

Values Education in Primary School 4th Grade Social Studies Course: An Action Research

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Abstract: Values education plays a critical role in fostering students' moral, social, and civic development, particularly during the primary school years when foundational attitudes and behaviors are formed. Within this context, Social Studies courses offer a key pedagogical space for integrating values education into everyday classroom practices. The purpose of this study is to examine how values education practices implemented through an action research framework influence students' understanding of values, classroom interactions, and observable behaviors in a fourth-grade Social Studies classroom. The study adopted a qualitative action research design and was conducted with 26 fourth-grade students and one classroom teacher in a public primary school in Türkiye. Data were collected over a eight-week implementation period through classroom observations, reflective teacher journals, semi-structured student interviews, and student-produced materials. The values education program focused on core values including respect, responsibility, empathy, justice, helpfulness, and tolerance, and was implemented using student-centered and experiential learning activities aligned with the Social Studies curriculum. The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis, with inter-coder reliability ensured through independent coding procedures. The findings indicate that values education practices contributed to students' conceptual understanding of values, promoted more respectful and cooperative classroom interactions, and supported the reflection of value-based behaviors in daily classroom routines. The results further suggest that sustained and experiential values education practices can positively influence classroom climate by fostering inclusivity, empathy, and shared responsibility among students. Additionally, the action research process enhanced teacher reflexivity by enabling continuous reflection and adaptation of instructional practices in response to classroom dynamics. Overall, this study demonstrates that values education, when embedded within classroom life through action research, can function as a transformative pedagogical process rather than a set of isolated instructional outcomes. The findings highlight the potential of action research to support both student development and teacher professional growth, offering practical insights for educators seeking to integrate values education into primary school Social Studies instruction.

Keywords: Values education; Social Studies education; primary school; action research; moral development; student-centered learning; classroom transformation.

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INTRODUCTION

Values education has become an increasingly central concern in primary education, as schools are expected not only to transmit academic knowledge but also to cultivate students' moral, social, and civic competencies. During the primary school years—when attitudes, behaviors, and value orientations are actively formed—educational practices play a decisive role in supporting character development and social responsibility. Within this framework, Social Studies courses occupy a distinctive position, as they are explicitly designed to promote democratic values, social participation, respect for diversity, and responsible citizenship. Despite the prominent place of values education in curricular frameworks, however, persistent challenges remain regarding how these values are translated from abstract curricular intentions into meaningful and sustainable classroom practices. Addressing this gap, the present study conceptualizes values education as a lived and process-oriented pedagogical practice and examines its classroom enactment through an action research study conducted in a fourth-grade Social Studies classroom.

The integration of values education into Social Studies extends beyond the mere transmission of information and aims to foster active student participation, critical thinking, and a sense of social responsibility. In this regard, John Douglas Hoge emphasizes that the relationship between character education and citizenship education constitutes a central concern in Social Studies instruction. While Social Studies teachers are encouraged to emphasize character and civic virtues, Hoge also notes that insufficient attention has been paid to how such practices align with the broader goals of Social Studies education in supporting modern democratic life (Hoge, 2002). This observation highlights the need for the continuous evaluation and renewal of values education practices within classroom contexts. Moreover, the literature consistently suggests that values cannot be effectively internalized through theoretical instruction alone; rather, students need opportunities to encounter, experience, and reflect upon values through authentic and interactive learning processes embedded in everyday classroom life. In Joseph A. Braun's model, values education at the primary level is structured around three core pillars: caring, citizenship, and conscience. Braun highlights the importance of explicitly discussing these values and allowing students to freely engage with controversial issues (Braun, 1992).

This approach emphasizes the creation of learning environments in which students can internalize values and apply them in real-life contexts. One of the primary aims of Social Studies education is to cultivate active citizenship. An analysis of the 2004 Turkish Social Studies curriculum indicates that the overarching goal of Social Studies is both to raise active citizens and to equip students with lifelong skills. Primary school is considered particularly significant in this regard, as students' developmental characteristics at this stage facilitate the acquisition of citizenship awareness.

