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The Effects of Turkish Cypriot Traditional Children's Games on Students with Special Needs in the Context of Values Education

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Abstract

This study, which aimed to instill values effective in developing social adaptation skills in students with special needs through traditional Turkish Cypriot children's games, employed an action research model within a qualitative research design. The participants in the study were 5 students with mild intellectual disabilities aged 9 to 12. In the first step of the two-stage implementation plan, data were collected by having the students play traditional Turkish Cypriot children's games, selected by the researchers and containing the relevant values, three times a week. In the second step, on the day following the game phase, the students' acquisition of the target value was assessed through worksheets containing activities prepared by the researchers, which covered the basic points related to the target value. The aim was to instill 8 core values through applications that continued for a total of 5 weeks. After the completion of the application phase, a one-week break was given. During this period, the aim was to determine the short-term retention level of the targeted values. After a one-week follow-up, the researchers evaluated whether the students had learned the relevant values permanently in the short term through visuals and texts. The findings of this study, in which traditional Turkish Cypriot children's games were practiced three times a week for five weeks, show that the games positively contributed to the learning of the targeted values and that the children adopted these values. However, the findings reflect only short-term retention; longer-term follow-up studies are needed to assess the long-term internalization of the values.

Keywords: special education; Turkish Cypriot traditional children's games; values education

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1. Introduction

Societal continuity is possible through the transmission of moral and cultural values from one generation to the next. Values are fundamental criteria that guide individuals' behavior within society and ensure the orderly progress of social life [1].

The personal characteristics of individuals, considered the cornerstone of society, are influenced by a range of core values and traits shaped by cultural differences. Humans, as the fundamental element of society, are beings shaped by the complex interaction of individual and social factors. Personal traits such as responsibility, empathy, patience, and extroversion shape an individual's behavior and social relationships, while intelligence and learning capacity directly influence problem-solving, creativity, and critical thinking. Furthermore, moral values and cultural norms guide an individual's decision-making processes and social roles. Family, educational institutions, and peer groups play a critical role in the internalization of these values and the reinforcement of personal traits. However,

broad social factors such as economic, political, and technological changes reshape an individual's goals, lifestyle, and social adaptation. In short, the individual becomes a central entity that reflects both their own values and those of society; thus, individual differences and cultural diversity emerge as fundamental elements that determine the richness and dynamic structure of society. Differences in personality, human values, and character also influence both the richness of society and the social standing of individuals within it.

Before reaching school age, children begin to acquire a foundation in social and cultural values within their family and social environment. They then develop these experiences at school, which shape their character over time. Especially in the preschool period, the most effective socialization element in a child's life is the family. In addition to its educational function as the transmission of culture across generations, the family also serves as an effective socializing agent in the child's life [2]. According to Kralik, the family and social environment are influential first, followed by the school, in the development of children's values [3].

The healthy acquisition of values that shape a child's personality is vital for the sustainability of individuals' futures and the overall development of societies. These values should be instilled not only in typically developing children but also in individuals with special needs. Existing literature emphasizes the importance of culturally relevant activities, such as traditional games, in fostering social values in special education [4,5]. Special education aims to foster individuals' ability to function independently in society at the highest level by developing their existing abilities while instilling these values. Individuals with special needs generally experience physical, mental, and sensory limitations; these limitations negatively affect their interactions with their environment and social development [4,5]. Special education aims to enable individuals to live in society as highly independent persons by developing their existing abilities, while also instilling the aforementioned values [6,7].

Childhood is the most critical developmental stage in which values are acquired. "Early childhood is a critical period, a stage of very rapid development, and the foundation of a child's personal characteristics is laid." [8]. The values acquired during this period directly impact an individual's personality development and social adaptation skills [9]. Therefore, educational institutions are expected to be structured not only to impart academic knowledge but also to develop an individual's character and sense of social responsibility [10]. "Education is a holistic system that must be implemented not only at the cognitive level but also at the social, emotional, and psychomotor levels. If this holistic approach is not achieved, individuals alienated from the values of their society will be raised, and a societal structure with broken interpersonal relationships will emerge" [11].

Values education is a process that aims to help individuals embrace universal human principles and translate them into behavior in their daily lives [12]. This process becomes even more crucial for students with special needs, particularly in terms of social integration and social acceptance [13]. Therefore, planning a curriculum that supports the acquisition of values by individuals with special needs is of great importance from both individual and societal perspectives [14]. Teaching values is crucial for the social acceptance of individuals with special needs. For example, a child with special needs who is patient, respectful, fair, and honest while playing with friends will be included in games by their peers and will gain social acceptance in the future. Similarly, an individual with special needs' ability to demonstrate courage or leadership when necessary will enhance their social acceptance. On the other hand, the ability of individuals with special needs to regulate their behavior, emotions, and desires by maintaining self-control in different situations and conditions will also facilitate their acceptance in society.

As is known, play is not merely a simple activity to fill leisure time, but also a phenomenon with a traditional aspect through which cultural values and social norms are transmitted. Roger Caillois, by classifying games under four headings (competition, chance, imitation, and enthusiasm), emphasized that play is a structure that establishes a relationship between individuals and the social order. According to Caillois, play is an activity domain in which individuals experience social roles, internalize compliance with various rules, and learn values. In this regard, games fulfill an important function in the transmission and perpetuation of cultural and social values [15].

Recent research shows that values education, when delivered through play-based methods, significantly supports students' social–emotional development [16,17]. Various studies have demonstrated that traditional children's games, in particular, reinforce values such as cultural transmission, cooperation, empathy, rule-following, and leadership [18,19]. Another study revealed the effects of traditional games on students' development in physical education classes [20].

