

## Having a Virtuous Teacher to Have Moral Virtues

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**Abstract:** This study aims to determine pre-service teachers' perceptions towards moral virtues expected from instructors in higher education. Descriptive survey model has been used in this study. Random sampling method was used for data collection. The sample group of the study consists of 253 pre-service teachers studying at Ataturk University in Turkey. Moral Virtues Scale (MVS) was used to collect the data. Mean, standard deviation, Kruskal Wallis H test and Mann Whitney U test were used to analyse the data. The major results of this study are: 1. Pre-service teachers mostly expect the virtue of justice from instructors. 2. Students studying at department of Social Sciences Education have higher perceptions of moral virtues than students of other departments. 3. First grade students have higher perceptions of moral virtues than upper class students. According to the results of this study, it can be suggested that instructors who will educate future generations should be role models for pre-service teachers and should behave fairly.

**Keywords:** Moral virtues, pre-service teachers, instructors.

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### INTRODUCTION

Having their roots in ancient philosophy of eastern and western civilizations, moral virtues are described as “the qualities that enable an individual to achieve eudaimonia which is explained as a state of objective achievement, of excellence”[1]. Several studies have dealt with moral virtues of human being from various perspectives [2-3-4-5]. Most of these studies have their groundings on Aristotelian argument of moral virtues which are stated to “come about as a result of habit” [1] or on Confucian perspective in which virtues are considered to stem from one’s internal qualities irrespective of social context [6]. Langston discusses moral virtues in a philosophical perspective. He, then, conceptualizes virtues and prudence in reference with Scotus’s views [7].

Freeland states that ‘moral virtues operate automatically or they are responses triggered by their environment’. She discusses Aristotle’s understanding of virtues in reference with excerpts from *Nicomachean Ethics* [8].

This review can give us a broader picture of studies on moral virtues. However there also exists quite growing interest in educational sciences to discuss and determine *moral education, teaching of ethics and virtues*. Research in educational sciences extends to investigate moral virtues in classroom settings for both teachers and students. Preliminary studies were devoted to defining moral virtues in context with philosophical

background while contemporary research has focused on determination and investigation of those virtues teaching professionals should have.

### Teaching of Ethics and Moral Virtues

It was not until 80’s that teaching of ethics and moral virtues found their way into school curricula. Many researchers point ‘the need for growing up good people and citizens who are in the pursuit of good’ as the reason of teaching ethics and moral virtues at school [9-10-11]. Some others have gone beyond this and argued for the need teachers’ moral virtues as they regarded virtuous teacher essential to grow up virtuous student. For example, Balay sketches out the importance of moral virtues in formal education system and he, then, mentions moral leadership and social integrity. According to him, today, problems of schools can and should be solved by moral leadership of educators which will help to “repair disordered sides of human relationships”[12]. These scholars have conducted descriptive studies to investigate and determine moral virtues a teacher should have. Studies have revealed seven moral virtues as fundamental and basic ones. They are: honesty, loyalty, courage, respect, interest, justice and grace.

### Honesty

Being honest is essential for a teacher. Balaystates that “the teacher as a moral leader is a consistent person with his/her values, words and actions”[12]. It should be noted that modern societies

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appreciate being honest even more than having a legal status. This virtue is mentioned as “being honest, having integrity, and seeking the truth” by Fallona. She comments this virtue as ‘truthfulness’ [1]. Honesty requires the establishment of life and actions on the facts and it is accepted as one of the basic principles of ethical behaviours. Teachers are required being in pursuit of truth in their all actions impartially and not make concessions from honesty and truthfulness with the purpose of facilitating some works. Dishonest teachers cannot establish a positive relationship with their students and they lose students’ confidence [13].

### **Loyalty**

Loyalty is a virtue that comes from a teacher’s or school leader’s internal fulfilment. Several scholars have defined the loyalty of a teacher as fulfilling his/her roles for the sake of school or his/her students [14-15]. Loyalty is also regarded as an important sign of identity statement for a teacher as a school leader [12].

