THE BUTTERFLY EFFECT OF THE DISTANCE LEARNING MA PROGRAM ON CHARACTER AND VALUE EDUCATION AT ANADOLU UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

For individuals who form the society to live in harmony, they need to acquire a set of values such as love, respect, tolerance and honesty. To create a society with individuals having these characteristics, value education should be carefully planned and implemented. Students who study in the Distance Learning MA Program on Character and Value Education, are expected to stimulate various feelings, thoughts, values and behaviours in their families, friends, colleagues and immediate environments, starting from themselves. The aim of this qualitative study is to reveal to what extent the students reflected the outcomes they gained in the program to themselves, their families, immediate environments and the society. The participants were 22 students studying in the Distance Learning MA Program on Character and Value Education at Anadolu University, Turkey. The data were collected through a data-collection form consisting of open-ended questions. Descriptive analysis was performed for data analysis. The results of the study showed that the students who attended the Distance Learning MA Program on Character and Value Education gained certain benefits for themselves, which were also reflected to their families and immediate environments as well as the country and the world. Various suggestions were offered in accordance with the results of the study.

Keywords: Character education, value education, distance learning, butterfly effect.

INTRODUCTION

Today, an observation of the incidents in families, workplaces, schools and communities, and inter-personal relationships shows that major problems are experienced in the society due to the lack of values such as love, respect, tolerance, justice and honesty. Those who throw their rubbish around, harm other's property and life, disrupt public health, use violence against animals, and make a living through corruption, and wars are only some of the examples that highlight the importance of character and value education for a society. In this respect, Mevlana's saying "Teaching wisdom and science to an ill-mannered person is similar to giving a sword to a bandit" emphasises the importance of being well-behaved above all things.

The gradual decrease in human values in social life poses an important threat to the society, and thus, necessary measures should be taken so that the education system can achieve the objective of raising active and responsible people. For individuals who form the society to acquire national and universal values, it is deemed necessary to conduct character and value education in a planned way.

One of the most significant goals of character education is to help people be good. This is a goal that should be achieved within life since the beginning of humankind. As the starting point of education is human existence, the origin of character education should thus be this very existence. In other words, character education is as old as education itself (Lickona, 1993).

Character education is described as a deliberate attempt for developing positive individual traits that affect the ways of thinking, forming attitudes and acting in real life. The word "character" comes from the Greek word "charassein" that means "to mark" or "to overwrite". The meaning turned into "a distinctive mark" and then to "behavioural pattern of an individual" over time. Character education aims to make a significant contribution to individuals' ability and ideals to build a good life that is beneficial to them and others (Komalasari and Saripudin, 2018).

The future of a society depends on well-trained people who have a strong character. Since people do not automatically gain a character with good morals, equipping every individual with values that help him/her make moral decisions and act accordingly is among the primary objectives of schools. In this sense, character education can be explained as the development of knowledge, skills and abilities that enable students to make appropriate choices for which they can bear responsibility (Eksi, 2003). Character or value education is an attempt to create educational and supportive constructs in schools to support the development of positive, ethical, social tendencies and competencies in young individuals, including strengthening their academic interests and achievements (Berkowitz, 2011). Value education has the potential to influence and change feelings, behaviors and thoughts of students and reveal their innate human characteristics (Tulunay Ates, 2017). Jeynes (2019) emphasize that schools and society will become stronger in various senses to the extent that an effective character education practice provides both academic and behavioral benefits.

When individuals acquaint themselves with their character and parents and teachers get to know the young individuals that they are responsible for, there will be a better future for the society. This highlights why people should have values.

The common point of the concepts used in the literature with terms such as character education, moral education and value education is teaching individuals the ability to apply moral thoughts and behaviours through democratic means, or in other words raising individuals who have attained moral maturity. Value education can be said to include everything that affects children's value judgements and attitudes. Value education is apparent almost in every context such as rules, events, social relationships, traditions and children that surround children, in addition to the school and classroom. An important issue that character educators highlight is that the education delivered at school has a reflection in the society, and if there is no such effect, there can be moral contradictions in children (Turan, 2014). As a matter of fact, Bozkurt (2019) concluded in his research that teachers perceive values education as important as academic success, and attribute great importance to experiencing the values.

Value education has been the subject of various research studies in educational sciences and included in the course curricula in recent years; however, to yield the expected effect, the conceptual framework of values education needs to be examined closely (Sarica, 2018). Character and value education delivered through the curricula of certain courses in schools encourages students to exhibit positive behaviours in their daily lives by adopting values such as love, respect, honesty, justice and tolerance. It leads to the modelling of these positive behaviours to others who can also adopt such behaviours, and thus to the formation of a society containing people who treat others fairly and honestly. This widespread impact of character and value education can be viewed as the butterfly effect that is described as a butterfly's merely flapping its wings, which can eventually cause a storm. The butterfly effect thus relates to the idea that the flapping wings of a flying butterfly can efect a large-scale area.

According to this approach, the application of the chaos theory, which highlights that the existence of many different variables that can cause an event and that small efects can lead to great changes in the consequences of events, to international issues will contribute to the solution of many problems (Ikiz, 2015). When Norton Lorenz presented a paper titled "Does a butterfly's flapping its wings in Brazil cause a storm in Texas?" in a conference organised by American Science Association on 29 December 1972, this approach was introduced to the scientific literature. Although Lorenz did not aim to prove the butterfly effect in

meteorology by means of experiments, it was stated that a butterfly's flapping its wings can cause a storm as it can also calm a storm (Taskin, 2014). The reason why the butterfly effect was called with this name was because the figures and graphs this scientist prepared in his mathematical analyses vaguely resembled a butterfly. The human-oriented nature of social sciences causes the action-reaction mechanism in individual, cultural and social areas to be filtered through a different process than in mathematical sciences. Therefore, this theory that is a proposition in physics is quite rarely applied to social sciences. In the butterfly effect, small changes in the initial state of a system can lead to a chain of events that will produce large-scale changes in the system. If this idea is applied, for example, to the effect of citizenship education within social sciences on raising future citizens, then a hopeful perspective on the maintenance of democracy in the world can be developed (Ponder and Lewis-Ferrell, 2009). Accordingly, as is the focus of this study, delivering character and value education, which falls into educational sciences, through a distance learning MA program without thesis is expected to have students who attend this program to stimulate a set of feelings, thoughts, values and behaviours in themselves, their families, workplaces and immediate environments.

