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System of Values of Future Early Education Teachers

KEYWORDS ABSTRACT

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The article presents the results of the research on values with the use of the concept of analysing values by Milton Rokeach and Mirosław J. Szymański. The RVS scale and the questionnaire “100 sentences – 100 opinions” were used. Following the ideas of L. Dyczewski, R. Borowicz and J. Mariański, a simplified character of the hierarchy of values and the lack of clear dominants in them were assumed. The aim of the research was to identify the hierarchy of autotelic and instrumental values, as well as their determinants. The main problem of the research was expressed in the question: What is the value system of future teachers of early education? Due to the exploratory nature of the research, the hypotheses were formulated only in an operational manner. The central values included true friendship, mature love, pleasure, ambition, helpfulness, and responsibility, and the peripheral values included the world of beauty, salvation, obedience, broad horizons, and imagination. The analyses led to the conclusion that the values of stabilization dominate over the values of progress and transformation. According to the assumptions, the hierarchy of the analysed values is simplified. The research results are enriched by the analyses of other authors concerning values. Also, the results indicate the need to strengthen axiological education both in early education and on further educational levels.

Introduction

The concept of values is one of those issues that are described by many sciences (Wojciechowska 2008a, 2008b; Wojciechowska, Wojciechowska 2022), yet the concept itself is difficult to define. This was already indicated years ago by, among others, W. Tatarkiewicz, who wrote: “Defining ‘a value’ is difficult, if possible at all [...]. What looks like a definition of ‘a value’ is rather the substitution of a word for another word of more or less the same meaning, for example, ‘good’” (Tatarkiewicz 1978: 63). In this article, the concept of a value is referred to considerations falling within the scope of pedagogy and psychology. The changes experienced in the contemporary world encourage us to take up a deeper reflection on the foundations of a person’s functioning in many spheres. These activities are connected with a complex process of valuing which is intensified in situations assessed as recognised and necessary in the process of individual development.

For many years, the representatives of pedagogy have made efforts both to define what values and their determinants are. Prominent experts in the field of upbringing and education have constructed numerous analyses facilitating the creation of ways of building a value system for children and young people that are adequate to the existing social order, taking into account the social contexts of values. These considerations take on particular significance today. According to M. Szymański, the sense of uncertainty, ambiguity, decentralisation, mosaicism, dysregulation, anxiety, trauma and chaos, which accompany a man, collides with a wide pool of possibilities for obtaining a powerful dose of information, practically unlimited by barriers of time and space, and enabling choices in all aspects of life (Szymański 2010: 14–15). These conditions create the basis for the creation of individual projects and opportunities, and for strengthening the sense of freedom and individualism, which are expressed in broad opportunities to make choices and decisions of one’s own (Szymański 2012: 12–13). However, these actions do not come easily to us. Moreover, they intensify our sense of insecurity and uncertainty, and even our resignation from participating in particular spheres of life. In the context of the considerations included in this text, apart from Szymański, the group of outstanding pedagogues representing the issue of values includes K. Denek who strongly underlined the essence of values as the basic category of education and related sciences (Denek 1999: 18, 31).

Psychologists are equally interested in the concept of values and valuing, and especially in determining the relationship (integration) of people, things and events with values. In this area, values are related to needs and attitudes, and are treated as a factor in the selection of motives, as a criterion for the choice of goals and ways of achieving them, and as a regulator of behaviour (Reykowski, Eisenberg, Stub 1990; Wojciszke 2016). A significant contribution to the analysis of the issue of values can

be found, among others, in the works of J. Ciecuch. While reviewing the opinion of S. H. Schwartz, Ciecuch indicates that values are characterized by five features: “1) values are beliefs or convictions that 2) refer to the desired objectives that describe ultimate states of affairs or behaviours; 3) transcend specific situations; 4) guide the selection and evaluation of behaviours and events; 5) are ordered by importance” (Ciecuch 2013: 38). In psychology, values are perceived as beliefs about what is “precious in a person’s behaviour or worthy of desire as his/her goal” (Oleś 2002: 53).

