean scores and t-test results according to gender

Factors	Gender	n	\bar{x}	Sd	t	p
Positive Perceptions of Social Values	Female	84	80.63	14.98	1.496	.136
	Male	158	83.22	12.60		
Negative Perceptions of Social Values	Female	84	14.90	4.75	.863	.389
	Male	158	14.27	4.94		
Total	Female	84	95.53	17.53	1.041	.299
	Male	158	97.50	14.02		

Examination of Table 2 reveals that middle school students do not differ significantly in perceptions of social values according to gender in factors Positive Perceptions of Social Values ($t_{(240)}=1.496$; $p>.05$), Negative Perceptions of Social Values ($t_{(240)}=.863$; $p>.05$), and for the whole scale ($t_{(240)}=1.041$; $p>.05$). This finding can be interpreted so that the variable gender has no effect on middle school students' levels of perceptions of social values.

3.3. Findings related to the variable of grade level

The study sought answer to the question "Do middle school students' total scores of perception of social values differ according to grade level?" For this purpose, One Way ANOVA was conducted to find out whether perception mean scores differed according to middle school students' grade levels. Results are provided in Table 3.

Table 3. One way anova results of middle school students' social value perception mean scores according to grade level

Factors	Descriptive Data				ANOVA Results					
	Grade Level	n	\bar{x}	Sd	Source	SS	df	MS	F	p
Positive Perceptions of Social Values	5 th Grade	65	81.80	15.43	Between Groups	412.956	3	137.652	.752	.522
	6 th Grade	52	81.00	14.53	Within Groups	43544.255	238	182.959		
	7 th Grade	82	82.19	13.56	Total	43957.211	241			
	8 th Grade	43	84.97	7.89						
	Total	242	82.32	13.50						
Negative Perceptions of Social Values	5 th Grade	65	14.75	4.971	Between Groups	266.819	3	88.940	3.864	.010*
	6 th Grade	52	13.61	5.423	Within Groups	5477.664	238	23.015		
	7 th Grade	82	13.76	4.756	Total	5744.483	241			
	8 th Grade	43	16.53	3.660						
	Total	242	14.49	4.882						
Total	5 th Grade	65	96.55	16.92	Between Groups	1263.996	3	421.332	1.812	.146
	6 th Grade	52	94.61	17.51	Within Groups	55328.004	238	232.471		
	7 th Grade	82	95.96	14.70	Total	56592.000	241			
	8 th Grade	43	101.51	9.55						
	Total	242	96.81	15.32						

* $p < .05$

Examination of Table 3 reveals that there are no statistically significant differences in middle school students' perception scores of social values in terms of grade levels for the factor Positive Perceptions of Social Values ($F_{(3-238)}=.752$, $p>.05$) and for the general scale ($F_{(3-238)}=3.417$, $p>.05$). On the other hand, the factor Negative Perceptions of Social Values ($F_{(3-238)}=3.864$, $p<.05$) displayed that there was a statistically significant difference in middle school students' perceptions of social values scores in terms of the grade level variable. Upon finding a significant difference as a result of one way analysis of variance, homogeneity of variances was checked to find out which groups differed. Because variances were homogeneous, Scheffe test among multiple comparison tests was used. According to Scheffe multiple comparison test results, the difference was between

6th and 8th grade students and 7th and 8th grade students, in favor of 8th grade students in both groups.