The Distance Learning Non-Thesis MA Program on Character and Value Education is the first and only program of its nature in Turkey, and is provided within the Open and Distance Learning System of Anadolu University. It was launched in 2017, aiming to give many individuals the chance to receive character and value education. After this training, teachers at different levels and those who work in public and private sectors as well as parents will be able to conduct effective value education in their institutions and homes. These individuals' carrying out value education either directly or indirectly would improve social order, leading to a society consisting of active citizens.

Problem

The Distance Learning MA Program on Character and Value Education is is expected to deliver character and values education with a butterfly effect throughout the country, and students from different provinces, ages, professions and environments are expected to pass on their knowledge in an expanding manner. In their study on postgraduate theses on values education, Erbir and Bagci (2013), concluded that teachers and students do not have enough knowledge of values education. In addition, they emphasized that value education is not sufficiently adopted in Turkey and that this problem in the field of value education should be eliminated. In this context, the Distance Learning MA Program on Character and Value Education will hopefully contribute to solving an important problem with a butterfly effect throughout the country.

By means of this MA program, students gain knowledge about current theories and research studies related to character and value education, and scientific research methods. They are then expected to make a contribution to social life by putting into practice the knowledge they acquired in scope of their roles such as parents, employers and teachers in daily life.

In the present study, the benefits of the Distance Learning MA Program on Character and Value Education at Anadolu University for its students, their families and immediate environments were considered as a butterfly effect, and this effect was investigated.

In the literature, no studies have so far associated character and value education with the butterfly effect. In addition, since this program is only available at Anadolu University, there are no studies in which the evaluation of such a program was conducted. Simsek and Alkan (2019) stated that most studies in the literature focused on primary, secondary and higher education, and in their study, they examined the outcomes of teacher trainees in the course "Character and Value Education". Studies on character and value education, a popular research topic in the international literature, have started to be conducted in the Turkish context in recent years. These studies mostly concentrated on preschool (Ata, 2020; Catalbas, 2018; Arslan, 2019; Kocalar, 2019; Turan, 2014; Ulavere & Veisson, 2015) and middle school levels (Tekin & Bedir, 2019; Kilinc Bozkurt, 2019; Akcin, 2016; Cokdolu, 2013) while there is limited research towards the university level (Selcuk & Simsek, 2019; Silay, 2010), but not studies are available in the context of postgraduate education. This study is expected to attract considerable attention to the effect of carefully planned character and value education and its butterfly effect.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to reveal how the students of the Distance Learning MA Program on Character and Value Education reflected what they gained in the program to themselves, their families and immediate environments and the society by means of examples from their lives. The following research questions were addressed based on this purpose:

- What are the outcomes of the Distance Learning MA Program on Character and Value Education for the students?
- What are the benefits of the program for the students' families and immediate environments?
- What are the benefits of the program for the country and the world?
- What do the students suggest for enhancing the effect of character and value education?

METHOD

This section presents information regarding the research design, participants, data collection and analysis, trustworthiness and ethics.

Research Design

Basic qualitative research design was adopted in this study that aimed to reveal the butterfly effect of the Distance Learning MA Program on Character and Value Education at Anadolu University. The primary objective of basic qualitative research is to bring out the ways in which individuals structure their lives, and the meanings they attribute to their experiences (Merriam, 2018). Accordingly, in the present study, it was aimed to identify the meanings the students of the Distance Learning MA Program on Character and Value Education attributed to the outcomes of the program in their lives, the ways they used the knowledge they gained in their lives, and the effect of the program on their families and immediate environments, the country and the world.

Participants

The participants were 22 students studying in the Distance Learning MA Program on Character and Value Education at the Graduate School of Educational Sciences, Anadolu University, Turkey in the 2018-2019 academic year. The characteristics of the sample are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Information about the participants

Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Marital Status	No. of Children	Education	Occupation
Rabia	27	Female	Single	-	Child Development and Education	Teacher
Ipek	34	Female	Married	1	Theatre Sociology	Theatre Trainer
Guler	25	Female	Single	-	Preschool Teaching	Teacher
Meltem	45	Female	Married	2	Turkish Language and Literature	Teacher
Nevin	42	Female	Married	4	Health Administration	Midwife/Health Administrator
Gul	44	Female	Single	-	Business Administration Sociology	Qualified Public Worker
Ceren	52	Female	Single	2	Sociology	Teacher Life Coach
Emine	38	Female	Single	-	Labour economics and industrial relations Sociology (ongoing)	Teacher
Derya	59	Female	Married	2	Philosophy Accommodation Administration	Retired Teacher
Ayse	34	Female	Married	1	Preschool Teaching	Preschool Principal
Fatma	38	Female	Married	2	Theology Sociology	Qur'an Instructor
Yagmur	41	Female	Married	2	Public Administration Theology	Official at the Office of Family and Religious Guidance
Birol	42	Male	Married	3	Geography Teaching International Relations	Teacher
Ali	45	Male	Married	-	International Relations	Religious Official
Demet	49	Female	Married	3	Elementary Teaching	Teacher
Bilge	32	Female	Married	-	Turkish Language and Literature Business Administration	Teacher Turcologist
Munevver	48	Female	Married	1	Elementary Teaching	Specialist Teacher at the Board of Education and Discipline
Hamide	57	Female	Married	1	Faculty of Medicine Sociology Philosophy	Doctor
Reyhan	48	Female	Single	-	Child Health and Education Laborant (ongoing)	Specialist Educator
Eda	28	Female	Married	2	Theology International Relations	Teacher
Tansu	29	Female	Married	-	English Language Teaching, Sociology	Teacher
Nihal	45	Female	Single	-	Business Administration Restoration	Unemployed

Twenty-two students, 20 females and two males, participated in the study. Their ages ranged between 25 and 59. For marital status, 15 of the participants were married, and seven were single. Sixteen of the participants had degrees in multiple areas. They had a wide range of occupations including teacher, doctor, Turcologist, Qur'an instructor, theatre trainer, preschool principal, worker, midwife and life coach.

