HUMAN VALUES IN STUDENTS FROM A HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION

Israel Alberto Cisneros Concha Ph.D.

alberto.cisneros@correo.uady.mx

Professor of the Faculty of Education

Autonomous University of Yucatan, Mexico

Nora Verónica Druet Domínguez Ph.D.

ddoming@correo.uady.mx

Professor and Administrative Secretary of

Autonomous University of Yucatan, Mexico

Gladis Ivette Chan Chi Ph.D.

ivette.chan@correo.uady.mx

Professor of the Faculty of Education

Autonomous University of Yucatan, Mexico

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to identify the preference level of the human values that students from a higher education institution endorse during August 2016-June 2017 school year, based on the Portrait Value Questionnaire. For this purpose, the basic values of Benevolence, Universalism, Stimulation, Power, Security, Tradition, Hedonism, Self-Direction, Achievement, and Conformity were studied. The study was exploratory, following a nonexperimental cross-sectional design. The sample was composed of 321 students from a higher education institution in Mexico. 67.6% (217) of the students were female, whereas 32.4% (104) were male. Their ages ranged from 18 to 30 years old. The Portrait Value Questionnaire devised by Shalom Schwartz was administered to them. The most important findings revealed that the basic values of Hedonism, Benevolence, and Self-Direction were highly preferred by the students, whereas the basic value of Achievement scored a preference level below the average. These findings highlighted the importance of identifying the portrait values of university students, so higher education institutions can establish appropriate strategies and actions that foster the students' development in order to make them professionals with values.

Keywords: values, university students, higher education, professional training.

INTRODUCTION

The World Declaration on Education for All (UNESCO, 1990) emphasizes on giving an education that

meets the demands of the surroundings and needs of all children, youths, and adults that is suitable for their life. Besides this, in the Report of the International Commission for Education for the Twenty-First Century, one of the four pillars that the education throughout life should have is the one of learning to know which emphasizes on the individual who learns every day through his own knowledge, combining personal and exterior elements (UNESCO, 1996)

Barba and Alcántara (2003) underline that México, in its jurisdiction, proclaims that the institutions of higher education should include values and objectives deriving from the third article of the Mexican Constitution and the seventh one of the General Law of Education, which are also the foundations for the curriculum design. In addition, they also state that national organizations, like ANUIES (the National Association of Universities and Institutions of Higher Education), and international ones like UNESCO suggest adding to the curriculum human aspects in the professions, highlighting the morality of education.

Furthermore, the National Development Plan 2013-2018 emphasizes that every student should master the disciplines and values that characterize the different professions (Gobierno Federal, 2013) because the plans and syllabus must meet the twenty first century challenges which include developing life competencies in the people (p. 43).

Different Mexican universities emphasize in their Institutional Development Plans or on their Educational Models the need of training professionals with competencies that will be useful throughout their lives and that allows them to respond to the social needs of their milieu.

In this sense, the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM, 2016) establishes in its Institutional Development Plan of 2015-2019 that one of the main challenges of the university is the training of citizens with capabilities, expertise, and attitudes to enter successfully to the work force and contribute in the improvement of their country.

On the other hand, in the northern part of the country, the Universidad Autónoma de Nuevo León (UANL, 2016) developed their Institutional Development Plan 2012-2020 that consists of programs and activities that foster a responsibility towards the society. Through the fulfillment of the three main functions of the university (teaching, research and extension) and with the participation of every member of the its population, it becomes a priority to serve the society with quality in order to improve its human development and to minimize the negative impact of its activities in different social contexts.

By the same token, the Universidad Autónoma de Yucatán, in its Institutional Development Plan 2014-2022, indicates that education in this university shall follow a humanistic approach in the knowledge and values given to its students, so they can perform responsible actions in their community. In addition, this university emphasizes values such as equity, quality, social responsibility, academic rigor, legality, honesty, ethics, respect, modesty and tolerance, which are to be followed by its students, professors, university authorities, and assistant and administrative staff.

