

A Study on Children's Perceptions of Their Moral Values Using an Online Picture-Based Values Survey

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Abstract

The Industrial Revolution 4.0 (IR 4.0) has changed how we live, work, and communicate; it is likely to change the values held by children, and the strength of their values. This research investigated 109 children's perceptions of the current level of their moral values and compared it with the level of their perceived ideal moral values. The respondents were between the ages of eight to eleven from an international school in Selangor, Malaysia. The study utilized a picture-based values instrument via an online survey. The instrument design was adapted from the Animated Values Instrument (Collins et al., 2016) and the content of the values was adapted from the core values in the Malaysia Moral Education framework (Vishalache, 2010). Fourteen moral values were included in this research. Examples of the values are respect, honesty, kindness, responsibility, and humility, among others. Findings revealed that there was a significant difference between the children's perception of the level of their current values and that of their perceived ideal of the values. The children's perception of the level of their current values generally rated lower than that of their perceived ideal of the values. Future research may explore interventions to bridge the gap to enhance the values held by the children so that they can develop into balanced individuals who can better handle the demands of the 21st century.

Keywords: moral values, moral education, picture-based values instrument

Introduction

The advent of the Industrial Revolution 4.0 (IR 4.0) has changed how we live, work, and communicate; it is also likely to change the things we value and the way we value them in the future. Future workers will need to be highly trained in the emerging technologies but also, as importantly, in the values associated with using those technologies. “In preparing the students of today in facing the highly industrialized digital nation in the future, there is a need to balance the skills and knowledge imbued with a proper emphasis on human values. The right balance shall enable these millennials to fully function as effective societal members” (Jabatan Pendidikan Tinggi, 2019, p. 2).

According to Verschoor (2017), the attitude of millennials is shaped by globalization of the economy, terrorism, and the rise of technology, including the internet. The study found that millennials tend to fail at reporting misconduct observed at work. It has been suggested that the value of ethical standards should be reinforced for this generation.

One aspect of the 11th Malaysia Plan is the focus on enhancing noble values in order to strengthen human capabilities and the role of family institutions in achieving a balanced society (Lee, 2017). The Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013 - 2025 aspires to create “an education system that gives children shared values and experiences by embracing diversity” and to “develop values-driven Malaysians” (MoEM, 2012).

Problem Statement

Education in Malaysia is guided by the National Education Philosophy and seeks to “provide students with knowledge and skills for problem solving and decision making in everyday life, guided by moral values” (Chowdury, 2016, p. 3). However, Lee (2017) observed that “Our nation’s future depends on a strong and cohesive moral foundation. Despite the many accomplishments, the social progress of our society is lagging. All Malaysians must take responsibility for declining values and social standards”. Charanjit (Hassan, 2020) believes that common courtesy is lost amongst the younger generation of Malaysia, and their uncouth behavior can be seen on social media, public spaces, public transport and on the road. Tan Sri Lee Lam Thye, a Malaysian politician and social activist mentioned that instilling good moral values should begin at home and schools need to reinforce the importance of instilling good moral values to overcome moral decay (Lee, 2018a; 2018b & 2018c). The declining moral values could be due to the focus on teaching and learning towards syllabus completion. Consequently, pupils may, for example, treat Civics education just like any other subjects with facts to memorize which they regurgitate during examinations. Therefore, they may not apply what they have learnt in their daily lives.

To address this problem, there is a clear need to first give voice to the children themselves and understand how they perceive the moral values that schools and society want to instill in them. This research therefore sought to elicit knowledge about 8 to 11-year-old children’s perceptions of some universal moral values. Specifically, the research intended to examine the children’s current level of moral values, their perceived ideal level of moral values and the difference between the current levels and their ideal level of moral values attending an international school. Obtaining an understanding of the children’s perception of their moral values might allow relevant parties to work on ways to fill any gap between their current level and ideal level of moral values.

Research Objectives

1. To investigate 8–11-year-old international school children's perceptions of the level of their moral values.
2. To investigate 8–11-year-old international school children's perceptions of their ideal level of moral values.
3. To identify any difference between the 8–11-year-old international school children's level of moral values and the perceptions of their ideal level of moral values.

Research Questions

1. What are 8–11-year-old international school children's perceptions of the level of their moral values?
2. What are 8–11-year-old international school children's perceptions of their ideal level of moral values?
3. Is there a significant difference between the 8–11-year-old international school children's level of moral values and the perceptions of their ideal level of moral values?

Significance of the Research

This research study is significant as there have not been many studies (Chowdhury, 2016) on young children's perception of moral values, especially in Malaysia. The majority of the studies focuses on the teaching of moral values and teachers' perspectives on how they develop children's learning of these values (Chang, 2018; Yusof et al., 2018; Abdul Rahman, 2014; Vishalache, 2010). This research is not about the teaching of moral values; it is intended as a platform to give voice to primary school children to discover their perspectives on moral values and assess if there is a difference between the levels of their moral values and the perceptions of their ideal level of moral values. Finding out this information would allow teachers and other relevant parties to understand the children's mind set and perhaps seek ways to work on enhancing the children's values especially through extra-curricular means.

Definition of Terms

Values: Values refer to the concepts or ideas an individual finds important in life (Pomeranz et al., 2011)

Framework of values: The framework of values includes 14 values that are adapted from the Malaysian universal values framework. The 14 values are benevolence, cooperation, courage, fairness, gratitude, hardworking, honesty and integrity, kindness, moderation, respect, responsible, tolerance, humility, love, and affection.

