

## **Moral Development in Early Childhood: Benevolence and Responsibility in the Context of Children's Perceptions and Reflections**

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### **Abstract**

This study aimed to examine children's perceptions regarding the concepts of benevolence and responsibility in early childhood and the way they put them into practice. The study was designed according to the basic qualitative research method and consisted of 64 children between the ages of 4 and 5. The data were collected through interactive value stories, children's drawings related to the relevant values, and semi-structured interviews. The data analysis presented remarkable results, the first of which is that preschool children may have not only result-oriented but also intention-oriented moral values. The second result is that the course of behaviours related to moral values is primarily directed towards family members. As the third result, preschool children's moral values were found to appear often in their relationships with people in need and with people who are much older. Finally, the fourth result indicates that children associate moral values not only with human beings but also with nature and plants, which is a significant indicator that universal moral thinking can develop in children of this age.

**Keywords:** Early Childhood Education, Values Education, Moral Development

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## **Introduction**

The impact, role, and importance of early childhood education not only on the lives of children but also on their families are rapidly increasing in the world (Lee & Hayden, 2009; UNESCO, 2008). The preschool period is one of the most important stages aiming the social, emotional and cognitive development of children in a programmed manner after their own families (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006, p. 993-1028; Hildebrandt & Zan, 2008, p.352). In the process of growing up and socializing, children form their own moral and ethical grounds according to what they hear, experience, and obtain from the society (Veisson & Kuurme, 2010). Not only the social, emotional and language-wise development of preschool children, but their mental and physical development is expected to be achieved in a systematic educational environment. In addition to the developmental areas mentioned above, the preschool period is of critical importance in the lives of individuals in terms of moral development. In this sense, values are ethical principles that contain good and desirable characteristics, motivate and influence human behaviour, affect decision-making processes, and give us an idea about what we should be like and how we should act (Cooper, 2014; Sagiv, 2002; Schaefer, 2012). In other words, the early childhood period is of great importance not only in academic terms but also in terms of raising individuals with sound personalities and values.

In this context, this study has tried to determine whether preschool children possess moral values, which are very important in terms of human skills, and to identify the value-related perceptions of preschool children and how children can put such values into practice.

### **Responsibility Value in Early Childhood**

Responsibility can be defined as being aware of one's own behaviour or any kind of circumstances within his/her authority and undertaking the consequences of his/her actions and deeds. In addition, people are expected to take the moral and legal responsibilities of their own actions and circumstances within their authority (Glover, 1970). Lickona (1991) defined responsibility as the active aspect of morality. The author further specified the concept of responsibility as showing care and attention for oneself and others, fulfilling one's obligations, participating in the social process, trying to alleviate suffering, and striving for a better world.

Undoubtedly, children are not born with a sense of responsibility. However, learning to be responsible starts sooner than most people think. It could be argued that a variety of phenomena that children can perceive around them from the moment they are born, the care and attention shown by parents, and the way parents fulfil their responsibilities create the initial effects on children. Scientists who study the development of child personality often claim that young children acquire their knowledge of responsibility according to the way their needs are met by the people around them. From another standpoint, the currently used preschool program by the Ministry of National Education (MoNE, 2013) in Turkey stated that children aged five to six begin to notice the consequences of their

behaviour and to act more responsibly. In fact, it seems clear that a well-structured social environment along with maturation can help to gain values in early childhood.

### **Benevolence Value in Early Childhood**

Studies show that the benevolence value can be observed in children starting from an early age. As an example, in a study by Warneken and Tomasello (2007), the researchers observed 18-month-old toddlers during routine activities at home, and the study concluded that children in this month are able to help their parents in daily routines. Similarly, the preschool education program in Turkey (MoNE, 2013) emphasized that three-four-year-old children can handle simple tasks and responsibilities in activities and fulfil their daily routines.

In this context, it is of great importance for children to learn values from an early age, whether it is achieved through educational activities in schools or through other activities in families (Karatekin & Sönmez, 2014).

### **Moral Development in Early Childhood**

Moral development theories about childhood examined in the literature emphasized three different theories, the first of which is based on the ideas of Piaget (1965) and Kohlberg (1984), which try to explain moral development with different aspects of cognitive development. Another group of theories are those put forward by Gilligan (1997) and Hoffman (2001), which emphasize the importance of emotional factors rather than cognitive development and the importance of the principles of care and upbringing of children. And finally, there are theories arguing that moral development occurs with the combination of cognitive and emotional development as mentioned above, and that the moral judgments of individuals can change according to the situation and conditions (Eisenberg, 1986; Rest, 1994).