The traditional children's games used in this study are important elements of folk culture that carry a society's cultural memory and social values. Games enable children to learn cooperation, rule-following, sharing, and empathy through a natural process [21]. Turkish Cypriot traditional children's games are powerful cultural tools that promote social solidarity, respect, honesty, patience, and courage [22]. In this context, a play-based values education approach can be an effective method for supporting the learning of students with special needs [23]. Games are considered not only educational activities but also folkloric elements that play a critical role in cultural transmission, social adaptation, and the instillation of values [7,24,25].

Throughout history, various studies have investigated the role of game-based interventions in supporting social communication skills in individuals with special needs. In this context, a study by Zengin and Peker [26] examined the effect of educational games on children with intellectual disabilities' anger levels; the findings showed that educational games significantly reduced participants' anger levels. Furthermore, it was concluded that educational games positively contributed to the development of social skills in children with intellectual disabilities by preventing increases in anger levels. In another study, Yutapratama and Syamsi [6] emphasized that traditional games encourage students to imagine and be creative. The researchers stated that these games guide children in forming words and sentences from the given material, maintain physical fitness, develop self-control, and develop organizational techniques among members of play groups.

Other studies conducted in recent years have also shown that creative arts therapies, play therapies, and psychomotor approaches produce positive effects on the attention, social participation, emotion regulation, and communication skills of individuals with intellectual disabilities [27]. McMahon also concluded in his study that educational sports games are important for integrating individuals with disabilities into their environment and society, for fostering friendships, and for promoting social acceptance [28].

However, empirical evidence in the literature also suggests that accessible, "serious play" platforms enhance learning, participation, and daily functioning among individuals with intellectual disabilities [29,30]. Therefore, values education practices should be evaluated not only at the theoretical level but also in terms of behavioral outcomes.

While studies comparing digital games with traditional games have shown that traditional games provide superior results in the behavioral development of values such as empathy, patience, and rule-following, current findings suggest that hybrid approaches can be complementary and effective in achieving educational goals [31]. Furthermore, empirical studies demonstrating the contribution of traditional cultural games to motor and socio-emotional skills have shown that these games have positive effects on motor

learning and social practice [32]. Studies on teacher education reveal that problems such as insufficient materials, family involvement, and methodological ambiguity arise when implementing game-based values education [33]. Therefore, this study contributes not only to children's value acquisition but also to the literature by creating a workable model for teachers.

Furthermore, according to experiential learning theory, learning by doing accelerates cognitive processes and increases learning retention [34]. Students with special needs who strive to integrate both academically and socially with their non-disabled peers are at a disadvantage in acquiring the values that their non-disabled peers naturally acquire throughout their lives and that are key to social adaptation. In this regard, through special education courses on values education, they can acquire these values and perpetuate them by applying them in their natural environment. This study offers a unique approach to supporting students with mild intellectual disabilities and special needs in the acquisition of values.

Purpose of the Study

This research aims to examine the effect of a values education program delivered through traditional Turkish Cypriot children's games on the acquisition of fundamental values, such as leadership, self-control, responsibility, respect, honesty, justice, patience, and courage, by students with mild intellectual disabilities. Furthermore, the study aims to determine the effects of the program on students' acquisition and retention of values, as well as on teachers' and students' opinions regarding the program. This study is expected to make significant contributions to the application of values education in special education.

This research investigates the impact of a "Values Education Program" implemented through traditional Turkish Cypriot children's games on the acquisition of core values, essential for the development of social adaptation skills, by students with special needs diagnosed with mild intellectual disabilities. For this purpose, the research sought to answer the following questions:

1. How does a values education program conducted through traditional Turkish Cypriot children's games affect students' level of value acquisition?
2. Is a values education program implemented through traditional Turkish Cypriot children's games effective in helping students adopt values on a lasting level in the short term?
3. What are the opinions of students and teachers regarding the values education program implemented through traditional Turkish Cypriot children's games?

2. Method

2.1. Research Design

The research was designed using the "action research" approach, a qualitative research method. Yıldırım and Şimşek [35] define action research as "an approach that brings together research and practice and facilitates the transfer of research results to practice." The choice of action research, with its process-oriented structure and systematic, in-depth collection of data related to a specific situation and evidence-based analysis, can be explained in several ways. The most important reason is that values education is a practical guide to social adaptation skills and follows a process-based structure for students with special needs, just as it does for typically developing students. Another rationale is that the effects of an acquired value can be observed in students' permanent outcomes and, in the long term, in their behavior, and that a detailed examination of students' development at each stage of their learning process is essential.

2.2. Study Group

The study group was formed using the "purposive sampling" method. In the study, the researchers sought specific prerequisite skills during the selection process. Accordingly, the students selected as subjects were required to be literate, able to express themselves verbally and in writing, able to independently perform psychomotor skills, able to correctly answer at least four of the 10 (ten) comprehension questions related to the text they read, not to have prior knowledge of values education, not to have acquired the target values previously, and not to have participated in a similar study.

The study, conducted at a special education and vocational training school affiliated with the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus Ministry of National Education, obtained feedback from teachers on students' knowledge and acquisition levels of target values and conducted a prerequisite assessment. Following this, subjects who possessed the prerequisite skills and lacked knowledge of the root values were identified.

The participants selected by the researchers consisted of a total of 5 students (2 girls and 3 boys) aged 9–12, attending a special education school and diagnosed with mild intellectual disability (Table 1). In accordance with ethical guidelines and participant confidentiality, before the interventions, consent forms were obtained from the families of the selected students, indicating their approval for their children's participation in the study. Subsequently, the real names of the subjects who consented to participate were concealed, and pseudonyms were used throughout the study.

Table 1. Participant Nicknames, Ages, and Genders.