Research assumptions

The research results presented here are related to the concept of values of M. Rokeach who argued that beliefs related to values are regarded as central, i. e. as important and closely related to the individual’s concept of oneself (Oleś 2002: 53). In one of his outstanding works, Rokeach defined values as “a fixed conviction that a certain way of behaving or an ultimate goal of life is individually and socially more desirable (attractive) than other ways of behaving and other life goals [...], thus, they are certain standards guiding human activity” (Rokeach 1973: 5). The research included university students in the Świętokrzyskie region who declared the willingness to become early education teachers. The research is inspired by long-term research interests of the author of this text concerning the estimation of value systems of representatives of different social and generational groups (author’s publications).

The research was also based on J. Szczepański’s concept of understanding values and on the assumptions for the study of values by M. J. Szymański. Taking into account the findings of L. Dyczewski, R. Borowicz and J. Mariański, an assumption was made about the simplified nature of the hierarchy of values, the lack of clear dominants in them, and the class and stratum conditions of the hierarchy. The aim of the study was to explore and describe the value system of candidates for early education teachers, and to estimate the determinants of recognition of the values studied. The observations made make it possible to predict the involvement of the respondents in various aspects of life, which was the practical application of the research results. Guided by the aim of the research, the main problem was expressed in the question: What is the value system of future early education teachers? The main problem was concretised in the form of specific problems concerning the rank of ultimate values, instrumental values and the determinants of the values studied. Due to the exploratory nature of the research, no hypotheses were formulated; they were only operationally formulated as a result of the recognition of variable distributions and as a result of the knowledge of the research subject. The research results presented here

are a continuation of a long-term observation of the dynamics of change within the value systems of selected social groups (Wojciechowska 2018: 65–74).

Two types of research were used in the study: exploratory and explanatory research (Pilch, Bauman 2001: 22–23). A total of 210 students participated in the study. Due to the fact that not all of them provided the responses, the data from 187 students were analysed. The group of people surveyed only included women, which confirms the thesis of the feminisation of the teaching profession, especially at the stage of early school education. This trend is observed in almost all countries of the world. While explaining the statistical dominance of women in the teaching profession, A. Gromkowska-Melosik formulates the thesis that this feminisation is a consequence of the loss of attractiveness of the profession and a testimony to its low prestige in the social structure (Gromkowska-Melosik 2013: 86). It is worth adding that, despite the recorded systematic increase in the average monthly salary in education (*Mały Rocznik Statyczny Polski [Small Statistical Yearbook of Poland] 2022: 152*), in the opinion of teachers the profession is continuously characterised by low economic attractiveness.

The research used a diagnostic survey and a corresponding questionnaire for the study of values. First, the questionnaire “100 sentences – 100 opinions” by M. J. Szymański was used (the content of the questions was updated with the author’s permission) (Wojciechowska 2018: 239–254). The research procedure also used the RVS scale by M. Rokeach in the Polish adaptation by P. Brzozowski (Brzozowski 1986: 527–540). The RVS scale consists of two sub-scales: ultimate values and instrumental values. The former refers to the supra-situational, most important goals of human life, while the latter describes general modes of behaviour as means to achieve ultimate values. The RVS scale is an appropriate and convenient tool for examining needs, attitudes and judgements in relation to the specific behaviour of an individual or a group. Adopting a given belief as the most important places the value in question from the first to the ninth place, and ranks it as the central value. Further positions – from the tenth to eighteenth – are associated with the recognition of a given value as peripheral (Brzozowski 1989: 7, 82–83).

The ten groups of values defined by the Szymanski’s questionnaire and the values measured by the M. Rokeach’s scale constituted the explained variables. Personal variables and social characteristics (age of the respondents, mode of education and place of residence) became important correlates included in the study. The SPSS/PC statistical package was used to develop the empirical material.

The data distributions obtained show a higher proportion of urban residents (57%) than those representing rural environments. With regard to age, the respondents were divided into “younger” – up to 25 years of age (73.5%), and “older” ones – over 25 years of age. The full-time mode of education was represented by 67.2% of the respondents, while the remaining ones were participants of extramural studies.

Table 1. Hierarchy of values of all the research participants (N = 187)

Type code	Type name	M	SD
W_ALLO	Allocentric values	0,94	0,52
W_PROS	Pro-social values	0,58	0,53
W_PRZYJ	Pleasure values	0,56	0,48
W_PRACY	Values related to work	0,50	0,46
W_EDUK	Educational values	0,46	0,41
W_RODZ	Family values	0,35	0,48
W_WŁAD	Values related to power	0,32	0,54
W_OBYW	Civil values	0,17	0,55
W_KULT	Cultural values	0,15	0,46
W_MATE	Non-tangible values	-0,18	0,53

- according to M
- on the theoretical scale from minus 2 to plus 2
- M – mean rate of assessment, SD – standard deflection

Source: the author's own research.

