

# Innowacje w kształceniu i edukacja dla rynku pracy

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## Preferences of the youth and their determining factors. A research report

Preferencje młodzieży i czynniki je determinujące.  
Raport z badań

**Key words:** youth preferences, value-oriented education, free time, reading choices, literary inspirations.

**Słowa kluczowe:** preferencje młodzieży, edukacja zorientowana na wartości, czas wolny, wybór lektury, inspiracje literackie.

**Streszczenie.** Jednym z głównych czynników determinujących zainteresowania ludzi młodych w zakresie kultury jest czas wolny, który w wielu przypadkach jest wykorzystywany w sposób nieplanowany i chaotyczny, podczas gdy czytanie i pisanie nadal są głównymi czynnikami wpływającymi na kompetencję komunikacyjną i nadal stanowią podstawę edukacji. To obieg tekstu pisanego, a nie drukowanego, gwarantuje ciągłość kultury i cywilizacji. Artkuł prezentuje część wyników szeroko zakrojonych badań poświęconych zaangażowaniu młodzieży w kulturę, prowadzonych w dziewięciu szkołach średnich w Radomiu i okolicach, na łącznej próbie badawczej 455 uczniów z 18 klas.

**Introduction.** We use the notion of axiology quite often because we live for values and it is values we constantly need. Discovery or attribution of values is based on the process of evaluation, which is an indispensable element of human life and the key aspect of being human. We may ask, then, what is values education? The most condensed yet the most profound definition was offered by Pope Saint John Paul II, who said that values education consisted in shaping one's own humanity: „Education

consists in fact in enabling man to become more man, to «be» more and not just to «have» more and consequently, through everything he «has», everything he «possesses», to «be» man more fully. For this purpose man must be able to «be more» not only «with others», but also «for others»<sup>1</sup>.

The article presents reflections concerning a current and alarming phenomena, namely the crisis of values, decline of customs, alienation of the individual, the necessity of demonstrating the special role of the Polish language in the promotion of universal values and humanistic ideals among school students in the context of axiological Polish language education. Interest in the questions just indicated stems from the fact that values pertain to the fundamental principles of human existence. We treat them as a particularly important element of reality which imparts sense on human desires, hopes and expectations.

### **Reading interests of secondary students from Radom and its vicinity.**

Transformations and changes which took place in Poland at the end of the 20th century have been contributing to the enlargement of the domain of freedom. In the modern times, there are no forbidden books, magazines, films; there are no restrictions on cultural, educational or political activity. However, we need to be able to use such freedom wisely because not every book or magazine is genuinely beneficial.

Modern-day popular reading, being a cultural phenomenon, is developing along two distinct paths. On the one hand, we have a small and exclusive group of individuals whose intellectual framework is based on the knowledge of the literary canon, while the community of reading interests is a symbolic brand whereby the members can affiliate themselves with that community. In this sense, elite groups of readers have been present in all historical periods. Nowadays, this trend has not profoundly changed, and the former aristocracy and court circles have been supplanted by intellectuals, scholars and artists. On the other hand, we can speak of a more extensive and heterogeneous type of readership. It comprises various social strata, determined by traditions, education, professional qualifications, material status, etc. It is in this group that we notice inclinations and readiness to take advantage of the new forms of communication, mainly electronic ones.

To avoid theorising it would be instructive to view the issue of values and reading aspirations of young people in the light of empirical research involving a sample of 455 respondents recruited from among secondary students of the city of Radom and its vicinity conducted at the end of the first decade of this century<sup>2</sup>.

Non-fiction writing scored the highest, chosen mostly by the girls. The books entitled *Zoo Station: The Story of Christiane F.*, which is a series of interviews with Christiane Felscherinow (5%), and *Pamiętnik narkomanki* by Barbara Rosiek (4%),

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<sup>1</sup> John Paul II, Address to UNESCO, delivered in Paris on June 2, 1980; the English text published in *L'Osservatore Romano*, English Weekly Edition, 1980, June 23, 9–12, accessed February 8, 2018, <http://inters.org/John-Paul-II-UNESCO-Culture>.