Data Collection and Analysis

The views of the postgraduate students were examined by means of the data collected through a data collection form with open-ended questions. The form consists of a personal information section, and four open-ended questions. Due attention was paid to make sure that the questions were in line with the research aim. The questions prepared by the researchers were presented to experts for their feedback to ensure that they relate to the topic under investigation and provide the information needed. The data were collected in the 2018-2019 academic year. The researchers informed the participants about the data collection form. They were asked to write their views on the form and send it to the researchers via e-mail.

The research data were analysed through descriptive analysis. In descriptive analysis, data are analysed based on pre-set themes, and research questions can be taken as the based in determining the themes (Yildirim & Simsek, 2011, p.224). Accordingly, in this study, the data were analysed with reference to the themes that were previously determined based on the research questions. In the process of data analysis, the data were firstly categorised according to the themes. These data were then coded with statements that were thought to express the participants' views. The codes were organised into a table. These codes that are shown in a table in the findings section were presented along with direct quotations from the participants' actual statements.

Trustworthiness and Ethics

With regard to research ethics, necessary permissions were taken from the Ethics Board of Social Sciences Research and Publication, Anadolu University, on 26 April 2018 with the protocol number "43563". The participants were informed about the research aim and the fact that the participation was on a voluntary basis. Pseudonyms were used to keep the identity of the participants anonymous. Expert opinion was received with respect to the data collection tool. The research data were examined by two independent researchers to ensure trustworthiness. In addition, to enhance trustworthiness, direct quotations from the participants' statements were used to support the findings.

FINDINGS

In this section, the findings revealed as a result of data analysis are presented. The findings were explained under four main themes that are "The Outcomes of the Distance Learning MA Program on Character and Value Education for Students", "Benefits of the Program for Students' Families and Immediate Environments", "Benefits of the Program for the Country and the World", and "Suggestions for Improving the Effectiveness of Character and Value Education".

The Outcomes of the Distance Learning MA Program on Character and Value Education for Students

The findings showed that the outcomes of the Distance Learning MA Program on Character and Value Education for the students were "acquiring knowledge", "being tolerant", "gaining various skills", "improving family relationships", "developing multiple perspectives", "enhancing professional development", "enabling individual development", "raised awareness related to values" and "self-acquaintance". The findings regarding the outcomes of the Distance Learning MA Program on Character and Value Education for students are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. The Outcomes of the Distance Learning MA Program on Character and Value Education for Students

Acquiring knowledge
Being tolerant
Gaining various skills
Improving family relationships
Developing multiple perspectives
Enhancing professional development
Enabling individual development
Raised awareness related to values
Self-acquaintance

Nihal explained her view that the Distance Learning MA Program on Character and Value Education expanded her knowledge by saying, *"My knowledge was limited to the books I read and the information I came across on web sites, but now I have learned on topics of my interest from the research studies of experts who invested years in their areas."*

Ali and Nevin stated that they became more tolerant thanks to the program they attended. Emphasising that he became more tolerant, Ali said *"Thanks to our education, our relationships with our family, students and immediate environment are more positive now, and we started to be more understanding and tolerant towards each other."* Nevin explained that she was more tolerant after she started the MA program by saying, *"As my level of education increased, I became more modest and tolerant as a result of this training. I felt like I was at the bottom of the ladder. My tolerance has grown thanks to this education."*

Of the students who participated in the study, Tansu, Ipek, Guler, Nevin and Fatma indicated that the program they attended taught them various skills such as research, reading, critical thinking, empathy, self-control, working in a planned way, and communication. By saying, *"This program reminded me what empathy was. It reminded me that students have their own world and I need to see things from their perspective.",* Tansu asserted that the program taught her to show empathy. Guler stated that her reading and research skills improved thanks to the program, and said *"I have got a lot of attention since I started this program. Most people around me got interested in it since it is a topic that concerns all sections of the society. And people started asking more questions, which led me to read and do research more."* Demet thought that the program taught her the questioning skill, and said the following: *"I first questioned myself about whether I neglected the people at home. I reviewed my rapport with my children. I started to observe how my family members approached certain events. I tried to do my best to identify what values we internalised as a Turkish family, and what values we lack."*

Nevin explained in the following her view that the program she attended enhanced her family relationships:

> *"My approach towards my children changed. I used to utter statements like an order when I asked them to do something. But these statements turned into those starting with 'if you want'. I realised that I was able to better understand my husband and had better communication with him. The program also helped me perceive the sources of the programs in family and produce smart and fair solutions to these problems."*

Thinking that the education she received brought her multiple perspectives, Derya said, *"I believed this program would relate to philosophy and axiology. And it did. The contents of the courses included the views and sayings of philosophers. Since I had a background due to my major, I developed new perspectives."* As Derya's views show, students can relate the contents of the courses within the distance learning MA program on character and value education to their own areas, and thus can be enabled to develop multiple perspectives.

Ceren, Ipek, Eda, Ali, Yagmur, Reyhan, Birol and Hamide pointed out that the character and value education MA program contributed to their professional development. While Ali said *"As a religious official, I started to think about how I can be more beneficial to people in terms of character and values, and I started to make an effort in this direction.",* Eda said *"This program contributed to me in many ways. For instance, it changed my perspective to teaching and encouraged me to be more beneficial and sensitive for my students."* Yagmur described the contribution of the education to her professional development by stating the following:

> *"This education helped me gain a lot professionally and it will continue to do so. As religious officials, we try to provide people proper guidance about religion. This education enabled me to adopt more effective and beneficial approaches in my seminars on value education. Moreover, since I started receiving this education, I have got positive feedback from my supervisors and colleagues about my seminars."*