Ada	Deniz	Yıldız	Güneş	Sahil
9 years old Male	10 years old Male	10 years old Girl	11 years old Male	12 years old Girl

2.3. Data Collection Tools

The traditional Turkish Cypriot children's games used in the intervention phase of the study are fun activities shaped by social life and folk culture, usually played outdoors in groups with simple tools (stones, ropes, balls), and based on physical movement, skill, and intelligence. These include games such as hide-and-seek, blind man's bluff, tag, hopscotch, and stick-and-ball, which help children socialize and learn cultural values. To determine the students' missing values in the study, the "Universal Moral Values Scale for 10–13 Year-Old Children," developed by Umar and Kanger [36], was used to measure the extent to which 10–13 year-old children have internalized universal moral values such as mercy, compassion, honesty, justice, responsibility, respect, and empathy across cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions. After obtaining the developers' permission to use the scale, participants who met the prerequisite skills and consented to participate in the study with a parental consent form were allowed to read and complete the scale individually in a suitable classroom during a free class period at their school. The data obtained were evaluated while accounting for participants' missing values. At the same time, to prioritize the missing values obtained from the children's responses, teachers were presented with a "Target Value Determination Control Chart," which included a single question with multiple options: "Which value will the student's acquisition of be positively impacting both their school and social life? Please tick?" They were asked to mark the chart individually, using the most appropriate option for their students. Two independent observers compared the results from both instruments, and the final target values were determined by consensus.

The researchers observed all participants during weekly sessions where traditional Turkish Cypriot children played games. They were evaluated using the "Student Prod-

ucts Evaluation Monitoring Chart," along with documents from the permanent products obtained in the following sessions. This chart includes evaluation items to determine the extent to which the students' products met the target values at the end of each completed session.

During the weekly sessions, traditional Turkish Cypriot children's games were played, and the researchers observed all participants. The resulting products were then systematically evaluated the following day in the sessions using the "Student Product Evaluation Monitoring Chart." This chart includes evaluation items designed to determine the extent to which the students' products met the defined target values after each session.

Accordingly, the chart, created individually for each student, lists the following items: observed, partially observed, and not observed. In each of the two consecutive sessions related to the target value, the highest number of statements in the overall assessment, conducted individually and collectively at the end of the sessions, represents the students' level of acquisition for that target value. The data collection tools were submitted to experts in the Turkish language and special education departments at the university for their opinions, and finalized based on their feedback. Two independent observers served during and after the sessions. They were briefed on the observation form and then evaluated.

The final data collection tool used in the research was the "Program Impacts—Self-Assessment Checklist," developed by the researchers and administered individually to participants after all sessions. This tool allows students to express their opinions on the values education program by marking the appropriate option from "agree," "disagree," or "undecided." A similar checklist, the "Program Impacts—Teacher Form," was prepared for completion by the teachers of the relevant students. This form contains questions to determine the participant's level of involvement with the program and to target the target value. Data is collected by having participants select the appropriate option from the following statements: "Agree, Disagree, or Undecided." This process allows for the collection of supporting data with self-assessment data collected from the children.

2.4. Data Analysis Related to Value Achievement

At the end of each session, students' responses are evaluated against the criteria specified in the "Student Products Evaluation Monitoring Schedule," in line with the relevant target value. As a result of this evaluation, the students' achievement levels in each session are determined by checking the box next to the relevant statement. The measurement tool used in the study was evaluated through an inter-observer reliability analysis conducted simultaneously by two independent experts in the field of special education. This analysis was calculated using the formula [Consensus/(Consensus + Disagreement)] × 100 [37] and was found to be 81% reliable and valid.

2.5. Interview Data Analysis

Following the completion of the research implementation phase, one-on-one, face-to-face interviews were conducted with the students in the classroom where the interventions were conducted. Simultaneous interviews were conducted with the participants' teachers, who were then presented with checklists. Responses were categorized as "agree, disagree," and "undecided," and analyzed and tabulated separately for each child and teacher.

2.6. Implementation Environment and Process

In the applications carried out during the March–April period of the 2024–2025 academic year, traditional Turkish Cypriot children's games, selected and determined by the researchers and incorporating specific values, were played a total of three times a week: twice in the first session and once in the second session, within the framework of the

application process planned for two days a week. During this five-week process, the goal was to instill eight core values identified according to the students' needs.

After the application phase was completed, a one-week break was given. This break was intended to assess short-term retention of the targeted values. After the one-week break, researchers measured children's retention of these values through visuals and texts.

Traditional Turkish Cypriot children's games, selected in accordance with the values identified throughout the study, used materials such as handkerchiefs, stones, sticks, anklebones, and chalk, all natural and readily available. The researchers prepared all worksheets and activities used in the study in accordance with the methods outlined in the action plan. Fonts, points, and line spacing were adjusted to ensure easy readability for students (ALFABET 98 basic upright letter font − 15 point/1.5 line spacing). To ensure engaging worksheets, clipart, and small pictures relevant to the text and appropriate to the students' level were used in the layout.

Action Plan implementation process: The action plan outlined the roadmaps to be followed during implementation. Accordingly, individual and/or group activities were designed for the children based on target values determined from data collected from the children themselves and their teachers. In the instructions prepared by the researchers for practitioners, the values to be included in each session and the activities to be supported were clearly and comprehensively illustrated. Furthermore, basic criteria for monitoring and evaluating the implementation sessions were also established.

Before the first step of the implementation, in which traditional Turkish Cypriot children's games were played, the participating students were seated in a circle on the grassy ground where the play phase would take place to stimulate their awareness of the target value indirectly. The children sat in a circle on the grassy ground where they could see both each other and the implementer and interact comfortably. The implementer positioned himself at the head of the circle to observe all the children's reactions, make observations more easily, and take notes in his journal. After ensuring the children's attention, the researcher read aloud a short story containing the relevant target value, in accordance with the action plan. This way, the researcher maintained a level of cognitive awareness for the children's value acquisition in the game. Following this phase, the game began. At the beginning of the play phase, the implementer provided the children with descriptive information about the game's name, its rules, and how to play. Following this phase, the child plays the game with them for the first five minutes to help them play correctly. At the end of this period, the practitioner releases the children to play, observes them without intervening, and records their progress.