<sup>2</sup> B. Borowska, *Uczestnictwo licealistów polskich i francuskich w kulturze. Studium empiryczne* (Lublin 2013).

which were written over twenty years ago, still had relevancy and were popular among teenage girls at the beginning of the 21st century. The problem of drug and sex addiction is also addressed in the novel *Junk* by Melvin Burgess; the book was indicated by 2% of the respondents. Published in late 20th century, it reflects a great deal of interest in this subject, especially among teenage girls. These books enjoyed the greatest popularity among Warsaw secondary students. Grażyna Straus wrote: „Popularity rankings were filled with «authentic» stories: experiences of drug addicts as told by themselves, confessions of sports stars, the fate of an American woman who married an Iranian, or the biography of a pop idol...”<sup>3</sup>.

For the young people residing in the studied region, *Harry Potter* by J.K. Rowling, classified as fantasy, ranked third as one of the most popular books, both with boys and girls (4%). Also in the same genre, the students indicated two other books, *The Lord of the Rings* by J.R.R. Tolkien (3%) and *Boży bojownicy* by A. Sapkowski (1%), as they enjoyed the greatest popularity among the surveyed boys. The Harry Potter books were screened, which may have contributed to the huge success of the books. Alternatively, their popularity may be due to a large-scale promotional campaign, commented on by S. Siekierski like this: „The translation and publication of the Harry Potter novel were accompanied by a very intensive media campaign, as well as by information about the hugely successful publication and screening in the West. This further increased the interest of the youth in the books”<sup>4</sup>.

The sense of reading community among secondary students was also perceptible in the case of Paulo Coelho's books. As many as three of his novels were found in the ranking: *The Alchemist* (4%), *Eleven Minutes* (3%) and *Veronica Decides to Die* (1%). I believe that Coelho owes his success to many factors. Above all, he uses simple, clear and intelligible language, accessible to anyone. His literature is not artistically sophisticated, therefore his books enjoy a wide readership, mainly young people.

Children and youth literature was shown to have special significance to the respondents, especially girls. Among the most widely-read books we find such titles as: *Oscar and the Lady in Pink* by Eric E. Schmitt (3%), *Jezioro osobliwości* and *Zapałka na zakręcie* by Krystyna Siesicka (2%), *Ann of the Green Gables* by Lucy Maud Montgomery (1%), and *Sophie's World* by Jostein Gaarder (1%). The popularity of books written by Siesicka and Montgomery has not decreased with the last few generations. Books written by these authors were also enjoyed by Warsaw secondary students. Grażyna Straus wrote: „Although various mechanisms often overlap and blend with one another, the mechanisms pertaining to tradition seem the strongest, that is the school-based reading heritage”<sup>5</sup>. The popularity of Gaarder's writing was also addressed by Dominique Simonnet in his article entitled „A date with philosophy”. He wrote: „Gaarder encourages young readers to reach for the roots and this is undoubtedly his great merit. In this unpretentious book, he managed to achieve what

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<sup>3</sup> G. Straus, *Czytanie książek u progu liceum* (Warsaw 2002), 135.

<sup>4</sup> S. Siekierski, *Książka we współczesnej kulturze polskiej* (Pułtusk 2006), 265–266.

<sup>5</sup> G. Straus, *Czytanie...*, 121.

educators rarely did: inspire self-reflection and reaction to everyday routine, as well as encourage people to be surprised”<sup>6</sup>.

The girls taking part in the opinion poll demonstrated a great deal of interest in social dramas and romantic literature, such as: *Bridget Jones's Diary* by Helen Fielding (2%), *Nigdy w życiu* by Katarzyna Grochola (2%), and *Samotność w sieci* by Janusz Wiśniewski (1%). The discovery and realisation of one's own feelings with the help of literary characters and the experience of love, the only and dream love which moves to tears, are all reasons for which girls are eager to read this kind of literature.

The only title which appeared on the list of the most widely-read action and crime books among the surveyed students was the best-selling *The Da Vinci Code* by Dan Brown (3%).

