



A Study of Religious Education Course Books in Terms of Values Education: The Case of Turkey

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to investigate Elementary and Middle School Religious Culture and Ethics Coursebooks in terms of approaches, methods and techniques used in values education. The data of this study were obtained using the document review technique, which is one of the qualitative research data collection methods. The data in this study were obtained from the 4th, 5th, 6th, 7th and 8th grade Religious Culture and Ethics Course books that were chosen to be teaching materials by decisions of The Turkish Republic Ministry of National Education, Board of Education and Morality. The data that were obtained as a result of document review were analyzed using the “Content Analysis” technique. According to the findings of the study, it is seen that values were attempted to be given to the students in Religious Culture and Ethics Course Books predominantly on the basis of direct training approach. In addition, value clarification approach, which allows students to explore and choose values of their own choice, was also tried to be utilized. Attempts were made to teach the values predominantly through reading passages based on knowledge and limited number of activities.

Keywords: Values education, Religious education, Approaches to values education, Teaching methods and techniques, Course book, Document review.

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Contribution of this paper to the literature

This study contributes to the existing literature by testing investigating Elementary and Middle School Religious Culture and Ethics Coursebooks in terms of approaches, methods and techniques used in values education.

1. Introduction

The purpose of values education, which was dealt with under such headings as character education, ethics education and citizenship education in the past is to raise individuals who exhibit examples of good character, possess moral values and act with a sense of morality by highlighting universal values shared by all humanity. In this respect, values education aims at helping individuals acquire extremely important moral and civil values such as respect, love, responsibility, virtue, courage, confidence, resolve, justice and individual discipline. On the other hand, the long-term goal of values education is to help society in moral, ethical and academic matters, which are becoming gradually more problematic, and contribute to making our world more reliable and livable (Altan, 2011).

When we look at studies on values education today, we see that an educational approach that encompasses values and moral development under the title of “improved character education” is being tried to be implemented. Although personal preferences and individual values are brought into the forefront in this approach, this does not mean that socializing duty of school disappears. This approach covers interrelated areas such as values education, social skills education, morals education and citizenship education (Demircioğlu and Tokdemir, 2008). There is no straightforward course or program titled values education within the Turkish education system. However, the said values are being tried to given to students through acquisitions included within different courses. For example, the statement “raising individuals who adopt humanitarian values and take responsibility for using rights and freedoms” in the curricula of the human rights, citizenship and democracy courses (Millî Eğitim Bakanlığı, 2018b) indicates the role of the said course in terms of values education.

When the relevant literature is examined, it is seen that approaches to values education are dealt with in three fundamental categories. The first concerns direct training of values, which is intended to give students values that are held to be general truths. The second concerns values analysis and values clarification approaches that help students form their own values and, in this way, help them arrive at general truths. The third one involves approaches of moral reasoning through character education that are more holistic and benefit from the other two approaches (Kaymakcan and Meydan, 2011; Doğanay et al., 2012).

The Direct Training of Values Approach: In this approach, it is believed that adults have the duty of teaching values to children. Moral values are taught to students directly, thereby forming their behaviors and giving them good habits. The first step in this approach is to determine the fundamental values that are to be given to students. Next, it involves offering opportunities to students to explore values in order to give them the specified values (Halstead and Taylor (2000). In this approach, the goals to be given to students, and the time allocated to activities that will lead to the goals are already known. Performances of students are watched, and they are guided by providing them with instantaneous feedback. Although teaching objectives, selection of materials fitting students’ skills and step-by-step progress of teaching are under control of the teacher, interaction is not an authoritarian one. Student participation is important (Senemoglu, 2012). The teaching process may involve problem solving, cooperative learning and experience-based projects (Halstead and Taylor, 2000). Methods such as exposition, demonstrations, drills-repetitions and asking didactic questions are used (Kaymakcan and Meydan, 2011).

