

OPEN ACCESS

Manuscript ID:
EDU-2026-140210023

Volume: 14

Issue: 2

Month: March

Year: 2026

P-ISSN: 2320-2653

E-ISSN: 2582-1334

Received: 18.01.2026

Accepted: 24.02.2026

Published Online: 01.03.2026

Citation:

Bilgen, Z. (2026). Values Education Programs in Preschool: A Systematic Review of Studies Conducted in Turkey. *Shanlax International Journal of Education*, 14(2), 172–181.

DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.34293/education.v14i2.10023>




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Values Education Programs in Preschool: A Systematic Review of Studies Conducted in Turkey

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Abstract

This study aimed to systematically examine experimental research on value education programs implemented in Turkish preschools. The research involved searching the TR Dizin, Google Scholar, ERIC, Scopus, Web of Science, and YÖKTEZ databases between January 2015 and August 2025. Seventeen studies meeting the eligibility criteria were included. Data were evaluated using thematic analysis; studies were classified according to year, method, sample size, program type, measurement tools, and reported effectiveness findings. The findings show that the vast majority of studies were conducted using experimental or quasi-experimental designs; they were based on small sample groups; and the most frequently used programs were “Basic Values Program”, “Social Values Education”, and activity/drama-based programs. Most studies observed significant improvements in values such as respect, cooperation, friendship, honesty, and sharing, while some studies reported limited effects on the value of responsibility. Studies that measured the persistence of program effects determined that they were maintained after weeks or months. Overall, the findings suggest that while value education programs in Turkish preschool settings are generally effective in promoting socially oriented values, their impact on more abstract values and their long-term sustainability remain limited, highlighting the need for more comprehensive, longitudinal, and methodologically robust research.

Keywords: Preschool Education, Values Education, Values Education Program, Systematic Review, Turkey, Early Childhood Education

Introduction

Values are core beliefs that influence the way people think about and define what is right, good, and desirable. They determine both personal behaviour and social interactions (Halstead & Taylor, 1996). Besides their personal function, values help a lot in giving social cohesion, democratic citizenship, and a culture of coexistence a common ground (Hökelekli, 2011; UNESCO, 2015). That is why today’s education systems are increasingly positioning values education as a must-have part of holistic development together with cognitive learning outcomes (Lickona, 1991). The first few years of childhood are a very important time for development, during which the basis of moral understanding and value orientations is set. According to developmental theories, children construct moral judgments, internalise social norms, and develop perspective-taking abilities at the age of 3–6 years (Piaget, 2015; Kohlberg, 1981). Through daily interactions with adults and peers, children learn to share, cooperate, and respect etiquette, which is internalised as values (Senemoğlu, 2018). Therefore, the type and character of early educational experiences are critically important for long-term value development. Preschools offer structured spaces where values are expressed through play, routines, and shared moments. Storytelling, drama, and group work help children see values in action (Berkowitz & Bier, 2007). If learning remains hidden behind the scenes, the results can be messy. Therefore, schools now push formal value programs, mostly in early years.

Values education in Turkey has gained momentum in policy and studies. The 2013 program quietly slipped values into growth goals. The 2024 Turkish Century Model makes this clear: it uses a virtue-value-action path to teach ethics directly. The Ministry of National Education [MoNE] leads this effort. More research is now focusing on how these programs work in preschools.

Although interest in this area is growing, the studies conducted so far are quite scattered and usually focus on individual programs, value domains with a narrow scope, or interventions on a small scale. It is worth mentioning that there are no comprehensive reviews that thoroughly examine the methodological features, types of programs, and effectiveness of value education interventions in the Turkish preschool sector. Bridging this gap would be helpful in providing direction to evidence-based educational practices and policy-making.

Literature Review

Values are defined as fundamental criteria that shape an individual's preferences, behaviours, and life orientations regarding what is "good", "right", and "desirable", encompassing moral principles and norms accepted in social life (Halstead & Taylor, 1996). Values not only guide individual attitudes and behaviours but also play a decisive role in building social harmony, social justice, democratic citizenship, and a culture of coexistence (Hökelekli 2011; UNESCO 2015). Therefore, in contemporary education systems, value education is considered an indispensable dimension of education alongside cognitive goals; developing children's fundamental value orientations, such as responsibility, respect, cooperation, empathy, and justice, is among the priority goals, as much as their academic achievements (Lickona, 1991).

