

## KARAKTER VE DEĞER EĞİTİMİNDE UZAKTAN ÖĞRETİMLE TARTIŞMALI KONULARA BAKIŞ

### OVERVIEW OF CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES IN CHARACTER AND VALUES EDUCATION PROVIDED THROUGH DISTANCE EDUCATION\*

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**ABSTRACT:** The primary objective of education is to enhance individuals' thinking skills and their thought processes including the cultivation of character and the internalization of values. Engaging students in discussions on controversial topics encourage critical thinking. This phenomenological research aims to investigate how students enrolled in the Non-Thesis Master's Degree Program on Character and Values Education through Distance Education perceive controversial issues such as discrimination, violence, and gender roles. Furthermore, the study aims to examine the influence of the Global Education in Character and Values Education course on students' perceptions of these controversial issues. The course incorporates various activities, assignments, and discussions to connect these topics with character and values education. The study also seeks to provide insights into students' perspectives on controversial issues in character and values education and explore how a specific course shape their perception and understanding of these matters.

**ÖZ:** Eğitimin temel amacı bireylerin düşünme becerilerini ve düşünce biçimlerini geliştirecek yolları onlara kazandırmaktır. Öğrencileri tartışmalı konulardaki tartışmalara dahil etmek, eleştirel düşünmeyi teşvik eder. Bu araştırmanın amacı Karakter ve Değer Eğitimi Uzaktan Öğretim Tezsiz Yüksek Lisans Programı'na kayıtlı öğrencilerin tartışmalı konulara (örn. ayrımcılık, şiddet ve toplumsal cinsiyet) yönelik algılarının nasıl olduğunun anlaşılmasıdır. Olgu bilim deseninde gerçekleştirilen bu çalışmada Karakter ve Değer Eğitimi Tezsiz Yüksek Lisans Programı'nda verilen ve bu konuların karakter ve değer eğitimi ile bağlantısının çeşitli etkinlikler, ödevler ve tartışmalar yoluyla kurulduğu Karakter ve Değer Eğitiminde Küresel Eğitim dersinin öğrencilerin bahsi geçen tartışmalı konulara yönelik algılarını nasıl şekillendirdiğini incelemektedir. Çalışma aynı zamanda öğrencilerin karakter ve değerler eğitimindeki tartışmalı konulara ilişkin bakış açıları hakkında iç görüş sağlamayı ve belirli bir dersin bu konuları anlama süreçlerini ve algılarını nasıl şekillendirdiğini keşfetmeyi amaçlamaktadır.

**Keywords:** Character and Values Education, Distance Education, Teaching Controversial Issues.

**Anahtar sözcükler:** Karakter ve Değer Eğitimi, Uzaktan Öğretim, Tartışmalı Konuların Öğretimi.

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## GENİŞLETİLMİŞ ÖZET

### Giriş

Değerler eğitimi, sivil ve ahlaki değerler eğitimi de içeren eğitim yoluyla değerlerin aktarımının güçlendirilmesine odaklanan bir alandır (Halstead & Taylor, 2000; Kantar, 2014; Lickona, 1991). Karakterin gelişimi ve değerlerin içselleştirilmesi önemlidir (Çiftçi, 2003). Tartışmalı konuların farklı stratejiler kullanılarak öğretilmesi, bireylerin bilgili, açık fikirli olma ve karmaşık konularda rasyonel tartışmalara girebilme becerilerini geliştirmelerine yardımcı olabilir (Brank & Wylie, 2013; Çopur, 2015). Uzaktan eğitim ise, öğretene ve öğrenenin aynı fiziksel alanı paylaşmadığı, teknoloji aracılığıyla iletişim kurduğu ve herhangi bir kurum tarafından tasarlanan bir öğrenme ve öğretme sürecidir (Moore & Kearsley, 2012). Karakter eğitimi için eğitimcilerin iyi planlanmış, deneyimsel eğitim faaliyetlerine ve fırsatlarına ihtiyaçları vardır (Allen & Friedman, 2010; DeBellis & Goldin, 2006; Leder & Grootenboer, 2005; Yazıcı & Yazıcı, 2011). Karakter ve değerler eğitiminde tartışmalı konuları ele almak için sınıf içi etkinlikler, çevrimiçi tartışmalar ve ödevler kullanılabilir ki bu yöntem etkili bir öğretim yaklaşımı olma potansiyeline sahip olmasına rağmen nadiren kullanılmaktadır (Çopur, 2015). Bu araştırmanın amacı Karakter ve Değer Eğitimi Uzaktan Öğretim Tezsiz Yüksek Lisans Programı'na kayıtlı öğrencilerin tartışmalı konulara (örn. ayrımcılık, şiddet ve toplumsal cinsiyet) yönelik algılarının nasıl olduğunun anlaşılması, Karakter ve Değer Eğitimi Tezsiz Yüksek Lisans Programı'nda verilen ve bu konuların karakter ve değer eğitimi ile bağlantısının çeşitli etkinlikler, ödevler ve tartışmalar yoluyla kurulduğu Karakter ve Değer Eğitiminde Küresel Eğitim dersinin öğrencilerin bu tartışmalı konulara yönelik algılarını nasıl şekillendirdiğinin incelenmesidir. Bu bağlamda bu araştırmanın karakter ve değerler eğitiminin nasıl daha etkili verilebileceği konusunda daha derin bir anlayış sağlayacağına inanılmaktadır.

Araştırmada şu sorulara cevap aranmıştır;

1-Karakter ve Değer Eğitimi Uzaktan Öğretim Tezsiz Yüksek Lisans Programı'na kayıtlı öğrencilerin tartışmalı konulara (örn. ayrımcılık, şiddet ve toplumsal cinsiyet) yönelik algıları nasıldır?

2-Karakter ve Değer Eğitimi Uzaktan Öğretim Tezsiz Yüksek Lisans Programı'nda verilen ve bu konuların karakter ve değer eğitimi ile bağlantısının çeşitli etkinlikler, ödevler ve tartışmalar yoluyla kurulduğu Karakter ve Değer Eğitiminde Küresel Eğitim dersi öğrencilerin bahsi geçen tartışmalı konulara yönelik algılarını nasıl şekillendirmektedir?

### Yöntem

Araştırmanın amacına uygun olduğu gerekçesiyle bu araştırmada nitel araştırmada kullanılan desenlerden fenomenoloji (olgubilim) deseni kullanılmıştır. Araştırmanın katılımcılarını belirlemek için amaçlı katılımcı seçimi (ölçüt örnekleme) gerçekleştirilmiştir. Bu araştırmanın katılımcılarını 2022-2023 Eğitim-Öğretim Yılı Güz Döneminde Karakter ve Değer Eğitimi Uzaktan Öğretim Tezsiz Yüksek Lisans Programı'na kayıtlı öğrencilerden Karakter ve Değer Eğitimi Tezsiz Yüksek Lisans Programı'nda seçmeli olarak verilen ve tartışmalı konuların karakter ve değer eğitimi ile bağlantısının çeşitli etkinlikler, ödevler ve tartışmalar yoluyla kurulduğu tek ders olan Karakter ve Değer Eğitiminde Küresel Eğitim dersine devam eden öğrenciler oluşturmaktadır. Araştırmada veriler uzaktan eğitim yoluyla Karakter ve Değerler Eğitimi Tezsiz Yüksek Lisans Programı'na kayıtlı öğrencilerle çevrim içi olarak gerçekleştirilen yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmeler, açık uçlu sorulardan oluşan bir anket, katılımcılar tarafından haftalık olarak tutulan ve dersin bu konuları kapsayan kısmını ayrıntılarıyla anlatan yansıtıcı günlükler, dersin amacına uygun olarak hazırlanan kavram haritası ve üç tartışmalı konu hakkında üç filmin analizini içeren öğrenci ödevleri ve öğrencilerin ders boyunca her haftanın konusunu incelemelerini sağlamak için sorulan soruların analizini içeren haftalık çevrim içi tartışmalardan elde edilmiştir. Analiz süreci araştırma boyunca devam etmiş ve bu süreçte elde edilen veriler, tümevarımsal yaklaşımla NVivo paket programında analiz edilmiştir. Satır satır kodlama yapılarak önce kodlara ulaşılmış, elde edilen kodlardan temalara ve belirlenen temalardan hareketle araştırmanın bulgulara ulaşılmıştır.

