

The Relationship Between the Individual Values and Critical Thinking Skills of Prospective Social Sciences Teachers

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to determine the relationship between the individual values and critical thinking skills of prospective social sciences teachers. The sample of the research is composed of a total of 298 prospective teachers, who are first-year, second-year, third-year and fourth-year students. These prospective teachers were randomly selected using the stratified sampling method which is one of the random sampling methods via the maximum variation sampling method in purposive sampling. The data of the study have been obtained using a Personal Values Scale and Critical Thinking Scale. In view of the research findings, a positive significant result has been obtained among the scores for the critical thinking and personal values factor perceived by the prospective teachers. Moreover, it has been observed that personal values factors collectively predict 42% of the critical thinking score.

Keywords: Critical Thinking, Personal Values, Prospective Teacher

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Introduction

In many fields of social sciences, “value” and “measuring the values” has long been the subject of research. That is because “value” is an important concept in understanding human behaviors (Asan et al., 2008). Values are important factors in guiding and shaping the behaviors of people throughout their lives (Ünal, Deniz & Polat, 2008; Yel & Aladağ, 2009). It is necessary to be aware of the value concept and value perceptions of people in order to discover and understand people (Altunay & Yalçınkaya, 2011). There are values that lay behind an individual’s decisions, evaluations, choices, relationships with people, in sum, his/her behaviors (Yılmaz, 2007).

Along with their values, the thinking skills of individuals are also influential in guiding their behaviors. Individuals utilize their mental processes, reason and come to a conclusion when they are required to make a decision in the light of any new circumstances they come across. Critical thinking is an approach that can be employed from the range of thinking processes that include the use of decision making and problem solving skills (Genç, 2008; Kökdemir, 2003; Özden, 2008).

When the studies of critical thinking are examined (Demirkaya, 2008; Elias & Kress, 1994; Özdemir, 2005; Seferoğlu & Akbıyık, 2006; Tok, & Sevinç, 2010), it is seen that the relationship between a great number of different variables have been examined. However, it cannot be said that the research, in which the relationship between critical thinking and personal values has been studied, is adequate.

In view of this, the present research aims to examine the relationship between the personal values and critical thinking skills of prospective social studies teachers, and the degree to which personal values predict the critical thinking of prospective teachers.

Personal Values

“Values” are the preferences of individuals which people consider significant in themselves and for others, and the values shape a schema for action. Values play an indispensable part in the lives of individuals (Dökmen, 2000). Every aspect of an individual’s daily life is affected by values (Pakizeh, Jochen & Maio, 2007). Schwartz (1994) defines values as the ideas that set human beings in motion and as the behavioral patterns that lead and guide their actions (Schwartz, 1994). Values serve as a basic principle for evaluating behaviors, people and events (Collins et al., 2007). To sum up, value is defined as the tendency to prefer a certain course of action based on one set of ideas above another (Genç & Eryaman, 2007).

Aspin (2007) regards values as the ideas, conventions, principles, rules, objects, products, activities, practices, procedures or judgments that people accept, agree to, treasure, cherish, prefer, incline towards, see as important and indeed act upon. Values are important tools in that they are used as tools to sanction behaviors and in the sustaining of such behaviors. That is because values serve as the controller of behaviors, that is, the attitudes and thinking patterns of individuals (Özkan, 2011).

Values have such a great effect on the lives of individuals that they do not doubt their values unless they meet with an objection or a question. Indeed, individuals are not even aware of their values most of the time. However, values are the determinants of an individual's behaviors, choices, evaluations, relationships and many other forms of social actions (Yılmaz, 2008). Imparting individuals with the competencies related to knowledge, skills and values helps to maintain an effective social participation (Öztürk, 2009a).

Since the values of individuals are not innate, they are only developed over the course of life (Gömlüksiz & Cüro, 2011). A formal part of elementary education is the imparting and development of non-negative personal and social values (Öztürk, 2009b). "Elementary" is an important level of formal education in which minimum and common basic knowledge and skills are taught, which are required of all citizens in society (Sahin, 2010). The knowledge, skills, attitudes and values, which are acquired during the education process, diversify the individual's character. When given properly and effectively, value education brings significant contributions to an individual's development (Yel & Aladağ, 2009).