Early childhood is considered a critical developmental stage in which the foundations of children's social, emotional, and moral development are established. Developmental psychology and moral development theories show that children's moral judgments, ability to understand others' perspectives, and value orientations are rapidly shaped, especially during the preschool years (Kohlberg, 1981; Piaget, 2015). During this

period, children form their first schemas of what is acceptable or unacceptable through interactions with their families, peers, and teachers; behaviours such as sharing, waiting their turn, following rules, and respecting the rights of others are internalised within their daily life routines (Senemoğlu, 2018). Therefore, the quality of educational environments provided in early childhood and how value education is structured become factors that directly affect the value orientations that children will maintain throughout their lives.

In this context, preschool institutions are important social learning environments where children encounter values, experience them, and have the opportunity to apply them. Through classroom rules, daily routines, play activities, group work, and teacher-child interactions, children learn social behaviours through observation (Bandura, 1986; Rogoff, 2003) and internalise these behaviours over time (Grusec & Goodnow, 1994). These processes offer natural learning contexts for values education. In particular, play-based activities, storytelling, drama, group discussions, and modelling can support children in understanding and translating values into behaviour in concrete situations (Berkowitz & Bier, 2005). However, leaving values education solely to latent achievements can lead to a lack of a programmed and systematic approach, which can lead to significant differences in practice among children and between institutions (Thornberg, 2008).

An examination of studies on value education in the preschool period in Turkey reveals a rich literature with diverse focuses. A group of studies examines teachers' perceptions of values education, their classroom practices, and the challenges they face, focusing on teachers' perspectives. Another group of studies analyzes preschool education programs and teaching materials from a values perspective, discussing which values the program makes visible, how, and to what extent.

In this context, Aral and Kadan (2018) examined the value orientations of the 2013 Preschool Education Program by relating its learning outcomes and indicators to fundamental values. Yenen and Ulucan (2021), on the other hand, compared the values education practices carried out in preschool institutions in different cultural contexts, examined

the perceptions and practices of teachers regarding values teaching, and emphasized the reflections of the cultural context on value transmission. While these studies reveal different dimensions of value education in the preschool period, they also show that research in the field is mostly clustered around certain focuses and that a holistic synthesis has not yet been sufficiently formed. However, despite this increase observed in the literature in recent years, systematic review studies that comprehensively reveal the methodological characteristics, sample structures, types of programs used, measurement tools, effectiveness levels, and retention findings of value education programs implemented in the preschool period in Turkey are limited. Existing research mostly focuses on the effectiveness of a single program or a limited number of values; the lack of studies that present a general picture based on evidence, where different programs are considered together and comparatively, is noteworthy. However, to structure education policies, curriculum development efforts, and teacher training processes in a scientifically evidence-based manner, it is necessary to systematically review and synthesise empirical research in the field (Gough et al., 2012; Petticrew & Roberts, 2008).

Specifically, most papers focus on how children gain values, but few investigate what shapes those changes. Teacher style, classroom mood, and growing up were all significant. A child might seem more moral after a lesson, but could it be just because they are older? Or do the teachers have an influence? Few studies have examined alternatives. Testing immediately after a program provides quick results but does not indicate whether the values are consistent. Long-term data would help to observe real changes over time. Studies rooted in growth and culture suggest that values form slowly through relationships, not sudden changes. This means that short courses do not build lasting ethics. There is a significant divide between what is measured and what theory says should happen.

This study aimed to systematically examine experimental research on value education programs implemented in Turkish preschools. This study evaluates existing publications in terms of methodological characteristics, sample structures,

study locations, types of programs implemented, measurement tools used, effectiveness findings, and retention results. In this context, this study seeks answers to the following research questions:

- What is the distribution of the examined studies according to (a) publication year, (b) publication type, (c) research methods, (d) sample, (e) study location, (f) measurement tools used, and (g) data analysis techniques?
- What are the types and basic characteristics of the value education programs implemented in the studies examined?
- What are the findings regarding the effectiveness and retention of the values education programs implemented in the studies?