Among these theories, Piaget's theory carried out studies on moral development with story pairs that he read to children and that contain dilemmas as well as a moral theme (McLeod, 2015).

*“There was once a little girl who was called Marie. She wanted to give her mother a nice surprise and cut out a piece of sewing for her. But she didn't know how to use the scissors properly and cut a big hole in her dress.*

*A little girl called Margaret went and took her mother's scissors one day when her mother was out. She played with them for a bit. Then, as she didn't know how to use them properly, she made a little hole in her dress.” (Piaget, 1932).*

During such an activity, after the story pairs are read, the children are asked, "Who is naughtier?" Typically, young children (in preoperational and early concrete operations, i.e., up to the age of 9-10) say Marie is the naughtier child. Drawing on Piaget's theory, Kohlberg created his own theory consisting of three levels and six stages, and similarly, tried to determine the moral states of

individuals by revealing scenarios containing moral dilemmas. The best known of these scenarios is the Heinz dilemma (Kohlberg, 1969). According to Kohlberg, cognitive development is a prerequisite for moral development, but is not sufficient by itself.

### **The Current Study**

Since education in preschool affects the future life of children, it is necessary to recognize and evaluate this period in the best way in order to raise children with positive personalities (Aral, Kandir & Can Yaşar, 2011). In the 2013 preschool education program in Turkey, the expression saying the child “pays attention to cultural and universal values”, which is included under the heading of the fundamental features of the program, emphasized that the exercises related to values education should be applied in classrooms (2013, Ministry of National Education [MoNE]). Education programs and activities to be implemented by teachers are of considerable importance for preschool children who are still in concrete operational period and who have difficulties in understanding and learning abstract concepts. At this stage, the preschool education program will help children learn abstract concepts such as values by "carrying out play-based activities, enabling children to learn by exploring, encouraging them to use their daily life experiences and close environment opportunities, and presenting concrete examples from life through activities involving family participation".

According to many scientists, although the critical age for moral development is often regarded as adolescence (Karabanova & Podolskij, 2003; Molchanov, 2013), the pre-pubertal childhood periods of individuals are also considered very important in terms of moral development (Burmenskaya, 2009; Bustamante et al., 2020; Fechter, 2014; Hasegawa, 2016; Hoffman, 2001; Karabanova, 2010; Stefanenko & Kupavskaya, 2010; Turiel, 1983; Wang et al., 2015).

In the literature, there are different studies about the acquisition of values in early childhood (Balat & Dağal, 2009; Civelek, 2006; Dereli, 2014; Dinç, 2011; Günindi, 2015; Macready, 2009; Öztürk Samur, & Deniz, 2014). Most of these studies emphasize that further studies should be carried out on values in early childhood and that values should be acquired beginning from early childhood (Alpöge, 2011; Atabey & Ömeroğlu, 2016; Neslitürk, Özkal & Dal, 2015; Sapasağlam, 2017). The relevant literature comprises children's perceptions of characters and themes in story books (Hsiao & Chen, 2015), children's perceptions of responsibility value (Sapasağlam, 2017), teachers as role models (Dağlıoğlu, 2011), emotions (Burkitt, Barrett, & Davis, 2009) as well as case studies on (Leslie, Knobe, & Cohen, 2006) children's perceptions of good and bad (Knobe & Roedder, 2009; Lee & Hyoung, 2012; Yüksel, Canel, Mutlu, Yılmaz, & Çap, 2015), family perceptions (Kaynak & Temel, 2015; Türkkkan, 2004), love value (Günindi, 2015), and children's drawings of toys (Karaman & Akyol, 2011). On the other hand, no study was found to be conducted through interviews, story completion, and children's drawings with the purpose of revealing the perceptions of preschool children on benevolence and responsibility values and how children can put them into practice.

In this context, this study examined whether preschool children have the moral values that are very important when it comes to human skills, and their perceptions of such values and how they can put them into practice.