Furthermore, the curriculum identifies 19 core values that play a crucial role in educating active citizens, including justice, respect, responsibility, and empathy values that are essential for social life (Kara et al., 2012). The effective implementation of values education requires the use of diverse instructional methods. In their study, Nadire Emel Akhan and Ali Altıkulaç demonstrated that creative drama practices based on Mevlana's universal messages of "love, respect, and tolerance" positively contributed to teachers' personal and professional values. Their findings indicate that creative drama serves as an effective instructional tool for teaching values and supports teachers in internalizing these values more deeply (Akhan & Altıkulaç, 2014). This evidence reinforces the notion that values education should be supported through experiential and interactive pedagogical approaches rather than limited to direct instruction. One of the challenges encountered in values education within Social Studies is the teaching of abstract concepts. Saputra et al. (2023) found that fourth-grade students experience difficulties with abstract thinking and that traditional teaching methods may lead to boredom and comprehension problems. In response, the researchers developed tolerance-based Puja Mandala learning videos, which were shown to enhance students' understanding of religious diversity. These findings

highlight the effectiveness of audiovisual materials in increasing student engagement and facilitating learning in values education.

Teachers play a critical role in the successful integration of values education into Social Studies. In an action research study by Boyraz and Türkcan (2020), the professional development of a primary school teacher implementing the Philosophy with Children (PwC) approach was examined in depth. The study revealed improvements in the teacher's ability to implement the PwC method, which in turn positively influenced students' skills, particularly critical thinking. The authors emphasize that thinking constitutes the essence of human identity and that this capacity can be cultivated through education. This finding suggests that values education should be supported not only through content delivery but also through the systematic development of thinking skills. The success of values education in Social Studies is closely linked to the instructional strategies employed. In a study conducted by Arahim (2018), the cooperative learning model known as "Snowball Throwing" was found to significantly enhance student achievement in citizenship education. The implementation of this model resulted in meaningful improvements in students' learning outcomes, with all students achieving instructional objectives. This finding supports the effectiveness of collaborative and interactive learning environments in values education.

Cultural diversity and tolerance constitute another essential dimension of values education. Awiria et al. (2019) demonstrated that the Value Clarification Technique (VCT) model increased students' understanding of national cultural diversity. The study highlighted that this approach enables students to question and express their own behaviors, thereby fostering greater confidence and active participation. These findings emphasize the role of values education as a powerful means of promoting tolerance and respect for diversity. Blended learning approaches have also been shown to be effective in values education. In a study by Setemen et al. (2023), a blended multicultural learning model implemented in Social Studies positively influenced students' attitudes toward nationalism, with cultural literacy identified as a significant mediating factor. This finding suggests that integrating technology and multicultural learning environments into values education can positively shape student attitudes. Character development represents a central component of values education. In a comprehensive literature review, Zhang (2023) noted that although theoretical approaches to character education are well developed, their practical implementation remains limited. Zhang argues that research on character education must be strengthened both theoretically and practically. This observation reinforces the need to bridge the gap between theory and practice in values education. Adopting a scientific approach in Social Studies education also contributes to students' acquisition of ethical values. Sukmawati and Fatonah (2018) found that the implementation of the 2013 curriculum fostered high levels of curiosity, responsibility, collaboration, and respect among students—attributes associated with scientific attitudes. These findings suggest that a scientific, inquiry-based approach supported by thematic content can promote ethical development not only in science education but also in Social Studies. Curriculum materials themselves constitute an important area of discussion in values education. Banks (2008) argues that citizenship and moral education frequently underrepresent social justice and community-oriented values, despite their centrality to democratic education. This reinforces the need for a more balanced inclusion of core values in curriculum materials.

