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Moral Values – A Comparative Study: Romanian and Turkish Students

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Abstract

The moral values of 156 Romanian and Turkish students of psychology and educational sciences are investigated by using the Rokeach Values Inventory. The country and demographical differences are taken into consideration. The cultural statistical significant differences deal with terminal values such as equality, health, inner harmony, national security, salvation, self-respect, wisdom, a comfortable life and a world of peace, and also several instrumental values such as being capable, helpful, intellectual, loving, obedient, ambitious, logical and self-controlled. When considering demographical aspects, Romanian students from small and big cities exhibit statistically significant differences regarding the values of social recognition (terminal value) and the intellect (instrumental value). Turkish students from big and small cities display statistically significant differences when it comes to items of a comfortable life and social recognition (terminal values) and several instrumental values such as forgiveness, honesty, politeness and responsibility. The students coming from big cities, in both countries, display statistically significant differences concerning the previously mentioned terminal values of comfortable life, equality, exciting life, health, inner harmony, national security, pleasure, salvation, self-respect and wisdom, as well as the instrumental values of being ambitious, capable, helpful, intellectual, loving, loyal, obedient and polite. Those coming from the small towns of both countries appear to differ on the following terminal values: equality, health, inner harmony, national

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security, salvation and self-respect, but also on the instrumental values of being ambitious, helpful, honest, logical, loving, obedient, responsible and self-controlled. Possible explanations and consequences are discussed.

Keywords:

Moral values; cultural difference; demographical differences.

1. Literature review

The subject of moral values and cultural differences is one of great importance to the analysis of the way people act and react in different circumstances.

As Geert Hofstede underlined in the 1980 preface of the first edition of the well-known “Culture’s consequences”, the survival of mankind will depend largely on the capability of different people to work together, given the fact that a better understanding of invisible cultural differences is one of the main contributions social sciences can make to practical policy makers within governments, organizations, institutions as well as to common citizens (Hofstede, 1980).

The concept of values is one of the key constructs used for describing the important differences between nations all over the world.

A value can be defined as a conception, explicit or implicit, distinctive to an individual or characteristic of a group, of the desirable which influences the selection from available modes, means and ends of actions (Kluckhohn, 1951/1967: 395). As Rokeach (1972) underlined, “to say that a person has a value is to say that he has an enduring belief that a specific mode of conduct or end-state of existence is personally and socially preferable to alternative modes of conduct or end-states of existence” (Rokeach, 1972: 159-160).

Elisabeth D. Scott (2000) notices individual differences in the way people define important moral values, these differences manifest themselves in dissimilarities within situations (Scott, 2000: 497). Scott’s research identifies five dimensions in which individuals can differ in their understanding of values: 1) value category (where the value lies in the hierarchy), 2) agent (how voluntary the action is and whether or not it is morally required of the agent), 3) object (how close the self is to the object of the action; whether the action offends God), 4) effect (whether the effect of the action is to harm or help), and 5) intention (whether the

intention of the action is to harm or help), and also four important values entailing moral dimensions: respect for life, respect for property, honest communication, and respect for religion (Scott, 2000).

One of the most widely referenced approaches for analyzing variations among cultures was done in the late 1970s by Geert Hofstede. In his survey, involving over 116,000 IBM employees of 40 countries, he focuses on work-related values. The research revealed a high score for China and West Africa when it comes to power distance, with the United States and the Netherlands at the other end. Most Asian countries were proven to be rather collectivist than individualistic, while the United States scored the highest on individualism amongst all countries. Germany and Hong Kong were rated high on achievement, while Russia and the Netherlands found themselves on the other end. When dealing with uncertainty and avoidance, France and Russia were rated high, with Hong Kong and the United States at the lower end. China and Hong Kong had a long-term orientation, whereas France and the United States had a short-term orientation (Hofstede, 2001).

The Hofstede Center is also the author of one of the most comprehensive surveys that underlined the values which differentiate Romania from Turkey. The study aimed at identifying the cultural dimensions which make countries unique and diverse. The results were very interesting, as the two countries tend to present more similarities than differences.