### Method

This study employed the basic qualitative research method. In basic qualitative studies, data are collected through interviews, observations, and document review (Merriam, 2013). Participants of the present study were selected by purposive sampling technique. It is predicted that the people who are included in the purposive sample group will provide information willingly about the research problem (Creswell, 2013). For this reason, the study was carried out in 2 classes from the morning groups studying in the spring semester of the 2019-2020 academic year. Qualitative data collection techniques were used in the data collection process of the study. Necessary legal permissions were obtained from the Ethics Committee in Kilis University, and Kilis Provincial Directorate of National Education with the approval number, E.2047381. In addition, relevant consent forms were obtained from the parent.

### Participants

This study consisted of 64 children who were being educated in kindergarten. Convenience sampling technique was used while determining the participants of the study. According to Yıldırım and Şimşek (2006), convenience sampling is less costly as it brings speed and practicality to the study. At this stage of the study, first of all, the demographic information of the participating children is presented as follows:

**Table 1.** Demographic Information about Participants

| Demographic Information |      | N  |
|-------------------------|------|----|
| Age                     | 4.00 | 28 |
|                         | 5.00 | 36 |
| Gender                  | Girl | 30 |
|                         | Boy  | 34 |
| Total                   |      | 64 |

As can be seen in Table 1, 28 of the children included in the study were 4 years old and 36 were 5 years old. Of the children participating in the study, 30 were girls, and 34 were boys.

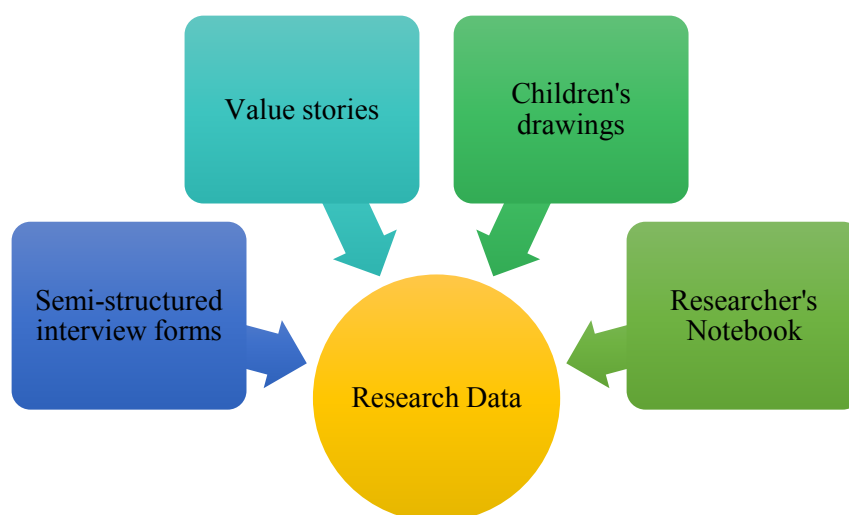
### Data Collection Tools

In order to establish the theoretical basis of the study, data were collected with demographic information form, semi-structured interview form, interactive stories and pictures during the implementation process in addition to the information obtained as a result of reviewing domestic and foreign literature. Interview forms and stories about benevolence and responsibility values were

prepared by the researchers with the purpose of data collection; expert opinions were taken and pilot applications were carried out. The forms were finalized in line with the feedback received. The data collection process started after the necessary legal permissions were obtained.

While collecting the research data, the validity and reliability of the study were strengthened by making use of measure triangulation (Kimchi et al., 1991), which is one of the methods of multiple triangulation (Campbell & Fiske, 1959; Denzin, 1970; Polit and Hungler, 1995). In measure triangulation, context is about the effect of the purpose of the measurement on the meaning it adds to the measurement. The framework of the study also enables to interpret the data obtained within the scope of the study (Flick, Kardorff, & Steinke, 2004). Besides this, it enables to conduct more than one measurement of any subject and to notice as many aspects as possible (Neuman, 2013).

During data collection, a focus group meeting was held with the children at the beginning of the day, followed by an interactive story being completed within the scope of Turkish language activities, and finally, children were asked to draw pictures related to the values during the art activities (See Figure 1).



**Figure 1.** Data collection tools

*Semi-structured interview form:* A semi-structured interview form was developed by the researchers by reviewing the relevant literature and examined by seven preschool experts in terms of its suitability for the field as well as its purpose and clarity, and the necessary corrections were made to make it ready to collect data. This form tries to reveal the opinions of preschool children about benevolence and responsibility values, and consists of 12 questions in total, including six open-ended questions, i.e. “Which of your friends are helpful? Why?” and “What responsibilities do we have in our homes”, and other six open-ended questions related to benevolence.

