The Impact of Secondary School Students' Perceived Parenting Values on School Choice

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Abstract

The target group of our quantitative research is comprised of secondary school students from Szeklerland (Romania). A multistage sampling was used: in the first stage students from all denominational schools were included, then students from the assigned non-denominational schools, while in the second stage we included students from the 9th and 11th grades (N=1927). A questionnaire was used as a data collection instrument. We were interested to find out which educational sector boasted most prominently the dimensions of autonomy and conformity values and whether they correlate with the decision-making process regarding the choice of school type.

Introduction

In addition to the value preferences of individuals, value system researchers are also interested in what these are rooted in, hence they focus on parenting values as well. Our questionnaire was only administered to students, so we could measure parents' value preferences only indirectly. In our questionnaire, through questions designed to elicit parenting values, we asked students to rate the values that their parents considered important when raising them. Thus, we could actually track students' perceptions, the way they see the educational values of their parents.

According to the theory of value change, the change in values has been accompanied by a shift in parenting principles. The predominance of values such as duty and conformity (respect, obedience, etc.) has been replaced by values of self-expression (autonomy, free will, etc.) (Bois-Reymond, 1994; Peukert, 2012). As a consequence, the parent-child relationship has become more intimate and more of a partnership. This has also occurred in the field of education, where the former teacher- and curriculum-centred educational approach has become child-centred. Just take into account the numerous education reform movements in the 20th century. It can therefore be said that children are equal partners of parents. Bois-Reymond (1998) discusses in his study that we are actually witnessing a dehierarchisation of educational relationships. However, most researchers agree (Bois-Reymond, 1994; Peukert 2012) that the modernisation of parenting principles occurs differently depending on the family. Their research results show that parenting principles can be associated with the socio-economic background of the family. Traditional values and parenting principles are most often found in families from lower socio-economic backgrounds (Hrabéczy et al., 2023).

Based on the above-mentioned literature, modern parenting principles are characterised by autonomy, i.e. education for autonomy and free will. In this milieu, children are encouraged to take action and make decisions, also developing a sense of responsibility. It is also a family milieu in which elements of a culture of negotiation can be discerned, where rational arguments and dialogue dominate everyday discourse and decision-making mechanisms (Pusztai, Bacskai & Morvai, 2021; Pusztai, Róbert & Fényes, 2022).

There are also families, of course, where another side of parenting is present, that of conformity, where the value dimensions of obedience and submission are more pronounced. In this case, the relationship between parents and children is characterised by limited individual freedom and space for action, which does not promote individual decision-making.

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Research design and Methods

The target group of our research is constituted by 9th and 11th grade students of denominational institutions with non-denominational schools of Szeklerland also examined (ISCED 3). We carried out our research in Szeklerland,[2] since this region includes the counties where the majority of the inhabitants are Hungarians, and it constitutes a territorial and social entity distinct from both the Partium[3] and the diaspora regions. In this area, school choice is made in an ethnically neutral environment. We applied a multi-stage cluster sampling to examine this.

At the first stage, all the denominational schools operating under the auspices of Hungarian historic churches in the three counties of Szeklerland (Harghita, Covasna and Mureș) were included in the sampling, and we fitted non-denominational schools to them. Thus, 14 schools were selected: seven (fully) denominational (2 Roman-Catholic, 4 Reformed and a Unitarian) and seven non-denominational schools. At the second stage of the sampling, the selection of the students was carried out within the schools. We conducted full questionnaire surveys among the 9th and 11th grade students. Out of the population of 2,157 there were 1,927 respondents, thus we managed to reach 89.33% of the target group.

According to our hypothesis, students educated according to autonomous values – a higher degree of freedom, autonomy, self-discipline, etc. – chose the non-denominational school; while students who were educated according to conform educational values – a higher degree of obedience, altruism, honesty, etc. – they chose the denominational school (Karikó, 2002; 2005; 2018). In addition to examining student values, school and parenting values are also scrutinized with Melvin Kohn's educational values test. We are interested in how the students take the information about parenting principles and goals. Kohn's educational values test was used in several church school researches (Pusztai, 2015), but it is also used by the World Values Study (WVS) and the European Values Survey (EVS).

