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## THE MOST IMPORTANT VALUES FOR PEDAGOGY AND SPECIAL EDUCATION STUDENTS

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**Abstract:** *There were two aims of this study. The first was to investigate what are the most important values for general education (pedagogy) students and special education students in terms of S. H. Schwartz Theory of Basic Human Values. The second aim of this study was to compare general education students and special education students in terms of their values. Two hypotheses were put forward: H1: Special education students are less often guided by the self-enhancement values than general education students. H2: Special education students are more often guided by self-transcendence values than general education students. Hypothesis 1 was partially confirmed. Special education students are less often guided by hedonism value. Although not significant ( $p = .103$ ), the difference in power value is noticeable. Hypothesis 2 was not confirmed. There were no differences between studied groups in self-transcendence values. In both groups benevolence was the one valued the most, and power was valued the least.*

**Keywords:** *values, pedagogy students, vocational interests*

### 1. Introduction

The teaching profession, especially the special education teaching profession, is very demanding. People who work in this area take responsibility for the health and life of children, including their proper mental and social development. In Poland, the profession of teacher is a profession of public trust [1]. On the one hand, teachers spend a lot of time with their pupils (sometimes even more than the busy parents), but on the other, teachers' work (due to their specificity) is not and cannot be fully controlled by certain procedures. Parents must believe that they leave their children under the care of responsible people. The issue of trust is particularly important in the case of parents of children with disabilities who are helpless without the help of adults. It is important to emphasise that teachers should become people who not only have the formal qualifications to practice, but must also be trustworthy, ethical, and guided in life by appropriate values.

The current sociopolitical state of the Western world gives numberless opportunities for young people regarding their career choices. On the one hand it leads to new, broader life perspectives and growth, on the other can cause a sense of living in a very dynamic and unstable environment that is difficult to gain control over. One's life experience and inner representation of the world are a foundation for values they form [2].

Most people are not aware of the impact of their self-identity until they are about to make choices regarding self-development, family or career [3]. In order to make thoughtful decisions it is important to take that influence into account. Investigating the relation between people's values and their career choices leads to better understanding of fulfilling one's various needs.

Schein's theory of career anchors highlights the relation between a person's value system, needs, competence and the career of their choice. According to that theory, a career anchor is one's self-concept that consists of self-

perceived talents and abilities, basic values and the evolved sense of motives and needs referring to the career. The concept evolves along with work and life experience, however, after it has been formed, it works as an anchor stabilizing the values and motives one will not give up to take a decision. E. H. Schein identified 8 categories of anchors: autonomy/independence, security/stability, technical-functional competence, general managerial competence, entrepreneurial creativity, service or dedication to a cause, pure challenge and lifestyle [3].

The Schwartz Value Theory describes values as trans-situational goals that vary in importance and function as a motivational guide in one's life. The ten distinguished values are culturally universal core principles: self-direction, stimulation, hedonism, achievement, power, security, conformity, tradition, benevolence and universalism. Moreover, the theory underlines the dynamic relations between them, e. g. some of the values oppose one another and cannot be retained by one person at the same time, whereas other are congruent [2].

L. Wils, T. Wils, and M. Tremblay [4] proposed a Circular Model of Career Anchor Structure that is a link between Schwartz's value concept and Schein's theory. Research shows that some motivational domains (self-transcendence, conservation, self-enhancement and openness to change) correspond directly to career anchors. Accordingly, they can be construed as values that guide career decisions. Moreover, in contrast to E. H. Schein, the authors state that, as some values are complimentary and other are conflictual, individuals can possess multiple dominant career anchors.



Figure 1. Circular model of Career Anchor Structure. Wils et al. 2010.

The main purpose of this research was to examine the differences pedagogy students' and special education students' values. In the context of values as career guides [5] it is important to analyse differences between regular teachers and special education teachers. In Poland, special education teacher is the least prestigious occupation associated with education [6]. Also, a risk of burnout is higher among special education teachers [7][8]. Existential hardness is one of the main problems associated with it. The engagement and effort put into the work does not always give satisfying results and the employees receive less gratification. Special education teachers are working in much less controllable conditions with less instruments of influence. Also, it is important to notice that they know and implement a variety of methods to meet the needs of students with disabilities. Giving the fact that it is a more resource-intensive occupation, with slightly higher earnings (in Poland maximum benefit is 20% [9]) it is crucial to identify the factors affecting students' decisions to choose special education instead of pedagogy.

## 2 Hypotheses

On the basis of previous theoretical framework and empirical research concerning special education teachers' difficulties it can be concluded that students are more prone to anticipate hardship related to that profession. Therefore, values and career anchors are different among pedagogy and special education students. Special education may not be interesting for students aiming for power, achievements, and hedonism. It is an occupation associated with emotional distress and less predictable outcomes than pedagogy. Thus, it is hypothesized that special education students are less often guided by the self-enhancement values than pedagogy students (H1). On the other hand, special education requires various competences and dedication to a cause that may not have any tangible outcomes. It is assumed that these anchors, related to values of universalism and benevolence, are important factors in choosing a special teacher occupation. Therefore, it is hypothesized, that special education students are more often guided by self-transcendence

values than pedagogy students (H2). Another premise for these hypotheses is the sinusoidal nature of values described by Schwartz [10][11], and incongruence of self-transcendence values and self-enhancement values.