*Stories about values:* Frequently used in preschool education, story completion is one of the important activity types that develop children's language and speaking skills, help them express

themselves, and contribute to the development of children's creativity. The researchers created stories about each of the values of benevolence and responsibility for the purposes of this study. In certain parts of the story, the researcher stopped the story and asked the children about the story and how the story was likely to continue. The responses given by the children were noted by the researcher to prevent data loss.

*Children's drawings:* At the start of the day, after having conversations with children and the story completion activity within the scope of language activities of Turkish, an art activity was carried out on the values of benevolence and responsibility. Before starting to draw, the children were given preliminary information about the pictures they were going to draw by asking them questions such as "Children, what is benevolence in your opinion? Who are helpful people?" Furthermore, the children were expected to draw their thoughts, views and perceptions about the responsibility value after being asked some questions about it. The researcher interviewed each child who was painting, and asked what s/he was drawing or what s/he was thinking while painting, and took note of the child's thoughts and what s/he wanted to draw on the back of the drawing paper.

*Researcher's Notebook:* One of the most basic data collection techniques in qualitative studies is undoubtedly researcher observations (Ekiz, 2013). In qualitative studies, observations are performed in a less structured manner, and the researcher tries to observe the research process as naturally as possible, rather than observing according to the categories and classes determined previously (Punch, 2013). The researcher of the present study took notes from the beginning of the study to the end of data collection.

### **Data Collection**

In this process, first of all, focus group discussions were held with teachers in order to learn the perspectives of preschool children on the values of responsibility and benevolence by informing especially the teachers of the classrooms where the study would be conducted. The data were completed in 4 separate classes with one-day intervals for a total of 4 days. Content analysis, one of the qualitative data analysis methods, was used for analysing the data obtained from the interviews and story completion.

**Table 2.** Data Collection Days

|                     | <i>Monday</i> | <i>Tuesday</i> | <i>Wednesday</i> | <i>Thursday</i> |
|---------------------|---------------|----------------|------------------|-----------------|
| Morning attenders 1 | X             |                |                  |                 |
| Morning attenders 2 |               | X              |                  |                 |
| Morning attenders 3 |               |                | X                |                 |
| Morning attenders 4 |               |                |                  | X               |

Some strategies were used in the study to ensure validity and reliability. These are intra-method variability (triangulation), expert review, and observational reliability (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2006). To this end, method diversification was achieved by making use of observation, interviews, and document analysis during the research process. In the presentation of the data obtained from the study, the data obtained from observation, interviews, story completion and children's drawings were presented in a qualitative perspective in a comparative manner.

### **Data Analysis**

Content analysis method was used in the analysis of the data obtained from semi-structured focus interviews with children and interactive story completion activities conducted within the scope of Turkish language activities. In addition to this, an art activity was carried out with the children participating in the study to identify the extent of their benevolence and responsibility values. Before starting the art activity, the children were given some initial information about the pictures they would draw by asking them such questions as “Children, what is benevolence in your opinion? Who are helpful people?” Then the children were asked to draw a picture about the values of benevolence and responsibility by saying “*Would you draw a picture about benevolence?*” After that, the same process was carried out on the responsibility value and children were expected to portray their thoughts, opinions, and perceptions about the value in question. During the activity, the researcher interviewed each child who was painting, and asked what s/he was drawing or what s/he was thinking while painting, and took note of the child's thoughts and what s/he wanted to draw. The drawings of children collected at the end of this process were analysed using the document analysis method.

### **Validity and Reliability**

Validity and reliability were ensured by some strategies, which are intra-method variability (triangulation), expert review and observational reliability (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2005). In order to ensure validity in the study, the interview form and stories were examined by seven preschool education experts during the preparation process in terms of their suitability to the field, purpose, and comprehensibility, after which necessary corrections were made to make them ready to collect data. In the process of determining the participants, purposive sampling technique was used, and the data collection tool was explained in detail with examples of questions. In addition, direct quotes, which are frequently used in qualitative studies, were made, and validity studies of the study were carried out by explaining the data analysis method. In addition, detailed information was given on how data was collected and analysed during the data collection phase. The findings were used without comment to prevent data loss. Also, the study was supported by the researcher's notebook and reliability was strengthened by ensuring consistency among data.



