

Youth Values: Analysis Outcomes of Latvia Secondary School Students' Essays

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Abstract

Youth's awareness of values and critical judgemental attitude to them is an essential sustainable guarantee for society's development.

According to the outcomes obtained within the State Research Programme "Latvian Language" (No VPP-IZM-2018/2-0002) the judgement can be made about what the real situation is.

The goal of the research is to analyse 409 argumentative type texts, created independently by Class 12 students (17-19 year-old youth) of Latvia regional gymnasiums, secondary schools with Latvian language of instruction and minority secondary schools.

Carrying out the content analysis of the essays as needed and the criteria based on the theory of values, a judgment can be made about the youth's awareness and attitude towards such values as culture and education, social security, internal freedom, tolerance for diversity in the society.

The research data allow to conclude that youth's awareness of values is essentially affected by global processes, economic and social changes in the society, informative environment and development of technologies. Freedom for the personality, the need for self-assurance in the society, security in the microenvironment and macroenvironment, also education as the quality of life provider are most appreciated by the youth.

Keywords: individual freedom; education; diversity in society; social security; self-assurance.

Introduction

Living in a society of globalization and dynamic changes, the issues of through generations inherited individual, social and cultural values preservation and forwarding, as well as formation of critically evaluative attitude towards them, are becoming more and more topical. Provision of value education is one of the most important tasks of the modern comprehensive school. Every individual and society's understanding of values is the basis of quality of life of the society's sustainability and every individual.

Topicality of the research emerges from the State Research Programme's "Latvian Language" (No VPP- IZM-2018/2-0002) strategic goal to develop human capital, also give a contribution to the education and language acquisition field and strengthen the role and functions of the state language.

The goal of the research is to study pupils' essays of gymnasiums, secondary schools with Latvian language of instruction and minority secondary schools of three Latvia Regions (Riga, Kurzeme and Latgale) and analyse the young people's attitude towards the surrounding world and their values orientation in them.

Methods

The research methodology is based on the theory of A.Maslov's hierarchy of needs (Maslow, 1943), S. Schwartz's model of values (Schwartz, 1992; Schwarch, Luycx, Vignoles, 2011), linguistics and linguodidactics theories (Laiveniece, 2010; Anspoka, Tūbele, 2015; Rozenbergs, 1995; Nītiņa, 2014; Ralph, Steve, 2019).

In the empiric research the content analysis of Class 12 secondary school students' essays in schoolyear 2018/2019 has been carried out according to the previously developed criteria based on theories. During the analysis, particular language units have been chosen in 409 essays, for instance, words, word collocations, sentences, in which the secondary school students' chosen values in compliance with the rating of values offered by Sh. Schwartz can be seen (Schwartz, 1992). The balanced text body of the modern Latvian language has been used for that, in which the texts of the above-mentioned secondary school students' essays have been digitalized.

For a higher data reliability provision the regional dispersal, differences among secondary educational institutions in terms of curriculum and social status have been taken into account (the pupils' essays from gymnasiums, secondary schools with the Latvian language of instruction and minority secondary schools of Riga, Kurzeme and Latgale Regions have been chosen), also the content analysis included in the original texts in a broader context, if the units found in the language text body do not reflect precisely the relation of statements to the research issue.

In the data analysis obtained during the research, the descriptive statistics methods and graphical methods have been applied. The obtained data are rated and expressed as a

percentage depending on the number of the obtained data and interpreted in order to identify correlation among the statements in compliance with the set research issue, what the young people's worldview and attitude to different values are like.

Results and Discussion

The base of the society's existence is successful communication and mutual collaboration. Society's sustainability is determined by what we as a society in general and each individual separately want to achieve, create, develop and protect.

The language, in which the thought is materialized, is one of the means according to whose application one can judge what the person's level of thinking, level of knowledge, social environment, in which they live, attitude towards oneself and the society in general are (Ralph, Steve, 2019; Laiveniece, 2010; Nītiņa, 2014).

An essay, as an independently created text, is one of the research resources, according to whose content and its way of presentation one can judge not only the textual skills, but also their value orientation, subjective attitude to particular situations, their assessment (Laiveniece, 2010; Nītiņa, 2014; Ralph, Steve, 2019).

In the independently created 17-18-year-old youth's texts the applied expressions enable us to see the writers' understanding about the chosen topic, also what their individual purpose of life is, personality's sociopsychological maturity, understanding about the social processes and experience acquired in the educational institution.

