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## THE VALUES OF ESTONIAN PRESCHOOL CHILDCARE INSTITUTIONS' PRINCIPALS, TEACHERS, AND PARENTS



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### Abstract

The aim of the current study was to find out, what the values of Estonian preschool childcare institutions' principals, teachers, and parents. The Estonian language version of the Portrait Value Questionnaire, developed by S. H. Schwartz, was used as a research method. Altogether 978 respondents from all over Estonia participated in the study, including 163 preschool childcare institutions' principals, 425 teachers and 390 parents. The values of preschool principals, teachers, and parents were rather similar. In all groups, the highest evaluations were assigned to values related to benevolence (both caring and dependability) and the lowest to power (both dominance and resources). The results indicated that principals, compared to teachers, valued higher dominance and tolerance, while teachers gave higher evaluations to personal security and conforming to rules. Compared to principals and teachers, parents gave significantly higher evaluations to resources. Also, parents valued dominance higher than teachers and hedonism more than principals.

*Keywords:* Values, preschool childcare institution, principals, teachers, parents

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## **1. Introduction**

"Values are used to characterize cultural groups, societies, and individuals, to trace change over time, and to explain the motivational bases of attitudes and behavior" (Schwartz, 2012). Values that prevail in a society shape and justify people's beliefs, judgements and behaviour. According to Schwartz, people's daily life arrangements, in turn, are based on such values that are considered important by the society (as cited in Realo, 2013). Values can be seen as a mirror image of the society, showing the priorities of the social structure as a whole, in which, in turn, one can see the differences between the values of various groups. The society as a whole changes under the pressure of people's value priorities, while at the same time people are affected by the existing values of the society. Studying values can give an idea about what particular social environment is valued and what are the desired objectives (Tart, Sõmer, & Lilleoja, 2012). People's perceptions about the meaning and behavioural patterns of the society are very strongly associated with abstract values (Tart, 2011), are in many ways well established in the process of socialization, and vary according to the socialisation conditions, in the middle of which one has grown up (Lilleoja, 2012).

The theoretical framework of the current study is based on the theory of basic human values developed by Professor Emeritus Shalom H. Schwartz from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. When thinking of values, one thinks of what is important to people in life, for example caring, dependability, achievement, security, etc. Values carry different meanings for different people. A particular value may be very important to one person but unimportant or even meaningless to another. Basic values are recognized by people in every culture (Schwartz, 1992; 1994; 2012; Schwartz et al., 2012). When creating his basic human values theory, Schwartz adopted the conceptions of values from the writings of many theorists and identified six main features that characterize values: 1. Values are beliefs linked inextricably to affect. For example, people for whom independence is an important value become aroused if their independence is threatened, and are happy when they can enjoy it. 2. Values are related to desirable goals that motivate action. For example, people for whom justice, and helpfulness are important, are motivated to pursue these goals. 3. Values transcend specific actions and situations. For example, obedience and honesty values may be relevant in the workplace or at school, in business or politics, with friends or strangers. This feature distinguishes values from norms and attitudes that are usually connected to specific actions, objects, or situations. 4. Values are used as standards or criteria. Values become the basis for selecting or evaluating actions, policies, people, or events. People decide what is good or bad, justified or illegitimate, worth doing or avoiding. 5. Values are ordered by importance, compared with each other. People's values form a hierarchical system of priorities that

characterize them as individuals. For example, some people may attribute more importance to novelty, others to tradition. 6. The relative importance of various values guides people’s actions. The trade-off among relevant and competing values guides attitudes and behaviours (Schwartz, 2012).

Values differ from each other in terms of their motivational goal, i.e. what do they aim to achieve. According to the theory of Schwartz the original 10 basic values were: self-direction, stimulation, hedonism, achievement, power, security, conformity, tradition, benevolence and universalism (Schwartz, 1994; 2012). Recently the basic values theory of Schwartz was developed further and the new refined theory defines altogether 19 values, which give a more precise insight into the original ten values theory. Value descriptions in terms of their motivational goals can be seen in Table 1 (Schwartz et al., 2012).