Results

In the second phase of our analysis, after the analysis of students' value preferences, we conducted an analysis of what students thought of parents' principles regarding parenting values. Perceptions of parenting values were also measured on a five-point scale and the Kohn value test, also used in international measurements, was applied. Our questionnaire contained 17 items. Table 1 below presents the means, rankings and inter-sectoral variations of the values.

Students perceive that the values listed are all or mostly important to the upbringing given them by their parents. At the top of the ranking are the values of autonomy and belonging to the community, while at the bottom are the values of religiosity and leadership. This is somewhat in line with the value preferences of the students, where we also found religiosity and power values at the bottom of the ranking. The biggest difference has been found in case of the originality/imagination value, as it ranks eighth among students' values and fifteenth among parenting values. Furthermore, there seems to be a large discrepancy between the values of autonomy (autonomous) and obedience (conforming) in parenting values, the former ranking fourth and the latter ranking thirteenth.

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[2] Szeklerland is a historical and cultural region located in the eastern part of Transylvania, which is in present-day Romania. It is primarily inhabited by the Székely people, who are a subgroup of the Hungarian population. The Székelys have a distinct cultural identity, and their region has a rich history. The Székelys are a Hungarian-speaking ethnic group. Székelyföld is situated in the eastern part of Transylvania, encompassing several counties, including Harghita, Covasna, and parts of Mureș.

[3] The name „Partium" is derived from the Latin word „partes", meaning „parts" or „divisions". The region was historically known for its geopolitical fragmentation and has been subject to shifting borders and political control. Partium has been inhabited by various ethnic groups, including Hungarians, Romanians and others. Historically, Partium was part of the Kingdom of Hungary, and it played an important role in the country's political and economic life. The Hungarian culture and language have a significant presence in the region.

Table 1. Differences in the importance of parenting values for non-denominational and denominational secondary school students (N=1912; mean)[4]

	total	non-denominational		denominational		ANOVA
	average	ranking	average	ranking	average	
Honesty	4.54	1.	4.54	1.	4.52	NS
good behaviour	4.46	3.	4.46	2.	4.44	NS
sense of responsibility	4.45	2.	4.48	3.	4.4	*
Autonomy	4.41	4.	4.44	4.	4.34	**
Courtesy	4.36	5.	4.37	5.	4.34	NS
respect for others/ tolerance	4.31	6.	4.31	6.	4.31	NS
self-discipline	4.23	7.	4.26	8.	4.18	*
loyalty/loyalty	4.21	8.	4.2	7.	4.24	NS
determination/ perseverance	4.11	9.	4.12	9.	4.1	NS
Patience	4.03	10.	4.04	10.	4.02	NS
hard work	3.93	11.	3.97	13.	3.87	*
Frugality	3.93	12.	3.91	11.	3.95	NS
Obedience	3.85	13.	3.83	12.	3.89	NS
Altruism	3.83	14.	3.82	14.	3.85	NS
imagination/fantasy	3.68	15.	3.73	16.	3.59	**
religious faith	3.47	17.	3.33	15.	3.72	***
leadership skills	3.46	16.	3.49	17.	3.41	NS

(Source: SIC-CSC 2018; author's own editing.)
Analysis of variance.
The significance level of the correlation is: NS = not significant; *$p \leq 0.05$; **$p \leq 0.01$; ***$p \leq 0.001$.

In a cross-sector comparison, significant differences were found for six values. Among pupils from non-denominational schools, significantly higher proportions of the values of education for independent living were found, such as autonomy (M=4.44; SD=0.71; p=0.003), sense of responsibility (M=4.48; SD=0.68; p=0.026), and self-discipline (M=4.26; SD=0.79; p=0.044) and also imagination (M=3.73; SD=1.01; p=0.005), which is a classic intellectual value. The value of originality/imagination was also significantly high among non-denominational students' value preferences, which is also present among educational values as well. The value of hard work, characteristic of the Protestant work ethic, is also significantly higher among non-denominational students (M=3.97; SD=0.90; p=0.023). In case of students who chose denominational schools, the value of religious education appears in significantly higher proportions (M=3.72; SD=1.17; p=0.000), which was already found when analysing student value preferences.

Factor analysis was used to create factors from the parenting values. Three factors could be created. The first factor comprises eight variables, which we call *autonomous* parenting values. This includes value preferences such as autonomy, leadership, decisiveness, sense of responsibility, imagination, etc., which could be well described by the adjective purposeful creative, but the first three values are typical autonomous educational values.

