Sensitivity to Animals Through the Eyes of Primary School Students*

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Abstract

Animal love holds an important role in the emotional and social development of children. The ability of children to form an attachment to and to take responsibility for an animal, and the development of sensitive behaviors towards animals emphasize the importance of animal love in the personal development of children. This study was conducted to examine the views of primary school students about sensitivity to animals. The phenomenology design, among qualitative research methods, was used in the study. Based on criterion sampling and maximum variation sampling methods, 120 primary school students attending the 3rd grade of 3 distinct public schools with low, middle and high socioeconomic levels in Afyonkarahisar provincial center were determined as participants. The data of the study were obtained by using a semi-structured interview form. The data obtained in the study were analyzed with descriptive analysis technique, and students' responses were examined in-depth, and results were tabulated using descriptions and supported with direct quotations from the views of primary school students. According to the findings, the ability of students to empathize with street animals, to give examples from their own lives on the protection and improving the living conditions of animals, and to use emotional statements like "'*I feel sorry for the animals left to the street', 'The animal's life is so precious', 'They are living beings, too and like members of my family'*" reveals that students have sensitivity to animals.

Key words: Animal Love, Life Sciences, Primary School, Sensitivity, Sensitivity to Animals

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INTRODUCTION

Sensitivity, which is defined as the ability to perceive sensations and emotions and being sensitive in TDK Turkish Dictionary (2005), has become an increasingly important phenomenon in the contemporary world both as a method for social education and as a value (Öcal, Demirkaya & Altınok, 2013). Sensitivity is defined as the level of awareness of an individual with its environment and relations. In other words, how aware is the individual about what it knows or does not know, how much and why it knows, and how it uses this information? In this sense, sensitivity can be defined as the level of consciousness and its criterion is the level of knowledge. In this case, education which will improve the sensitivity firstly aims to increase the level of knowledge and to develop certain tools to ensure the awareness of the acquired information. The aim of raising conscious individuals requires such sensitivity to be acquired in even primary education period (Türksoy, 1991).

It is one of the main duties of parents and educators to enable children to gain some values that have been becoming extinct in society in recent years. Values education is as important as teaching children mathematics, science and life sciences (Bridge, 2003; Genc & Eryaman, 2007). Values teaching is a topic included within all courses and educational programs of schools. The Ministry of National Education has included several subjects related to values education to its curriculum to protect our existing values and transfer them to future generations. It can be observed that values are transferred through the curriculum of Life Sciences, Social Studies, Religious Culture and Moral Knowledge courses (Aydın & Akyol Gürler, 2012). Individual, community and nature topics were taken into consideration in the development of the related curricula (Tay & Yıldırım, 2009).

Values are taught primarily through the Life Science course to the growing and developing child in the school where the child takes its first steps to the social life following its family. Life Science course, which is designed in accordance with the developmental characteristics of children, is a course that is based on social and natural sciences and includes information about daily life. The aim of this course is to help students to live a more effective life through concrete activities that can be used in daily life. It is also critical in terms of forming the basis for secondary school courses (Güzel Candan & Ergen, 2014).

The curriculum of Life Science course aims to educate individuals to enable them to gain basic life skills, to know themselves, to lead a healthy and safe life, to assimilate the values of the society they live in, to be sensitive to nature and environment, to do research, to be productive, and to love their country (MEB, 2018). Examining the social and cultural environment in which the child lives, the aim of the course is to gain the child good habits and necessary skills in adapting to the environment at early ages with the help of right and sound information about the environment and environmental problems. In this course, the subjects are more meaningful because they are based on the child's own environment (Binbaşıoğlu, 2003). Based on the unit-based approach, six units are specified in the curricula of Life Science courses of each three grade: "Life in our School", "Life at Home", "Healthy Life", "Safe Life", "Life in Our Country" and "Life in Nature". Outcomes related to animal love and sensitivity to animals are included in the "*Life in Nature*" unit at 1st, 2nd and 3rd grades. In these units, learning outcomes such as "*Students are able to…. observe animals in the immediate environment, take care protecting animals in the immediate environment, compare the conditions necessary for the survival of animals, recognize the importance of animal feeding, and understand the importance of animals for human life*" emphasizes animal love and sensitivity to animals (MEB, 2018).

