RIGA TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY

Gunita Delijeva

INTERRELATIONS BETWEEN PRESCHOOL TEACHERS' EXPLICIT AND IMPLICIT VALUES IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF VALUES EDUCATION

Summary of the Doctoral Thesis



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RIGA TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY
Liepāja Academy
Centre for Pedagogy and Social Work

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To be granted the scientific degree of Doctor of Science (PhD), the present Doctoral Thesis has been submitted for defence at the open meeting of the RTU Promotion Council on December 16, 2026, at 10:00 a.m. at the Centre for Education and Social Work of Riga Technical University Liepāja Academy, 14 Lielā Street, Room 227.

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DECLARATION OF ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

I hereby declare that the Doctoral Thesis submitted for review to Riga Technical University for promotion to the scientific degree of Doctor of Science (PhD) is my own. I confirm that this Doctoral Thesis has not been submitted to any other university for promotion to a scientific degree.

Gunita Delijeva ……. (signature)
Date: ……

The Doctoral Thesis is written in Latvian. It consists of an Introduction, five chapters, Discussion, Conclusions, Recommendations and Proposals, Theses for Defence, Acknowledgements, a List of References, two figures, 28 tables, and 43 appendices. The total number pf pages is 367, including appendices. The List of References contains 525 titles.

ANNOTATION

The Doctoral Thesis “Interrelations Between Preschool Teachers’ Explicit and Implicit Values in the Implementation of Values Education” is devoted to the study of the interrelationships between preschool teachers’ explicit and implicit values and their significance in the practice of values education. In contemporary educational policy, values education is regarded as an essential prerequisite for the development of a sustainable and democratic society (OECD, 2024; UNESCO, 2021), with particular emphasis on the importance of early childhood in the acquisition of values. Research indicates that teachers’ declared values do not always coincide with those enacted in practice, which may affect pedagogical decision-making and the quality of values education.

The aim of the study is to investigate the interrelationships between preschool teachers’ explicit and implicit values in the process of implementing values education and to develop a theoretical model for improving the quality of values education implementation in preschool education. The theoretical framework is grounded in insights from axiology and psychological theories of values (Allport, 1960; Rokeach, 1973; Schwartz, 1992), studies on explicit and implicit values in teachers’ professional practice (Jana et al., 2015; Mergler, 2008; Press et al., 2020), approaches to the indirect transmission of values in education, including manifestations of the hidden curriculum (Campbell-Barr, 2026; Halstead & Taylor, 2000; Kärner & Schneider, 2024; Kļaviņa, 2022), as well as the reflective practice approach (Schön, 1983).

The study was conducted using a sequential mixed-methods research design implemented in three phases, combining qualitative and quantitative research methods. The findings reveal the interrelationships between explicit and implicit values and their association with the implementation of values education, as well as identify discrepancies between declared values and values enacted in practice. Based on the empirical data, a theoretical model for improving the quality of values education implementation in preschool education was developed.

The scientific novelty of the Doctoral Thesis lies in a conceptually integrated approach to analysing the interrelationships between preschool teachers’ explicit and implicit values in the process of implementing values education and in the development of an empirically grounded theoretical model. The practical significance of the study is associated with the application of the model in the education and professional development of preschool teachers, the development of the professional environment in educational institutions, and educational policy planning, with the aim of enhancing the quality of values education implementation.

Keywords: explicit values; implicit values; values education; preschool education; teachers’ professional practice; hidden curriculum; reflection; value interrelationships.

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INTRODUCTION

Values education is one of the central aspects of education in fostering a sustainable, democratic, and socially responsible society. International education policy documents emphasise that the purpose of education extends beyond the acquisition of knowledge and skills to encompass the development of personality, attitudes, and values, thereby ensuring an individual's ability to act in a socially responsible and ethically grounded manner (OECD, 2024; UNESCO, 2021). This understanding is also reflected in Latvian education policy and regulatory documents, where the implementation of values education is defined as an integral component of the educational process (Cabinet of Ministers, 2016, 2018; Saeima, 1998). Particular importance is attributed to early childhood, during which the foundations of a child's moral orientation, social relationships, and attitudes towards oneself, others, and the surrounding world are established.

In early childhood, values are acquired within the family, the broader social environment, and educational institutions, where values education is implemented purposefully and systematically (Ročāne & Jurs, 2023). Research by Wu and Tan (2022) indicates that children begin to develop understandings of morality and values already in early childhood. Studies by Elizarov et al. (2023) demonstrate that by the age of five, children develop a value system whose structural organisation is comparable to that of parents, older children, and adults. Early childhood is also characterised by the development of prosocial behaviour and an orientation towards caring for others, which form the foundation for social responsibility and mutual support (Malti & Dys, 2018). The internalisation of values occurs gradually through social interaction, as externally presented norms become internally accepted principles guiding an individual's behaviour (Deci & Ryan, 2000). The introduction of values education at an early age promotes children's personality development and the long-term stability of values (Duban & Aydoğdu, 2017).

In preschool education, a significant role is played by the teacher, who acts not only as an organiser of the learning process but also as a bearer and mediator of values. Children's behaviour and value acquisition are largely based on observing and modelling adults' actions, which is consistent with the social cognitive learning approach (Bandura, 1986; OECD, 2024). Teachers' attitudes, communication styles, and pedagogical choices provide children with important models of behaviour and relationships. In teachers' professional practice, values are manifested both explicitly – through consciously articulated pedagogical goals and norms – and implicitly, as revealed in everyday actions, attitudes, and interactions with children (Halstead & Taylor, 2000; OECD, 2024).