Values Analysis Approach: The purpose of the values analysis approach is to help students use scientific methods and develop logical thinking skills in solving problems that arise in the face of values conflict within society. It is stated that in this approach students may play an active role in solving social problems. This role requires that students define the problem, collect information and evidence connected with the problem, assess the data collected, define ways of solution, evaluate consequences of ways of solution and choose one of the ways of solution. Classroom discussions are a fundamental component of this approach. The teaching method constituting the values analysis approach is generally based on moral issues or dilemmas. Coursebooks, short articles, stories or current issues discussed by the public can be used as course materials (Kupchenko and Parsons, 1987). Values analysis mostly involves literature reviews or fieldwork related to social problems. Individual or groups works are shared and debated in the classroom through the seminar method. Many problems such as keeping the environment clean, overcoming the problem of wastefulness, obeying traffic rules, eliminating the problem of coming late to school and generating solutions with regard to stray animals can be linked to this approach (Meydan, 2014).

Value Clarification Approach: The essence of this approach involves helping individuals become aware of their formed and rising values. In this approach, unlike transfer of values, individuals have the freedom to choose values after they have explored the values of their own selection rather than values determined by others (Bacanli, 1999; Tahiroğlu et al., 2010). Simon, Leland and Kirschenbaum state that children of today are faced with more choices to make compared with those of the past. They argue that abundance of alternatives causes them to experience more confusion, disagreements and values conflicts. People use their beliefs, values and attitudes in the process of decision-making. Therefore, the decision-making processes of individuals who have thought over their values and clarified them can be facilitated (Akbas, 2008).

This approach encourages students to use seven specific skills. These skills involve individuals specifying what they consider to be important and what they respect, examining alternative points of view, evaluating various choices in detail, making choices freely without being exposed to peer pressure or pressure by authorities, announcing the selected value to those around explicitly and acting in accordance with their beliefs. Teachers must in no way attempt to assess students or instill values in them in order for the process to be conducted successfully. In other words, teachers should help students develop their own values (Kirschenbaum, 2000). The following methods and techniques can be used in the implementation of this approach: Value voting, ordering of values (if it were you...), making choices (which one is you...), sharing views (I totally agree, I somewhat agree, I totally disagree etc.), discussion, open-ended questions, incomplete sentences, autobiographies, pictures, stories, articles (UNESCO, 2005).

Character Education Approach: Character education arose as a pioneer school effort with a view to implementing programs in the fields of moral values, ethics and citizenship education. All of the intentional efforts on the part of schools, families and society to help youths understand, pay heed and behave in line with ethical values are defined as character education. In short, all that occurs in all stages of school life is character education (Lickona, 1996). Hence, character education is not a separate curriculum; on the contrary, it is a curriculum integrated into all curricula of a school (Ekşi, 2003).

Teachers serve as models in character education unlike value realization approaches and they make an effort to improve students' ethical characters. They enable students to express their own views and opinions easily and clearly regarding ethical issues (Akbas, 2008). When the relevant literature is examined, it is seen that various methods and tools are used in character education. Literary texts compatible with students' developmental state, family bulletins involving activities to be done at home, character bulletins published at school, debates, fictional stories etc. are used as basic methods and tools (Ekşi, 2003). Participation in extracurricular activities may provide opportunities for many students to discover new roles, working on a team and improve their leadership skills. Students improve their needs for justice, cooperation and respect in a practical way by struggling with hardships in real life. Extracurricular activities may be a significant way of enhancing achievements and self-esteem of adolescents who are not superior academically and youths with special needs (Halstead and Taylor, 2000). In conclusion, extracurricular activities can be used as a method in character education.

Moral Reasoning Approach: The moral reasoning approach basically tries to improve students' ethical reasoning skills concerning complex structures. This approach is not in contrast with the other approaches; instead, it adopts a specific valuing process. According to this approach, development of values depends on the stages of ethical development (Kupchenko and Parsons, 1987).

Kohlberg, who intended to encourage ethical developments of individuals and society and established "Just Community Schools" to this end, made an effort to help students develop their ethical reasoning skills (Halstead and Taylor, 2000). Justice, equality and democracy constitute the basis of the just community school. All of the decisions in this school were taken through moral debates and participatory project groups. Moreover, Kohlberg revealed students' ethical reasoning by giving them stories involving moral dilemmas (Yüksel, 2005; Akbas, 2008). Kohlberg argued that moral dilemmas should focus on the following universal moral issues; punishment, property, roles and concerns of affection, roles and concerns of authority, law, life, liberty, distributive justice, truth (Kupchenko and Parsons, 1987).