In the related literature, it was found that previous studies are about students, teachers and prospective teachers' attitudes and views towards environment [Sağgöz & Doğanay, 2019; Ahi & Özsoy, 2015; Önder, 2015; Özata, Yücel & Özkan, 2014; Genç & Genç, 2013; Zengin & Kunt, 2013; Aydın & Çepni, 2012; Nalçacı & Beldağ, 2012; Uluçınar, Sağır, Oktay & Cansaran, 2008; Uzun & Sağlam, 2007]; environmental awareness [Karaca, 2018; Erökten, 2015; Çavuş, Umdu, Topsakal and Öztuna Kaplan, 2013; Yalçınkaya, 2012; Erten, 2012; Talas & Karataş, 2012; Karataş & Aslan, 2012;

Eryaman et all. 2010; Diken & Sert Çıbık, 2009; Yılmaz, 2009; Uzun, Sağlam & Varnacı Uzun, 2008; Erten, 2005; Uzun & Sağlam, 2005]; and sensitivity towards nature/environment [Köşker, 2019; Köşker, 2013; Yeşilyurt, Gül & Demir, 2013; Yıldırım, Bacanak & Özsoy, 2012; Aydın & Kaya, 2011; Çukur & Özgüner, 2008; Yücel, Altunkasa et al., 2006; Çabuk & Karacalıoğlu, 2003]. In these studies, animals were frequently emphasized as sub-dimensions, albeit there is no direct research on sensitivity to animals. On the other hand, there is Emre & Erten (2012) research on the interests of primary school students in plants and animals even though there is no emphasis on sensitivity or consciousness.

This study was conducted to determine the level of primary school students' sensitivity to animals. For this purpose, primary school students' observations were gathered in the following dimensions: animals and their living conditions in students' immediate environment, and their views on whether they show protective behaviors towards animals, the importance of adopting a pet and their contribution to human life. This study can be considered critical with respect to shedding light on a subject little studied Turkey, contributing to the improvement of primary school students' sensitivity to animals and setting an example for further studies.

METHODS

Research Design

This research was designed with phenomenology, one of the qualitative research methods. Phenomenology design focuses on phenomena that "we are aware of and do not have an in-depth and detailed understanding of". Phenomena may exist in various forms such as events, experiences, perceptions, orientations, concepts, and situations in the world we live in (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013). For this reason, sensitivity to animals was considered as a phenomenon and the views of the students were tried to be revealed.

Study Group

The study group was determined through criterion sampling and maximum variance sampling methods, which are among purposeful sampling methods within the qualitative research approach (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013). In this study, the criteria were determined first. These criteria are:

- 3rd grade students in the spring semester of 2018-2019 academic year,

- Students enrolled in a public school with high socioeconomic level in Afyonkarahisar provincial center,

- Students enrolled in a public school with middle socioeconomic level in Afyonkarahisar provincial center

- Students enrolled in a public school with low socioeconomic level in Afyonkarahisar provincial center

Maximum variation sampling was used as the second step for determining the sample. According to Yıldırım & Şimşek (2013), the purpose of generating a sample based on maximum variance sampling is not to provide such variation for generalization, on the contrary, it is to try to find out whether there are any common or shared phenomena among the various situations and to reveal the distinct dimensions of the problem according to this variation. Three public schools in Afyonkarahisar provincial center were selected for the implementation of the study. In line with the above-mentioned criteria, the study group consisted of 52, 41 and 27 students enrolled in public schools with high, middle and low socioeconomic levels in Afyonkarahisar provincial center, respectively. 10 foreign students enrolled in the low socioeconomic level school were not included in

the study group because of their inadequate Turkish reading and writing skills. A total of 120 students from all three schools participated in this study.

Demographic information of the study group is given in Table 1.

Table 1. Distribution of Demographic Information of the Study Group

		f	%
Gender	Female	60	50
	Male	60	50
Socioeconomic Level of the School	High	52	43
	Middle	41	34
	Low	27	23
Being a Pet Owner	I own a pet at home	42	35
	There is an animal I keep in the garden	6	5
	I do not own any pets	72	60
Visiting an Animal Shelter	I have never visited an animal shelter	82	68
	I have visited an animal shelter before	38	32
Total		120	100

The study group consisted of 60 female and 60 male students. In the study group, students are enrolled in public schools with high (52), middle (41) and low (27) socioeconomic levels, respectively. It is clear in the table that 42 students own pets at home, 6 students keep animals in the garden and 72 students do not own any pets. 82 students have never visited an animal shelter, but 38 students have visited an animal shelter before. However, 5 of the students who stated that they had visited an animal shelter before told about the observations about their visit to a zoo, not an animal shelter.