Methodology

This systematic review aimed to examine experimental research on value education programs implemented in Turkish preschools. Systematic reviews are research approaches that aim to examine studies selected according to specific criteria by bringing them together in a planned, transparent, and repeatable process (Gough et al., 2012; Petticrew & Roberts, 2008). Document analysis was used as the data collection method for this research. Document analysis is a data collection method that involves collecting and examining written materials related to the phenomenon to be investigated within a specific framework (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2018). Experimental studies that met the inclusion criteria were included in this study.

Data Collection Process

In this study, a literature review was conducted covering publications from January 2015 to August 2025. The TR Dizin, Google Scholar, ERIC, Scopus, Web of Science, and YÖKTEZ databases were used in the systematic search process. Both Turkish and English keywords were used in the search; the words “values education”, “preschool”, “early childhood”, “values education program”, “early childhood”, and “effectiveness” were searched in various combinations. Furthermore, a Boolean (logical) search technique was used to ensure the systematic and repeatable nature of the review. In this context, keywords were structured by combining

them with AND and OR connectors; for example, search terms such as (“values education” OR “values education program”) AND (“preschool” OR “early childhood”) AND (“experiment” OR “intervention” OR “effectiveness”) were used (Gough et al., 2012; Petticrew & Roberts, 2008). As a result of these searches, 142 studies were initially identified, and a pool of studies to be included in the preliminary review was created by removing duplicate records. Predefined criteria were used to determine the studies to be included in the review. Accordingly, the studies were required to have been published between 2015 and 2025, to have been conducted with preschool children (36–72 months), to use an experimental or quasi-experimental design, to involve the implementation and evaluation of the effectiveness of a values education program, to have been published in peer-reviewed journals or included in YÖKTEZ, to have been published in Turkish or English, and for the full text to be accessible. In contrast, qualitative research (interviews, focus groups, case studies), conceptual studies, review articles and opinion pieces, studies focusing on topics other than value education, and publications for which the full text was unavailable were excluded from the scope of this study. A four-stage process was followed for the selection of studies in accordance with the PRISMA 2020 guidelines (Page et al., 2021).

In the first phase of the data collection process, 142 studies were accessed. Duplicate entries were eliminated, reducing the number of studies to 108. Further title and abstract reviews excluded review-type studies that did not fall within the preschool education field and presented theoretical literature reviews. Finally, 36 studies with full-text access were included in the research data pool. In the final stage, the full texts of these studies were examined in detail, and focusing on effectiveness research conducted during the preschool period, the final sample was created from 17 studies. From each included study, data were systematically extracted using a standard data extraction form, including the year, publication type (article/thesis), research method and design, sample characteristics, implemented values education program, measurement tools used, data analysis techniques, key findings, and retention measures, and prepared for analysis.

Validity, Reliability, and Limitations

Efforts were made to improve the validity and reliability of this systematic review; nevertheless, a few limitations were noted.

Initially, the research process was carefully considered in relation to potential biases. Publication bias could be an issue as only papers available in the selected academic databases (TR Dizin ERIC Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, and YÖKTEZ) and accessible in full text were taken into consideration. This might have resulted in the omission of significant unpublished studies or those published in less accessible sources. In addition, language bias might also have had an effect, as only papers written in Turkish and English were considered. Moreover, the selection criteria were limited to experimental and quasi-experimental designs only which, while making the studies more internally reliable, might have excluded valuable qualitative information, thereby limiting the scope of the review.

Second, certain methodological deficiencies in the reviewed papers also influenced the final understanding of the results. Most of the studies included in this review used small samples and were conducted in a few geographical locations, which may limit the applicability of the findings. In addition, the variety of intervention programs and assessment instruments used in the studies greatly hinder making a direct comparison between them.