The most characteristic method used to ensure moral development involves moral dilemmas (Kupchenko and Parsons, 1987). Students are asked to reason over value dilemmas presented. Students are presented with a story, a short reading or a film representing one or more characters with a moral dilemma. Students are asked to specify with their reasons and discuss what the person in the story should do (Superka and Johnson, 1975). In this way, an attempt is made to ensure their moral development. According to Halstead and Taylor (2000) it is argued that approaches and methods such as personal narratives, stories, biographies and poetry readings, peer mediation, philosophy for children, roleplaying, drama, mock parliaments, circle time, educational games, simulations, practical activities, cooperative learning, projects, student-centered studies, problem solving, critical reasoning and theme days also strengthen moral reasoning.

In conclusion, different methods can be used in values education depending on desired objectives or specified approaches. On the other hand, it is thought that using different methods together in values education rather than using a specific approach or method can be more effective (Halstead and Taylor, 2000).

One of the tools most frequently used in the implementation of education is course books. In general, cognitive, affective and psychomotor learning objectives are given to students through course books in teaching programs. Course books are essential educational materials that organize and present information included in the content of curricula in line with the adopted teaching approach, and guide and inform students concerning the gains of the subject matter through planned activities (Izgar, 2017). Seen from this perspective, the importance of course books cannot be denied. There are many studies in the relevant literature regarding values in the religious education programs in Turkey (Cekin, 2012; Osmanoglu, 2012; Errakkuş, 2015; Onder, 2015; Altıntaş, 2016). However, no study has been found in course books used in religious education dealing with how values education will be implemented. In this scope, the purpose of this study is to investigate Elementary and Middle School Religious Culture and Ethics Course books in terms of approaches, methods and techniques used in values education.

2. Methods

The data of this study were obtained using the document review technique, which is one of the qualitative research data collection methods. According to Yıldırım and Simşek (2005) document review in qualitative studies involves analyzing written materials containing information about the phenomenon or phenomena that are intended to be investigated. Documents such as course books in education, curriculum directives, intramural and extramural correspondence and student records can be used as sources of data. Therefore, "Elementary and Middle School Religious Culture and Ethics Course books" were handled and analyzed as sources of data in this study.

2.1. Data Collection Tools

The data in this study were obtained from the 4th, 5th, 6th, 7th and 8th grade Religious Culture and Ethics Coursebooks (MEB, 2018c;2018d;2018e;2018f;2018g) that were chosen to be teaching materials by decisions of The Turkish Republic Ministry of National Education, Board of Education and Morality dated 28.05.2018, number 78, and dated 25.06.2018 and number 12254648.

2.2. Selection of the Scope of the Study

All of the units and subjects included in the elementary and middle school religious culture and ethics coursebooks were examined. The teaching programs of the Religious Culture and Ethics course (4th to 8th grades) were divided into five units in all grades (MEB, 2018a). The units where subjects dealing with values directly were

included in the scope of the study. The units that were included in the study are shown in Table 1 by their grade levels.

Table-1. Units Included in the Study According to Grade Levels

Grade	Name of Unit	Class hours	Key Concepts	Gains and their Explanations
4	Social Ethics	12	Ethics, Love, Respect.	1-He notices the role of religion in individuals' having social ethics. 2- He advocates the importance and necessity of love and respect in the development of human relations. 3- He recites Surah Fatiha and tells its meaning.
5	Morals and Politeness	12	Morals, Politeness, Greeting.	1- He makes a point of exhibiting behaviors that comply with rules of politeness in social life. 2- He complies with rules of greeting. 3- He complies with rules of communication and speech. 4- He complies with rules of table manners. 5- He makes a point of reflecting counsels of Prophet Lokman in his life. 6- He recites prayer Tahiyat and tells its meaning.
6	Our Fundamental Values	12	Religion, Value, Martyrdom, Veterans, Festival, Commemoration Night.	1- He notices fundamental values uniting our society. 2-He interprets contribution of religious holidays and important days and nights to social unity.
7	Ethical Behaviors	12	Ethics, Value, Attitude, Behavior.	1- He explains socially ethical attitudes and behaviors through examples. 2- He appreciates contribution of exemplary attitudes and behaviors to the moral development of individuals and communities. 3- He makes a point of being measured in his attitudes and behaviors. 4- He learns about the general outlines of the life of Prophet Salih 5- He recites surah Felâk and tells its meaning.
8	Exemplary Personality of Prophet Muhammad	16	Setting an example, Integrity, Reliability, Consultation, and Resolve.	1- He makes associations between Prophet Muhammad's integrity and his reliable personality and qualities of prophets. 2- He makes a point of reflecting Prophet Muhammad's compassionate and forgiving nature in his behaviors. 3- He makes inferences concerning everyday life on the basis of cases revealing the importance attached by Prophet Muhammad to consultation. 4- He explains Prophet Muhammad's courage and determination. 5- He gives examples of Prophet Muhammad's sensitivity to uphold what is right. 6- He explains the importance which Prophet Muhammad attaches to people through examples. 7- He appreciates the importance of Prophet Muhammad's exemplary behaviors in social life. 8-He notes that Prophet Muhammad guides people to what is good and beautiful through his wise words and behaviors. 9- He recites surah Qureish and tells its meaning