## Bulgular

Araştırmadan elde edilen bulgular katılımcıların çoğunluğunun tartışmalı konuları, uzlaşmayı gerektiren ve farklı tarafların birden fazla görüşünü içeren konular olarak tanımladıkları, ancak bazı katılımcıların bu kavramı sadece “tartışmayı içeren” konularla sınırladıklarını ortaya koymuştur. Ayrıca, katılımcıların toplumsal cinsiyet, eğitim ve değerler, dini konular, sosyal, ekonomik ve çevresel konuları tartışmalı konular olarak tanımladıkları tespit edilmiştir. Katılımcılar dersin sonunda, tartışmalı konuların yarattığı olumsuz durumların, demokratik bir ortamda demokratik kişilik gelişimiyle, değerler eğitimi ve küresel eğitimle, dünyanın birbirine bağlı ve bağımlı olduğunun farkına vararak, bireysel farkındalık kazanımıyla ve küresel vatandaşlar yetiştirerek önlenebileceğine inandıklarını belirtmişlerdir. Buna ek olarak, katılımcılar bireysel farkındalık, hoşgörü, farklılıklara saygı duyma ve öz-kontrol becerilerinin kazandırılması için tartışmalı konuların karakter ve değer eğitiminin bir parçası olması gerektiğine inandıklarını vurgulamışlardır. Katılımcılar ayrıca, tartışmalı konuların öğretiminde öğretmenlerin tarafsız olması gerektiğini vurgulamışlar ve tartışmalı konuların, sınıfta tartışmaya uygun bir ortam oluşturularak, öğrencilerin gelişim evrelerini dikkate alan örnekler ve etkinliklerle basitten karmaşığa doğru verilmesi gerektiğine inandıklarını belirtmişlerdir. Araştırmanın bulguları katılımcıların ayrımcılığı temelleri, yapısı, türleri, sonuçları ve önleme yöntemleri bağlamında ele aldıklarını ortaya koymuştur. Katılımcıların hepsi ayrımcılığa maruz kalındığında da uygulayan pozisyonunda bulunduğu da zarar görüldüğünü, bunun sonucunda duygusal travma yaşanabileceğini, ayrımcılığın şiddete ve bireylerin yaşamlarını olumsuz şekilde etkilemeye varan sonuçları olduğuna inandıklarını belirtmişlerdir. Son olarak, katılımcıların şiddetin insanların yetersizlik ve aşağılık duygularından, toplumsal ve kurumsal eksikliklerden ve iktidar arzusundan kaynaklandığını, şiddeti, şiddet türleri, yapısı, sonuçları ve önleme yöntemleri çerçevesinde tanımladıkları anlaşılmıştır.

## Tartışma ve Sonuç

Araştırmadan elde edilen bulgulardan hareketle ulaşılan sonuçlar incelendiğinde, katılımcıların tartışmalı konuları farklı şekillerde tanımladığı görülmektedir. Kuş ve Öztürk (2019), öğretmenlerin eğitim sistemini ve dini farklılıkları tartışmalı konular olarak algıladığını belirlemiştir, ayrıca Çopur (2015), öğretmenlerin eğitim ve sınav sistemini tartışmalı bir konu olarak gördüğünü tespit etmiştir. Diğer yandan, Woolley (2020), öğretmen adaylarının cinsel yönelimi tartışmalı bir konu olarak gördüklerini ortaya koymuştur. Bu bağlamda, alanyazında öne çıkan diğer tartışmalı konular arasında kadına yönelik şiddet, terör, milliyetçilik, liyakatsizlik, yozlaşma, sınav sistemi, ve yargı bağımsızlığı gibi konular bulunmaktadır (Seçgin, 2009). Katılımcılar, tartışmalı konuların karakter ve değer eğitiminin bir parçası olması gerektiğine inanmaktadırlar. Bu konuların, bireylerin bireysel farkındalık, hoşgörü, farklılıklara saygı duyma ve öz-kontrol becerileri kazanmasına katkı sağlayabileceğine ve olumsuz durumların, farklı eğitim yaklaşımlarına dayalı eğitim vermek yoluyla önlenebileceğini vurgulamaktadırlar. Ayrıca, tartışmalı konuların öğretilmesinin öğrencilerin önyargılarını azaltmalarına, farklılıklara saygı duyma konusunda yeterli kazanmalarına, aktif ve bilinçli vatandaşlar olarak topluma katkı sağlamalarına yardımcı olabileceği belirtilmektedir (Hand & Levinson, 2012; Hess, 2009). Katılımcılar, ayrımcılığın zararlı sonuçlar doğurduğuna ve duygusal travmalara yol açabileceğine inanmaktadırlar. Assari ve Lankarani (2017) de ayrımcılık ile bireylerin psikolojik rahatsızlıkları arasında pozitif bir ilişki olduğu sonucuna varmıştır. Ayrıca, katılımcıların şiddeti, insanların yetersizlik ve aşağılık duygularından, toplumsal ve kurumsal eksikliklerden ve iktidar arzusundan kaynaklanan bir olgu olarak algıladıkları bulunmuştur. Benzer olarak, okullarda yaygın olan şiddete dair, öğretmenlerin kurumsal yapıların şiddeti önlemeye yönelik yetersiz olduğu algısını taşıdığına dair araştırmalar da mevcuttur (Brandt, 2021; Çaylı & Çaylı, 2022).

## INTRODUCTION

Values education focuses on strengthening the transfer of values by using education and includes civic and moral values education (Halstead & Taylor, 2000; Kantar, 2014; Lickona, 1991). Moral development, i.e., the development of character and the internalization of values, is part of education (Çiftçi, 2003). Throughout literature focused on values education, there is a limited literature regarding teaching about controversial issues through values education, even though these two areas intertwined. Educating students in controversial issues encourages them to think about a particular subject or problem with a view to ensuring that the subject is well understood, and raises awareness of that subject and/or problem (Aykaç, 2005). The use of controversial topics can help developing individuals who are knowledgeable about

contemporary issues, open-minded, and able to engage in complex and rational conversations which often create an environment to gain values efficiently (Brank & Wylie, 2013; Çopur, 2015). Teaching about values through distance education is another subject that is studied limitedly. Distance education is a learning and teaching process designed by any institution in a planned way in which the teacher and the learner exist without sharing the same physical space, and communicating through the use of technology (Engelbrecht, 2005; Moore & Kearsley, 2012; Özyürek & Bedge, 2016). The United States Distance Learning Association (USDLA) defines distance education as activities carried out using satellites, audio-visual equipment, interactive graphics, and computer-based and multimedia technologies (2004). It has been highlighted by Sivaswaroop (2009) that the use of distance education methods in character and values education is more favorable than traditional methods, and can be expected to continue throughout life for the raising of awareness about values. Literature contains limited studies of the provision of character and values education specifically through distance education. Deveci (2015) suggests that values education can be delivered effectively by means of websites, television programs, and online education, and claims that teacher candidates regard values education as an important part of social life that can be delivered through distance education.