**Table 1.** Value descriptions in terms of motivational goals (Schwartz et al., 2012)

| Value                     | Conceptual Definitions in terms of motivational goals                              |
|---------------------------|--|
| Self-direction-thought    | Freedom to cultivate one’s own ideas and abilities                                 |
| Self-direction- action    | Freedom to determine one’s own actions   |
| Stimulation               | Excitement, novelty, change and challenge in life                                  |
| Hedonism                  | Happiness, pleasure and sensuous gratification                                     |
| Achievement               | Success according to social standards  |
| Power-dominance           | Power through exercising control or dominance over people                          |
| Power-resources           | Power through control of material and social resources                             |
| Face                      | Security and power through maintaining one’s public image and avoiding humiliation |
| Security-personal         | Safety in one’s immediate environment  |
| Security-societal         | Safety and stability in the wider society  |
| Tradition                 | Maintaining and preserving cultural, family, or religious traditions               |
| Conformity-rules          | Compliance with rules, laws, and formal obligations                                |
| Conformity-interpersonal  | Avoidance of upsetting or harming other people                                     |
| Humility                  | Recognizing one’s insignificance in the larger scheme of things                    |
| Benevolence-dependability | Being a reliable and trustworthy member of the in-group                            |
| Benevolence-caring        | Devotion to the welfare of in-group members  |
| Universalism-concern      | Commitment to equality, justice, and protection for all people                     |
| Universalism-nature       | Preservation of the natural environment  |
| Universalism-tolerance    | Acceptance and understanding of those who are different from oneself               |

Note: The table was completed based on Table 2 from “Refining the Theory of Basic Individual Values.” By S. H. Schwartz et al, 2012, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 103, No. 4, 663–68

### *1.1. Earlier studies*

In recent decades values have been studied a lot in various countries, among others in Estonia. Since 1981 the World Values Survey has regularly taken place and covers by now already a 100 countries (World Values Survey). The European Values Study is also carried out since 1981 and takes place every nine years. In the last study, in 2008, altogether 47 European countries participated (European Values Study). Estonia takes part in both aforementioned studies.

In Estonia researchers have studied the values of principals, teachers, students and parents in the school context (e.g. Veisson, 2009). Students and teachers, as well as parents, considered the most important school value to be academic success, followed by self-development, politeness, honesty, and discipline. Less important values at school were considered to be the so-called soft values, such as interpersonal relations, helpfulness, caring and tolerance. Principals on the other hand considered more important such soft values and less important academic success. Kalmus and Vihalemm (2004) have studied values in the Estonian transitional culture. Compared to earlier studies conducted in Estonia, values such as happiness, comfortable life, pleasant life, interesting life, love, societal recognition, equality, wisdom, self-respect, self-actualisation, beautiful world, and real friendship have become more meaningful and important for people. The basic values theory of Schwartz has been used for studying the values of Estonians compared to neighbouring countries (Tart, 2011; Tart et al., 2012), as well as for studying the basic values of birth cohorts and changes in them in Estonia after the year 2000 (Lilleoja, 2012). The Estonian Human Development Report gives an overview of Estonian values studies compared to other countries within the last 20 years (Realo, 2013).

The research methodology of Schwartz has been used for studying values of students, among others those who learn to become teachers (Lilleoja & Lilleoja, 2014; Niit, 2002; Oğuz, 2012). Based on Schwartz's basic values theory, studies have been conducted for explaining the relationship between the values of children and parents (Knafo & Schwartz, 2004). Moreover, the basic human values theory of Schwartz has been used for studying values of children (Bilsky et al., 2013; Döring, 2010). Bilsky et al. (2013) have also studied the structure of children's values and their value preferences, and have found in their results that children's value preferences are similar to the values of adults.

## **2. Problem Statement**

Values and values education in Estonian educational institutions has been under discussion more and more in recent years. The National Programme “Values Development in

Estonian Society 2009-2013” (National Programme..., 2009) points to the importance of values education in preschool childcare institutions and to the role of personal values of preschool principals, teachers and parents in values education. The programme states that human values, including the basis of linguistic values, develop in early childhood, they are influenced by the value judgements of parents and kindergarten teachers, but even more so by the ways both teachers and parents communicate or give these values further. In terms of values education attention is paid to harmonising the values of different target groups (the values of preschool principals, teachers and parents). The OECD (2012) report emphasises the importance of values and values education in the curricula of preschool childcare institutions of different countries. The importance of taking into account different values when organising and carrying out preschool’s learning and educational activities has also been pointed out by the Estonian National Curriculum for Preschool Childcare Institutions (2008).

The aforementioned National Programme has raised the following questions: do parents at home and preschool teachers give further the same values, and are the values of preschool principals and teachers in accordance with each other. These questions are also the basis of the current study, where the authors will try to find out, what are the basic values of preschool childcare institutions’ principals, teachers, and parents?