Source: MEB (2018a)

2.3. Data Analysis

The data that were obtained as a result of document review were analyzed using the "Content Analysis" technique. The basic procedure in content analysis involves bringing together the data that resemble one another around certain concepts and themes, arrange and interpret them in such a way that they can be understood by readers (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2005). Course activities used in values teaching were examined when analyzing the data. These activities were encoded and analyzed in terms of methods and techniques that were used. The themes that arose as a result of encodings were classified in terms of themes. A list of the themes and codes used in the study are shown in Table 2.

The data obtained as a result of document review were encoded by the researcher at different times again and evaluated in order to ensure the reliability of the encoding made for the themes within the scope of the study. Cases where the same encoding was done were marked using a symbol indicating "agreement" whereas cases where different encodings were done were marked using a symbol indicating "disagreement". As a consequence of the calculations made after the agreements and the disagreements were determined, the mean reliability rate among calculations was found to be 81 %. A reliability calculation above 70 % is sufficient for a study to be regarded as reliable (Miles and Huberman, 1994).

3. Findings

Findings about the approaches, methods and techniques used to implement values education in Elementary and Middle School Religious Culture and Ethics Course books are shown in Table 3.

When Table 3 is examined, it is seen that the predominant methods and techniques that adopted direct training of values approach were utilized to implement teaching of values in Religious Culture and Ethics Course books. It is observed that there were 24 activities in the 4th grade level, 28 activities in the 5th grade, 19 activities in the 6th grade, 37 activities in the 7th grade and 27 activities in the 8th grade level.

In addition, methods and techniques used in the value clarification approach were also made use of in order to implement values teaching. It is seen that there were 14 activities in the 4th grade level, 4 activities in the 5th grade level, 5 activities in the 6th grade level, 6 activities in the 7th grade level and 9 activities in the 8th grade level.

Table-2. A Sample List of Themes and Codes

Themes	Codes
Direct Training of Values Approach	Methods and techniques such as knowledge transfer, drills-repetitions, asking didactic questions.
Value Analysis Approach	Methods and techniques such as problem solving (<i>problem definition, collection of information and data, data assessment, definition of ways of solution, evaluation of results and selection of ways of solution</i>), classroom discussion, literature review, field work, and individual and group work.
Value Clarification Approach	Methods and techniques such as value voting, value sorting (<i>if it were you...</i>), making a selection (<i>which one is you...</i>), sharing opinions (<i>I totally agree, I somewhat agree, I totally disagree</i>), debates, open-ended questions, incomplete sentences, autobiographies, pictures, stories and articles.
Character Education Approach	Methods and techniques such as domestic activities (<i>family bulletins</i>), school-parent cooperation activities, character bulletins, debates, narrated/debated fictional stories and extracurricular activities.
Moral Reasoning Approach	Methods and techniques such as stories involving moral dilemmas, personal narratives, stories, biography and poetry readings, peer mediation, philosophy for children, role playing, drama, mock parliaments, circle time, educational games, simulations, practical activities, cooperative learning, projects, student-centered studies and critical reasoning.