A look at the results of research conducted in 2000–2001 by the Book and Readership Institute of the National Library of Poland reveals that among the most popular titles were those indicated by my respondents: *Harry Potter* by J. K. Rowling (3%), *The Name of the Rose* by U. Eco (1%), *Nigdy w życiu* by K. Grochola (1%), *Samotność w sieci* by J. Wiśniewski (1%), and the best-selling title *Da Vinci Code* by D. Brown (6%)<sup>7</sup>.

The reading tastes manifested by the surveyed community of secondary students varied radically with respect to their different backgrounds. The youths attending Radom secondary schools, mainly the girls, would read non-fiction (*Zoo Station: The Story of Christiane F.* and *Pamiętniki narkomanki*). The thriller and crime book *Da Vinci Code* proved hugely successful with both the boys and girls.

In contrast, students from the towns surrounding the city of Radom preferred dramas and romantic books. These were read solely by girls. The most popular ones were: *Bridget Jones' Diary* and *Nigdy w życiu*. The students of the countryside secondary schools would reach for fantasy titles, with *Harry Potter* and *The Lord of the Rings* taking the lead. These students were also interested in *belles lettres* and novels written by P. Coelho, and non-fiction.

Their replies suggest that the secondary school youth, not being fully mature readers, will frequently reach for titles that are in vogue at the moment. Film adaptations of the best-sellers were an important factor for the popularity of particular books and authors. The girls would read biographies, dramas and romantic novels. The boys, in contrast, preferred science-fiction or thrillers. Thrillers and dramas satisfy the need for intimate experiences, coping with volatile moods or better insight in self. No wonder, then, that these books turned out to be interesting items of popular literature in the researched group.

Apart from the family and social life as well as the mass media, school education, including the content of Polish lessons, is an important factor in the building of the appropriate hierarchy of values. In the process of learning, the student finds answers to many questions that bother her, building her own moral stance. Literature is a vehicle

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<sup>6</sup> D. Simonnet, *Randka z filozofią*. „Forum” 13 (1995), 18.

<sup>7</sup> G. Straus, K. Wolff, and S. Wierny, *Książka na początku wieku. Społeczny zasięg książki w Polsce w 2002 roku* (Warsaw 2004), 48.

for values provided by text and language, and as such it fulfils a significant role in the formation of the student's personality. For the young generation, who are on the threshold of adult life and for whom choices and finding their own place in society are of utmost importance, literature provides various solutions to these tough humanistic issues. By recognising values in literature and accepting them as particularly important the reader is able to comprehend the meaning and goal of life. This also broadens their outlook on the complex and diverse world they are part of.

Using my observations and experience, I can conclude that modern-day school places significantly less emphasis on literary culture. One can be a good student reading only crime or science-fiction books. The number of books read as home assignments does not significantly affect learning success.

Due to the fact that the phenomenon just mentioned is noticeable, teachers of Polish treat the axiological issues too superficially, while values communicated by literary text are rejected, hence readership culture becomes detached from the broadly-perceived world of humanistic ideals, therefore the teacher of Polish should highlight the ideas and values embedded in literary text in her classroom practice, and any analyses and interpretations of a literary work should cultivate a reflective approach to values and reality among young people.

Unquestionably, one of the tasks of pedagogy is to make reference to the essence of humanity on all possible occasions – humanity which is assumed to transcend itself all the time. Many ethicists and pedagogues believe that nowadays there exists substantial social demand for an educational system which would underscore not only the content but also values to be treated as teaching goals influencing teachers in their choice of didactic content and activities<sup>8</sup>. The formation of values and their recognition in the educational process entail an axiological situation, man being its foundation and the cause. The reception of a literary work involves a special kind of axiological activity. Axiological situations require mutual agreement between the teacher and the pupil, as well as comprehension of the language used by the author and the context for the work and its tradition; these conditions are indispensable for capturing the meaning of a given work. The important role of the teacher consists in supporting the pupils in their process of choosing, recognising, understanding and accepting the world of values. The question arises where the surveyed secondary students learnt about books worth reading? Below are presented answers to this question.