In the scientific literature, values are conceptualised as relatively stable beliefs or desirable goals that serve as guiding principles for an individual's actions and decision-making (Allport et al., 1960/1931; Rokeach, 1973; Schwartz, 1992). Research (Sagiv & Schwartz, 2022; Yu et al., 2024) places particular emphasis on the distinction between explicit values and implicit values that are not always consciously reflected upon. In education, this distinction is significant because teachers' explicit values do not always fully correspond to their implicit values, while

the values embodied in everyday pedagogical practice have a substantial influence on children's value development (Halstead & Taylor, 2000; Sagiv & Schwartz, 2022; Yu et al., 2024).

Latvian education policy and regulatory documents identify such fundamental values as life, human dignity, freedom, family, marriage, work, nature, culture, the Latvian language, and the Latvian state (Cabinet of Ministers, 2016, 2018; Saeima, 1998). These values constitute the explicitly formulated foundation of values education. At the same time, research (Halstead & Taylor, 2000; Jana et al., 2015; Mergler, 2008) indicates that educational practice does not always ensure full alignment between the values declared in regulatory documents and their actual implementation in everyday pedagogical practice, particularly in preschool education, where values are acquired indirectly through social interaction. The hidden curriculum encompasses implicitly conveyed values, norms, and behavioural expectations that are reflected in everyday pedagogical interactions and the organisation of the educational environment without being explicitly stated in official curriculum documents (Campbell-Barr, 2025; Jackson, 1968/1990). Kļaviņa (2022) emphasises that values education is substantially manifested at the level of the hidden curriculum, where teachers' everyday actions and attitudes may differ from the values declared in regulatory documents.

Although studies (Dinh et al., 2012; Mergler, 2008; Sagiv & Schwartz, 2022) demonstrate the relationship between teachers' values and pedagogical goals, the creation of learning environments, professional attitudes, and educational approaches in preschool education, there has been insufficient systematic investigation into how teachers' explicit and implicit values interact in the process of implementing values education. Furthermore, insufficient attention has been paid to identifying inconsistencies between the values declared in regulatory documents and their implementation in pedagogical practice, as well as to determining which components of the professional support ecosystem may facilitate teachers' awareness of values, reflection, and value alignment.

Thus, the research problem is characterised by the lack of an empirically grounded and conceptually integrated understanding of the interrelationships between preschool teachers' explicit and implicit values in the process of implementing values education. Given that, in preschool education, values are largely acquired indirectly through teachers' everyday actions, attitudes, and social interactions, it is necessary to analyse these interrelationships both theoretically and empirically and to develop a theoretical model that explains their significance for improving the quality of values education implementation in preschool education.

Object of the Study: The process of values education in preschool education.

Subject of the Study: The interrelationships between explicit and implicit values in preschool teachers' pedagogical practice.

Aim of the Study: To investigate the interrelationships between preschool teachers' explicit and implicit values in the process of implementing values education and to develop a theoretical model for improving the quality of values education implementation in preschool education.

Research Questions

1. How are the values defined in regulatory documents substantively implemented in the pedagogical practices of preschool teachers?

2. What interrelationships can be observed between preschool teachers' explicit values and the implicit values enacted in their professional practice?
3. Which components of the professional support ecosystem influence the interrelationships between preschool teachers' explicit and implicit values?

Research Tasks

1. To analyse the scientific and theoretical literature on the integration of values and the implementation of values education in preschool education, as well as on explicit and implicit values in teachers' professional practice.
2. To identify, based on the scientific literature, the preconditions and support mechanisms required for the implementation of values education by preschool teachers.
3. To explore preschool teachers' views on the integration of values and the implementation of values education in preschool education, as well as on explicit and implicit values in teachers' professional practice.
4. To explore teacher educators' views on the components of the professional support ecosystem required for the implementation of values education in higher education and professional development programmes for teachers.
5. To develop and pilot a questionnaire for preschool teachers on explicit and implicit values and the implementation of values education in preschool education.
6. To conduct a survey of preschool teachers and identify the interrelationships between teachers' explicit and implicit values and the implementation of values education;
7. To develop a theoretical model for improving the quality of values education implementation in preschool education.
8. To formulate recommendations for national and local government institutions and educational institutions regarding the implementation of the developed theoretical model for improving the quality of values education implementation in preschool education.

Brief Description of the Research Methodology

The empirical study was conducted using a sequential mixed-methods research design, combining qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis methods. This approach was selected to gain an in-depth understanding of the manifestations of preschool teachers' explicit and implicit values in pedagogical practice, to quantitatively identify the interrelationships between these values, and to interpret the findings within the context of professional preparation and support.

The empirical study was structured into three consecutive phases and carried out between 11 March 2025 and 28 February 2026. Prior to the commencement of the study, approval was obtained from the Research Ethics Committee of Riga Technical University. By Decision No. 04000-10.2.3-e/6 of 10 March 2025, the research protocol was approved.

In the first phase of the empirical study, semi-structured online interviews were conducted with preschool teachers from different regions of Latvia. The aim of this phase was to explore how teachers interpret the values defined in regulatory documents and how these values are implemented in everyday preschool educational practice and in teachers' pedagogical choices. The interview data were analysed using thematic analysis. In total, 240 interviews were analysed, involving 24 respondents in the analysis of each value.