### **Courage**

Courage or bravery is generally connected to ‘risk’ and ‘responsibility’ because a teacher, having this virtue, should be aware of the harmony between his/her words and actions as well as the results of his/her actions. Sockett states that this virtue is important for a teacher especially in difficult, problematic or turbulent circumstances [16]. Fallona explains this virtue as “temperance” [1].

### **Respect**

Respect is defined as “regarding people noble and valuable beings and to treat them accordingly” [12]. It should be noted that a teacher will be prestigious as s/he listens to others and make them feel noticed and cared. Giving feedback, being approachable and being open-minded are indicators of being respectful. Çelik states that teacher’s power of leadership increases as s/he respects her/his students [17]. Teachers are needed to respect primarily students’ presence and integrity. Students’ exposure to teachers’ behaviours such as beatings, violence, insults, nicknaming, humiliation of certain characteristics is considered morally wrong. Students will learn to have respect on getting respect from their teachers [13].

### **Trust**

Trust is probably the most implicit virtue which can only be expressed with love and care. Lipsitz regards interest or love as the source of success and peace of humanity [18]. In this context, trust becomes an essential virtue which “is the sense of transmissions of our energy to the aims of others” [12]. While performing professional activities teachers should firstly rely on themselves. Teachers’ self-esteem allowed them to be worthy of trust and respect of the community and so they should behave with respect and

avoid from untrustworthy approaches in their words and actions [13].

### **Justice**

As a kind of equality or fairness, justice is a virtue that is concerned with public good. A teacher should have this virtue for two aims: a) during his/her professional activities and b) for any opportunity of unfairness that can be caused by rules and norms. Fair attitude of teacher means equal distribution of rights and tasks among students; proportional share of students’ performance and participation; distribution of tasks considering students’ personal factors. Balay mentions three dimensions of justice: a) regarding people as the ultimate goal not as the tools to achieve the objective, b) acting for the benefits of others before one’s own benefits and c) developing empathy [12].

### **Grace**

Grace includes nobility, excellence, tolerance, fineness especially in hard times. Fallona explains it under several virtues: mildness, temperance and bravery [1]. If a teacher behaves in his/her normal and acceptable way while s/he is under pressure, s/he has the grace. Dedication is also an underlying factor for this virtue.

With the process of globalization, serious ethical problems in education as in many areas began to emerge [17]. School administrators and teachers have great responsibility for analysis of these problems. In order to fulfil their responsibilities, teachers should have students acquire moral values. Having these values acquired by students can be possible only if teachers, themselves, have these values. In this context, this study aims to determine the perceptions of pre-service teachers towards moral virtues expected from instructors in higher education. For this purpose, the following questions are tried to be answered:

1. What is the level of pre-service teachers’ perceptions towards moral virtues expected from instructors?
2. Does the level of pre-service teachers’ perceptions towards moral virtues differentiate in terms of gender, academic department and grade level?

## **METHOD**

### **The Research Model**

In this research, descriptive survey model has been used to determine pre-service teachers’ perceptions of moral virtues expected from instructors.

### **Study Group**

The study group of this research consists of 253 pre-service teachers selected by random sampling method. They are studying at Atatürk University in Turkey. Personal and educational details of the participants are given in Table 1.