Although the differences in scores are rather important (Romania scores 90, while Turkey's score is 66), both nations score high on the dimension of **Power distance**, meaning that people accept a hierarchical order in which everyone has a place and which needs no further justification. The situation is also similar on the dimension of **Individualism** as both Romania (with a score of 30) and Turkey (with a score of 37) are considered collectivist societies, which is manifested in a close long-term commitment to the member 'group', be that a family, extended family, or extended relationships. On the dimension of **Masculinity**, where Romania scored 42 and Turkey scored 45, it is concluded that both countries are relatively feminine societies, with a focus on "working in order to live." On the dimension of **Uncertainty avoidance**, both countries score high with Romania scoring 90 and Turkey scoring 71. Therefore, there seems to be a rather high preference for avoiding uncertainty as both countries tend to maintain a rather rigid

code of beliefs and behavior and are intolerant of unorthodox behavior and ideas, feeling an emotional need for rules – even if the rules never seem to work, an inner urge to be busy and work hard develops. Finally, on the dimension of **Pragmatism**, both countries exhibit rather similar scores, as Romania scores 52 and Turkey scores 46, consequently no dominant cultural preference can be inferred to any of the two countries).

A difference is however identified on the dimension of **Indulgence**, where the Romanian culture (with a rather low score of 20) appears to be one of restraint, characterized by a tendency for cynicism and pessimism. It would appear that people's actions are restrained by social norms and the feeling of indulging oneself is somewhat wrong. On the other hand, with an intermediate score of 49, a characteristic corresponding to this dimension cannot be determined for Turkey.

Given that previous research is indicative of the two countries having a tendency to register more similarities than differences in values, further research appears to be of great interest to the study of cross-cultural moral values.

2. Research methodology

The current research was conducted on a **number of 156 students** of Psychology and Educational Sciences from Romania and Turkey (aged between 18 and 32).

Of the 89 Turkish students, 32 came from large cities such as Istanbul or Ankara, while the rest came from small, less developed cities.

The Romanian sample included 44 students that originated from large cities (Constanța, Tulcea, Brăila), and 22 coming from smaller cities (such as Medgidia, Cernavodă, Năvodari, Ovidiu).

The subjects of the research were investigated using the Rokeach Study of Values (RVS) and the results were statistically investigated through the SPSS 15, with Mann-Whitney Statistical Test.

The research followed **2 important objectives**:

- a. To determine whether or not there are statistically significant differences in the moral values of Romanian and Turkish students
- b. To identify possible demographical differences in the moral values of the students brought up in the two countries

Five hypothesis were inferred:

H1. We presume significant differences in the moral values of Romanian and Turkish students (due to cultural differences).

H2. We presume significant differences in the moral values of Romanian students coming from small and large cities.

H3. We presume significant differences in the moral values of Turkish students coming from small and large cities.

H4. We presume significant differences in the moral values of Romanian and Turkish students coming from large cities.

H5. We presume significant differences in the moral values of Romanian and Turkish students coming from small cities.

3. Findings and results

The first hypothesis presumed the existence of statistically significant differences in the values presented by Romanian and Turkish students, due to cultural differences.

The following results were registered:

equality – $U=1760.500$, $p=.000$, mean rank 1 = 96.72, mean rank 2 = 64.78.

health – $U=1498.000$, $p=.000$, mean rank 1 = 56.36, mean rank 2 = 95.17.

inner harmony – $U=1371.500$, $p=.000$, mean rank 1 = 54.47, mean rank 2 = 96.59.

national security – $U=1611.000$, $p=.000$, mean rank 1 = 98.96, mean rank 2 = 63.10.

salvation – $U=1890.000$, $p=.000$, mean rank 1 = 94.79, mean rank 2 = 66.24.

self-respect – $U=2151.000$, $p=.003$, mean rank 1 = 66.10, mean rank 2 = 87.83.

wisdom – $U=2058.000$, $p=.001$, mean rank 1 = 64.72, mean rank 2 = 88.88.

a comfortable life – $U=2215.500$, $p=.006$, mean rank 1 = 89.93, mean rank 2 = 69.89.

a world of peace – $U=2319.500$, $p=.017$, mean rank 1 = 88.38, mean rank 2 = 71.06.

