



# Performance Task Application Concerning the Promotion of the Value of Helpfulness in Social Studies Course for Primary Schools

Mustafa TAHİROĞLU<sup>a</sup>

Nevşehir University

## Abstract

This study deals with determining the impact of the performance tasks in the social studies course assigned to the 4th grade students about helpfulness and solidarity on their attitudes and level of acquisition of helpfulness value among students. "Mixed method", which is formed as a result of using a combination of qualitative and quantitative research designs was employed during the study. The experimental and control groups consisted of 16 students in each group. The research data were obtained based on the student reports, Helpfulness Attitude Scale and the Form of Your Feelings. Descriptive analysis method was employed in the qualitative data analysis, while Mann-Whitney U Test was used in the analysis of quantitative data. The result of the analysis suggested that there was a significant difference in favor of the experimental group ( $U = 24.000, p < 0.05$ ). Moreover, the result of the qualitative data analysis showed that experimental group students displayed positive attitudes and they seemed happy to help each other. In addition, they were observed to consider assistance important and they seemed willing to continue helping each other after the task. These results suggested that the performance tasks assigned to improve assistance and helpfulness proved effective to help students develop positive attitudes and behaviors.

## Key Words

Values, Values Education, Helpfulness, Performance Task, Attitude.

Humankind faces very serious challenges today on both both individual and social as well as global terms. Even though the new generation, compared with that of the past, is significantly better on nutrition, education and health care terms, it is also true that it faces many moral challenges. It is possible to observe these moral challenges and its consequences on both both individuals and the society. However, it is the challenges in a global context that principally threatens humanity. Of all these challenges, such are the ones that stand out in the world as socio-economic inequalities, war, conflict, disruption of the ecological balance and an

increase in violence. It is especially children that are increasingly affected in a negative way by violence, intolerance, and other problems (Köylü, 2007, p. 308; Tillman, 2000, p. IX).

In order to cope with these challenges, it is necessary that we first teach ourselves towards the "Age of Information and Communication Technology", a more civilized and humane globalization instead of turning ourselves to a globalization which puts humane values aside and alienates people. In addition, we should adopt a humanely life which prevents loss of humane, ethical and spiritual values, helping us resolve challenges such as poverty, injustice,

**a** Mustafa TAHİROĞLU, Ph.D., is an assistant professor of Primary School Education, Social Sciences Education (training of values, education supported with virtual museum, education of environment, health education, problems that instructors come across), education in the unified classes [problems that are confronted with during the programme applications] and fluent reading training (with the pupils who have reading disability) take place among his studies. *Correspondence:* Nevşehir University, Faculty of Education, Department of Primary Education, Nevşehir University Campus 50300 Nevşehir, Turkey. Email: mtahiroglu@nevsehir.edu.tr, tahiroglu80@hotmail.com Phone:+90 505 244 4574.

inequality, illiteracy, hunger, diseases, violence and conflicts, which in turn will improve our quality of life (UNESCO, 2005, p. 13). Therefore, humankind should comply with moral values in order to enjoy love, friendship, happiness, freedom and peace in a society because humankind is a being that can feel, think, share how they feel and what they produce in a society with common values. That's why they should have generally accepted values that form the basis of living together (Thiroux, 1980 cited in Akbaba-Altun, 2003; Tillman, 2000). Helpfulness is one of the generally accepted values that holds a society together. It includes such values as kindness, generosity, compassion, social responsibility and volunteering and this is a value that emerged as a result of solidarity and commitment to the community. The survival of a society depends on community solidarity as well as on individuals exhibiting and internalizing attitude of kindness. It is impossible for societies that turn a deaf ear and a blind eye to the needy individuals to progress and keep their existence. Landowners, farmers, industrialists, merchants and artisans thrive in society by helping each other (Aktepe, 2010; Kolukisa, Oruç, Akbaba, & Dündar, 2005; Paine, 1985 as cited in Koç, 2007).