In the second phase of the empirical study, an online survey of preschool teachers (N = 476) was conducted. The aim of this phase was to quantitatively identify the interrelationships between preschool teachers' explicit values and the implicit values enacted in practice. Data analysis included descriptive statistical methods, graphical analysis, and inferential statistical methods, namely the Kolmogorov–Smirnov test, Cronbach's alpha coefficient, and Spearman's rank correlation analysis.

In the third phase of the empirical study, semi-structured online interviews were conducted with higher education teacher educators ($N = 7$) involved in the education and professional development of preschool teachers. The aim of this phase was to specify the components of the professional support ecosystem that influence the interrelationships between preschool teachers' explicit and implicit values. The interview data were analysed using thematic analysis.

Overall, Phases 1 and 2 of the study formed a sequential analytical structure in which qualitative data helped to identify the interrelationships between explicit and implicit values, while quantitative analysis helped to determine the strength and nature of these interrelationships. The perspectives of teacher educators obtained in Phase 3 contributed to the interpretation of the findings and to the formulation of preconditions for providing support for the implementation of values education. This methodological approach provided an empirical basis for the development of a theoretical model aimed at improving the quality of values education implementation in preschool education.

The preliminary investigation and initial groundwork for the doctoral research were carried out between 2020 and 2024. During the preliminary phase, the scientific literature was systematically reviewed, and the theoretical framework and research questions of the Doctoral Thesis were refined. An initial empirical research methodology was developed, including interview questions and the research protocol. Furthermore, the empirical and methodological insights gained during the preparation of the Master's Thesis "Teachers' Practice in the Implementation of Moral Education in Preschool Educational Institutions" (Delijeva, 2018) were examined and incorporated.

The conceptual foundations of the research phases and the preliminary findings were presented at scientific conferences and further developed through scientific publications. These activities provided the theoretical and methodological foundation for the development of the empirical part of the Doctoral Thesis.

Scientific Novelty of the Research

1. Teachers' explicit and implicit values and their interrelationships in pedagogical practice have been systematically analysed in Latvian preschool education.
2. A theoretical model has been developed that structures and explains the interrelationships between explicit and implicit values in the implementation of values education.
3. The understanding of values education as a systemic and dynamic process has been expanded, emphasising the significance of reflection in teachers' professional practice.
4. The significance of implicit values and the hidden curriculum in preschool education has been empirically substantiated.

5. The significance of the professional support ecosystem for the implementation of values education in preschool education has been empirically substantiated.

Practical Novelty of the Research

1. The developed theoretical model can be applied in the education and professional development of preschool teachers and in the development of the professional environment of educational institutions in order to promote improvement in the quality of values education implementation in preschool education.
2. A structured framework is proposed for raising teachers' awareness of explicit and implicit values, supporting reflection, and promoting value alignment in pedagogical practice, thereby fostering more consistent implementation of values education.
3. Practical recommendations have been developed for educational institutions and education policy-makers to improve the quality of values education implementation.
4. The research findings can be used in the development of curricula and professional development programmes, strengthening the quality of values education implementation in preschool education.

Structure of the Doctoral Thesis

The Doctoral Thesis is structured into an Introduction, five chapters, a Discussion, Conclusions, Recommendations and Proposals, Theses for Defence, a List of References, and Appendices.

The first chapter analyses the historical development of the understanding of values, the concept of values, classifications and interpretations of values in different theoretical approaches, as well as the understanding of explicit and implicit values and the significance of values in Latvian education. The second chapter characterises methods and approaches to the implementation of values, emphasising the role of the preschool teacher in values education and the manifestations of explicit and implicit values in professional practice. It analyses the relationship of these values to pedagogical interaction, reflective practice, teachers' professional identity, and methods used in values education. The third chapter examines the preconditions and support mechanisms for the implementation of values education in preschool education. The fourth chapter substantiates the research methodology, the sequential mixed-methods research design, and the three phases of the empirical study. The fifth chapter presents the research findings, including the results of the first phase concerning the implementation of the values defined in regulatory documents in preschool education, the quantitative results of the second phase, and the findings of the third phase regarding the components of the professional support ecosystem.

The discussion interprets the research findings within theoretical and empirical contexts, while the concluding part of the Thesis presents the conclusions, recommendations, and theses proposed for defence.

The appendices include research ethics documentation, data collection instruments, informed consent materials, as well as interview and survey materials.

Dissemination of Research Findings

Findings of the Doctoral Thesis have been disseminated in seven peer-reviewed scientific publications.

Delijeva, G., & Ozola, A. (2025). Teachers' beliefs on nature as a value in early childhood education. In L. Daniela (Ed.), *Human, technologies and quality of education 2025: Proceedings of scientific papers [Cilvēks, tehnoloģijas un izglītības kvalitāte 2025: Rakstu krājums]* (pp. 538–549). Riga: University of Latvia. https://doi.org/10.22364/htqe.2025.38

Markus, D., Zīriņa, T., **Delijeva, G.**, Tauriņa, A., Ivanova, O., Iļinska, L., & Ivanova, D. (2025). Transition to learning and speaking in Latvian: *Pre-school education*. *Vārds un tā pētīšanas aspekti, 29,* 133–148. https://doi.org/10.37384/VTPA.2025.29.133

