

VALUE EDUCATION THROUGH DISTANCE LEARNING: Opinions of Students who already Completed Value Education

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ABSTRACT

Individuals in a society should be systematically trained on value education so that they can appreciate values such as love, respect, tolerance, and honesty. Employment of value training approaches within Anadolu University Open and Distance Learning System will make it possible to educate many people on values. The purpose of this research is to determine the opinions of university students about providing value education through distance learning system. This study has been completed via use of semi-structured interview technique based on qualitative research approach. The participants are registered students studying at Social Studies Teacher Training Program, Faculty of Education, Anadolu University during the fall term of 2013-2014 academic years. Based on the selection criteria, 15 students who had already completed value education course and who were familiar with Anadolu University's open and distance learning system partook in the study. Research data was analyzed through content analysis. Participating students believe that value education is a necessary component of social life and that students within distance learning system should be provided with value education. Furthermore, participants stated that value education could be integrated into distance learning. Based on the findings, it is possible to conclude that offering value education to students through distance learning system may significantly contribute to social life as it facilitates maintaining social order and raising effective citizens.

Keywords: Value, value education, distance learning

INTRODUCTION

Recently, there has been a crucial increase in acts of violence, distrust, and bad habits, lack of love and respect, and intolerance throughout the whole world and in our country. Decrease of humane values within social structure poses a serious threat for future generations; therefore, relevant precautions should immediately be taken so that education systems can achieve their goals of raising effective and responsible citizens (Deveci and Ay, 2009). Value education should be systematically administered through elaborate plans in order to establish a society in which individuals have gained various values.

It would not be wrong to state that individuals without values such as love, respect, tolerance, mercy, honesty, and sedulity would more probably display destructive and negative behaviors and more easily be involved in acts damaging for a society. Thus, it seems more important for students in an education system to gain values rather than to accomplish high academic success. Known as modern sources of value education, Dewey and Whitehead emphasized that education was expected to grow "whole persons" and that it had to be useful/functional as early as the beginning of 20th century (Shea, 2003). Kirschenbaum (1995) underlined that the nature of value education entailed helping people and other beings. As for Kirschenbaum, the primary goal of value education is to make each individual lead a better and happier life; and the second goal is to contribute to the welfare of the society. Value education helps the young to pursue a decent life by aiding them to gain values (Akbas, 2008).

Being a significant domain in need of education to develop and mature (Doganay, 2009), values have different conceptual definitions. Turkish Language Association (2009) defines the concept of value as "an abstract criterion to appraise the importance of something, what something is worth, and preciousness". Value is an abstract unit of measure to appraise concrete or abstract concepts; it is a word to describe the status and significance of animate and inanimate entities, events, and phenomena (Koknel, 2007). Values are standards, beliefs and moral principles accepted by an individual or a social group (Collins English Dictionary, 1991). Briefly, a value is a choice determining how one perceives life and what his/her goals are, affecting the decisions, reflecting the beliefs, and shaping the principles (Baloglu and Balgamis, 2005).

On the other hand, value education can be explained as teaching values to students by teachers or other adults, administering various relevant activities accordingly, and conducting research in order to impose the meanings of basic values on students' minds. Value education is attained at home, school, several other institutions, and everywhere directly within life as a process. What value education includes as themes are character and moral development, religious training, spiritual improvement, citizenship training, personal, social, and cultural development (Deveci, Gultekin and Bayir, 2009; Wikipedia, 2009).

During the 18th National Education Council, it was underlined that value education should be actively incorporated within every level of formal and non-formal education and that necessary regulations should be enacted in order to effectively employ mass media streams to raise public awareness about value education (MNE, 2010). Distance learning is a crucial channel offering the opportunity to use mass media devices and its new technologies for education. Various educational problems are tackled through use of distance learning in many parts of the world. The first contemporary distance-learning model to have been used in Turkey is Anadolu University distance education system. This system has been helping those wishing to have a vocation and those others hoping to improve their educational backgrounds (Demiray, 2010).

Literature review shows that there are several approaches in value education (Sunal and Haas, 2002; Superka et.al, 1976). Following are general guidelines as to how these approaches can be employed within distance learning.

Inculcation

This approach aims to instill and internalize certain values in students and to change the values of students so that they can more nearly reflect certain desired values (Cengelci, 2010). Activities targeting value education can be conducted across several courses within distance learning. For instance, some short stories can be placed in coursebooks in order to guide the students, and animations of these stories can be incorporated within TV programs. This approach facilitates value education through participation into various activities within the scope of Community Service Course included in the curriculum of distance learning.