Literature Review

Values are concepts or ideas of what individuals find important in life, and

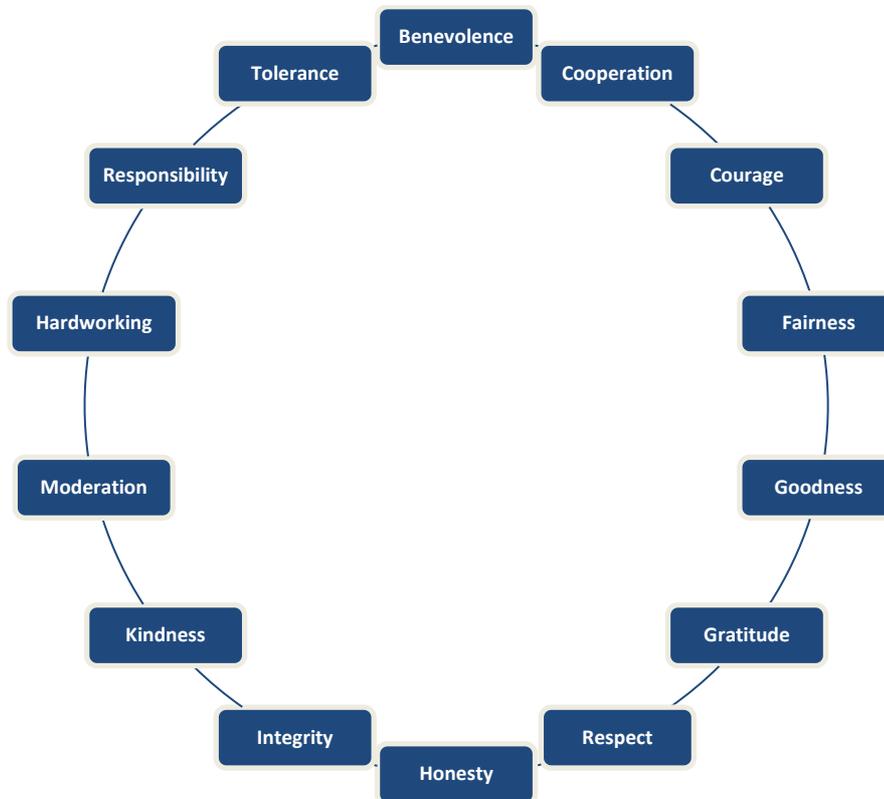
what they consider ought to be good, bad, right, and wrong (Pomeranz et al., 2011). Examples of values are trust, respect, or tolerance. Cheng and Fleishmann (2011) proposed 16 value concepts in their meta inventory of human values: (1) freedom, (2) helpfulness, (3) accomplishment, (4) honesty, (5) self-respect, (6) intelligence, (7) broad-mindedness, (8) creativity, (9) equality, (10) responsibility, (11) social order, (12) wealth, (13) competence, (14) justice, (15) security, and (16) spirituality.

Theoretical Framework

One of the aims of the National Transformation Programme (NTP) is to “create a society whose values and morals are of a high standard” and any transformation on a national level would entail changes in the education system. Hence, the Ministry of Education (MOE) via the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013 aspires to create “an education system that gives children shared values and experiences by embracing diversity” and an environment where “every student will have ethics and spirituality”. The Blueprint then states that the outcome or impact on students would be that they “will have strong moral values”. This refers to students in all schools, whether they are public schools or private or international schools. However, Abdul Rahman (2014) raises concern about some action plans and initiatives to strengthen values education in schools, citing that these initiatives are “not substantive and ...perhaps questionable, both in theory and in practice” (p. 50).

This research is based on the Malaysian universal values framework which is a guide to teaching moral education in primary schools. The Malaysian universal values framework is made up of 14 core values which include belief in God, good-hearted, responsible, thankfulness, courteous, respect, love, justice, bravery, honesty, diligence, cooperation, humility and tolerance (Vishalache, 2010). These common values are culled from different religions, societal norms and the Malaysian constitution. After deliberation with experts and reading around the subject, it was concluded that certain descriptions like “belief in God” and “good-hearted” may not represent values. Therefore, this study adapted the original Malaysian moral values framework and adjusted the values to include more relatable and relevant values like “benevolence”, “kindness” and “integrity”. The following is the final design of the framework of values for this study (Figure 1).

Figure 1
Framework of Values



The Values Crisis

The ongoing global COVID-19 pandemic has created citizens worldwide who have become highly dependent on new technologies and with a decrease in face-to-face interactions. Inevitably, in the long run, traditional social relations that start from the family and expand through neighborhood groupings, religious affiliations, and hometown associations could weaken, thus threatening the transfer of common social values like faith, ethics, decency, respect, tolerance, justice and compassion, from one generation to the next. As a result, basic values like care, cooperation, and tolerance could potentially become an anomaly, especially to the younger generation and those who come after. This research seeks to gauge the current mindset of children with regard to these common moral values.

Children and Values

A study done by Collins et al., (2017) shows that young children can understand the concept of values. When asked to illustrate a picture about the value of responsibility, the three- to five-year-old children can do so. Their understanding of values becomes more complex as they grow. The younger children would scribble themes related to the household like helping with the laundry and cleaning the dining table. Older children

would include the environment around them too, such as feeding the cats, collecting chicken eggs, charging the tablet, and refraining from playing games on it (Sapsağlam, 2017). Children as young as seven can understand and attach meaning to values like adults would (Uzefovsky et al., 2016). Ciecuch's (2016) and other colleagues' research also show that children's value preference is stable after the age of seven.

Children's values can be affected by various factors. Children's values tend to resemble their parents' values, as parents usually dictate the values, they would want their children to adopt (Barni et al., 2017). Guha and Sudha's (2019) study found that the development of values in children is derived from their environment which would include parents and family. School going children's values could also be influenced by the school's climate (Berson & Oreg, 2016) and their teachers' (Özdilekler et al., 2016), as they spend a large portion of their day in school.

Interestingly, a study done by Fedorova (2019) in Ukraine shows a majority of children ages five to seven had zero to the elementary level of the emotional and motivational components of the formation of moral values. This could be due to the underdevelopment of their emotional understanding of others. Döring et al. (2016), found that values direct and predict an array of young children's behavior. In middle childhood, they are able to make goal generalizations and form goals that are precursors to versions of their adults' values. Children as young as age six have an understanding of values and differentiates among them, their value structures are as differentiated as adults' and follow Schwartz's model (Ciecuch, 2016). Vecchione et al. (2016) assessed 310 sixth-grade students (ages 10 to 12) from four Italian public schools using Schwartz's Portrait Values Questionnaire and found that values predicted later behaviors. The children's value prioritization predicted their actions and behaviors and as they mature, the values they are working towards increased while the behaviors which conflicted with their values decreased. The study concluded that children's values and behavior are stable to a certain degree but change meaningfully over time according to the conflicts and compatibilities of values in Schwartz's model.