Values, which guide human behaviors and which are formed as a result of learning, just like other feelings, attitudes and manners, are significant in terms of teaching and education since there can be no education stripped of values, i.e. one that does not incorporate values. As an individual in society, the teacher brings with them to the school his/her values, attitudes, manners, emotional sides, life philosophy and behaviors. While the school is guiding students through the process of acquiring the behaviors that are defined by educational objectives, the teacher is the one who will affect the individual's behaviors and who will be held up as an example in this process (Güney, 2010). It can be stated that the teacher is the most important factor in the school life of a student. The teacher not only teaches the content for which he/she is responsible in the course, but also affects the mental, emotional and social side of the students (Yalmanç, 2009).

Critical Thinking

The requirements of the modern world have necessitated that today's individuals should possess thinking skills. Instead of information exchange, learning how to think has gained in importance in education. Critical thinking is the most important indicator of high level thinking (Akbıyık & Seferoğlu, 2006; Doğanay, 2009; Genç, 2008).

Today, it is a commonly accepted view among all countries of the world that a society in which critical thinking does not prevail, cannot be a developed society (Karabağ & İnal, 2009). Being a developed society in the twenty first century, in which information flows rapidly, is possible through the presence of individuals who can use the information in a critical manner via a questioning technique while making a decision on any matter without simply accepting the information at face value (Şenşekerci & Bilgin, 2008).

Critical thinking is an important attribute that should be taken into account in order to be successful in all areas of life (Güven & Kürüm, 2006). Critical thinking basically depends on the skill and inclination to effectively acquire, evaluate and

utilize information (Cantürk-Günhan & Başer, 2009). Critical thinking skill, which refers to the skill of examining something, commenting and making decisions via a questioning approach, is thinking in which the person guides, disciplines and verifies himself/herself (Acun, Demir & Göz, 2010; Paul & Elder, 2007).

Critical thinking should be regarded as obligatory educational goal. That is because critical thinking is an ethical right that should be possessed by every individual (Şahinel, 2007). Having critical thinking skills is regarded as both the result and an important indicator, of high quality education (Korkmaz & Yeşil, 2009). All societies aim to raise citizens who can create new values for both their countries and the entire world by questioning current social values, and by thinking critically and creatively through education (Gömleksiz & Cüro, 2011). Individuals must definitely acquire critical thinking skills during their education in order to understand information clearly, correctly and wholly and to put their knowledge into practice by blending new information with their prior knowledge fully and meaningfully. Teachers should be fully cognizant of this subject and must prepare the learning environment accordingly; this is of considerable importance for students to be able to acquire this skill (Çalışkan, 2009).

A good critical teacher must embrace critical thinking in his/her life, too (Özden, 2008). Although encouraging critical thinking and questioning is regarded as one of the important duties that requires a great effort from the teacher, great successes are achieved in the classes where there are teachers who value different opinions and encourage their students to think independently (Demirkaya, 2008).

Method

Research Design

A relational scanning model has been used in this research which aims to determine the relationship between the individual values and critical thinking skills of prospective social sciences teachers. The relational scanning model is a research model that aims to determine the existence and degree of mutual change between two or more variables (Karasar, 2003).

Universe and Sample

The universe of the research is composed of a total of 650 prospective teachers who were studying in the Department of Social Studies Teaching at Atatürk University, Kazım Karabekir Faculty of Education, Department of Elementary Education in the 2009-2010 academic year. Stratified sampling method, which is among random sampling methods, has been used in order to determine the sample of the research. A total of 298 prospective teachers, who were first-year, second-year, third-year and fourth-year students, were randomly selected from the related department, and they constituted the sample group of the research. Information on the demographic features of the sample group is presented in Table 1.