Ceren asserted that the education she received contributed to her professional development. Ceren explained her view that thanks to the MA program on character and value education, she used scientific knowledge in her practices on values, by stating the following: *"As a teacher, I already had experience working with my students on values. Now, with this education, I do what I do based on scientific knowledge."* Similarly, Ipek argued that because the knowledge she acquired from her MA education enabled her to link her major with values, the program supported her professional development. In this respect, Ipek said the following: *"Thanks to this education, I gained the ability to think and critique about the effect of plays written and exhibited in theatres, which is my area. Also, I'm considering writing critics about some of the plays I watched, after examining them. I think this is the most important benefit of the program for me."*

Emine asserted that the MA program made a contribution to her personal and professional development. Emine thought that the education she received made various contributions to both her and her students, as she was more sensitive about values and included these values in my classes. She said: *"It enabled me to approach values with more care, and use them in my classes with more emphasis. In this way, it helped me be more beneficial for my children. Not just about school or teaching, it also contributed to my personal development in general."*

Guler described the contribution the MA program made to her personal development as follows: *"As an educator, I found the chance to developm myself by starting this program. I also became more selective in my perception."* On the other hand, Gul talked about the contribution of the program on her feeling more responsible towards living species and the nature, and her own individual development, by saying *"This program made positive contributions to my development. It created a person who has self-respect, show respect to different views and lifestyles, is tolerant, can better understand the nature and living species, and most importantly can understand that she is not only responsible for herself. "*

Hamide who reported that she raised her awareness towards values thanks to this education said*: "In my profession as a doctor, I learned that medical ethics is prior to treatment. It helped me feel myself valuable. It created awareness about values, going beyond the fact that things don't just exist or they don't just occupy a place in space."* With regard to her view that the MA program raised her awareness, Meltem said: *"This program helped me realise the mistakes I made about my children. It helped me gain new perspectives."* Birol highlighted his similar view by saying, *"My awareness about how important character and value education is has increased and I have understood that this education is quite important for the society. As I practice my profession, I includes value education in a more systematic and planned way."*

Tansu and Gul stated that the education they received contributed to their self-acquaintance. Tansu expressed her view by saying, *"Thanks to this education, I'm developing new skills such as questioning myself, understanding the reasons underlying my behaviours, and perceiving others' values."* while Gul said:

> *"It helped me make better sense of my characteristics that constitute my personality, and brought me new perceptions of myself and other people. The way I move around, walk or think, or in other words the way I live changed significantly. Of course, I had certain characteristics and values due to my age, but I had no idea how I used them and reflected them to my behaviours."*

The findings revealed in this study show that the Distance Learning MA Program on Character and Value Education achieved different outcomes on the side of the students who participated in the study. In other words, the Distance Learning MA Program on Character and Value Education made contributions to its students for initiating the butterfly effect in character and value education.

Benefits of the Program for Students' Families and Immediate Environments

The findings showed that the benefits of the Distance Learning MA Program on Character and Value Education for the students' families and immediate environments included "raising awareness in their environment", "reflection of teacher development to children", "creating a sharing environment with the

family and immediate environment", "setting an example for the family and immediate environment", "guiding the family and immediate environment", "contributing to the strengthening of the relationships in the family and immediate environment", "contributing to the strengthening of the communication in the family and immediate environment", "enabling behavioural change in the environment", "conveying values", "creating awareness in parents", "producing peaceful solutions" and "ensuring happiness". The findings regarding the benefits of the Distance Learning MA Program on Character and Value Education for students' families and immediate environments are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Findings Regarding the Benefits of the Program for Students' Families and Immediate Environments

Raising awareness in their environment
Reflection of teacher development to children
Creating a sharing environment with the family and immediate environment
Setting an example for the family and immediate environment
Guiding the family and immediate environment
Contributing to the strengthening of the relationships in the family and immediate environment
Contributing to the strengthening of the communication in the family and immediate environment
Enabling behavioural change in the environment
Conveying values
Creating awareness in parents
Producing peaceful solutions
Ensuring happiness

One of the participants, Yagmur, pointed out her observation that the character and value education program raised awareness in her environment, and said, *"I don't have the exact figures about the contribution of the program. But I can say this: Now, I, my family and social environment are aware of the importance of character and value education."* In a similar view, Ipek indicated that she shared the knowledge she gained in the MA program with her family, which led to an awareness and sensitivity in them with respect to current issues, by saying *"With this program, we became more sensitive about current issues. We started to interpret and realise what's happening around us. This created an awareness both in the family and the environment."*

Tansu, who is a teacher, observed changes that were reflected to both her and her students by means of the education she received, by stating the following: *"I believe that it will lead to a positive change in the youth of this country as it affected how I delivered my courses and my approach to my students. In this way, with the spark of this program, I have more faith in making the whole country and the world a more liveable place again."*

Ayse, Meltem, Emine and Yagmur highlighted the new sharing environment with their families and immediate environments as a result of the program. In this regard, Meltem said, *"We listen to the classes with my husband. We make comments together, and share ideas with each other. As our children are old enough, we also discuss certain topics with them."* Emphasising that family is important in value education, Yagmur expressed her thoughts as follows:

> *"When I consider that family forms the basis of the society with its mission for future generations, it seems apparent to me that the ideal approach would be to start value education in family. There is no doubt that character and value education showed its effect in my family as well. I have children who go to high school student. When we are with them, we can explain the importance of our need to values. We share things together. In fact, my daughter started calling me a 'values police'. Concepts such as honesty, diligence, being straightforward, compassion and justice are among the values we frequently talk about."*

Ayse touched upon her exchange with colleagues, and said *"I thought about how I could be of more use to my environment, family, and profession. I conveyed what I learned in the program with my teacher colleagues in our chats."*

Rabia emphasised that the knowledge she acquired in the MA program enabled her to set an example to her environment. She explained her view that the education she received helped her guide the immediate environment by saying the following:

> "I comprehended the importance of setting an example with this program, now I'm trying to do so. I internalised the values and I shared what I learned with most of my friends. For instance, my niece used to exhibit some aggressive behaviours. I talked to his parents and told them they needed to change their own behaviours to set a model. When his parents were a model to him, there was a decline in my niece's aggressive behaviours."