Moreover, Arango, Clavijo, Puerto and Sánchez (2014) conducted a research with a quantitative approach, in a non-experimental design, descriptive and correlational study, that had the purpose of determining the relationship between the academic training, empathy, values and socially responsible behaviors of students in the first, fifth, and tenth semesters of the different academic programs of the Luis Amigó University Foundation (by its Spanish acronym FUNLAM) in Colombia. The sample was 234

students of ten traditional programs of the FUNLAM. It was found among the results that the participants claim to be socially responsible in Self-Care, Ecology/Environment and Respect for shared spaces. In other words, the FUNLAM students assert more frequently that they tend to be conscious about their surroundings and shared spaces as well as being interested in their own processes of mental and physical health. Furthermore, it was also found that the university training influences the development of these behaviors because in the first semesters the students claim to be socially responsible but it is actually in the last semester (tenth semester) that their behaviours tend to be more related to Work Responsibility, Volunteering, Social Help, Citizenship and Ecology/Environment. According to the results of this research, the conclusion is that the academic training provides some sort of development and strengthening of socially responsible behaviors in the students that were part of the sample.

Similarly, Kepowics (2003) carried out a research project using a qualitative method in order to find the relationship between the explicit values in a university project and the values that students had by the end of their university studies. Students from three different degrees in two schools from the Universidad de Guanajuato were selected for the project. The first part of it involved an analysis of the ideas and values included in the mission of the university, and hence, in its iterations on the curricular projects and graduate profiles. During the second stage, the graduates' characteristics were inquired, finding that there was a total of 98 students (43 male and 55 female). After examining the graduate profiles from the three different degrees, it was found that values are not pressed enough in them.

The inclusion of values is not very accurate and when compared to the space and time allotted to the development of competencies and professional knowledge, it is rather limited. Having this in mind it is possible to state that the scope of the graduate profiles is not complete, if the mission of the university is to be considered. The participants of this study mentioned that this was the first time that they reflected upon these topics, and that it was rather difficult for them to answer some questions. In the same way, it was possible to assert that the values included in the curricular projects are reflected as students' dreams and ideals to some extent, making them an undeniably important element.

In the same way, the research conducted by Quijano and Lorenzo (2012) studied the perception of university undergraduates regarding their values. Quijano and Lorenzo did this through the administration of the Value Reaction Test (Test de Reacción Valorativa) from García adapted by Casares and Collado to a sample of 400 participants. Among the findings, their values scale was reported in the following order: moral, individual, ecological, affective, physical, intellectual, esthetic, instrumental, social, and lastly, religious. Also, differences based on gender were found because women preferred the esthetic, moral and religious values while men were more inclined to the instrumental ones.

Thus, it can be concluded that there is a need for schools to foster the development of humanistic values in order for students to feel encouraged to fulfill their own personal aspirations (Druet, 2008). This can be done through environments and spaces where they can advance their human potential according to the values that universities establish in their educational model and that can solve the problems that the society demands.

In this way, the training institution must heed a proper identification of students' beliefs, perceptions, and conceptions, so as to establish a bond with those that are part of their professions (Gómez, 2008).

Additionally, universities must take into account the development of professionals with the potential to face challenges of the modern world, gain technological and scientific knowledge, and to have values for their proper performance in society. Therefore, universities must join together professional competencies with personal characteristics for job success (Arana, 2006).

Hence, it is important to consider that professionals' values are based on a wide variety of experiences and knowledge that are developed through their time in school. Due to this, a competent development of values is required, for which purpose is fundamental to identify the portrait value of students undergoing university studies, making possible to set action strategies that allow them to take up the necessary values for their work as professionals.

OBJECTIVES

General Objective

Identify the preference level of the students' values of an institution of higher education during the school year August 2016 through June 2017, on the basis of the Portrait Values Questionnaire.

METHODOLOGY

A. Type of Study

An exploratory study, which consists in examining a topic or a research problem that has not been studied much or of which there are many questions or has not been studied before, was conducted. Therefore, this study provides information through the Portrait Values Questionnaire to have a broader understanding and knowledge of the portrait values that the university students endorse that can contribute to their professional training (Hernández, Fernández y Baptista, 2014).