Table 1
Frequency and Percentage Distributions Regarding the Demographic Information on the Sample Group

Options		1	2	3	4	Total
Gender		Male	Female	-	-	
	<i>n</i>	116	182			298
	<i>%</i>	38.9	61.1			100
Number of Siblings		1-3	4-6	7-9	-	-
	<i>n</i>	19	208	71		298
	<i>%</i>	6.4	69.8	23.8		100
Academic Year		First Year	Second Year	Third Year	Fourth Year	-
	<i>n</i>	75	71	77	75	298
	<i>%</i>	25.2	23.8	25.2	25.2	100

Data Collection Tools

Personal Values Scale: The PVI (Personal Values Inventory) scale developed by Roy (2003) has been reviewed via an exploratory factor analysis method by Asan, Ekşi, Doğan, and Ekşi (2008). The scale is composed of 47 items which have 5-level Likert type options (1. It does not characterize me at all, 2. It rarely characterizes me, 3. It characterizes me at times, 4. It usually characterizes me, 5. It always characterizes me) and five sub-dimensions (Discipline and Responsibility, Trust and Forgiveness, Honesty and Sharing, Respect and Candidness Sharing and Respect). Cronbach's alpha value, which has been used in calculating the total reliability value of the scale, is 0.63. Values of the sub-dimensions range from 0.60 to 0.71.

Critical Thinking Scale: The California Critical Thinking Disposition Inventory (CCTDI) was formed in 1990 via the Delphi project organized by the American Philosophical Association. The necessary processes were undertaken by Kökdemir (2003) in order to adapt the scale into Turkish. The Turkish form of the scale is composed of a total of 51 items and 6 sub-dimensions (Analyticity, Open-Mindedness, Inquisitiveness, Self-Confidence, Truth-Seeking, Systematicity). The scale has been designed as a Likert type (1. I completely disagree, 2. I disagree, 3. I partially disagree, 4. I partially agree, 5. I agree, 6. I completely agree). Cronbach's alpha value, which has been used in calculating the total reliability value of the scale, is 0.88. The values of the sub-dimensions range from 0.61 to 0.78 (Kökdemir, 2003). Both scales' number of items, average scores, standard deviations and reliability coefficients are given in Table 2.

Table 2
Reliability Coefficients, Averages and Standard Deviations of Personal Values and Critical Thinking Scales

	Number of Items	Alpha	\bar{X}	SD	n
Sharing and Respect	4	.84	17.24	2.912	298
Respect and Candidness	6	.61	19.86	2.869	298
Honesty and Sharing	9	.68	36.54	4.792	298
Trust and Forgiveness	12	.63	34.83	6.419	298
Discipline and Responsibility	16	.83	65.42	7.964	298
Analyticity	10	.71	39.96	5.497	298
Open-Mindedness	12	.65	42.79	5.088	298
Inquisitiveness	9	.70	33.47	5.342	298
Self-Confidence	7	.76	23.69	4.495	298
Truth-Seeking	7	.58	21.96	4.465	298
Systematicity	6	.62	21.40	4.130	298
Critical Thinking (Total)	51	.84	183.32	19.16	298

Process

Frequency, percentage, arithmetic mean, standard deviation, Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient Analysis and Multilinear Regression Analysis techniques have been utilized in analyzing the data obtained in the research.

Findings

Correlation Findings Regarding the Relationship among Prospective Teachers' Critical Thinking and Personal Values Scores

The results of the correlation analysis, which has been conducted to evaluate the relationship between prospective teachers' critical thinking and personal values, are given in Table 3.

When the table has been examined, it has been detected that there is a positive significant relationship among prospective teachers' scores for personal value sub-factors, namely sharing and respect and analyticity [$r = .40$], open-mindedness [$r = .32$], inquisitiveness [$r = .24$], self-confidence [$r = .23$], truth seeking [$r = .20$] and systematicity [$r = .25$]. It has been detected that there is a positive significant relationship among prospective teachers' respect and candidness factor their scores for and analyticity [$r = .25$], open-mindedness [$r = .13$], inquisitiveness [$r = .24$], self-confidence [$r = .28$] and systematicity [$r = .21$]. It has been detected that there is a positive significant relationship among prospective teachers' honesty and sharing factor and their scores for analyticity [$r = .41$], open-mindedness [$r = .27$], inquisitiveness [$r = .25$], self-confidence [$r = .36$], truth seeking [$r = .14$] and systematicity [$r = .29$]. It has been detected that there is a negative significant relationship between only the trust and forgiveness factor and systematicity [$r = -.15$]. It has been detected that there is a positive significant relationship among prospective teachers' discipline and responsibility factor and their scores for analyticity [$r = .55$], open-mindedness [$r = .25$], inquisitiveness [$r = .43$], self-confidence [$r = .52$], truth seeking [$r = .22$] and systematicity [$r = .46$].