### **3. Research Questions**

Based on the main goal, the authors posed the following research question: What are the values of principals, teachers, and parents at preschool childcare institutions?

### **4. Purpose of the Study**

The goal of the current study was to find out, what are the values of Estonian preschool childcare institutions’ principals and teachers.

### **5. Research Methods**

As a research method a structured questionnaire was applied, which included the Estonian language version of the “Portrait Value Questionnaire” developed by Shalom H. Schwartz. The questionnaire consists of 57 items or short verbal portraits, which describe human goals, ambitions and wishes. The respondent has to evaluate how similar to him/her each described person is. Responses are given on a 6-point Likert-type scale: “not like me at all”, “not like me”, “a little like me”, “somewhat like me”, “like me”, “very much like me”. Every portrait constitutes a certain value type (Schwartz et al., 2012). For example, the value

caring is described by the following statements: “It is important to him to take care of people close to him”, “It is very important to him to help the people dear to him” and “It is important to him to respond to the needs of people close to him”.

### 5.1. *The sample*

The questionnaire was administered from March to May 2013. The questionnaire was sent to 184 preschool childcare institutions’ principals, 517 teachers and 509 parents. Altogether 978 respondents from all 15 Estonian counties returned the questionnaire, including 163 principals, 425 teachers, who constituted 5 % of Estonian preschool teachers in 2012 according to the statistics concerning Estonian preschool pedagogues (Estonian Ministry of Education and Research, 2012), and 390 parents. The authors intended to include at least 5% of preschool teachers from each county to the study. Thus, the sample encompassed both city and country kindergartens. The questionnaires were returned anonymously, data was analysed and the results were generalised. Participation in the study was voluntary.

### 5.2. *Data analysis*

The following analyses were conducted with SPSS 14.0: Frequencies, Descriptives, One-Way Anova, Post Hoc tests and Reliability Analysis. The dataset was compiled and verified, and figures and tables were created with the help of MS Excel.

## 6. Findings

Measuring the reliability of questions 1-57 of the questionnaire, a Cronbach’s Alpha of .895 was received.

### 6.1. *What are the values of preschool childcare institutions’ principals, teachers, and parents?*

For full results, see the Appendix. The given table indicates that when taking into account the mean values, principals, teachers and parents gave the highest evaluations to benevolence: caring (three group average  $M = 5.39$ ) and dependability ( $M = 5.17$ ). Relatively high evaluations by all respondent groups were also given to values such as personal security ( $M = 4.99$ ), self-direction (action) ( $M = 4.97$ ), face ( $M = 4.90$ ), societal security ( $M = 4.83$ ), tradition ( $M = 4.82$ ), and self-direction (thought) ( $M = 4.77$ ). Taking into account the mean values the aforementioned were followed by tolerance ( $M = 4.75$ ), concern ( $M = 4.72$ ), nature ( $M = 4.57$ ), interpersonal conformity ( $M = 4.30$ ) and conformity

of rules ( $M = 4.21$ ). Preschool principals, teachers, and parents value less achievement ( $M = 4.20$ ), stimulation ( $M = 3.96$ ), hedonism ( $M = 3.70$ ) and humility ( $M = 3.62$ ). Lowest evaluations were given by all three respondent groups to power-based values such as dominance ( $M = 2.91$ ) and resources ( $M = 2.43$ ).

According to the ANOVA test preschool principals, teachers and parents considered similarly important caring ( $p = .366$ ), dependability ( $p = .146$ ), achievement ( $p = .671$ ) and humility ( $p = .451$ ). In case of other values statistically significant differences appeared between the responses of principals, teachers and parents. All aforementioned differences were significant at ( $p < .05$ ).

According to the Post Hoc test preschool principals and teachers gave similar evaluations to 15 values out of 19 (caring, dependability, achievement, hedonism, humility, universalism (concern), face, resources, self-direction (action), self-direction (thought), societal security, stimulation, tradition, interpersonal conformity and nature). Statistically significant ( $p < .05$ ) differences between the evaluations of principals and teachers appeared in case of four values. Compared to teachers, principals gave higher evaluations to values such as dominance and tolerance. Teachers in turn gave statistically significantly higher ratings to personal security and to following rules.

