

VALUES DEVELOPMENT THROUGH GYMNASTIC EDUCATION IN PRESCHOOL CHILDREN

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Abstract

Physical education and sports are at the forefront of many schools of thought when it comes to values education since sport has the power to provide a universal framework for learning values. For this reason, the aim of this study is to examine the development of values in children aged four and five who start their gymnastics education in early childhood. In the experimentally planned study, the children's families filled the values scale as a pre-test and post-test, and the changes were examined. The population of the research group consisted of children aged four to five who attended the gymnastics course opened by a private club in the Akhisar district of Manisa during the summer period. The sample group consisted of 49 children whose consent was obtained after informing their families. The Preschool Values Scale Family Form (PVSFF), developed by Neslitürk and Çeliköz (2015), was used as a measurement tool. Although there was no significant difference between the pre-test and post-test mean scores of the Preschool Values Scale Family Form, a significant difference was found only in the responsibility sub-dimension of the scale. Therefore, it is understood that children can gain values, especially responsibility, through lifelong game-based sports. Considering that learning through game is important in early childhood, it is thought that emphasizing the concept of values in the movement or sports education programs to be structured and to inform the teachers, coaches or consultants working in this field is crucial.

Key words: *pre-school education, sports, movement education, gymnastics, values education.*

INTRODUCTION

Every society wants to transfer its culture, traditions, and customs to the individuals within it, and to pass its values on to the next generations. The best way to do this is by instilling value to children (Sümbüllü & Altınışık, 2016; Koç & Akdoğan, 2018). Values are generally

defined as a set of desirable behaviors (Gündoğan, 2019). In other words, values are explained as generalized social behavior principles that are accepted as the most correct, best, and beneficial in society. Since they are an important part of the daily life of individuals, values deeply influence

life (Ceyhan, 2022). Values vary according to what people consider important and the goals they want to pursue (Roccas et al., 2002).

Values are essential and indispensable concepts for nurturing individuals who think, feel, and act in a healthy manner, emphasizing that life itself should be the subject of lessons rather than a lesson (Öztürk et al., 2016; Kaya & Antepi, 2018). Research indicates that children's value systems are similar to those of adults in many ways before school age (Tamm & Tulviste, 2022). Hence, the preschool period is viewed as a crucial time that directly influences children's future personality structures, emotions, and thoughts. Consequently, teaching values in early childhood significantly contributes to a child's social and emotional development. As emotions are present in individuals long before school age, providing a quality education during childhood, when the acquisition of values and character is most rapid and convenient, becomes a cornerstone that people require in life (Bostan, 2014; Koç & Akdoğan, 2018). Activity-based practices implemented during the preschool period enhance a child's ability to feel a sense of belonging to a certain social group, engage in helpful interactions, establish common activities, foster harmonious relations with peers, and interact effectively with those around them (Ivanchuk et al., 2022). Physical education and sports activities designed for this purpose can instill various human values such as courtesy, sportsmanship, cooperation, honesty, endurance, and leadership, thanks to their dynamic nature. Sport, with its capacity to provide a universal framework for learning values, has been recognized as a powerful tool in this regard (UNESCO, 2017). Values that

can be imparted to children through physical education and sports include respect, responsibility, helpfulness, social relations, honesty, justice, fair play, citizenship, and more (Gil-Madrona et al., 2016; Rogers, 2020).

According to the innovative physical education curriculum at One World International School (OWIS), children are encouraged to lead a healthy and active lifestyle while instilling important values in them. In the preschool program, children embark on their physical education adventures like throwing balls at each other and playing fun games. It is evident that gymnastics, a discipline that has been recognized as an educational branch for many years, holds a central position in the physical education program (Mauldon, 2014). Gymnastics, known for its emphasis on play activities and peer collaborations, has consistently maintained this crucial role. Within gymnastics, children acquire a range of fundamental movement skills, encompassing displacement movements like running, jumping, and bouncing, as well as balancing skills such as standing on one leg, walking in balance, and turning. These movements are essential for the development of children's motor skills in daily life, providing them with opportunities to practice and enhance these skills through gymnastics practices (Mülazımoğlu Ballı, 2021). Beyond these benefits, gymnastics training contributes to improvements in physical fitness, body awareness, spatial awareness, and balance. Moreover, it fosters creativity, aesthetic appreciation, and collaboration within small groups (Kleinman, 2009). Working with peer groups improves cooperation and sensitivity, making individuals more tolerant and willing to help. This experience helps children learn responsibility and