The range of programs and tools used makes it difficult to compare studies side by side. Some studies were conducted for different lengths, covered different topics, or used different ways to measure results, which might have skewed how effective values education looks. Only one person performed the coding and theme work. This kept things consistent, but there was a risk of bias. Therefore, they reviewed the data repeatedly, tightened the definitions of the codes, and checked the themes across the papers. However, no other researcher has reviewed the codes or calculated how well they agreed, which is a known gap.

Even with steps taken to stay clear and organised, these flaws matter when reading the results. Future reviews could be improved by adding more coders, including more research, & using broader study types.

Data Analysis

The data obtained were evaluated using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a flexible qualitative analysis method that allows systematic identification of meaningful patterns within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Accordingly, each study was first read in detail, and open coding was performed. The resulting codes were grouped according to their similarities, and categories were created through sequential comparisons of the codes. In the final stage, these categories were organised into main themes under the headings of methodological characteristics, types of programs applied, sample structures, measurement tools used, and effectiveness. The coding process was performed by a single researcher. To ensure the consistency of the coding process, all data were reviewed at certain intervals, and the codes and themes were compared and checked holistically. The code definitions and themes were clearly structured throughout the analysis process, and the scope of each theme was limited to the data samples. Thus, an attempt was made to strengthen the traceability and internal consistency of the analysis process.

Findings

The 17 studies included in this systematic review were examined in terms of research year, publication type, methodology and design characteristics, sample structure, study location, values education programs implemented, measurement tools used, data analysis techniques, and reported effectiveness and retention results. The findings are presented below in a thematic structure.

Distribution of Studies by Publication Year

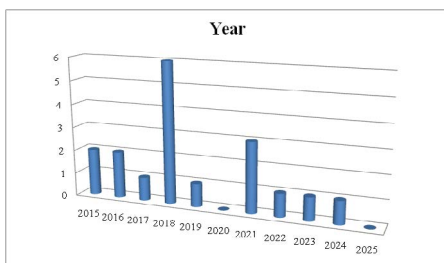


Figure 1 Distribution of Studies by Publication Year

The studies examined spanned 2015–2025. The first studies were conducted in 2015–2016, a significant increase (n=6, 35%) was observed in 2018, and after 2021, experimental studies on values education programs intensified again. In recent years, Persona Dolls, Social Values Education Programs, and activity/drama-based programs have become particularly widespread.

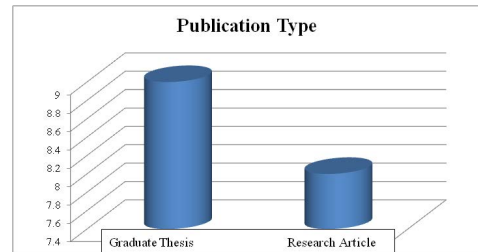


Figure 2 Publication Type of Studies

Nine (53%) of the studies examined were postgraduate theses, and eight (47%) were articles published in peer-reviewed journals. This distribution indicates that a significant portion of experimental research on value education programs in preschool education is produced during postgraduate studies; however, approximately half of the findings are disseminated through academic publications.

Journal and Index Information in which the Article was Published

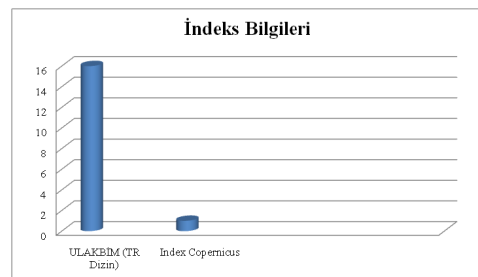


Figure 3 Journal and Index Information in which the Article was Published

The vast majority of articles (87%) were published in journals indexed in the Turkish Index (TR Dizin), indicating that research in this field is predominantly produced within a national academic context. The fact that only one study is indexed by an international index (Index Copernicus) suggests that the field's international visibility remains limited.