3.4. Findings related to the variable of educational level of mother

The study sought answer to the question “Do middle school students’ total scores of perception of social values differ according to mother’s educational level?” For this purpose, One Way ANOVA was conducted to find out whether perception mean scores differed according to middle school students’ mothers’ educational level. Results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. One way anova results of middle school students’ social value perception mean scores according to educational level of mother

Factors	Descriptive Data				ANOVA Results					
	Educational Level	n	\bar{x}	Sd	Source	SS	df	MS	F	p
Positive Perceptions of Social Values	1. No education	8	62.50	23.48	Between Groups	3363.916	4	840.979	4.910	.001*
	2. Primary School	69	82.52	12.23	Within Groups	40593.294	237	171.280		
	3. Middle School	65	82.46	10.15	Total	43957.211	241			
	4. High School	52	84.21	12.76	Difference (Scheffe)					
	5. University	48	83.12	15.73	1-2					
	Total	242	82.32	13.50	1-3					
Negative Perceptions of Social Values	1. No education	8	13.12	6.44	Between Groups	78.538	4	19.634	.821	.513
	2. Primary School	69	13.85	5.32	Within Groups	5665.946	237	23.907		
	3. Middle School	65	15.03	4.31	Total	5744.483	241			
	4. High School	52	14.34	4.93	Difference (Scheffe)					
	5. University	48	15.06	4.63	1-2					
	Total	242	14.49	4.88	1-3					
Total	1. No education	8	75.62	29.72	Between Groups	3883.537	4	970.884	4.366	.002*
	2. Primary School	69	96.37	14.10	Within Groups	52708.463	237	222.399		
	3. Middle School	65	97.49	12.12	Total	56592.000	241			
	4. High School	52	98.55	14.36	Difference (Scheffe)					
	5. University	48	98.18	16.66	1-2					
	Total	242	96.81	15.32	1-3					

*p< .05

Examination of Table 4 reveals that middle school students’ perceptions of social values do not differ according to their mothers’ educational level in terms of the factor Negative Perceptions of Social Values ($F_{(4, 237)}=.821, p>.05$) while they significantly differ in terms of the factor Positive Perceptions of Social Values ($F_{(4, 237)}=4.910, p<.05$) and the whole scale ($F_{(4, 237)}=4.366, p<.05$). Upon finding a significant difference as a result of one way analysis of variance, homogeneity of variances was checked to find out which groups differed. Because variances were homogeneous, Scheffe test among multiple comparison tests was used. According to Scheffe multiple comparison test results, the difference was among all educational levels and against mothers with no education. Based on this finding, it can be said that educational level of mother has an effect on middle school students’ perceptions of social values. Considering this finding, we can state that generally middle school students who mothers have high levels of education have more positive perceptions of social values.

3.5. Findings related to the variable of educational level of father

The study sought answer to the question “Do middle school students’ total scores of perception of social values differ according to father’s educational level?” For this purpose, One Way ANOVA was conducted to find out whether perception mean scores differed according to middle school students’ fathers’ educational level. Results are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. One way anova results of middle school students’ social value perception mean scores according to educational level of father

Descriptive Data					ANOVA Results					
Factors	Level of Education	n	\bar{X}	Sd	Source	SS	df	MS	F	p
Positive Perceptions of Social Values	1. No education	5	57.40	26.51	Between Groups	3441.571	4	860.393	5.033	.001*
	2. Primary School	43	81.74	11.24	Within Groups	40515.640	237	170.952		
	3. Middle School	58	82.43	11.25	Total	43957.211	241			
	4. High School	53	84.77	10.05	Difference (Scheffe)					
	5. University	83	82.49	15.58	1-2					
	Total	242	82.32	13.50	1-3					
Negative Perceptions of Social Values	1. No education	5	12.00	7.77	Between Groups	135.453	4	33.863	1.431	.224
	2. Primary School	43	13.48	5.40	Within Groups	5609.030	237	23.667		
	3. Middle School	58	14.06	4.59	Total	5744.483	241			
	4. High School	53	15.28	4.94	Difference (Scheffe)					
	5. University	83	14.95	4.50	1-2					
	Total	242	14.49	4.88	1-3					
Total	1. No education	5	69.40	34.08	Between Groups	4461.289	4	1115.322	5.071	.001*
	2. Primary School	43	95.23	13.56	Within Groups	52130.711	237	219.961		
	3. Middle School	58	96.50	12.62	Total	56592.000	241			
	4. High School	53	100.05	11.74	Difference (Scheffe)					
	5. University	83	97.44	16.93	1-2					
	Total	242	96.81	15.32	1-3					