Taking the term "value" as the base for a set of positive qualities that determine something important, significant, useful, ideal to a certain extent, which can be achieved in a purposeful action, one can talk about individual values, social values and cultural values (Schwartz, 1992).

Doubtlessly, all above mentioned values are mutually related and they supplement each other. Every individual has their own system of values that consists of both their individual and in the society approved or social values and cultural values. The individual's values emerge from the social environment, in which they live, their age, gender, lifestyle, attitude towards oneself and the surrounding environment (Schwarch, 1992; Schwarch, Luyex, Vignoles, 2011).

The individual's values are closely related to their needs. In compliance with A. Maslow's model of needs (Maslow, 1943), awareness of own goals, education, freedom of thoughts and action, independence, creativity, awareness of national and world culture and religious values are closely related to the need for self-realization. The social status in the society, recognition, success, welfare emerge from the need of social recognition. Whereas, the family as a value, friendship, love, cooperation, understanding of diversity of life, tolerance for diversity, social

justice, harmony and stability, peace in the world, nature as a value emerge from the need for security in both the microenvironment and macroenvironment.

Young people's selection of values emerges from the socioeconomic situation, the skill to weigh own values against the possibilities of social and cultural acquisition. If both the physical and emotional and social needs are satisfied, the person feels contentment, satisfaction and life fulfilment. If it is not there, the risk of emotional and social problems increases (dissatisfaction with oneself, with the surrounding people's attitude, behaviour, oversensitivity, inadequate emotional expressions emerge, etc.) as the risk of addiction.

Every young person's attitude to values is closely related to the social environment they are identified with. They reveal the youth's experience and interests in the particular cultural space. Such values of the modern youth as the family, friends, health, status in the society and love are related to the need for emotional and social security (Austruma, 2012).

In 409 respondents' essays the term "value", meaning a set of positive qualities which determines something important, significant, useful, also ideal, has been used 262 times.

There are no statistically significant differences in the term "value" application neither in terms of frequency nor its interpretation among the youth of different regions and different secondary education institutions. The youth regardless of the social environment or the educational establishment's status assign the same meaning to the term "value" and use it in the appropriate context. The term "value" is used in essays in different word collocations, for example, my values, my spiritual values, moral values, life values, eternal values, cultural values, Latvia values, values of nature, century values, family values, classical values, tested values, values of my generation, human values, youth values. The mentioned word collocations are interpreted in a broader context and according to it judgements can be made not only about the particular values, which are important for the youth individually or the society in general, but also about the level of attitude towards them.

In all educational institutions during the study process the youth have acquired well enough the skill not only to describe particular situations but also interpret them, express their subjective attitude towards them in a well-grounded way (I consider...; I think...; I am sure...; my opinion is...). It should be noted that the minority pupils, whose level of Latvian as the level of the second language skills is low, are not able to express their ideas profoundly enough, stylistically and grammatically correctly. At times it can only be comprehended from a broader context. Moreover, Class 12 pupils of gymnasiums and secondary schools with Latvian language of instruction use more foreign words, more complex syntactic constructions to express their ideas, as well as expressions which have not been made independently, but encountered in mass media, especially if the topic is politics, such topical issues in the 21st century as development of information technologies, multiculturalism in the society, etc.

Analysing the language tools used in texts of essays for particular value presentation (Rozenbergs, 1995; Nītiņa, 2014), 51% of the youth emphasize the values that are personally

significant in their lives, but 49% of the youth are aware that the values described in the texts are important without expressing a sufficiently convincing opinion or clear personal attitude.