Table 3
Correlation Findings Regarding Personal Values and Critical Thinking Factors

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Sharing and Respect	-										
Respect and Candidness	.40*	-									
Honesty and Sharing	.54*	.47*	-								
Trust and Forgiveness	-.08	-.06	-.04	-							
Discipline and Responsibility	.40*	.31*	.49*	-.10	-						
Analyticity	.40*	.25*	.41*	-.06	.55*	-					
Open-Mindedness	.32*	.13*	.27*	-.02	.25*	.38*	-				
Inquisitiveness	.24*	.24*	.25*	-.07	.43*	.48*	.21*	-			
Self-Confidence	.23*	.28*	.36*	-.03	.52*	.38*	.12*	.52*	-		
Truth-Seeking	.20*	.08	.14*	-.09	.22*	.18*	.40*	.08	.21*	-	
Systematicity	.25*	.21*	.29*	-.15*	.46*	.41*	.33*	.30*	.39*	.36*	-

$\eta=298, *p<.01$

Multilinear Regression Analysis Findings among Prospective Teachers' Personal Values and Critical Thinking Scores

The results of the multilinear regression analysis, which has been conducted to evaluate the power of prospective teachers' personal values factor scores to predict their critical thinking scores, are given in Table 4. A VIF (Variance Inflation Factor) test has been conducted in order to see whether or not there is a multilinear dependence among explanatory variables, and it has been understood that all dimensions have values that are close to 1. This result indicates that there is no multicollinearity in the regression model (Özdamar, 2009).

When the table has been examined, the power of personal values factors to predict critical thinking level has been found statistically significant [$F_{(5-292)}=43.068$ $p<.01$]. Accordingly, this shows that personal values sub-factors (Discipline and Responsibility, Trust and Forgiveness, Honesty and Sharing, Respect and Candidness, Sharing and Respect) collectively explain 42% [$R=.65, R^2=.42$] of critical thinking scores. In view of this finding, it has been found that a 58% change in critical thinking scores can be explained by other variables. Furthermore, upon the respective examination of personal values sub-factors, it has been observed that the discipline and responsibility factor is the variable that predicts the critical thinking scores at the highest degree [$R=.62, R^2=.38$].

Table 4.
Results of the Multilinear Regression Analysis among Critical Thinking and Personal Values Factor Scores

Application Level	B	SH _B	β	t	p
Constant	74.794	9.965		7.506	.000
Sharing and Respect	1.029	.361	.156	2.850	.005
Respect and Candidness	.277	.344	.041	.803	.422
Honesty and Sharing	.348	.236	.087	1.472	.142
Trust and Forgiveness	-.140	.134	-.047	-1.046	.296
Discipline and Responsibility	1.184	.126	.492	9.385	.000

$\eta=298, R=.65, R^2=.42, F=43,068, p<.01$

Discussion

Based on prospective teachers' perceptions, it has been observed that there is a negative significant relationship between the trust and forgiveness factor and the systematicity factor among the factors of personal values (discipline and responsibility, trust and forgiveness, honesty and sharing, respect and candidness, sharing and respect) and factors of critical thinking (analyticity, open-mindedness, inquisitiveness, self-confidence, truth seeking and systematicity). It has been observed that there is a positive significant relationship among all the other sub-factors.

Although there are many studies conducted on the relationship among different variables related to values (Costaa & Goodwinb, 2006; Collins, Steg, & Koning, 2007; Gömleksiz & Cüro, 2011; Lietz & Matthews, 2010) and critical thinking (Akar, 2007; Korkmaz & Yeşil, 2009; Özdemir, 2005; Serefoğlu & Akbıyık, 2006; Tok & Sevinç, 2010) in the literature, there is no research in which the relationship between the two factors is analyzed.