The School and Children's Values

Children spend a large portion of their time in school. Their values are influenced by the school's climate, which is mediated by the school's principal; thus, the children's values are similar to their principal's (Berson & Oreg, 2016). Education inspectors, school directors and subject teachers in Özdilekler and colleagues' (2018) research observed that teachers were good models in value transfer. Children tended to model their teachers' behavior and eventually develop similar values.

Children's Perception of Moral Values

A study by See (2018), explored 12-13-year old's perceptions of moral values and the kind of influences that shape their behavior. A total of 1,997 children from South-East England were provided 6 values (trust, honesty, loyalty, justice, courtesy, and tolerance) of which they were required to rate how important these were to them. Results showed values such as trust and honesty were considered very important, while courtesy and tolerance were seen as less important. The findings suggested that children were able to justify the prioritization of values by relating them to concrete examples such as what

they think makes a 'good person' - instead of thinking of values in a more abstract or even philosophical manner. Although the children in the study generally had a common understanding of what constitutes a good person, there were some differences in the perceptions of values between the 12 and 13-year-olds. The 13-year-olds did not see qualities like having a 'sense of humor', 'being fair', and 'determined' as important in a good person as they did for 12-year-olds. On the other hand, qualities like being considerate, friendly, and understanding, which were not mentioned by primary pupils, were featured in the responses among 13-year-old students. While the study showed that generally, young people showed a reasonable level of moral awareness and most believed that they possessed some characteristics of a good person, there were two interesting findings to be highlighted; firstly, children related values to people who had great influence in their lives, for example, a teacher a parent or a peer. Secondly, the majority of children in this study valued trust and honesty but not courtesy and tolerance.

Picture-based Representations of Moral Values

Numerous studies have also been conducted examining how young children perceive values by having them draw pictures in order to relay their perceptions to particular values. Sapsağlam (2017) conducted a qualitative study in the Central Black Sea Region to examine the children's perceptions of the value of responsibility in their drawings and verbal expressions. A total of 60 children ages three to five participated in the study. Results from the children's drawing showed that all of the children perceived the value of responsibility positively. The older children associated the value with a higher number of details. They also include various details and types of responsibility to their home, parents, and other living things (animals and plants) in their drawings. The study showed that the children realize they had responsibilities at home and their family played a big role in affecting them (Sapsağlam, 2017). Günindi (2015) examined the perceptions of children in preschool education with regard to the value of affection in the pictures they draw. The study involved 199 children aged 60 months old or above. During the collection of the data, the children were requested to draw a picture related to the value of affection and explain the picture they drew. The children's explanations were recorded by the researcher. The study is one of the first to be conducted in Turkey with preschoolers in this research area. The results showed that the children generally depicted human figures like family members, other children, and friends, animals like butterflies and dogs, trees, flowers, and grass, happy images such as hearts, balloons, and balls, and abiotic images like clouds and sunshine, as well as other images like houses in their drawings. The children tended to feature people and objects in their immediate vicinity. This provided useful information for the design of the Children Values Survey instrument in this research. The pictures in the instrument depicted the social and cultural activities common to children living in Malaysia.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative research design. Quantitative research collects

and analyses close-ended and quantifiable data from participants (Creswell, 2009; Edmonds & Kennedy, 2017; Merriam & Grenier, 2019). The cross-sectional design was employed because it has the advantage of collecting information in a short time frame (Mertens, 2015). Google Forms survey was used as an instrument as it provides instantaneous results. The researchers monitored the children in real time via zoom as they completed the survey forms.

Sample and Sampling Technique

The study used a convenience sample of 109 Malaysian children (54.1% male) between the ages of eight to eleven from an international school in Selangor, Malaysia. Amongst the total number of children, 53 were Grade 4 children and 56 were Grade 5 children. A convenience sampling technique was used in this study as the children were readily available in their intact groups (Mertens, 2015).

The children in this study aged eight to eleven can be categorized under the concrete operational stage according to Piaget's theory of cognitive development (Piaget, 1932). In this stage, the children are able to think in an organized and logical manner when dealing with concrete information (Berk, 2019). They are still developing skills to work with abstract ideas and hypothetical scenarios (Berk, 2019) therefore, they make decisions based on how things look (Morrison, 2015). In this study, the children rated their perceived level of moral values and perceived ideal level of moral values in a picture-based values instrument via an online survey. The pictures were intended to aid the children in the concrete operational stage to rate their perception of values as accurately as possible.

Research Instrument

For the purpose of this study, a survey instrument titled "Children Values Survey" was developed and validated by the researchers. It was an adaptation of Collins et al.'s (2016) Animated Values Instrument (AVI). The Children Values Survey consists of 14 values, which are adapted amended from the 14 core values in the Malaysia Moral Education framework (Vishalache, 2010). The 14 values were benevolence, cooperation, courage, fairness, gratitude, hardworking, honesty and integrity, kindness, moderation, respect, responsible, tolerance, humility and love and affection.

The survey items consisted of picture-based illustrations with textual descriptions items for each value. There were a total of 56 picture-based items in the Children Values Survey. Four different picture-based items represented one value. Each of the 14 values was depicted in four settings, which were classroom, cafeteria, playground, fieldtrip, and virtual. Each picture-based item came with a descriptive statement and two rating questions, for instance, "*The picture shows a responsible student. He makes sure he helps with the cleaning up in his classroom, unlike his friends, who prefer to chat or go home immediately.*" This was followed by two questions, "*What represents me in this value?*" and "*What I think should be the ideal value*".

Figure 2
Sample Picture-based item

Question 50: The picture shows a responsible student. He makes sure he helps with the cleaning up in his classroom, unlike his friends, who prefer to chat or go home immediately.



What represents me in this value?

