CZU: 37.035:159.955:37.013 **https://doi.org/10.59295/sum5(195)2026_09**

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS OF STUDENTS' VALUE ORIENTATIONS

Valeria BOTEZATU,
Moldova State University

The article focuses on the conceptual clarification of students' value orientations from a pedagogical perspective, emphasizing their role in personality development of students within contemporary education. The study is based on a theoretical analysis of the concepts of value and value orientations, highlighting their interrelations and their function in guiding behavior and decision-making. The structure and main characteristics of value orientations are examined, with attention to their cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions, as well as their systemic and dynamic nature. The paper also analyzes relevant typologies of value orientations, underlining their significance for understanding the diversity of students' value systems. The findings indicate that value orientations represent essential mechanisms through which values are internalized and transformed into behavioral regulators. In the context of value pluralism and social change, education plays a key role in forming coherent value orientations that support responsible behavior and social integration.

Keywords: *value orientations, values, value education, the axiological dimension of education, education for values, education through values.*

DELIMITĂRI CONCEPTUALE PRIVIND ORIENTĂRILE VALORICE ALE ELEVILOR

Articolul abordează conceptul orientărilor valorice ale elevilor din perspectivă pedagogică, evidențiind rolul acestora în dezvoltarea personalității elevilor în contextul educației contemporane. În acest articol este realizată o analiză teoretică a conceptelor de valoare și orientări valorice, fiind subliniate interrelațiile dintre acestea și funcția lor în orientarea comportamentului și a procesului decizional. Sunt analizate structura și caracteristicile orientărilor valorice, cu accent pe dimensiunile cognitive, afective și comportamentale, precum și pe caracterul lor sistemic și dinamic. De asemenea, sunt examinate tipologii relevante ale orientărilor valorice, evidențiindu-se importanța acestora pentru înțelegerea diversității sistemelor valorice ale elevilor. Rezultatele subliniază că orientările valorice constituie mecanisme esențiale prin care valorile sunt interiorizate și transformate în repere comportamentale. În contextul pluralismului valoric, educația are un rol fundamental în formarea unor orientări valorice coerente.

Cuvinte-cheie: *orientări valorice, valori, educația valorilor, dimensiunea axiologică a educației, educația pentru valori, educația prin valori.*

Introduction

In recent decades, pedagogical reflection has increasingly focused on the axiological dimension of education, as students' personality development is conceived not only as cognitive development, but also as value-based (axiological) development. Values represent fundamental reference points that guide individuals' behavior, decisions, and social relationships, while the educational process plays an important role in their transmission, internalization, and appropriation by students. From this perspective, students' value orientations can be understood as the expression of how values are integrated into their system of beliefs and attitudes, influencing their relationship with themselves, others, and society.

However, in the context of contemporary social, cultural, and educational transformations, the issue of value orientations becomes increasingly complex. Globalization, the development of information technologies, and the diversification of socialization environments expose students to multiple, often divergent, value systems, which may generate uncertainty and fragmentation in the formation of their value system. Under these conditions, the role of education can no longer be reduced to the transmission of values, but involves facilitating a reflective and critical process of selecting, internalizing, and integrating them, capable of supporting the development of an autonomous and responsible personality.

The relevance of values education is also emphasized in international and national educational policy documents. At the international level, documents such as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture [2], developed by the Council of Europe, highlight the role of education in promoting democratic values, social responsibility, and respect for human rights. At the same time, UNESCO initiatives such as Global Citizenship Education and Education for Sustainable Development emphasize the need to develop universal values such as solidarity, tolerance, and respect for diversity.

At the national level, these orientations are reflected in documents regulating the organization and development of the education system. The Education Code of the Republic of Moldova [3] establishes, among the aims of education, the formation of an autonomous and responsible personality capable of valuing and respecting the principles of a democratic society. Furthermore, the National Curriculum Framework [3] highlights the role of education in the formation of personal, social, national, and universal human values, while the Guide for the Integration of Values-Based Education into the National Curriculum [7] provides methodological guidelines for integrating values into educational activities. Under these conditions, students' value orientations cannot be reduced to simple outcomes of the transmission of values, but must be understood as structures through which students construct their own way of relating to reality. Therefore, the analysis of this concept becomes essential for understanding how values are transformed into guiding principles of behavior and personality development within the contemporary educational context.