In order to create an effective educational environment for character education, educators need well planned educational activities and opportunities that are based on experience (Allen & Friedman, 2010; DeBellis & Goldin, 2006; Leder & Grootenboer 2005; Yazıcı & Yazıcı, 2011). Character and values education can address controversial issues through classroom activities, online discussions, and assignments and has the potential to be an effective means of equipping students with effective domain competencies. Studies in literature, however, suggest that it is not a frequently used approach due to the low self-efficacy related to the teaching of these subjects (Çopur, 2015). A review of studies of character and values education indicates that studies usually focus on investigating the knowledge and practices of teachers. Ergin and Karataş (2014) revealed that teachers mostly see values education as the education provided to regain the supposedly lost values. Another study, Tokdemir (2007) found the knowledge of the participants in values education to be lacking, although they had a positive attitude towards values education, and despite feelings of inadequacy related to values and their teaching, they believed that it was necessary to include values education in the curriculum. Erkuş (2012) reported that the values education courses in the studied curricula fell short of providing effective education, and as a result, individuals learn from other sources, highlighting those values based on other media could have an adverse effect on character development. According to Özdaş (2013), teachers working at secondary school believe that undesirable student behaviors occur due to lack of values. In Çatalbaş's (2018) study, it was stated that the most significant problem encountered in practice was the inadequacy of teachers in the teaching of values and that this deficiency had an adverse effect on values education. Mawardi, Raharjo and Olawale Fahm (2021) found that aiming to strengthen the strategies used in values education by focusing on Islamic values in online learning environments that teachers used methods such as reinforcement and sanctions to enrich the learning process, but complained about issues such as technical problems, economic barriers, student apathy, and boredom. Gabatbat and Santander (2021), in their study on the importance of values education delivered in virtual environments, reported that the participants emphasized such benefits as individual character development, psychological development, and support for the socialization of students. In addition, Sivaswaroop (2009) argued that values education provided through distance education was more effective in raising awareness of values than values education delivered by traditional methods. In character and values education, emotions, thoughts, and values among the affective domain competencies are as important as cognitive competencies or the level of knowledge that individuals are expected to have, while effective outcomes may sometimes be considered of secondary importance (Yaşaroğlu, 2013). Such outcomes include raising awareness, observation, showing interest, attributing responsibility, attention and care, and appreciation (Demirel, 2020). Uğurlu and Doğan (2016) also suggest that teaching controversial issues can effectively provide students with such outcomes as understanding and developing different perspectives. Teaching about controversial issues through various classroom activities can support the effective delivery of character and values education. The aim of the study is to understand how students enrolled in a Non-Thesis Master's Degree Program on Character and Values Education through Distance Education perceive controversial issues (e.g., discrimination, violence, and gender roles), and how the Global Education in Character and Values Education course, in which such issues are linked to character and values education through various activities, assignments, and discussions shapes students' perceptions of controversial issues. In this regard, it helps clarify how controversial issues are perceived within the framework of character and values education, and how students' perceptions of such issues are shaped by

their classroom experiences, thus contributing to literature in this field. In addition, the study provides a deeper understanding of how character and values education can be delivered more effectively.

In accordance with the aim of the research, answers to the following questions were sought;

1) What are the perceptions of controversial issues (e.g., discrimination, violence, and gender roles) of the students enrolled in the Non-Thesis Master's Degree Program on Character and Values Education through Distance Education?

2) How does the Global Education in Character and Values Education course delivered in the Non-Thesis Master's Degree Program on Character and Values Education through Distance Education, in which the connection of controversial issues with character and values education is established through various activities, assignments, and discussions shape students' perceptions of such issues?

## METHOD

Since the aim of this research is to understand how students enrolled in the Non-Thesis Master's Degree Program on Character and Values Education through Distance Education perceive controversial issues (e.g., discrimination, violence, and gender roles), and how the Global Education in Character and Values Education course, in which such issues are linked to character and values education through various activities, assignments, and discussions, shapes their perception of controversial issues, the study used a phenomenological design. Through such a design, which is included in the interpretive paradigm, it is attempted to discover how individuals define their experiences and how their experiences shape the social phenomenon under investigation (Creswell, 2013).

### Participants of the Study

A purposeful selection method (criterion sampling) was employed to select participants for the study. In this method, the researcher includes situations and/or participants that meet predetermined criteria in the research (Patton, 2005). The criterion set for this purpose was attendance of the Global Education in Character and Values Education course, which is an elective and only course that establishes the connections between controversial issues and character and values education through various activities, assignments, and discussions in the Fall Term of the 2022–2023 academic year. In the study, the examinations, assignments, reflective diaries, and online discussions of 43 students who took the Global Education in Character and Values Education course were analyzed through a document analysis and semi-structured online individual interviews were conducted with 11 students after obtaining their consent and the necessary permissions on 19<sup>th</sup> of August 2022 with the number of 356044 from the Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Committee of Anadolu University. Details of the interviewed participants are provided in Table 1.

Table 1  
*Details of Interviewed Participants*

Participant	Branch	Teaching Experience	Sex	Hometown	Age
İrem	Psychological Counseling and Guidance	12	Female	Bursa	38
Kadriye	Psychology	-	Female	Kayseri	25
İpek	English	9	Female	Istanbul	32
Melis	Preschool Teaching	-	Female	Çankırı	34
Adile	Special Education	13	Female	Zonguldak	37
Dilek	Clothing	-	Female	Istanbul	37
Demet	Turkish	16	Female	Amasya	39
Sultan	Biology	7	Female	Mersin	-
Ceren	English	2	Female	Afyonkarahisar	26
Ayten	Healthcare Services	20	Female	Aydın	44
Neşe	Preschool Teaching	9	Female	Eskişehir	31

### Data Collection Tools

Data for the research was gathered through the followings; 1) semi-structured interviews, which were conducted online with students enrolled in the Non-Thesis Master's Degree Program on Character and Values Education through Distance Education, 2) the questionnaire, comprising open-ended questions, was sent via e-mail to students who were enrolled in the course and who agreed to participate voluntarily and they were asked to give brief answers to the questions, 3) reflective diary, which was kept weekly by the participants detailing the part of the course that covered such issues, 4) student assignments that were in accordance with the purpose of the research involving a concept map and analysis of three movies about three controversial issues, 5) online discussions which were weekly discussions, which involved an analysis of questions to make students analyze each week's subject during the course.