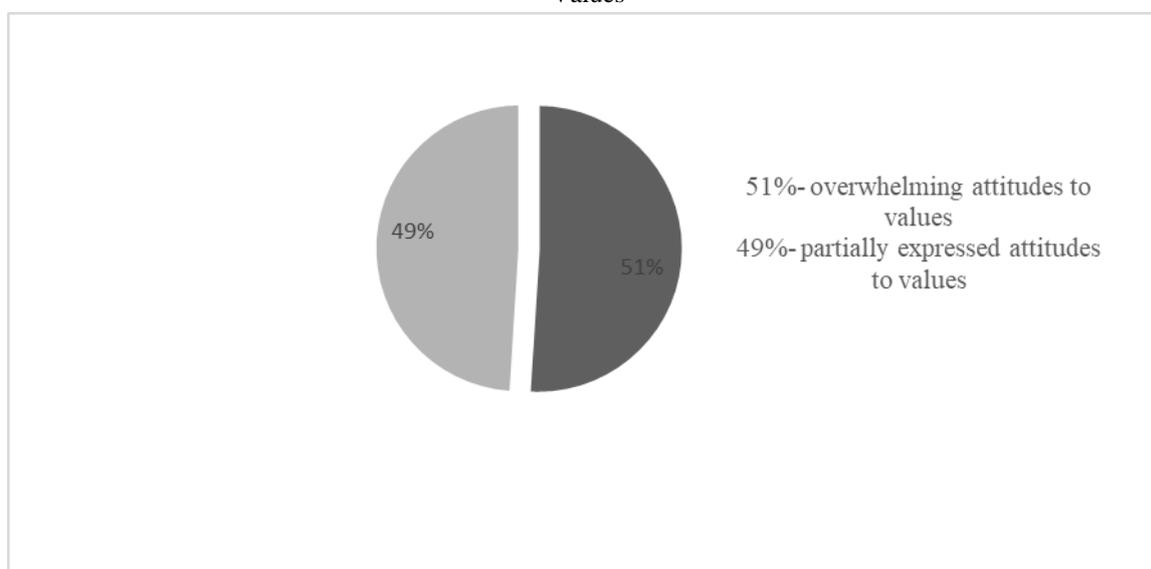
Among the youth there are also such people who express too categorical statements which in a broader context does not allow to judge to what extent they emerge from the youth's personal conviction. The obtained data allow to conclude that in the pupils' educational process in the text formation learning attention should be paid not only to the content presentation according to the topic, spelling and punctuation acquisition, but also to the pragmatic aspects of the language, i.e. conscious application of language tools with a particular intention.

Such language tools applied in the text as the 1st person singular I understand...; I know that...; personally, for me it is important...; word collocations my values; my values of life; my conviction, my opinion...; to my mind...etc. confirm that particular values are personally important for the youth.

In its turn, verbs in Subjunctive Mood (humanity could be called as my value; knowledge could be useful; I should become independent; I should respect other people), Reported Speech (it is thought we live in the age of technologies; a book is considered as a value) confirm that secondary school students speak about the values they only consider as possible or about the values they have heard from others without any personal significance, for instance, we should be better; we should be more tolerant to each other; I could call humanity as important; we should be more friendly. Also, the youth often use verbs in obligation forms when they do not speak about themselves but about the society in general, thus expressing categoricity, for example, we have to be educated, we have to respect each other; we have to be positive; we have to have family values; everybody has to be responsible and kind-hearted.

The overview of the youth's attitude towards values can be seen in Figure 1.

Figure 1: The Youth's Attitude to Values



Measuring the youth's values, groups of core values mentioned in S. Schwartz's theories have been taken into account in the research methodology (Schwartz, 1992). From each group the values important for the youth personally, for the society and mutual communication and values important for cultural environment development have been distinguished.

The following values have been distinguished for the content analysis for a young person as an individual in order to be able both to self-realize and self-express: education, individual freedom, sense of belonging, success, social status in the society, love, friendship, affluence, enjoyment of life.

Concord and tolerance, social security, stability, understanding nature as a value have been distinguished as important values for the society and mutual communication, but the values related to cultural development and self-preservation have been distinguished for awareness of national and world culture and religious values (Schwartz, 1992; Schwarch, Luycx, Vignoles, 2011).

In the texts of essays, the youth analyse values in interconnectedness. However, when processing the research data, the confidence interval has been calculated as the arithmetic mean. Thus, the values mentioned for at least six or more times by the youth have been taken into account. The values mentioned for five or fewer times in the respondents' texts have not been distinguished, as, when carrying out the content analysis of the texts, the obtained data make only 1% and therefore it can be considered as statistically insignificant.

Among the values important for the young person as an individual in order to be able to self-realize and self-express, the following values can be considered as statistically significant: love, friendship, education, individual freedom, affluence, social status, success and enjoyment of life. In its turn, among the values important for the society and mutual communication the youth distinguish: nature as a value, social security peace and stability, concord and tolerance in the society, but the values related to cultural development and self-preservation are the two ones: values of national and world culture and religious values.

