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# Education in Dede Korkut's stories: Qualification of bravery in Boghach Khan and Uruz

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Dede Korkut's stories, one of the most important works in Turkish literature, are distinguished with their feature of reflecting the Oghuz culture. In this respect, it is possible to obtain information about children and their education in the light of the works. In the study, it is intended to reveal the education of the characters called Boghach Khan and Uruz in acquiring the qualification of bravery and the key educational elements which they confront during that process. Especially "the teacher, education methods used, punishment and reward applications" participated in the education process of the said heroes will be explained. For the education of the young ones, the focus is on particularly war educating providing their physical development and the character education (value etc.) ensuring their affective development. Who is responsible for children's education? Fathers. Fathers render a permanent education through the principle of "learning through practising and experiencing" and "demonstration" method. In the works, reward is preferred to reinforce youths' positive behaviours and achievements, while punishment is employed to prevent negative behaviours and failures.

**Key words:** Dede Korkut's stories, educational elements, reward, punishment, value.

## INTRODUCTION

Considered as an important step in the transition from epic to story tradition, Dede Korkut's stories is as well among the most significant works in Turkish literature. Estimated to be written in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, Dede Korkut's stories, having two principal manuscripts, "Dresden" and "Vatican" consist of twelve stories. The work mentions the culture and civilization of the Oghuz tribe, especially the horse-nomadic lives and alp-type people (Günay, 1998: 3).

Ergin (1997: 24) expresses the characteristics of the stories based generally on the events an Oghuz Bey experiences and the customs and traditions of the society as stated in these words:

*"...stories center around the Oghuz Beys who lived at the same region in the same era and were interdependent on each other in various ways. Each story, though primarily an adventure of just a single bey, is a sequence of events participated by the other beys in some degree or at least has their names mentioned somehow. Moreover, along with the beys in the foreground, the life of a whole Oghuz tribe is reflected in those stories with their customs, traditions and diverse aspects while visualizing the environment and the lives of the beys."*

While the social life is depicted in the stories, one of the issues that are highlighted is children and having a child.

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It is believed that childless people have been cursed by Allah and consequently they are cast away by the society. The fact that people having sons sit in white tents, those having daughters, in red tent and those without any sit in black tent reflects this situation. *“He had made a white tent pitched in one place, a red tent in another, and a black tent in another. He had been told to put anyone who ever had no sons or daughters in the black tent, spread black felt beneath him, set before him mutton-stew made from the black sheep, if he pleases, he might eat; if he does not, he shall get up and leave”* (Ergin, 1995: 21).

This practice in the works shows that having children is influential in determining the reputation of a family in the society. It is recommended that those who do not have children should do good and obtain benediction to get out of this curse. For example, Dirse Khan with no children gives ear to his wife's advices on this regard and has a son in the end (Ergin, 1995: 24).

In the period when the events take place, they are not given names until they are 15 to 16 years old. They are named after a heroic, brave deed. Accordingly, Boğaç Khan earns his name after defeating a bull which everyone fears and runs from (Ergin, 1995: 23).

While this achievement/bravery is shown generally at the ages of 15-16, the process of the children getting to these ages is not mentioned in the stories and it is skipped from the infancy to youth through a rapid stream of time as in the fairy tales; *“The horse is quick of foot, the minstrel is quick of tongue. As the vertebrated grow, the ribbed develop. Son has turned fifteen”* (Ergin, 1995: 24). This indicates that rather than the experiences in childhood, the living in adolescence/youth when the characteristics of heroism, bravery are gained is noticed in Dede Korkut Stories.

According to the knowledge obtained in adolescence/youth, war/physical education underlies the education and by natural conditions, elements such as struggle, endurance, etc become prominent. Male children of 15-16 years are supposed to show bravery. As for bravery; it is associated with performing such deeds as riding a horse, girding himself with a sword, shooting arrows, chopping off heads, etc. For a father, his sons having such capabilities is a source of pride, reputation, confidence and the feeling of joy at the same time. In the works, fathers wish to have a son in order to become famous, and sons girding with swords to make fathers proud is an indication for this: *“Let my father see me ride and be proud; let him see me shoot my arrow and have confidence; let him see how I use my sword and rejoice”* (Ergin, 1995: 28).