After 10 min, the practitioner rings a bell, summons the children, and chats about the game. During the conversation, the practitioner collects each child's thoughts and feelings about the game, including questions about their favorite part, their most challenging part, and what they would like to change if they had the chance. The practitioner then records these thoughts and feelings in the diary. Following this period, the practitioner releases the children to play the game again for 20 min, encouraging them to continue. She continues to observe the children throughout this process. When the time is up, the practitioner rings the bell again and gathers the children back into the circle. This time, she announces that they will be playing a new game and calls out the children's names at random. The student whose name is called is expected to stand, approach the practitioner, and quietly whisper the answer to the question into the practitioner's ear. After all students respond, the facilitator asks each student to share their answer with the group and begins calling out their names. The facilitator asks each child who approaches them what value they gain from the game. After all participants have provided their answers, the facilitator asks the children how the game relates to the story read beforehand and expects them to

identify its value. After this stage is completed, the children are thanked, and the first session concludes.

On the day of the second session, students are asked to replay the game they played before the intervention. The facilitator observes without intervening. After the game ends, the children are taken to a pre-assigned classroom to complete the worksheets prepared in accordance with the objectives of the second session. There, the children are asked to complete various worksheets and activities individually (cutting and pasting, doing puzzles, exploring strengths and weaknesses, matching activities to find alternatives and the possible consequences of a behavior, sentence-completion activities that require writing behavioral patterns related to the determined value, etc.). Following this stage, the classroom is seated in a circle again. An evaluation discussion is held, focusing on examples of where and how the target value can be used in daily life. The children are thanked, and the activities conclude. Observations and evaluations are recorded in the practitioner's diary.

In the short term, to determine retention, the students are gathered again in the classroom where the second session is held, and children are presented with cards containing images or cartoons related to the target values. They are asked to guess and explain what the values on these cards represent. After all students have done this, a short story containing the relevant target value is read to them, and they are asked to state the value mentioned in the text. The session concludes with a question asking for examples of situations where this value should be used. The data is recorded in the practitioner's journal.

During the development of the action plan, some of the traditional Turkish Cypriot children's games selected for the target value were evaluated in terms of their difficulty of implementation in the school environment, their ability to fully engage children, and the potential dangers they might pose. These games were subsequently replaced with other traditional games that represented the same value. A similar process was designed for different activities and values, such as project development, homework reflection, completing unfinished stories by writing them in accordance with the target values, poster design, and wallpaper creation. Some activities were redesigned. During implementation, it was observed that children struggled to complete these activities, particularly poster design and wallpaper creation, which remained challenging and abstract. Therefore, these tasks were removed from the action plan and replaced with activities such as cutting and pasting, puzzle-making, discovering and dramatizing strengths and weaknesses, and matching activities in which children would find alternatives and the possible consequences of a behavior.

When we evaluated the areas where the values education program was most effective for children, we observed not only that the acquisition of the target values was practical and fun through traditional Turkish Cypriot children's games, but also that their self-confidence and friendships improved during the program. Furthermore, the children learned about each other's strengths and weaknesses through fun activities and tended to be more tolerant of one another. One of the most important benefits of the program is the preservation of fading games and traditions to maintain social culture. A significant finding of the study is that traditional Turkish Cypriot children's games serve as a guide for students with special needs in learning social values and adapting to the society they live in. This project serves two primary purposes: first, to instill values that will contribute to the development of children with special needs. Second, it aims to revive traditional Turkish Cypriot children's games, which are gradually being forgotten, and to bring them to today's children in a sustainable way. Therefore, it would be accurate to note this two-phase impact of the project. Below are the Roadmaps for the Value and Goal Game Sessions (Table 2) and the Value and Worksheet Application Sessions (Table 3).

Table 2. Roadmap for Value and Goal Play Sessions.

Week	Values	Traditional Turkish Cypriot Children's Game
Week 1	Leadership + Self-control	Wand Wipe + Change of Residence
Week 2	Responsibility + Respect	From the Malay word " regiment " + What is needed?
Week 3	Honesty + Justice	Bass + Andrez
Week 4	Patience + Courage	King father, Tower + Lover
Week 5	Repetition of all values	Replay of all games
	1 Week Break	

Table 3. Values and Worksheet Practice Sessions.

Week	Values	Worksheets
Week 1	Leadership + Self-control	If I were a leader, I would evaluate myself
Week 2	Responsibility + Respect	My To Do List + My Watch List
Week 3	Honesty + Justice	I observe behavior + Am I being fair?
Week 4	Patience + Courage	How much patience? + Brave boy
Week 5	Repetition of all values	Worksheet not used. Games played individually.
	- SEARCH -	

The table (Table 4) above presents the relationship between the values aimed to be instilled in children with special needs through traditional Turkish Cypriot children's games within a conceptual framework. The table clearly and systematically demonstrates which values each game aligns with through its rules, interaction patterns, and group dynamics. The table provides a general overview of which values the selected games can support in children's social, emotional, and moral development. This association reveals the educational potential of values inherent in games, such as respect, leadership, self-control, responsibility, honesty, justice, patience, and courage. Therefore, the table is based on the theoretical relationships between the structural characteristics of games and the dimensions of value education and serves as a reference guide for planning value-oriented practices in the subsequent stages of the research.

Table 4. Relationship Between Target Values and Games.

Values	Traditional Turkish Cypriot Children's Game	The Relationship Between Value and Play
Leadership	**Handkerchief with a Wand:** Children are divided into two groups. A leader is chosen for each group. A handkerchief is tied to a stick approximately the children's height across the playing field. Players, taking turns, run simultaneously, following the leader's command, to catch the handkerchief and return to their seats without being caught by the other group. The player who reaches it earns three points. The player who fails to reach it and is caught is out of the game. The group with the highest score wins. The team leaders of the groups must be able to manage and guide the team effectively.	The ability of team leaders to effectively manage and direct their teams, give commands at the appropriate time, organize their teams, and play a strategic role in achieving success develops leadership values.