Out of all above mentioned values in terms of frequency in the youth's essays the most often analysed, i.e. 98%, are culture values, including literature, art, music, theatre, different festivals and social events. The youth think that music and art festivals, Song and Dance Festival, such cultural events as "Riga Marathon," "Bildes," "Positivus," "Mamma Daba" etc. create the sense of community. From the youth's point of view culture is not only every individual's value but also the value of Latvia state and the world. The youth are really proud of the cultural heritage in Latvia, outstanding cultural personalities (culture includes in itself the theatre, music, art, literature; we have K. Barons, Rainis, I. Ziedonis, Song and Dance Festival; we have beautiful symphonies, festivals).

Out of all respondents involved in the research, Class 12 students of minority secondary schools most often write about Latvian traditions, cultural events and cultural achievements. It can be explained with the fact that the national policy of education is directed towards the

integration of minority pupils in the society, towards more profound acquisition of the Latvian language and Latvian culture in order to provide a gradual transition to training in the official language, starting already from pre-school. The justification that minority youth, graduating from Class 12, write their essays in the Latvian language and thus trying to show the acquired knowledge during the education process is not less important. However, students of secondary schools with Latvian language of instruction and gymnasiums more often write about literature as an important cultural value, emphasising the role of the book in personal development, for example, literature is an important value; life without books would be colourless and ugly; book reading liberates, cures; the book is the first and main tool of education in the world; my language perception has improved due to reading books, a book shapes our values; a book is a lot more than just letters on paper; memory, writing skills, concentration abilities, perception improve due to reading; books can calm me down; a book can pull me out of depression; the people who read are smarter and their vocabulary is broader than others'.

A wider context of the texts of essays enable us to make a conclusion that the distinct interest in cultural values is related to two aspects. Firstly, with the choice of topics for the essays (two topics dominate "Notice, Understand, Feel Your Century" and "Magic Power of Books"). Secondly, the events related to the hundredth anniversary of Latvia through the whole year in 2018 and the wide cultural programme in all regions of Latvia and biggest cities.

Whereas, religion as a value has been mentioned by the youth in 2% of cases. It should be noted that the respondents consider religion and faith as every individual's own choice, as affiliation to a religious denomination cannot be a reason for discord and wars.

The research findings allow to conclude that understanding of Latvia and its culture is similar between educational institutions of Latvian language of instruction and minority educational institutions, as well as the youth of different regions. It also complies with the data of previously performed studies (Research on Youth Opportunities, Attitudes and Values, 2013; Austruma, 2012).

According results 84% of the youth mention love and friendship as an important value. However, it should be mentioned that the youth talk about love and friendship either too superficially or these values are analysed as important in the context of family, state and birthplace, for example, the family cannot exist without love; family goes hand in hand with love and friendship; we have to love our country; patriotism and love to my native country are important for me.

Whereas, family as a value, relating it mostly to the need for sense of belonging, being needed, understood and supported, is mentioned in 46% of cases (the true value of life is family; my value is my family; a loving family is important; the purpose of life is my family; one cannot forget the principal value – the family; I could give life for my family). It should be noted that the youth are aware of the fact that not in all families there are relationships

which provide the sense of belonging and security, they also appreciate if they are lucky to live in a loving family.

A noteworthy fact is that in the modern society the youth are aware of the value of nature. Nature as an important value is described in 16% of cases (I start noticing the beauty of nature; I am grateful to Latvia for its natural beauty; we have to be able to listen to nature; nature is a healer; we have to live in harmony with nature; nature helps me in hard times; it's so good that people do community work to tidy up nature).

Being aware of their course of life, 12% of respondents emphasize wisdom and education (it is important to think of own education; education provides possibilities to find a job; education provides us with wisdom).

This is important that 9% of the youth emphasize security, harmony and stability and peace in the world, too. They are convinced that the previously mentioned values are the base for the society's sustainability. It is confirmed by the expressions that are close to warnings to people, for instance, we have experienced several tragedies in the 21st century, acts of terrorism, and it makes us afraid of our survival; it cannot be allowed that people are replaced with technologies, the 21st century is chaotic; electrical appliances wreck and damage our life; comfort is often missing; scheming, racketeering exist; we have to be able to notice beauty in daily life, in nature; I want to be safe in Latvia; at home I want to be safe together with my family. The youth also stand against the modified food, acknowledging it as unhealthy and the means of society's destruction.