Table 2. Statistics of value displays according to RVS in the group of the students analysed (N=187)

Autotelic values	Me	M	Instrumental values	Me	M
national safety	10	10,8	ambitious	6	6,5
family safety	4	5,4	clean	9	9,5
mature love	7	7,8	an intellectual	11	9,9
exciting life	13	11,0	loving	6	7,4
wisdom	7	8,3	cultural	9	9,4
the sense of success	11	10,3	logical	11	10,5
peace on Earth	10	10,4	loyal	8	8,8
true friendship	7	8,2	independent	11	10,9
pleasure	10	9,5	with broad horizons	11	10,6

Autotelic values	Me	M	Instrumental values	Me	M
equality	10	10,1	with imagination	12	11,5
respect	7	7,9	responsible	8	8,5
the world of beauty	14	12,6	brave	11	9,9
social recognition	12	11,2	self-controlled	11	10,9
inner harmony	10	11,3	obedient	14	12,5
freedom	8	8,5	agile	12	11,5
comfortable life	11	10,2	honest	6	7,8
salvation	13	12,4	helpful	10	9,9
health	4	5,7	tolerant	8	9,3

- in a theoretical scale from 1 to 18, where 1 – the first and the most important thing
- Me – median, M – mean importance after rounding up
- in the order provided by the RVS questionnaire

Source: the author’s own research.

The research on values falls into the area of complex and multifaceted empirical inquiry. It is also difficult to compare the results from the application of different scales and research procedures (Allport, Vernon, Lindzey 1960; Rokeach 1973; Brzozowski 1995). However, based on his own research experience, the author of the study suggests to take into account the observations resulting from the application of both tools concerning the attribution of specific importance to selected values.

What is particularly noteworthy is the high appreciation of allocentric values, true friendship and mature love, which should be considered as fulfilling one’s own needs and seeking to feel positive emotions determined by close relationships. Providing help and mutual support, as well as doing things for others in the context of the difficulties of functioning in today’s world, were considered fundamental. Interesting observations concern the respondents’ reference to pleasure values. Although the importance given to these values on the RVS scale is lower than in the case of the “100 sentences – 100 opinions” questionnaire, there is no doubt that pleasure as a value is located in the field of central values. This indicates a strong commitment on the part of the respondents to construct their long-term intentions and to undertake a variety of activities for their well-being and satisfaction, and for the renewal of their physical and mental strengths.

It is worth emphasizing that candidates for the teaching profession give aspects of education, wisdom and intellectualism a slightly higher ranking than in the author’s

previous research proceedings (Wojciechowska 2008a, 2008b, 2018). Although the mean scores for these values are not very high, it can be assumed on this basis that knowledge and education, as understood by its representatives, are an important pillar for one's own development and a stable basis for professional action. And, although there is a widespread opinion that wisdom is a rare good and only few can attain it, the respondents value both knowledge acquired through learning, accumulated over generations, and their own intellectual resources enabling them to choose action strategies and anticipate their consequences.

The respondents' reference to family values is puzzling. It should be emphasized that young people do not fully appreciate this group as a strengthening and desirable life environment due to the functions and duties ascribed to it. The rather low positioning of family values in the general hierarchy of values is probably an expression of the long-lasting and commonly felt crisis of family functioning, as well as the search for and verification of its alternative forms. At the same time, issues concerning the protection of family from numerous threats are an unquestionable value for the respondents.

The low importance of cultural values, the world of beauty and imagination should be viewed with concern. According to M. Rokeach's assumptions, the ranks obtained are a confirmation of the treatment of these values as peripheral, which demonstrates a superficial understanding of complex offers and narrowing of the area of interest only to simple forms. Cultural values continue to be understood as ceremonial and festive, and thus significantly distanced from everyday performance, which confirms the lack of internalisation of norms derived from tradition and a socially accepted value system, as well as the lack of proper understanding of cultural canons. The possibility to exercise existing freedoms and rights is often understood, also by respondents, without proper reflection. This reduces the possibility to participate in life to its simple meanings; to easy and accessible forms. Consistently, the respondents refer to the world of beauty by giving it a peripheral status, which can be explained, on the one hand, by the fact of a traditional high appreciation, e. g. for the security of the family, mature love; and, on the other hand, by an underestimation of the relationship between beauty and other aspects of life, including one's own intellectual development.