Research Methods and Designs of the Studies

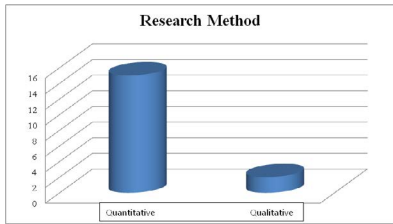


Figure 4 Research Methods and Designs of the Studies

When the methodological characteristics of the studies were evaluated, a quantitative research approach was preferred in 88% of the studies. This widespread use of quantitative methods reveals that structured designs, which allow value education programs to be evaluated mostly through measurable behavioural changes, are preferred.

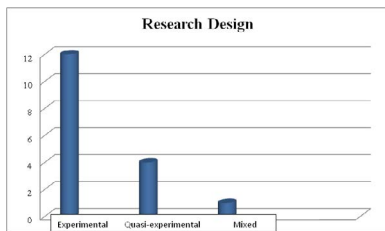


Figure 5 Distribution of the Studies Examined According to their Research Design

When the studies examined were evaluated according to their research design, the vast majority were conducted using an experimental design. Approximately 70% of the studies were fully experimental, 24% were quasi-experimental, and 6% involved a mixed-methods approach. This distribution indicates that research based on experimental interventions is gaining prominence in the field of value education.

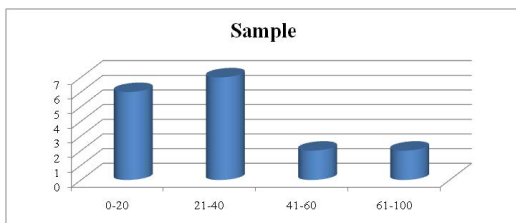


Figure 6 Distribution according to the Sample of the Studies Examined

The sample sizes of the studies examined were predominantly concentrated in the 21–40 children range ($f=7$) and the 0–20 children range ($f=6$). In contrast, studies with larger sample sizes in the 41–60 child ($f=2$) and 61–100 child ($f=2$) ranges were limited. This distribution indicates that most studies were conducted with small- and medium-sized sample groups.

Distribution of Studies by Province

Of the 17 studies examined, four were conducted in Istanbul, three in Ankara, and two in Bursa. One study was conducted in each province of Muğla, Malatya, Tokat, Antalya, and Edirne. Three studies did not specify the province in which the research was conducted. This distribution indicates that the studies are largely concentrated in Turkey's major cities

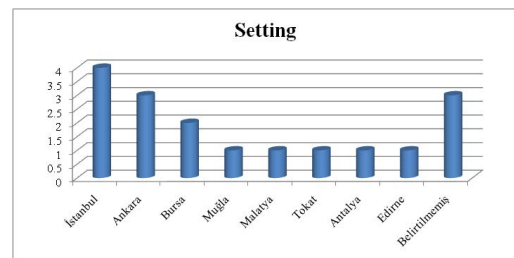


Figure 7 Distribution of Studies by Province

Values Education Programs Implemented

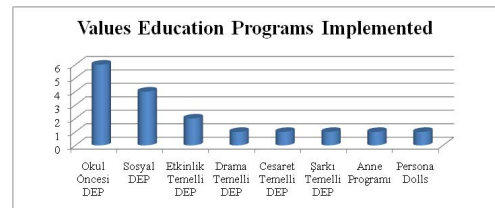


Figure 8 Values Education Programs Implemented

When examining the studies, the most frequently implemented values education programs (VEP) were the Preschool Values Education Program ($f=6$). This was followed by the Social Values Education Program ($f=4$) and activity-based values education programs ($f=2$). Drama-based, courage-based, and song-based values education programs, the mother program, and the Persona Dolls approach were each

addressed in only one study ($f=1$). This distribution indicates that the studies largely focused on general and comprehensive values-education programs. Measurement Instruments Used in the Studies

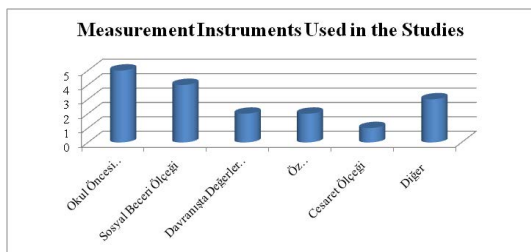


Figure 9 Measurement Instruments Used in the Studies

The most frequently used scale for value education in the studies examined was the Preschool Values Scale ($f=5$). This was followed by the Social Skills Scale ($f=4$). The Values in Behaviour Scale ($f=2$) and scales related to self-regulation/problem solving ($f=2$) were used in fewer cases. The Courage Scale was used in only one study ($f=1$), while three studies ($f=3$) were included in the “other” category, which grouped various types of measurement tools. This finding indicates that most studies prefer measurement tools that focus on values and social skills.