Human behaviors are the patterns of values, attitudes and beliefs of individuals.

We can foresee the attitudes and behaviors of the individuals to a great extent by getting information about their values (Elkatmış, 2009). Values, which are influential on the decisions of the individuals, are abstract in essence but they can be seen or sensed in the behaviors of the individuals (Karaköse & Altınkurt, 2009). Personal values are influential in the formation of an individual's attitudes and the individual's presenting a certain behavior accordingly, and people present behaviors in line with their values (Ünal, Deniz & Polat, 2008). Values may be looked to when the individual comes across a conflict or a decision making process (Yalmancı 2009). Thus, it is important to know the values held by teachers for an understanding and explanation of teacher behaviors, which may be defined as one of the most important factors for fulfilling the objectives of the education system (Dönmez & Cömert, 2007).

According to the results of the multilinear regression analysis among the sub-dimensions of the personal values and critical thinking scales, it has been found that personal values predict 42% of the change in the critical thinking scores. This finding shows that 58% of critical thinking can be explained by different variables.

Katz defines value as the element that regulates and combines the perception of the individual regarding his/her characteristics and social powers, and he proposes that the values of the individual should be closely examined when they play a role in decision making (Kuzgun, 2000). Every reaction exhibited by someone is based on a value (Yılmaz, 2009). However, values explain only a part of the causes that underlie behavior (Karalar & Kiracı, 2010). The fact that 42% of the change in the critical thinking scores obtained in the present research can be explained by personal values supports the findings in the literature.

More than the cognitive skills or abilities of the individual, it is the individual's willingness to take intellectual risks and to think critically that makes him/her an individual who can think effectively (Serefoğlu & Akbıyık, 2006). The need for people who have acquired critical thinking skills in terms of behaviors of choosing, organizing and using information, rapidly increases (Genç, 2008). That is

because individuals whose critical thinking is of a high standard, are expected to use more of the information that is given to them and to choose more rational decision making methods compared to those individuals whose critical thinking levels are low when making decisions in ambiguous circumstances (Kökdemir, 2003). The solidity of a teacher's system of values is effective in solving problems and balancing roles that conflict with each other. Moreover, this system of values is the product of both the teacher's personal and professional development (Turan & Aktan, 2008).

According to findings obtained in the research, it has been observed that there is a significant relationship among personal values and critical thinking. The teacher has a very significant function in the development of students' critical thinking skills. The most important role of the teacher in developing students' critical thinking skills is to shape the teaching environments and create applications that will support students in thinking creatively (Özdemir, 2005). In this regard, family and educators have important tasks to perform in order to increase the relationship among personal values and critical thinking.

Opportunities must be presented in order to develop and support the prospective teachers' personal values and critical thinking skills throughout the course of their education. Academicians must give their lessons in such a way that they can be taken as role models for prospective teachers in this respect. Teacher training is one of the most important stages of encouraging thinking skills in education. First of all, teachers must acquire thinking skills and apply those skills in real life situations. After teachers have acquired these skills, they can create activities to develop these skills for their students. For that reason, enabling teachers to acquire thinking skills is an important stage in educational studies. It is possible that a prospective teacher, who thinks critically and who is efficient in problem solving, may rather prefer thinking-based environments while forming educational environments (Tok & Sevinç, 2010). It is vital to nurture individuals to analyze what they hear, read and accordingly learn; to study those inputs from a critical perspective; filter those inputs in their minds; and question those inputs (Özkan, 2011).

It is very important for prospective teachers to have adequate knowledge and skills in those subjects in order to raise future students as individuals who will be inclined to think critically (Güven & Kürüm, 2008). That is because students' learning to think critically is related to the fact that teachers are educated in this subject (Demirel, 1999). Therefore, prospective teachers must be given the necessary training on critical thinking and values both before the service and during the service. Prospective teachers, who will work in schools, must not be individuals who only do what they are told; rather, they must be individuals who take responsibility by collectively using their personal values, critical thinking and decision making skills.

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