*“Fathers have sons for the sake of fame;  
And the son girds on sword out of zeal for his father.”*  
(Ergin 1995: 96)

The son's inability to show bravery characteristics is the

cause of dishonour and sadness for the father.

*“He looked in front of him, saw his son, Uruz, he smote his hands together and wept. This displeased his son Uruz...”*

*...You looked in front of you and cried / what is the reason, tell me*

*...I look to my left, I saw my uncle Aruz*

*He has cut off heads, spilled blood, taken booty, won a name*

*When I looked ahead I saw you / you turned sixteen*

*One day I shall fall down to death, you survive*

*You didn't pull a bowstring, shoot an arrow, cut off a head, spill blood*

*Didn't take booty in bloody Oghuz*

*Suppose I shall die tomorrow and leave you behind, I cried out, son, referring the end, for they might not give you my crown said he”* (Ergin, 1995: 91-92).

Kaplan (1991: 53-55) reclaims that these words of Kazan Khan signifies that the fathers raise their sons in accordance with the living conditions and value judgments of society in that period and the son is encouraged towards bravery by the father. The mentioned characteristics of bravery are depicted generally through male adults and male children. However, women characters such as Uruz's mother tall Burla Hatun, the girls she took along and the others we face in other stories as Banu Chickek, Seljen Hatun are well-skilled as much as men in riding a horse, shooting arrows, cutting off heads, etc. *“The human type in Dede Korkut is the alp type. The qualification required in human beings is bravery. This type is even considered for women”* (Ergin, 1997: 28).

The significant values and educational techniques as used today in education are seen in the Dede Korkut's stories, written in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. This study is based on similarities in educational approach between today's and Dede Korkut's stories. In the light of this information, the study intends to reveal the education of the characters called Boghach Khan and Uruz in acquiring bravery and the key educational elements which they confront during that process.

## METHODS

In this study, the survey model serving the purpose of collecting, sorting out and summarizing the required data for the practices such as recognizing the current conditions, solving and formulating the problem etc. is employed. Besides, document review method consisting of the analysis of the written materials related to the subject (Yıldırım and Şimşek 2005) and the content analysis method in resolving the data about the content of the works are used. The content analysis is used to unite data around similar concepts and themes. In addition, it is a method that allows easy interpretation and arrangement of data. Data obtained from the educational elements in Dede Korkut's stories consists of content analysis as reward, punishment, teacher and teaching methods.

## FINDINGS

### Key elements in being Alp/brave in education

#### Reward

In the works, the youths performing heroism are appreciated by the society and needed to be rewarded. "It is required to give a principality, throne, horse, sheep, camel, house and garments to the hero fitting into the Alp community by the encouragement of his father and the appreciation of the society" (Duymaz, 2000: 119). In other words, the good deeds and achievements of children performed during and after education are reinforced with "reward"; thus the young ones are encouraged to have these characters.

"In Dede Korkut Stories, children are always rewarded for their beneficial deeds. These deeds become a strong reinforcer for them. Reinforcements given among the society contribute to children's characteristics to develop positively" (Yalçın and Şengül, 2004: 215).

Rewarding is also considered to be an effective way of discipline in education today. Positive and negative reinforcers should be used in education as the occasion arises. While using them, it is recommended to take action according to the cultural environment in which the students live, their age, sex, and the qualification of the behaviour to be earned. Reward/reinforcer is the incentive applied during the education process to make the required behaviours be performed or to engrave it after the required behaviour is performed. In order for the practice to be a rewarded, it should include the incentives that can cause delight in individuals (Başaran, 1992; Tuncel, 2010: 75).

According to educators, reward in learning process is of a higher value than punishment. Moreover, reward provides various benefits in education such as "building up passion in an individual to perform the required deeds, motivating the individual to reach his/her target, drawing his/her attention to the subject to be learned, creating high morale in individual, and developing the "sense" of self of the individual (Başaran, 1992: 236).