Data Analysis Techniques Used in Studies

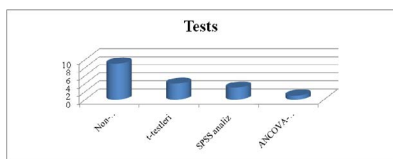


Figure 9 Data Analysis Techniques Used in Studies

Half of the 17 studies examined used non-parametric tests (Mann–Whitney U and Wilcoxon) ($f=9$). This was followed by t-tests ($f=4$). Studies using SPSS-based descriptive analyses ($f=3$) also accounted for a significant proportion of the total. In contrast, parametric analyses, such as ANOVA/ANCOVA, were preferred in only one study ($f=1$). This finding indicates that non-parametric analysis techniques were used in most studies.

Findings Regarding the Effectiveness of the Programs

Nearly all studies have determined that the implemented values education programs significantly increase children’s acquisition of values. The values that showed the most development were respect, cooperation, honesty, friendship, and sharing. As these values are directly related to children’s daily social interactions in the preschool period, positive development can be achieved even with short-term programs. However, some studies have failed to find a significant difference in the value of responsibility (Asar, 2019; Erikli, 2016). Since it involves more abstract behavioural components such as responsibility, self-control, and a sense of duty, it can be concluded that the development of this value should be supported by long-term, regularly repeated programs.

Discussion

The findings of this systematic review show that value education programs implemented in Turkish preschools generally lead to significant improvements in children’s social and moral behaviour. The strong effects observed, particularly in socially oriented values such as respect, cooperation, sharing, friendship, and honesty, are largely consistent not only with national studies but also with the international literature (Nucci et al., 2014). In a similar vein, many studies emphasise that significant changes in these values can only be achieved through long-term, reinforcement-based, multidimensional interventions (Berkowitz & Bier, 2005). Therefore, the limited impact observed in Turkey regarding the value of responsibility can be explained by the short duration of the intervention, the intensity of the implementations, the program content, and the variability of family participation, and this should not be seen as a limitation unique to Turkey, but as a universal trend.

Another noteworthy finding in this review is that most of the value education programs implemented in Turkey were developed by researchers. In the international literature, there is no single universally accepted values education program at the preschool level; in most countries, content created by various institutions, researchers, or teachers is used (Lovat

[& Toomey, 2009](#)). In this respect, program diversity reflects the flexible and context-sensitive nature of value education worldwide, rather than being a unique feature of Turkey. However, the lack of a national standard program or implementation guidelines in Turkey limits the comparability between studies. This indicates that the “Virtue-Value-Action” framework proposed by the Turkish Century Education Model can contribute to the development of more holistic and structured practices in this field in the future.

The limitations of the measurement tools are also important findings of this review. Most measurement tools used in Turkey consist of scales that measure social skills, adaptive behaviour, or general value acquisition; measurement tools specific to a particular value are less frequently used. A similar situation exists in the international literature as well. The limited availability of tools for directly measuring value behaviours in the preschool period has led researchers to use social-emotional skill scales ([Denham et al., 2014](#)). This situation is related to the abstract nature of values, developmental differences, and limited observable behaviours at an early age. Therefore, developing more comprehensive, culturally sensitive, and value-specific measurement tools in Turkey is a significant need in this field. The fact that the vast majority of the studies examined in this work were conducted with small sample groups of 20–40 people is consistent with the general structure of early childhood research, but it can be considered a limiting factor in the generalisability of the findings of this review. International studies similarly show that classroom-based interventions are conducted with small samples; however, in recent years, multicentre, large-sample studies have begun to be conducted, especially in Northern Europe and Canada ([Campbell & Ramey, 1995](#)). The concentration of studies in metropolitan centres in Turkey and their limitation to rural and disadvantaged regions reveal a significant research gap, considering the determining role of cultural context in value development.