B. Design

A non-experimental cross-sectional exploratory design was used. It was a non-experimental one because no variable was manipulated and the phenoma was observed in its natural context. At the same time, it is a cross-sectional exploratory design because the intention was to understand a variable at a specific moment, and generally speaking, this takes place in phenomena, situations, new or less addressed contexts by the different areas of study (Hernández, Fernández y Baptista, 2014). In this case, the contexts only reflect the level of preference of the values that students at a institution of higher education uphold while the research took place based on the Portrait Values Questionnaire.

C. Sample

The sample was composed by students of different semesters of the institution of higher education that were enrolled in the school year August 2016 through May 2017. There were a total of 321 students out of which 67.6% (217) were of feminine gender while 32.4% (104) were masculine. The age of the sample was in between the 18 to 30 years old range, while 20 years old was the average age.

INSTRUMENTS

D. *Portrait Values Questionnaire*

The fourth edition of Shalom Schwartz's Portrait Values Questionnaire (PVQ) was used for this study, as its purpose is to measure value orientations from people.

This instrument is composed of written descriptions of a given person's goals, wishes, and desires. Respondents are asked to answer the question 'how similar am I to this person?' using a six-point scale, whose options range from 'very much like me' to 'not like me at all' based on the level of importance that the respondent assigns to each value. (Linderman & Verkasalo, 2005).

The instrument is composed of 38 items that measure ten basic values which guide people's behavior: self-direction, conformity, tradition, security, power, achievement, hedonism, universalism, and benevolence.

Schwartz's definitions of the ten basic values are as follows: (García, Medina y Dutschke, 2010, pp. 42 - 43):

Self-direction: Independent thought and action – choosing, creating, exploring (creativity, independent, freedom).

Stimulation: excitement, novelty, and challenge in life (a varied life).

Hedonism: pleasure and sensuous gratification for oneself.

Achievement: personal success through demonstrating competence according to social standards.

Power: social status and prestige, control or dominance over people and resources.

Security: safety, harmony and stability of society, of relationships, and of self.

Conformity: restraint of actions, inclinations, and impulses likely to upset or harm others and violate social expectations or norms.

Tradition: respect, commitment and acceptance of the customs and ideas that traditional culture or religion provide.

Benevolence: preservation and enhancement of the welfare of people with whom one is in frequent personal contact (the 'in-group').

Universalism: understanding, appreciation, tolerance and protection for the welfare of all people and for nature.

With regards to this instrument's reliability, Druet, Escalante, Cisneros, and Guerrero (2017) established that Cronbach's alpha was .864. On the other hand, factor analysis was used as the validation technique to extract the factors from the scale, in order to obtain a value higher than KMO 0.9 (KMO = .864). In addition, the significance level for Bartlett's Test of Sphericity ($x2$ = 5346.127 / gl = 780, Sig. = .000) was lower than .05. Lastly, the first component of the unrotated factor matrix had a variance value of 17.909, saturating all items with a positive value higher than 0.3, which is appropriate.

II. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings after the administration of the Portrait Values Questionnaire (PVQ) to 321 students of a higher education institution in México are presented through the motivational domains considered in the

instrument Universalism, Self-Direction, Stimulation, Hedonism, Achievement, Power, Security, Conformity, Tradition, and Benevolence. This was achieved through the analysis of the descriptive statistics and the measures of central tendency.

