

HUMANISTIC VALUE ORIENTATIONS OF STUDENT IDENTITY AND THE PARADOX OF SELF-ACTUALIZATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

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Abstract: This article provides a comprehensive examination of the avenues for cultivating humanistic values in higher education institutions. The primary objective of the study was to identify the psychological characteristics and developmental patterns of the emergence of humanistic values among Azerbaijani students. To this end, an empirical study was conducted among a total of 120 students at Azerbaijan State Pedagogical University. The obtained results show that a high level of altruism is not always directly related to a high level of humanistic thinking. However, it is possible to activate latent potential through the strengthening of socially accepted motivations and to utilize it for the development of humanistic values. Based on the research findings, regardless of students' levels of self-assessment and self-affirmation, their overall attitude toward humanistic values remains high. The formative influence in the development of these values is attributed to the influential characteristics of social values, which hold a leading position in a professional self-affirmation and value system that reflects the holistic qualities of the personality. It was also determined that there is

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a positive correlation between humanistic qualities, personality traits, and academic achievements. Although this correlation is weak in some cases, it is statistically significant.

Keywords: higher education institutions, humanistic values, students, educational orientations, perspectives

Introduction

The socio-political, socio-economic, and cultural processes occurring in the context of modern globalization, particularly intercultural integration, have a significant impact on young people's value systems, self-perception, and social relationships. As a result of this influence, a new value system is formed, which reflects both positive and negative elements. It should be noted that negative values can weaken humanistic approaches, influencing not only students' views but also their motivational sphere and behavioral patterns (Jabbarov et al, 2024). This, in turn, creates certain contradictions in the national self-awareness of young people. As a country with multicultural and tolerant traditions, Azerbaijan is in an exemplary position from a humanist perspective. However, to preserve and develop these values, it is crucial to protect students from foreign influences and to strengthen humanist thinking. On the other hand, the increased focus on the spiritual and psychological characteristics of the individual in the modern era, the changing attitude toward humanity, and the influence of globalization make the formation of humanist values one of the priority areas. The main trends observed in global integration processes are also based on a humanistic approach, and this approach is clearly manifested in the field of education. In this regard, the formation of a personality with humanistic values is considered one of the main goals of modern education. Changes in the world, especially the increase in the flow of information, can make it difficult for young people to correctly analyze this data and assimilate it within the national context (Jabbarov, 2021; Jabbarov, 2018).



For this reason, it is necessary to expand educational activities, conduct psychological research, and strengthen family-school cooperation. The formation of humanistic behavior in young people should begin at an early age and be continued systematically. Humanist values are generally closely linked to the problems that arise in the process of human development and require the formation of a behavioral culture in accordance with the socio-economic and cultural characteristics of each era. In this context, one of the main tasks facing higher education institutions is to cultivate young people who can think independently, possess a high level of cultural awareness, and have a sense of social responsibility. Young people with such qualities are shaped into useful, morally rich, and mature individuals for society. The main purpose of this article is precisely to examine the characteristics of the formation of humanistic values in this regard.

Methodology

In this study, the methods of observation, interview, questionnaire, and psychological testing were used. The research applied M. Rokich's "Value Orientation" questionnaire, S. Schwartz's value system methodology, as well as the "Self-Assessment" and E. Shostrom's SAT methodologies. In addition, supplementary survey questions were used to determine the influence of mass media and the self-awareness process on the formation of humanistic values. The research was conducted among students at Odlar Yurdu University and the Azerbaijan State Pedagogical University. Participants were selected from both higher education institutions, with a total of participants. The obtained results were analyzed both qualitatively and quantitatively.