**Table 1. Personal and educational details of the participants**

Group		N	%
Gender	Female	154	60.9
	Male	99	39.1
Type of Academic Department	Department of Computer and Instructional Sciences Technology (C.I.S.T.)	32	12.6
	Department of Fine Arts Education (F.A.E.)	38	15.0
	Department of Secondary Science and Mathematics Education (S.S.M.E.)	62	24.5
	Department of Social Sciences Education (S.S.E.)	81	32.0
	Department of Foreign Languages Education (F.L.E.)	40	15.8
Grade Level	Grade 1	48	19.0
	Grade 2	10	4.0
	Grade 3	116	45.8
	Grade 4	79	31.2

**Data Collection Instruments**

In this research, a “Personal and Educational Data Sheet” was developed by researchers in order to collect socio-demographic variables of the participants. In addition, “Moral Virtues Scale (MVS)” developed by Balay was used to determine the moral virtues which instructors are expected to have according to the participants. MVS consists of 50 Likert-type items and seven dimensions, namely respect, justice, loyalty, courage, honesty, grace and trust. In the reliability analysis conducted by researchers for each dimension, the alpha reliability coefficient of the scale was found

.90 for respect, .87 for justice, .83 for loyalty, .83 for courage, .76 for honesty, .62 for grace and .81 for trust.

**Data Analysis**

The statistical analysis of data was conducted using SPSS 20.0 for Windows. Descriptive statistics such as mean, standard deviation, frequencies and percentage techniques were used. As homogeneous distribution is not observed in the data, nonparametric statistical methods such as Mann Whitney U and Kruskal Wallis H tests were conducted.

**RESULTS and DISCUSSION**

**Question 1: What is the level of pre-service teachers’ perceptions towards moral virtues expected from instructors?**

**Table 2. Mean and standard deviation values related to the dimensions of moral virtues**

Dimensions	N	$\bar{X}$	Ss
Respect	253	4.62	.40
Justice	253	4.70	.43
Loyalty	253	4.30	.64
Courage	253	4.64	.46
Honesty	253	4.68	.46
Grace	253	4.60	.47
Trust	253	4.68	.58

In Table 2, it is seen that there are differences at the levels of pre-service teachers’ perceptions of moral virtues expected from instructors. Accordingly,

pre-service teachers expect mostly the virtue of justice ( $\bar{X}$  =4.70) from instructors and the virtue of loyalty ( $\bar{X}$  =4.30) at the lowest level compared to others.

**Question 2. Does the level of pre-service teachers' perceptions towards moral virtues differentiate in terms of gender, academic department and grade level?**

**Table 3. Mann Whitney U test results for gender variable**

Dimensions	Groups	Mean Rank	Sum of	U	p
Respect	Female	123.37	18998.5	7063.5	.82
	Male	132.65	13132.5		
Justice	Female	128.61	19806.5	7374.5	.65
	Male	124.49	12324.5		
Loyalty	Female	122.30	18834	6899	.20
	Male	134.31	13297		
Courage	Female	126.92	19546	7611	.98
	Male	127.12	12585		
Honesty	Female	129.75	19981.5	7199.5	.42
	Male	122.72	12149.5		
Grace	Female	130.30	20066.5	7114.5	.35
	Male	121.86	12064.5		
Trust	Female	130.39	20080	7101	.29
	Male	121.73	12051		

\*p<.05

Referring to the findings in Table 3, pre-service teachers' perceptions of moral virtues expected from instructors do not differentiate significantly in terms of gender variable. According to these findings, it can be said that female and male pre-service teachers have similar views about the moral virtues expected from instructors.

From the table-4, it can be seen that pre-service teachers' perceptions of respect, courage, honesty and trust virtues expected from instructors differentiate significantly in terms of academic department variable. Mann Whitney U test was conducted to determine which groups caused to this difference. As a result of Mann Whitney U test, it has been found that students studying at department of Social Sciences Education have higher perceptions of respect, courage, honesty and trust virtues expected from instructors than students studying at departments of Computer and Instructional Sciences Technology, Secondary Science and Mathematics Education, Foreign Languages Education.

It is found that pre-service teachers' perceptions of justice virtue expected from instructors differentiate significantly in terms of academic department variable. Mann Whitney U test was performed to determine which groups caused to this difference. As a result of Mann Whitney U test, it has been found that students studying at department of

Social Sciences Education have higher perceptions of justice virtue expected from instructors than students studying at departments of Computer and Instructional Sciences Technology, Fine Arts Education and Secondary Science and Mathematics Education.