Not like me at all				Very much like me
1	2	3	4	5

Tick one appropriate box below *

	1	2	3	4	5	
not like me at all	<input type="radio"/>	very much like me				

What I think should be the ideal value

Not an ideal value				Exactly the ideal value
1	2	3	4	5

Tick one appropriate box below *

	1	2	3	4	5	
not an ideal value	<input type="radio"/>	exactly the ideal value				

Each of these questions was accompanied by a five-point semantic differential scale. The picture-based scale was illustrated with smiley faces. In the first question “*What represents me in this value?*”, scale number 1 was a sad face with the descriptor “*not like me at all*” and scale number 5 was a smiley face with the descriptor “*very much like me*”. In the second question “*What I think should be the ideal value*” scale number 1 with the sad face was accompanied by the description “*not an ideal value*” and number 5 with the smiley face read “*exactly the ideal value*” (me in this value) and “*What I think should be the ideal value*”. (Figure 2)

Reliability

An instrument is reliable if it yields consistent results (Knapp, 2008). “A reliability measure essentially tells the researcher whether a respondent would provide the same score on a variable if that variable was to be administered again (and again) to the same respondent” (Trobia, 2008, p.168). Cronbach’s Alpha test was conducted to measure the internal consistency of scales in the Children’s Values Survey. Cronbach’s

Alpha ranges between 0 to 1. The greater the value, the more reliable the scale. The scale is deemed reliable if the value of each item is above 0.70 (Creswell, 2009). The reliability test was conducted for all 56 items, across 14 values. It was found that all the reliability coefficients are above 0.70.

A reliability analysis was undertaken to determine the internal consistency of the 14 values constructs in the study. Table 1 shows the reliability coefficients (Cronbach alpha).

Table 1
Reliability Analysis of the Constructs

Constructs	Reliability Coefficients	No. of Items
1. Construct 1: Benevolence	.766	8
2. Construct 2: Co-operation	.746	8
3. Construct 3: Courage	.738	8
4. Construct 4: Fairness	.749	8
5. Construct 5: Gratitude	.835	8
6. Construct 6: Hardworking	.778	8
7. Construct 7: Honesty and integrity	.767	8
8. Construct 8: Humility	.764	8
9. Construct 9: Kindness	.790	8
10. Construct 10: Love and affection	.767	8
11. Construct 11: Moderation	.805	8
12. Construct 12: Respect	.853	8
13. Construct 13: Responsibility	.798	8
14. Construct 14: Tolerance	.812	8

All constructs were found to be highly reliable (Cronbach alpha > 0.7). There were four constructs with relatively high alpha values > 0.8 (Construct 5: Gratitude, Construct 11: Moderation, Construct 12: Respect, and Construct 14: Tolerance (refer to Table 1).

Validity

Content validity is the extent to which a measure “covers” the construct of interest (Price et al., 2015). All 56 pictorial items in the Children Values Survey were verified for its’ suitability and clarity based on the 14 values. Each pictorial item was accompanied by a statement to avoid response bias. “Construct validity addresses the issue of how well whatever is purported to be measured actually has been measured” (Lavrakas, 2008, p. 134). The Children Values Survey was given to five experts to evaluate the underlying value in each picture. The 56 pictorial items and statements were then refined according to the comments and suggestions from the experts.

Data Collection and Data Analysis

Permission was obtained from the school’s principal to administer the survey. Parental consent was also obtained for all children who participated in the survey. The

Children Values survey was administrated by the research team via a zoom meeting and using Google Form at an agreed-upon a set time. The 109 children from Grade 4 and Grade 5 were further divided into smaller groups of 10 to 12 children and their activities were handled and monitored via zoom by the respective research team members. Prior to the survey exercise, the children were briefed. A clear explanation was provided on accessing the Google Form survey link and how to read and respond to the survey items. The children were encouraged to seek clarification via the Zoom call.

The data collected from the quantitative study was analyzed using the SPSS 26.0v software. Descriptive analysis such as frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation was computed. Following that, inferential statistics was used to find significant differences amongst the group in the sample.

Ethical Considerations

The children participated in this study voluntarily and consented by their parents. They have the option to withdraw from the study at any time if they wished to. The children's data, privacy, and anonymity were protected throughout the study.

Research Results

As this study investigated pupils' values, those who participated were required to rate their perceptions based on a total of 56 pictorial representations using five-point semantic differential scales (1 to 5) encompassing two major value reflections – “What represents me” and “My ideal value”.

The pupils were cooperative in filling up the questionnaire and there were no missing cases and values. Data were analysed using SPSS Statistics 26, SPSS AMOS 24, and SPSS Text Analytics 4.0. The data input file was prepared from the spreadsheet file downloaded through Google Forms. For data preparation, all data inputs were checked for duplication and verified for inconsistencies, and corrected before the final analysis.

Statistical Assumptions

Since inferential statistics were computed to answer the research questions in this study, statistical assumptions would support the conclusions made. Statistical assumptions such as normality of distribution and homogeneity of variances were checked as inferential statistics were used to make generalizations and conclusions. Normality of distribution, a cardinal principle of inferential statistics of the dependent variables, was computed using normality tests such as Shapiro-Wilks and Kolmogorov-Smirnov to determine the normality of the important dependent variables for analysis. In addition, the normality test would show the presence of outliers and other descriptive statistics which could have a direct impact on the data analysis and results. Table 2 shows the computations in the normality test of the two overall aggregated dependent variables – “What represents me” and “My ideal value”.

Table 2
Tests of Normality

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	Df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Overall mean for “ <i>What represents me</i> ”	.048	109	.200*	.992	109	.767
Overall mean for “ <i>My ideal value</i> ”	.104	109	.005	.937	109	.000

* This is a lower bound of the true significance.

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

The overall mean of “*What represents me*” is indicative of a normal distribution while the overall mean for “*My ideal value*” is not indicative of a normal distribution. However, other acceptable tests of normality such as skewness and kurtosis did indicate normal distribution, for example, for “*What represents me*”, the overall mean for skewness of this variable is $-.268$ and kurtosis is $-.058$. For the “*My ideal value*” overall mean, the skewness value is $-.820$ and kurtosis is $.233$. A value less than 1 can be interpreted as resembling normal distribution.

Figure 3 and Figure 4 show the histogram for the “*What represents me*” variable and the “*My ideal value*” composite means respectively.