Literature review

The formation of students' humanistic values in higher education institutions is considered one of the most fundamental issues in modern pedagogy and psychology. The theoretical foundations



of this process stem directly from humanistic psychology and its proposed methodological concepts. Humanistic values serve as both an indicator of personal development and a common moral heritage of humanity. In this context, Maslow (2018) expresses the concept of values with a very interesting analogy, likening them to “a great chest in which are stored various, often not fully clarified, meanings.” Although the multifaceted research conducted to date retains certain controversial points regarding the nature of values and their relationship with society, it is undeniable that the content of each value, in addition to individual characteristics, is also shaped by the perspective of the ethnicity and culture to which it belongs.

In modern times, the application of constructivist, cognitive, and gestalt approaches is particularly recommended for the systematic formation of these values in higher education institutions. As researchers note (Chen & Carsten, 2017), creating cognitive dissonance, using contextual teaching methods, and original assessment systems are the main driving forces for integrating humanistic elements into education. These approaches aim not only to transmit knowledge but also to instill values such as dignity, autonomy, freedom, integrity, and well-being within the learners’ inner world. The ultimate goal of education, as emphasized by Nemiroff (1992), is to cultivate “self-actualized” individuals in the truest sense of the term. Scholars such as Aloni (2011) and Veugelers (2011) believe that students should enjoy making decisions about their own lives, and teachers should deeply believe in students’ freedom of choice.

Creating a humane educational environment also directly impacts students’ academic achievement and their motivation to learn. Scott (1980) proves that in such an environment, students have a more positive attitude toward classes, spend more time on assignments, and, most importantly, genuinely enjoy the learning process. However, research by PariNaz, PourAli, et al. (2017) shows that in practice, the four main components of education—the environment, the teacher’s role, the student’s role, and assessment methods—are still not at the desired level, indicating that the humanistic approach is not being used to its full potential. To fill this gap, it is necessary to use methods for activating emotions in education. The identification of values, especially humanistic ones, allows us to unlock



the psychological mechanism of assessment and understand the nature of the socio-psychological environment. Jabbarov (2018) rightly emphasizes that values are fundamental concepts that guide a person's life path and strategy. They determine priorities in the perception of reality and influence the general way of life of society (Jabbarov, 2018; Jabbarov and Ibragimova, 2013). In higher education, the formation of these values entails the development of qualities such as goodness, compassion, justice, tolerance, and multiculturalism.

All the world's thinkers have always called on young people to strive for truth and justice, reminding them of the principle, as stated in Azerbaijani folklore (2005), "you reap what you sow."

In proposed models for the development of humanistic values in education (William, 2015), the unity of methods such as critical thinking, practical skills, and support groups optimizes the formation of professional identity. Although technological progress and industrialization sometimes overshadow humanist traditions, modern "student-centered" educational approaches create conditions for the revival of these values (Vakil, 2021). The humanization of the system also requires a combination of ethical leadership and responsibility, which ensures harmony in both professional and personal life (Baumeister, 1991). In conclusion, schools and universities should not aim for academic success alone, but must create an environment where transparency, truth, and humane communication prevail (Effendi et al., 2020). Only then can the humanization of education bear its true fruit.

Results

In the first phase of the research conducted to examine the psychological characteristics of the formation of humanist values among young people in Azerbaijan, an assessment of the value domain was carried out. The primary objective of this phase was to identify the dominant humanist tendencies in the students' personalities and to determine their place within their individual psychological structure.



Table.1. Indicators of terminal and instrumental values (expressed as a percentage, n=120 before and after the experiment)