Our second factor is made up of six variables, which we have called *conformist* because of obedience, loyalty and altruism, but other values such as religious faith, honesty and thrift can also be associated with it. Bocsi (2017) refers to the group of similar values as religious loyalty, which may fit our category, but we believe that conformist values draw a sharper distinction with autonomous values. The third factor, which includes the least number of values, is called *social cooperation* values, which we have named based on Pusztai's (2015) study.

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[4] Question 31: *On a scale of one to five, please rate how important you think it is for your parents to teach you the following traits.* 1 – not at all important; … 5 – very important

Table 2. Value dimensions formed by the importance of educational values

	autonomous	**conformist**	**social cooperation**
determination/perseverance	0,570		
Autonomy	0,554		
leadership skills	0,536		
imagination/fantasy	0,529		
self-discipline	0,452		
sense of responsibility	0,444		
Patience	0,419		
hard work	0,408		
Obedience		0,674	
Altruism		0,576	
Loyalty		0,518	
religious faith		0,506	
Honesty		0,468	
Frugality		0,366	
Courtesy			0,732
good behaviour			0,689
respect for others/ tolerance			0,397

(Source: SIC-CSC 2018; author's own editing.)
Factor analysis. Extraction Method: Maximum Likelihood, Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.
Total Variance Explained: 48,67%, KMO=0,903.

Next, we compared the three factors derived from parenting values with explanatory variables such as school type, type of residence, socio-economic background and religiosity of parents, and we were interested in the ways these variables affect the three distinct sets of values. Based on the literature we read and the value groups of the pupils, we would expect the autonomous value factor to be higher among parents of higher social status, which would also imply the settlement type (Pusztai & Fényes, 2022).

The results show that the parents of students who chose the non-denominational sector/school type prefer values and socialize their children according to the values and principles of autonomous education. We can also conclude that students in the non-denominational sector make more autonomous, conscious and rational choices. This confirms the findings discussed in the previous chapter that students in the non-denominational sector make significantly higher rates of autonomous decisions about the type of school they attend. Parents of students who chose the denominational sector prefer values constituted along the lines of conformist parenting principles, where obedience, honesty, religious faith, thrift, etc. are considered attractive. We have seen earlier that religious and conservative values were significantly higher among students in the denominational sector, which is also consistent with the parents' educational principles. Moreover, the choice of school is also guided by these educational values and principles (Hrabéczy et al., 2023).

Table 3. Distribution of social background variables across different parenting value groups
(N=1912; mean, scores from 0 to 100)

		autonomous	conformist	social cooperation
sector	denominational	61.55	**69.48***	75.67
	non-denominational	**63.79***	67.20	76.60
type of settlement	rural	61.34	**69.63***	76.14
	urban	**64.56***	66.48	76.37
father's occupational status	low	60.81	**69.91***	74.99
	medium	62.41	**68.51***	76.60
	high	**64.08***	67.04	75.92
mother's occupational status	low	59.89	**70.30***	76.29
	medium	62.17	**68.96***	76.42
	high	**64.44***	66.72	76.19
father's educational level	primary	61.51	**70.69***	**77.21***
	secondary	62.40	67.92	76.35
	tertiary	**64.93***	65.96	75.32
mother's education	primary	60.52	**70.72***	76.90
	secondary	62.65	**68.21***	76.57
	tertiary	**64.33***	66.70	75.67
subjective well-being	do not live better	62.19	**68.60***	75.93
	live better	**64.20***	67.15	76.78
objective well-being	below average	61.54	68.59	75.90
	above average	**63.93***	67.67	76.50
father's religiosity	non-religious	63.69	62.38	74.75
	religious	62.60	**70.73***	**76.94***
mother's religiosity	non-religious	63.71	61.99	73.76
	religious	62.83	**69.22***	**76.71***

(Source: SIC-CSC 2018; author's own editing.)
Analysis of variance.
The significance level of the correlation is: *$p \leq 0.05$; **$p \leq 0.01$; ***$p \leq 0.001$.

In terms of gender differences, we have found that all values, except hard work and leadership, were significantly higher among the parenting values of girls' parents. The literature also shows that as opposed to men, both mothers and female educators consider the above mentioned educational values more important to develop in children, with the exception of hard work and leadership (Morvai, 2015; Bocsi, 2015), which belong to the classic masculine manifestation dimension. We have also found a significant difference by settlement, with urban parents considering autonomous parenting principles as more important, while rural parents consider conformist parenting values as more important. This result also reflects the traditional, conservative, religious milieu of Szekler villages, in contrast to the more liberal educational principles of urban areas (Fejes, 2018).