Helping means using one's power and possibilities for someone else's welfare and helping someone in need is a value that every individual in a community should have. To really enjoy helping someone is an indicator of helpfulness (Kolukisa et al., 2005; Şen, 2007). To bring up helpful people with this value is one of the fundamental conditions to ensure social solidarity and cooperation (Çiftçi, Yüksel, & Yıldız, 2005). However, it is difficult for members of a given community with their own efforts. Therefore, the main objectives of education programs should be to equip individuals of learning age with values and skills that will help them make reasonable and moral decisions. However, today's modern educational system focuses mainly on skills and knowledge. The fact that the modern education system has attached excessive importance to knowledge and skills has resulted in the neglect of values and opinions (Ekşi, 2003; UNESCO, 2005). According to Raths, Harmin, and Simon (1978, p. 5-6) people nowadays are desperately asking for values. There appeared to be not so much need for value education years ago; however, there are too many inconsistencies and changes in the behaviours of people. Methods provided via value education for many people who struggle a lot to make their lives more meaningful are believed to make personal and social contributions to a significant degree.

Experts agree on the need to work on shaping of many school characteristics. However, resources and materials generally fail to be suitable for the level of students or to meet what their thinking system requires. On the other hand, progress will be faster when new principles and actions are consistent with the student's understanding and way of thinking. No progress can ever be made if there exists an inconsistency, which in turn creates a sense of insecurity (Davis, 2006; Sims, 2003). According to Yazıcı (2006, pp. 510-513), leaving the whole initiative to teach the values that we want our students to acquire in the hands of teachers and school administrators would result in the reduction of the impact of the expected benefits in the value teaching part of the courses. Therefore, it is necessary that a non-coincidental and a planned teaching approach be adopted in order to offer an effective teaching of values.

Moreover, teachers and parents should work in collaboration to come up with a clear plan of strategies to be applied and which values are to be taught. Pedagogues, families and other relevant authorities should make sure that a whole set of values regarding the school life is taught with the help of suitable resources and closely monitor the effectiveness of the teaching (Australian Government Department of Education, Science and Training, 2005, p. 7). Today, pedagogues, counselors, parents and youth leaders have got the opportunity to work in close collaboration with each other. This collaboration includes teaching, setting an example, identifying character traits, moral virtues, social values and self-orientation whose responsibility relies on our common future. If the above-mentioned objectives are achieved, the teaching of values will cease to oscillate between historical, traditional and progressive movements and then it will have a consistent, comprehensive role in unifying each generation (Kirschenbaum, 2000). Another important point to note in the teaching of values is that students should be taught the values in a way that ensures the natural acquisition of values. The mere teaching of values does not guarantee the acceptance of the actions that ensure continuity. That is to say, it is suggested that concepts and methods can be taught: however, teaching of values cannot be ensured solely with texts and courses but it requires practice and presentation as does a culinary course, that is, students should be taught the values heart and soul (Hossain & Marinova, 2004).

According to Taba (1962) and Fraenkel (1973), students need to get the opportunity to check whether experiences are just as they are told in reality or fiction, to react with their feelings and to sympathize with other people. Therefore, teachers need to

increase the awareness of students in order to help them develop empathy and gain an insight into the feelings of other people (cited in UNESCO, 1986). In fact, there are various challenges to do a study on values because there have been many serious debates going on about the classification of values, what kind of methods are to be followed and to what extent the results are reliable (Yapıcı & Zengin, 2003, p. 174).

In this study, as a performance task assignment, students were asked to provide help within their capacity- either moral or material- with someone in need of anything so that they could empathize with other people and experience the feeling when they helped other people. According to Airasian (1994), Huerta-Macias (1995), Brown & Hudson (1998), Stiggins (2001), Kutlu (2002) and Şenel (2008), performance assessment is the condition whereby students show their understanding and adopt an approach in the face of situations and experiences and see to what extent they are capable of managing challenges they face. These conditions help determine students' abilities which are poor or good. Moreover, these conditions encourage students to resolve a problem as, rather than product-oriented, they are process-oriented and based on real-life scenarios. Performance tasks, on the other hand, are assigned to observe the conditions under which students experience for a certain period of time and to check their products. Teachers observe their students for that period of time and decide on their level based on the products (cited in Bacanak, 2008). Based on these statements, performance tasks were supposed to help students develop positive attitudes and behaviors towards that certain value by experiencing the situation they value. In addition, this study deals with the impact of performance tasks on students' attitudes and acquisition level regarding their value of helpfulness.