To be taken into account that 6% of respondents emphasize the role of individual freedom and it is mostly related to the relationships in the family, among their peers, for example we want to be independent, but power is necessary for it; the youth want to attract attention, even talking differently than others; the key to success is not to be understood, as then people have got something to talk about.

It can be approved that the youth are aware of the society's diversity and manifest tolerance for people of different generations. In 5% of texts there are such expressions as the people born in the 20th century had harder lives; nowadays the elderly people have difficulties to acquire technologies; it is important to notice the new, hear the old and understand how people's perception and thinking change as time goes on...; we have got so many people to remember and commemorate; people have left heritage to us to be proud of; people have to be able to live together so that everyone could get joy from life.

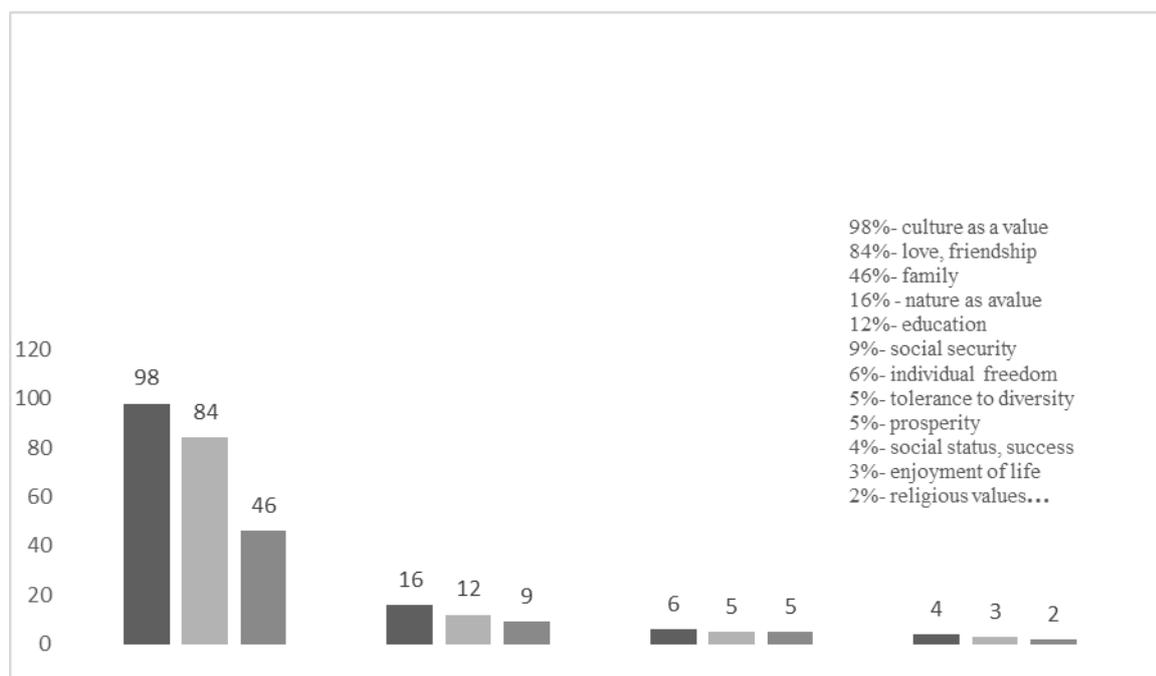
Similarly, 5% of the youth also perceive affluence as a value without relating it only to material possessions and money (we should not only strive for money, this way we may miss noticing the core values; money is important, but it is not more important than love and family; if we lack money, we will not be able to feed our family; one has to know how to earn money; one can become a millionaire with a higher education).

The study shows that 4% of respondents emphasize the need for the social status in the society and success (a person is judged by the status in the society; the status is important in

the society; it is essential for me to find my place in the society) but 3% of respondents mention enjoyment of life as an important value (for me it is important to enjoy life; enjoyment of life helps me notice better what is around me; we have to enjoy life).

Overview on frequency of value application in essays see in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Frequency of described values in essays.



As human values also determine their behaviour, action in certain situations, and a human implements themselves as a subject in relation to others (Schwarch, Luycx, Vignoles, 2011; Austruma, 2012; Рубинштейн, 2002), carrying out the content analysis of the problem to be researched, one cannot also disregard such expressions that testify several important problems which emerge from the youth's view of life. One of them is the excessive categoricity and uncritical perception and assessment of the information found in mass media.