Figure 1. Level of preference in the domains of the Portrait Values
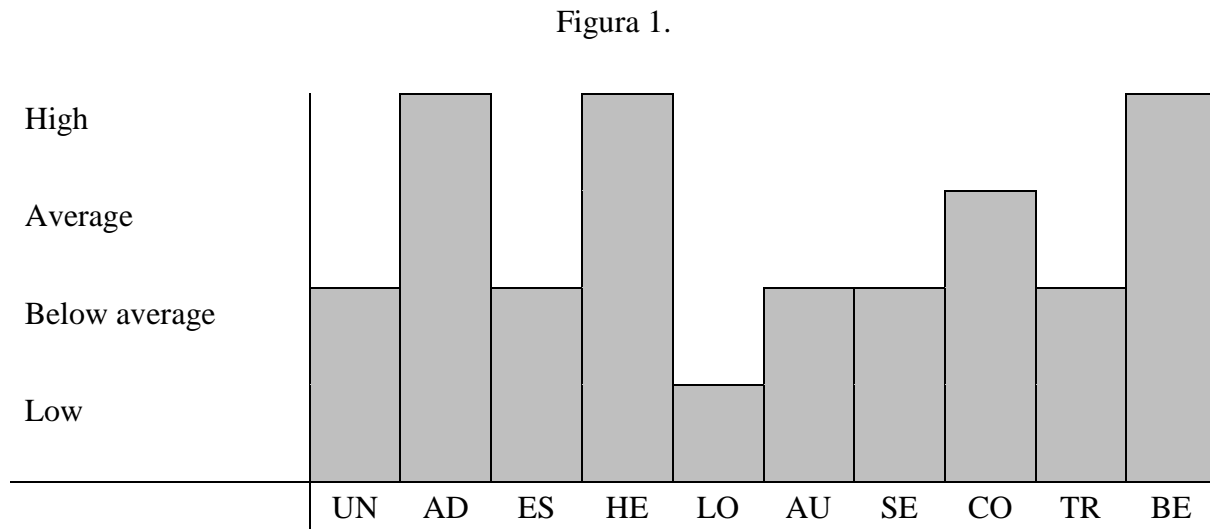
Figures and Tables

Figura 1.

Figure 1. This graph represents the level of preference in each domain after analyzing the findings of all the students who participated in the diagnostic. Meaning of abbreviations: UN= Universalism, AD= Self-direction, ES= Stimulation, HE= Hedonism, LO= Achievement, AU= Power, SE= Security, CO= Comformity TR= Tradition y BE= Benevolence.

As it can be seen in Figure 1, Self-Direction, Hedonism, and Benevolence are the domains in the high level of preference. Conformity is in the average level of preference. Universalism, Stimulation, Power, Security, and Tradition are below the average level of preference and Achievement is found in the low level of preference.

Based on this, it is considered that the students fulfill the high level domains. However, the other seven domains present an area of opportunity that seeks to match the coincidences with the values that the institution establishes as an important element for students to have as part of their academic training in their exit profile.

García, Medina and Dutschke (2010) state that the students considered as the most important values those that have to do with the development of their creativity, independence and freedom. They are interested in the well-being of people who are closed to them as well as being interested in activities related to pleasure and personal satisfaction. Moreover, these findings overlap with the research conducted by García (2010) because two of them are similar. The objective of the former research was to identify the Value System of the Undergraduate Students of the Faculty of the PUCP, since it was found that the prevailing domains in these students were Self-Determination, Benevolence and Universalism.

In this same line, identifying the motivational domains in university students allows the higher education institutions to establish strategies and mechanisms so that the students can get a congruent training in the necessary values for their professional training and those that the students deem to be a priority for them.

III. CONCLUSIONS

The findings of this research allowed the identification of the value preference of the students of a higher institution in an exploratory manner using the Portrait Values Questionnaire (PVQ) because it measures ten general motivational domains.

The findings show that only Hedonism, Self-Direction and Benevolence are in the high level of preference whereas Universalism, Stimulation, Power, Security and Tradition were in the below average category and the Achievement one in the low category of preference.

The findings reveal that even when the higher level institutions outline the importance of fostering values in students in their institutional development plans it is still necessary to include this training in the syllabus. In addition, spaces need to be opened and projects need to be developed that consider vivid strategies to be included in real educational environments that allow students to endorse values.

Even though students identify themselves with some values like Benevolence, it is important to mention that this value is only focused in the people close to them. However,the nature of professions demands that students should be benevolent to all people as well as to nature.

In addition, other research on identifying the portrait values could not be found in higher education that use a quantitative methodology that allows a first approach to this topic.

These findings give an opportunity to the institutions of higher education to identify the values that need to be reinforced according to the institutional mission and vision. This will allow the learning processes to contribute to the development of a more human professional with values.

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