Figure 3
Overall mean for “*What represents me*”

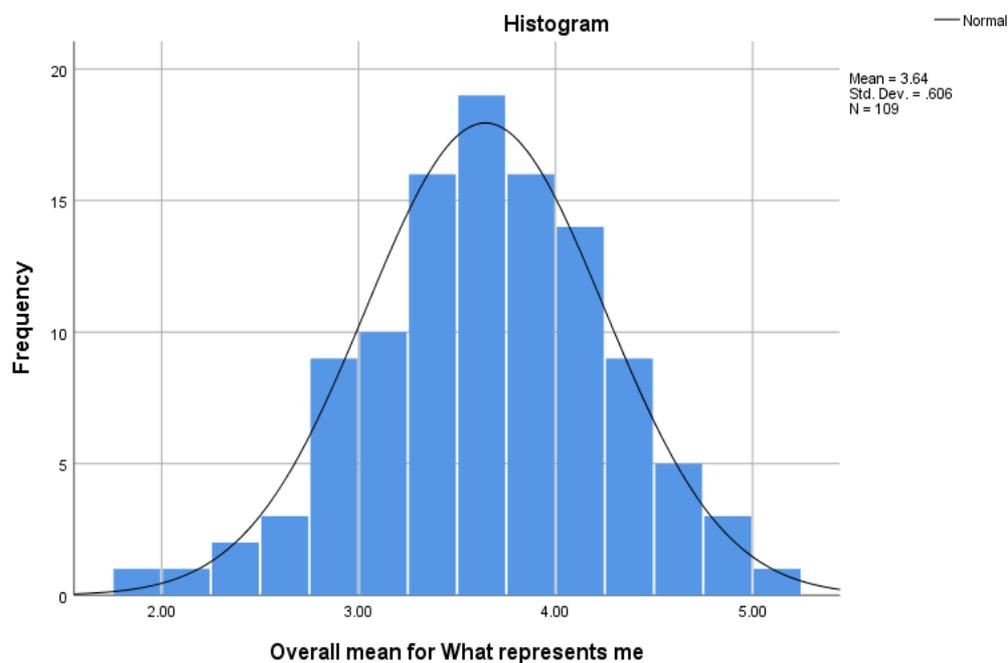
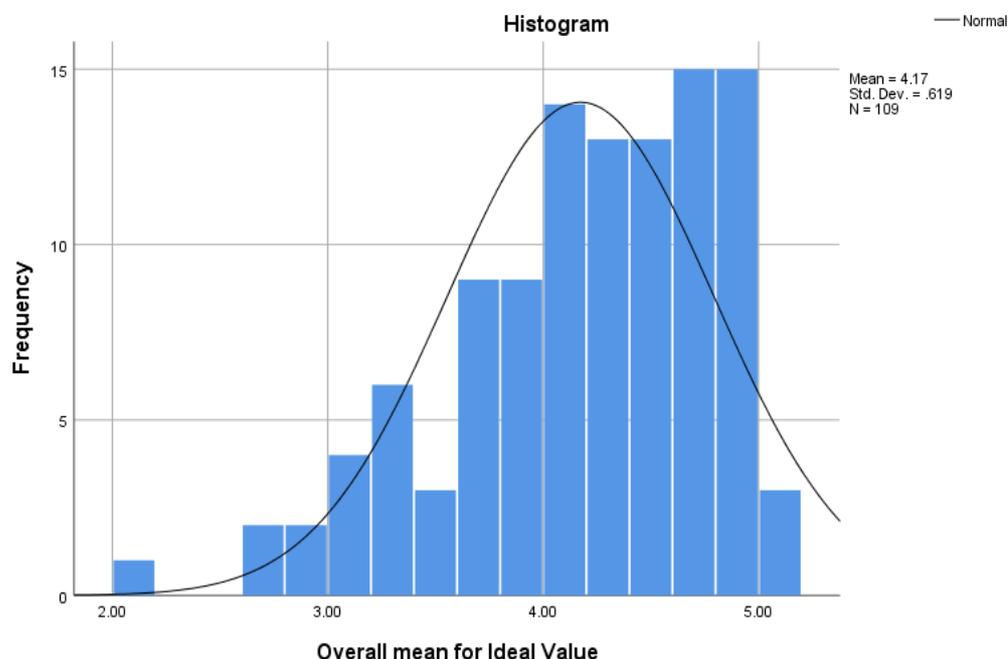


Figure 4
Overall mean for “My ideal value”



Demographic details

A total of 109 pupils from HELP International School participated in the Children's Values survey. The breakdown of pupils by age and grade is shown in Table 3.

Table 3
Age of pupils

Age in Years	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
8	4	3.7	3.7	3.7
9	37	33.9	33.9	37.6
10	53	48.6	48.6	86.2
11	15	13.8	13.8	100.0
Total	109	100.0	100.0	

The age range of pupils is between 8 and 11 years with 33.9% categorised as 9 years and 48.6% categorised as 10 years (refer to Table 3). Those categorised under 8 years (3.7%) and 11 years (13.8%) made up the remainder of the pupils in this study.

Report of results

What are 8–11-year-old international school children's perceptions of the level of their moral values?

For data analysis, the 56 items which made up the questionnaire were aggregated

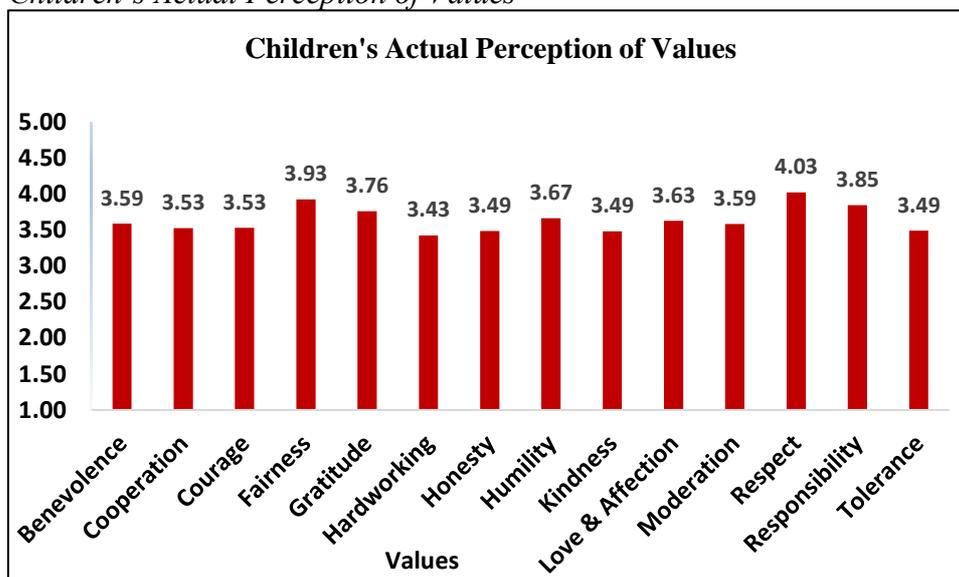
to obtain composite means of the constructs. All in all, there were 14 constructs where composite means were calculated. The constructs were: Benevolence, Cooperation, Courage, Fairness, Gratitude, Hardworking, Honesty, Humility, Kindness, Love & Affection, Moderation, Respect, Responsibility and Tolerance (Table 4).