In recent years, interdisciplinary approaches have gained prominence in values education. Baek et al. (2022) examined the SSIBL-STEAM program developed in Korea, which adopted an interdisciplinary approach centered on climate change. The results indicated significant improvements in students' character dimensions, particularly morality, emotional awareness, and integrative thinking. These findings demonstrate that values education can be effectively integrated into interdisciplinary Social Studies contexts. From a citizenship education perspective, Carr (2006) argues that moral responsibility cannot be explained solely through rights-based frameworks. Instead, virtue

ethics—while maintaining general moral principles—places character development at the center of moral education. According to Carr, a virtue-based ethical framework can serve as a foundational element of citizenship education. This perspective underscores the importance of integrating principle-based and character-oriented approaches in values education. In conclusion, values education in the fourth-grade Social Studies course represents a multidimensional process influenced by instructional methods, curriculum materials, teacher competencies, and interdisciplinary approaches. For values education to be effective, it is essential to employ student-centered strategies; emphasize fundamental social values such as cultural diversity, tolerance, and empathy; support teachers' continuous professional development; and ensure that curriculum materials provide a balanced representation of all core values. Despite the growing body of research on values education in primary education, there remains limited classroom-based evidence demonstrating how values can be systematically enacted, observed, and refined through action research within the Social Studies context. In particular, empirical studies focusing on fourth-grade classrooms and value-centered instructional cycles remain scarce. Addressing this gap, the present study employs a qualitative action research design to examine the implementation and outcomes of a structured values education program integrated into the fourth-grade Social Studies course.

The present study conceptualizes values education as an interactional, experiential, and reflexive process situated at the intersection of instructional design, classroom discourse, and teacher reflection. Within this framework, constructivist learning theory provides a coherent epistemological foundation for understanding how values are internalized in primary education settings. Constructivism posits that learners actively construct knowledge through engagement with their social and material environments rather than passively receiving transmitted information (Piaget, 1970; Vygotsky, 1978).

Knowledge construction is therefore mediated by prior experiences, social interaction, and reflective interpretation. When applied to values education, this perspective challenges transmission-based moral instruction and instead foregrounds participatory, dialogic, and experience-based pedagogies. From a constructivist standpoint, moral development is not the outcome of rule memorization but the result of meaning-making processes embedded in authentic social contexts. Dewey (1938) argued that ethical growth emerges from democratic participation and reflective inquiry within lived experiences. Similarly, Vygotsky (1978) emphasized that higher-order reasoning including moral reasoning develops through socially mediated interaction within the zone of proximal development. These perspectives suggest that ethical understanding is co-constructed through dialogue, negotiation, and shared problem-solving. Contemporary moral development theories further support this view.

Kohlberg (1976) conceptualized morality as a developmental progression shaped by exposure to moral dilemmas and social discourse. Narvaez (2021) similarly highlights the role of emotional engagement and relational experiences in shaping moral competence. Together, these perspectives underscore that values education must extend beyond cognitive explanation to include affective engagement and behavioral practice. In this regard, constructivism performs several critical functions in educational settings. First, it promotes epistemic agency, positioning students as active interpreters of moral meaning rather than passive recipients of ethical norms. Second, it fosters reflective judgment, enabling learners to examine moral dilemmas from multiple perspectives. Third, it supports social co-construction, facilitating the development of empathy, cooperation, and perspective-taking through peer interaction. These processes collectively contribute to the transition from external behavioral compliance to internally regulated moral commitment. Empirical research reinforces the effectiveness of constructivist-aligned pedagogies in values education. Participatory approaches such as drama-based instruction, project-based learning, digital storytelling, and experiential museum education have been shown to make abstract moral concepts more tangible and personally meaningful (Ezer & Aksüt, 2020; Seçgin, 2021; Öner & Çengelci Köse, 2019;

Saputra et al., 2023). Such methods enhance engagement, strengthen social cohesion, and promote lasting internalization of core civic values.

Importantly, these approaches align closely with the methodological logic of action research. Action research emphasizes iterative reflection, practitioner inquiry, and context-sensitive intervention (Dođru Oral, 2020). By situating values education within a constructivist and action-oriented framework, the present study positions moral learning as a dynamic and socially negotiated process shaped by classroom interaction and teacher reflexivity.

Therefore, the integration of constructivist pedagogy into values education does not merely represent a methodological preference; it constitutes a theoretical necessity. If values are to become internalized moral orientations rather than externally imposed behavioral expectations, students must be afforded opportunities to construct, test, and reflect upon ethical meaning within authentic social contexts. This theoretical alignment provides the conceptual foundation for the six-week intervention examined in this study and guides both the data analysis process and thematic interpretation.