However, one should be attentive in case that reward and punishment may bear negations such as "reward substituting for the purpose, its inducement to subterfuge, immunization to punishment, arousing hatred for the punisher and the society" (Başaran, 1992: 236-237). Reward in the stories, appropriately with the information above, leads the young ones to the required behaviours, draws them away from negative ones, and improves their self-confidence.

#### Relationship between reward – ability and virtue

Rewards are witnessed to be given particularly in return for two traits in the stories.

**Ability/skill:** physical abilities are in the foreground in stories; shooting arrows, using sword, etc.

**Virtue/morality** (possessed values): being brave, honest, helpful, respectful, etc. (Duymaz, 2000: 110).

*O Dirse Khan! Give this young man a principality now.  
Give him a throne for the sake of his virtue.  
Give him also a tall Bedouin horse  
He can ride such a capable man* (Ergin, 1995: 26)

This reveals that society's desires to see those two traits together in youths, and the education of children is based on physical abilities and adding values. Günay (1998: 5) states that a society of horse-nomadic culture and civilization is obliged to be physically strong against the hard natural and living conditions; however, additionally, the inner structure (beliefs, value judgments, knowledge and self-confidence) should also be powerful. The harmony between these two structures makes people well-balanced and more powerful. Günay (1998: 6) also reveals that in the works, it is still seen that the people possibly called "despicable" may as well be skilled (good horse-riding, using sword, etc.); though he says that it is not enough for a hero to have abilities by indicating that this kind of people cause harm to the family, society and the state. He puts forth that morality/values are the essential element to the society.

Rewards given in return for abilities and virtue are "principality, tent, castle" which are important for the society and signify power, and "horse, sheep, camel, robe" which are the indicators of richness. In the stories, principality and tent that are the symbols of power and dominance are given for "virtue" while "camel, sheep, horse, etc.", the indicators of richness, are given in return for ability. Considering that the qualification of richness falls below power and dominance, it can be said that society places virtue before ability. Considering the social life, rewards given are appropriate for the cultural life of the period, ages and sexes of people, the features of the behaviour to be reinforced, and so on. As Kazan Khan states in the story that Uruz's being captured is narrated, the society shall not give "principalities", i.e. crown and throne, to the young ones incapable of performing bravery deeds. In other words, it is not enough just to be the son of a bey in order to be a bey; on the contrary, one should be a well-educated brave person for the principality (Kaplan, 1991: 53; Ergin, 1995, 1997).

#### Virtue/value of education

Social education of youths also takes place in the stories inasmuch as their physical education is concerned. The society demands children to be 'dutiful' sons and daughters, respect their families and the society they live in and expects to be trained by their families in that

aspect. *"The hero joining the community of adults is in the position of recognizing the social and sacred values"* (Duymaz, 2000: 117). As for the aspersion cast upon Boghach Khan, the elements such as "disrespect for father, state, and immorality" which cause Boghach Khan to be qualified as bad, unfaithful reveal the values which the society wants or does not want to be maintained (Ergin, 1995: 26-27).

In the works, particularly the son's hunting, riding the horse, shooting arrows, girding on swords, etc. in his father's presence is considered as disrespect. The values such as respect (for parents, elders and state), honour are the values which are required to be brought in and demanded to be continued in the society. Dirse Khan decides on killing Boghach Khan because he believes that he has disrespected the social values. In the story in which Uruz is captured, it is especially emphasized on the respect of sons for their fathers and their words; it is understood from the following saying that disrespect for the father is an unaccepted manner among the society *"then the son would follow his father's words, if he hadn't, he wouldn't have been approved of"* (Ergin, 1995: 97).

In the stories in which the parents struggle to protect and save the child and the child struggles for the parents in return, one of the most important values is the "love of family".

*"The son gathered forty young men along with him, rode horses, fought and combatted. He beheaded some and captured some others. He saved his father"* (Ergin, 1995: 34, 36).

