



AXIOLOGICAL CULTURE AS A RESPONSE TO THE CHALLENGES FACING THE EDUCATION OF THE FUTURE

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The development of axiological culture among students at European universities should become one of the central themes in contemporary educational discourse. Having long worked on the practical application of conceptual ideas from value theory in educational processes, we argue that there remains a significant lack of scholarly research investigating the level of axiological culture within the academic environment in Europe and worldwide. Nevertheless, existing, mostly indirect, studies still indicate the importance of and interest in this topic (Rigoli & Lennon, 2025).

The fundamental idea of our reflections is based on the assertion of a correlation between the level of development of axiological education and the formation of modern individuals' readiness to face the moral and ethical challenges of the twenty-first century. Clearly, we share the universal position that education is the most important element of the social system, designed to develop human capital and shape ideas, ideals, and worldviews (Lamanauskas, 2025). In turn, axiological education - as well as the broader paradigm of the axiologization of education - serves as a real response to the demand for shaping a personality oriented toward self-development, moral improvement, and responsibility in all types of social relations, which form the basis of positive and constructive social practice (Roothaan, Nullens, & van den Heuvel, 2019).

We understand axiological education as a pedagogical system that functionally facilitates engagement with value theory and the internalization of humanistic values, with the ultimate goal of forming a high level of axiological culture.

Extensive empirical data collected in studies on the formation of axiological competencies and the value-semantic sphere (Pelekh, 2024) demonstrate that a well-developed axiological culture can serve as the core of an individual's value-semantic system and, consequently, the foundation for the life strategies of modern youth. A high level of development ensures a personal understanding of one's own values and the ability to reflect on both personal and others' values, thereby contributing to the improvement of interpersonal relations within pluralistic democracies by fostering unity and cohesion.

Neglecting the issue of developing an axiological culture will inevitably, and in some cases already has, led to problematic consequences and new challenges, which we aim to address below.

First, in our view, the lack of attention to value-related issues in education, and consequently the absence of a formed axiological culture and a developed value-semantic sphere - particularly in terms of internalizing humanistic values, norms, principles, and moral reasoning - ultimately poses a significant threat to the successful functioning and even existence of a democratic society. On a macro level, this can manifest in entire national spaces where ruling elites impose stereotypical thinking to control the masses through slogans (as exemplified by contemporary Russia).

At the micro level, that is, within the sphere of secondary and higher education, several key challenges can be identified:

1. The reduction of the university model to a system solely focused on training professionals through the transmission of knowledge, aimed at saturating the labour market with skilled executors - producers of human capital - without taking into account the need to form holistic personalities. In contrast, value-oriented education aims precisely at this. Without sufficient attention to the formation of cultural and moral personality within the university walls, the institution itself becomes, in the eyes of young people, a narrowly functional establishment - a place for obtaining diplomas for future employment. Before our eyes, educational and professional pragmatism is turning into utilitarianism and value nihilism. Spiritual questions - those encompassing Platonic values such as truth, goodness, and beauty, as well as tolerance, wisdom, integrity, and moral resilience - are pushed to the background. Meanwhile, value and moral immaturity give rise to shameful phenomena within academia, including academic dishonesty, plagiarism, data fabrication and falsification, cheating, and bribery - all of which undermine public trust in the entire system of education and science.

2. We share the view of educational experts that a low level of axiological culture can pose challenges to *democratic resilience and social cohesion*. Late adolescence and early adulthood - the high school and university years - constitute a period of active mental development, grounded in the internalization of values transmitted by social institutions such as the media, peer groups, family, schools, universities, and extracurricular environments. A crucial question here is the formation of an individual's own vision of social development, their participation in shaping society, and readiness for active engagement with others in strengthening democracy and preventing dictatorship. The role of the young generation's axiological culture in this process is decisive.

Our long-term observations from university practice convincingly show that students with poorly developed value systems - those with low levels of axiological culture - are more susceptible to disinformation, extremism, polarization, and intolerance, as they are unprotected by the "umbrella" of stable value convictions. Conversely, axiological culture counters these negative phenomena, fostering a sense of social responsibility and commitment to the common good, serving as a safeguard against egoism and political apathy. Within this context, the university environment - often multicultural - can cultivate key components of axiological culture, including interaction with diverse value systems, intercultural dialogue, European democratic unity, human dignity, and equality.