Within the scope of the research, two semi-structured interviews were planned to be conducted with 10 students, but due to time constraints, a total of 11 participants were interviewed once. Details of the interviews, which were conducted before the commencement of course activities, and are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

*Details of the Interviews with the Participants*

Participant	Interview Date	Place	Duration
İrem	06.12.2022	Online Platform	33'14''
Kadriye	06.12.2022	Online Platform	21' 02''
İpek	06.12.2022	Online Platform	28'34''
Melis	07.12.2022	Online Platform	09'07''
Adile	07.12.2022	Online Platform	16' 22''
Dilek	07.12.2022	Online Platform	19'16''
Demet	08.12.2022	Online Platform	18'50''
Sultan	13.12.2022	Online Platform	19'42''
Ceren	13.12.2022	Online Platform	18'27''
Ayten	14.12.2022	Online Platform	14'17''
Neşe	15.12.2022	Online Platform	19'37''

Activities carried out during the course are presented in Table 3.

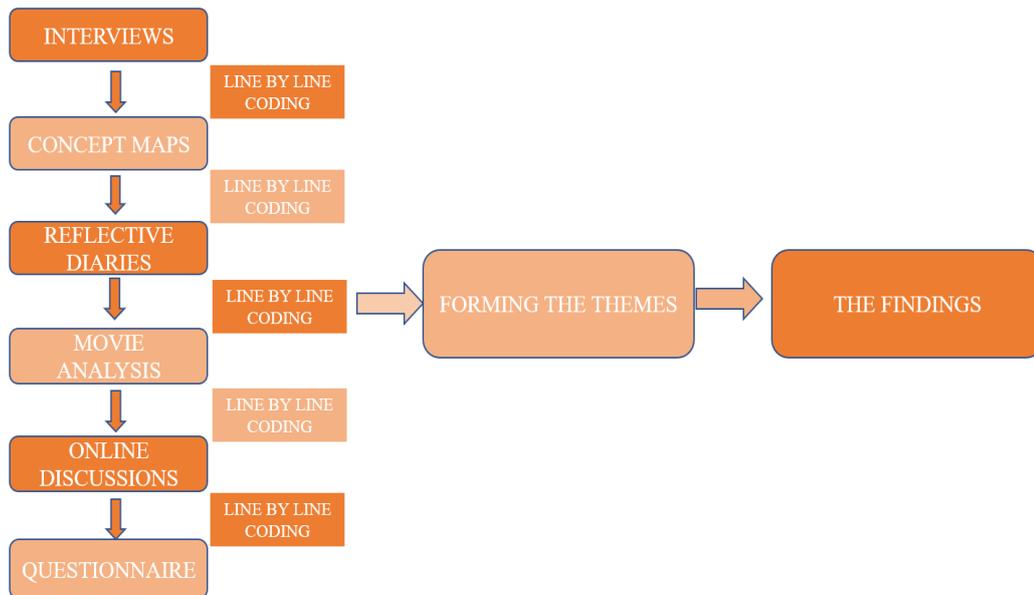
Table 3

*Activities Carried Out During the Course*

ACTIVITY	CLASS HOURS (AVERAGE)
Movie Analysis	60 Minutes
Document Analysis	60 Minutes
Concept Mapping	40 Minutes
Research Paper Reviews	20 Minutes Each in 8 Weeks
Classroom Discussions	Weekly

### Data Analysis

The analysis process continued for the duration of the research, and the obtained data were analyzed using the NVivo package program with an inductive approach, since there was no specific theme. First, the codes were created by coding line by line, themes were then obtained from the codes, based on which the findings of the research were obtained. Figure 1 provides an explanation of how the data obtained by the various data collection methods were gathered and analyzed.



*Figure 1. Data diversification and inductive data analysis*

### **Trustworthiness**

To ensure the trustworthiness of the research, the data collection methods were diversified through the use of multiple data collection tools. After the analysis of the obtained data, member-checking was employed. The participants were asked to provide confirmation of the accuracy of the meaning deduced by the researcher. In addition, some of the data obtained by the researcher were analyzed by an independent researcher, and the data were re-analyzed after based on the received feedback. The interview questions in the study were also analyzed by an independent field expert and edited in line with their feedback.

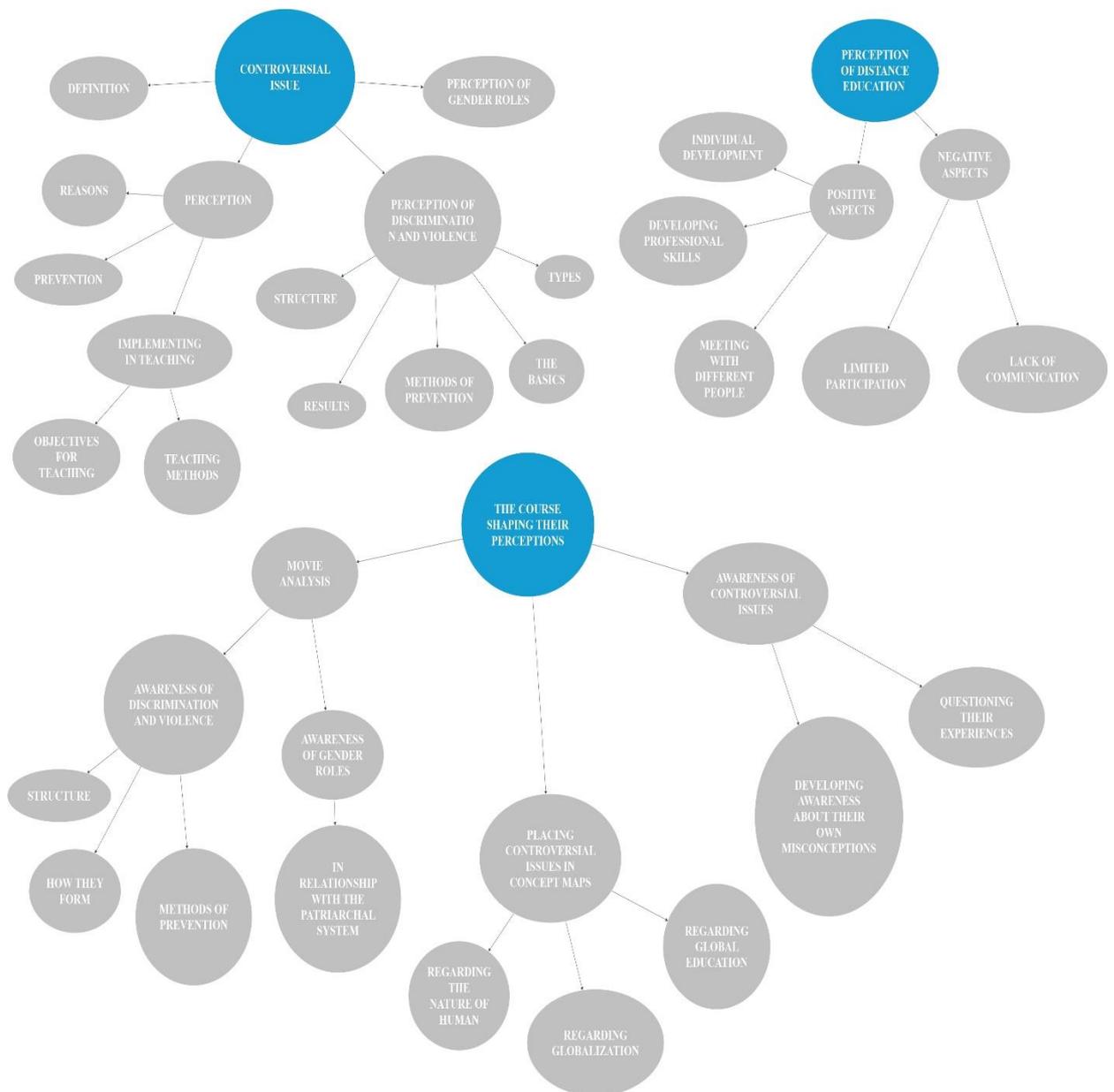


Figure 2. Thematic view of the findings of the inductive analysis

### Ethical Approval

In this study, research ethics principles were observed and necessary ethics committee permissions were obtained. Within the scope of ethics committee permission, the document was obtained from the Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Committee of Anadolu University on 19<sup>th</sup> of August 2022 with the number of 356044.