Table 4
“What Represents Me” – Children’s Actual Perception of their Values

<i>No</i>	<i>Values</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Std. Deviation</i>
1.	Benevolence	3.59	109	0.71
2.	Cooperation	3.53	109	0.81
3.	Courage	3.53	109	0.76
4.	Fairness	3.93	109	0.70
5.	Gratitude	3.76	109	0.80
6.	Hardworking	3.43	109	0.88
7.	Honesty	3.49	109	0.78
8.	Humility	3.67	109	0.79
9.	Kindness	3.49	109	0.86
10.	Love & Affection	3.63	109	0.84
11.	Moderation	3.59	109	0.86
12.	Respect	4.03	109	0.79
13.	Responsibility	3.85	109	0.72
14.	Tolerance	3.49	109	0.81
Overall		3.64	109	0.61

The findings from the pupils’ perceptions on the level of moral values are shown in Table 4. The highest value for “*What represents me*” is “Respect” (mean = 4.03; S.D. = .79) while the lowest value is “Hardworking” (mean = 3.43; S.D. = .88) with a relatively large standard deviation, indicating a fairly wide range of ratings in their perceptions. Of the 14 values, “Tolerance” was rated second lowest with a mean of 3.49 (Figure 5), with also a fairly large standard deviation (SD = 0.81). The composite mean value of 3.64 indicates that the children perceived they possessed a moderate level of moral values.

Figure 5
Children's Actual Perception of Values



What are 8–11-year-old international school children's perceptions of their ideal level of moral values?

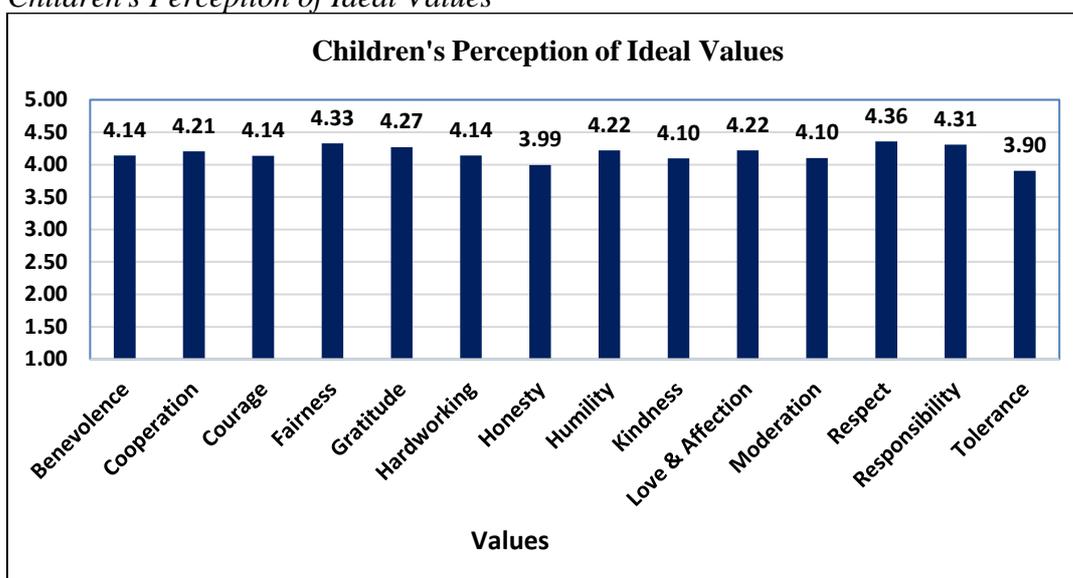
The findings of children's perceptions of the ideal level of moral values are shown in Table 5. Results showed that the children tended to perceive generally higher ideals in moral values in all the 14 constructs (Table 5 & Figure 6). The composite mean of 4.176 (S.D. = .62) indicated that the values highly reflected their ideal. The highest perception of "ideal" value is "Fairness" (mean = 4.33; S.D. = .68) while the lowest is "Tolerance" (mean = 3.90; S.D. = .86). The standard deviation for "Tolerance" (mean = 3.90, SD = 0.86) is rather high as compared to the generally high perception ratings of "Fairness". This means that the ratings for "Tolerance" tended to more dispersed and not as consistent as that of "Fairness".

Table 5
"What Represents Me" – Children's Perception of their Ideal Values

Values	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
1. Benevolence	4.14	109	0.70
2. Cooperation	4.21	109	0.71
3. Courage	4.14	109	0.84
4. Fairness	4.33	109	0.68
5. Gratitude	4.27	109	0.76
6. Hardworking	4.14	109	0.73
7. Honesty	3.99	109	0.84
8. Humility	4.22	109	0.79
9. Kindness	4.10	109	0.80
10 Love & Affection	4.22	109	0.73
11. Moderation	4.10	109	0.81

12. Respect	4.36	109	0.81
13. Responsibility	4.31	109	0.71
14. Tolerance	3.90	109	0.86
Overall	4.17	109	0.62

Figure 6

Children's Perception of Ideal Values

Is there a significant difference between the 8–11-year-old international school children's levels of moral values and the perceptions of their ideal level of moral values?