Markus, D., Tauriņa, A., Zīriņa, A. & **Delijeva, G.** (2023). Mazākumtautību pirmsskolēnu latviešu valodas prasme. *Linguistica Lettica.* LU latviešu valodas institūta žurnāls. 31 (1). 294–308. LU Latviešu valodas institūts. https://doi.org/10.22364/lingualet.31.1 (*Scopus*)

Delijeva, G., & Ozola, A. (2023). Teachers' perspectives on promoting children's participation in early childhood education. *Society. Integration. Education. Proceedings of the International Scientific Conference, 2*, 56–69. https://doi.org/10.17770/sie2023vol2.7092

Delijeva, G. (2023). Laulības kā vērtības aktualizēšana pirmsskolas izglītībā: pirmsskolas skolotāju uzskatu izpēte. *Liepājas Universitāte, Zinātnisko rakstu krājums, Pedagoģija: teorija un prakse (XII)*, 4–15. https://doi.org/10.37384/PTP.2023.12.001

Delijeva, G., & Ozola, A. (2021). Actualization of values in pre-school education by implementing competence-based learning content. *Society. Integration. Education. Proceedings of the International Scientific Conference, II,* 715–728.

https://doi.org/10.17770/sie2021vol2.6404 (*Web of Science*)

Delijeva, G., Ozola, A., Biģelis, T. R., & Miķelsone, I. (*in press*) "*State language and culture as values in linguistically diverse preschools: Teachers' perspectives*". *International Journal of Early Childhood. A*

The Doctoral Thesis has been presented at twelve scientific conferences in Latvia and abroad.

77th OMEP World Assembly and Conference. Conference Presentation "*State language and culture as values in a linguistically diverse preschool education environment*" (Bologna, Italy, 16–18.07.2025, World Organization for Early Childhood Education).

77th OMEP World Assembly and Conference. Conference Presentation "*Exploring teachers' perspectives on promoting child participation in nature-based learning*" (Bologna, Italy, 16–18.07.2025, World Organization for Early Childhood Education).

77th OMEP World Assembly and Conference. Poster Presentation "*Teachers' opinions on instilling nature as a core value in early childhood education*" (Bologna, Italy, 16–18.07.2025, World Organization for Early Childhood Education).

19th European Congress of Psychology. Conference Presentation "*Teachers' beliefs on child participation through nature-based activities in early childhood*" (Paphos, Cyprus, 01–04.07.2025, European Federation of Psychologists' Associations).

The 67th International Scientific Conference of Daugavpils University. Conference Presentations "*Preschool teachers' beliefs about the state language as a value in educational practice*" (Daugavpils, 10.–11.04.2025., Daugavpils Universitāte).

31st International Scientific Conference "Current Issues in Literary and Cultural Research". Conference Presentation "Latviešu valoda un kultūra kā vērtības pirmsskolas izglītībā" (Liepāja, 20.–21.03.2025., RTU Liepāja Academy).

83rd International Scientific Conference of the University of Latvia, section Conference Presentation "*Implementation of Child Participation in Nature-Based Activities in Early Childhood Settings*" (Rīga, 13.02.2025, University of Latvia).

21st International Scientific Conference "Language Learning: Problems and Perspectives". Conference Presentations "Ilgtspējīgas attīstības mērķis – nevienlīdzības mazināšana latviešu valodas apguvē" (Liepāja, 17.05.2024., RTU Liepāja Academy).

17th International Scientific Conference "Society. Integration. Education." Conference Presentations "*Teachers' perspectives on promoting children's participation in early childhood education*" (Rēzekne, 26.05.2023, Rezekne Academy of Technologies).

14th International Scientific Conference "Dimensions of Educational Quality in the Knowledge Society". Conference Presentations "Laulības kā vērtības aktualizēšana pirmsskolas izglītībā: pirmsskolas skolotāju uzskatu izpēte" (Liepāja, 28.04.2022, Liepaja University).

15th International Scientific Conference "Society. Integration. Education." Conference Presentations "*Actualization of values in pre-school education by implementing competence-based learning content*" (Rēzekne, 28.05.2021, Rezekne Academy of Technologies).

79th International Scientific Conference of the University of Latvia. Conference Presentations "*Implementing values in education: research of the beliefs of preschool education teachers*" (Rīga, 12.02.2021, University of Latvia).

Participation in Research Projects

State Research Programme "Letonika for the Development of a Latvian and European Society", No. VPP-LETONIKA-2022/1-0001, project "Use and Development of the Contemporary Latvian Language" (2022–2024).

Awards and Honours

OMEP New Scholar Award 2025 (Postgraduate Category). Awarded in recognition of the research study *"State Language and Culture as Values in a Linguistically Diverse Preschool Education Environment"* (World Organization for Early Childhood Education, Bologna, Italy, July 2025).

The study was carried out within the framework of the European Union Recovery and Resilience Facility project No. 5.2.1.1.i.0/2/24/I/CFLA/003, "Implementation of Consolidation and Governance Changes at Riga Technical University, Liepaja University, Rezekne Academy of Technologies, the Latvian Maritime Academy, and Liepaja Maritime College for Advancing Excellence in Higher Education, Science and Innovation".

1. HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE CONCEPT OF VALUES

1.1. The Concept of Values and Its Transformation

The concept of values has been central to human thought since antiquity, when philosophers sought to understand the nature of the good, justice, virtue, and the purpose of human life within society. Throughout history, values have been regarded not only as criteria guiding individual choices but also as prerequisites for social coexistence, harmony, and moral order (Parsons, 1951; UNESCO, 2021). An axiological approach to values is associated with topics of particular importance in education, such as values education, the understanding of normative behaviour, human rights, citizenship, and sustainable development (Kryvylova et al., 2020).