The placement of the values: peace on Earth and courage, is noteworthy, especially due to the fact that these values are also more 'festive' than related to everyday life. These values were ranked on the borderline between central and peripheral values, demonstrating the perceived difficulty in fulfilling them. A similar conclusion appears with regard to civil values, as evidenced by the assessment of the indicator sentences comprising this group of values. In general, it can be concluded that the rank given to individual values by the respondents indicates rather individualistic attitudes, which results from placing freedom, pleasure, ambition, courage and intellectualism in the area of central values. Also, young respondents do not neglect values related

to protection of the welfare of others, respect for tradition, family security, equality, responsibility, honesty, mature love, and true friendship.

The variables separated in the study do not differentiate the evaluation of the values studied, as the profiles are similar. Slight differences appear when considering the age of the respondents and the mode of education. In relation to these variables, a slightly higher appreciation is expressed by students of extramural studies towards wisdom and intellectualism, while cultural values and the world of beauty gained a higher importance among full-time students, as well as 'older' respondents. However, these differences are insignificant. The place of residence, on the other hand, differentiates the evaluation of allocentric values, mature love and true friendship in favour of those representing the city as their residential environment. In general, however, it should be stated that the surveyed group is homogeneous with regard to the values being the basis of the analysis.

Conclusion

The results of the research do not differ significantly from the research of other authors among whom the following values have usually been ranked high for many years: family security, education, freedom, friendship, respect. At the same time, in the research there is a low approval for social activity and belief in eternal life (Jeziorowski 1997: 51–58). W. Dróżka, conducting cyclical research on the life and professional values and goals of teachers, emphasises the axiological shift from values related to ethos (fulfilment of the intelligentsia and social mission, responsibility for the young generation and for the future of the country) to values related to everyday life (working and living conditions, current work, qualifications, promotion grades). There has been a significant reduction among young teachers in the rank of general social values (Dróżka 2016: 51–73). Similar conclusions emerge from other observations in which the recognition of everyday life issues concerning health, family, financial matters, interesting professional work, and professional success, are the most important references in the lives of the respondents. However, these values do not correspond, as understood by the respondents, to the continuous deepening of pedagogical knowledge (Taradejna 2013: 169–190).

The presentation of the rank ordering within the 10 analysed value groups shows some differences with regard to the conclusions of Szymański (2001: 133). These differences particularly concern references to culture, education and civil values, which rank higher in the overall hierarchy of values in the research of the cited author. Also, the lower valuation of power and significantly lower recognition of pleasure is worth noting. If one takes into account the rather low rating of indicator sentences related to educational values, it is reasonable to assume that this is still due to the demands

placed on teachers and the lack of satisfaction with the profession, also in terms of the finances.

Referring again to the assumptions of pedagogues that the process of valuing begins from the earliest years of human life, and that axiological education plays a major role in it, the importance of the influence of teachers (also of early education teachers) on the recognition of values by children should be strongly emphasised. There is no doubt that an early education teacher is the source of pupils' values, and that the effectiveness of the teacher's actions depends on his/her competences. K. Chałas emphasises the importance of education for values in school education, but it is connected with numerous difficulties. The key issue of axiological education and upbringing towards values is the teacher's efforts to make children adopt the value linking the person with his/her actions. The teacher plays the role of an animator and authority in fulfilling values and giving proper witness (Chałas, Winiarczyk 2018: 143–157). The assumption by teachers of the obligation to show, explain and enable the fulfilment of a value is applicable within all aspects of early education, including health education. Although the research results presented in this article show that health is a highly appreciated value, teachers are not obliged to intensive and responsible work on reinforcing this values. It has to be accepted that only a clear and credible offer addressed to pupils will be perceived and noticed by them as a criterion for their own behaviour, as a result of which the value of health will be internalised (Leszcz-Krysiak 2016: 261–271).