## Results

### Activity 1

#### Results Obtained from the Interviews

In this part of the study, the interview findings were transcribed to the computer-based format to make content analysis, and the codes and themes were specified in line with the purpose of the research. Content analysis was conducted on the interviews in order to reveal the views on the benevolence and responsibility values of preschool children, and the interview documents were divided into codes and themes. Table 3 presents the preschool children's views on benevolence and responsibility values.

**Table 3.** Results regarding the data obtained from the interviews

| Theme          | Category            | Code                   | F  |
|----------------|---------------------|------------------------|----|
| Benevolence    | People              | Helping family members | 27 |
|                |                     | Helping the elderly    | 22 |
|                | Other living beings | Helping animals        | 13 |
| Responsibility | Tasks at school     | Order                  | 23 |
|                |                     | Self-care              | 18 |
|                | Tasks at home       | Helping others         | 6  |

In order to determine the opinions of preschool children on benevolence and responsibility values, content analysis was performed on the interviews; relevant codes were created and classified under themes. In this regard, the views of preschool children on the value of benevolence were examined under three themes: "Helping Family Members, Helping the Elderly, and Helping Animals." Regarding the themes of helping family members and helping the elderly, which are under the heading of benevolence value, children mostly expressed their thoughts as helping parents at home, helping mother with cooking or making a cake, helping younger siblings with painting. In this context, Melisa said, "My mother may need help while she is making a cake or cookies. At those times, I should help my mother," while Mahmut said, "We should help the elderly, uncles, grandfathers, mothers. We should help old people cross the road", and Mehmet said, "When the weather is hot, some animals run out of water, we have to give them water then. We can leave water in a bowl" to express their thoughts about the value of benevolence.

On the other hand, opinions of the preschool children in the study on the responsibility value have been examined under three themes: "Order, Self-care, and Helping Others." Regarding the themes of order, self-care and helping others, which are included under the value of responsibility, children mostly expressed their thoughts about the value of responsibility indicating such behaviours as knowing their responsibilities in the classroom, picking up their toys, keeping their rooms clean and tidy, and putting the items and toys they took back in their places. In this respect, Ece said, "We

*should pay attention to what our parents say; we must not let go of their hands while walking on the road"; Elif Naz said, "We should pick up our toys and put them in their places after playing games at home, we should not make a mess with them". Furthermore, Emir expressed his responsibilities regarding nutrition and said, "We should finish our fruits, we should finish our meal on our plate", and Beyza expressed her opinions in relation the value of responsibility and said, "We should sleep on time".*

In addition, a remarkable statement in the researcher's notebook regarding the interviews held at the start of the day is as follows:

*"The interviews were less efficient than I expected. The children would not focus their attention on the situation. After the interviews, we had a short chat with the teachers. I also told them about the situation. I found out that the teachers, unfortunately, usually started the day allowing the children to play without having a start-the-day activity on the grounds that children cannot do activities without playing games first. In short, teachers do not follow the daily flow included in the 2013 preschool education program. Therefore, children do not know what it is to start the day, how to do it and what to talk about when starting the day. Despite this, we were able to collect satisfactory data" (Researcher's notebook, 2019, p. 2).*

## **Activity 2**

### **Results Obtained from the Interactive Story Completion Exercise**

At this stage of the study, the findings are related to the data obtained by reading the stories about the benevolence and responsibility values to the children as created by the researchers during the Turkish activities. The children were asked some questions about the values by stopping the stories at certain times and at the end of the story. The story about the value of responsibility was narrated as follows:

"Once there was a forest where everyone had a responsibility. There was an elephant called Tonton and a mouse called Vikvik, who took care of the cleaning of that forest. One day Tonton and Vikvik got bored of cleaning and started doing other things. Tonton and Vikvik just played games, and never cleaned up in the following days. Then the forest was so polluted that all the animals started to get sick. (1) Nobody understood what was happening. They did not understand why everyone started to get sick in the forest where no one had ever been sick before...

- 1- Why do you think the animals in the forest got sick?
- 2- Why was everywhere dirty in the forest?
- 3- Why do you think the order in the forest got deteriorated?"