Within the Western philosophical tradition, the understanding of values has evolved from the emphasis on harmony, virtue, self-knowledge, the good, and human flourishing in ancient philosophy to the value hierarchy characteristic of medieval philosophy, the ideal of spiritual development, and the principle of moral responsibility (Aristotle, 1985; Augustine, 1998; Cicero, 1991; Kahn, 2001; Kūle & Kūlis, 1998; Lasmane, 2006; Plato, 2008). This historical perspective reveals that values have been interpreted across different periods as guiding principles for human action, virtue, social coexistence, and spiritual development.

Today, values are examined from an interdisciplinary perspective encompassing philosophy, psychology, sociology, and educational sciences. Alongside the understanding of values as universal principles, emphasis is also placed on their dynamic nature and their social and cultural construction, which influence individuals' choices, attitudes, and behaviour (Hitlin & Piliavin, 2004; Skakun, 2023). Such an understanding is significant for the implementation of values education, as it provides opportunities to analyse how teachers' values are shaped through the interaction of historical, cultural, social, and professional factors.

In this Doctoral Thesis, the historical and theoretical analysis of the concept of values provides the foundation for understanding preschool teachers' explicit and implicit values. Teachers' beliefs, attitudes, actions, and pedagogical choices influence the implementation of values education; therefore, values are examined in this study as important guiding principles of professional practice and pedagogical interaction.

1.2. Classification and Interpretation of Values in Different Value Theories

The classification of values in different theoretical approaches provides a basis for analysing teachers' value systems, professional practice, and the implementation of values education. Axiological insights were further developed in the field of psychology by Gordon Willard Allport (1897–1967), who conceptualised values as a central organising force of personality that structures an individual's thinking, motivation, and behaviour (Allport, 1960). Allport's theory of value orientations helps to explain how individual value priorities are manifested in teachers' professional practice and how they may influence pedagogical choices.

Milton Rokeach (1918–1988) defined values as relatively stable beliefs that influence an individual's attitudes, choices, and actions (Rokeach, 1973). A key distinction in Rokeach's theory is between terminal and instrumental values. Terminal values characterise desired end-

states of existence, whereas instrumental values refer to preferred modes of conduct for attaining these end-states. In the professional practice of preschool teachers, this distinction helps to analyse how teachers' consciously formulated pedagogical goals are related to the forms of action implemented in everyday practice.

Shalom H. Schwartz's theory of basic human values offers a structured perspective on values as universal, interrelated motivational goals (Schwartz, 1992, 2012). In Schwartz's model, values are organised into four higher-order categories: self-enhancement (power, achievement), self-transcendence (benevolence, universalism), conservation (security, conformity, tradition), and openness to change (hedonism, stimulation, self-direction), which together form a universal structure of values across cultures (Schwartz, 1992, 1994, 2012). This perspective helps to analyse how teachers' value priorities and their interrelations influence pedagogical practice. This approach is significant for the doctoral study because it makes it possible to analyse how teachers' value priorities, as well as their mutual consistency or inconsistency, influence the implementation of values education in preschool education. Based on Schwartz's universal structure of values, Table 1.1 summarises the interpretation of Schwartz's basic values in preschool education (see Table 1.1).

Table 1.1

Schwartz's Universal Value Structure and Its Interpretation in Preschool Teachers' Professional Practice (adapted from Schwartz, 1992, 1994, 2012)

Higher-order value categories	**Value types (ten-value model)**	**Focus**	**Interpretation in preschool teachers' professional practice**
Self-enhancement	Power, achievement	Social status, personal success	Teachers purposefully develop their professional identity by grounding their practice in supporting children's individual development and the formation of a positive self-concept as an expression of pedagogical professionalism (Āboltiņa & Černova, 2017).
Self-transcendence	Benevolence, universalism	Concern for others, tolerance, social justice	Promotes children's ethical development, empathy, and inclusion, while emphasising respectful relationships and collaboration (Kurian, 2024; Lin et al., 2025).
Conservation	Security, conformity, tradition	Personal security, social security, compliance, respect for traditions	Provides stability and behavioural guidelines, strengthens the continuity of values, and supports social order within the educational environment (Lin et al., 2025).
Openness to change	Self-direction, stimulation, hedonism	Creativity, intellectual autonomy, enjoyment of life	Encourages children's individuality, independence, and interest in new experiences, fostering initiative and creativity in the educational process (Cieciuch et al., 2015; Schwartz, 2012).

Together, Allport's, Rokeach's, and Schwartz's theories of values form the theoretical basis for analysing the interrelations between preschool teachers' explicit and implicit values. Allport's approach emphasises the motivational significance of values within personality; Rokeach's approach helps distinguish between value goals and modes of conduct; and Schwartz's approach provides a structured framework for explaining the interrelations among values. In this Doctoral Thesis, these theoretical approaches are used to substantiate the significance of explicit and implicit values in teachers' professional practice and in the implementation of values education.

1.3. Explicit and Implicit Values

Drawing on the definition of values proposed by Schwartz and Bilsky (1987), values are characterised as desirable goals that transcend specific situations and serve as guiding principles for human behaviour, influencing both behavioural choices and the evaluation of events. In this Doctoral Thesis, explicit and implicit values are conceptualised as two interrelated yet functionally distinct dimensions of value expression.