METHODS

Research Design

This study was conducted as a qualitative action research project to examine the implementation of values education practices in a fourth-grade Social Studies classroom. Action research was preferred because it allows researchers to investigate classroom practices systematically while simultaneously improving instructional processes. The aim of the study was not only to observe how values were addressed in the classroom but also to refine teaching practices through continuous reflection. The researcher took an active role in the research process as a participant-observer. The classroom teacher carried out the instructional activities, while the researcher collaborated in planning the lessons, conducted regular classroom observations, kept detailed field notes, and organized weekly reflection meetings. The researcher did not directly teach the lessons but closely monitored the implementation process and contributed to revisions based on observational data and reflections.

The study was carried out over eight weeks and structured around three action research cycles. Each cycle followed the stages of planning, implementation, observation, and reflection. During the first cycle (Weeks 1–3), activities focused on responsibility and justice. Observations indicated that some students were hesitant to participate in discussions, which led to the inclusion of more structured discussion prompts in the second cycle. The second cycle (Weeks 4–6) emphasized respect and cooperation. Although peer interaction improved, participation levels varied; therefore, additional peer-led tasks were incorporated. The third cycle (Weeks 7–8) focused on solidarity and participation. Based on previous reflections, student-led reflection activities and collaborative tasks were added to encourage more active engagement. The study was conducted in a public primary school in Konya, Türkiye, during the 2024–2025 academic year. The participants consisted of 26 fourth-grade students (14 girls and 12 boys) aged between 9 and 10. The classroom was selected through convenience sampling, as is common in action research conducted within naturally occurring educational settings. Ethical approval was obtained prior to data collection. Parental consent and student assent were secured, and participants were informed about the purpose of the study. Pseudonyms were used to ensure confidentiality, and all data were used solely for research purposes.

Participants and Research Context

The study was conducted during the spring semester of the 2024–2025 academic year in a public primary school located in the city center of Konya, Türkiye. The primary participants consisted of 26 fourth-grade students and one classroom teacher responsible

for the Social Studies course. In addition, two classroom teachers from the same school participated in supplementary interviews to enrich the contextual understanding of values education practices. The study was conducted in a public primary school located in Konya, Türkiye, during the 2024–2025 academic year. The participants consisted of 26 fourth-grade students (14 girls and 12 boys) aged between 9 and 10, along with their classroom teacher. The classroom was selected as an intact group through convenience sampling, which is commonly employed in action research conducted within naturally occurring educational settings. Since the primary aim of action research is contextual improvement rather than statistical generalization, the selection of a single classroom allowed for in-depth and process-oriented examination of instructional practices.

Values Education Program

A eight-week values education program was specifically designed and implemented as part of the action research process. The program was embedded within the official 4th-grade Social Studies curriculum and aligned with national learning objectives. Each week focused on a distinct core value commonly emphasized in primary education: respect, responsibility, empathy, helpfulness, justice, and tolerance. Instructional activities were structured to be student-centered, experiential, and reflective, aiming to transform abstract values into concrete, behavior-based experiences. Teaching strategies included creative drama, role-playing, storytelling, collaborative problem-solving, reflective writing, and visual production tasks. At the end of each instructional cycle, reflections were recorded, and subsequent activities were revised based on observed outcomes and participant feedback.

Table 1. *Weekly Values Education Themes and Activities*

Week	Core Value	Instructional Activities
1	Respect	Creating values posters; drawing and writing on “What Does Respect Mean to Me?”
2	Responsibility	Role-playing activities; designing a classroom duty chart
3	Empathy	Story completion; reflective writing: “If I Were My Friend for a Day”
4	Helpfulness	Group problem-solving tasks; exploration of community support examples
5	Justice	Peer court activity; designing a “Justice Scale” poster
6	Tolerance	Creative drama activities; “United in Diversity” themed classroom project

Data Collection Tools

Multiple qualitative data sources were utilized to ensure data triangulation and strengthen the credibility of the findings. The data collection tools included:

1. Structured observation forms documenting classroom interactions and behaviors
2. Reflective teacher journals completed after each instructional session
3. Semi-structured interviews conducted with students
4. Student-produced materials such as stories, posters, and value cards
5. Peer- and self-evaluation forms completed by students

All data collection instruments were developed in consultation with field experts and were piloted prior to implementation to ensure clarity and relevance.