The recognition of vital values and pro-healthy lifestyles by students of pedagogy influences the aspirations to shape pro-healthy attitudes and behaviours of their pupils in their future professional work (Kosiba, Gacek, Bogacz-Walancik, Wojtowicz 2017: 21–40). Moral values (kindness, honour, truthfulness, helping others) and truth values (intelligence, wisdom, knowledge, broad horizons) were indicated as the most highly valued. A prosperous life, a life full of events, comfort, and pleasure were ranked further down. The rather distant position given to vital values (health, well-being) is puzzling; this observation differs significantly from the results of our own research. The neglect of vital values by future teachers may weaken their attitude towards the promotion of pro-health behaviours in their educational activities.

The fact that students of pedagogy perceive a teacher as a transmitter and interpreter of values is also a conclusion from L. Dakowicz's study. The results emphasize the importance of teachers' personal attitude in interpreting and prioritising values. The students surveyed intend to impart cognitive values (acquiring knowledge) and moral values (being a good person) to students at the early education level. A much lower priority was given to the pursuit of well-being, pleasure and comfort in life (Dakowicz, Laskowska 2021: 47–62). In the light of the analyses made available by many researchers, it has been concluded that the axiological condition of the teacher,

his or her world of values, is an important element of educational work that guarantees understanding and adoption of values (Langier, Siembida 2019: 117–127).

In discussing the results of our own research, we cannot ignore the findings of C. Langier and M. Siembida (Langier, Siembida 2018: 403–409) who define values preferred by students of early education pedagogy. The authors' findings indicate a clear preference for moral values and truth values by the respondents, while vital and aesthetic values were found to be the least important. High appreciation for truth, i. e. for knowledge, wisdom, intellect and open mind, foreshadows students' continuous improvement and broadening of their horizons. In turn, the respect for moral values (goodness, honesty, helping others, truthfulness, kindness) clearly indicates their care for universal values, as well as values enabling proper interpersonal relations and providing support and assistance to those in need. The results of the cited studies coincide with the author's research, as indicated by the ranks given to individual values and presented in the earlier sections of this text.

On the basis of her analyses, K. Wereszczyńska concludes that teachers, apart from parents and the broader social environment, constitute an important pillar of including children and youth in social and political life. The achievement of adopted assumptions in the process of education: the development of personal and social identity, results from the quality of the process in which an individual undertakes activity towards the construction of his or her own axiology, nurturing social values, the adoption of social roles, and building interpersonal relationships (Wereszczyńska 2019: 107–133). The results of the conducted research determining the level of social competences of students of early school education and preschool education are puzzling. It is because they indicate that the competences studied were located at an average level. Moreover, a moderate participation of the respondents in culture (understood in the broad sense) was observed. It turned out that the students participate in popular culture much more often than they participate in more complex forms of cultural life (Wereszczyńska 2017: 155–169). This result is consistent with the author's own research presented in this article.

In conclusion to the research conducted, it should be recalled that the construction of one's own axiology and the work on arranging values into an appropriate hierarchy is conditioned by cultural contexts and the adoption of individual criteria for assessing values. The cultural conditions in which today's respondents function, and the similar range of offers they come across in many spheres of life, determine a unified experience and lead to a similarity in understanding values and organising them into a system (Czerniawska 2018: 36). This text only gives a fragmentary overview of the empirical aspects of the values studied. The overall analysis of the results, however, makes it possible for us to conclude that a general regularity became apparent in the studied group, with the values of stability – health, family, love, friendship – dominating

over the values of development, progress and transformation. The observed hierarchy has, as expected, a simplified character, without clear dominants. The value sphere represented by future early education teachers is important for the development of students' moral sphere and beliefs. The primary task of teachers is, therefore, to build an appropriate offer based on discourse and mutual understanding, through which pupils will acquire respect for universal values that guide the way they see the world and themselves. However, this requires ongoing reflection by professionals on their own sphere of values and a conscious commitment to fulfilling them.

The teacher's profession has been described as one around which discussions on the qualities of its representatives have been carried out for many years. The very fact of being assigned to this profession obliges one to work on oneself, especially in the intellectual, cultural and moral aspects. It is a guarantee of readiness to take on the burden of transmitting values. However, taking into account the changing contexts of the modern world and the findings of many authors, the need to strengthen teachers for further improvement, including within their own axiology, should be strongly emphasized. It is because the value system of teachers, combined with their well-chosen measures to introduce children and young people into the world of values, is the key aspect of upbringing and education for the present and future.

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