Data Collection Tool

In the study, a semi-structured interview form was used as the data collection tool. Semi-structured interview forms provide both a fixed-choice response and an in-depth approach to the relevant field (Büyüköztürk, Çakmak, Akgün, Karadeniz & Demirel, 2014). The semi-structured interview form was developed in line with the outcomes emphasizing animal love and sensitivity to animals within the "Life in Nature" unit of the Life Science course curriculum of 1st, 2nd and 3rd graders. In the development of interview questions, the principles such as comprehensibility of the questions, avoidance from multidimensionality, and avoidance from directing the respondent were taken into consideration (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992, as cited in Altunay, Oral & Yalçınkaya, 2014). The interview form prepared was subjected to expert opinion to check the intelligibility and applicability and it was rearranged in line with the recommendations of the experts.

Data Collection and Analysis

To administer the data collection tool, the schools were visited, the school principals and the teachers of 3rd graders were interviewed, and they were informed about the research. Then, the classes of 2 teachers, who accepted to participate in the study voluntarily, were visited and students were informed about the study. It was announced to the students that this study was not an exam or an activity measuring any achievement, and their responses would not be used to evaluate them. Then, the survey forms were distributed, and a sample item was shown to the students to explain how they should respond to other items in the forms. Students were given adequate time for filling out the forms and the completed forms were then received by hand.

The responses obtained through the semi-structured interview forms were analyzed with the descriptive analysis technique. In the descriptive analysis, a descriptive approach is presented to the reader by adhering to the original form of the data collected as much as possible and directly quoting from the participants where necessary (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013). The descriptive analysis was

carried out within the framework of three activity steps: data reduction, data presentation, inference and validation (Türmüklü, 2000). Criteria of headiness (distinct views), explanatory (suitability for the theme), and diversity and extreme examples were taken into consideration for the selection of quotations (Ünver, Bümen & Başbay, 2010).

Data obtained from the forms were transferred to MS Office program, read several times, and coded. Then, the codes were brought together, the themes that would outline the research findings were identified, and descriptive analysis was performed. To ensure the validity of the data, two experts were consulted about the questions used, the data collected, and the coding. In the study, direct quotations were made from the expressions uttered by the students. To ensure reliability, a confirmation review was conducted by an expert regarding the consistency of the relationships established between the raw data obtained from the research, and the conclusions and interpretations made in accordance with the data. Frequencies related to the codes were presented and direct quotations were also included to reflect the views of the participants. The students' responses include expressions that can be used in more than one theme. Therefore, the number of frequencies in the themes obtained during the analyses was higher than the total number of participants. The participants were coded with a number. These codes (S1, S2, S3, …) were used when revealing the students' expressions.

FINDINGS

This study revealed the views of primary school students about sensitivity to animals. In this section, the data obtained from participants were interpreted by utilizing the tables.

Suggestions of primary school students about their practices and behaviors that can be exhibited to protect the street animals

Students' responses to the question *"What do you do to protect the street animals living in your neighborhood? What can be done if you do not do anything?"* are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Suggestions of primary school students about their practices and behaviors that can be exhibited to protect the street animals

Suggestions of primary school students about their practices and behaviors that can be exhibited to protect the street animals			
Themes	Codes	f	%
Need for Feeding	Giving them water/milk/bread/meal/bone	78	40
	Feeding them	22	11
	Placing a water/food container	6	3
Need for Shelter	Building a hut/kennel in winter	31	16
	Adopting street animals	9	4
	Building animal shelters	3	2
Need for Protection	Not harming/protecting animals	8	4
	Warning those harming animals	4	2
	Protecting/being sensitive to street animals	4	2
	Organizing activities to make people conscious about and sensitive to animals	2	1
	Protecting endangered animals	1	0.6
Need for Affection-Care	Loving and caring for animals	10	5
	Playing with animals	1	0.6
Need for Health	Having sick animals treated in veterinarians	3	2
	Taking care of and curing sick animals at home	2	1
	Having unvaccinated animals vaccinated	1	0.6
Aid in the context of social responsibility	Organizing campaigns to help and protect animals when necessary	9	4
	Donating to veterinarians for caring for street animals	1	0.6
	Establishing associations to protect animals and meet their needs	1	0.6
Total		196	100