Data Collection Process

Data were collected through multiple qualitative instruments to ensure methodological triangulation. These included semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, researcher field notes, student artifacts (posters, written reflections, and activity sheets), and reflective meeting records. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with selected students at the end of each action research cycle. The interview protocol was developed based on the research questions and relevant literature on values

education. Expert opinions were obtained from two academics specializing in Social Studies education and qualitative research to ensure content validity. The interview form was piloted with a small group of students outside the study sample, and minor revisions were made for clarity. Classroom observations were conducted systematically during each instructional session. The researcher used an observation form focusing on student participation, peer interaction, value-related expressions, and classroom dynamics. Detailed field notes were taken immediately after each session. Student artifacts produced during classroom activities were collected and analyzed as supporting data sources. In addition, weekly reflection meetings between the researcher and the classroom teacher were documented to track instructional adjustments across cycles.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis. All interview recordings were transcribed verbatim. Observation notes, student artifacts, and reflective meeting records were organized and coded systematically. The analysis process followed four stages: (1) familiarization with the data, (2) initial coding, (3) categorization of codes into themes, and (4) interpretation of themes in relation to the research questions. Codes were developed inductively from the data while also being informed by the conceptual framework of values education. To enhance credibility, two independent researchers coded 25% of the data separately. Intercoder reliability was calculated using Miles and Huberman's (1994) formula:

$$\text{Reliability} = \text{Agreement} / (\text{Agreement} + \text{Disagreement}) \times 100$$

The agreement rate was calculated as 92%, indicating a high level of consistency between coders. Discrepancies were discussed until consensus was reached, and the coding scheme was refined accordingly. Triangulation across interviews, observations, and student artifacts was used to strengthen the trustworthiness of the findings. Additionally, member checking was conducted by sharing preliminary interpretations with the classroom teacher to confirm the accuracy of interpretations.

Ethical Considerations

Prior to the implementation of the study, written informed consent was obtained from the school administration and students' parents. Participation was voluntary, and all personal identifiers were anonymized to ensure confidentiality. Ethical principles of respect, beneficence, and protection of participants were upheld throughout the research process.

RESULTS

Development of Responsibility and Justice

During the first cycle, students' understanding of responsibility was initially limited to individual task completion. Interview data revealed that many students defined responsibility as "doing homework" or "finishing assigned duties."

One student stated:

"Responsibility means doing what the teacher tells us and finishing our homework" (S7, Interview, Week 2).

However, by the end of the cycle, students began to associate responsibility with social accountability and fairness. For example:

"Responsibility is also about helping others and not being unfair" (S14, Interview, Week 3)

Classroom observations supported this shift. In Week 1, only a few students volunteered to speak during discussions. By Week 3, observation notes indicated increased participation and more references to fairness in peer interactions:

"Students began referring to fairness when resolving minor group disagreements" (Observation Log, Week 3).

Student posters produced at the end of Cycle 1 reflected a broader interpretation of justice, including equal speaking rights and shared decision-making.

Improvement in Respect and Cooperation

During the second cycle, activities focused on respect and cooperation. Observation data showed noticeable changes in peer interaction patterns. Initially, some students interrupted each other during group work. However, structured peer-led tasks appeared to support more respectful communication.

One student commented:

“We learned to listen before talking. If we don’t listen, it’s not respectful” (S3, Interview, Week 5).

Observation notes from Week 6 indicated that students waited for their turn to speak more consistently compared to earlier sessions.

Additionally, student reflection sheets demonstrated an increased awareness of cooperative behavior. Several students emphasized “sharing ideas” and “deciding together” as important aspects of group work.