*"He has known well that his son is a captive for the infidel. ...Three hundred brave men of the Oghuz were lost in the battle. Kazan had saved his son, and he returned"* (Ergin, 1995: 103, 110).

The value "love" frequently discussed in the stories is regarded as the element maintaining peace, prosperity, fellowship, national unity and social solidarity among the society by Özbay and Tayşi (2011: 29). Arı and Karateke (2010: 283) state that the love for the family annihilates selfishness and takes on a significant task in order to maintain the social order. One of the reasons behind Kazan Khan's getting angry with his son Uruz is his thought that Uruz leaves his companions at the battle field, fears and escapes. Accordingly, another value praised by the society is courage and bravery.

*"Regarding the horse nomadic psychology, the greatest qualification which this society, whose life passes through hunting and raiding, seeks in human is the "virtue of manliness", power and courage in other words"* (Eliuz, 2000: 140).

*"Courage is a value taking place in each Dede Korkut's story. Being courageous at the battles, gaining a position in the society by showing courage occupy a significant place in the lives of the Oghuz Turks and the educations*

*of boys and girls"* (Deveci et al. 2013: 309).

"Cowardice" is a situation which is not wished to be seen in the youth and considered a source of dishonour for the family.

*"He came and could not find his son where he left. He said "O, beys, where had he gone to. Beys said: sons are often bird-hearted (coward), he probably ran away and went to his mother. Kazan, growing very seriously, turned and said: Beys, Allah has given me a good-for-nothing son. Let me go and take him from his mother, cut him into six pieces with my sword, leave each piece at the junction of the six roads, so that may nobody leave his companions and run away from now on"* (Ergin, 1995: 98).

Accordingly, while leaving a companion having a bad situation in the lurch is an unacceptable manner, the interdependent values like cooperation, solidarity, fidelity, etc., are the basis of the society. The childless Kazan Khan having a child only after obtaining benediction by feeding the poor signifies once more the moral power of such values as cooperation, sharing, etc. in the society. As a result of Kazan Khan's thinking that his son does not behave in line with these values and deeming Uruz's death as the punishment underlines the importance of the values mentioned. This situation shows that the beys do not forgive though who errs is their own sons and are stick to the value of "justice". In short, in case that a child does not have the values of the society, he/she becomes a reason for dishonour for his/her family and makes his/her father lose his reputation. In the works where having a child, a son in particular, is praised, "preferring having none rather than having such a child" reflects the importance attributed to these values. *"Bayindir Khan will call you his presence and will give you a serious punishment, such a son is not worthy of you, it is better not to have such a son. Why do you not put him to death?"* (Ergin, 1995: 27).

From the statements above, it is understood that "punishment" is applied for the youth who does not duly behave in social education as well as in physical education. Both the children lacking these social values and the fathers/instructors considered insufficient to discipline those children are punished by the society. In the study, as it will also be stated in the part titled "punishment", punishment practice which is effective as a part of the education process gains an important position in the stories as much as the reward.

In the works analyzed, "jealousy, slander and rumour" are among the traits specifically disliked by the society. Regarding this matter, Günay (1998: 8) emphasizes that in the Boghach Khan's story the forty young men trying to turn the father and son against each other through envying, rumour and slander causes substantial damages. Thus, these forty men are qualified heroes having physical power and abilities; however, they do not have

the characteristics of “virtue”, perform “cravenness” and harm the society and the state.

*“At this point, we witness that the bravery in the Oghuz tribe and Turks is not only limited to being a good horse-rider, but also includes various values that will form the exemplary character, such as self-denial, respect for the elder, love for the younger, honesty, truthfulness, not rumouring”* (Günay, 1998: 10, 12).

### **Punishment**

As the youth showing bravery is rewarded in the stories, there is a practice of punishment for the young ones who are coward. Punishment, which is as well important for today’s perception of education, is the preventer, prohibitor to withhold the individual from the undesired behaviour and the unpleasant stimulants from which the individual try to refrain. The essentiality in punishment is to create sadness in individual in order not to perform the undesired deed (Başaran, 1992: 235-236; Arı, 2006: 307).