become more reliable individuals (Pallett, 2014). Consequently, it is strongly advocated that all children, especially at the introductory level, should be participate in gymnastics training (Mitchell, Davis & Lopez, 2002). Gymnastics, as a discipline with an early starting age, is believed to offer value-oriented education to children through peer interactions and game-themed educational content. Despite the longstanding goal of promoting values through physical activity, there is limited evidence and research on values education and development in the field of physical education and sports (Wandzilak, 2012). Moreover, few studies specifically investigate the effects of play and creative drama, with positive outcomes reported in these studies (Kılıç, 2017; Mehmudoğlu & Yüce, 2020; Can & Günaydı, 2019; Doğan, 2021; Gündüz et al., 2017; Özyürek et al., 2018). In this context, there is a noticeable gap in the literature regarding the impact of disciplines such as gymnastics on values. To address this gap, this study aims to examine the development of values through basic gymnastics education during the pre-school period.

METHOD

This semi-experimental study was planned to examine the value development of four and five-year-old children.

In this study, 49 preschool children aged four and five, officially enrolled in the gymnastics program at the Akhisargücü Sports Club in the Akhisar district of Manisa, were included. Before the application, the parents of the preschool children planned to participate in the study were informed about the research. Participation was voluntary, and written and

verbal consent were obtained from both parents and children.

The research received approval from the Ege University Social and Humanities Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Committee on 29/06/2022, with the meetings/decision number 06/05 and protocol number 1520.

A personal information form, prepared by the researcher, was completed by the parents, containing various demographic information. Additionally, the parents filled out the Preschool Values Scale Family Form, developed by Neslitürk and Çeliköz (2015). The Preschool Values Scale is a 3-point Likert-type scale, assessable by both families and teachers. It comprises six sub-dimensions and a total of 30 items, covering aspects like friendship, honesty, cooperation, sharing, respect, and responsibility. During the validity studies, factor analysis and subtest correlation coefficients were computed. Items were included in the final scale based on a factor load value of at least .30 in the factor analysis. Significant relationships at the levels of .01 and .001 were observed between subtests of the teacher and family forms when examining correlation coefficients. Moreover, the reliability of the forms was established using the internal consistency coefficient, with split-half and Cronbach's alpha reliability formulas. The family form demonstrated a reliability coefficient of .84 based on the split-half method and .89 according to the Cronbach's Alpha reliability results.

The research was carried out at the Akhisargücü Sports Club over a period of 10 weeks, including both pre-test and post-test measurement weeks. In the first week, the Preschool Values Scale was completed as the pre-test. Subsequently, an 8-week experimental procedure was implemented.

Finally, in the last week, the same scale was once again filled out by the parents for the post-test evaluation.

The experimental program commenced one week after the start of the school holidays and spanned 8 weeks

throughout the summer vacation. The content of the 8-week planned training and the 10-week total program, including the 2-week measurement period, is outlined below:

Table 1
10-week program content

Weeks	Days	Duration	Program content
1.	Tuesday	Online	Parents fill in the Preschool Values Scale as a pre-test.
2.	Tuesday-Thursday	1 hour	Meet-and-greet (everyone tells their name and greets each other). Presentation of the rules to be followed in gymnastics training, such as coming to class on time; wearing an appropriate outfit for gymnastics; and packing together after the lesson (promoting the value of responsibility). Activities to be followed in order. Showing respect when a friend is unable to perform a move (promoting the respect and friendship values), cooperation and sharing tasks during games (promoting the cooperation and share value). Honesty encouraged in evaluation of gymnastic moves given as homework (promoting the honesty value). Coordination studies carried out aimed at developing skills such as group cohesion, maintaining order, following instructions, and waiting for friend.
3.	Tuesday-Thursday	1 hour	Warm-up using a game (tail snatch); teaching basic gymnastics postures (lunge, back scale, bridge, plank, side plank, reverse plank, candlestick, long sitting, straddle leg sitting, athlete sitting, eagle stance, tabletop, reverse table top, butterfly sitting).
4.	Tuesday-Thursday	1 hour	Warm-up using an animal-imitation game (bear walk, rabbit, caterpillar, snake, worm, seal, crab), repetition and control of basic gymnastics postures (lunge, back scale, bridge, plank, side plank, reverse plank, candlestick, long sitting, straddle leg sitting, athlete sitting, eagle stance, tabletop, reverse table top, butterfly sitting) through games. The animal-imitation game rules: the teacher calls out a movement, everyone performs it at the same time. Those who get it wrong are eliminated. This continues until only one person remains.
5.	Tuesday-Thursday	1 hour	Warm-up using the animal-imitation game (bear walk, rabbit, caterpillar, snake, worm, seal, crab); teaching flexibility and balance postures (seated forward fold, standing fold, split, straddle leg sitting, front balance, side balance, vertical split, bridge).

6.	Tuesday- Thursday	1 hour	Warm-up using a game, repetition of flexibility and balance postures (seated forward fold, standing fold, split, straddle leg sitting, front balance, side balance, vertical split, bridge). The game rules: the teacher calls out a movement, everyone performs it simultaneously. Anyone who makes a mistake is eliminated. This continues until only one person remains. The teacher may intentionally make a wrong to add some excitement. Teaching basic aerobic gymnastics steps (march, jog, skip, knee lift, kick, jumping jack, lunge).
7.	Tuesday- Thursday	1 hour	Warm-up on the spot, teaching jumping movements (air turn, straddle jump, tuck jump, cossack jump, pike jump, split jump, star jump); playing and repeating aerobic steps (march, jog, skip, knee lift, kick, jumping jack, lunge) using the coordination ladder.
8.	Tuesday- Thursday	1 hour	Warm-up using a game of catch; repetition of basic jumping movements (air turn, straddle jump, tuck jump, cossack jump, pike jump, split jump, star jump). The game includes jumping on the mat from different heights and performing the basic jumping movements. Jumps from from each height are different. Anyone who makes a mistake is eliminated.
9.	Tuesday- Thursday	1 hour	Parkour competition, checking each of the learned movements.
10.	Tuesday	Online	Parents to fill in the Preschool Values Scale as a post-test.

In the 8-week experimental program, with games integrated in the course content to promote the values of responsibility, respect, cooperation, friendship, sharing and honesty, emphasis was placed on the concepts of respect, cooperaton, sharing, and friendship. Additionally, at the end of each lesson, the movements learned in that lesson were given to the children to study at home as homework. In the following week, the children were always asked whether they did their homework (to promote the values of responsibility and honesty).

The pre-test and post-test data obtained from the experimental and control groups were analyzed using the SPSS Statistics 25.0 package program. Skewness-Kurtosis values and Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests were used to determine the normality distribution and the analysis methods to be used in the study. Mann Whitney-U and Kruskal Wallis tests were used for group comparisons, and Wilcoxon-Signed Rank test was used for pre-test-post-test comparisons, since the number of samples (n:49) was small, and the distribution was not normal.

RESULTS

Table 2 presents participants' socio-demographic data.

When the normality distributions are examined as presented in Table 3, skewness and kurtosis values of some variables appear to deviate from the extreme points.

The total scores of the participants' preschool values scale did not differ according to gender, age, and kindergarten variables in the pre-test. (Table 4).

Table 5 shows the total scores of the participants' preschool values scale didn't differ according to the mother's and father's education level variables in the pre-test.

Table 6 presents there was a significant difference only in the sub-dimension of responsibility in the participants' pre-test and post-test scores as extracted from the preschool values scale family form.

There was no significant gender difference in the scores of the scale total score and sub-dimensions (Table 7).

As displayed in Table 8, age produced a significant difference in the total score of the scale and the difference scores of its sub-dimensions only in the friendship score.