being capable – $U=2093.000$, $p=.001$, mean rank 1 = 65.24, mean rank 2 = 88.48.

being helpful – $U=1323.500$, $p=.000$, mean rank 1 = 103.25, mean rank 2 = 59.87.

being intellectual – $U = 1894.000$, $p = .000$, mean rank 1 = 62.27, mean rank 2 = 90.72.

being loving – $U = 2080.000$, $p = .001$, mean rank 1 = 65.04, mean rank 2 = 88.63.

being obedient – $U = 1374.000$, $p = .000$, mean rank 1 = 102.49, mean rank 2 = 60.44.

being ambitious – $U = 2214.000$, $p = .006$, mean rank 1 = 67.04, mean rank 2 = 87.12.

being logical – $U = 2237.500$, $p = .008$, mean rank 1 = 89.60, mean rank 2 = 70.14.

being self-controlled – $U = 2249.500$, $p = .009$, mean rank 1 = 67.57, mean rank 2 = 86.72.

Cultural statistical significant differences were thus discovered involving terminal values such as equality, health, inner harmony, national security, salvation, self-respect, wisdom, a comfortable life and a world of peace. Significant differences also regarded several instrumental values such as being: capable, helpful, intellectual, loving, obedient, ambitious, logical and self-controlled.

The first hypothesis is thus confirmed. Turkish students tend to appreciate more terminal values such as equality, national security, salvation, a comfortable life and peace, while Romanian students appreciate more values such as health, inner harmony, self-respect and wisdom. As to the instrumental values, Turkish students appreciate more a helping behaviour, obedience and logic, while Romanian students think more of values such as being capable, intellectual, loving, ambitious and self-controlled.

Possible explanations may concern the type of education valued in the two countries. The general targets of the Turkish National Education, identified through the Basic Law of National Education No 1739, which determines both the aims and fundamental principles of the national education, values fundamental principles such as universality and equality, needs of the individual and society, orientation, educational right, equality of opportunity and possibility, continuity, the revolution and principles of Atatürk, democracy education, secularity, scientific education, planning, mixed education, cooperation of school and parents, and education in all places (MoNE, 1973).

Robert Thornberg and Ebru Oğuz (2013) consider that there has been a growing awareness of values in Turkey's education system during

recent years. As they suggest, in many schools, energetic work has begun preparing new projects with regards to education values. This issue has become a focus of interest for many (Şişman, 2012). Values and educational values are emphasized especially in life sciences and social studies curricula; in other courses it has taken place within the hidden curriculum in Turkey's primary schools (Demirel, 2009).

Meanwhile, Romanian students think more of values such as being capable, intellectual, loving, ambitious and self-controlled, probably due to the continuous economic changes that are specific to their country in these last years. Romanian children also grow up in an environment that tends to have more appreciation for love, while obedience and helpful behaviour tend to be more specific to Muslim countries, where these values tend to receive a greater importance.

The second hypothesis presumed the existence of statistically significant demographical differences in the Romanian sample.

The following results were registered:

social recognition – $U = 308.000$, $p = .009$, mean rank 1 = 38.50, mean rank 2 = 25.39.

intellect – $U = 353.000$, $p = .042$, mean rank 1 = 30.52, mean rank 2 = 40.65.

This hypothesis was also confirmed. When considering demographical aspects, Romanian students from small and large cities present statistically significant differences on the values of social recognition (terminal value) and the intellect (instrumental value). Thus, Romanian students coming from a small city tend to place more value on social recognition, while those coming from a large city place more value on the intellect.

A possible explanation may regard exactly the environmental particularities of the two samples. Small city students, which have in fact broken their boundaries when succeeding in going to University courses, tend to feel a greater need for social appreciation and recognition than their colleagues, which did not need to overcome the same obstacles. While it is very common in Romania for large city adolescents to go to University, the rural surrounding does not provide all young people with the same opportunity. This is probably why students that come from small cities or towns tend to place greater value on social recognition, while students coming from large cities are more preoccupied with the

intellectual values, which tend to be of greater importance in such an environment.