Punishment is highly effective in “providing the discipline and learning”. Accordingly, punishment dissuades the individual from the negative behaviour; is beneficial for disciplining; ensures confidence when used together with reward, prevents negative deeds performed purposely from being engraved (Başaran, 1992: 236). Erden (2008: 148-149) states that, though punishment is effective to cease negative behaviours, it employs many negations within; thus it should be avoided as much as possible in education, and be used only when stuck in a difficult position.

In the stories, punishment, in line with the information above, serves purposes like disciplining the youths in education, withholding them from negative behaviours, etc. In the part where Uruz is captivated, the beys besides Kazan Khan think that Uruz has feared and run away to his mother. In response to this, Uruz’s father/teacher gets very angry and gives such a severe punishment as death to his son. This type of punishment we face in the work corresponds to “physical punishments” out of the types explained by Erden (2008:149) for the modern – day perception of education. Like many other educators, Arı (2006: 307-308) also states that punishments such as slapping, hitting which are not required and effective in education are not humane and legal, and for this reason physical punishment should be avoided. However, in the works, along with the influence of the living conditions of the time physical punishments are specifically adopted in children’s education.

### **Teacher and the teaching methods**

One of the attention-grabbing points in the stories is that

especially the father is responsible for the child’s education. During the education process, the father also substitutes for the teacher. Generally speaking, the mother is responsible for the education of daughters, and the fathers for the sons’ education. Mother and father are models for children. Uruz shows his father not giving him a warrior education as the reason for his not performing bravery and puts the blame on his father. Kazan Khan finding him right also highlights the importance of father in education as a teacher/a model.

*“Does the son gain the skill from the father or the father from the son, when did you take me to the infidel borderline, give me a sword to cut off heads, what did I see in you, thus what could I learn he said. Kazan bey clapped his hands and laughed heartily, said: O beys, Uruz is right”* (Ergin, 1995: 93).

According to the work, briefly stated, the model for the child in education is the family and society. Family, the minimal unit of the society, is a school, and parents are the teachers. In the work, the fact that Kazan Khan who is an alp type takes his son to hunting on his request and makes effort to be a good model for him emphasizes the importance of family in raising the child and his/her developing an identity in the society (Yalçın and Şengül, 2004: 213, 222).

From the above statements, in relation to Uruz, it is understood that “learning through practising and experiencing” which is also important for today’s perception of education comes to the foreground in the fighting education given to youths. In learning through practising and experiencing, an effective learning environment is provided due to the stimulation of many senses of a person, thus education process becomes effective and efficient.

“Beneath the subconscious of the heroes in Dede Korkut Stories there is the stimulation ‘I can do.’, “I must do” which are formed around the cult of gaining reputation. While this leads the child to learning through practising and experiencing, it provides him/her with an enterprising trait of personality” (Yalçın and Şengül, 2004: 218).

The learning environment provided by the learning through practising and experiencing is generally the “hunting” ceremonies. For example, Kazan Khan takes Uruz to hunting for educating and prefers to teach some skills by showing during the hunt. Başaran (2012: 1014) marks that youths demonstrate their skills in riding, shooting arrows, using swords and bows while hunting wild animals and thus they simply do their apprenticeship and gain experience before the fights against the enemy. Briefly, hunting ceremonies are not only important for subsistence but also for the education of children. As for the real fighting atmospheres, they constitute an opportunity for the youths to prove their bravery against

the family and society and to demonstrate what they have learned, merely an “examination environment”. The achievement after the exam brings the reward along with it.

The educational appliances used in fighting educating are as much important as the methods and the techniques employed. Among the mostly-used tools in hunting education and social life are horse, sword, arrow-bow, spear, knife, helmet, iron garments, etc.

*“That day brave beys fought turning round and round. That day, black steel swords were struck. That day beechen arrows with sharp tongues were shot, and long sharp spears of red dragon were thrust. That day the coward, the treachers looked out for remote areas. That day Uruz the son of Kazan was enraptured”* (Ergin, 1995: 97).