As can be seen in Table 2, as a result of the analysis of students' responses, six themes were identified: need for feeding, need for shelter, need for protection, need for affection-care, need for health and aid in the context of social responsibility. The students mostly emphasized street animals' needs for feeding in their responses. Accordingly, S33 said "*We can put milk for cats and bones for dogs in front of gates and on the pavement. Or the animals will starve*" and S94 reported "*Animals must be very happy when we leave food to the streets and feed them*". Building huts to shelter animals especially in winter and kennels containing a blanket, food and water, and the adoption of such animals were emphasized in the theme of "need for shelter". S116 revealed its desire sharing its house with street animals for their need for shelter by stating "*I would take it home, name it, walk it around, provide it a warm place*".

In the theme of "need for protection", it was emphasized not to harm animals, to warn those harming animals, and to organize activities to raise awareness of the people.

Emphasizing the need to protect street animals, S56 and S89 reported "*We need to be sensitive to protect the street animals living around us*" and "*We can protect street animals by drawing the area where they live with yellow tape*", respectively. In terms of "need for affection-care", it was suggested that people love street animals and children should play with the animals on the street. In the theme of "need for health", it was suggested that sick animals should be treated at the veterinarian and they should be taken care at home. Statements from some students imply that street animals sometimes seek health aid from people. For example, S43 reported "*When I recognize a wounded bird, I take it home*". S105 said "*When animals such as a bird, cat, dog are injured, I help them*". S69 indicated "*If an animal is sick, we can bring it to a veterinarian or care for it at home until it recovers*". In the theme of "aid in the context of social responsibility", it was proposed to organize campaigns, to establish associations and to make cash donations to protect and help animals.

The views of primary school students on whether people are sensitive to animals and the reasons on which they base their views

The responses of the students to the question "*Do you think that the people living around you are sensitive to animals?*" are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. The views of primary school students on whether people are sensitive to animals and the reasons on which they base their views

The views of primary school students on whether people are sensitive to animals and the reasons on which they base their views				
	Themes	Codes	f	%
Yes	Affection dimension	People like animals very much	8	7
		Everyone in our class likes animals/I love animals	3	2
		Street animals enliven our lives	3	2
		Street animals also need affection	1	1
	Sensitivity dimension	We share the same world with street animals	2	2
		People are sorry about the living conditions of street animals	1	1
		Animals are living beings, too	4	3
		There are people who treat animals well	5	4
		Animals need water and bread	1	1
		Animals have their own life, like us, they have the right to be free.	1	1
		Street animals are also sensitive to humans	1	1
	Responsibility dimension	There are a lot of people feeding street animals	15	14
		In most places, I see food and kennels	2	2
		I help people who feed animals	1	1
	Helpfulness dimension	I have seen someone helping street animals	5	4
		I feel happy when I help street animals	1	1

No	Affection dimension	People living around me don't treat animals well	2	2
		Some people don't respect street animals	1	1
		They look like as if they hated street animals	1	1
		Those who do not like animals interfere with animal lovers' affairs	1	1
	Responsibility dimension	Nobody gives food and water to animals	2	2
		Our neighbor constantly gives his dog dry bread and water	1	1
		People don't care street animals	1	1
		People adopt animals, but they leave them back soon	2	2
	Sensitivity dimension	People throw stones to animals and hit, kill and torture them	26	23
		People scare animals	4	3
		People/industry pollute nature and living beings may be poisoned and killed	2	2
		People are unconscious about street animals	2	2
		Many animals are extinct because of people	1	1
		Some people add poison to animals' food container	1	1
Neutral		Some are sensitive, but some are insensitive to animals	11	10
Total			113	100

As can be seen in Table 3, while 66 students stated that people around them are sensitive to animals, 44 students reported that these people are not sensitive to animals. 11 students remained neutral by stating "*Some are sensitive, but some are insensitive to animals*". Four themes emerged as a result of the analysis of students' views on whether people are sensitive to animals: affection, sensitivity, responsibility, and helpfulness.