Table 4. *Cont.*

Values	Traditional Turkish Cypriot Children's Game	The Relationship Between Value and Play
Self-control	**Change of Residence**: Children draw large circles on the ground, one less than the number of participants. Then, they choose a leader by counting among themselves. The player who reaches it remains outside, and the others enter the circles. Players in the circle switch places for a predetermined time and enter one of the other rings. At this point, the midwife tries to find an empty ring and enter it. Thus, the player who cannot enter the ring becomes the new midwife.	Students' ability to track the moment of movement, wait for the right time, and act in accordance with the rules develops self-control.
Responsibility	**Alaydan Malaydan**: Children divide into two groups and hold hands. They stand opposite each other and take turns taking three or four steps toward each other, first one group and then the other, chanting a folk song. They suddenly pull a member from the opposing group, whom they had agreed on beforehand, and add them to their own group. The other group unites tightly and resists, trying not to lose any of its members. If they can get the member, they move on to the other group. If they cannot, they remain in their place. The game continues until only one member of one group remains.	Students holding hands and taking on the task of protecting the group, striving to maintain group unity, develop a sense of responsibility.
Respect	**What is needed?** One player stands in a separate spot, separated from the others. The remaining players quietly discuss a profession among themselves and decide on a profession. Then they go to the midwife, who is waiting at a distance, and the midwife guesses the profession. If they guess correctly, one of the children lines up behind the midwife. If their guess is incorrect, they ask, "What is needed?" The midwife is asked the name of one of the tools used in that profession. The midwife makes a guess. If the guess is correct, one person from the group lines up behind the midwife. If the guess is incorrect, they ask again what they need as a last chance to learn the name of another tool. If the answer is incorrect this time, those who do not know the answer are separated. A long line is drawn on the ground between those who know the answer and those who do not. With the leader at the head, they pull each other toward their side of the line. The winner is the one who pulls to their side.	Students who carefully listen to each other, wait their turn, and pay attention to given clues develop respect and values.
Honesty	**Bas:** This game is played individually by children in a single group. Technically, it resembles the game of marbles. An ellipse is drawn in the middle, with a straight line drawn through it. Marbles are placed on these marbles. Children throw the largest marble they have, specifying whether they want to be left or right. (If they want to be left, they shoot from the left; if they want to be right, they shoot from the right). If their shot is accurate, they collect the marbles in the opposite direction of their prediction. The game continues until all the marbles are gone.	Children learning to follow rules about direction before throwing, where the marbles will hit, etc., and to avoid cheating develop honesty.

Table 4. *Cont.*

Values	Traditional Turkish Cypriot Children's Game	The Relationship Between Value and Play
Justice	**Andrez**: This game is played with three stones facing each other. Players play in pairs. Two concentric squares are drawn on the ground, intersected by four straight lines passing through the midpoints of the angles and sides. Each player places their own stones at the intersections, one by one, then moves them back and forth. The goal is to place all three stones of the same player on the same intersection point on the same line. Placing their stones in this manner is called "andrez." Winning five times in a row wins the game.	Having specific, equal rules for everyone in the game, players taking turns making moves, and the winner being determined by the rules, allows for a concrete experience of the value of justice.
Patience	**Tower:** This game is played individually within a group. Children place a large, flat stone on the ground, and this is called the Hearth. A few steps away from that stone, they built a tower of at least seven flat stones stacked on top of each other. Players throw their stones at the hearth. The player who throws the farthest stone into the hearth is the winner and stands next to the hearth. Children take turns throwing their stones at the tower. The winner must rebuild the collapsed tower. At that moment, the player must pick up their piece. If the midwife catches it, they become the new midwife. **King Father**: Players choose a king from the group and stand away from the king. The king asks, "What were you doing last night?" and the children take turns complaining to him, but they do not speak. The king makes predictions based on pantomime-like movements. If he guesses correctly, he catches one of the children and becomes king. If not, he continues to be king.	Behaviors such as each player waiting their turn, building the tower, and waiting for the right moment to make a move develop patience values. The King Dad game also develops patience, which involves waiting for the prediction process, performing actions according to the rules and at the right time, and adapting to the flow of the game without rushing to the result.
Bravery	**The Ashik Game:** A traditional game played with a four-sided bone from the hind legs of animals such as sheep and goats. Children draw a circle on the ground and throw the ashik bone into it. Each side of this bone has a different appearance and name. These appearances and names lead to different tasks. Children throw the ashik bone and perform the tasks assigned to them based on where it lands.	It develops courage, which involves completing the assigned task without hesitation and demonstrating it in front of a group.

3. Findings

This section presents the findings of practices implemented to instill specific values in children with special needs through traditional children's games.

Table 5a shows that, overall, participants Ada, Yıldız, Güneş, and Sahil partially realized the leadership value in the first session of the games. Participant Deniz, however, achieved the target value.

In the second session, following the game session and continuing with the worksheets, it was observed that participants Ada, Güneş, and Sahil began to realize the target value they had partially realized in the first session. The participant, coded Yıldız, also partially realized the target value in the second session. Participant Deniz's performance on the target value from the first session remained unchanged.

Table 5. Findings for Leadership and Self-Control Root Values. (**a**) Leadership value; (**b**) Self-control Value.