## FINDINGS

### Participants' Perceptions of Controversial Issues

One of the findings of the study was that most of the participants defined a controversial issue as one that needs to be agreed upon and that is subject to the different views of more than one side, while other participants defined it merely as an issue that “involves a dispute.” Among the participants, Kadriye defined controversial issues as “issues about which differing opinions are expressed”, Ayten describe them as "bringing together different ideas and stating them as an assessment", and İrem defined them as "subjects on which different ideas are put forward that cannot be agreed upon, and on which different perspectives

are held by different people." In addition, the participants defined controversial issues as issues "that are undecided", "over which people disagree", and "over which two sides do not agree." The participants also identified gender roles, education, values, religious, social, economic, and environmental issues as controversial.

The participants argued that preventing negative consequences arising from contentious matters could be accomplished by nurturing global citizens within a democratic setting. This entails a specific focus on fostering democratic personality development through values and global education. They highlighted the importance of recognizing the interconnectedness and interdependence of the world and emphasized the need for individuals to improve their self-awareness. By adopting these strategies, they also believed that undesirable outcomes could be minimized. The participants stated further that there was a need to address controversial issues in character and values education to ensure the development of a culture of awareness, tolerance, and respect for differences, and to help individuals acquire self-control skills. The participants also emphasized that teachers should remain impartial when teaching controversial issues, and conveyed their belief that controversial issues should be addressed, from simple to complicated, from an early age by maintaining an environment in the classroom in which discussion is encouraged through examples and activities.

The participants' perceptions of discrimination, violence, and gender roles among the controversial issues constituted another finding of the research. It was found that the approach of the participants to discrimination addressed its basis, nature, type, consequences, and means of prevention. The participants stated they believed that discrimination was based on their self-construal, their perception of differences, and the will to power and value. In her diary, Yeşim explained, "[people] are fed by prejudices, which gives rise to stereotypes in society. While people see themselves as superior, they stigmatize others to make up for their own shortcomings." Dilek, on the other hand, stated that discrimination was based on people's self-construal, and their efforts to feel valuable and establish power, further explaining, "people build their own worthiness, and lay the foundations [of this] by devaluing and humiliating others." Moreover, Berrin said she believed that at the core of discrimination was the feeling of unable to tolerate differences, noting, "we marginalize other people because of their differences, just for our own interests, and we play innocent by taking shelter behind the sense of self."

The participants' perception of the nature of discrimination is one of the key findings of the research. Participants stated they believed that discrimination was structurally class-hierarchical, applied positively and negatively, included violence, was forbidden by religion [Islam], and had such qualities that it could be done involuntarily as well. Mustafa, underlining the hierarchical aspect of discrimination, said, "It is seen that both the strong and the weak mutually discriminate against each other. We believe that half the world does not know how the other half lives, or we assume that this girl is rich and will not care about you", and suggested that discrimination could manifest itself in positive and negative ways in our everyday lives.

Ceren considered violence and discrimination inseparable, stating, "[discrimination] certainly includes violence, but it is a bigger concept than violence." Only Arzu emphasized how discrimination is addressed in Islam, "We know that discrimination is prohibited in Islam. But I realize that we do it a lot in our daily lives." Most of the participants stated during the interviews that they agreed that discrimination could be unintentional. Ceren provided her perception of the nature of discrimination, saying, "Even by saying we do not discriminate, we may be discriminating against others. It can even be unintentional." Another finding of the study was that the participants explained only about discrimination based on language, religious beliefs, ethnic origin, and gender roles. Melis offered her perception of discrimination based on gender roles, "When I think about discrimination, there are these schemas that first come to my mind. The first things that springs to my mind are the concepts associated with the gender roles." İrem, who immigrated from Bulgaria to Turkey when she was a child, explained the concept of discrimination based on her own experience, "I started kindergarten there, where they always warned me not to speak Turkish otherwise my Bulgarian teacher would get angry, etc. They still do it." Kadriye also added "I am of Circassian origin. My teacher would come to class and look at me, saying he did not like Circassians at all, and I would feel very sad."

All of the participants stated they believed that both the target and the perpetrator of discrimination were harmed, and that discrimination led to trauma, restriction on the lives of individuals, and violence. İpek provided an explanation of the impact of discrimination on human life:

*"I witnessed discrimination by my primary school teacher; I still cannot forget those days. I have unpleasant memories of my primary school years for this reason. I remember him vividly favoring certain students in the class, treating them differently, more kindly."*

İrem explained the feelings of restriction created by discrimination based on her own experiences:

*"I am a person who paid a price to come to my homeland, but who is marginalized in her homeland. I had to pay more attention to my manners as an immigrant girl who had no choice but to be hardworking because my parents had left everything behind."*

Finally, all of the participants stated that different opportunities exist for stamping out discrimination, including education, preventing the cultural reproduction of discrimination, maintaining close contact with those exposed to discrimination, maintaining a vision of divine unity and individual moral development. Dilek said, "Values that are needed to live with or overcome discrimination and violence should be taught," while Suna suggested that to deal with discrimination, "We need to remember and think about the eternal beloved. We need to love the created for the sake of the creator." Bilge expressed her thoughts as "Understanding and respecting cultures; respecting differences; understanding one's own cultural heritage; being able to communicate with different cultures and dealing with what is different are important."

It was found that the participants defined violence in terms of its basis, nature, types, consequences, and means of prevention. One of the findings of the present study is that the participants believe violence to be associated with a sense of inadequacy, social and institutional deficiencies, and the desire for power.

Offering her opinion of the role of feelings of inadequacy in the violent tendencies of humans, Ceren said:

*"Frankly, many people get angry when they encounter something that goes against their point of view, or they may act impulsively or negatively when faced with something about which they feel abhorrent or otherwise think negatively. I think that is why violence emerges."*

Suna, on the other hand, drew attention to the inadequacy of efforts to combat violence institutionally, saying that "the inadequacy of sanctions also plays a role in the spread of violence." Furthermore, Dilek, commented on the social aspect of violence, "Sometimes, violence can be unconsciously accepted and applied as a normal situation due to the inherited values created by customs, traditions, and culture. Suna explained the relationship between violence and the desire for power, "At the core of violence is the desire to control others, to display power, to punish, to vent anger." The participants referred to the structural aspects of violence as actions that vary in severity from one class to another, that are perpetrated by people, that mostly target women and children, and that are resorted to by people who make poor value judgments. İpek claimed that violence may differ in severity from one class to another by saying "I remember how traumatic it was when our teacher beat us, one by one, and hit those [who were well off or who were the children of other teachers] much more gently, or did not hit them at all."