It is found that pre-service teachers' perceptions of loyalty virtue expected from instructors differentiate significantly in terms of academic department variable. Mann Whitney U test was conducted to determine which groups caused to this difference. As a result of Mann Whitney U test, it has been found that students studying at department of Social Sciences Education have lower perceptions of loyalty virtue expected from instructors than students studying at departments of Fine Arts Education and Social Sciences Education.

It is also found that pre-service teachers' perceptions of grace virtue expected from instructors differentiate significantly in terms of academic department variable. Mann Whitney U test was performed to determine which groups caused to this difference. As a result of Mann Whitney U test, it has been found that students studying at department of Fine Arts Education have higher perceptions of grace virtue expected from instructors than students studying at departments of Computer and Instructional Sciences Technology and Social Sciences Education.

**Table 4. Kruskal Wallis H test results for academic department variable**

Dimensions	Departments	Mean Rank	Chi-Square	Df	p	Significance
Respect	1.C.I.S.T.	113.14	15.514	4	.00	1-4, 3-4, 4-5
	2.F.A.E.	132.05				
	3.S.S.M.E.	109.23				
	4.S.S.E.	150.90				
	5.F.L.E.	112.44				
Justice	1.C.I.S.T.	102.22	21.798	4	.00	1-4, 2-4, 3-4
	2.F.A.E.	126.34				
	3.S.S.M.E.	112.10				
	4.S.S.E.	155.65				
	5.F.L.E.	112.54				
Loyalty	1.C.I.S.T.	112.73	9.700	4	.05	2-3, 3-4
	2.F.A.E.	145.76				
	3.S.S.M.E.	110.70				
	4.S.S.E.	139.69				
	5.F.L.E.	120.16				
Courage	1.C.I.S.T.	102.50	22.404	4	.00	1-4, 3-4, 4-5
	2.F.A.E.	135.20				
	3.S.S.M.E.	106.34				
	4.S.S.E.	154.04				
	5.F.L.E.	116.09				
Honesty	1.C.I.S.T.	106.13	23.775	4	.00	1-4, 3-4, 4-5
	2.F.A.E.	132.36				
	3.S.S.M.E.	100.20				
	4.S.S.E.	152.23				
	5.F.L.E.	129.06				
Grace	1.C.I.S.T.	109.84	10.675	4	.03	1-2, 2-3
	2.F.A.E.	146.96				
	3.S.S.M.E.	111.88				
	4.S.S.E.	139.09				
	5.F.L.E.	120.71				
Trust	1.C.I.S.T.	120.89	12.526	4	.01	1-4, 3-4, 4-5
	2.F.A.E.	116.46				
	3.S.S.M.E.	111.83				
	4.S.S.E.	146.81				
	5.F.L.E.	125.30				

\*p<.05

From the table 5, it can be seen that pre-service teachers' perceptions of respect, loyalty, honesty, grace and trust virtues expected from instructors differentiate significantly in terms of grade level variable. Mann Whitney U test was conducted to determine which groups caused to this difference. As a result of Mann Whitney U test, it has been found that first grade students have higher perceptions of respect, loyalty, honesty, grace and trust virtues expected from instructors than third and fourth grade students.

It is also found that pre-service teachers' perceptions of justice and courage virtues expected from instructors differentiate significantly in terms of grade level variable. Mann Whitney U test was performed to determine which groups caused to this difference. As a result of Mann Whitney U test, it has been found that first grade students have higher perceptions of justice and courage virtues expected from instructors than second, third and fourth grade students.