Similar to Rabia, Guler also reported her effort to set a model for her environment: *"I feel a responsibility over my shoulder since I received this education. Not just as a teacher, but also as an individual, I try to be a role model."*

Fatma and Bilge stressed that they guided their families by sharing them the knowledge they acquired in the program. Accordingly, Fatma says:

> "Of what I learned, I share those that impressed me with my family. Their perspective to events changed positively. For instance, my daughter understood the importance of responsibility as a value. She is more aware of her responsibilities at home and school. She says she realised that she is more successful in inter-personal relationships when she fulfils her responsibilities."

Birol, Ceren and Bilge thought that the education they received in the program helped them carry out practices of value education in a systematic and planned way, and guide their friends in this respect. Birol said: *"I think I deliver more planned, proper value education to my students. After this education, I have better understood what approach to adopt and how to act in teaching them values. I think that I have contributed to my colleagues at school as well, and guided them."*

Ali explained how the education enabled the strengthening of relationships in his family and immediate environment by saying, *"Thanks to this education, our relationships with family, students and immediate environment turned out to be more positive. We started to be more understanding to each other and show empathy in our interactions."* Based on Ali's view, the program can be said to enable enhancing the development of inter-personal relationships in the family.

Bilge thought she supported her students' strengthening their communication with their families and social environments as she used the knowledge she acquired, and said:

> "I started to evaluate my family and students from this angle, and tried to beneficial for them, as much as I could, by informing them about values and using approaches to value education. In this way, I supported my students' development through the values I aimed to teach them. I observed positive changes in their communication with their families and social environment."

Ayse expressed her view that she could achieve behavioural changes in her environment following her education, by saying *"I think I can make a contribution to both myself and my environment. Even if we can touch someone's hear, there will be hope. Nobody should say he or she can't change. Everybody can change with goodness, patience and education."*

Derya, a 59-year-old participant, mentioned the role of character and value education in conveying values, and said: *"By teaching these values to my to-be-born grandchildren and reinforcing them, I will ensure that they will be individuals beneficial for both themselves and the society."*

Demet who reported to have turned what she learned in the program into practice in her teaching asserted that she could create awareness in parents. She said:

> "In this process, I made the greatest progress in my students' parents. I informed them about the values included in the program. I tried to share everything I learned in the program in our visits to parents every two weeks. In this week's visit, I will first thank them for their help about non-waste nutrition in the scope of an environment project in the class. I will then make a presentation to them about how the values of prudence and generousness can be treated and supported at home."

Hamide stated that with the effect of this program, she would be able to contribute to using peaceful ways in finding solutions to problems, and explained her view by saying, *"Every living human-being belongs to the*

world and the universe. Human is as fragile as a porcelain and as strong as a rock. So is life. We need to be part of the solution, not destruction. I believe this education will bind up the wounds." Likewise, Ali referred to the importance of this program for ensuring a peaceful environment as follows:

> *"I thought of tiny little bodies buried under bombs weighing tons, people who died of hunger without a bite of bread, those who walked barefoot for miles to drink a glass of water, so many people who lost their lives from illness, etc. They always say peace, peace, peace in the international press, or social media, but wars cannot be stopped. In this sense, the fact that character and value education is provided in Turkey, though a bit late, at the postgraduate level is of great importance."*

Tansu asserted that the Distance Learning MA Program on Character and Value Education indirectly enabled the people around her to be happy through herself. She explained how the program brought happiness to her environment by saying the following:

> *"Sharing something that I saw or heard in a class with my family, asking them 'Look, did you know about this?' attracts their attention. The fact that I have self-confidence as I learn new things and that I can apply them makes them happy. Because this indeed creates a butterfly effect. You make a connection with someone you don't know on a computer screen and indirectly that connection is spread to the ones around you. Knowledge gains value as it is shared, and everybody is happy."*

The students who participated in the study described the benefits of the distance MA program on character and value education for their environment as raising awareness for values and current issues, creating a sharing environment, setting an example for and guiding people around them. In addition, the students stated that this program contributed to the strengthening of communication and relationships in their families and immediate environments.

Benefits of the Program for the Country and the World

The findings revealed in this study show that the Distance Learning MA Program on Character and Value Education led to various effects in the country and the world. The participants thought that this program they attended had benefits for both the country and the world by "contributing to social development", "raising individuals who have adopted values", "contributing to social solidarity and continuity", "raising global citizens", "contributing to the improvement of human relationships", "training teachers", and "helping others". The findings regarding the benefits of the Distance Learning MA Program on Character and Value Education for the country and the world according to the studies are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Findings Regarding the Benefits of the Program for the Country and the World

Contributing to social development
Raising individuals who have adopted values
Contributing to social solidarity and continuity
Raising global citizens
Contributing to the improvement of human relationships
Training teachers
Helping others

According to Ayse, the Distance Learning MA Program on Character and Value Education would help form a society that adopts values, and thus contribute to social development. In this respect, she says *"If the value of this program is appreciated, I think that peaceful societies in which individuals may have the same or different values but show respect to and care about each other, show empathy, are sensitive and merciful, not warriors, can be created."*

Rabia had the opinion that most of the students attending this MA program were teachers and parents, and since they were responsible for raising at least one individual, the program would contribute to raising responsible who had adopted values. Reading her opinion, she said, *"If individuals who are education have*

quality characteristics, this will move the society forward. In this program, most of my friends are either teachers or parents. They all raise at least one individual. This program has a great contribution of us. We can be beneficial for both ourselves and those who are around us." Based on Rabia's view, the program can be said to have a contribution to social life.