The children were asked to answer the questions according to the flow of the story while telling them the story and at the end of the story. When asked "Why do you think the animals in the forest got sick?", Elif Nisa replied, "Because everywhere is full of garbage", and Asaf replied,

“Because they threw the garbage around”, and Alperen said, “Because Tonton and Vikvik did not fulfil their responsibilities and they always played games”. When asked “Why was everywhere dirty in the forest?”, Elif Naz said, “Because they did not collect the garbage and threw it on the ground”, and Ece said, “Tonton did not collect the garbage”. All of the children who answered the question: “Why do you think the order in the forest got deteriorated?” stated that Tonton and Vikvik did not fulfil their responsibilities and therefore, the order was broken as a result of failing to collect the garbage.

The children were observed to answer the questions related to the story called, "Help and cheer up!", about the value of benevolence, in accordance with the flow of the story. As an answer to the question: “What do you think Tintin may have done when stuck in the tree” Eray said, “Tintin may have asked the squirrel to help him to be saved”, while Semih said, “I think he said, brother Squirrel, I got stuck in the tree. Can you help me rescue?”, and Elif said, “Tintin probably cried when he got stuck in the tree. He asked the squirrel for help and the squirrel saved him”.

When asked "What do you think the squirrel may have done when he saw Tintin stuck in the tree?", all of the children said, "*The squirrel must have helped Tintin.*", or "*He helped and saved Tintin*". As an answer to the question: "Why didn't Tintin ask for help when he got stuck in the tree?", Beyza said, "*Because Tintin didn't help anyone either*", while Ayşe Tuba said, "*Because Tintin thinks helping is a bad thing*".

The findings about interactive story reading showed that the children who participated in the study gave proper answers to the questions in accordance with the purpose of the story. It was also observed that the children listened to the story carefully, and were able to establish a cause-effect relationship and make inferences in the context of the story. Based on this, it can be concluded that the children participating in the study have a certain level of morality regarding responsibility and benevolence values.

### **Activity 3**

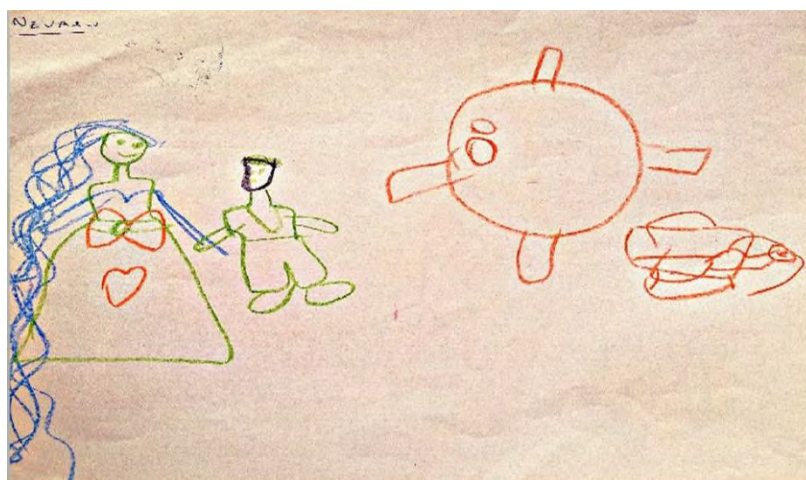
#### **Results Obtained from the Children's Drawings**

In order to determine the children's experiences on the subject and to understand what these values mean for them; the researchers used the children's drawings. Children were asked to portray what the values in question meant to them and what came to mind about responsibility and benevolence. After making the necessary explanations, the researchers did not interfere with the children. The children were, therefore, expected to portray their pure thoughts and perceptions of the values. In addition, the researchers took notes about the pictures by asking the children, whose picture was finished, what they had drawn.

*In this section, there are findings of children's drawings about the responsibility value.*



*Picture 1.* Tuba is 5 years old. In this picture, she tries to explain her sense of responsibility by indicating the necessity to keep her room clean and tidy. The lines depicted on the top of the closet represent her tidied-up clothes. Nothing seems messy in the room.



*Picture 2.* Neval is 5 years old. In this picture, she helps her mother with setting the table. She draws hearts on her mother's dress because she loves her very much. Her mother's hair looks very long and beautiful. Neval leaves the plates on the dining table in order.



*Picture 3.* Elif is 5 years old. In this picture, she gets up in the morning and tidies up her bed. The colour orange represents the toy locker and the colour blue the wardrobe. Everything is neat and in right place. Elif considers tidying up her room as her responsibility.