(**a**)				
Ada	**Deniz**	**Yıldız**	**Güneş**	**Sahil**
Partially Observed	Observed	Partially Observed	Partially Observed	Partially Observed
Observed	Observed	Partially Observed	Observed	Observed
(**b**)				
Ada	**Deniz**	**Yıldız**	**Güneş**	**Sahil**
Observed	Partially Observed	Not observed	Partially Observed	Partially Observed
Observed	Observed	Partially Observed	Observed	Observed

In light of these findings, the following is the acquisition of the leadership value: Leadership is a characteristic that develops over time and is closely related to factors such as experience and self-confidence. Therefore, acquiring this value in a single session or in a short period of time is difficult for students with special needs. Systematic and quality experiences provided to these students will pave the way for more effective acquisition, internalization, and use of the leadership value.

Table 5b shows that in the first game session, Ada achieved the target value, while Yıldız did not. However, Deniz, Güneş, and Sahil were partially able to achieve it.

In the second session following the game session, which continued with the worksheets, it was observed that Ada, Deniz, Güneş, and Sahil achieved the target value. The participant, coded Yıldız, who was unable to achieve the target value in the first session, partially achieved it in the second session.

Based on these findings, the acquisition of self-control value is important for the socialization and social adaptation of students with special needs, and almost all participants had no difficulty achieving this value.

According to Table 6a, which reflects the data on the acquisition of the responsibility value, it is observed that in the first session of the games, participants Ada and Deniz achieved the target value, while Yıldız, Güneş, and Sahil were partially achieving it.

Table 6. Findings for the Responsibility and Respect Root Values. (**a**) Responsibility Value; (**b**) Value of Respect.

(**a**)				
Ada	**Deniz**	**Yıldız**	**Güneş**	**Sahil**
Observed	Observed	Partially Observed	Partially Observed	Partially Observed
Observed	Observed	Partially Observed	Partially Observed	Observed
(**b**)				
Ada	**Deniz**	**Yıldız**	**Güneş**	**Sahil**
Observed	Observed	Partially Observed	Partially Observed	Observed
Observed	Observed	Observed	Partially Observed	Observed

In the second session, following the game, participants Ada, Deniz, and Sahil were observed to achieve the target value. Participants coded Yıldız and Güneş were observed to achieve the target value in the second session, having achieved it only partially in the first session.

In light of these findings, it is concluded that the responsibility value is critical for the majority of participants in their ability to act independently in the face of other individuals and environmental factors in their daily lives and to maintain independent living skills. While a significant portion of the participants did not experience any difficulties in acquiring this value, the remaining students have the potential to develop in the relevant area.

When Table 6b, which presents data on the acquisition of the target value, is examined, it is observed that in the first game session, participants Ada and Deniz did not acquire the target value. At the same time, Yıldız and Güneş partially achieved it, while Sahil achieved the target behavior.

In the second session, following the game session and continuing with the worksheets, participants Ada, Deniz Yıldız, and Sahil were observed to achieve the target value. Participants coded Güneş, who had partially achieved the target value in the first session, were also observed to achieve it partially in the second session.

Table 7a shows that in the first session, where games related to the value of honesty were played, participants Ada, Güneş, and Sahil demonstrated attainment of the target value. Deniz partially achieved it, while Yıldız was unable to.

Table 7. Findings for the Root Values of Honesty and Justice. (**a**) Honesty Value; (**b**) Justice Value.

(**a**)				
Ada	**Deniz**	**Yıldız**	**Güneş**	**Sahil**
Observed	Partially Observed	Not observed	Observed	Observed
Observed	Observed	Partially Observed	Observed	Observed
(**b**)				
Ada	**Deniz**	**Yıldız**	**Güneş**	**Sahil**
Partially Observed	Observed	Not observed	Observed	Partially Observed
Observed	Observed	Not observed	Partially Observed	Observed

In the second session, which followed the game session and continued with the worksheets, participants Ada, Deniz Güneş, and Sahil were observed to achieve the target value. Participants coded as Yıldız were observed to partially achieve the value in the second session, which was not observed in the first session.

Based on these findings, a large proportion of participants attained the value of respect.

Table 7b shows that in the first session, where games related to the value of justice were played, participants Ada and Sahil partially achieved the target value. Deniz and Güneş achieved it, while Yıldız did not.

In the second session, which followed the game session and continued with the worksheets, participants Ada, Deniz, Yıldız, and Sahil were observed to achieve the target value. Participants coded as Güneş partially achieved the value in the second session, whereas this was not observed in the first session. Based on these findings, it can be concluded that a large proportion of participants achieved the value of respect.

When Table 8a, which reflects the data on the acquisition of the patience value, is examined, it is observed that in the first session of the games, participants Ada and Deniz Güneş demonstrated acquisition of the target value, whereas Sahil was only partially able to achieve it. At the same time, Yıldız was unable to achieve the target behavior.

Table 8. Findings for the Root Values of Patience and Courage. (**a**) Patience Value; (**b**) Courage Value.

(**a**)				
Ada	**Deniz**	**Yıldız**	**Güneş**	**Sahil**
Partially Observed	Partially Observed	Not observed	Partially Observed	Partially Observed
Observed	Observed	Not observed	Observed	Partially Observed
(**b**)				
Ada	**Deniz**	**Yıldız**	**Güneş**	**Sahil**
Observed	Observed	Partially Observed	Partially Observed	Observed
Observed	Observed	Partially Observed	Observed	Observed

In the second session, following the game, participants Ada and Deniz, Güneş demonstrated acquisition of the target value, while Sahil partially achieved it. It was observed that the participant, Yıldız, who failed to achieve the target value in the first session, was also unable to do so in the second session.

Table 8b, which reflects data on the acquisition of the courage value, shows that in the first session of the games, participants Ada, Deniz, and Sahil achieved the target value. In contrast, Yıldız and Güneş partially achieved the relevant value. In the second session, following the game session and continuing with the worksheets, participants Ada, Deniz, Güneş, and Sahil were observed to have achieved the target value. The participant coded Yıldız, who had partially achieved the target value in the first session, also partially achieved it in the second session.