Birol, Nihal, Ayse and Gul emphasised that this program would contribute to individuals' adopting values. Ayse verbalised her view on the effect of the program on raising individuals adopting values by saying, *"In the global world, everything is rapidly changing. It is important to preserve certain values as we adapt to this change. Therefore, I think that peaceful societies in which individuals show respect to each other can be created by means of this program."* Similarly, Gul made reference to this effect of the program by giving an example from her own life: *"It created a person who has self-respect, show respect to different views and lifestyles, is tolerant, can better understand the nature and living species, and most importantly can understand that she is not only responsible for herself. If you asked me to give an example, I would say 'me', I'm an example."*

Nihal expressed her view that the program would help raise individuals who have adopted values by saying the following:

> *"Today, parents can't spend enough quality time with their parents and unfortunately, they can't reflect these values to them, either. I think that by attending this program individuals can contribute to raising young individuals who know what they want, can express themselves respectfully, are planned, punctual, hard-working and solution-oriented."*

For Reyhan, this program contributes to social solidarity and continuity. The adoption and preservation of the values that keep people together as well as their transfer to future generations ensure the continuity of societies. Regarding her view, she said the following:

> *"I think that the inclusion of character and value education in educational curricula is of great importance for a country. I think that it would contribute to reinforcing values that keep a society together and make people feel like they live as part of a nation, maintaining unity and solidarity thanks to values, and their transfer to future generations."*

Fatma pointed out that the Distance Learning MA Program on Character and Value Education had an important place in raising global citizens. Fatma's view that this program can contribute to raising global citizens is as follows: *"It is one of the most necessary trainings for becoming a global citizen in the world. This MA program aims to educate individuals who have characteristics like reflecting values into their lives and not being prejudiced. In this context, this program has an important place in raising global citizens."*

Demet explained her view that this program would make a contribution to improving human relationships by saying, *"Rapid developments in technology, globalisation and excessive workloads caused a disconnection in human relationships. To eliminate these negative consequences, this is an effective educational program."*

Demet stated that there were teachers among the students who attended the Distance Learning MA Program on Character and Value Education, and highlighted that the program trained teachers as well. She explained the importance of teachers' attending this program as follows: *"Values are binding, and commitment brings power. Individuals who have values and a character move forward themselves, their families and most importantly their country. So, this program is important in that it trains the teachers who will raise such individuals. That is to say, this program will enlighten individuals, families, the country and the world."*

Demet also asserted that she showed her students a visual that she had seen in the program, and her students took action to help after seeing that visual. In this regard, she said the following:

> *"I showed my students the picture of an African boy that had been used in our MA class and that affected me so much. We created a discussion platform about helping each other with my students who saw the visual. They exchanged ideas about what they could do. They decided to organise a charity bazaar in the class and at school. Since that day, they have been selling objects like book markers, bracelets, buckles that they made themselves. They earned about two hundred liras. When they save more, they will send this money to Africa for a water well. Their determination made me really happy."*

This finding shows that a visual included in the course materials of the program created a butterfly effect, motivating students to act for those who are in need by adopting the value of helping each other. On the other hand, the participants of the study pointed out that the Distance Learning MA Program on Character and Value Education would have contributions to the improvement of human relationships, and social development, solidarity and continuity. Furthermore, they stated that the program would support the process of raising global citizens who are respectful to differences and have adopted values.

Suggestions for Improving the Effectiveness of Character and Value Education

The students who participated in the study offered suggestions for improving the widespread impact of the education they received in the Distance Learning MA Program on Character and Value Education, in other words the butterfly effect of the program. These suggestions included "teaching a course on character and value education in all faculties", "training all teachers for character and value education", "providing character and value education in all stages of the education system", "teaching a course on character and value education in teacher training programs", "making character and value education the priority area", "opening an MA program with thesis and a PhD program on character and value education", "collaborating with different ministries to carry out character and value education", "training parents for character and value education", "starting a nation-wide campaign on character and value education", "a new undergraduate program specifically for character and value education", "making character and value education an area of expertise in various institutions", "organising character and value education through modular training", "holding non-formal and distance education programs on character and value education", and "conducting multi-disciplinary scientific studies on character and value education". The findings with regard to the suggestions for improving the effectiveness of character and value education are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Suggestions for Improving the Effectiveness of Character and Value Education

Teaching a course on character and value education in all faculties
Training all teachers for character and value education
Providing character and value education in all stages of the education system
Teaching a course on character and value education in teacher training programs
Making character and value education the priority area
Training parents for character and value education
Starting a nation-wide campaign on character and value education
A new undergraduate program specifically for character and value education
Making character and value education an area of expertise in various institutions
Organising character and value education through modular training
Holding non-formal and distance education programs on character and value education
Conducting multi-disciplinary scientific studies on character and value education
Opening an MA program with thesis and a PhD program on character and value education
Collaborating with different ministries to carry out character and value education

Ipek suggested that all faculties should have a course on character and value education. She said: *"I think that having character and value education as a separate course in all faculties will be useful for university students. For instance, there should have been a course in which theatre and value education are combined in addition to courses such as 'Playscript Analysis' and 'Structural Analysis' in the faculty I graduated from."*

Rabia who indicated that all teachers should be trained for value education said, *"Character and value education should be attributed more importance so that we can live happily together. I'm glad that I'm part of this program. I think that all teachers should receive a training like this."*

Meltem stated that character and value education should be provided in elementary schools, and Guler indicated that it should be in all school stages. Meltem said, *"I do think that it should be taught as a course*

in elementary schools. In fact, it should be before all other courses. Happy children means a happy society.", while Gulsum said, *"Character and value education should be delivered in all schools in a planned and implicit way."*

Referring to the necessity of a course on character and value education in teacher training certification programs, Meltem also said, *"I would want to receive a course on character and value education as I received my teacher training. I would at least have an idea about how children can be better raised. We are told in detail how to teach courses, but the spiritual part remains missing, I think."*

Nevin had the opinion that character and value education is a priority area in the whole country, and she said, *"It is beyond a necessity, and if character and value education can be at the second place of the emergency list, it will be beneficial individual and global happiness. In other words, character and value education should be seen as a priority, right after vital life signs."*

Emphasising the collaboration between ministries to provide character and value education, Gul stated, *"Not only I would want character and value education to be taught as a course, but also for it to be taught in different institutions. More people could be reached through a collaboration between the ministry of national education and other ministries."*

Bilge drew attention to the need to train parents for character and value education, and said the following: *"In teaching values, the education given in schools is not enough. That's why trainings should be held for parents, considering that the values they exhibit and their attitudes and behaviours are the main determinants of children's personality development and values."*

Munevver brought forward her idea about providing parents value education by saying, *"If families as the smallest unit of the society are given value education, we as the society can raise individuals who are happy, hopeful, educated and look at the future with hope, and make sure that many more values can be developed in our children and society."*