Arzu and Kadriye claimed that human beings are weak and may become aggressive. According to Arzu, "The most basic human features are weakness and dependence. It is the only species that engages in violence out of nowhere." Suna, on the other hand, highlighted that women and children are the primary targets of violence.

Some of the participants identified three categories of violence, namely, psychological, cyber, and physical emphasizing that discrimination was a phenomenon that should be addressed together with violence, while others stated that they could not make sense of violence. İrem, addressing the issue of psychological violence, said:

*"Sometimes even a glance can be considered violence to a person. If you flash somebody that kind of look, they may feel truly worthless and disgusting. This is also a kind violence. That momentary glance may interrupt the other person's life."*

Kadriye gave her interpretations of cyber and physical violence, "It can be verbal or written. Nowadays there are many who we refer to as cyber bullies, who say things to people that they would do not dare tell them in person on WhatsApp or on other online platforms."

Most of the participants stated that violence leads to decreased productivity, emotional damage, and distorted perceptions of reality, but that violence can be prevented through values education, sanctions of

different kinds, and effort to understand others. Hüsniye explained the damage that psychological violence can cause to one's perceptions of reality, saying, "It damages the sense of self. It distorts one's perception of reality." Demet, drawing upon personal experience, spoke about the impact of being exposed to violence in one's professional career:

*"When I was doing the Comenius Project with my best friend in Ankara, we broke up. He was doing sneaky things behind our backs so that he could visit other countries. As a result, I did not consider participating in the Comenius Project again."*

Many of the participants offered opinions of how violence could be prevented. Suna said, "We turn on the TV every day only to see an increase in violence, substance abuse, fraud, and people engaged in self-harm. In this age of rapid change, we need education to teach us fundamental human values." Another finding of this study was that some of the participants attempted to define the concept of gender roles through focus on gender roles equality, and stated their belief that gender roles equality is not an attainable goal, and leads to a conflict between gender roles. Dilek expressed her belief that gender roles equality is unrealistic, "I know we have a male-dominant society."

### **How the Global Education in Character and Values Education Course Shapes the Participants' Perceptions of Controversial Issues**

One of the findings of the research is that Global Education in Character and Values Education course encouraged the participants to think about their own experiences and question their own behaviors during and after the discussion of controversial issues and the various activities in the course. Some of the participants stated that while taking the course, they became aware of their own prejudices, negative emotions (e.g., hatred), violent, and discriminative tendencies. Sema noted that her perspective of the refugee students in her teaching classes had changed as a result of her raised awareness: "After I took the course, my perspective of problematic students changed. The school in which I work is primarily attended by students from Syria. I try to understand them and think like them now." Birsal explained how she had started to question herself: "During this course, I realized that I was also guilty of stereotyping and prejudicial behaviors, albeit unintentionally." İrem also expressed "I tried to understand how the concepts of stigma, marginalization, discrimination, racism, ummahism, sexism, and prejudice had affected my personality, and their effects on my profession."

Another finding of the research was that the course helped the participants corrected their misconceptions about controversial issues. Neşe explained the awareness she had gained as follows:

*"When I look back, the most important benefit of the course was that I came to understand the differences between the concepts we discussed. I realized that I did not know the meanings of such concepts as stigmatization, marginalization, discrimination, prejudice, and that sometimes I was using them incorrectly."*

Commenting on the course, Sultan said: "It prompted us to think about many concepts. I can say that it remedied the incorrect and incomplete understandings we attributed to those concepts." The concept mapping activity showed that the participants perceived the controversial issues only in relation to their effects on humans, globalization, and global education.

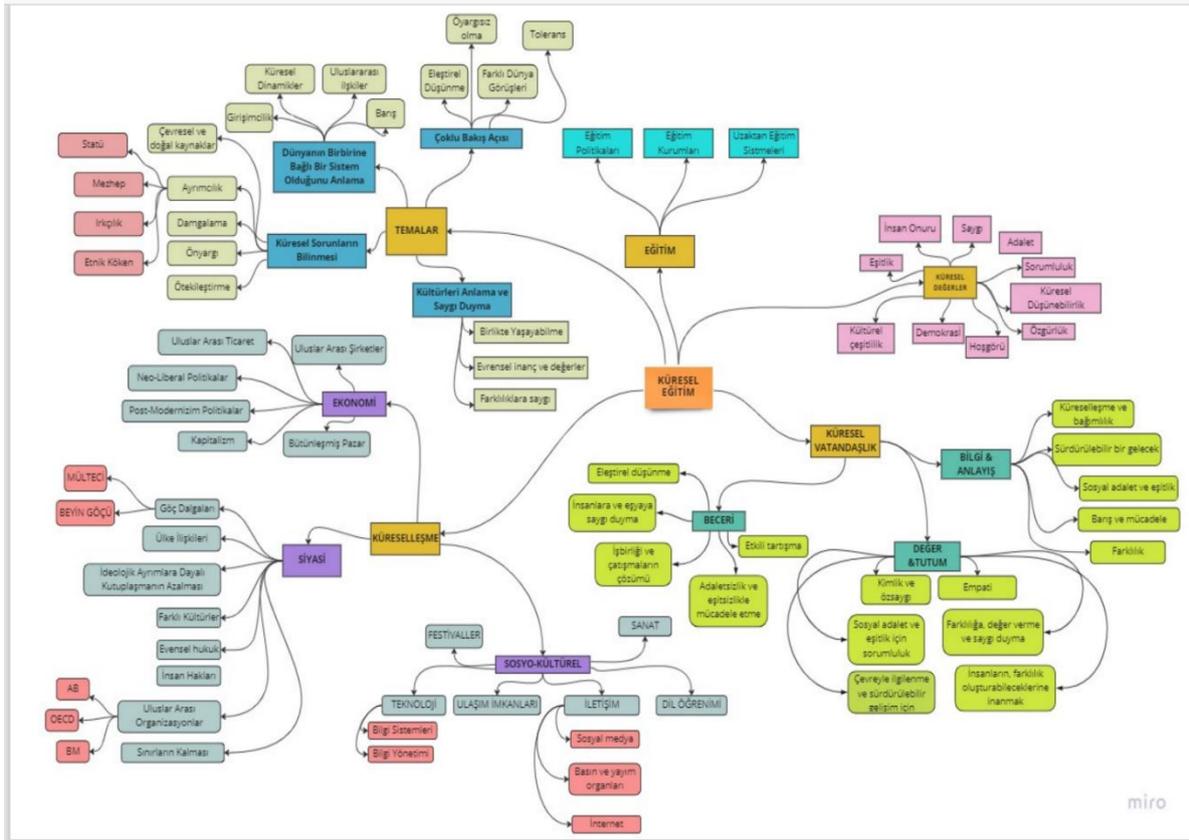


Figure 3. Neşe's concept map

İpek stated that the source of all the controversial issues on her concept map was globalization.