Theoretical perspectives on the concepts of *value* and *value orientations*

In the specialized literature, the concepts of value and value orientations are analyzed from diverse theoretical perspectives, being addressed within philosophy, sociology, psychology, and pedagogy. From an axiological perspective, values are considered normative reference points that express what is regarded as important, desirable, or worthy of pursuit in a society. The philosophy of values highlights their role in guiding human behavior and structuring social relations.

From a philosophical standpoint, values are not merely abstract cultural norms, but also formative reference points that influence the process of personality development. Pragmatist philosophy, represented by John Dewey, emphasizes that values are closely linked to human experience and the learning process, being formed and consolidated through the individual's interaction with the social and educational environment [5]. Thus, values become fundamental elements of education, as they contribute to guiding students' behavior and to the development of responsible conduct within society.

Complementing these approaches, sociological and psychological perspectives underline that values are internalized through processes of socialization and education, forming a relatively stable system of beliefs that influences individual decisions and behaviors. However, the mere internalization of values does not explain the diversity of ways in which individuals relate to the same values, which calls for the analysis of a deeper level of their organization.

In this context, the concept of value orientations becomes particularly relevant, referring to the way in which values are organized and hierarchized within the individual's system of preferences. According to Rokeach [11], value orientations represent relatively stable structures of the value system that guide behavior and individual choices, while Schwartz's theory [12] highlights the trans-situational character of values and their role in guiding actions. From this perspective, value orientations are not simple reflections of values, but mechanisms through which values become operative in individual conduct.

This idea is also supported by the OECD Learning Compass 2030 [10], which emphasizes that values and attitudes influence individual choices and behaviors. However, even within this framework, the focus remains predominantly on the normative function of values, while the relationship between values, attitudes, and value orientations as integrated structures of personality is less clearly explained.

At the same time, the relationship between values and attitudes shows that values constitute the foundation of the individual's system of attitudes and behaviors, guiding the way in which reality is interpreted and social interactions are conducted. Thus, values do not act directly upon behavior, but through intermediate structures, which supports the need to analyze value orientations as a distinct level of personality organiza-

tion. Values are central to the configuration of personality, shaping judgments, attitudes, and behavior. They are expressed through attitudes that contribute to personality formation from an instrumental perspective, in terms of self-image protection, expression of personal values, and organization of external social stimuli.

According to the OECD Learning Compass 2030 [10], values are classified into several categories depending on their role in individual and societal development. Thus, personal values are associated with individual identity and the way a person defines life goals and meaning. Social values refer to principles and beliefs that influence the quality of interpersonal relationships and the way individuals interact within the community, contributing to social cohesion. Societal values reflect the cultural and institutional priorities of a society and are embedded in social structures, norms, and democratic practices. At the same time, human or universal values transcend cultural and national differences, promoting the well-being of humanity and being reflected in fundamental international documents such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

From a pedagogical perspective, the integration of values into the educational process is considered essential for students' personality development. However, reducing values education to the transmission of axiological content overlooks the fact that value orientations are formed through the interaction between learning experiences, social models, and processes of individual reflection.

In this regard, the analysis of the concepts of value and value orientations reveals that they represent different levels of the individual's relationship with the axiological system of society. Values express general normative reference points, while value orientations reflect the way in which these are internalized, hierarchized, and assumed at the individual level. Thus, value orientations can be interpreted as the personalized expression of social values, resulting from their integration into the structure of personality.

Theoretical approaches that emphasize the systemic character of values (Rokeach [11]; Schwartz [12]) and those highlighting the cultural dimension of value orientations (Kluckhohn [9]) indicate that value orientations cannot be understood outside the relationship between the individual and the social environment. At the same time, educational research shows that they are formed through the interaction of family, school, and cultural influences. In this sense, Rokeach [11] considers that values are organized into a relatively stable system of beliefs that influence how individuals interpret reality and make decisions. Similarly, Schwartz [12] argues that values are trans-situational principles that guide evaluation and action, being organized within a coherent structure. In pedagogical literature, value orientations are interpreted as the result of educational processes and socialization experiences.