The prevalent source of information on extra-school literature was social networks (61%). The following media sources were ascribed similar values by the students: the press (26%), television (24%), and the Internet (18%). The young people attached a great deal of importance to teachers (20%), taking them to be the most reliable sources of information. The students also relied on their family for information – for 11% of the respondents, family was the main source of information

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<sup>8</sup> K. Chałas, *Moc wychowawcza przypadkowych zdarzeń w świetle introcepcji wartości* (Kielce – Lublin 2011); W. Stróżewski, *W kręgu wartości* (Kraków 1992); M. Gulda, *Postawy młodzieży wobec niektórych wartości życiowych* (Gdańsk 1988); *Młodzież a wartości*, H. Świda, ed. (Warsaw 1979).

related to books worth reading. The role of the three remaining sources indicated by the students seemed rather surprising. Merely 1% of them replied that they gained their knowledge from librarians, while only 0.5% found out about books worth reading in bookshops. Slight differences among the students of various backgrounds were discernible. The youths of Radom obtained information from their friends (64%), the press (29%), the Internet (26%), television (24%), family (14%), and teachers (13%). Librarians and bookshops scored very low (2% and 1%, respectively). In contrast, the youths who attended schools in towns, apart from their friends (58%) and the press (25%), sought information about worthwhile books in television (22%), the Internet (16%), with teachers (19%), and finally in their families (8%). Those secondary students did not indicate librarians and bookshops as sources of information about books at all. The youths who attended secondary schools in the countryside, obtained information about books to read mainly from their friends (61%) but also teachers (28%). They also gained information from the media (press – 26%, TV – 25%, and Internet – 14%) and from their families (12%). The respondents from the countryside, just like town youths, did not indicate librarians and bookshops as sources of information about books at all.

From the analysis presented above it transpires that the image of librarians is not satisfactory from the pedagogical point of view because they are not perceived as a reliable and valuable source of information about books. It is also interesting to note that the boys did not find out about worthwhile books from librarians whatsoever. Also, information obtained in bookshops were scant. On the other hand, interest in the Internet had grown (21% of boys and 17% of girls). The amount of information received from teachers turned out to be satisfactory as it exceeded one from family sources. The greatest influence on the development of reading interests of secondary students was came from the peer group and the advertising market promoted by the media. Teachers from village and town schools scored high.

The arrangement of axiological situations depends largely on the linguistic competences of the teacher with respect to her skills in communication, persuading, convincing, moving, stimulating, or imaginativeness and feelings. It should be said that teaching of values embraces axiological issues related to the pupil and his or her way of „becoming”, that is exploring and understanding the world of values. Undoubtedly, the educational process is associated with the rich world of values. The teacher of Polish, in the course of didactic work supported by literary works, gives the youth an opportunity to make certain choices. In this way, she teaches her pupils to make proper decisions which add sense to their life.

**Leisure-time preferences.** As a thinking and conscious being, man aims for specific core values encompassing and determining all aspects of life which pertain to the physical, psychological, spiritual and social spheres. Values also determine the criteria and attitudes which enable the person to maintain the integrity of development and fulfilment of her life aspirations; they also determine our attitudes towards people and things. Consequently, they affect emotional states and self-esteem. With respect to one another, values constitute a hierarchical structure, therefore we can distinguish

more or less preferred values. The system of values is tightly connected with development and its goals. It is their kind which determines intellectual standards and personal growth; it also directs the person towards her goal. The degree and mode of realisation of values also determines the person's mental health and her moral attitudes. Reflections on the hierarchy of values belong to the domain of the highest relevance in our times. In the process of development and pursuit of happiness, man can alter the hierarchy of values as well as changing his paths of development by using substitutes. Motivation for this change can be more or less noble. These elements can affect the personal maturity or its absence. Personal refinement and maturity, however, depend on the degree in which a concrete hierarchy of values is realised, on motivation and the way these are experienced in life.