The 3rd hypothesis presumed the existence of statistically significant demographical differences in the Turkish sample.

The results indicate statistically significant differences on several items, as follows:

a comfortable life – $U = 650.500$, $p = .025$, mean rank 1 = 36.83, mean rank 2 = 49.59.

social recognition – $U = 674.500$, $p = .042$, mean rank 1 = 52.42, mean rank 2 = 40.83.

being forgiving – $U = 633.500$, $p = .017$, mean rank 1 = 53.70, mean rank 2 = 40.11.

being honest – $U = 670.500$, $p = .038$, mean rank 1 = 52.55, mean rank 2 = 40.76.

being polite – $U = 654.500$, $p = .027$, mean rank 1 = 36.95, mean rank 2 = 49.52.

being responsible – $U = 613.000$, $p = .010$, mean rank 1 = 35.66, mean rank 2 = 50.25.

The results above indicate that our third hypothesis is also sustained. Turkish students from large and small cities present statistically significant differences on the items of *a comfortable life* and *social recognition* (terminal values) and on several instrumental values such as being *forgiving*, *honest*, *polite* and *responsible*. Small city Turkish students appreciate more *social recognition*, *forgiving* and *honest* behavior, while large city students think more of values such as *a comfortable life*, or *polite* and *responsible* behavior.

A possible explanation may regard the implicit and explicit rules promoted in the environments students came from. Small cities usually tend to place more value on a forgiving and honest behavior, probably due to the fact that it is much easier in such an environment to get in touch with the people around you and to get to know them better, so that mistakes may be easily surpassed. Meanwhile, politeness and responsibility tend to be taught more in large cities, where social rules tend to be of more importance. It is also logical for young people living in large cities to place more value on a comfortable life, since they know it better than their colleagues do. Social recognition remains, exactly as it did in the case of the Romanian sample, a need of small city students,

which seem to be more preoccupied with obtaining their rightful place in the eyes of the beholder.

The 4th hypothesis presumed the existence of statistically significant differences in the values promoted by Romanian and Turkish students coming from large cities.

Statistically significant differences were obtained, as expected, on several items:

a comfortable life – $U = 376.000$, $p = .001$, mean rank 1 = 45.95, mean rank 2 = 28.25.

equality – $U = 370.500$, $p = .000$, mean rank 1 = 46.08, mean rank 2 = 28.08.

an exciting life - $U = 509.000$, $p = .040$, mean rank 1 = 42.93, mean rank 2 = 32.41.

health – $U = 307.500$, $p = .000$, mean rank 1 = 29.49, mean rank 2 = 50.89.

inner harmony – $U = 344.000$, $p = .000$, mean rank 1 = 30.32, mean rank 2 = 49.75.

national security – $U = 489.500$, $p = .023$, mean rank 1 = 43.38, mean rank 2 = 31.80.

pleasure – $U = 500.500$, $p = .032$, mean rank 1 = 43.13, mean rank 2 = 32.14.

salvation – $U = 478.500$, $p = .016$, mean rank 1 = 43.63, mean rank 2 = 31.45.

self-respect – $U = 436.500$, $p = .005$, mean rank 1 = 32.42, mean rank 2 = 46.86.

wisdom – $U = 463.000$, $p = .011$, mean rank 1 = 33.02, mean rank 2 = 46.03.

being ambitious – $U = 469.500$, $p = .013$, mean rank 1=33.17, mean rank 2 =45.83.

being capable – $U = 440.500$, $p = .005$, mean rank 1 = 32.51, mean rank 2 = 46.73.

being helpful – $U = 345.500$, $p = .000$, mean rank 1=46.65, mean rank 2=27.30. intellect – $U = 372.000$, $p = .000$, mean rank 1=30.95, mean rank 2 = 48.88.

being loving – $U = 504.500$, $p = .035$, mean rank 1=33.97, mean rank 2 =44.73.

being loyal – $U = 481.500$, $p = .019$, mean rank 1=43.56, mean rank 2 = 31.55. being obedient – $U = 267.500$, $p = .000$, mean rank 1 = 48.42, mean rank 2 = 24.86.

being polite – $U=438.000$, $p = .005$, mean rank 1=44.55, mean rank 2 =30.19.