Students who think that people are sensitive to animals stated that they love and feed animals. Students suggested people exhibit sensitive behaviors towards animals. For example, S32 proposed "*I think people are sensitive to animals because we share the same world with animals*". S36 said "*People are sensitive because animals are living beings, too*". S76 stated "*People behave sensitively towards animals because they protect and feed animals*". The students stated that they also behave sensitively towards animals. In this regard, S43 stated "*I think people are sensitive to street animals, and I feel happy when I help street animals*". Students who think that people are not sensitive to animals stressed that people physically harm animals, scare them and do not feed them. Some students think that people are not sensitive to animals because they harm animals. In this respect, T6 said "*Although some of the people around me like animals, I don't think people are very sensitive to animals because they look at animals as if they hated them*". S65 suggested "*I don't think people living around me have sensitivity to animals. Because I saw our neighbor beating a dog with a stick. I wish all humans were more sensitive to animals*". Besides, in terms of social interaction for sensitivity to animals, S23 proposed "*I think people are not sensitive to animals. People who do not like and feed animals even interfere with people who like animals and try to prevent them to feed or protect animals*". They emphasized the social interaction about sensitivity. S117 made a good point to peoples' insensitivity to animals by reporting "*I think people are not sensitive because there is no such thing as 'street animal'; they are actually pets. People bring them home first, then they can't take care of them and leave them back to the street. This case makes people ask 'Why do you bring them home if you can't take care of them'*".

The views of primary school students about the living conditions of street animals and their suggestions on improving their living conditions

Primary school students were asked *"Do you think the living conditions of street animals are appropriate for them? What are your suggestions for improving these conditions?"* and their responses are given in Table 4.

Table 4. The views of primary school students about the living conditions of street animals and their suggestions on improving their living conditions

	Themes	Codes	f	%
Appropriate	Affection	People treat street animals well	5	3
		People warn those harming street animals	1	0.7
		Street animals are a part of our world	1	0.7
	Sheltering and Feeding	People give water and food to street animals	4	3
		People build home for them in winter	2	1.3
		Street animals sometimes find a warm cover and sleep in the balconies and gardens	1	0.7
		They are fed in animal shelters	1	0.7
		They are used to live in street	1	0.7
Inappropriate	Sheltering and Feeding	Kennels can be built for street dogs and cats	18	12
		Blankets and some other stuff can be put in a box in the street for street animals	13	8
		Street animals can be fed	11	7
		Street animals' living conditions can be improved by adopting them	11	7
		Street animals can be sent to animal shelters	7	5
		The municipality should put food beside the trash bins for animals	1	0.7
	Affection	Street animals should not be mistreated/tormented/harmed/killed	9	6
		They cannot find food in winter and they are frozen to death; they are exhausted from high temperature in summer and die of thirst	8	6
		We should show them affection and compassion to improve their conditions	5	3
		We need to give importance to street animals	2	1.3
		I love animals. I'm happy when I give them water and food	2	1.3
		We need to protect endangered animals	1	0.7
	Environmental Sensitivity	We should not cut trees, and throw garbage and spit on the ground	6	4
		We should keep the habitats of street animals clean and leave them a beautiful nature	4	3
		I don't want animals living in artificial environments. They should stay in a safe and natural environment	1	0.7
		Animals should be set free	1	0.7
	Health	They should be taken to the veterinary clinic	5	3
		Unvaccinated ones should be vaccinated	2	1.3
		Because they may get hurt and sick, and die.	2	1.3
		We should bandage them when they get hurt.	1	0.7
		Vets can help them	1	0.7
	Social Responsibility	More animal protection foundations should be established	1	0.7
		Campaigns that meet their basic needs should be launched to improve their conditions	1	0.7
		Activities should be organized for street animals	1	0.7
Neutral		I do not know	20	14
Total			148	100

In Table 4, 31 students stated that living conditions were appropriate for street animals while 87 argued such conditions were not appropriate. 20 students remained neutral. Five themes emerged as a result of the analysis of students' views on the living conditions of street animals: affection, sheltering and feeding, environmental sensitivity, health, and social responsibility.

Students who think that living conditions are appropriate for street animals emphasize that people treat well and feed animals. S76 said "*I think that living conditions are appropriate for street animals because people give them food and water*". However, S105 pointed out that people should be more sensitive in winter by stating "*Although living conditions are appropriate for street animals, they cannot find any shelter in winter. I think there should have one or two kennels/nests in every garden. Food and water should be left to such shelters*".