When informing youths about the combat and enemy, “question and answer” technique is also made use of in the stories. This technique is a group of education techniques which is conducted in the way of asking questions and answering them, and bears an atmosphere of discussion. According to the technique, the ones who question and answer may differ among the class, teacher and source person (Bilen, 2002: 151, 2010: 264-265). In the work, an education method based on the question-answer relationship between teacher-student/father-son takes place. Accordingly; in the story in which Uruz is captivated, the one who questions is the student/son/ Uruz whereas the one who answers is the teacher/father/Kazan Khan.

*“Son said: whom do they call as enemy? Kazan said: Son, they call them enemy who would kill us if they could catch, and whom we would kill if we could catch. Uruz said: Father if brave beys are killed, do they seek for blood vengeance? Kazan said: Son, though you kill a thousand infidels, nobody can avenge upon you”* (Ergin, 1995: 94).

On the other hand, one of the techniques of learning through practising and experiencing, “demonstration” is used in the stories. The purpose of this technique mostly seen appropriate for teaching the psychomotor practices is to teach the performance of an action in an environment where the students are capable of seeing and hearing (Bilen, 2010: 280, 282).

*“Let me fight turning round and round, reeling and reeling in struggle  
Watch as I swing my sword around and cut heads off”* (Ergin, 1995: 96-97).

In the story, the words uttered by Kazan Khan for his son Uruz while teaching him to fight display that during the education of the brave ones, fighters, the teachers first

show how to fight and use a sword and thus the young develop their skills by means of what they witness.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In Dede Korkut’s Stories, while the social life is narrated, one of the main subjects discussed is the education of children. According to the data obtained from Boghach Khan and Uruz’s education, the teacher and the student who are the basis of education are substituted by the father and son in the works. The aim is to raise both virtuous and capable brave young men. “...*the Book of Dede Korkut is a book of morals which presents the virtuous and talented alps as models for the society”* (Duymaz, 2000: 121).

In parallel with this purpose, an education based on the principle of learning/teaching through practising and experiencing, which makes learning more permanent in the society, is given. Moreover, the method of demonstration is frequently utilized.

Throughout the education of children, reward is adopted in order to lead them towards positive behaviours, and punishment is employed in order to dissuade them from negative ones. Giving rewards, particularly to the young ones who have skills and virtue/value reveals that values matter highly for the society and specifically, character education is prioritized. Values such as respect for mother, father, state and the statesmen and love, courage, being just, cooperation, honesty are praised.

Passing these values which have always been significant for the Turkish society down to the new generations is another substantial point. Literary texts are important in that they are the main sources for passing on the values. According to the Curriculum of Turkish Lesson in Primary Education (6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades), along with the general purposes of Turkish lesson, it is aimed to bring up individuals, who are aware of the importance of the language, know and adopt the national and universal values through the works of both Turkish and world culture and art, are tolerant, respectful for the human rights, sensitive to the national and global problems, put emphasis on national, sentimental, moral values at the end of the Turkish education (MEB, 2006: 3). Turkish lessons bear a significant position in introducing the values adopted by the society through literary texts (Yaman et al., 2009: 108). “*Since the Turkish lesson is primarily based on the written texts, i.e. the literary products, it becomes effective to introduce and adopt the national, moral and humanistic values and thus provides the maintenance of the life of the nation”* (Özbay, 2002: 115).

Dede Korkut’s stories approve themselves in value education, which is of high importance today, as a main source to make use of in lesson especially such as Turkish, Literature, Social Sciences, etc.

*“The values taking place in Dede Korkut’s stories coincide with the values handled in various lessons of today’s primary education curriculum. ... Furthermore, these values are of qualifications suitable with the general purpose to earn the national and sentimental values specified in the curriculum of Turkish lessons”* (Deveci et al. 2013: 315).

The values partaking in Dede Korkut’s stories are the values which are still regarded today by the Turkish society. Consequently, using these texts in the education of children from social and affective aspects, Turkish lessons in the first place will make the value of education successful and permanent.

### Conflict of Interests

The author has not declared any conflict of interests.

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