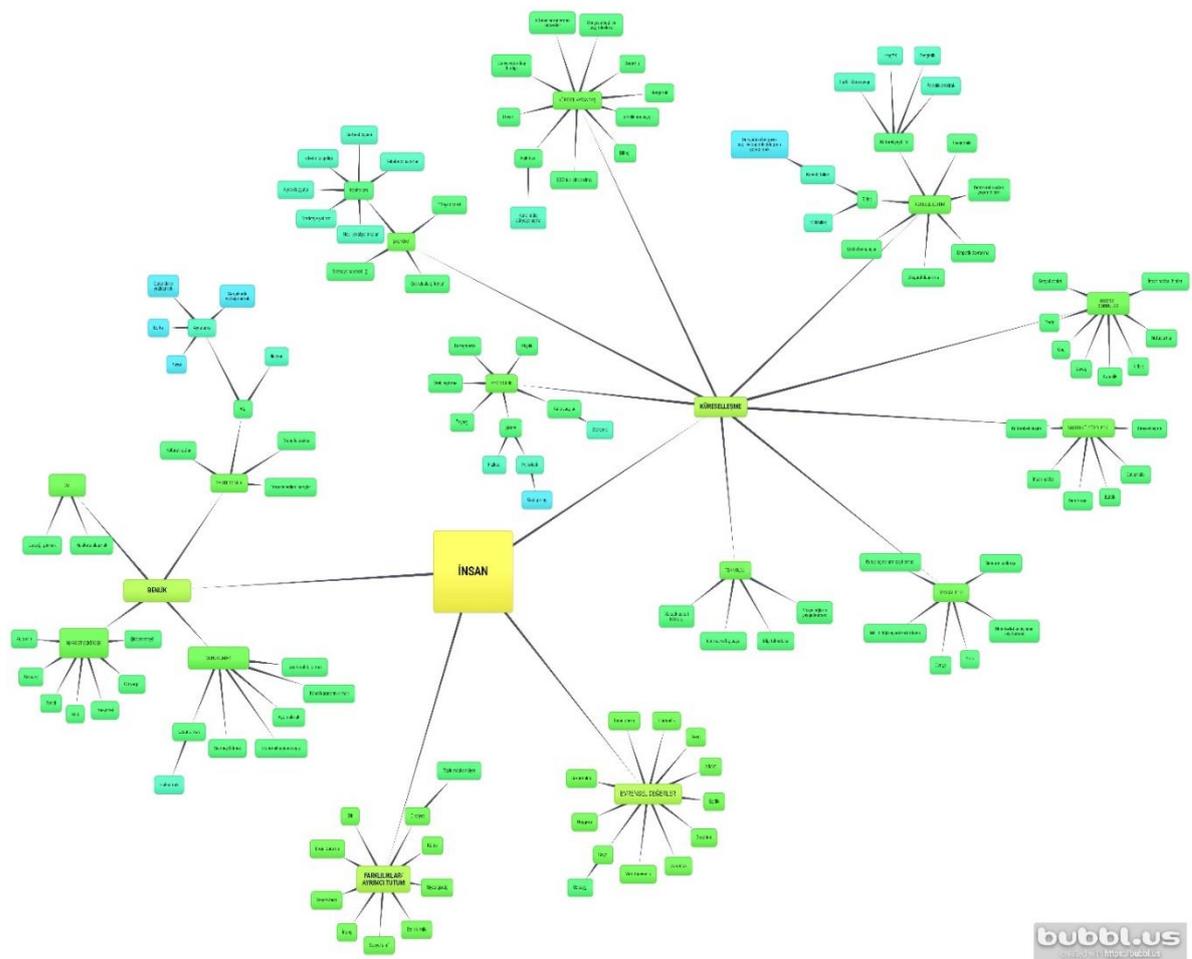


Figure 4. İpek's concept map

Another finding of the study was that the movie analyses conducted in the course aided the participants in understanding the structural features of discrimination and violence, how they occur and the ways they can be prevented, addressing gender roles in terms of its relationship with the patriarchal system, gaining awareness and perspectives about such issues, and making individual self-evaluations of their nature.

While analyzing the movie “The Help”, Ceren said that she understood discrimination/racism to be an ironic circular phenomenon between the oppressor and the oppressed that can be handed down by subsequent generations, “The plates, toilets or any item used by black people are seen as a potential cause of illness. Black people, however, are still being trusted to raise the white people of the future. The move contains similar ironies.”

Sultan explained her perception of how discrimination is presented in the movie Django Unchained, which she analyzed as part of the course:

*“Black people are always in bad conditions, and are forced to serve others, as they are considered deserving of violence and exploitation. It was a truly unacceptable scene when they said that black people were obedient because of differences in their skulls, and presented it as a basis for their horrific acts of discrimination.”*

Referencing the movie “Django Unchained” which she had analyzed, Dilek suggested that a desire for power could give rise to violence: “One of the crucial details of the movie is that the black actor playing the role of the “housekeeper” had a voice just like the white people, and had earned this right by oppressing and inflicting violence on other black people.”

In her analysis of the movie “My Name is Khan”, İrem stated that the most effective approach to the prevention of violence was to raise awareness about discrimination and prejudice, and to instill the values of love and respect through character and values education:

*“The references to religion, nationalism, discrimination, and prejudices against different individuals in the movie and the message given throughout the movie, namely, that kindness, honesty, and love can change the world through a snowball effect, seem to be very valuable to me in terms of character and values education.”*

Referring to the movie “Mutluluk”, İpek explained her perception that gender roles are embedded in the patriarchal system, and that this could be a factor in increasing and facilitating violence against women:

*“The tendency towards violence against women, which is the dominant theme of the movie, is further reinforced by the phenomenon of honor killing. The fact that the patriarchal structure increases violence against women, the acts of violence ordinary and permanent. One of the most undesirable situations for women is to become accustomed to such aggressive behaviors.”*

Sultan explained that she had had the opportunity to evaluate her own thoughts and actions through the movie analyses carried out as part of the course. She said “It was a moment of sadness when I realized that I should live with more empathy and be especially careful with my words.”

### **Participants’ Perceptions of Distance Education**

Since the study was carried out as part of a course within a non-thesis master's degree program, it also revealed the participants’ perception of distance education. The participants listed the positive aspects of distance education, including the facilitation of the acquisition of professional skills and individual development, the creation of an educational environment in which different people can come together, and the facilitation of attendance to the course. Adile explained how distance education had contributed to her professional development: “I think it is definitely very effective. We wrote the Teknofest Project yesterday at school and I realized that I had learned a lot in this program.” Canan, on the other hand, emphasized how the distance education program had contributed to her individual development: “If we had not been offered the opportunity to attend the courses remotely, it would have been almost impossible for me to attend under my current conditions.”

Ayten described the positive vibe created by an educational environment that brings together differences, “Actually, it is generally positive, given that people from many different provinces come together, as they all bring different points of view. We inevitably create a sense of us there.” Melis emphasized on distance education was its facilitation of access to education, “The good thing about it is that we can do things directly anywhere, anytime; we can connect. I think this is the most positive aspect of it. To discuss about controversial issues, I think distance education offers great advantages.”

The participants saw the absence of a requirement to turn on their cameras during classes as a positive aspect of distance education, and stated their belief that distance education is affordable and efficient, while the ability to record the classes was a further advantage. İrem explained how distance education and the absence of a requirement to turn on the camera encouraged her to attend the classes: “Face-to-face classes can definitely provide a different transition. Turning on the camera is both an advantage and a disadvantage for me. I am home with children, this is definitely an advantage.”