On the other hand, the paper also points out the great strength of these studies: the extent to which program effects can last over time. Research with follow-up times shows that through interventions, values can be internalised, and programs can have a lasting effect even after the program has ended.

Moreover, this result highlights the role of regularity, repetitive learning, and a learning atmosphere that encourages continuation.

In terms of Turkey, the above-mentioned results show a gap between policy, research, and practice that calls for greater harmony. Although educational reforms in Turkey in recent years have increasingly focused on a holistic and integrated approach to value education, the current research scene is rather scattered. Improving methodological quality, facilitating research with larger and more heterogeneous samples, and developing common frameworks for program design and evaluation are just a few areas that will significantly increase the level and influence of future research in this domain.

Conclusion

The results of this research show that value education programs implemented in preschools in Turkey generally improve children’s value acquisition positively. Most studies showed significant increases in socially oriented values such as respect, cooperation, sharing, honesty, and friendship; however, some studies found that the effects were more limited in more abstract value areas such as responsibility. The small sample sizes of most studies, the limited variety of measurement tools, and the fact that the programs were largely researcher-based development are noteworthy methodological limitations of the studies. However, the persistence of program effects weeks or months later in studies where follow-up measurements were conducted provides an important finding regarding the permanence of value education interventions. In this context, the following recommendations can be made for researchers, practitioners, and policymakers:

For Researchers

Multicentre studies should be conducted whenever possible, with larger and more socio-culturally diverse sample groups.

Long-term and phased intervention programs should be designed for abstract values such as responsibility, self-control, and patience, and their effectiveness should be supported by monitoring studies.

Measurement tools specific to different value

domains should be developed, and validity and reliability studies of existing scales should be reviewed with current samples.

For Practitioners (Teachers and Institutions)

Values education programs should be implemented regularly, in a structured and repetitive manner, and program content should be linked to children's daily life experiences.

School-family cooperation should be strengthened by planning activities that prioritise family participation, and families should be informed about the program's goals and content.

For Policymakers

A nationally standardised value education program or implementation guide compatible with the Turkish Century Education Model should be developed for the preschool period. • Applicable, inclusive, and flexible values-education models that can be implemented in different socioeconomic and cultural contexts should be supported. Special incentives and support mechanisms should be created for programs to be implemented in disadvantaged areas.

The recommendations in this study are closely linked to the empirical trends observed in the articles investigated. For example, the recommendation for using larger and more diverse samples in research is a direct consequence of the fact that most current studies have small and homogeneous groups which limits the generalisation of the results. Consequently, the proposal for longer and well-organised interventions is a natural extension of the realisation that there is very little influence on more abstract values like responsibility, which is a change that typically comes about through exposure over time and through repetition. Another point made is that the development of measurement tools that are specific to values is necessary, as the vast majority of studies depend on social skills scales which are rather broad and may not reflect value acquisition accurately. Finally, the suggestion to create a standardised or framework-based approach to value education is motivated by the fact that there are many variations in the kinds of programs and their implementation processes, as revealed by the studies.

Future research should transcend short-term, small-scale experiments and instead give priority to longitudinal and multi-site studies which are capable of capturing the developmental trajectory and sustainability of value acquisition over time. In particular, considering the small effects seen for more abstract values such as responsibility, it would be worthwhile for future research to understand how varying program durations, intensities, family involvement components, etc. affect the internalisation of such values. Furthermore, the creation and validation of culturally sensitive and value-specific measurement tools, which are capable of assessing beyond general social skills, are sorely needed. If researchers perform comparative studies of different types of value-education programs within a standardised methodological framework, the findings of effective ways under specific conditions would also be facilitated. Lastly, the use of qualitative and mixed-methods designs in combination would provide a more profound understanding of the mechanisms which lead to value acquisition, thus helping to fix the existing disparity between quantifiable results and the multifaceted, context-dependent character of moral growth.

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