In this study, explicit values are understood as consciously articulated life goals, professional orientations, and guiding principles that can be verbalised, reflected upon, and institutionalised, for example, in educational programmes or regulatory documents. Implicit values, in turn, are understood as values that are not always consciously reflected upon but are manifested in teachers' spontaneous actions, attitudes, emotional responses, interactions, and pedagogical choices (Dinh et al., 2012; Mergler, 2008; Sagiv & Schwartz, 2022).

The distinction between explicit and implicit values is based on the assumption that values may operate at both conscious and verbalised levels as well as unconscious and automated levels, thereby influencing individuals' behaviour and decision-making across different situations (Dinh et al., 2012; Sagiv & Schwartz, 2022; Yu et al., 2024). In preschool education, this distinction is particularly important because teachers' declared values do not always fully correspond to the values enacted in everyday pedagogical practice.

The distinction between terminal and instrumental values in classical value theories is not directly analogous to the distinction between explicit and implicit values. Terminal values more often represent consciously articulated end goals, whereas instrumental values refer to principles of action for achieving these goals. However, the same value may be manifested at both explicit and implicit levels under different circumstances of professional practice (Rokeach, 1973; Schwartz, 1994).

In preschool education, explicit values may be manifested as teachers' consciously articulated professional goals and institutionally established norms, whereas implicit values are revealed through everyday pedagogical practice, attitudes, and interactions with children and colleagues, thereby contributing to manifestations of the hidden curriculum (Campbell-Barr, 2026; Jana et al., 2015; Mergler, 2008). Studies (Dinh et al., 2012; Jana et al., 2015; Yu et al., 2024; Zaruba et al., 2021) indicate that inconsistencies may exist between the values declared in educational policy and those enacted in practice, highlighting the importance of teachers' reflection in the implementation of values education.

The analysis of the interrelations between explicit and implicit values is particularly significant in preschool education because children's acquisition of values is influenced not

only by teachers' consciously articulated pedagogical goals and explicit values but also by the implicit values embodied in their everyday actions, attitudes, communication, and pedagogical choices. In this Doctoral Thesis, such an approach provides the theoretical foundation for analysing the interrelations between explicit and implicit values.

1.4. Values in Latvian Education

For education systems to respond purposefully and sustainably to global challenges, it is important to strengthen values that shape societal identity, provide a foundation for culture, and promote social cohesion (Mausethagen et al., 2024; Pavitola et al., 2024). In Latvia, the value system underpinning education is rooted in national identity, cultural heritage, and the principles of a democratic society. Within the educational process, values serve as a foundation for fostering a sense of belonging, ensuring cultural continuity, and shaping identity, thereby contributing to value stability within the educational environment.

In Latvian regulatory documents, values education is defined as one of the fundamental tasks of the educational process, and its implementation is closely linked to children's personal development, their ability to navigate the value system of society, and their capacity to act responsibly (Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Latvia, 2016, 2018; Saeima, 1998). Regulatory documents identify ten core values that are integrated across all levels of education, including preschool education: life, human dignity, freedom, family, marriage, work, nature, culture, the Latvian language, and the Latvian state (Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Latvia, 2016, 2018; Saeima, 1998). In this Doctoral Thesis, each of these values is analysed separately with regard to its theoretical understanding, significance in preschool education, explicit and implicit manifestations in teachers' professional practice, and possible approaches to implementing values education in pedagogical practice.

As in many other countries, the interpretation of values in Latvia is not static. The understanding of values is influenced by socioeconomic conditions and broader societal development trends. Research (Jackson & Medvedev, 2024) indicates that in societies with higher levels of well-being, increasing importance is attached to individual freedom, self-expression, and human rights, whereas in countries characterised by strong collective traditions, values related to community and belonging tend to predominate. In Latvian education, there is a growing need to balance individual and collective values by fostering both children's personal development and their sense of belonging to Latvia's cultural space. Such a balance is associated with understanding educational values in both individual and collective terms. At the same time, prosocial values are becoming increasingly important in contemporary education, as they contribute to overall societal well-being and socially responsible behaviour (Ročāne & Jurs, 2025).

In this Doctoral Thesis, the values established in Latvian regulatory documents provide the theoretical and empirical foundation for analysing the interrelations between preschool teachers' explicit and implicit values. The implementation of these values in preschool education is closely related to teachers' ability to recognise, reflect upon, and align their own values with the aims of values education and the developmental needs of children.

2. APPROACHES AND METHODS IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF VALUES

2.1. Preschool Teachers' Role in the Implementation of Values

Preschool teachers' professional practice in implementing values education involves the purposeful selection of pedagogical approaches and methods adapted to children's developmental level, experience, and emotional understanding. In the scientific literature, several approaches to the implementation of values are identified: inculcation, evocation, and value clarification (Castro, 2024). In preschool education, these approaches can be implemented in age-appropriate ways through explanation, modelling, play, stories, creative activities, emotionally meaningful situations, and the stimulation of children's initial reflection.

Inculcation involves the intentional actualisation of values through teachers' explanations, reinforcement of behaviour, example-setting, and the organisation of the learning environment. Evocation is based on developing children's emotional responsiveness, empathy, and shared emotional experience, whereas value clarification helps children to gain awareness of their actions, their consequences, and their relationships with other people (Castro, 2024). In preschool education, a balance between teachers' structured guidance and children's active involvement in the process of acquiring values is particularly important.