## 3. Methods

**Participants.** A total of 355 students took part in the study, 332 women (93.0%) and 17 men (4.8%), 8 persons (2.2%) did not report gender, with mean age of 22.17 years ( $SD = 4.63$ ). Students were studying at the University of Gdańsk, at the Faculty of Social Sciences. 186 participants (52.4%) were pedagogy students and 169 (47.6%) were special education students. They were from different years and modes of study.

**Measures.** 10-item, self-report measures were developed on the basis of items from the *Short Schwartz's Value Survey (SSVS)*. The scale of value consisted of the question: "Please, rate the importance of the following values as a life-guiding principle for you. Use the 8-point scale in which 0 indicates that the value is opposed to your principles, 1 indicates that the value is not important for you, 4 indicates that the value is important, and 8 indicates that the value is of supreme importance for you."

There were 10 values, divided into two dimensions:

- A. Self-enhancement vs. self-transcendence
  1. Power (social power, authority, wealth)
  2. Achievement (success, capability, ambition, influence on people and events)
  3. Hedonism (gratification of desires, enjoyment in life, self-indulgence)
  4. Universalism (broad-mindedness, beauty of nature and arts, social justice, a world at peace, equality, wisdom, unity with nature, environmental protection)
  5. Benevolence (helpfulness, honesty, forgiveness, loyalty, responsibility)
- B. Conservation vs. openness to change
  6. Tradition (respect for tradition, humbleness, accepting one's portion in life, devotion, modesty)
  7. Conformity (obedience, honoring parents and elders, self-discipline, politeness)
  8. Security (national security, family security, social order, cleanliness, reciprocation of favors).
  9. Stimulation (daring, a varied and challenging life, an exciting life)
  10. Self-Direction (creativity, freedom, curiosity, independence, choosing one's own goals)

**Procedure.** Data collection used opportunistic sampling. Students were invited to participate anonymously in the study during classes or lectures. More than 90% of all present students agreed to do so. All participants filled in 'paper and pencil' questionnaires. The study endured from December 2016 to January 2017.

**Statistical analyses.** Value scores have been centered in order to correct for individual differences in use of the response scale [12]. Each person's mean rating score was subtracted from his/her rating scores. Deviation scores are treated as corrected data. Student's  $t$  test was used to

compare two groups. All statistical analyses were conducted in IBM SPSS Statistics 24.0.

**4. Results**

**4.1 Descriptive statistics**

The most important value both for pedagogy students and special education students is benevolence (mean for all students  $M = 6,64$ ). The second most important value is self-direction ( $M = 6,24$ ). In third place were security ( $M = 6,04$ ). On the following items were conformity ( $M = 5,65$ ), achievement ( $M = 5,31$ ), universalism ( $M = 5,23$ ) and stimulation ( $M = 4,87$ ). The least important values for students were hedonism ( $M = 4,81$ ), tradition ( $M = 4,64$ ) and power ( $M = 2,78$ ) (Figure 1).

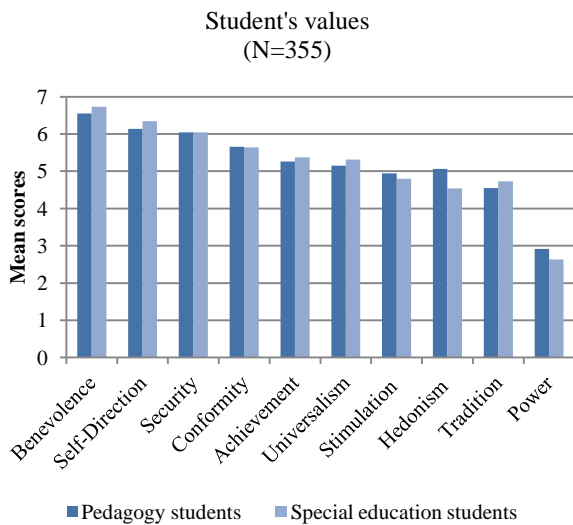


Figure 1. Student's values on Schwartz Value Survey. Arithmetic mean of the raw scores.

Value scores have been centered in order to correct for individual differences in use of the response scale are presented in Figure 2.