Preschool principals and parents evaluated 8 values similarly: caring, dependability, achievement, humility, following rules, personal security, concern and dominance. Parents evaluated statistically significantly ( $p < .05$ ) higher than principals hedonism and wealth (resources), whereas principals gave significantly ( $p < .05$ ) higher ratings to face, self-direction (action), self-direction (thought), societal security, stimulation, tradition, interpersonal conformity, nature, and tolerance.

Teachers and parents gave similar evaluations to the following values: caring, dependability, achievement, hedonism, humility and personal security. Parents gave statistically significantly ( $p < .05$ ) higher evaluations than teachers to resources and dominance. Teachers' ratings were significantly ( $p < .05$ ) higher than those of parents in case of universalism (concern), following rules, face, self-direction (action), self-direction (thought), societal security, stimulation, tradition, interpersonal conformity, nature, and tolerance.

## **7. Conclusions**

The aim of the current study was to find out what are the values of preschool childcare institutions' principals, teachers, and parents. In general, the values of preschool principals, teachers and parents are rather similar in what concerns the means of 19 values of

the renewed theory of Schwartz (Schwartz et al., 2012). From the point of view of values education it is important that the values of principals, teachers and parents are in accordance with each other (Values Development in Estonian Society, 2009). In all groups, the highest evaluations were assigned to values related to benevolence (both caring and dependability) and the lowest to power (both dominance and resources). This corresponds to the study of Schwartz et al. (2012) administered in 10 countries, where respondents answered in the same way. Moreover, similar results were reported by a values study conducted among the students of the Pedagogical College of Tallinn University (Lilleoja & Lilleoja, 2014). The results of a study by Oğuz (2012) in Turkey showed that future teachers gave highest evaluations to values such as universalism, benevolence, and security, while lowest scores were given to stimulation, hedonism and conformity. The values of preschool childcare institutions' principals and teachers were rather similar. They work in the same organisation and obviously also have similar values. Among the differences, principals compared to teachers valued higher dominance and tolerance, while teachers gave higher evaluations to personal security and conforming to rules.

The mean results of preferred values of parents resembled those of principals and teachers. However, according to ANOVA all three respondent groups gave statistically similar evaluations only to values such as caring, dependability, achievement and humility. Parents' evaluations to the remaining 15 values showed statistically significant differences compared to those of principals and teachers. In case of most values, principals and teachers gave significantly higher evaluations, while parents valued higher resources. Parents valued dominance higher than teachers and hedonism more than principals. The current study continues and the next phase is planning to look into the relations between personal values of preschool childcare institutions' principals, teachers, and parents, and values education in kindergartens.

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**Appendix A: The mean values, Standard Deviations, F-value and Significance of principals, teachers and parents according to ANOVA**