Students who stated that living conditions are not appropriate for street animals pointed out the inappropriateness of sheltering, feeding and health conditions in streets, people's negative behaviors against street animals, and the fact that people should keep the animals' living areas clean. Comparing the difficult living conditions of street animals with their own lives, students proposed that it is needed to show affection and compassion to street animals and to adopt them. For example, S6 said "*I think the living conditions of street animals are very difficult because if we force a person to live under such conditions, it will die almost in a month. For this reason, I think that kennels should be built for street animals, food and water should be left inside these kennels, and they should be cleaned regularly*". S46 reported "*I think that the living conditions of street animals are very difficult. How can we survive without a warm place? Animals want a warm place too, but we don't understand it*". In addition, S30 stated that the streets are not suitable for the survival of animals and suggested that "*I think everyone should be an animal friend to live together at home*". Besides, some students focused on environmental sensitivity. S100 expressed "*I think that the living conditions of street animals are not appropriate. People throw garbage everywhere, spit on the ground, cut down trees, and replace animals' huts with huge buildings. We have to leave them a beautiful and clean nature*". S43 stated "*The streets and the air are dirty. Garbage should not be thrown on the ground, trees should not be cut down. It should be always remembered that street animals are living beings too*".

The views of primary school students about the contributions of adopting a pet

Student responses to the question "What are your views on the contribution of adopting a pet?" are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. The views of primary school students about the contributions of adopting a pet

What are your views on the contribution of adopting a pet?	f	%
Playing games/keeping company with	25	20
Considering/protecting it as a member of the family	22	18
Feeding it/taking it to the toilet/walking it around/cleaning its living space	21	17
Pets are fun/lovely/sweet/soft	13	12
The animal we adopt is fed/does not feel cold/remains safe	10	9
I think people increasingly love animals as they adopt animals	9	7
They make people feel happy/help people reduce their stress levels	8	6
They help people thanks to their senses and instincts	5	4
Adopting animals makes them happy	3	2
Being responsible	3	2
Knowing how to take care of an animal	1	0.8
It gains you a different perspective towards life	1	0.8
Adopting animals is very good deed and protects you from people who treat you badly	1	0.8
I think we should train the animals we will adopt so as not to harm people	1	0.8
Total	123	100

The views of primary school students about the contributions of adopting a pet were analyzed. In this section, the students emphasized factors such as keeping company with pets, considering them as members of the family, creating a safe living space for the pet, pets' reducing the stress level of humans and raising awareness about responsibility. Students primarily see pets as playmates in their daily lives. For example, S81 stated "*I play with my cats every day; we have a lot of fun. No time is wasted thanks to them; I love them very much*". S47 expressed "*When you love it, you will be happy; when you play with it, it will be like your sibling and you will not alone at home*". The students emphasized that people started to behave more sensitively when they adopt a pet. S41 suggested "*I think that people increasingly love animals when they adopt an animal*" and S12 stated "*The greatest contribution of adopting a pet is to make one start protecting animals*". Moreover, with this respect, S106 and S9 gave examples from their own lives respectively: "*I really like having a pet; I love street animals, too. I see some cats and dogs starve but they have the right to live. We should have good feelings and thoughts about street animals, and we should love and respect them as well*" and "*We found a very sweet cat on the street; it was in a very difficult situation. It was too weak. We took it home. We need to be sensitive to animals with harsh conditions on the street*". Expressions of students, like "*It is a very good deed to adopt animals. You help a living being in trouble. I think such*

behavior protects you from people who treat you badly" (S55), indicate the spiritual contribution of pet adoption to human life. Besides, the students expressed the contribution of adopting a pet and being responsible for the care of the pet to their daily lives. S29 argued "*I have a pet, so other responsibilities at home are not difficult because I gained more responsibility*" and S46 said "*I know how to take care of an animal and it teaches me how to prepare for actual life*".

The views of primary school students about the difficulties of adopting a pet

Student responses to the question *"What are your views about the difficulties of adopting a pet?"* are presented in Table 6.