This perspective is also supported by national pedagogical research. According to M. Dohotaru, value orientations constitute „a system of hierarchically interconnected values that guide an individual's behavior. Value orientations are reflections. They manifest themselves dynamically and actively within an individual's personality. They can manifest themselves cognitively, emotionally, and behaviorally, as well as in the realm of interpersonal relationships, in the realm of "individual-nature" relationships, in relation to one's own self, etc." [6, p.34]. Likewise, I. Gîncu argues that „a value orientation refers to a person's choice regarding a range of values; once selected, these values are grouped into an organized value system and influence the person's attitudes and behavior. Thus, value orientations are internalized values that are, in their own way, specific in that they refer to certain patterns." [8, p.20]. These perspectives emphasize both the hierarchical organization and the operational role of value orientations in personality development.

Based on these perspectives, value orientations can be defined as relatively stable systems of preferences, attitudes, and beliefs oriented toward certain values, which guide behavior and decision-making in various social situations. Building on multiple theoretical approaches, D. Antoci [1] highlights that value orientations constitute an organized system of beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors, hierarchically structured and integrated into personality. From this perspective, value orientations are not merely individual preferences, but stable personality structures that guide individual activity and social interaction. They are influenced by social, educational, and cultural factors, and their formation is closely linked to socialization and educational experiences. Moreover, value orientations are organized hierarchically, with certain values becoming dominant and determining individual priorities across different domains of life. In this sense, value orientations contribute to behavioral stability and coherence, guiding decision-making and adaptation to the social context.

Table 1 presents a comparative analysis of the concepts of „value" and „value orientations".

Table 1. Conceptual delimitation between *value* and *value orientations*

Criterion of analysis	Values	Value orientations
Definition	General normative reference points expressing what is considered important, desirable, or worthy of pursuit in a society	Ways of organizing, hierarchizing, and internalizing values within the structure of personality
Level of abstraction	General, abstract, cultural, and social level	Individual, concrete, psychological, and behavioral level
Status in relation to personality	Elements of the axiological system of society	Internal structures of personality reflecting the assimilation of values
Main function	Provide general normative standards and criteria	Guide behavior, decisions, and individual attitudes
Structure	Systems of principles and norms	Organized systems of beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors
Formation process	Historically and culturally constructed	Formed through socialization and education

The differentiation between values and value orientations highlights that, while values represent general normative reference points of society, value orientations reflect the way in which these are internalized and become operative within the structure of personality, guiding individual behavior and decision-making processes.

Structure and characteristics of students' value orientations

The analysis of value orientations requires overcoming the frequent confusion between the concepts of value and value orientation. While values refer to general axiological contents – principles or standards that express what is considered desirable in a society – value orientations indicate the way in which these values are organized and activated within the structure of personality. In this logic, a value orientation is not a singular value, but a functional configuration of the individual's value system, which determines how situations are evaluated and behavior is regulated.

An important starting point in analyzing the structure of value orientations is the theory of the value system developed by M. Rokeach [11]. The author considers that values are organized in a hierarchical system of relatively stable beliefs that guide individual behavior. Within this conceptual framework, value orientations reflect the internal order of values within the personality system, namely the way certain values become dominant and determine individual priorities in different situations. Thus, the structure of value orientations is not determined by isolated values, but by the hierarchical relationships among them.

A complementary perspective is proposed by C. Kluckhohn [9], who defines value orientations as an organized system of conceptions about what is desirable, influencing the selection of goals and means of action. In this interpretation, the structure of value orientations has both a normative and motivational character, as values function not only as cognitive reference points but also as mechanisms that determine the selection of specific behavioral patterns.

The psychological analysis of value orientations is further developed in the theory of basic human values proposed by S. Schwartz [12]. According to this theory, values are trans-situational principles that guide the evaluation of situations and the orientation of human actions. Schwartz demonstrates that values are organized in a coherent system, in which different types of values are in relations of compatibility or tension. From this perspective, value orientations reflect the internal structure of this system, namely how values are integrated and correlated within the individual's consciousness.