Table-3. Approaches, Methods and Techniques Used to Implement Values Education in Elementary and Middle School Religious Culture and Ethics Course Books

Grade	Activities	Codes	f	Themes	
4th grade	Reading passages, case studies, conceptual maps, matching, gap filling, sentence completion, individual work, crossword puzzles	Information transfer (Narration)	14	Direct training of values approach	
	Evaluation questions	Drills-repetitions	8		
	Preparatory question	Asking didactic questions	2		
	4th grade	Interpretation, completion, writing poetry through acrostics, writing poems, drawing pictures, gap filling, project	Sharing opinions	9	Value clarification approach
		Story completion	Value sorting	1	
		Gap filling	Value voting, incomplete sentences, making choices	3	
		Evaluation questions	Open-ended questions	1	
5th grade	Reading passages	Information transfer (Narration)	10	Direct training of values approach	
	Preparatory question	Asking didactic questions	3		
	Gap filing, interpretation, crossword puzzles, evaluation questions, conceptual maps, talking	Drills-repetitions	15	Value clarification approach	
	Preparatory question, writing opinions, evaluation questions	Open-ended questions	4		
6th grade	Reading passages, reading poetry, conceptual maps	Informationtransfer (Narration)	11	Direct training of values approach	
	Matching	Asking didactic questions	1		
	Crossword puzzle, completion, association, evaluation questions	Repetition	7	Value clarification approach	
	Preparatory question, interpretation, association, talking	Sharing opinions	5		
7th grade	Reading passages, reading poetry, conceptual maps, crossword puzzles	Information transfer (Narration)	20	Direct training of values approach	
	Preparatory question	Asking didactic questions	1		
	Crossword puzzles, association, matching, intepretation, gap filling, evaluation questions	Repetition	10		
	7th grade	Writing poems through acrostics, gap filling	Sharing opinions	3	Value clarification approach
		Gap filling	Value ordering	1	
		Completion	Incomplete sentences	1	
		Discussion of opinions	Dicussion	1	
8th grade	Reading passages, conceptual maps	Information transfer (Narration)	15	Direct training of values approach	
	Crossword puzzles, interpretation, talking, evaluation questions	Asking didactic questions	11		
	Preparatory question	Asking didactic questions	1	Value clarification approach	
	Interpretation, question-answer	Sharing opinions	2		
	Preparatory question	Open-ended questions	6		
	Research	Articles	1		

4. Discussion and Recommendations

According to the findings of the study, it is seen that values were attempted to be given to the students in Religious Culture and Ethics Course books predominantly on the basis of direct training approach. Similar results are also seen when the relevant literature is reviewed. On the basis of his research findings, Altıntaş (2016) concluded that a large majority of teachers used course books in accordance with the direct training of values approach. It was observed that teachers usually used statements such as “write in your notebooks exactly in the

same way”, “please memorize” and “narrate in the same way” during the classes and contented themselves with making students read only their course books. On the other hand, they did not involve students in activities such as debate and interpretation. In a study in which he investigated the curriculum of Religious Culture and Ethics, Zengin (2010) concluded that although teaching of values was included in the curriculum, there were not adequate practices and examples. Likewise, Sahin (2010) arrived at the conclusion that methods and techniques that could facilitate acquisition of values, attitudes and skills were not sufficiently explained in the books included in the teaching programs. Another view that is in support of our research finding is a study conducted by Hossain and Marinova (2004). Defining values in a simple way and saying that they are important is a method that does not appeal to hearts and minds. Implementing ordinary teaching strategies alone to acquire an abstract thing like values will not be enough to attain the desired results. In the teaching of values, methods and approaches used need to be further improved so that results not only create an awareness but also appeal to hearts (Hossain and Marinova, 2004). It is also stated that approaches such as multiple intelligence, student-centered learning and skills-based learning, which support the constructivist learning model, were taken into consideration in developing the curriculum of the religious culture and ethics course (4th to 8th grades). In this context, the importance was emphasized of environments that give particular importance to basic skills, allow active participation of students and teacher guidance, and where students can do research, discover, solve problems and share and discuss their solutions and approaches (MEB, 2018a). Therefore, approaches like “values analysis” and “moral reasoning”, which could be used in teaching of values, could have been made use of in order to prioritize skills such as investigating, questioning and judging the information, and solving problems. When the relevant literature is reviewed, it is seen that there are similar findings and research results. For example; Tahiroğlu and Aktepe (2015) designed activities making use of values teaching approaches such as value analysis, value clarification and moral reasoning. According to their research findings, they concluded that the activities had a positive effect on students’ perceptions of democracy. Likewise, Cheung and Lee (2010) concluded as a result of their research findings that the character education program contributed to social competence. Errakkuş (2015) on the other hand, concluded in his study on alternative schools that these schools made use of student-centered methods and techniques in religious and values education such as drama, extracurricular activities and community service practices.