Table 6. The views of primary school students about the difficulties of adopting a pet

What are your views about the difficulties of adopting a pet?	f	%
I think it has no difficulties	37	21
Walking it daily/toilet training/taking it to the toilet/changing the litter	22	13
Cleaning dirty areas/its hair/its living space	21	12
Its care is difficult/expensive	20	11
Giving food/water to it every day/knowing which food it likes	15	8
It may scratch me/bite me/tear me/rip my books/bother me	11	7
The pets that we adopt cannot get used to us and our house	8	6
Doing its care/washing it/cleaning it	7	5
I'm happy even if it is difficult/the life of a living being is so precious	6	4
Its messing up the house/its misbehaving	5	3
Playing with it/making it happy/showing affection to it/spending time with it	4	2
My mom and dad won't let me adopt a pet	4	2
Preparing a space for it at home	3	1
I can't make a judgment because I don't have a pet/it may have difficulties I don't know	3	1
Having difficulties in training it	3	1
Our pet has escaped home	2	1
Pets that we leave to the street feel upset	2	1
Taking its responsibility	1	0.5
Sick animals infect us	1	0.5
I'm scared of animals	1	0.5
Total	176	100

The views of primary school students about the difficulties of adopting a pet were analyzed. Accordingly, 25% of the students stated that there is no difficulty in adopting a pet; even if it has difficulties, a living being is so precious. Positive responses to a negative question in 25% and such responses' having the highest frequency prove that the students are sensitive to animals. For example, S13 stated "*Adopting a pet is very good; I don't think it will be a challenge for me*". S41 expressed "*I think there is no difficulty in adopting a pet; even if it has difficulties, a living being is so precious*". S82 argued "*If we have a pet, we have to take care of it. If we do not have a pet, we should consider the question 'Can we take care of them by ourselves?'*". Finally, S87 reported "*When we leave the pets to the street, they get scared and upset*".

The students frequently repeated following factors as the difficulties of adopting a pet: the care of the pet, its toilet training, its cleaning, its feeding, cleaning its living space and being expensive to take care of it. The following expressions indicate the points where the students have difficulty in taking care of a pet: "*I would have difficulty in doing its care and training*" (S3), "*A dog can wake you up while you sleep*" (S14), "*My cat makes me very angry and rips my books*" (S68), "*Cleaning up the behind of the pet!*" (S84) and "*Pets such as cats and dogs shed their hair and urinate to the floors, which are difficult to handle for me*" (S97). On the other hand, some expressions imply a sensitive approach. For example, S105 stated "*I have cats and birds. They sometimes scratch or bite me terribly. The house is full of feathers and litter. However, we have to put up with this. After all, they are living beings, too*", and S106 argued "*Yes, it is a difficult task, but we live our lives very well. Nevertheless, street dogs die. Animals that we adopt and live on the streets have the right to live. Our feelings and thoughts towards them must be good; we should love and respect them*".

The views of primary school students about joining animal lovers associations

Student responses to the question "*Do you want to become a member of any animal lovers association in the future? Which association do you want to join?*" are given in Table 7.

Table 7. The views of primary school students about joining animal lovers associations

Theme	Codes	f	%
	The views of primary school students about joining animal lovers associations		
I would like to join	I don't know any animal lovers association/I forgot its name	24	28
	I would like to join an animal protection association	14	16
	I would like to join any association for street animals	13	15
	I would like to join an association that cares/like animals	11	13
	I would like to join any association for dogs	7	8
	I don't know how to join such associations	4	5
	I would like to join all since all such associations like animals	4	5
	I would like to join any association for cats	2	2
	I would like to establish an association by myself	2	2
	I would like to join any association for rabbits	2	2
	I haven't decided which association to join yet	1	1
I would not like join	I would like to be a veterinarian rather than a member of an animal lovers association	2	2
	I would not like to join an animal lovers association because I'm allergic to animals	1	1
	I would prefer to join an association for environment rather than join an animal lovers association.	1	1
Total		87	100

Primary school students' wishes to become members of animal lovers associations and their views on which association they prefer to join were analyzed. While 96 students stated that they would like to join an animal lovers association in the future, 20 students said they would not like to become members of such associations. Among those who stated they would not like to join any association, 7 students confused animal lovers associations with animal shelters and 1 student made the same mistake for being a veterinary. 1 student confused the Human Rights and Freedoms Humanitarian Relief Foundation (IHH) with an animal lovers association. Some of the students who would like to become a member of such associations stated that they do not know any or forget the name of the association while many students stated that they would like to join an animal lovers association. Students who would not like to be a member of an animal lovers association indicated several reasons such as preferring to become a vet, being allergic to animals, and preferring to join an association for environment.