Based on these findings, a large proportion of participants achieved respect value.

When Table 9, which presents data on the achievement of all target values, is examined, it is seen that Sahil, Ada, and Deniz among the participants achieved all target values. Güneş achieved five target values and partially achieved 3. Yıldız, on the other hand, achieved only one value, partially achieved four values, and did not achieve three values. Considering the findings, it can be concluded that a large percentage of the participants achieved the acquisition and retention of the values.

Table 9. General Gain Table for All Root Values.

Ada	**Deniz**	**Yıldız**	**Güneş**	**Sahil**
All values have been gained	All values have been gained	1 value gained, 4 values were partially gained, 3 values not gained	5 values gained 3 values partially gained	All values have been gained

Data from classroom teacher evaluations, showing the program's impact on the five participating students and the frequency of teachers' responses, are presented in Table 10a. According to the table, the teachers stated that the program positively contributed to students' social development, that the activities attracted students' attention and increased their participation in the lesson, and that teaching values through games created a more effective learning process for students (P5). Furthermore, the teachers believed that the program was appropriate for the level of students with special needs and that the game-based approach was practical in terms of program duration, the number of weekly sessions, and retention of values (P5). Teachers stated that positive communication and cooperation developed among students during the program, and they also observed a noticeable increase in students' self-confidence (P9). As shown in another table of students' opinions,

the games and activities were found to be quite interesting by all participants. All students made an effort to support each other during the games and activities. On the other hand, teachers agreed with the item regarding their students starting to complete the given tasks on time and with a sense of responsibility at a very low rate (P2). Another notable finding concerns students' acquisition of skills such as not cheating, being honest, and controlling their own behavior during the games. It was determined that students showed a moderate level of participation in these skills (P3).

Table 10. Teachers' and Students' Opinions on the Implemented Values Education Program. (**a**) Teachers' Evaluations of the Program; (**b**) Student self-assessments of the program.

(**a**)

Articles	I Agree	I Disagree	I Am Undecided
The student became more willing to take on a leadership role during group games.	4		1
The student showed improvement in following game rules and controlling his own behavior.	3	1	1
The student began to fulfill the assigned tasks on time and responsibly.	2	1	2
Students exhibit more respectful behavior towards their friends and teachers.	4		1
The student pays attention to honesty during games (not cheating, telling the truth, etc.).	3	1	1
Game-based activities increased students' interest and participation.	4		1
The program improved students' social interaction skills.	5		
Teaching values through games has become easier and more effective for students.	5		
Positive communication and cooperation among students developed during the program.	4		1
The program supported students' ability to express their emotions.	5		
There was a noticeable increase in students' self-confidence.	4		1
The game-based approach seems effective in terms of the permanence of values.	5		
The program was appropriate for the level of students with special needs.	5		
The students easily understood the game materials and instructions.	4		1
Program duration and weekly session frequency were sufficient.	5		
It would be beneficial to implement similar studies with different age and need groups.	4		1
Overall, I think the program has a positive impact on students.	4		1

(**b**)

Articles	I Agree	I Disagree	I Am Undecided
Thanks to games, I learned values better.	4		1
The applications and games we made really caught my attention.	5		
The applications and games we made were very memorable.	4		1
I help my friends with what I learn in games or activities.	5		
I pay more attention to following the rules in games and at school.	4		1
I do my duties on time.	3		2
I do not interrupt my friends while they are speaking.	1	2	2
I respect my friends even when we disagree.	4		1
I follow the rules in games; I do not cheat.	3	1	1
I honestly admit when I do something wrong.	3	1	1
I warn anyone who behaves wrongly around me.	4	1	
I am patient while waiting for my turn at school and elsewhere.	3		2
I do not give up easily on strenuous activities.	3	1	1

Table 10b presents participants' evaluations of the program's effects and details the frequency of responses from students. This table allows a detailed examination of the program's perceived effects across different dimensions and students' observations. Accordingly, the participating students (P5) stated that the apps and games piqued their interest and that they helped their friends with what they learned. Furthermore, some participants (P4) stated that they learned values better through the games, were more diligent in following the rules, and found the apps and games very memorable. Some of the most striking responses are as follows: only one participant (P1) did not interrupt while listening to their friends, while the remaining four (P4) disagreed or were undecided on this item. Based on participants' views, many children with special needs are thought to be impulsive, and developing patience may take longer than for their typically developing peers.

4. Discussion

The study's findings are consistent with research on related themes in the literature. The findings of this study are similar to those of studies investigating the effects of play-based activities on the emotional development and social adaptation levels of typically developing children. This indicates that the existing literature supports the study's findings and strengthens the validity of the results. For example, Yatmaz et al. [33] found that children who play traditional games release their energy more easily, express their feelings and thoughts more easily, develop self-confidence, improve communication skills, and develop social and emotional skills such as cooperation and solidarity. Koyuncu and Bulut [25] similarly found in their study that traditional children's games can positively contribute to students' development across all aspects. Furthermore, in their research on the subject, Sümbüllü and Altınışık stated that traditional games embody social values and emphasized that children acquire many values, such as kindness, honesty, and rule-following, through these games [38]. In a 2019 study, Kelime Erdal found a similar result, stating that games provide children with environments where they can learn through experience and foster lasting learning [39].

On the other hand, similar studies in the literature show that games make positive contributions to the socialemotional and communication skills of students with special needs, as they do in typically developing children, and these findings are consistent with the current research. For example, the research conducted by Zengin and Peker [26] revealed that educational games had a positive effect on children with intellectual disabilities' anger levels and improved their social skills. Alotibi and Algahtani also stated in their study that game-based activities contributed to the more effective integration of children with intellectual disabilities into social life [40].