### Objective

This study aimed to find out the impact of the performance tasks assigned for 4th year social studies course at primary school level to help students experience the impact of helpfulness and solidarity upon the attitudes of students towards the helpfulness value and their opinion on being helpful.

### Method

#### The Design of the Research

This study was designed in accordance with various techniques including the methods of quantitative

and qualitative data collection. The quantitative dimension of the research was carried out using pretest-posttest control group design in order to show the difference of attitudes between the students that were assigned performance tasks regarding helpfulness and solidarity and those who were not given that task. Based on the pretest-posttest control group design, two groups were formed at random, the former being the experimental group and the latter being the control group and these groups were measured both at the beginning and at the end of the experiment. The qualitative dimension of the research contained the students' responses on the form "Your Feelings" and their reports about whom they helped and how they felt afterwards.

#### Study Group

The research participants were 32 students in the 4th grade (4/A) at a public school in Aksaray. The students were divided into two groups as the experimental group (8 girls and 8 boys) and the control group (8 girls and 8 boys).

#### Procedure

- i. As part of the pre-test, both groups of students were scored on a Helpfulness Attitude Scale.
- ii. Students were assigned a performance task about solidarity and helpfulness in their social sciences class and they were asked to fill out the "Your Feelings" form. The "Your Feelings" form and the details regarding this performance task can be found in Appendix-1 and Appendix -2.
- iii. The process lasted 6 weeks. 4 weeks were allotted for students to do the task and prepare a report and in the following 2 weeks, students were asked to present their reports and to fill out the "Your Feelings" form.
- iv. The control group was not assigned any performance tasks about the same value. Both groups, however, participated in the activities about helpfulness outlined in the teacher's handbook.
- v. As part of the post-test, both groups of students were scored on a Helpfulness Attitude Scale.

#### Instrument for Data Collection

**Helpfulness Attitude Scale:** Helpfulness Attitude Scale was used in this study to measure to what extent the students value helpfulness. This scale, developed by Aktepe (2010) contains 7 factors and 26 items. It is

a 5-level scale: “completely agree (5), agree (4), somewhat agree (3) disagree (2), totally disagree (1)”.

**Your Feelings Form:** This form is designed to help students develop a sense of empathy, make choices freely and be aware of their personal values by considering the consequences of their actions. After they were assigned the performance task, they were asked to complete the ‘Your Feelings’ form anonymously.

**Student Reports:** The experimental group students prepared and presented a report on how they offered help and these reports were collected in order to measure the extent of their help.

### Data Analysis

**Quantitative Data Analysis:** Pretest and posttest scores of the experimental and control groups were compared via Mann-Whitney U Test with a significance level of 0.05. The data were analysed with SPSS 15 (Statistical Package for the Social Science).

**Qualitative Data Analysis:** Descriptive analysis method was used in the analysis of the qualitative data. In this process, there were direct references to the students responses on the ‘Your Feelings’ form and the students reports, where necessary. In addition, students were not referenced by name, but rather by their anonymous code numbers, e.g. Participant 1 (P1), Participant 2 (P2).

## Results

### Findings on Students’ Attitude towards the Value of Helpfulness

The scores of the students gathered from the pre-test of “Helpfulness Attitude Scale” in the experimental and control groups before the experimental process were tested with Mann-Whitney U Test and no significant difference between the two groups ( $U = 108\ 500, p > 0.05$ ) was found. This result showed us that the attitudes of the experimental group towards the value of helpfulness in the pre-test were close to those of the control group.

On the other hand, the post-test results showed that there was a significant difference ( $U=24.000, p<0.05$ ) between the groups when the scores from “The Helpfulness Scale” post-test were analyzed by Mann-Whitney U Test. One can conclude from the results that the students taking part in the performance tasks about helpfulness and solidarity adopt a more positive attitude towards the value of helpfulness than those who did not take part in the performance tasks.