DISCUSSION, RESULTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

According to the results of this study, primary school students were found to be highly sensitive to animals. Students' expressions and responses to the questions of this study robustly demonstrate high levels of sensitivity to animals. To illustrate, giving some examples from their life to the questions about sensitivity to animals, empathizing with animals by comparing their and animals' living conditions, using certain emotional expressions, such as "being sad, being glad, being happy etc.", for certain situations that animals are exposed to, and using positive expressions in the highest frequency while reporting their views about the difficulties of adopting a pet can be considered as evidence for their sensitive views about animals.

The findings of the study revealed that the students find feeding, sheltering and health conditions of street animals to be insufficient and that they try to help the street animals as much as they could. Karaca (2018) concluded that students are willing to help street animals. The fact that there are students stating that they deliver feeding, sheltering and health aids to animals with the help of family elders such as mother, father, brother and sister indicates the importance of the family's exemplary and supportive behaviors in the development of sensitivity to animals. According to Ateş (2005), the emotional relationship, without seeking self-interest, established between children and

animals also affects the child's behavior in further developmental stages. People who were interested in plants and animals in their childhood and who had childhood experiences in nature may be more sensitive to environmental problems in their adulthood than those who did not have such experiences in their childhood (Berck & Klee, 1992, as cited in Emre & Erten, 2012).

73% of the students stated that streets are not suitable for the survival of animals. In addition to providing basic needs of animals such as feeding, sheltering, health and affection, they also emphasized that people should have environmental sensitivity. They also argued not to destroy and pollute habitats of street animals and not to force animals to live in artificial environments. This is clearly understood from the expressions of the students that they do not regard animals as "any entities" or "worthless beings", but "individuals" or "part of nature". With this respect, Işın (1995) refers to social values. Valuing animals, which are a part of the natural environment, by humans, who are another part of the natural environment, can be regarded as the pioneer of valuing environment, which is another part of nature.

In this study, 55% of the students think that people are sensitive to animals. As justifications for their opinions, they proposed the fact that people love animals, feed them, and help them in need. They felt sorry for the living conditions of street animals by empathizing with them and emphasized that animals are living beings, too and that their rights to live should be protected. They gave examples from their own lives and stated that they help people who feed animals and are happy when they feed an animal on the street. Students who think that people are not sensitive to animals reported that they see people who harm animals and who do not feed them. Underscoring social interaction about sensitivity, they mentioned that people who do not like animals try to prevent people who show sensitive behaviors towards animals.

Another finding of the study is that students see pets as playmates in their daily lives, which is due to the fact that the students are in play age. This finding is consistent with the results of Emre & Erten (2012). Students reported that adopting a pet contributes to their personal development, makes them self-confident and responsible towards others and that having a nice time with animals reduces their stress levels. Children with pets have higher empathy, self-confidence and independent decision-making skills than others (Koçak, 2009). According to Ateş (2005), the research suggested that children who feed or take care of pets have a sense of self-confidence and responsibility arising from taking care of a living being. In this way, the child makes significant progress towards becoming a self-sufficient individual (Akşehirli, 2011).

Giving examples from their own lives, students supported that people with pets are more sensitive to and may empathize with other animals. According to Ateş (2005), empathy is one of the most important skills that children gain from their relationships with animals. The ability to understand how others feel is elevated in those who feed animals. Children learn to understand feelings and desires of animals through their relationship with pets. The relationship established between children and animals has a positive effect on child psychology and development (Akşehirli, 2011, Çaya, 2015). According to Özkul, Sarıbaş, Uzabacı & Yüksel (2013), adopting a pet has a positive effect on attitudes and behaviors of one towards animals.

25% of the students stated that there is no difficulty in adopting a pet. They even uttered some emotional statements, such as "'*I feel sorry for the animals left to the street*', '*The animal's life is so precious*', '*They are living beings, too*', '*It's one of the members of the family*'", which can be considered as robust evidence that the students are sensitive to animals.

The following recommendations can be made based on the research results:

- Students' awareness and sensitivity towards animals can be raised through activities to be carried out in schools in the scope of animal sensitivity. Thus, students' interest and awareness for animals should be increased at early ages to develop positive feelings towards animals.

- To ensure teachers' sensitivity towards animals, theoretical and practical courses on environmental and animal sensitivity issues should be included in the Higher Education Curriculum for prospective teachers.

- This study is limited to 3rd graders enrolled in schools in a provincial center. A similar study can be conducted with the students enrolled in village, town and district schools to observe whether settlement makes a significant change to the results of this study.

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