Terminal values	Before (%)	After (%)	Rank Dynamics	Instrumental values	Before (%)	After (%)	Rank dynamics
Active life	35	52	+8 ↑	Orderliness	60	40	-5
Wisdom	38	24	+1	Politeness	65	80	-1
Health	70	85	-1	High demands	52	18	+1
Interesting work	45	27	-2	Cheerfulness	54	62	+8 ↑
Beauty of nature and art	68	12	-14 ↓	Efficiency	50	5	-3
Love	53	42	-3	Independence	56	11	-9 ↓
Financial security	51	57	+2	Intolerance of shortcomings	59	37	+9 ↑
Reliable friends	55	75	+2	Education	63	86	+1 ↑
Social recognition	44	81	+8 ↑	Responsibility	61	70	0
Inner harmony	48	31	-2	Rationalism	55	34	+2
Productive life	33	48	+8 ↑	Self-control	62	78	+2 ↑
Development	57	92	+4 ↑	Courage	57	47	+4
Entertainment	41	9	-4 ↓	Strong will	58	7	-9
Freedom	30	6	-1	Tolerance	56	14	-9
Happy family life	69	37	-7	Broad-mindedness	58	30	-2
Happiness of others	28	14	+3	Honesty	57	26	-2
Creativity	42	22	-2	Effectiveness	49	53	+10 ↑
Self-confidence	58	63	-1	Sensitivity	47	16	+3

As can be seen from Table 1, the highest increase in the terminal values group was in ‘Development’ (from 57% to 92%, +4 ranks), ‘Social recognition’ (from 44% to 81%, +8 ranks) and ‘Active life’ (from 35% to 52%, +8 ranks). This result indicates that, following the experimental intervention, students’ desire for social recognition and self-development has significantly strengthened. At the same time, the sharp decline in the ‘Beauty of nature and art’ value (from 68% to 12%, -14 ranks) is noteworthy; this suggests that students are shifting from an aesthetic-emotional orientation towards practical-social values. The decline in the values of ‘Freedom’ (from 30% to 6%) and ‘Entertainment’ (from 41% to 9%, -4 ranks) also aligns with this trend.



Within the instrumental values group, ‘Effectiveness’ (from 49% to 53%, +10 ranks) and ‘Cheerfulness’ (from 54% to 62%, +8 ranks) showed the most significant positive dynamics. The ‘Education’ value, meanwhile, remained high, rising from 63% to 86% (+1 rank), which indicates a strengthening of academic motivation. Conversely, a sharp decrease is notable in the values of ‘Independence’ (from 56% to 11%, a drop of 9 ranks), ‘Strong will’ (from 58% to 7%), and ‘Tolerance’ (from 56% to 14%). Taken together, these results indicate that the experimental intervention strengthened students’ socially-oriented, collectivist values, while instrumental values related to individual will and independent behaviour were relegated to the background. The overall picture from Table 1 confirms that the students’ value system took on a more humanist-social orientation after the experimental process.

Table.2. Indicators of the correlative relationship between humanistic values and personality traits in students

	Humanistic values				
	Self- awareness	Cognitive needs	Self-esteem	Self- affirmation	Academic achievements
Friendship	0,32**	0,35 **	0,20*	0,32**	0,22*
Love	0,89**	-0,37**	-0,76**	-0,26**	0,66**
Empathy	0,38**	-0,23*	0,98**	-0,43**	0,54**
Altruism	0, 58**	0,21*	0,42**	0,56**	0,27**
Moral values	0,44**	0,46**	0,78**	0,69**	0,19*
Social ideals	0,186*	0,232*	0,49**	0, 96**	0,72**

Note:** significant at the 0.01 level, * significant at the 0.05 level

The correlation analysis conducted (see Table 2) reveals the existence of complex relationships among students’ humanistic value system, personality qualities, and academic achievements. The statistical profile of the study indicates that positive correlations predominantly prevail between humanistic qualities and personality traits. In particular, the value of social ideals with self-assertion



($r=0.96$, $p<0.01$) and self-esteem ($r=0.49$, $p<0.01$) demonstrate that the extent to which an individual internalises social ideals directly influences their sense of self-confidence.

Based on the results of the research, the process of forming humanistic thinking and values in young people can be divided into three fundamental stages:

- Stage I (Cognitive assimilation): The young people's understanding and perception of humanist qualities, and the elimination of psychological factors that hinder this process. In this stage, it is important to reinforce correct perceptions of humanist values to prevent potential distortions during the assimilation process.
- Stage II (Experiential Application): The application of the consolidated concepts in various situations. Here, students' attitudes towards the values are assessed through experimental and reflective tasks.
- Stage III (Self-actualisation): An investigation into the degree to which assimilated values are integrated into the personality's moral development and self-education.