Our reflections above suggest that human aspirations cannot exist without values, and values can be the object of human aspirations; they are fundamental driving forces of human activity, they guide the learning process, they have a major impact on innovative measures that people take in order to transform and improve themselves and their environment. Aspirations are a major factor determining people's behaviour; they affect life decisions and day-to-day and long-term plans, desires. Finally, they urge people to be active in the pursuit of their life goals. Aspirations can stimulate personal growth towards further perfection and attainment of more and more challenging goals. At times, however, they can impede their development.

A major factor determining cultural interests of the youth is free time, which in many cases is not spent according to a plan, say chaotically, therefore it is important to have insight in the environment of the youth and their lifestyle. How, then, did the secondary school students of Radom and its vicinity spend their leisure in the early 21-st century?

The young respondents indicated that their best free-time activity was listening to music (34%). It was followed by social networking (32%). Reading came second (26%), while the latter places were occupied by television (18%), the computer and Internet (16%), and sports (14%). The following forms of activity proved slightly less popular: sleeping (7%), resting and going for walks (6%), watching DVDs (2%), meeting boyfriends or girlfriends and partying (1.5%), helping parents and drinking alcohol (1%).

The girl respondents preferred listening to music and meeting friends (39%), reading (32%), and watching television (22%). The less popular leisure activities for the girls were: sleeping (10%), going for walks and using the computer and Internet (8% each). The girls spent their free time doing sports (7%), watching DVDs and partying (2%), helping parents or meeting boyfriends (only 1%). As for the boys, their favourite free-time activities were by far the computer and Internet (30%) and sports (28%). Close behind these were such interests as: listening to music (25%), meeting friends (20%), reading books and magazines (14%), and watching television (12%). Alarmingly, it turned out some of the boys indicated drinking alcohol (mostly beer) and passive resting as their pastime (3% each), which they preferred over walks and meeting their girlfriends (2%) or helping their parents (1%).

In contrast, the students of Radom schools, both girls (41%) and boys (28%) spent their time with their friends (36%). Listening to music was indicated by 30% (35% of the girls and 21% of the boys). Reading as a leisure activity was indicated by 26% of of them, 32% in the case of the girls, which was a radically higher score relative to the boys (16%). Watching television was preferred by 18% of the respondents, again the girls dominating over the boys (24% and 9%, respectively). In contrast, doing sports was indicated by 15% of the respondents, while the computer and Internet use was indicated by 12%. These activities were preferred equally by 21% of the boys, in comparison with 12% for sports and 7% for the computer and Internet in the case of the girls.

The youths living in the towns of Radom and its neighbouring areas would prefer listening to music (42%), meeting their friends (28%), reading (23%), using the computer and Internet (18%), watching television (17%), doing sports and resting (11%). The girls' favourite pastime was listening to music (49%), meeting friends (37%), and reading books (28%). The boys, however, were more likely to use the computer and Internet (31%), do sports (29%) and listen to music (28%).

The respondents from village schools preferred meeting friends (33%), listening to music (30%), reading books (30%), watching television (21%), doing sports (18%), using the computer and Internet (17%), and going for walks (11%). In their free time, the country school girls would read books and meet friends (38%), listen to music (30%), watch television (22%), walk (15%), and sleep (12%). The boys were likely to spend their leisure time at the computer, using the Internet (41%), doing sports (35%), listening to music (28%), meeting friends (24%), watching television (20%), and reading (13%).

The interpretation of the results revealed that reading was an acceptable pastime and, as it might be expected, regarded as a decent way of spending free time, regardless of the young people's gender and background, yet not their top priority. In contrast, their preferences for other free-time activities had changed, and it seems certain that it is mainly the young people who is becoming fluent in information technology. In recent years, the Internet has become an innovative channel to transmit information with. Although its main function is not the filling of free time, the continuing need for new kinds of entertainment makes people use it for this particular purpose. The use of the computer and the Internet is consistently replacing watching television, especially among boys. Meeting friends, which ranked very high for the surveyed young people, took place mainly at home, at a café or in the park, in other words, away from cultural or educational facilities.