According to Dewey (1966) teaching should be based on experiences of students. Experiences and abilities that develop in the meantime will serve as a starting point for subsequent learning. When the research findings were examined, it was found that before new acquisitions were given to students, the course books included preparatory questions that would prompt prior knowledge belonging to these acquisitions and raise curiosity about new knowledge. However, it is sad that the reading passages presented after the preparatory questions were intended only to transfer knowledge. As was pointed out by Senemoglu (2012) students’ interests involve direct discovery of life and nature of knowledge. Sense of wonder will set students in motion and direct them to meaningful learning. Therefore, reading passages related to the values intended to be given could have been diversified. Reading passages could have been built on methods such as sample cases, dilemmas and making guesses. Proverbs, which reflect the essence of a culture, could also have been utilized. Moreover, tools like pictures, caricatures and finding differences, which could appeal to students’ visual-spatial intelligence, could also have been used. Indeed, in a study investigating the values in 9th grade English course book in Palestine, Shaat (2017) suggested that pictures in the reading passages be rendered more interesting. Davis (2006) on the other hand, made a point of making students read character education books in the ethical education classes that present good behavioral models focusing on qualities of a good person. Likewise, Çinemre’s research findings (Çinemre, 2014) revealed that proverbs provided a really rich source of material for teaching of religion and values in terms of content.

As a result of the analysis of the textbooks, the value-clarification approach was used as a base with regard to adaptation to new situations of the values that have been attempted to be given or linking them to life.

Methods and techniques such as sharing opinions, value ordering, value voting, incomplete sentences, making choices and open-ended questions were used. At this point it can be said that other approaches could also have been made use of effectively. Methods like problem solving, finding solutions, role playing, drama, preparing questions, story completion, story writing and extracurricular activities could have been used, too. According to Izgar (2017) especially problem solving could be used as a significant means of education. In this way, students can be given problems having several ways of solution and they can be enabled to come up with solutions through various different points of view, thereby improving students’ skills such as analysis, reasoning, reasoning and establishing cause and effect relationships. Indeed, in a study he conducted on values education, Izgar (2018) developed an action plan involving the cooperative learning and the extracurricular activity methods. In the action plan, students were asked to conduct projects outside of class hours through group work within the scope of a topic they had chosen. According to the results of the study, it was concluded that the action plan was effective in acquisition of ten different values like ethics and cooperation. A study supporting the findings of this study was one conducted by Schuitema *et al.* (2008) in middle schools regarding teaching strategies for ethics education. As a result of the study, it was suggested that topics involving ethical issues be included in ethics education and social differences among students be taken into consideration. In conclusion, it was seen in this study, in which elementary and middle school religious culture and ethics course books were analyzed, that values were predominantly attempted to be taught through activities based on direct training of values approach. In addition, value clarification approach, which allows students to explore and choose values of their own choice, was also tried to be utilized. Attempts were made to teach the values predominantly through reading passages based on knowledge and limited number of activities. It is conceived that especially superordinate skills such as assimilation of values, turning them into habits and using them in daily life will be rather hard to gain via such unidirectional readings. Shortage of activities in course books will force teachers to use methods like narration and question-answer based on direct training approach.

At this point, it can be suggested that approaches like moral reasoning, value analysis and character education, which can be used in values education, should be used in designing religious culture and ethics course books. It can be further suggested on the basis of this that activities can be planned which will encourage teachers to employ various teaching methods and techniques such as observation, interview, drama, brain storming, six thinking hats,

fishbone analysis, generation of ideas, educational games, extracurricular activities, family bulletins and biographies. Moreover, when the relevant literature is reviewed, it is seen that there is a need for empirical studies on approaches used in values teaching.

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