The t-test for paired samples was used to calculate the differences between pupils' perceptions of values related to "What represents me" and their "My ideal value". The t-test was computed up to 95% confidence interval to determine whether significant differences existed between those two values based on the 14 constructs. Table 6 shows the results of the data analysis.

Table 6

Difference in Children's Perception of Actual and Ideal Values

Values	Actual Values Mean	Std. Dev.	Ideal Values Mean	Std. Dev	t-value	Mean Difference of Actual Values Mean and Ideal Values Mean	Paired samples t-test Sig. (2-tailed)
1. Benevolence	3.59	0.71	4.14	0.70	-8.601	0.55	.000

2. Cooperation	3.53	0.81	4.21	0.71	-8.819	0.68	.000
3. Courage	3.53	0.76	4.14	0.84	-8.399	0.61	.000
4. Fairness	3.93	0.70	4.33	0.68	-7.129	0.40	.000
5. Gratitude	3.76	0.80	4.27	0.76	-7.412	0.51	.000
6. Hardworking	3.43	0.88	4.14	0.73	-9.387	0.71	.000
7. Honesty	3.49	0.78	3.99	0.84	-8.210	0.50	.000
8. Humility	3.67	0.79	4.22	0.79	-7.608	0.55	.000
9. Kindness	3.49	0.86	4.10	0.80	-7.313	0.61	.000
10. Love & Affection	3.63	0.84	4.22	0.73	-7.309	0.59	.000
11. Moderation	3.59	0.86	4.10	0.81	-6.293	0.51	.000
12. Respect	4.03	0.79	4.36	0.81	-4.944	0.33	.000
13. Responsibility	3.85	0.72	4.31	0.71	-6.284	0.46	.000
14. Tolerance	3.49	0.81	3.90	0.86	-6.749	0.41	.000
15. Overall	3.64	0.61	4.17	0.62	-9.771	0.53	.000

(N= 109)

The findings show that Pair 1 to Pair 15 have significantly different means ($p < .05$) indicating that there are significant differences between each of the 14 constructs plus one overall construct (refer to Table 6 and Figure 7). The standard deviations, which are measures of dispersion or consistency of the ratings differ from 0.71 to 0.88 (Table 6). This shows some inconsistency in the perceptions of “What represents me” and “My ideal value”.

Figure 7

Difference in Children's Perception of Actual and Ideal Values

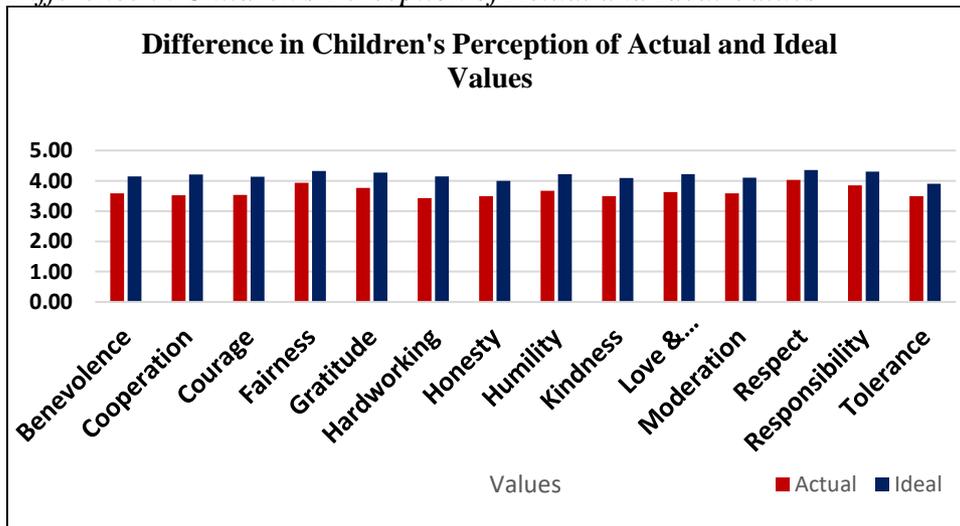
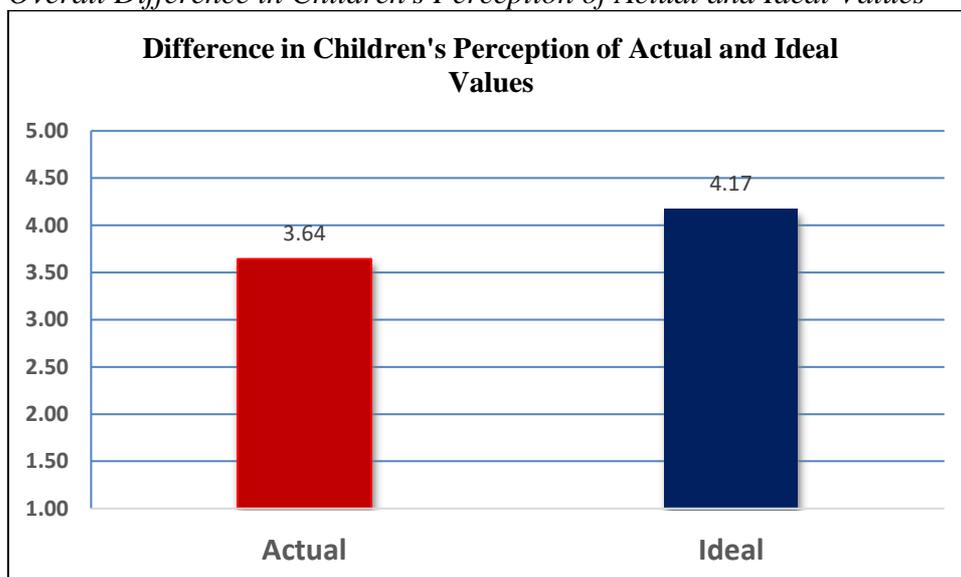


Table 6 indicates that all 15 pairs (14 constructs and one overall, Figure 8) have significant differences where p-values are $< .05$ (Table 6).

Figure 8

Overall Difference in Children's Perception of Actual and Ideal Values

The mean differences between “What represents me” and “My ideal value” range from .33 for the construct “Respect” and .71 for the construct “Hardworking”. This would mean that pupils tended to perceive closest in the construct “Respect” as compared to the construct of “Hardworking”. The closer the mean difference, the more likely they would belong to the ideal state.