In contemporary educational research, value orientations are analyzed as structures of personality that include several interdependent dimensions. D. Antoci [1] highlights that value orientation comprises a set of beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors organized hierarchically and integrated into the personality's value system.

From this perspective, the structure of value orientations can be analyzed through three main components:

- *the cognitive component* (beliefs about values),
- *the affective-attitudinal component* (evaluative stance toward values),
- *the behavioral component* (the manifestation of values in actions).

This structure demonstrates that value orientations are not simple individual preferences, but complex mechanisms for regulating behavior.

The analysis of value orientations highlights several essential characteristics that explain their role in students' personality development.

A first characteristic is their *systemic nature*. The values internalized by the student do not function independently, but are integrated into a system of beliefs and preferences that determines how educational situations are perceived and evaluated. The system of value orientations reflects the relationships among the values considered important by the student, and the coherence of this system contributes to behavioral stability and the orientation of learning activities.

Another important characteristic is the *hierarchical nature* of value orientations. Within the student's value system, values do not have equal importance, but are organized according to a certain order of priority. This value hierarchy influences how the student sets goals and organizes activities. For example, for some students, values related to academic achievement and performance may be dominant, while for others, values associated with cooperation, solidarity, or group belonging may become more important.

Students' value orientations are also characterized by *relative stability*. Values internalized through socialization and education tend to provide continuity and coherence in behavior. This stability is reflected in consistent attitudes and behaviors, such as responsibility for learning tasks, adherence to school rules, or involvement in collective activities. However, this stability is not rigid, as the student's value system may evolve through new educational and social experiences.

Closely related to stability is the *dynamic character* of value orientations. During schooling, value orientations are in a continuous process of development and restructuring. Interactions with teachers and peers, learning experiences, and behavioral models provided by the educational environment contribute to the reorganization of students' value systems and to the consolidation of certain value orientations.

Value orientations also have an *integrative character*, as they connect different dimensions of the student's personality. They simultaneously involve cognitive, affective, and behavioral aspects, contributing to the formation of coherent conduct. Through value orientations, the student constructs personal criteria for evaluating situations and organizes behavior in accordance with the values considered important.

These characteristics demonstrate that value orientations represent essential mechanisms through which values promoted in the educational environment are internalized and transformed into stable reference points for students' behavior and decision-making.

Typologies of value orientations

In the specialized literature, value orientations are also analyzed from a typological perspective, being correlated with different classifications of values and reflecting the way the axiological system is organized and internalized at the level of personality.

a. *The typology of value orientations proposed by C. Kluckhohn*

This typology is based on the criterion of how individuals relate to the fundamental dimensions of existence, such as time, human nature, activity, and social relationships. From this perspective, value orientations are interpreted as relatively stable responses to universal problems of life, reflecting the influence of cultural patterns on individual behavior. Theoretically, this approach highlights the global and structuring character of value orientations, as they configure the individual's general way of relating to reality, rather than representing isolated preferences. However, its general character limits its direct applicability at the le-

vel of individual analysis, being more appropriate for cultural interpretations. From a pedagogical perspective, Kluckhohn's typology is relevant as it emphasizes the influence of cultural context on the formation of students' value orientations, underlining the need to integrate the cultural dimension into the educational process.

b. *The typology of value orientations in the view of M. Rokeach*

M. Rokeach's approach [11] is based on the analysis of the individual's value system structure, using as a criterion the distinction between terminal and instrumental values. Terminal values express the ultimate goals of human existence, such as happiness, freedom, or self-fulfillment, while instrumental values refer to modes of action and behaviors through which these goals can be achieved, such as honesty, responsibility, or perseverance. In this perspective, value orientations reflect how these two categories of values are hierarchized and correlated within the personality structure, determining the general direction of behavior.

From a theoretical standpoint, this classification highlights the motivational and regulatory character of value orientations, as they are directly involved in decision-making and behavioral choices. Value orientations are not reduced to simple preferences, but express the relationship between the goals pursued by the individual and the means considered appropriate to achieve them. Thus, human behavior is guided not only by what individuals consider important, but also by how they choose to act in order to realize those values.