One of the study's notable findings is that not every individual who exhibits highly altruistic behaviour necessarily possesses a strong humanist thought system. This indicates that humanism is an internal disposition and that its development requires the activation of socially valued motives and inherent potential. At the same time, the correlation matrix confirms that the development of humanist values is intertwined with cognitive demands, opportunities for self-affirmation, and academic achievements.

The creation of a moral ideal is of particular importance for the formation of these values within the Azerbaijani ethno-cultural environment. The life paths of national heroes and the activities of state figures, based on our ethnopsychological heritage, serve as a model of humane behaviour for students.

Consequently, the application of humanist principles alongside pragmatic objectives is essential in the modern education system (Waddock, 2016; Melé, 2016). It is not effective to limit



the humanist approach to only certain areas of the educational process; Conversely, it is possible to strengthen pupils' self-confidence and healthy social relationships through teamwork and project-based learning methods. The synthesis of humanist and pragmatic approaches by teachers serves both to organise an effective teaching process and to create a morally sound social environment.

Discussion and Conclusion

Based on the data obtained through our research, the development of a certain humanistic mindset in students is directly proportional to the development of humanistic values. Thus, to develop humanistic values in a student, it is necessary to foster empathy and compassion toward others. One interesting aspect is that not all individuals with high altruistic behavior possess a strong humanistic mindset. It is possible to strengthen social motivations for the development of humanistic thinking, activate the hidden internal potential in a person, and direct it toward the development of this way of thinking. Our research showed that students' positive attitude toward humanistic values does not depend on how they evaluate themselves or the extent of their self-affirmation. We conclude that humanism exists in students as an internal inclination. When we look at what influences the development of humanistic values, the basis is the individual's general character traits, self-awareness, and the importance they place on social values. It should also be added that there is a positive correlation between personal characteristics, moral qualities, and academic achievement.

Although this connection may not always be clearly visible, it is statistically significant. In addition, a correlation has been observed between the student's process of self-awareness, self-esteem, and self-affirmation, and the humanist social ideas they adopt. Similar, but weaker, relationships are observed for other personal qualities. All of this indicates that the role of theoretical knowledge alone is insufficient for the development of humanist values. During the process, cognitive needs, self-affirmation, and academic achievements should also be taken into account. Although our findings are similar to those of other studies, they also differ in certain respects. One of the main



distinctions of our article is that it demonstrates how humanist principles can be more effectively applied in a collaborative, project-based, and more agile learning environment. However, looking at the reality of today, the humanistic approach is rarely used in educational institutions, and education is more pragmatic in style. (Waddock, 2016; Dierksmeier, 2016; Melé, 2016). Some studies separate humanitarian and technical education, stating how humanist principles should be applied in technical education (Miller & Gregson, 1999). Nevertheless, during the course of instruction, the teacher uses humanistic methods without realizing it. This also shows that humanistic approaches and pragmatic goals can be applied together. The main reason for the limitations of humanist principles in education to certain areas is the specific perspectives involved. However, it should be noted that these principles are not contrary to the course of practical activity and can be effectively used by teachers in all areas of education. (Miller & Gregson, 1999). Many studies have shown that the humanistic approach increases students' motivation and orientation toward the lesson. It has even been shown that a great deal of time and resources can be saved. Finally, to properly develop humanistic values in students, teachers must apply diverse and contemporary approaches during lessons. The core of the process is to strengthen students' self-confidence, help them build healthy social relationships, and demonstrate the importance of moral values. The teacher must apply a combination of a pragmatic and a humanistic approach to ensure an effective lesson and create a healthy social environment.

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