3. The development of axiological culture among university students is closely linked to the ethical risks they may face in their future professional activities. Students who possess strong knowledge and skills but a low level of axiological culture can pose potential threats to various sectors of society, including public administration, economic management, medicine, and education. For instance, in the financial sector, this may manifest in dishonest lending practices, financial manipulations, profit-seeking "at any cost," or creating unstable corporate environments for personal gain. In technology, a lack of axiological culture during education can lead to the development of software without reliable ethical safeguards, which can later be misused for criminal purposes, such as hacking, data theft, or sabotage. In medicine, it may lead to the disregard of ethical principles in research and clinical practice, for example, neglecting to identify the true causes of diseases in elderly patients, which is often rationalized by ageist attitudes. Future corporate managers with low axiological culture may also transmit anti-values to subordinates, fostering toxic workplace environments.

4. The absence of a sufficient level of axiological culture among university students, who are future professionals in all leading sectors of the EU economy, may pose a threat to sustainable development. Specific critically important projects, such as the *European Green Deal*, necessitate profound social transformation rooted in values like justice and European

solidarity. These values must be unified and preserved across generations. Therefore, students must approach environmental issues through ethical imperatives rather than purely utilitarian or economic perspectives. Only then will they be genuinely motivated to promote green economy initiatives. Conversely, a system of values focused solely on individual consumption and social status undermines the goals of sustainable development, as it prioritizes consumer identity over civic responsibility.

5. A sufficient level of axiological culture among future professionals can also serve as an adequate safeguard against the negative implications of artificial intelligence. Recent research suggests that, in addition to its benefits, AI may also be exploited for personal gain, plagiarism, confidentiality violations, or even hinder the development of essential human abilities, such as critical thinking, creativity, and independent problem-solving (Pikhart & Al-Obaydi, 2025).

Therefore, it is crucial that the European education system not ignore the axiological dimension. Axiological culture, instilled in early childhood and nurtured in university settings, should serve as an indicator of the health - or illness - of a social system, given the inherently reciprocal and multifaceted relationship between education and society (Lamanauskas, 2025). Addressing the issue of developing a high level of axiological culture requires significant effort and practical innovation from both the educational and scientific communities.

A logical step, based on the considerations above, is the theoretical and methodological search for a modern concept of axiological culture as the foundation for the axiologization of the educational process and the development of axiological education. Matviichuk (2025, p. 544) defines *axiological culture* as “a personal quality that consists in an individual’s ability to perceive and understand axiological knowledge fully, possess skills of value self-reflection and self-analysis, identify personal and social values, model value-oriented life strategies, and communicate with consideration of value aspects.” The scholar emphasizes that general axiological culture reflects a person’s capacity to build their life strategies on a conscious value foundation and to communicate with others while considering the axiological dimension.

In turn, we have proposed a structural concept of axiological culture, grounded in the understanding of any object as a system composed of (1) constituent elements and (2) functional relationships among them. Accordingly, the structural concept of axiological culture views this type of culture as an integral unity of elements and structures, including axiological knowledge, axiological self-awareness, modelling of life strategies based on values, communication in the context of axiological dialogue, humanistic values, axiological improvement (development), and value intelligence (Pelekh & Matviichuk, 2024). Importantly, we regard an individual’s axiological culture (especially that of a learner) as broader than axiological competence, which is defined as the dynamic unity of value knowledge, self-reflection, and self-analysis skills, as well as the ability to identify personal and social values. Hence, we place special emphasis on the internalization of humanistic values and on encouraging youth to construct their lives on this basis. The proposed structural concept, currently under theoretical elaboration and empirical validation, is essential for diagnosing and measuring the formation of axioculture, which can be assessed through the analysis of its structural elements and their manifestations.