Increased Participation and Solidarity

The third cycle emphasized solidarity and active participation. Compared to earlier sessions, students demonstrated greater willingness to contribute to discussions and collaborative tasks.

One student expressed:

“Before, I was shy to speak. Now I think my ideas are important for the group” (S18, Interview, Week 8).

Observation records confirmed an increase in voluntary participation:

“More than half of the class requested to speak during the final reflection session” (Observation Log, Week 8).

Student-produced artifacts, particularly collaborative problem-solving worksheets, reflected collective decision-making processes rather than individual answers. This suggests that students increasingly viewed participation as a shared responsibility rather than an individual act.

Classroom-Level Transformation

At the classroom level, the findings reveal a noticeable transformation in students’ modes of interaction and engagement. Values education practices supported the development of more respectful communication patterns, increased cooperation during group activities, and heightened sensitivity toward peers. Importantly, these changes were not limited to structured lesson activities but gradually extended to routine classroom behaviors. This suggests that when values education is sustained and consistently reinforced through experiential activities, it can influence the broader social climate of the classroom. The study thus underscores the potential of values education to contribute to the formation of inclusive, participatory, and ethically grounded learning environments in primary education.

Teacher Reflexivity and Professional Practice

Another significant outcome of the study concerns the role of teacher reflexivity in the successful implementation of values education. The action research process enabled the teacher to critically examine instructional practices, respond to emerging classroom dynamics, and adjust pedagogical strategies accordingly. This reflective stance not only enhanced the effectiveness of values education activities but also contributed to the teacher’s professional growth. The findings suggest that values education is closely tied to teachers’ capacity for reflection, adaptability, and ethical awareness. As such, action research emerges not only as a research methodology but also as a powerful form of professional learning that supports sustainable pedagogical change.

Implications

Overall, the study highlights that effective values education in primary school Social Studies requires intentional design, experiential learning opportunities, and reflective teaching practices. When these elements are aligned, values education can function as a transformative force that shapes both student behavior and classroom culture. The results point to the importance of supporting teachers in developing reflective and context-sensitive approaches to values education and suggest that action research can play a key role in bridging the gap between curricular intentions and classroom realities.

DISCUSSION

Values education in fourth-grade Social Studies courses represents a multidimensional pedagogical domain shaped by instructional strategies, curriculum design, student engagement, and broader sociocultural expectations. Interpreted through an action research framework, the findings of the present study indicate that values education cannot be reduced to the transmission of abstract moral concepts. Rather, it should be conceptualized as a situated and process-oriented practice embedded in classroom interaction, reflective dialogue, and lived experience.

These findings align with earlier research emphasizing that values education gains pedagogical depth when grounded in authentic classroom interaction and systematic reflective inquiry (Gürhan, 2017). From this perspective, values are not merely taught but negotiated, enacted, and reconstructed within the social dynamics of the classroom.

A central interpretation emerging from the study is the critical role of student-centered and experiential approaches in rendering values meaningful and accessible to young learners. Consistent with Şekerci's (2021) analysis of authentic learning practices in Social Studies, the present findings suggest that moral understanding deepens when students engage in real-life problem situations rather than occupying passive roles in teacher-directed instruction. Experiential environments appear to facilitate both cognitive engagement and affective resonance, thereby strengthening the personal relevance and internalization of values.

Project-based learning further illustrates this instructional potential. Although Ökmen et al. (2022) examined project-based character education at the university level, their findings demonstrate that collaborative, inquiry-driven tasks foster responsibility, honesty, empathy, and social competence. Interpreted in relation to the present study, this suggests that developmentally adapted project-based structures at the primary level may similarly promote moral dispositions alongside higher-order thinking skills by situating students within meaningful, value-laden learning contexts. Drama-based instructional practices further appear to offer a powerful medium for values education.

The findings of Ezer and Aksüt (2020) suggest that drama activities facilitate emotional engagement, self-confidence, and cooperative interaction dimensions that are central to the internalization of values such as respect, empathy, and solidarity. From an interpretive standpoint, drama may function as a bridge between abstract values and embodied experience, allowing students to rehearse moral decisions and social roles within a safe and reflective classroom environment.