*p< .05

Examination of Table 5 reveals that middle school students’ perceptions of social values do not differ according to their fathers’ educational level in terms of the factor Negative Perceptions of Social Values ($F_{(4-237)}=1.431, p>.05$) while they significantly differ in terms of the factor Positive Perceptions of Social Values ($F_{(4-237)}=5.033, p<.05$) and the whole scale ($F_{(4-237)}= 5.071, p<.05$). Upon finding a significant difference as a result of one way analysis of variance, homogeneity of variances was checked to find out which groups differed. Because variances were homogeneous, Scheffe test among multiple comparison tests was used. According to Scheffe multiple comparison test results, the difference was among all educational levels and against fathers with no education. Based on this finding, it can be said that educational level of mother has an effect on middle school students’ perceptions of social values. Considering this finding, we can state that generally middle school students who mothers have high levels of education have more positive perceptions of social values.

4. Conclusion/Discussion and Recommendations

The following results were obtained in the study that aimed to find out the perceptions of social values among middle school students with respect to several variables (gender, grade level, educational level of mother, and

educational level of father):

A general examination of middle school students' perception scores of social values revealed that they were mostly at the level of Definitely Agree, they were positive, and the level of perception was very high. This finding of the study is parallel to those of Likaj (2013) while it contradicts the findings by Zavalı (2014).

No significant difference was detected in middle school students' Positive Perceptions of Social Values, Negative Perceptions of Social Values, or the whole scale in terms of gender; therefore, it was concluded that gender variable did not have any impact on the level of perception of social values among middle school students. Gender-related results of the study are parallel to Aydın's (2003) findings while they contradict the findings of Coşkun and Yıldırım (2009) and Zavalı (2014).

No significant difference was found in middle school students' Positive Perceptions of Social Values or the whole scale in terms of their grade levels. On the other hand, middle school students' perceptions of social values showed a statistically significant difference according to their grade levels on the factor of Negative Perceptions of Social Values. Results of multiple comparison test revealed that the difference was between 6th and 8th grade students and 7th and 8th grade students, in favor of 8th grade students in both groups. Findings of the study related to grade level are parallel to those of Dılmaç, Bozgeyikli and Çıkılı (2008).

When middle school students' perceptions of social values were examined in terms of educational level of mother, it was seen that Negative Perceptions of Social Values did not differ but Positive Perceptions of Social Values and the total scale significantly differed depending on mother's educational level. Multiple comparison tests showed that the difference was among all groups and against mothers with no education. Middle school students whose mothers had high levels of education had more positive perceptions towards social values. Findings of the study related to educational level of mother are parallel to those of Aydın (2003) and Ural and Sağlam (2011).

When middle school students' perceptions of social values were investigated in terms of educational level of father, it was found that Negative Perceptions of Social Values did not differ but Positive Perceptions of Social Values and the total scale significantly differed according to the educational level of father. Multiple comparison tests revealed that the difference was among all groups and against fathers with no education. Middle school students whose fathers had high levels of education had more positive perceptions towards social values. Findings of the study related to educational level of father are parallel to those of Aydın (2003), Coşkun and Yıldırım (2009), and Ural and Sağlam (2011).

In view of the related findings:

Contact meetings where families are informed about the transference of social values can be arranged with the cooperation of schools and families in order to minimize the differences related to the educational level of mother and father.

Applications of values education can be spreaded over all grade levels in order to minimize the differences related to grade level.

Social values of the Republic of Turkey can be included in the program as an elective course outside the hidden curriculum.

Activities focusing only on social values can be developed; experimental studies related to the topic can be conducted.

Results of different studies imply that different studies should be conducted with different techniques on different samples. It would contribute to the related literature if similar future studies on this topic were conducted on a different and wider sample of middle school students from different schools.

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