Diverse methods are significant in the implementation of values education: dramatisation and role play, storytelling with fairy tales and stories, discussions, questioning, educational games, collaborative tasks, the development of experiences of kindness and care, and the modelling of teacher behaviour (Chepil et al., 2023; Döring et al., 2024; Gregòri, 2018; Haryono et al., 2020; Kılınç & Andaş, 2022; Samuseviča & Vikmane, 2018; Warren et al., 2023; Wu & Tan, 2022; Yüksel et al., 2020). These methods promote the integration of children's moral, social, and emotional development with everyday pedagogical experience.

Teachers' professional practice in the implementation of values cannot be reduced solely to the planning of learning content. Values are also acquired through the organisation of the learning environment, teachers' attitudes, communication, the promotion of cooperation among children, and the pedagogical use of everyday situations. Therefore, in implementing values education, teachers' ability to integrate values into learning content and everyday interactions is significant for creating an emotionally safe environment in which children feel accepted, listened to, and involved.

The quality of values education is also influenced by teachers' self-efficacy, that is, their belief in their professional ability to carry out pedagogical tasks. Teachers with higher self-efficacy and stronger pedagogical knowledge are able to select methods appropriate for values education more purposefully, create a learning environment based on trust, and ensure more consistent implementation of values (Leijen et al., 2024). At the same time, research indicates that, in practice, methods are often improvised and not implemented consistently enough; therefore, teachers' professional development and methodological support are needed (Döring et al., 2024; Nguyen & Huynh, 2024).

Preschool teachers' professional practice in the implementation of values education includes both consciously selected methods and everyday pedagogical interactions in which values are highlighted, modelled, and reinforced in children's experience. Teachers' professional competence, self-efficacy, cooperation with parents, and ability to create a value-based learning

environment are essential prerequisites for the purposeful and consistent implementation of values education in preschool education.

In this Doctoral Thesis, these approaches and methods are analysed in relation to the manifestations of explicit and implicit values in preschool teachers' professional practice and in the implementation of values education.

2.2. Explicit and Implicit Values in Teachers' Practice in Values Education

Teachers play a central role in the process of values education, as their attitudes, language, actions, and everyday pedagogical choices function as important conditions for children's acquisition of values. Preschool children acquire values not only through explanation and purposefully organised activities but also by observing teachers' behaviour, emotional responses, communication, and attitudes towards children, colleagues, and parents (Biesta, 2020; Cornelio et al., 2019; Lilja et al., 2025; Wu & Tan, 2022).

Explicit values in teachers' practice are manifested in consciously formulated learning objectives, pedagogical explanations, thematic plans, rules, and the verbalisation of values. Implicit values are revealed in teachers' everyday actions, attitudes, non-verbal communication, spontaneous responses, pedagogical choices, and classroom management practices. These values are not always consciously reflected upon; nevertheless, they significantly influence children's understanding of social norms, relationships, and morality (Adu Sarpong et al., 2021; Bilgiz Öztürk & Tufan, 2018; Guevara & Rodríguez, 2023; Isotalo et al., 2024; Szabo, 2018).

In this Doctoral Thesis, explicit and implicit values are analytically distinguished from attitudes, professional habits, and professional norms. This distinction is important because, in teachers' professional practice, these phenomena often manifest simultaneously; however, theoretically, they are not identical. Explicit values are consciously formulated and declared values. Implicit values are value orientations that are not always consciously reflected upon but guide teachers' professional actions. Attitudes, in turn, characterise a specific evaluative position; professional habits are manifested in repeated patterns of action; and professional norms are related to institutionally and collectively maintained understandings of professionally appropriate conduct (Gardner et al., 2024; Hanel et al., 2021; Hwa, 2024; Sagiv & Schwartz, 2022; Yu et al., 2024).

In this Doctoral Thesis, the distinction between the concepts of explicit and implicit values is used to clarify the interpretation of empirical data and to substantiate the analysis of value manifestations observed in teachers' professional practice.

Teachers' implicit values are shaped by their beliefs, personal experience, culture, professional socialisation, and educational experience. They may be manifested positively, for example, in care for children's safety, participation, inclusion, empathy, and respectful relationships, as well as problematically, when teachers' actions reveal stereotypes, prejudices, excessive conformity, or communication that diminishes a child's self-worth (Barzut et al., 2020; Bećirović & Bešlija, 2018; Emilson et al., 2016; Goriss-Hunter et al., 2023; Guedes et al., 2024; Kärner & Schneider, 2024; Pažur et al., 2024; Shirani & Mohamadi Zenouzagh, 2021; Su, 2023; Yilmaz-Na & Sönmez, 2023).

Implicit values are closely related to the hidden curriculum, as teachers' personal values, attitudes, emotional responses, and communication styles indirectly reinforce children's understandings of desirable and undesirable behaviour in everyday practice. From this perspective, education is not value-neutral, as teachers' pedagogical choices always involve a

certain normative orientation (Biesta, 2020; Kärner & Schneider, 2024). In preschool education, this aspect is particularly significant because children largely acquire values through social interaction, emotional experience, and observation of adults' actions.