From a pedagogical perspective, Rokeach's typology is particularly relevant, as it allows understanding how students structure their relationship with educational goals and associated behaviors. Thus, students' value orientations may reflect either the prioritization of goals such as academic achievement or personal development, or an emphasis on modes of action such as responsibility, discipline, or cooperation. In this sense, the educational process plays a key role in supporting the coherent alignment between pursued values and adopted behaviors, contributing to the development of consistent and responsible conduct.

c. *The typology of value orientations in the view of S. Schwartz*

The theory of basic human values developed by S. Schwartz [12] offers one of the most coherent and widely used perspectives on the organization of the value system, based on the criterion of structural relationships among different types of values. The author identifies a set of values organized within a dynamic system, in which they are in relationships of compatibility or opposition, shaping the general directions of human behavior. Thus, values are grouped around bipolar dimensions such as openness to change versus conservation and self-transcendence versus self-enhancement, reflecting the fundamental tensions of human motivation.

From this perspective, value orientations can be interpreted as tendencies of individuals to prioritize certain categories of values over others, which determines how they evaluate situations and structure their actions. For example, value orientations centered on self-transcendence involve the prioritization of cooperation, altruism, and responsibility toward others, while orientations toward self-enhancement are associated with competition, personal success, and influence. Similarly, orientations toward conservation favor respect for norms and stability, whereas orientations toward change support autonomy and openness to novelty.

Unlike other approaches, Schwartz's theory allows for the understanding of value conflicts and the dynamics of value orientations, explaining how individuals manage tensions between different values.

From a pedagogical perspective, this typology provides an explanatory framework for the diversity of students' value orientations in the context of contemporary education. Students may display different value orientations depending on the values they prioritize, which influences their engagement in school activities, relationships with others, and attitudes toward educational norms. In this sense, the educational process should support the development of a balance among different types of value orientations, promoting the integration of prosocial values and those oriented toward personal development into a coherent system.

The analysis of these typologies shows that, although they offer different perspectives, they are complementary: some emphasize the cultural dimension of value orientations, while others highlight their internal structure or motivational function.

Conclusions

The theoretical approach developed in this paper highlights several essential conclusions:

- Students' value orientations can be understood as mediating structures between the axiological system of society and individual behavior, representing the level at which values become operative within personality. In this sense, the distinction between values and value orientations is not only conceptual but also functional, highlighting the transition from social norms to internal mechanisms regulating behavior.

- The theoretical analysis reveals that value orientations have a systemic, hierarchical, and dynamic character, being the result of the interaction between socialization processes, educational experiences, and the individual's reflective capacity. Thus, they are not merely internalizations of values, but active configurations that structure the evaluation of situations and the orientation of decisions.

- The diversity of the analyzed typologies confirms that value orientations cannot be reduced to a single explanatory dimension, but should be interpreted within an integrated approach that correlates the cultural, motivational, and personal dimensions of values.

- In the context of contemporary education, characterized by value pluralism and multiple influences, value orientations become essential reference points for ensuring the coherence of students' behavior. In this regard, the role of education is not limited to the transmission of values, but involves facilitating the formation of value orientations capable of supporting autonomy, responsibility, and social integration.

- Therefore, the study of value orientations in pedagogical research requires moving beyond descriptive perspectives toward understanding them as central mechanisms of personality development, relevant both for educational theory and for educational practice.

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N. B.: *The paper was carried out within the Subprogram "Theory and Methodology of Continuous and Cyclical Monitoring and Development of School Curriculum", cod 011401.*

Data about author:
***Valeria BOTEZATU*,** PhD in Education Sciences, Associate Professor, Faculty of Psychology, Educational Sciences, Sociology and Social Work, Moldova State University, Republic of Moldova.
ORCID: 0000-0001-9034-8825
E-mail: valeria.botezatu@usm.md

Presented: 27.02.2026
Reviewed: 30.04.2026
Accepted for publication: 20.05.2026