Ceren mentioned a nation-wide campaign on this issue by saying, *"I think there should be an educational campaign for character and value education. We should do this for future generations and social welfare. In this sense, this program is a significant attempt for our society."*

Fatma thought that character and value education should be taught as an undergraduate program to be provided to a wider audience. Regarding her view, she said the following: *"I think it will be beneficial for this discipline if it is provided in a program at undergraduate level. Our society, youth and old alike, need character and value education, and an undergraduate program would be of use in meeting this need."*

Yagmur thought that the graduates of the non-thesis MA program on character and value education should be able to work as experts in different institutions, and this area should be accepted as an expertise. She pointed out, *"Those who graduate from this program should be given the chance to get an 'expert' title. So that we can do more effective work both in our institutions and in the field."*

Birol suggested that modules should be prepared for character and value education, and these modules can enable this education to reach the society. He said: *"By means of protocols with public and private institutions, the basic parts of this education should be made available through modular trainings. There should be a plan for the experts of this field to reach every section of the society, and this plan should be put into practice."*

Munevver mentioned the benefits of providing value education through distance education, and drew attention to the usefulness of giving large crowds value educations in this way, by saying the following: *"If value education is supported with non-formal and distance education systems, I believe, there will be improvement in many areas in the society. I think it should be delivered not just in schools but also other institutions and even workplaces. It can be face to face, but the alternative in the form of distance education is also a change for those who have limited time."*

The findings showed that conducting inter-disciplinary research on character and value education would help take this area to a larger population. Hamide who state a similar view said, *"I would want the character and value education to be associated with other disciplines and see collaborative scientific studies. Disciplines like medicine, finance, law, etc."* Likewise, Emine referred to the need for more studies in this area by saying, *"I think there should be more research studies, not just for our country but the whole word, it is important that we have more studies and also PhD dissertations."*

Ipek and Tansu suggested that character and value education should also be in the form of an MA program with thesis and a PhD program. Ipek expressed her view as follows: *"I think this program should also be at the postgraduate level, like a PhD program."* In this sense, Tansu said the following: *"I would like to have this education in an MA program with thesis. This is because we attend the classes in certain hours every weekday, write forum posts, do our homework, read articles, learn certain computer applications, and at the same time we prepare a term paper. I would want to have the opportunity to do a distance learning MA program with thesis in this area."*

Munevver thought that character and value education should be provided to employees in all public institutions. She said the following: *"I think value education course should be delivered not just in schools but also other institutions and even workplaces, to employees and administrators. I mean, values are important in the family, in daily life and at work, or in the society, and they should be taught to every individual."*

The participants offered suggestions towards enabling this education to reach larger populations so that the Distance Learning MA Program on Character and Value Education could have a butterfly effect. The participants pointed out that character and value education should be provided to teachers, families and all students from elementary school to university level. Moreover, they thought that reaching more people through distance education and conducting inter-disciplinary studies by making associations between various disciplines and character and value education were important for informing the whole society in this respect.

DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSION

The aim of this study was to reveal how the students of the Distance Learning MA Program on Character and Value Education reflected what they gained in the program to themselves, their families and immediate environments and the society based on their views and examples from their lives. The results of the study showed that the students who attended the Distance Learning MA Program on Character and Value Education gained certain benefits for themselves, which were also reflected to their families and immediate environments as well as the country and the world. Based on the findings regarding the benefits of the program for the students and their environment, it can be said to have led to a butterfly effect in the society.

The Distance Learning MA Program on Character and Value Education was observed to have contributions to the students such as acquiring knowledge, being tolerant, gaining various skills, improving family relationships, developing multiple perspectives, enhancing professional development, enabling individual development, raised awareness related to values and self-acquaintance. As Ravinger (2006) indicates, by equipping them with values, individuals are enabled to share responsibilities, be more sensitive to their environment and the living species, regulate and develop themselves, and thus improve their relationships in social life. According to the findings obtained in this study, the MA program concerned makes important contributions to the enhancement of social life by providing students with values such as tolerance and fairness.

Simsek and Alkan (2019) found that the character and value education course provided various gains for teacher candidates, similar to the findings of this study. In their study, they reported that the students who took the character and value education course achieved outcome such as showing empathy, avoiding prejudices, having new perspectives, accepting differences, understanding the importance of value education, appreciation and respect. Moreover, the teacher candidates stated that they learned various concepts such as values and character. Likewise, in the present study, the students reported to have acquired knowledge and certain values during the program.

In the study, the Distance Learning MA Program on Character and Value Education was also observed to have benefits for the students' families and immediate environments. Taskan (2011) explained the butterfly effect with the example of a snowball, and emphasised that it covers time travel. Accordingly, when a small snowball starts rolling from the top of a hill, despite the weakness of the initial conditions, the snowball can turn into an avalanche. A small change or action can grow with a chain effect. Time is what is need for the effect to turn into an avalanche or a storm. Considering the effects of the program on their families and immediate environments according to the views of the students who participated in this study, these effects may expand over time and provide significant contributions to the society in terms of value education.

The Distance Learning MA Program on Character and Value Education had benefits for the students' families and immediate environments such as raising awareness for values and current issues, creating a sharing environment, setting an example for and guiding people around them, and strengthening of the relationships and communication. In their study, Gurdogan Bayir et al. (2016) concluded that teacher candidates realised they should be a model for value education while practising their teaching profession, and emphasized that this awareness should be gained properly in pre-service training. According to the results of the present study, being a model can also be regarded as important in value education, and the Distance Learning Non-Thesis MA Program on Character and Value Education can be said to enable students to be a model for their immediate environments in terms of values. As is also reported in the findings, the program can be beneficial for the students' families and immediate environments in terms of bringing about behavioural change, conveying values, raising parents' awareness, producing peaceful solutions, and ensuring happiness.

The participants pointed out that most of the students attending the program were teachers, and thus the program also trained teachers in this respect, having an indirect reflection to the development of these teachers' students. In this regard, it can be argued that the program can make contributions to important changes in individuals and the society through its butterfly effect.