Clarification

This approach makes the individual aware of his/her emotions, beliefs, values, strengths and weaknesses, helps him/her own the honor of life. This one investigates the ways how students state their value choices, how they evaluate them, and how they use the values in their daily lives (Akbas, 2008). Within this approach, it may be possible to enclose several problem-solving activities into the coursebooks or courses conducted through video-conference method so as to make students think about their own solutions. Related dramas can be broadcasted via TV or radio programs in order to help students with their decision making skills. Similarly, several pages on values can be spread among inside the course books. These pages on values may include a problem situation, a two-to-three paragraph text, a part of a movie, or a painting.

Moral Development

Moral dilemmas can be questioned through group discussions to be held in e-learning courses with the aim of supporting moral development of students within distance learning system. Anchored by a teacher, these moral discussions offer students the chance to verbalize what they think about the dilemma and to defend their standpoint.

Analysis

The aim of this approach is to help students employ scientific research and thinking process to be able to solve problems they face concerning the values (Doganay, 2009). Problem cases about values can be derived based on the life of an important person, and these can be provided to the students via books, television, and other e-learning opportunities within distance learning. Since this approach depends on the questions posed by the teacher about the case study, it is perfectly appropriate for educating adults.

Character Training

Character training is defined as the process to help students understand basic ethical concepts, bond with these concepts, and change their behaviors in accordance with these values (Cengelci, 2010). Within this approach, it may be possible to conduct e-meetings, make use of cooperative learning activities, design tasks to improve consciousness, and teach conflict management via utilizing the learning tools of distance education.

Value approaches above can be applied by associating them with relevant units and topics in several courses within distance education. Literature on value education points that a majority of the works focus on primary education, and that these works generally cover subjects such as teachers' and students' opinions concerning the value education, instructional programs and coursebooks, and the effectiveness of approaches employed in value education (Akbas, 2009; Balci

ve Yanpar Yelken, 2013; Baydar, 2009; Husu ve Tirri, 2007; Keskin 2008; Kus, 2009; Yazar ve Yanpar Yelken, 2013; Yigittir ve Kaymakci, 2012). There are few studies where value education and distance learning are examined together. However, as stated by Sivaswaroop (2009) citing Johnson (1991), distance learning should not only strive to teach skills and information, but also values.

This study has been designed to draw attention on value education within distance learning and to determine the opinions of students who are already aware of value education since they completed a related course about the necessity of value education within distance learning system. Anadolu University Open and Distance Education System plays a major role in tackling educational problems in Turkey with its one million seven hundred and fifty thousand students and more than one and a half million graduates.

Along with meeting the demand for higher education in our country, this system also trains personnel for national education, health sector, religious studies, agriculture, police, military police, navy, army, and air force (Anadolu University, 2014). The number of individuals having value education will dramatically increase through use of various approaches to equip them with values targeting physical, intellectual, moral, esthetic socio-economic, and political aspects of personality (Quisumbing and Leo, 2005) within Anadolu University Open and Distance Education System. Directly or indirectly inclusion of value education into the system following this study is expected to contribute significantly to social order and a society composed of effective citizens.

Purpose of the Study

The aim of this research is to determine the opinions of university students who completed value education course and who are familiar with the distance learning sytem of Anadolu University about providing value education through distance learning system. Accordingly, answers for the following questions have been sought.

What do university students think about;

- the necessity of value education for a society?
- the necessity of providing value education to students within distance education system?
- the value education process for the students within distance education system?
- the social benefits of providing value education to students within distance education system?

Limitations

The findings of this study are limited with the opinions of sophomore and senior students who took the elective course on value education and who study Social Studies Teacher Training Program at Faculty of Education, Anadolu University during 2013-2014 academic year.

METHOD

Aiming to determine what university students think about offering value education within distance learning system, this study has been completed through semi-structured interview technique based on qualitative research approach.

Participants

This research has been conducted with students studying Social Studies Teacher Training Program at Faculty of Education, Anadolu University during the fall term of 2013-2014 academic years.

Totally, 15 teacher candidates who already took the value education course participated in the study. Since being aware of value education and having scientific knowledge on it was deemed important, basic selection criteria were to have completed 'Value Education Course' and to be familiar with distance learning system of Anadolu University. Because the only course on value education is included in the curriculum of Social Studies Teacher Training Program at Anadolu University, the research has been conducted within this course in this program.