As shown in Table 9, the averages of the friendship sub-dimension are in favor of the post-test in the 4-year-old group.

Table 2
Frequency table

Variable	Type	Frequency	Percent
Gender	Girl	38	77.6
	Boy	11	22.4
Age	Four	30	61.2
	Five	19	38.8
Preschool	Private	34	69.4
	Public	15	30.6
Mother's education level (graduate)	Primary-secondary school	2	4.1
	High school	5	10.2
	University	37	75.5
	Master's/ doctorate	5	10.2
Father's education level (graduate)	Primary-secondary school	4	8.2
	High school	11	22.4
	University	32	65.3
	Master's/ doctorate	2	4.1

Table 3
Normality distributions

	Gender	Age	Preschool (private-public)	Pretest Values Total Score
N	49	49	49	49
Mean	1.2245	1.3878	1.3061	47.8980
Standart deviation	.42157	.49229	.46566	4.77513
Skewness	1.363	.475	.868	-.676
Std. error of skewness	.340	.340	.340	.340
Kurtosis	-.151	-1.851	-1.301	1.264
Std. error of kurtosis	.668	.668	.668	.668

Table 4

Results of Mann Whitney-U test for pre-test preschool values scale total scores

Variables	Mann Whitney- U	Z	p
Gender	140,	-1.661	.097
Age	277	-.165	.869
Preschool	174	-1.765	.078

Table 5

Kruskal Wallis test results for pre-test preschool values scale total scores

Variables	Chi-Square	df	Asym. Sig.
Mother's education level (graduated)	2.174	3	.537
Father's education level (graduated)	.312	3	.958

Table 6

Pre-test post-test Wilcoxon results in relation to the participants' preschool values scale total score and sub-dimension averages

	Total Values Scale Score	Responsibility	Respect	Cooperation	Honesty	Friendship	Sharing
Z	-.801 ^b	-2.002 ^b	-1.583 ^c	-.475 ^b	-.320 ^c	-1.439 ^b	-.222 ^c
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.423	.045	.114	.635	.749	.150	.824

Table 7

Comparison of pre-test and post-test difference scores in relation to gender in preschool values scale sub-dimensions

	Responsibility	Respect	Cooperation	Honesty	Friendship	Sharing	Values Total
Kruskal Wallis	.043	.321	.157	1.511	.659	.037	1.391
df	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Asym. Sig.	.836	.571	.692	.219	.417	.848	.238

Table 8

Comparison of pre-test and post-test difference scores in relation to age in preschool values scale sub-dimensions

	Responsibility	Respect	Cooperation	Honesty	Friendship	Sharing	Values Total
Kruskal Wallis	.105	.676	.027	.906	6.648	1.254	.880
df	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Asym. Sig.	.746	.411	.869	.341	.010	.263	.348

Table 9

Pre-test post-test averages in the friendship sub-dimension in relation to age

	Valid	Friendship average (Pre-test)	Friendship average (Post-test)
Age 4	30	1.8200	1.9267
Age 5	19	1.9263	1.8737

DISCUSSION

In the study, preschool children who underwent 8 weeks of gymnastics training during the summer showed an increase in total scores on the values scale. However, this difference was not statistically significant, except for the responsibility sub-dimension, where a significant difference was observed. The significance of the responsibility dimension may be attributed to the fact that the movements taught in the course were assigned as homework, requiring children to take ownership of their responsibilities.

There is a lack of literature examining the development of values specifically through sports such as gymnastics. However, existing studies on values in education highlight concepts such as respect, responsibility, love, tolerance, and cooperation as essential for children's development (Akto & Akto, 2017; Arıcı & Bartan, 2019; Ogelman & Sarıkaya, 2015; Yıldız, Elibol & Ada, 2021). These concepts align with the scale and sub-dimensions used in our study. Notably, Yıldız et al. (2021) found that sharing is a challenging value to acquire, consistent with Ogelman and Sarıkaya's (2015) observation that responsibility and sharing are particularly challenging for families and teachers to instill in children. The significant difference observed in the responsibility sub-dimension in our study supports the notion that sportive activities, especially those involving game-based fun

activities like gymnastics, can serve as effective tools in facilitating the transfer of values that are often difficult to attain.