The cultivation of empathy represents a particularly significant dimension of values education. Taşkesen and Öztürk's (2019) findings indicate that empathy-focused activities generate positive emotional responses among students, even if direct correlations with creativity are not consistently observed. In the context of the present study, this suggests that empathy may operate as an affective foundation for values education, supporting students' willingness to engage with moral perspectives and social responsibility, regardless of measurable cognitive outcomes. Parental involvement also appears to play a complementary role in reinforcing values education. Yıldırım and Çalışkan's (2021)

findings suggest that task-based values education programs extend beyond the classroom by influencing students' behaviors within family and community contexts.

Interpreted alongside the present study, this highlights the importance of aligning school-based values education with home environments, thereby strengthening the continuity between formal instruction and everyday moral practice. Responsibility emerges as a multidimensional value shaped by both educational and social contexts. Ergün and Koç (2022) demonstrate that students and parents conceptualize responsibility across familial, societal, and civic domains. Similarly, Şekerci (2020) emphasizes the role of modeling and mentorship in the internalization of responsibility. These findings suggest that values education is most effective when supported by consistent role models and reinforced through observable practices rather than solely through verbal instruction.

The integration of digital tools into values education represents an emerging pedagogical opportunity. Elitok Kesici and Payza's (2022) findings indicate that computer-assisted games can support values acquisition by increasing student engagement, particularly in digitally mediated learning environments. From an interpretive perspective, digital tools may serve as complementary resources that enhance motivation and participation, provided they are aligned with pedagogical objectives and ethical learning goals. Active learning strategies also appear to support the development of values-related competencies. Sağlamgöncü and Deveci's (2023) findings suggest that student-centered activities promote empathy, justice, critical thinking, and media literacy. Interpreted within the present study, this reinforces the notion that values education is inherently connected to broader civic and analytical skills, particularly when learning activities are grounded in contemporary and socially relevant issues. Out-of-school learning environments offer additional interpretive insight into values education practices. Öner and Çengelci Köse (2019) and Aydemir (2021) highlight the pedagogical potential of museums, historical sites, and courthouses in fostering values such as responsibility, justice, tolerance, and civic awareness. These environments appear to enable students to encounter values within authentic social and cultural contexts, thereby supporting experiential learning beyond the classroom. However, such practices also require careful planning to address logistical and institutional constraints.

The role of teachers and teacher education programs in shaping values education practices cannot be overlooked. Karadağ and Yılar (2021) demonstrate that pre-service teachers prioritize certain values over others, reflecting both cultural norms and curricular emphasis. This finding suggests that values education is influenced not only by student-centered practices but also by teachers' own value hierarchies and professional beliefs, underscoring the need for reflective and balanced approaches in teacher education. Finally, curriculum design and instructional materials play a mediating role in values education. Dolmaz and Metin (2021) illustrate how Social Studies textbooks contribute to the development of values and skills through historical content, while also revealing gaps in value representation. These findings suggest that curricular structures should be critically examined to ensure a balanced and comprehensive integration of values across content areas. Taken together, the present study and the reviewed literature suggest that values education in primary school Social Studies courses is most effective when approached as a holistic, context-sensitive, and experiential process. Action research provides a valuable methodological framework for examining and refining such practices, as it enables educators to respond adaptively to classroom dynamics and student needs. Rather than functioning as a discrete curricular component, values education emerges as an evolving pedagogical practice shaped by instructional strategies, teacher reflection, student participation, and sociocultural context.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to examine how values education practices, implemented through an action research framework in a 4th-grade Social Studies classroom, shape students'

attitudes, classroom interactions, and observable behaviors. The findings indicate that values education, when designed as a process-oriented and student-centered pedagogical practice, can move beyond abstract moral instruction and become an integral component of everyday classroom life. Rather than treating values as isolated curricular outcomes, the study demonstrates that values such as respect, responsibility, empathy, justice, and tolerance can be meaningfully internalized when embedded within authentic learning activities and reflective classroom practices.

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