Criteria sampling, one of the purposeful sampling methods, has been used in the study, and voluntary students who took the Value Education Course participated in this research. Of all the participants, 12 are sophomores, 3 are seniors, and 10 are females and 5 are males. Of all the subjects interviewed for the research, 2 are students at both Faculty of Education and Open Education Faculty, and one of them graduated from Open High-School.

Data Collection

In this research, a semi-structured interview form was prepared in order to determine the opinions of university students about providing value education within distance learning system. Pilot interviews were conducted with two university students following the advice of field experts so as to establish the content validity of the interview form. By this way, potential difficult points impeding the clarity of the questions on the interview form were identified and necessary adaptations and corrections were carried out.

Prior to the interviews, all students were informed about the research, and consent forms were signed by all the participants. All interviews were audio-recorded. All interviews were completed in January, 2014.

Data Analysis

Content analysis, one of the data analysis approaches, has been employed for data examination. As dictated by content analysis, following steps were followed for data analysis; data coding, labeling themes, categorization of the data in accordance with the codes and themes, and interpretation of the findings (Yildirim and Simsek, 2005). In this sense, answers given for the interview questions were descriptively defined, then coding was carried out, related codes were gathered under a title, themes were formed, and findings were put under relevant categories. The reliability of the research has been settled through double analysis of the data by two researchers, and by using the formula 'P (Agreement %) = [Na (Agreement) / Na (Agreement) + (Disagreement)] X 100' (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The result of the formula is P = % 98 which meant that the research is reliable.

FINDINGS

In this section, findings are presented in tables, and participants' opinions were quoted where necessary. Table: 1 displays participants' answers regarding the question about the necessity of value education for a society.

Table: 1
Opinions of university students about the necessity of value education for a society

Value education is necessary for a society.
Individuals should absolutely gain values either in family or at school.
Every human should have values such as honesty, respect, and tolerance.
There is a need to adopt values for daily life.
People should have moral values.
Interpersonal relations should be organized.
It is necessary to have values to be useful for a society.
Value education is the most significant field of education for a society.
Effective citizens should be furnished with values.
Values contribute a lot to personal development.

Participating students believe that value education is of crucial importance for a society. Regarding value education as a necessary component for a society, students stated that individuals within any society should absolutely be taught about the values in order for the social order to prevail. What makes value education compulsory are the fact that each member of a society should bear values such as honesty, respect, and tolerance, the necessity to arrange daily life and interpersonal relationships, and the need to raise individuals adopting moral values.

Similarly, participants also mentioned that value education is essential in terms of being beneficial for a society, raising effective citizens, and personality development. University students underlined that value education is the most significant educational field for any given society.

One of the participants (S.4) stated the following with respect to the necessity of value education for daily life

An overview of the society clearly displays the need for value education in many fields. An adult smokes, and throws his cigarette away when he is finished. People without values act like this. If you collect the cigarette butts in the streets, you may easily pile a huge butt-dump. Providing value education for the members of a society may be a remarkable precaution to stop this cigarette-dump.

Likewise, participants think that value education matters significantly in terms of arranging relationships in daily life, ensuring that people turn into effective individuals with steady personalities enhanced by values such as honesty, respect, and tolerance.

Table: 2 depicts the opinions of university students who already completed value education course about the necessity of offering value education to students within distance learning system.

Table: 2
University students' opinions about the necessity of providing value education to students within distance learning system

<p>Students within distance learning system should be provided with value education. Distance learning is a vast tool to spread value education throughout the whole country. Unethical behaviors can be eliminated. People living in far away spots can be accessible. Workplaces will be full of fair, honest, and hardworking workers. Professional ethics can be attained. Having values matters more than having professional knowledge. It raises awareness of values.</p>
<p>It may not be beneficial to provide value education to students within distance learning system. It is too hard to gain values. Even face-to-face education can't succeed in value education.</p>

Students who already took value education course think that their peers in distance learning system should be given value education as well.

Participants underlined that distance education reaches out to many students and that training those students on value education would mean training the entire country, which proves the usability of distance learning for value education.

Underpinning that a majority of the students in distance learning system work at the same time, participants believe that unethical behaviors can be eradicated and that raising fair and honest workers with a well-balanced code of ethics can be facilitated through value education. Emphasizing that gaining values is of more significance than having professional knowledge, university students stated that their peers in the distance learning system should absolutely be equipped with values. The least outcome of providing value education to students in distance learning can be a well-educated level of awareness of regarding values. Following are opinions of a university student (S.3) about the necessity of giving value education to students within distance learning system and how unethical behaviors can be stopped by this way.