That especially applies to the attitude to the older generation and values of the previous century, the information heard or read in social portals Facebook or Instagram etc. In 4% of respondents' texts expressions can be found which testify that the youth trust separate individuals' opinions not based on facts and accept them as theirs without any critical assessment, for example, the 20th century is horrible, terrible; in the 20th century people were brought up to become workers without any brain, not to have own opinion; EUR 500,000 should not be spent on the celebration (the hundredth anniversary of Latvia meant here); everybody is addicted to the computer, phone, the Internet; using Wase, people even do not know where they live; Latvian youth do not listen to any other music but the US songs; the musician of the 21st century is a drug addict; only old people love Latvian music; the new

generation is less developed, as everything is provided for them; one should not read bad news as mass media controls us; technologies degrade us).

In 4% of expressions the youth express intolerance for diversity, different opinions, (for example, I am fed up with hearing that earlier everything was better, the old do not understand the young; the one who shouts louder, is always right; there is no need to waste money on publishing a book about 100 celebrities of Latvia; we are not going to listen to the rich who tell lies and impose their opinion; the parents born in the horrible 20th century give their children born in the 21st century much more freedom, but they do not understand how bad the world is; the poor can only see surroundings from the street, the rich can afford tickets to the theatre, opera and see art of this century). The expressions which testify to the youth's reluctance to take responsibility, be socially active are also similar(officials of Latvia have to listen to our desires, let us leave all bad to the people who are responsible for it (meaning members of parliament); I do not like members of parliament telling lies).

In 2% of the youth's expressions the talk is about depression, the situations are described in which they lack willpower, motivation to act, in which they wait for help from other people, especially from the family and teachers in order to be clear about their goals, the way to achieve them, for example, I lack motivation, I want to give up everything and stay in bed; it would be great if I had somebody next to me to motivate me more, we all are not strong enough to cope with life.

As the youth admit themselves, there are a lot of young people who feel lonely, not understood, they cannot get rid of the events in their past, they have low self-esteem, uncertainty about oneself.

When thinking about the youth's upbringing process, it is important to pay attention to attitude formation towards the different, promotion of positive thinking. The expressions with a really negative attitude towards the past, people, who have lived during that time, including their parents and other relatives allow to make a conclusion that in the education process more attention has to be paid to promotion of critical thinking, expressing opinions based on facts, skills to assess information from the point of credibility, for a more accurate argumentation of their point.

When thinking about the youth's education in a broader context, it is essential to achieve every young person's true interest in the process of multicultural society's events, research of human mutual relationships, interpretation, comparison and assessment.

Conclusion

- Provision of value education is one of the most important tasks of the modern comprehensive school, since every individual and society's awareness of values in general is the basis of the society's sustainability and every individual's quality of life.
- The youth's awareness of values is essentially affected by global processes, economic and social changes in the society, informative environment and development of technologies. The youth's selection of values emerges from the socioeconomic situation, the skill to correlate their values with the social environment and cultural acquisition possibilities.
- There are no significant differences expressed about attitude to values in students' work among different regional gymnasiums, secondary schools with Latvian language of instruction and minority secondary schools. The only differences can be noticed in the use of language tools. There are more complex syntactic constructions, more foreign words and expressions encountered in the social environment about the modern society, politics in the students' essays of gymnasiums and secondary schools with Latvian language of instruction. Emphasising cultural values, minority students write more about what Latvia means for them, what they now about Latvia culture, and it can be explained with the national policy of education.
- Among the values important for a young person as an individual in order both to self-realize and self-express, love, friendship, education, individual freedom, affluence, social status, success and enjoyment of love can be considered as statistically significant.
- Among the values important for the society and mutual communication the youth distinguish nature as a value, social security peace and stability, concord and tolerance in the society.
- The values related to cultural development and self-preservation as important for the young person are the national and world culture values and religious values.
- In order to decrease the excessive categoricity in the youth's judgements, perception and assessment of the information found in uncritical mass media, also intolerance to diversity, to different opinions, more attention has to be paid to the upbringing issues in the education process, promotion of critical thinking, expression of argumentative opinion based on facts, skills to assess information from the point of credibility, formation of tolerant attitude to different people in the society.

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