*Picture 4.* Egemen is 4 years old. In this picture, he and his brother are picking up the toys scattered around his room. The yellow circles represent the scattered toys. Egemen states that they will collect the toys and put them in the yellow closet. In his painting, Egemen seems to emphasize the value of responsibility by tidying up his room, and the benevolence and helping-others values by doing it with his brother.



*Picture 5.* Derya is 4 years old. In this picture, she goes out with her mother and does not let go of her mother's hand. Derya considers not leaving her mother's hand as a responsibility. She also tries to illustrate that they will water the flower. She states that because the weather is hot, the flower can dry out, so it should be watered.

As can be seen in the pictures above, the children mostly consider the responsibility value as tidying up their rooms, helping their mothers with the housework, and picking up their toys. These findings support each other with those obtained from the interviews and story completion activity.

### Pictures on the Benevolence Value

*In this section, there are findings of children's drawings about the benevolence value.*



*Picture 6.* Melek is 4 years old. In this picture, her mother buys Melek clothes as a gift. Melek considers her mother's buying her clothes as a way of helping her. Melek expresses that she is happy when she receives a gift from her mother.



*Picture 7.* Ayşe is 5 years old. In this picture, her grandfather and grandmother are very old and have trouble walking. Ayşe takes them to the park and helps them walk. She expresses benevolence as helping her elders. Her grandparents do not see very well so Ayşe tells them what she sees outside.



*Picture 8.* İrem is 5 years old. In this picture, she gives an aid package to a person in need of help. She separates the concept of benevolence from the family context and considers it as helping people in need. She emphasizes that people in need of help should be helped. Helping people in need makes İrem happy.



*Picture 9.* Fuat is 4 years old. In this picture, Fuat helps a friend who falls to the ground and lifts him up. Similar to Figure 8, helping each other is expressed as helping other people outside of the family, showing us that children are able to relate some values to different people outside of the family.



*Picture 10.* Ayşenur is 5 years old. In this picture, she waters the water-thirsty plants in the sun, showing that plants can also be helped. She states that if they are given no water, they can dry out. Pictures 8 and 9 represent that the children participating in the research can relate the values in question to other people apart from their family members. Picture 10, however, represents a higher-level mindset that cares about a non-human creature, is aware of its need for water for its survival, and tries to meet this need. Also, in this picture, Ayşenur demonstrates not only the responsibility value but also the benevolence value.

The pictures above show that the children participating in the research mostly consider the value of benevolence as something interpersonal and human-oriented such as helping the elderly, helping people in need, or helping a friend. A different result emerging from the findings of the study is that the preschool children participating in the study also depicted benevolence with nature and plants, that is, a non-human being. This finding is deemed very important as it may be an indication that it is possible to help all living beings apart from human beings, and that multi-dimensional thinking as well as a more universal and moral mindset can develop in children at this age.

### **Conclusion and Discussion**

The findings obtained using multiple data collection methods by focus group interviews, interactive story activities, and art studies reveal that the perceptions of preschool children about the values of benevolence and responsibility support one another in 3 different data groups.

#### **The Development of Responsibility Value in Children**

The participants expressed their opinions about the responsibility value with acts such as picking up the toys at home and school, keeping their rooms clean and tidy, and putting the items and toys back in their places. In the literature, Chandler, Greenspan, and Barenboim (1973) stated that children under the age of 7 are often able to take into account the intentions behind actions rather than the results in value-laden actions, while Aydoğan (2020) stated that children aged 5-6 are able to



make a moral judgment, considering the intention of the behaviour resulting in either personal or property damage.

Similarly, theory of mind argues that preschool children with more advanced mental skills are able to distinguish knowingly or unknowingly between moral value-related actions, and that they make their moral judgments not only according to the result of the action but also by considering the intention under it (Killen, Mulvey, Richardson, Jampol, & Woodward, 2011). A variety of studies on children's moral development have shown that children aged 3 and 4 evaluate moral violations based on internal judgment rather than result-oriented perceptions such as a teacher's exercising his/her authority or punishment (Smetana, 2006; Turiel, 2006; Yuill, & Perner, 1988). In addition, there are many other studies reporting that preschool children are aware of moral rules (Meriç & Özyürek, 2018; Seçer, Çağdaş, & Seçer, 2006; Walker, 1984).