I have some experience since I graduated from an open high-school. For example, some people took exams instead of others, and this led to injustice. Students may be furnished with an awareness and consciousness concerning honesty through value education, and such unethical behaviors can be diminished or eliminated. Furthermore, open-education students should also be considered as mothers, fathers, and workers. Training them on values would improve the society as a whole.

Holding the belief that furnishing students with values is a tough and long-winded process, few of the participants said that even face-to-face education had to tackle many difficulties in value education, and that, therefore, it might be a useless effort to try value education for students within distance learning.

A university student (S.14) stated his/her opinions as follows:

We do not gain some values in the classroom while we study value education course. So, I'm not quite sure how beneficial distance learning can be for value gaining, I guess what is taught would not transfer from the class to practice. It is of vital significance how to present value training through open education. It wouldn't be useful if students have to study the subject from a book and then have to take a multiple-choice exam about it.

University students in this research think that distance learning has a tremendous influence for value education with respect to its extensiveness in reaching a seriously wide population.

Highlighting the difficulties of providing value education, some of the participants mentioned that value education can't be conducted through distance learning.

The opinions of university students who already took the value education course about how to present value education to students within distance learning are shown in Table: 3.

Table: 3
What can be done within the value education process targeting students in distance learning system according to the university students?

<p>TV and radio can be used TV programs can be prepared TRT-School can be used Movies highlighting values can be shown on TV. Animations can be prepared Personal stories can be scattered among various media settings Radio programs can be prepared</p>
<p>Technological means can be employed Video-conferences can be conducted Value education can be turned into a project within distance learning E-certificate programs can designed</p>
<p>Face-to-face education can be utilized Seminars can be organized at workplaces where a great many of workers are also students in distance learning system Value education course can be delivered Value education centers can be established in several cities</p>
<p>Coursebooks can be used Values can be spread in coursebooks</p>

Participating students stated that value education could be presented through integration with distance learning. In this sense, tools of distance learning such as TV and radio programs, video-conferences, and e-certificate programs can easily be employed for value education. Similarly, examples and stories about values can be put inside various coursebooks. Stories and movies underlining values may be broadcasted in order to efficiently make use of the TV system. Participants think that value education course may be incorporated into TV and radio programs

within distance learning. Likewise, value education centers that would offer seminars can be established in some cities, and in this way, value education can be supported through several face-to-face organizations.

A university student (S.11) stated the following as to how value education can be given to students within distance learning system:

Value education centers can be founded in some cities with a high number of open-education students such as Diyarbakir and Ankara, and value education course can be provided in a face-to-face setting through monthly seminars. In this way, students would feel that they are valuable for their university. Since value education is very important for both individuals and societies, these centers might be very resourceful in terms of raising awareness and producing a society in which all the individuals know themselves.

Based on the research findings, one can conclude that value education can be provided through TV and radio programs, video-conferences, and coursebooks within distance learning system. Participating university students were asked what kind of benefits it would bring to provide students in distance learning system with value education, and their answers are given in Table 4 below.

Table: 4
Social benefits of providing value education to students within distance learning system according to university students

<p>Social order can be achieved The society gets organized It contributes to formation of a society composed of honest people Differences are respected A more peaceful and happier society emerges Sensitivity for ethics increases A huge group of people are furnished with values It helps raising effective students It makes people fair People become more responsible Rules are followed People adopt positive attitudes</p>
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As for university students, training students in distance learning system about values may yield socially significant benefits. According to the participants, offering value education to a mass body of people from many different layers of society may contribute seriously to the formation of a more peaceful and happier society composed of honest people. Educating the majority of people in a society about values help people adopt positive attitudes, lead to social order, and increases sensitivity towards ethics. Besides, the number of effective citizens grows vastly. A university student (S.8) said the following about making value education accessible for a huge group of people through distance learning system:

By reaching out to as many people as we can, we may appeal to a high number of individuals in a society. Through distance education, we first reach the individual in person, then to his/her family and friends, and finally to every nook and cranny in a society. In this way, the number of people appreciating the importance of value education, acting accordingly, and respecting differences will significantly increase.

Conducting value education through distance learning may tremendously and positively contribute to social order and efforts to raise effective citizens, hence, the future of a country.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

The opinions of participating university students who took the value education course about administering value education through distance learning system have been presented under several categories; these are the necessity of value education for a society, the necessity of conducting value education for students within distance learning system, the process of value education through distance learning, social benefits of conducting value education for students within distance learning system.