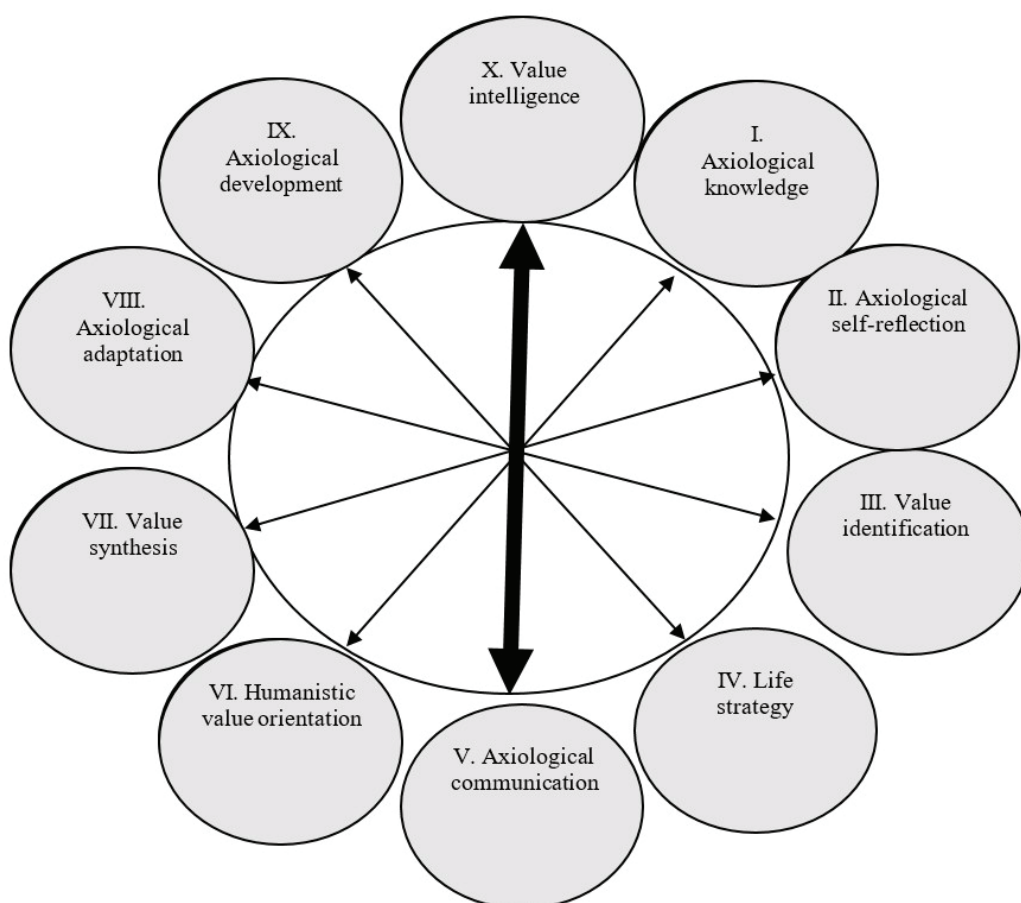
Based on the analysis of numerous scholarly sources (Gay, 2000; Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005; van den Heuvel et al., 2017; Kenter & O’Connor, 2022; Kosteljik, 2020; Nieto, 2004; Pelekh, 2021; Pommeranz et al., 2011; Russo et al., 2022; Salazar, 2013), we have developed a model consisting of ten components (see Figure 1). Without detailing its content here, we note its key idea.

If we use the metaphor of a compass to analyse the diagram in Figure 1, the completeness of a person’s axiological culture - their axiological state in life - is determined by values (X) oriented toward intelligence. This occurs when they are ideally connected by a bidirectional vector along the vertical axis (the compass needle aligned north-south) with axiological

communication (V). The “movement of the compass arrows” toward perfect alignment illustrates the process of harmonizing value, intelligence, and axiological communication. Before reaching communication (V), the “lower orientation” must pass through components I-IV, while the “upper orientation,” directed toward value intelligence (X), must pass through components VI-IX. Therefore, it is crucial to ensure a precise bidirectional connection between the following pairs of components: axiological knowledge (I) and humanistic value orientation (VI); axiological self-reflection (II) and value synthesis (VII); value identification (III) and axiological adaptation (VIII); and life strategy (IV) and axiological development (IX). This model is designed to serve as a “system of reference points” for making morally sound decisions in complex situations. Like a handpan musical instrument, its operation leads to a person’s harmonious “resonance” in the world.

Figure 1

The Multidimensional Model of Axiological Culture, the So-called “Axiological compass”



Note. Categories I-IV – internalization of values; V - axiological dialogue; VI-IX - axiological effectiveness; X - axiological culture (author’s development: Walat & Pelekh).

Our position is that implementing the proposed model in university education would enable a more effective approach to developing the axiological culture of its key actors - teachers and students - as equal partners. We must note, however, that the formation of axiological culture is a long-term process. For its effectiveness, several urgent reforms are necessary: a) aligning the content of educational programs with broader integration into the value-humanistic

domain (embedding values across disciplines); b) improving tools for monitoring the level of axiological culture among participants in the educational process; c) conducting interdisciplinary longitudinal research on the development of students' axiological competencies; d) directing institutional policies (rules, ethical norms, resources, and declared university missions) toward supporting the axiological mission.

Essentially, this concerns the establishment of a systemic approach and an educational ecosystem in which values are not only transmitted through teaching but also experienced by students through personal perception and practice. We believe such systemic work can yield positive results at both micro and macro levels. At the micro level, a university graduate would not only be a well-trained professional but also a morally stable, integral individual, harmonizing intellectual, professional, emotional, and moral development, and acting as a responsible citizen. Such graduates would go on to build similar ecosystems around themselves - spaces for ethical reflection and axiological culture.

At the macro level, axiological culture becomes a practical component in addressing one of the most significant challenges of European education: to remain simultaneously competitive and democratic, globalized (while preserving its identity and balancing between deep traditions and global pressures), and locally effective.

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