In the study, the Distance Learning MA Program on Character and Value Education was also found to have various benefits for the country and the world. The participants stated that this program they attended was useful for contributing to social development, raising individuals who have adopted values, contributing to social solidarity and continuity, raising global citizens, contributing to the improvement of human relationships, training teachers, and helping others. Based on the finding that the program can bring about benefits for both the country and the world, the outcomes of this program can be said to create a butterfly effect through a transformation in the family, immediate environment, and local and global contexts. This can be illustrated in a story. A farmer settles in a large plain that he likes. Other farmers follow him, and one of them opens a supply store, and then a grocery store is opened right next to him. These shops become a meeting place. In time, a village emerges with the arrival of buyers, sellers and agricultural workers. The existence of the village makes it easier to market agricultural products and more farms are established around the village. The increase in agricultural activity paves the way for the development of industry, and the village grows further and turns into a city. Throughout the process, the flat plain has been transformed with a series of positive developments (Cobanoglu, 2008). As in this example, small events and gains can continue to growth, and can lead to big effects. In this regard, according to the findings of this study, the Distance Learning MA Program on Character and Value Education has outcomes that can contribute to development, solidarity and continuity of individuals, societies, countries and consequently the world.

The students who participated in the study offered various suggestions for enhancing the butterfly effect of the character and value education, considering the benefits of the training they received for themselves and their environments. They drew attention to the significance of character and value education by stating the view that it should be taught in all faculties, teacher training programs and all stages of formal education. Beachum et al. (2013) reported that teacher candidates supported the idea of including topics related to character education in undergraduate teacher training courses. In her study, Kurtdede Fidan (2009) found that according to teacher candidates, teaching values should be regarded as the primary duty of schools, which would contribute to solving value conflicts in schools.

In fact, every individual in a society is in the same boat. Values are the fuel, and also vital equipment, of this ship. Schools are the cabins and teachers the captains in this ship. For a society to survive, children should apprehend the importance of values, and then value education should be conducted in a planned way without leaving it up to chance. In other words, in line with the findings of this study, value education that is provided in a planned manner will have a significant contribution to social life. The importance of schools and teachers cannot be denied in planned value education practices. Similar to the findings of this study, teacher candidates in Genc et al. (2015) also offered suggestions such as having a course on value education in instructional curricula, and holding in-service trainings for teachers in this respect. Likewise, Ozyurt (2015) concluded that a value education program developed with a school-based curriculum development approach was effective in achieving goals. Otten (2001) stated that value education that is integrated to the school can help students deal with conflicts and enhance their responsibilities, while improving the society

through their active participation. Kuzu Jafari and Demirel (2019) found that most of the preschool teachers participated in their study thought that the value education they implemented had long-term effects. In other words, value education that is provided in formal educational institutions starting from early ages can have significant impacts in students.

In the study, the participants suggested that all teachers should be given character and value education to make this education widespread. Tokdemir (2007) found that most of the history teachers did not have theoretical knowledge on values and value education, but believed that values were an important part of education, tried to teacher various values to students and had positive attitudes towards value education. It can thus be argued that even though teachers do not have sufficient knowledge, they are willing to receive training related to value education.

Providing families and parents character and value education is another finding reported in this study. Based on their findings, Tosun and Uyanik Balat (2017) suggested that mothers should be given more detailed information about value education, and trainings for families should be held. In Gurdogan Bayir et al. (2016), teacher candidates perceived the problems experienced in value education as those stemming from teachers and those from families. Erkus (2019) reported that the character education in elementary schools was inadequate, most problems in character education were due to families, and it should be conducted in every possible context, particularly the family and school. The suggestion that character and value education should be given to teachers and families can be a solution to the problems stemming from these parties. A further suggestion mentioned was providing character and value education to not only teachers and families, but also employees working in public institutions, and making this area as a field of expertise in various institutions.

Although early ages and formal education are important in character and value education, it is also of great significance to provide this education at later ages and through distance education. In this regard, the participants in the present study mentioned providing modular training, non-formal education and character and value education through distance learning in their suggestions. In Deveci (2015), university students stated that a society with happy, peaceful and honest people can be created through value education via distance learning. Thus, a contribution can be made to the process of forming a developed society consisting of citizens who control their behaviours. Based on the results of the present study as well, it can be argued that character and value education delivered through distance learning would reflect to students' immediate and distant environments starting from themselves.

In a report during the COVID-19 pandemic, Rogers (2020) stated that she used video lessons and various materials to help teach positive character traits online, these materials were useful for character development, and character education via distance learning was important in dealing with the pandemic. Likewise, the participants of this study asserted that there can be a collaboration between different ministries as educational environments are used. They also offer suggestions towards ensuring a widespread effect across the country such as making character and value education a priority area, and starting a nation-wide campaign on character and value education. Ustunyer (2009) found that according to educators, character education was an urgent need and an important area for the society.

The participants suggested that undergraduate, MA (with thesis) and PhD program should be opened, and collaborative and multidisciplinary studies should be conducted with respect to character and value education. These findings make one think that the students appreciated the value of character and value education, and academic life and scientific knowledge for individuals and the society thanks to the Distance Learning MA Program on Character and Value Education that they attended. Silay (2010) asserted that there should be more research on character education at higher education, and policy-makers should encourage postgraduate studies with in-depth focus on morality and values. Furthermore, in the study, it was also suggested that non-governmental organisations and higher education institutions should collaborate on studies related to character education.

When the findings revealed in the present study are evaluated in overall, the following suggestions can be offered.

- Character and value education should be provided in all formal educational stages including preschool, primary and high school, and higher education.
- A course on character and value education can be taught in teacher training programs.

- Character and value education can me turned into an area of expertise in various institutions.
- A new undergraduate program can be initiated specifically for character and value education.
- The number of MA programs (non-thesis and with thesis) on character and value education can be increased.
- A PhD program on character and value education can be opened.
- Scientific research on character and value education can be increased.
- Activities related to character and value education can be held for various target populations through non-formal education and distance learning.
- Activities related to character and value education can be organised for teachers and parents.
- Practice-oriented research studies can be conducted for providing parents and teachers character and value education.
- Topics such as peer teaching and parental involvement can be investigated in research studies to enhance the butterfly effect of character and value education.

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