Free-time activities exert an impact on the behaviour, lifestyle and quality of life of young people. Scientists believe that individual differences, which determine behaviours in leisure time, are conditioned by both external and internal factors, such as: environment (natural surroundings, landscape, climate, architecture, public transport), role models (family, school tutors, people who serve as authorities, customs, models of free-time activity) and organisation of life (free time, the right to use recreational facilities). The models of spending free time correlate also with socio-demographic factors (gender, age, education, and the parents' occupation) and



economic ones (material status, amount of free time, availability of recreational facilities)<sup>9</sup>.

A special role is played by the family environment with respect to ways of spending free time. Sylwia Słupik claims that „the roles fulfilled by the family with respect to spending free time should be also involve skilful management of the children's interests and physical activity. Physical recreation within one's family and shared models of spending free time improve the quality of life and atmosphere, contributing also to the establishment of partnerships”<sup>10</sup>.

The second most important environment is school, which is expected to arrange leisure activities for children and teenagers. Organisation of free-time activities is a vital element of the caring and educational role of school<sup>11</sup>.

The results of the presented research provoke the reflection that the sphere of youth behaviour is undergoing changes that are increasingly visible, described by some as lifestyle change. Teenagers who come from the countryside no longer believe in the model of continuing labour on the family farm. In contrast, a more consumerist model is developing, involving participation in a broad range of cultural activities. The following spheres exert an undeniable impact on patterns of behaviour, including the choice of free-time activities: family, peer groups, school and cultural-educational institutions. The results of the way the youths of Radom and its vicinity spend their leisure time demonstrate that the interest in recreational activities offered by culture centres or various clubs is vanishing. Therefore, while seeking opportunities for positive changes in school students, we need to pay special attention to the influence of school and cultural institutions and the lifestyle of young people living in local communities. A knowledge of youth interests and preferences will enable cultural and educational facilities operating in various environments to offer free-time activities which would promote specific lifestyles among teenagers. It should also be noted that school is not only a place of work and knowledge sharing but also a place to live, where students spend a great deal of their time. Value-based education should encourage pupils to accept the world of values, motivate them to choose values freely and wisely, support pupils in their pursuit of values and the building of proper hierarchical structures.

**Conclusion.** Education entails a dynamic process which encompasses many inter-related factors. A vital role in the educational process is played by the most important entities: the pupil and the educator. A major role is also played by the environment in which the educational process occurs: parents, school, the home country, church, and the mass media. Each of these groups contributes to the overall development of the human person. Obviously we may claim that since value-oriented education forges the person's relationship with other people, from a broader perspective, the same will apply not only to schools, work places and various social

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<sup>9</sup> R. Winiarski, *Wstęp do teorii rekreacji* (Kraków 1989), 85–86.

<sup>10</sup> S. Słupik, *Czas wolny dzieci i młodzieży*. „Polityka Społeczna” 9 (2004), 64.

<sup>11</sup> M. Walczak, *Wychowanie do wolnego czasu* (Zielona Góra 1994), 35.

groups, but also to the nation and the state; on a broader plane, to international relations. It seems essential to revert to universal and immutable values, which properly organise the person's roles within society, her relationship with others, and ultimately her happiness and the sense of fulfilment. Some tutors claim that the youths of today are losing grasp of such notions as self-improvement, overcoming oneself, self-limitation, or sacrifice. Likewise, attitudes of service, kindness, helpfulness and friendship are becoming a thing of the past. The youth are rather lost and sometimes they seek role models through various desperate and rebellious behaviours, in the hope that these authorities may give them guidance or inspiration. Not only and not in every sphere of life can parents fulfil such a role; in this case teachers and tutors should assume that. Pope John Paul II was aware of the potential inherent in young people, and he addressed them along the following lines: „Do not be afraid. (...) The future (...) lies in your hands. (...) To to this, you must be people with a deep trust in man and a deep trust in the grandeur of the human vocation – a vocation to be pursued with respect for truth and for the dignity and inviolable rights of the human person”<sup>12</sup>. It is teachers who should instil trust, respect and humility towards others in young people.

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<sup>12</sup> Message of John Paul II for the Celebration of the World Day of Peace, January 1, 1985.