Similar distribution can be found when comparing the socio-economic indicators of parents with parenting value groups. Autonomous parenting values were found among less religious parents with a high occupational status, higher/tertiary education and better financial situation. Conformist parenting values were detected among religious parents with medium and low occupational status, primary and secondary education and below average financial situation. Conformist values include religious belief, so it is not surprising that religiosity is associated with these values. It is also associated with values such as obedience, selflessness, loyalty and honesty, which, according to the literature, are also traditional Christian values (Szabados, 1995; Csók & Pusztai, 2022).

Scores for social cooperation values do not indicate a significant difference between sectors or in case of other explanatory variables. Only for religiosity could we find a significant difference and data also show that values of politeness, good behaviour and tolerance are also higher among religious parents. The values of parenting as perceived by the students are thus mainly grouped around two sets of values, autonomous and conformist, the development of which is also strongly influenced by the demographic and socio-economic

background of the parents. Therefore, it can also be concluded that the family of the student plays a strong role in choosing the type of school (Csók & Pusztai, 2022; Pusztai & Fényes, 2022).

As a next step, we set out to compare the value factors derived from the students' value preferences with the factors of the parenting value system as perceived by students and to explore the possible correlations between the two value systems. The closeness and direction of the linear relationship between the two value systems were tested by bivariate correlation analyses. We are aware of the fact that we are not investigating a causal relationship here, so we cannot draw definitive conclusions from the effect of one variable on the other, but the results obtained are nevertheless well interpretable.

Table 4. Correlations between parenting values and students' values (N=1912; Pearson's correlation coefficient)

	autonomous	conformist	social cooperation
self-actualisation/self-expression	**0.304***	0.283***	0.237***
Religious	−0.062***	**0.425***	0.082***
traditional/communal	0.129***	**0.252***	0.125***
new materialistic self-actualisation	**0.289***	−0.062***	0.024

(Source: SIC-CSC 2018; author's own editing.)
Bivariate Correlation (Pearson's correlation coefficients)
The significance level of the correlation is: *$p \leq 0.05$; **$p \leq 0.01$; ***$p \leq 0.001$.

The student value of self-actualisation/self-expression shows a positive relationship with all three of the parenting values. but the strongest relationship can be detected with autonomous parenting values. Both factors carry characteristics of the individual. the private sphere. In both cases. we find a high value placed on originality. imagination and the shaping of an autonomous. varied life. which are typical postmodern values. The religious group of values includes the values of religion and faith in God. a factor which has a weak negative relationship with autonomous values. but a positive and strong relationship with conformist values. It has been previously shown that religious belief can be included among the conformist values, so the two value domains have an obviously high correlation.

The traditional/communal learning values also show the strongest relationship with the conformist values. which is also understandable. as both values belong to the sphere of Christian-conservative values. The last factor – new materialistic self-actualisation – similarly to the self-actualisation factor. shows a correlation with the autonomous parenting value system; however. it shows a negative relation with the conformist value system. while it is not even significant with the social cooperation value group. The new materialistic self-actualisation value group includes the values of material goods. power and social order. which fit well with the values of leadership. determination and hard work. Thus, results have shown that there is a correlation between students' and parents' value sets.

Conclusions

We started from the premise that parents' consensus decision making together with their child manifests itself along different educational goals – autonomy (autonomy. self-actualisation. free will. freedom. etc.) and conformity (obedience. respect. discipline. etc.) (Schütze, 2002; Wild & Lorenz, 2010; Nave-Herz, 2012). On this basis. it was assumed that students educated according to autonomous values – higher levels of freedom. autonomy. self-actualisation. etc. – would choose non-denominational schools; whereas students educated according to conformist values – higher levels of obedience. discipline. respect. etc. – would choose denominational schools. The analysis revealed that students choosing the denominational sector prefer values constituted along conformist educational principles. while students opting for non-denominational schools prefer autonomous educational values. At the same time. the two sets of values – pupils' and parents' – were also examined using correlation analysis. where the strongest correlations were found between religious and conformist and traditional and conformist values. The correlation between students' and parents' parenting values suggests that the family is the main agent of socialisation.

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