|                           |           | (N) | Mean  | SD    | F      | Sig.  |
|---------------------------|-----------|-----|-------|-------|--------|-------|
| Value Achievement         | Principal | 163 | 4,204 | 0,752 | 0,399  | 0,671 |
|                           | Teacher   | 423 | 4,179 | 0,790 |        |       |
|                           | Parent    | 389 | 4,230 | 0,836 |        |       |
|                           | Total     | 975 | 4,203 | 0,802 |        |       |
| Benevolence-caring        | Principal | 163 | 5,437 | 0,520 | 1,006  | 0,366 |
|                           | Teacher   | 424 | 5,399 | 0,537 |        |       |
|                           | Parent    | 389 | 5,363 | 0,639 |        |       |
|                           | Total     | 976 | 5,391 | 0,577 |        |       |
| Benevolence-dependability | Principal | 163 | 5,252 | 0,554 | 1,928  | 0,146 |
|                           | Teacher   | 424 | 5,147 | 0,629 |        |       |
|                           | Parent    | 389 | 5,150 | 0,620 |        |       |
|                           | Total     | 976 | 5,166 | 0,614 |        |       |
| Conformity-interpersonal  | Principal | 163 | 4,343 | 0,843 | 6,377  | 0,002 |
|                           | Teacher   | 424 | 4,403 | 0,878 |        |       |
|                           | Parent    | 389 | 4,185 | 0,900 |        |       |
|                           | Total     | 976 | 4,306 | 0,886 |        |       |
| Conformity-rules          | Principal | 163 | 4,128 | 0,890 | 5,982  | 0,003 |
|                           | Teacher   | 424 | 4,320 | 0,873 |        |       |
|                           | Parent    | 389 | 4,127 | 0,842 |        |       |
|                           | Total     | 976 | 4,211 | 0,868 |        |       |
| Face                      | Principal | 163 | 4,963 | 0,732 | 4,946  | 0,007 |
|                           | Teacher   | 424 | 4,968 | 0,778 |        |       |
|                           | Parent    | 389 | 4,809 | 0,772 |        |       |
|                           | Total     | 976 | 4,904 | 0,771 |        |       |
| Hedonism                  | Principal | 163 | 3,575 | 0,960 |        |       |
|                           | Teacher   | 424 | 3,670 | 0,919 |        |       |
|                           | Parent    | 389 | 3,779 | 0,844 |        |       |
|                           | Total     | 976 | 3,698 | 0,899 |        |       |
| Power-dominance           | Principal | 163 | 3,056 | 0,984 | 7,719  | 0,000 |
|                           | Teacher   | 424 | 2,778 | 0,931 |        |       |
|                           | Parent    | 389 | 3,002 | 0,971 |        |       |
|                           | Total     | 976 | 2,914 | 0,962 |        |       |
| Power-resources           | Principal | 163 | 2,261 | 0,946 | 9,902  | 0,000 |
|                           | Teacher   | 424 | 2,349 | 0,909 |        |       |
|                           | Parent    | 389 | 2,590 | 0,964 |        |       |
|                           | Total     | 976 | 2,430 | 0,946 |        |       |
| Self-direction-action     | Principal | 163 | 5,029 | 0,629 | 3,362  | 0,035 |
|                           | Teacher   | 424 | 5,001 | 0,624 |        |       |
|                           | Parent    | 389 | 4,902 | 0,664 |        |       |
|                           | Total     | 976 | 4,966 | 0,643 |        |       |
| Self-direction thought    | Principal | 163 | 4,940 | 0,547 | 15,804 | 0,000 |
|                           | Teacher   | 424 | 4,827 | 0,637 |        |       |
|                           | Parent    | 389 | 4,640 | 0,659 |        |       |
|                           | Total     | 976 | 4,771 | 0,642 |        |       |
| Security-personal         | Principal | 163 | 4,919 | 0,621 | 5,220  | 0,006 |
|                           | Teacher   | 424 | 5,068 | 0,641 |        |       |
|                           | Parent    | 389 | 4,943 | 0,637 |        |       |
|                           | Total     | 976 | 4,994 | 0,639 |        |       |

|                        |           |     |       |       |        |       |
|------------------------|-----------|-----|-------|-------|--------|-------|
| Security-societal      | Principal | 163 | 4,959 | 0,658 | 7,393  | 0,001 |
|                        | Teacher   | 424 | 4,874 | 0,805 |        |       |
|                        | Parent    | 389 | 4,715 | 0,762 |        |       |
|                        | Total     | 976 | 4,825 | 0,770 |        |       |
| Stimulation            | Principal | 163 | 4,151 | 0,960 | 8,041  | 0,000 |
|                        | Teacher   | 424 | 4,004 | 0,902 |        |       |
|                        | Parent    | 389 | 3,825 | 0,947 |        |       |
|                        | Total     | 976 | 3,957 | 0,937 |        |       |
| Tradition              | Principal | 163 | 5,014 | 0,667 | 29,801 | 0,000 |
|                        | Teacher   | 424 | 4,959 | 0,742 |        |       |
|                        | Parent    | 389 | 4,589 | 0,832 |        |       |
|                        | Total     | 976 | 4,821 | 0,790 |        |       |
| Universalism-concern   | Principal | 163 | 4,763 | 0,606 | 6,276  | 0,002 |
|                        | Teacher   | 424 | 4,789 | 0,719 |        |       |
|                        | Parent    | 389 | 4,617 | 0,761 |        |       |
|                        | Total     | 976 | 4,716 | 0,723 |        |       |
| Universalism-nature    | Principal | 163 | 4,667 | 0,801 | 17,520 | 0,000 |
|                        | Teacher   | 424 | 4,705 | 0,790 |        |       |
|                        | Parent    | 389 | 4,382 | 0,836 |        |       |
|                        | Total     | 976 | 4,570 | 0,824 |        |       |
| Universalism-tolerance | Principal | 163 | 4,933 | 0,612 | 13,468 | 0,000 |
|                        | Teacher   | 424 | 4,794 | 0,674 |        |       |
|                        | Parent    | 389 | 4,619 | 0,744 |        |       |
|                        | Total     | 976 | 4,747 | 0,702 |        |       |