From the perspectives of correlation, Table 7 shows positive and moderate to high correlations between “What represents me” and “My ideal value”. The highest correlation (Pearson r) could be found in the construct “Tolerance” ($r = .710$; $p < .05$). On the other hand, the lowest correlation was found in the construct “Love and Affection” ($r = .426$; $p < .05$).

Table 7

Paired Samples Correlations

Correlation of Actual and Ideal Values	N	Correlation	Sig.
Pair 1 Overall	109	.572	.000
Pair 2 Benevolence	109	.548	.000
Pair 3 Co-operation	109	.442	.000
Pair 4 Courage	109	.571	.000
Pair 5 Fairness	109	.642	.000
Pair 6 Gratitude	109	.579	.000
Pair 7 Hardworking	109	.529	.000
Pair 8 Honesty and Integrity	109	.692	.000
Pair 9 Humility	109	.542	.000
Pair 10 Kindness	109	.448	.000
Pair 11 Love and Affection	109	.426	.000
Pair 12 Moderation	109	.474	.000
Pair 13 Respect	109	.615	.000
Pair 14 Responsibility	109	.437	.000

Pair 15	Tolerance	109	.710	.000
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Discussion and Conclusions

This research investigated the children's perceptions of their current level of moral values, an ideal level of moral values, and the difference between the current levels of moral values and the ideal level of moral values. This study employed a quantitative research design.

A survey titled "Children Values Survey" was administrated on 109 pupils from the international school via the respective Grade 4 and Grade 5's morning Zoom session. Data were analysed to answer the following research questions: "What are children's perceptions of their level of moral values?", "What are children's perceptions of their ideal level of moral values?" and "What is the difference between the levels of their moral values and the perceptions of their ideal level of moral values?"

The research revealed that overall, 8–11-year-old international school children perceived the level of their moral values as moderate. Out of the 14 values, "Respect" has the highest mean rating. Children aged between 8 to 11 years were able to distinguish the different levels of values using pictures. This finding is congruent with Döring et al. (2016) research using the Picture-Based Value Survey.

The research also revealed that the children had high ideals of the moral values. The highest perception of "ideal" value is "Fairness" while the lowest is "Tolerance". According to Collin et al. (2017), the order of priorities of how important children perceived each value can be affected by individual characteristics like age and gender and their life experiences (home) and significant life events. Children learn and understand the concept of value by interacting with their immediate environment (Guha & Sudha, 2019). Hence, the school system, teachers, peers and school culture are some of the factors that influenced their value development (Berson & Oreg, 2016). The findings that indicated the highest perception of "ideal values" is "Fairness" which may be interpreted that the school has emphasized on fairness is widely practiced among members of the school despite their country of origin, race, age, gender, and grade. The participants in this study were international school students who were surrounded by people from multicultural backgrounds. They spent most of their time communicating and collaborating with teachers and peers of different cultural beliefs and lifestyles. The majority of the pupils in this school followed the same rules and moral values established by the school's principal. These pupils might have been embedded with a fixed mindset of values over time.

There were clearly significant differences between the children's perception of their level of moral values and their ideal of moral values. There was also a significant relationship between "What represents me" and "My ideal value". The moderate to high and positive correlations indicated that pupils who generally rated high on "What represents me" tended to also rate high on "My ideal value" and vice versa. Children between the age of 8 to 11 were better than younger children at perceiving values. They could make meaning to their new learning based on their existing knowledge. This behavior is consistent with Piaget's 'concrete operations stage' whereby the concept of the values could be taught at any stage by building on their existing knowledge. The findings in this study indicated that both the Grade 4 and 5 pupils were able to relate the

pictorial-based values and make sense of each value based on their personal experiences (Sevinç, 2019).

Therefore, the finding explained why the pupils who generally rated high on “What represents me” tend to also rate high on “My ideal value”, especially for “Respect”. But the value for “Hardworking” was rate low for both “What represents me” and “My ideal value”. These might be due to the lack of stimulation provided for this value. Hence, these pupils were not able to interpret it to themselves. The study recommends proactive intervention of careful listening and discourses to provide the stimuli to narrow the gap between the pupils’ existing perception of values and their ideal values.

Limitations of Research

This survey research collected data at a single point in time. The researchers administered the survey via Google Forms. There were certain limitations to this online survey as participants might be less likely to stay fully engaged for a survey of more than 8-10 minutes. The researchers were mindful of this shortcoming and ensured that the length of questionnaire could be completed in less than 8 minutes.

Children self-reported their data on the survey. Self-reporting may introduce bias as the respondents may over-report to give socially desirable answers (Cohen et al., 2017). The children may choose to provide answers that are more socially acceptable, rather than being true to themselves. Accordingly, the researchers anticipated this limitation by using a picture-based questionnaire in which values were depicted in graphic form supported by text description. This was aimed at ensuring similar cognition of the intended values.

The subjects in this study were pupils in an international school. Some might argue that the results of this study might not represent the perception of moral values of the general young population in the country. However, the researchers intended to carry out the research in an international primary school to gather views from children from more diverse backgrounds than those found in most public schools.

Recommendations

Since there were significant gaps in all the 14 constructs, future research may investigate why these gaps occurred and how to solve this disparity. While schools have put in place efforts to inculcate moral or values education, Abdul Rahman (2014) raised concern about some action plans and initiatives to strengthen values education in Malaysian schools, citing that these initiatives were “not substantive and perhaps questionable, both in theory and in practice” (pg. 59).

Future studies may explore various forms of interventions to develop those values outside the teaching and learning context. Future studies may also research for data to reveal the multidisciplinary perspectives of the pupils based on their gender, culture and social development. Multiple methods, including quantitative and qualitative approaches, may be employed to delve deeply into the values of children.

Acknowledgement

The research team acknowledges that this research was made possible with funding from Ministry of Education Malaysia under the Fundamental Research Grant Scheme (FRGS), Project Code FRGS/1/2019/SSI09/HELP/02/1.

The research team expresses gratitude to the international school for their willingness to participate in this research and for the cooperation of the teachers and students.

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