**Table 5. Kruskal Wallis H test results for grade level variable**

Dimensions	Groups	Mean Rank	Chi-Square	Df	p	Significance
Respect	1 <sup>st</sup> Grade	166.53	17.647	3	.00	1-3, 1-4
	2 <sup>nd</sup> Grade	116.70				
	3 <sup>rd</sup> Grade	118.30				
	4 <sup>th</sup> Grade	117.06				
Justice	1 <sup>st</sup> Grade	172.73	25.046	3	.00	1-2, 1-3, 1-4
	2 <sup>nd</sup> Grade	120.10				
	3 <sup>rd</sup> Grade	114.93				
	4 <sup>th</sup> Grade	117.81				
Loyalty	1 <sup>st</sup> Grade	167.46	21.751	3	.00	1-3, 1-4
	2 <sup>nd</sup> Grade	127.90				
	3 <sup>rd</sup> Grade	109.32				
	4 <sup>th</sup> Grade	128.26				
Courage	1 <sup>st</sup> Grade	177.18	30.968	3	.00	1-2, 1-3, 1-4
	2 <sup>nd</sup> Grade	111.25				
	3 <sup>rd</sup> Grade	110.97				
	4 <sup>th</sup> Grade	122.05				
Honesty	1 <sup>st</sup> Grade	168.46	25.525	3	.00	1-3, 1-4
	2 <sup>nd</sup> Grade	137.70				
	3 <sup>rd</sup> Grade	109.44				
	4 <sup>th</sup> Grade	126.25				
Grace	1 <sup>st</sup> Grade	156.71	14.026	3	.00	1-3, 1-4
	2 <sup>nd</sup> Grade	138.40				
	3 <sup>rd</sup> Grade	112.44				
	4 <sup>th</sup> Grade	128.89				
Trust	1 <sup>st</sup> Grade	160.57	16.840	3	.00	1-3, 1-4
	2 <sup>nd</sup> Grade	132.60				
	3 <sup>rd</sup> Grade	116.92				
	4 <sup>th</sup> Grade	120.70				

\*p<.05

## DISCUSSION and CONCLUSION

From the findings of the study, it is obvious that pre-service teachers expect mostly the virtue of justice while they expect the virtue of loyalty lesser from instructors. Many researchers emphasized that a good teacher should be fair towards each student [19-20-21-22-23]. Teachers have an obligation to be fair in all actions and provide justice in the relations among students. It is extremely important for teachers to provide justice in every activity such as students' participation in and out of classroom activities, and giving voice to students equally, etc.[13]. In terms of human relations, justice in classroom is to treat students equally, to respect their personality, to avoid to treat them degradingly, and to give the fruits of their labour [24]. According to Kiroğlu, education is making people to be able to display a behavior which they are unable to display [23]. As being one of the most important

elements of education, teachers have great role for students to be able to show the virtuous behaviours. In study of Ada, Baysal and Korucu, it is expressed that teachers' perceptions of the value they have exhibited have a significant effect in terms of students' behavioural changes in the class. In this respect, for a teacher who wants to teach justice, expressing or interpreting the concept "justice" will not be enough yet it will be more effective for teacher to be fair and manage to preserve justice in the class [25]. Kurtde-Fidan emphasized that pre-service teachers stated that experiencing values is important for teaching values and teachers are not role models in the education of value [26]. The reason why pre-service teachers expect the virtue of loyalty at a lower level can be expressed in that loyalty is mostly associated with the institution.

The other results obtained from the study show that male and female teachers have nearly same views about moral virtues which they expect from instructors. It is found that students studying at department of Social Sciences Education have higher perceptions of moral virtues than students studying at other departments. In addition, it is concluded that first grade students have higher perceptions of moral virtues than upper class students. In Karakavak-Çırak's study on university students' moral judgement abilities, first grade students' moral judgment scores were found higher than those of fourth grade students' which supports the results of current study [27].

### Implications

Based on the findings of this study, the following suggestions have been presented.

1. Instructors should be more attentive in respects of education such as measurement and assessment.
2. Instructors who will educate future generations should be role models for pre-service teachers and should behave fairly.
3. Various activities such as symposiums, conferences, etc. related to the importance of moral values should be organized in universities in order to create awareness on these subjects.

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