Participating university students believe that value education is necessary for a society. Research findings indicate that education is the primary way to furnish individuals in a society with values.

In addition, research findings also point to the significance of value education in order to establish a society composed of individuals who love, respect, and tolerate each other and who hold moral values. As stated by Scapp (2003), the need for value education is underlined by the threat that the whole humanity is under, namely wars, terrorism, and human rights violations. Durkheim (2004) believes that events leading to corruption can't be avoided unless moral forces in a society start acting and people exert genuine efforts for social interests. Since moral goals aim a society as a whole, it won't be wrong to say that a society consisting of people with moral values would have healthier structures.

Participants stated that value education process could be organized and conducted via use of TV and radio programs, video-conferences, and e-certificate programs within distance learning system. As pointed by Bozkaya (2006), students can ask questions, perform group works for given tasks, try to understand and interpret the information through synchronous interaction, reach main sources of information, and discuss their opinions online via video-conference system, also known as virtual classroom in the literature.

A value education course augmented and strengthened with video-conference may have similar effects to the one conducted in face-to-face settings.

Emphasizing that distance learning system is a considerable source of power in terms of equipping individuals and a society with values, participating university students mentioned that conducting value education within distance learning is important due to several reasons. Sivaswaroop (2009) expressed that values are constantly learned within lifelong learning, and therefore, open and distance education is more advantageous with respect to increasing sensitivity towards ethics and values as compared to traditional learning settings. Giving the example of how national values can

be taught to Turks living in Europe, Toker Gokce (2008) stated that desired cultural values could easily be transferred to individuals living in different places since distance learning erases the spatial differences. According to Toker Gokce (2008), any government wishing to preserve the identity of a nation state can reach out to its citizens living in different countries and can furnish them with national values through use of distance learning systems. Distance education can be employed both to protect national culture and to spread global culture. Tuncer and Taspinar (2008) analyzed Suanpang et.al's (2004) study in which traditional education and distance learning were compared in terms of efficacy, skills, values, and ease of use, and underpinned that distance learning was more effective in improving every aspect including the values.

Referring to the difficulties of value education, several participants mentioning that even face-to-face education falls short in terms of value training said that distance education would have no influential role in teaching values to people. However, Koksoy (2004) believes that e-learning will be a remarkable alternative to traditional learning and that it will play a major role in terms of meeting the educational needs at every level. Based on the findings of this research and what Koksoy thinks about it, one can conclude that distance learning may well be employed for value education.

E-learning services within Anadolu University Distance Education System started in 1994 in order to offer the chance to study through computerized settings together with TV programs and books. Students can study and learn some courses at their own pace through interaction by using related soft-wares within computer-assisted learning settings (Anadolu University, 2014). Value education course to be conducted through e-learning services provided by Anadolu University can have an influential role in gaining values to the society.

Participating students who already completed value education course mentioned that administering value education course through distance learning system may have prominent contributions with respect to establishing a more peaceful and happier society composed of honest people.

This may help the formation of a developed society with effective citizens. Some scholars use the term value education as an umbrella definition to cover ethics and citizenship education (Wikipedia, 2009).

As expressed by Sugur and Savran (2006), Anadolu University Open and Distance Learning System stands as the one with the highest number of students among the other examples throughout the world. Students in Open Education in Turkey have different personal aims and they are mainly adults with families professionally working as a member of an occupational group as civil servants or workers and living mostly in urban areas. Providing value education to such a crowded student group with diverse profiles would undoubtedly and dramatically contribute to social order and raising effective citizens.

Kaltsounis (1987) stated that values are intrinsic source of power affecting and controlling an individual's behaviors. Since values help individuals contain their behaviors, value education poses a great potential with respect to maintaining social order. Offering value education to students in

the open education system may help establish a society consisting of individuals who can control their behaviors. Following can be suggested based on the research findings:

- Value education should be provided within distance learning systems either directly or indirectly. In terms of direct approaches, value education course can be incorporated into the programs. As for indirect approaches, values can be scattered across different tools and topics.
- Online instructional settings such as websites can be designed for value education.
- Value education centers can be established for distance learning students in different cities, and these centers can regularly organize value education activities and events.
- Various programs and shorts to be broadcasted on TRT-School can be prepared.
- Several projects aiming to furnish open education students with values can be developed, and project results can be depicted via related research studies.
- Research studies can be conducted to indicate the efficacy of administering value education within distance learning system.

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