### **The Development of Benevolence Value in Children**

The first notable result of the study on benevolence value is that children primarily define benevolence in their relationships with family members (helping siblings while doing activities, helping parents, helping mothers in the kitchen, etc.) The second important conclusion about benevolence is that children describe it as doing good to people who are older than themselves, people in need (homeless, economically disadvantaged people), and a classmate, apart from family members. The most important result that emerged from the findings of the study is that the children participating in the study also associated benevolence with nature and plants, that is, a non-human being. This finding is deemed very important as it may be an indication of young children's understanding that, apart from human beings, all living beings can be given help, as well as of multi-dimensional thinking and a more universal and moral mindset that can develop in children at this age.

In the literature, in a study of values conducted with preschool children aged three, four and five, Sapsağlam (2017) concluded that children perceive values correctly and demonstrate proper behaviours.

The study by Yüksel et al. (2015) conducted with children aged 5-6, children on the concepts of "good and bad" reported that children draw the values of love, friendship, responsibility and goodness in relation to the concept of "good". Günindi (2015), on the other hand, investigated the perceptions of preschool children about "love", and concluded that children describe the value of love in association with family members and friends by illustrating flowers, balloons, clouds, and hearts.

In general, values education is shared among three institutions, namely family, religion and school (Lickona, 1991). And parents are considered to be the closest people and first teachers of children in the 0-6 age group in terms of meeting all their needs (Gordon, 1993). Values education and consequently moral development are considerably influenced by family expectations (Wiley, 2000). Children can acquire skills, attitudes and moral values about society with the influence of

parents and social environment (UNICEF, 2012). In this context, contrary to the moral development theory of Piaget based on the belief that "*preschool children think in a result-oriented manner in moral situations because abstract thinking has not yet developed in them*", the preschool children in this study were observed to develop moral values and demonstrate such values in appropriate social environments. Based on this, it can be assumed that preschool education institutions equipped with proper social environments and rich stimulants can play an important role in moral development.

### **Moral Development in Early Childhood Education**

The above-mentioned results for the moral development of children and the results of this research have been obtained on the basis of Piaget's moral development theory and can be expressed as an application of his ideas about children's cognitive development. In this context, Piaget's argument suggesting that the moral judgments of children differ depending on their age can be acceptable. However, the results of this study and the those of other scientific studies conducted in recent years have found different results from Piaget's moral development theory, and contrary to the theory, it has been concluded that children can have moral judgments in the preschool period. This can be explained by social learning theory. On the basis of this theory, there is an indirect learning based on observation and imitation of the behaviours of others (Bandura, 1977). In the theory suggesting that human beings learn as a result of the mutual interaction of individual, environmental, and behavioural factors, Bandura (1977) argued that an individual does not need to learn everything directly, but can learn many things by observing the experiences of others. Hence, it can be assumed that the communication and interaction of the children participating in the study with their friends, teachers and other social environment during the education process is effective in their development of moral judgments and moral values.

To date, many developmental studies conducted pertaining to early childhood have focused on children's emotional responses to the intention or result of blaming and punishment based on a single scenario (Killen, Mulvey, Richardson, Jampol, & Woodward, 2011). These have mostly been structured in such a way that contain situations forcing one to choose either of two situations, thus increasing the probability. Given that point of view, there are three remarkable factors to distinguish this study from the others. The first of these is that this study determined the real perceptions of children about the given situation by presenting them open-ended situations instead of a single scenario consisting of two structured situations. This technique revealed the real perceptions of the children regarding the values as the probability was considerably lowered. The second is that instead of collecting a single type of data from the children participating in the study, 3 different data groups (interviews, interactive stories, children's pictures) were used to verify one other. The most important feature that distinguishes this study from others is that the children participating in the study also associated moral values with nature and plants, that is, non-human beings. This finding is considered very important as it may be an indication that apart from human beings, children are capable of

considering that non-human beings can also be helped, and that multi-dimensional thinking and a more universal and moral mindset can develop in children at this age.

### **Disclosure statement**

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

### **Limitations**

- This study is limited to:
  - ❖ the pictures drawn by the children about the values in question,
  - ❖ their responses to interactive value stories,
  - ❖ and their responses in a semi-structured focus interview about values.

### **Recommendations**

- This research was conducted in a moderate social and economic setting. The results can be compared by conducting other studies in different social and economic settings.
- Based on the limitations of this study, a further study can be planned in which data are collected both quantitatively and qualitatively. In this way, research results with higher validity and reliability can be obtained by achieving a method, data and observer triangulation, that is, complex triangulation.

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