Games are of great importance for both facilitating the lives of individuals with special needs and strengthening their social bonds [6]. In this research, the games played with students with special needs can also be considered as sports activities. These games provide children with the opportunity to learn to establish healthy relationships with their peers and make friends. While their physical development is supported through sports, their emotional health is also strengthened. In addition, the values conveyed during the games contribute to the children's understanding of the culture of the society in which they live. These experiences also help them to enter their future working lives as individuals who are better prepared and have more developed social skills [41].

Şirinkan, in her study with deaf students aged 10–15, found that sports-based educational games support children's physical development and that sports activities are effective in reducing persistent anger, a phenomenon commonly observed in adolescence [42]. Similarly, Baxtiyor and Ruslanovna [43] stated in their study that well-organized, hands-on

activities and events for deaf and mentally disabled children help them overcome the cognitive difficulties and sensory impairments they face.

As the study's findings show, traditional children's games stand out as functional tools in this process, not only through their cultural heritage but also through the values they instill in children. These games, while developing social skills such as responsibility, justice, patience, honesty, and respect in a natural learning environment, also lay the foundation for equal and inclusive interaction among individuals. Thanks to the fun, safe atmosphere of traditional games, children with special needs can express themselves, communicate with their peers, and take part in the community.

In their study, Jubhari et al. [4] followed a three-month program involving traditional Japanese children's games with twelve students who had four different types of disabilities: intellectual disability, physical disability, hearing impairment, and autism. Their findings showed that playing traditional Japanese children's games improved the cognitive, social, fine motor, and creative abilities of children with disabilities.

"Children learn through play, get to know themselves and the world they live in through play, express themselves best during play, and acquire critical thinking skills through play. Play is the language of the child" [44]. Thus, games not only support physical and cognitive development but also contribute to a social integration process in which differences are accepted, solidarity is strengthened, and the individual feels a sense of belonging to society. In this context, traditional children's games serve as an important bridge, helping individuals with special needs build stronger bonds with society.

In a study with 12 participants with intellectual disabilities, Pehlevan and Şafak examined the effects of traditional Turkish folk dances on socialization, self-confidence, and motor coordination [5]. The researcher noted that participants showed positive improvements in areas such as basic social skills, initiating relationships, maintaining relationships, teamwork skills, emotional skills, self-control, coping with aggressive behavior, and giving instructions.

A review of similar studies in the literature to date reveals that their findings are consistent with those of this research, strengthening the validity of the findings.

5. Conclusions

Analysis of the findings indicates that a significant portion of students with special needs who participated in the study acquired the targeted core values. Based on the activities and observations following the implementation process, it was determined that the participants were able to maintain their social–emotional developmental gains, such as values education, waiting one's turn, respecting others' rights, courtesy, leadership, and behaving appropriately, both during recess and during class time, by generalizing them with their peers.

According to the results of a short-term retention assessment conducted after a one-week break following the completion of the interventions, participants' rates of maintaining leadership value were lower than those for other values. In contrast, the retention rate for the honesty value was higher than for the other values. This is a noteworthy finding.

During a one-week break following the implementation, the teachers observed and shared with the researchers that the students attempted to play the traditional Turkish Cypriot children's games they had learned, following the same rules, on their own and teaching them to other peers. This finding, which was not planned to be measured at the beginning of the study but was recorded in the researcher's journal as a natural observation that sheds light on the short-term persistence dimension from a different perspective, was noted.

The study demonstrates that both teachers and students who participated in the program expressed generally positive opinions about the values education program developed by the researchers. Teachers stated that the program made significant contributions to students' social development, that the activities increased student engagement, and that game-based values education made the learning process both more effective and more accessible. Similarly, participating students stated that the apps and games increased their interest in the lessons and that they helped their peers by sharing the values they learned. These findings demonstrate that the program both supports the learning process and contributes to the development of students' social skills.

With advances in technology and the proliferation of digital games, traditional children's games are being forgotten. Therefore, children with special needs must learn and practice traditional Turkish Cypriot children's games with their peers, as this is vital for their socialization. The short-term gains observed in the study show that children tend to exhibit the targeted values through play and also have the opportunity to engage in these behaviors during social interaction. Thus, games stand out as an effective method for learning values and ensuring their retention in the short term.

6. Limitations and Recommendations

This study has some limitations. The types of games used and the values addressed in the research are limited, and diversification could enable a more comprehensive evaluation of the program's effects. Furthermore, the fact that only students aged 9–12 with mild intellectual disability (MID) participated limits the generalizability of the findings to students with different special needs. In other words, selecting participants from a specific disability group and the low number of participants limit the generalizability of the findings to all individuals with special needs. Future studies that increase the number of participants and apply the program to learning disabilities, ASD, and other developmental disabilities will demonstrate the impact of game-based values education applications on more diverse needs groups.

Another limitation of this study is that only Turkish Cypriot children's games were used in the applications. This makes it difficult to generalize the results to games from different cultures directly. Therefore, future studies should include a comparative examination of games from different cultures.

This action research study, when supported by quantitative and mixed-methods research in the future, will strengthen the statistical analysis of the findings. Furthermore, beyond the short-term retention addressed in this study, longer-term follow-up studies could provide more comprehensive findings regarding the long-term retention of values.

To support students with special needs in value acquisition, traditional Turkish Cypriot children's games could be regularly integrated into lesson activities. In addition, local cultural elements (such as traditional Turkish Cypriot children's games) could be more extensively incorporated into the values education curriculum taught in Northern Cyprus. Furthermore, game-based value teaching could be included in programs as an alternative teaching method, especially for inclusive settings. On the other hand, comparative studies examining different cultural games could also be conducted to provide a broader perspective on the program's effects.

In this study, retention of values was assessed using a one-week follow-up measurement. This period allows only interpretation of findings on short-term retention and provides limited information about the long-term internalization of values. Therefore, it is recommended that future research support these findings with longer-term follow-up measurements.

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