This hypothesis was also confirmed. Large city students from both countries exhibit statistically significant differences on the terminal values of a comfortable life, equality, an exciting life, health, inner harmony, national security, pleasure, salvation, self-respect and wisdom, and on the instrumental values of being ambitious, capable, helpful, intellectual, loving, loyal, obedient and polite. Turkish students tend to place more value on such items as a comfortable life, equality, an exciting life, national security, pleasure, salvation, a helpful, loyal, polite and obedient behavior. Meanwhile, Romanian students think more of values such as health, inner harmony, self-respect, wisdom, ambition, being capable, intellectual and loving.

The results might be explained by the specific values promoted in the two countries, be it by teachers, parents, religion or the media. The socio-economic, religious and political environment of the two countries appear to be a distinctive factor in the values young people tend to assume, the large number of items to which students from the two countries gave different answers being a sign of cultural differences in the way they were brought up and in the education they have received to this point in their lives.

The 5th hypothesis presumed the existence of statistically significant differences in the values promoted by Romanian and Turkish students coming from small cities.

The assumption above was sustained by the results of the research, as one can easily notice from the data below:

equality – $U = 440.500$, $p = .022$, mean rank 1= 49.85, mean rank 2=36.73. health – $U = 323.500$, $p=.000$, mean rank 1=26.07, mean rank 2 =46.32.

inner harmony – $U = 349.500$, $p=.001$, mean rank 1=27.20, mean rank 2=45.87.

national security – $U = 316.000$, $p=.000$, mean rank 1=55.26, mean rank 2 = 34.54.

salvation – $U = 350.500$, $p=.001$, mean rank 1=53.76, mean rank 2 =35.15,

self-respect $U=461.500$, $p=.038$, mean rank 1=32.07, mean rank 2 = 43.90.

being ambitious $U=454.000$, $p=.032$, mean rank 1=31.74, mean rank 2=44.04

being helpful $U=238.500$, $p=.000$, mean rank 1=58.63, mean rank 2 =33.18,

being honest $U=417.000$, $p=.011$, mean rank 1= 50.87, mean rank 2 =36.32

being logical $U=456.000$, $p=.033$, mean rank 1=49.17, mean rank 2 =37.00,

being loving $U=419.500$, $p=.012$, mean rank 1=30.24, mean rank 2 =44.64,

being obedient $U=336.500$, $p=.001$, mean rank 1=54.37, mean rank 2=34.90, being responsible $U=425.500$, $p=.014$, mean rank 1=30.50, mean rank 2=44.54,

being self-controlled $U=459.000$, $p=.036$, mean rank 1=31.96, mean rank 2 =43.95,

This hypothesis was thus also confirmed. Small city students from the two countries appear to differ on the following terminal values: equality, health, inner harmony, national security, salvation and self-respect, but also on the instrumental values of being ambitious, helpful, honest, logical, loving, obedient, responsible and self-controlled. Turkish students think more of values such as equality, national security, salvation, being helpful, honest, logical and obedient. Meanwhile, Romanian students appreciate more values such as health, inner harmony, self-respect, being ambitious, loving, responsible and self-controlled.

The possible explanations also regard the values promoted in the two societies analyzed. While the differences are not as important as they seem to be in the case of large city students, they still exist, suggesting that the two countries place indeed more value on different kind of characteristics. The values promoted in the National Laws of Educations of the two countries appear to mark the way students develop their abilities and characteristics, therefore it is important for the future of young people to consider what education should implement in their minds and souls.

4. Conclusions

The study suggests that there are a lot of similarities between Romanian and Turkish students. However, as expected, several statistically significant differences between the values of the examined groups appear to emerge.

They regard cultural dimensions, but also demographical aspects, suggesting that indeed, there are things to be considered when we address issues like moral values and culture. Families, teachers, school books and curricula, the media, religion or simply the society, are all important factors in the way young people grow up and in the instrumental and terminal values they tend to adopt.

Further research should shed light on these cultural differences between the values promoted in the two countries, in order to better respond to the cultural implications of these social and moral aspects.

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