Emphasizing the economic nature of distance education, Dilek said:

*“In my opinion, distance education, like everything else, has its pros and cons, but for me the benefits outweigh the drawbacks. This course is held completely online, and I am very happy right now because I incur no travel costs and save time.”*

Kadriye expressed an opinion that the recording of classes in distance education allowed students to include education in their everyday life practices, saying, “It saves time, and there is convenience in being able to stream the recorded classes, as well as the evening classes, particularly for those who are busy working during the day.”

Another finding of the study is the participants’ perceptions that the inability of the participants to attend the class via video conference in courses leads to a lack of communication and limited participation. The participants stated that having limited knowledge of the use of technical tools and the problems that can occur while using such tools can make it difficult to attend classes in distance education programs. Demet and Kadriye mentioned some disadvantages of distance education. According to Demet, “If people turn on their cameras, their sincerity can be understood from their facial expressions and what they write.

If they turn off their cameras and we cannot communicate, we cannot understand what they are thinking and write.” Kadriye also said, “These are just some of disadvantages of delivering courses through distance learning. People generally do not attend classes through video conferencing and prefer writing down short sentences, and all these factors reduce the motivation of the teachers.”

İrem stated that her limited knowledge of the use of the platform on which the courses are delivered in distance education made it difficult for her to attend the classes, saying: “I am trying to figure out the system, and honestly I don’t have a clue what I am doing right now. Fortunately, we have a WhatsApp group through which we help each other.” Kadriye also conveyed her belief that the possible disruptions that may occur during distance education may be detrimental to the process, “Sometimes my Internet connection crashes. I get stressed. I cannot focus properly on the moment. Sometimes there is a power cut, the computer shuts down, etc. There can be such problems. I think distance education can sometimes be demotivating.”

## CONCLUSION, DISCUSSION, and IMPLICATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, it can be concluded that the majority of the participants defined controversial issues as those that need to be agreed upon, and that must be considered based on the views of different parties, although some of the participants suggested that this was the case only related to issues “involving a dispute”. The participants referred to gender roles, education and values, and religious, social, economic, and environmental issues as controversial issues. In previous studies, Kuş and Öztürk (2019) found that teachers perceived the education system and religious differences as controversial issues, Çopur (2015) found that teachers considered the education and examination system to be controversial, while Woolley (2020) suggested that teacher candidates perceived sexual orientation as a controversial issue. Contrasting the findings of the present study, there are studies in literature reporting violence against women, terrorism, nationalism, incompetence, corruption, examination system, judicial independence, and unemployment to be the most important controversial issues in Turkey (Seçgin, 2009).

After the class, the participants shared that by focusing on democratic personality development, values and global education, and understanding that the world is interconnected and interdependent, improving self-awareness, and raising global citizens, negative outcomes of controversial issues could be prevented. There have been studies in the literature reporting that teachers believe lessons on controversial issues should be included in the curriculum (Byford et al., 2009; Tannebaum, 2020; Zembylas & Kambani, 2012).

The participants stated that controversial issues should be included in character and values education, if a culture of self-awareness, tolerance, and respect for differences is to be developed, and to help people acquire skills in self-control. The participants also emphasized that teachers should be impartial when teaching controversial issues, and conveyed a belief that controversial issues should be addressed from simple to complicated by creating an environment appropriate for discussion in the classroom, using examples and activities that take into account the developmental stage of the students. Gert-Jan Wansink et al. (2023) suggest that it is important for students to perceive the classroom environment as a safe place when teaching them controversial issues. Sætra (2021) draws attention to the importance of social relations and interactions in the classroom, and the application of appropriate rules during discussions of controversial issues. Some participants suggested that awareness of controversial issues could be raised through religious education on how to respect boundaries. It is highlighted in literature that teaching controversial subjects can help students overcome their prejudices, respect differences, and participate in society as active and conscious citizens (Hand & Levinson, 2012; Hess, 2009).

Another finding of the study is that the participants consider discrimination, violence, and gender roles to be controversial issues. The findings of the study indicated that the approach of the participants to discrimination addressed its basis, nature, types, consequences, and means of prevention. All of the participants stated that when exposed to discrimination, or when in the position of a perpetrator of discrimination, they suffer harm and may experience emotional trauma as a result, and stated that the potential consequences of discrimination include violence, negatively affecting the lives of individuals. Mulvey et al. (2020) reported a relationship between perceived discrimination and bullying among young people in their study of a student sample. Assari and Lankarani (2017) reported a positive correlation between discrimination and psychological disorders, while other studies in the literature have suggested that discrimination negatively affects the academic achievement of individuals (Assari & Caldwell, 2018; Banerjee et al., 2018; Benner & Graham 2013; Stephan & Stephan, 2013). Xiong et al. (2021) claim that discrimination can be detrimental to both the lives and group activities of individuals, and to increase their aggression levels.

One of the findings of the study was that the participants believed violence stems from feelings of inadequacy and inferiority, from social and institutional deficiencies, and from desire for power, and referred to violence in the context of its types, nature, consequences, and means of prevention. There have been previous studies in the literature highlighting an understanding among teachers that the reason violence is so common in schools relates to the failure of authorities to take the necessary measures (Brandt, 2021; Çaylı & Çaylı, 2022). Gorgon et al. (2020) found that both teachers and students believed that violence in schools could be reduced by providing students with more guidance and counseling, and that teachers should be equipped with the necessary skills to deal with violence.

The results of the research suggested that the Global Education in Character and Values Education course encouraged the participants to question their own beliefs and to reflect on controversial issues, both while learning them and afterwards. It was further found that the course helped the participants gain self-awareness of their misconceptions regarding controversial issues. Another finding of the study was that the movie analyses carried out as part of the course led the participants to consider the nature of discrimination and violence, how they occur, the means of preventing them, and the relationship between gender roles and the patriarchal system, supported them in gaining an awareness and perspective of such issues, and encouraged them to evaluate their own beliefs. Previous studies have identified education as a determining factor in the perception of discrimination in individuals (Verkuyten & Thijs, 2013; Vervaeke et al., 2018). Balakrishnan (2017) reported art activities to be instrumental in raising awareness of discrimination and violence, and in helping in the acquisition of critical thinking skills.

Körükçü (2021) noted in his study of social studies teachers that they found values education to be ineffective when delivered online, while the participants in the present study highlighted the pros of distance education, including the facilitation of the acquisition of professional skills and individual development, the creation of an environment in which different people can come together, and the facilitation of attendance to the course. Finally, the participants emphasized that the inability of students to attend distance education courses visually resulted in a lack of communication and limited their participation. Er and Saritiken (2022) found that teachers had limited technical knowledge, and reported that distance education gave rise to miscommunication between teachers and students.

In the light of the findings of the study, the following suggestions can be made:

- In an effort to eliminate any conceptual confusion related to the definition and scope of controversial issues, courses on controversial issues should be given more focus in non-thesis Master's degree programs.
- To equip students with the ability to cope with the social and psychological challenges associated with the discrimination and violence arising out of the increased communication and interaction with different cultures in the globalizing world, courses covering such issues should be incorporated into the non-thesis Master's degree programs.
- Various activities can be included in courses teaching controversial issues so as to provide students with a profound understanding of such matters.
- Character and Values Education Programs should be expanded to raise awareness of controversial issues, social changes and conflicts, and to improve the coping skills of those involved.
- To make the education process more effective, instructions and training should be provided on the use of the distance education systems to students before the commencement of the education process.

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