Furthermore, the study revealed that the development of values did not exhibit significant differences based on age and gender. Regarding age variables, only the difference scores in the friendship sub-dimension showed significance in favor of the 4-year-old age group. This finding aligns with Neslitürk and Çeliköz's (2015) study, which reported no difference in the family form scores of the values scale in preschool children based on gender and age. Similarly, Deniz's (2019) master's thesis results indicated no significant relationship between the family form scores related to values in preschool children and the children's gender and age variables. Upon examining sub-dimensions such as friendship, honesty, sharing, cooperation, and respect, which did not vary significantly based on age and gender, it is suggested that acquiring these values may take time. Pedagogical support and participation in a longer and more regular training program are considered potential factors that could make a difference in developing these values.

In Şahin's (2017) study, girls' value scale scores were reported to be significantly higher than boys. Similarly, Eke's (2018) study mentioned a higher mean for girls than boys, specifically in the cooperation sub-dimension. Ötgür's (2019) results indicated a significant difference favoring girls in the responsibility sub-

dimension of the value acquisition scale for children. Alamehmet's (2019) master's thesis observed higher mean scores for girls in both the preschool values scale and the honesty sub-dimension compared to boys. Yakupoğulları's (2018) master's thesis found significantly higher scores for girls in respect and cooperation than boys. Yılmaz et al. (2022) compared the value perceptions of Turkish and English children, revealing significantly higher scores for girls. Contrary to these findings in the literature, no significant difference between genders was observed in the present study. This lack of difference may be attributed to the fact that both girls and boys participated together in gymnastics activities, engaging in games and inclusive activities without gender-specific distinctions. Regarding age variables, while Şahin's (2019) and Şahin's (2017) studies found that as children's age increases, their level of value acquisition also increases, the current study did not reveal significant differences in sub-dimensions or the total scale, except for the friendship sub-dimension, based on age. To draw a clearer conclusion regarding age effects, longitudinal studies may be warranted.

Dönmez & Uyanık (2022) proposed initiating preparations for values development in the pre-school period, emphasizing the need for practical applications. The current experimental study aligns with this suggestion. Yenen & Ulucan (2021) highlighted the complexity of the value transfer process, involving multiple disciplines. Thornberg & Oğuz (2013) emphasized the integration of values with subjects like physical education, and Öztürk & Can (2020) noted the positive impact of integrating music education with movement on the social values of preschool students. Several studies support the idea

that transferring values through physical education and sports is a powerful, enjoyable, and sustainable approach (Öztürk Kuter & Kuter, 2012). The choice of gymnastics in this study, with activities conducted through entertaining games, aligns with the notion that values, being related to various disciplines, can be effectively conveyed through enjoyable physical education and sports activities.

Moreover, studies have indicated the effectiveness of creative drama (Kılıç, 2017; Mehmudoğlu & Yüce, 2020) and games (Can & Günadı, 2019; Doğan, 2021; Gündüz et al., 2017; Özyürek et al., 2018) in values development. The emphasis is on the idea that children learn more permanently when actively participating, doing, and experiencing. The practice content of this study reinforces the recommendations and findings from other literature, showcasing that gymnastics exercises, designed as game-based activities, engage children in the learning process with their peers in a fun and interactive manner.

CONCLUSION

In the study, a significant difference was observed only in the dimension of responsibility in the development of values in preschool children who participated in gymnastics training during the summer period. However, an increase was noted in the scores of all sub-dimensions. This outcome suggests that game-based sportive activities such as gymnastics in preschool children can be effective in transferring the values that families and teachers aim to instill in children.

SUGGESTIONS

The recommendation is to conduct multidisciplinary studies in various disciplines and with different samples to explore the development of values. It is also suggested to design and incorporate training plans with game content, such as gymnastics and group activities, into the preschool curriculum.

Additionally, supporting trainers who work with younger age groups in terms of communication and specific training activities for this age group is deemed important. Therefore, it is advised to include courses on working with preschool children in the curriculum of the Sports Science Faculty.

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