**This Finding Leads us to Think that the Performance Task Assignment Proves Effective in Having Students Develop a More Positive Attitude towards Helpfulness and Solidarity:** When the data gathered from the student reports and the “Your Feelings” form filled out by the students of the experimental group were analyzed, one could conclude that:

- i) The experimental group students offered help to the elderly, the handicapped, animals, plants and others that need help.
- ii) The majority of the experimental group students were observed to be glad to receive assistance. They also agreed that those in need of help should be offered assistance, which clearly shows us that the students had positive attitudes towards the value of helpfulness.
- iii) The experimental group students were observed to be happy to help each other even if it was just an assignment for them to do.
- iv) It could be said that the experimental group students were glad when they offered help and shared happiness with others.
- v) Among the experimental group students who stated before the assignment that they would not help but their family members were observed to feel like offering help to those in need of help after the performance assignment.
- vi) The experimental group students were asked to check whether there were sure of their attitudes towards being helpful after the performance task and to see whether they would be happy with the consequences of their actions. Once the findings were analyzed, one could see that all of the students were of the opinion that offering help to those in need of help yielded positive results.
- vii) Almost all of the experimental group students were observed to be aware of the grave problems likely to occur in society when the value of helpfulness ceased to exist.
- viii) Almost all of the experimental group students were observed to be aware of the importance of helpfulness.
- ix) Almost all of the experimental group students were observed to go on with their benevolent actions for the rest of their life.
- x) After the performance task, all of the experimental group students were found to be determined to help those in need of help even if they were in any case prevented from doing so.

### Discussion

The findings of the research showed that performance task assignments about helpfulness and solidarity in the social sciences class increased students' helpfulness scores that they exhibited positive attitudes during the performance task and that they appeared willing to continue with display of positive attitudes even after the task. This is a clear proof that the performance task about the value of helpfulness and solidarity proves efficient in helping students develop positive attitudes and behaviours.

Literature review shows us that activities applied regarding value teaching have positive impacts on the attitudes and behaviours of students towards the subject in question (Aktepe, 2010; Aladağ, 2009; Balcı, 2008; Demirtaş, 2009; Dilmaç, 2007; Keskinoğlu, 2008; Koç, 2007; Meaney, 1979; Taylor, 2007). When the findings of this research are taken into consideration, it is possible to state that certain activities and programs developed for teaching values prove efficient in having students develop positive attitudes and behaviours towards the related values. In contrast, however, the results of the studies by Germaine (2001), Lamberta (2004) and Robinson-Lee (2008) suggest that activities or programs applied for teaching values are not efficient enough to achieve the goals of that program. This view leads us to think that all of the activities or programs developed for teaching values do not ensure that the students develop positive attitudes and behaviours about the related values. Ricketts (2008), in his study on primary school teachers' point of view towards character teaching, concludes that value teaching should be offered in a meaningful way, that is to say, in relation with the real life. According to UNESCO (2005), values should first be associated with the experience and opinions of a person and then be adopted on emotional level. On the other hand, Sims (2003) states that if the principles and actions planned to be taught are consistent with the students' understanding, the progress will be much faster; otherwise, a sense of insecurity will prevail and no progress can be made.

The statements above lead us to think that it is not enough to merely be cognizant of a value in order for that value to be taught or developed. One should be aware of the positive or negative aspects of the related values in their lives and identify them with their experience and knowledge if we want them to adopt these values. Therefore, it can be said that it is necessary to conduct studies whereby individuals can see and experience the impacts of the related values in real life commensurate with their age and

levels while teaching or developing these values. This study has helped students to see the impacts of the helpfulness value by "experiencing" it during the performance assignment. Moreover, it has sought to come up with reasons as to how important this value meant to themselves, in other words, whether it is consistent with themselves and whether they will act in line with this value for the rest of their lives. In conclusion, it was observed that students were of the opinion that those in need of help should be offered assistance, that they were glad to help, and they agreed that helping those in need would result in positive consequences. Furthermore, they were observed that they were aware of the importance of helpfulness, that they agreed that help should be uninterruptedly offered to those in need of help, and that they were determined to help even if in any case they were barred from doing so.

As is known, values influence every aspect of our life, consciously or unconsciously. They are the values that help us distinguish between what is good and bad, ideal thinking and acting. In other words, they guide us to make our decisions and plans for our life (Özensel, 2003; Rokeach, 1973). In this sense, it is vital that values be taught to our children when we consider how important values are in our life. When the findings of this study are analyzed, one can see that students develop positive attitudes and behaviours towards the value of helpfulness after they have experienced it themselves in their life.

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