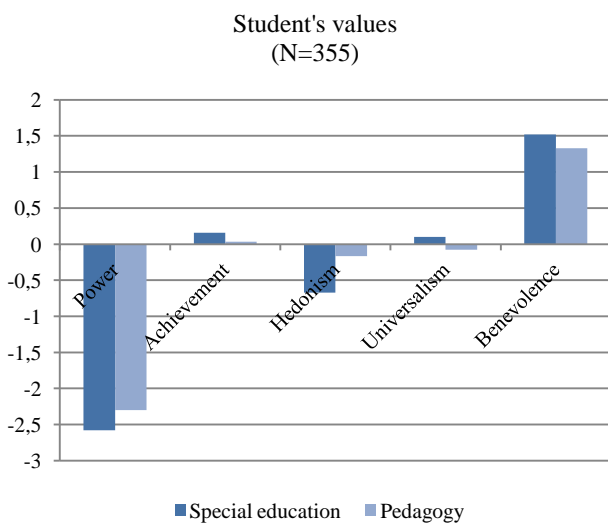


Figure 2. Students' values on Short Schwartz Value Survey. The table shows the individual values relative to the mean of all values.

Power was positively related to achievement and hedonism. Universalism was positively related to benevolence. Power was negatively related to universalism and benevolence. Achievement was negatively related to universalism and benevolence. Hedonism was negatively related to universalism and benevolence. Pearson correlation coefficients, means and standard deviations are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Means, standard deviations, and correlations (Pearson's r) of studied variables

	M (SD)	2.	3	4	5
Power	-2.43 (1.60)	.25**	.14**	-.32**	-.37**
Achievement	0.09 (1.37)		.01	-.29**	-.18**
Hedonism	-0.41 (1.58)			-.32**	-.36**
Universalism	0.01 (1.61)				.30**
Benevolence	1.42 (1.79)				

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$

**4.2 Group comparisons**

There was no significant difference in power value between pedagogy students ( $M = -2.30$ ;  $SD = 1.73$ ) and students of special education ( $M = -2.58$ ;  $SD = 1.42$ ),  $t_{350} = 1.61$ ,  $p = .103$ ,  $d = 0.17$ . There was no significant difference in achievement value between pedagogy students ( $M = 0.04$ ;  $SD = 1.31$ ) and students of special education ( $M = 0.16$ ;  $SD = 1.44$ ),  $t_{349} = -0.85$ ,  $p = .399$ ,  $d = -0.09$ . There was a significant difference in hedonism value between pedagogy students ( $M = -0.17$ ;  $SD = 1.48$ ) and students of special education ( $M = -0.67$ ;  $SD = 1.64$ ),  $t_{351} = 3.04$ ,  $p = .003$ ,  $d = 0.32$ . There was no significant difference in the scores of universalism between pedagogy students ( $M = -0.08$ ;  $SD = 1.63$ ) and students of special education ( $M = 0.10$ ;  $SD = 1.59$ ),  $t_{350} = -1.03$ ,  $p = .306$ ,  $d = -0.11$ . There was no significant difference in the scores of benevolence between pedagogy students ( $M = 1.33$ ;  $SD = 1.10$ ) and students of special education ( $M = 1.52$ ;  $SD = 1.26$ ),  $t_{351} = -1.53$ ,  $p = .128$ ,  $d = -0.16$  (Table 2).

Table 2: A comparison using the Student t-test group of students of general education and special education students in terms of their values

Variable	Pedagogy students (n=186)		Special education students (n=169)		t	p	d
	M	SD	M	SD			
Power	-2.30	1.73	-2.58	1.42	1.61	.103	0.17
Achievement	0.04	1.31	0.16	1.44	-0.85	.399	-0.09
Hedonism	-0.17	1.48	-0.67	1.64	3.04	.003	0.32
Universalism	-0.08	1.63	0.10	1.59	-1.03	.306	-0.11
Benevolence	1.33	1.10	1.52	1.26	-1.53	.128	-0.16

**5. Conclusions**

Hypothesis 1 was partially confirmed. Special education students are less often guided by hedonism value. Although not significant ( $p = .103$ ), the difference in power value is noticeable. Hypothesis 2 was not confirmed. There were no differences between studied groups in self transcendence values. In both groups benevolence was the one valued the most, and power was

valued the least. This study shows that people who want to practice special education teaching profession have different values than people who want to be a teacher. On the basis of the study, it may be assumed that the profession of a special education teacher selects specific persons who are less concerned about their own sense of comfort and pleasure. This seems to be consistent with (postulated in pedagogy) ideal special education teacher as a supporter of others, with a sense of mission.

## 6. Discussion

Biggest strengths of this research are large sample and use of one of the most popular value theories, which make interpretation more efficient. Main limitations of this study are no direct measurement of career anchors, and cross-sectional data on non-representative sample. Future studies should include different measurement tools, providing quality data (such as interviews). Study was conducted among students, and many of them were at the beginning of their courses. Longitudinal data is important to examine how many of them is really going to work as special education teachers. Nevertheless, this study provided some evidence concerning differences between people educating themselves at these two courses. Two groups were mostly similar in value structure. Lower hedonism among special education students may be an effect of their different view on happiness. Differentiation of hedonic and eudaimonic well-being [13] may be useful in interpretation of these results. Subsequent studies should compare the group of students of special education and pedagogy with students from other fields. That comparison may show significant differences in terms of values.

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