Teachers' reflection is an essential mechanism for recognising, evaluating, and aligning explicit and implicit values with the aims of values education. Reflection helps teachers analyse their beliefs, pedagogical choices, emotional responses, and everyday actions, as well as assess their alignment with children's developmental needs and educational values (Machost & Stains, 2023; Philp-Clark & Grieshaber, 2023; Su, 2023). Reflective practice strengthens teachers' professional identity and promotes a more conscious implementation of values in pedagogical practice.

Overall, explicit and implicit values in teachers' professional practice form an interrelated foundation for the implementation of values education. Explicit values provide a consciously formulated direction for values education, whereas implicit values are revealed in everyday actions, attitudes, and emotional expressions. Therefore, the quality of values education in preschool education is closely related to teachers' ability to reflect on their values, recognise their manifestations in professional practice, and develop coherent pedagogical practice that supports children's development.

Thus, in this Doctoral Thesis, the second chapter provides the theoretical foundation for the further empirical analysis of the interrelations between teachers' explicit and implicit values in the implementation of values education.

3. PREREQUISITES AND SUPPORT MECHANISMS FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF VALUES EDUCATION IN PRESCHOOL EDUCATION

In this Doctoral Thesis, the implementation of values education is viewed as a process in which teachers' value orientation, capacity for self-reflection, professional development, institutional support, and educational policy mutually influence teachers' professional practice (Argon & Taşkın, 2023; Güzelyurt, 2020; Marušić-Jablanović, 2018; Philp-Clark & Grieshaber, 2023). Teachers' role in value formation is not limited to ensuring the acquisition of knowledge and skills. Preschool teachers act as models of moral conduct, promoting democratic decision-making, conflict resolution, and the integration of values into the learning process (Duban & Aydoğdu, 2017; Gregòri, 2018; Ryder & Krieken Robson, 2023). The implementation of values education requires teachers to possess certain professional and personal qualities, such as discipline, friendliness, diligence, responsibility, reliability, and openness to change (Gökçe, 2021). The practical manifestation of these qualities is closely related to teachers' professional identity and their ability to implement values consciously in pedagogical practice.

Teachers' personal values are significant for children's moral and social development, as they are manifested in teachers' attitudes, behaviour, emotional communication, and everyday pedagogical choices (Jana et al., 2015; Leijen et al., 2024; Samuseviča & Vikmane, 2018). Studies indicate that inconsistencies may emerge between explicit and implicit values in teachers' actions, affecting the quality of values education (Jana et al., 2015). Therefore, the practice of reflection is of particular importance, as it helps teachers become aware of the influence of their values on children, evaluate their pedagogical actions, and align their personal values with the aims of values education (Machost & Stains, 2023; Philp-Clark & Grieshaber, 2023). The implementation of values education is also influenced by teachers' education and professional development. In the education of both prospective and practising teachers, it is essential to develop the ability to connect theoretical knowledge with pedagogical practice, acquire methods applicable to values education, and reflect on their value dimension (Chepil et al., 2023; Lorente-Echeverría et al., 2022; Ulvik & Smith, 2018).

Studies (Lamanauskas, 2024; Nguyen & Huynh, 2024) indicate that the practical implementation of values education may be hindered by insufficient teacher preparation, limited methodological and institutional support, and insufficient access to professional development opportunities. To reduce such difficulties, it is necessary to strengthen teachers' professional development, provide methodological resources, promote support from educational institution leadership, and develop a pedagogical environment in which values are integrated not only into learning content but also into everyday relationships, cooperation, and institutional culture (Argon & Taşkın, 2023; Güzelyurt, 2020; Jabaar et al., 2024; Kılınç & Andaş, 2022; Marušić-Jablanović, 2018).

In this Doctoral Thesis, based on the theoretically analysed prerequisites and support mechanisms for the implementation of values education in preschool education, an initial conceptual model has been developed as a basis for further empirical analysis. In the model, values education is viewed at three interrelated levels: teachers' professional and ethical foundation, pedagogical practice, and systemic factors of the educational environment. This model shows that the implementation of values education does not depend solely on teachers' individual values or the methods used, but develops through the interrelations among teachers' reflection, explicit and implicit values, pedagogical actions, institutional support, and available

resources. Thus, the third chapter provides the theoretical foundation for further empirical analysis and the refinement of the initial model.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This Doctoral Thesis employed a sequential mixed-methods research design integrating qualitative and quantitative approaches to investigate the interrelations between preschool teachers' explicit and implicit values in the implementation of values education. Such an approach is appropriate for analysing both teachers' experiences and interpretations of values in pedagogical practice, as well as identifying interrelations among explicit values, implicit values, and the implementation of values education within a broader sample of respondents (Mārtinsone & Pipere, 2021). The choice of a sequential mixed-methods design was justified by the need to develop the research logic through three interconnected phases. In the first phase, a qualitative approach was used to gain an in-depth understanding of how the values established in regulatory documents are implemented in preschool teachers' pedagogical practice and to identify the most significant thematic categories. In the second phase, a quantitative approach was employed to analyse the interrelations between explicit and implicit values and their association with the implementation of values education in a larger sample. In the third phase, a qualitative approach was used to clarify and provide an in-depth interpretation of the findings by analysing the components of the professional support ecosystem for the implementation of values education in teacher education and professional development.

The empirical study was conducted in three phases from 11 March 2025 to 28 February 2026. During Phase 1 of the study, from 11 March 2025 to 1 June 2025, interviews were conducted with preschool teachers. During Phase 2, from 2 June 2025 to 14 December 2025, a survey of preschool teachers was conducted focusing on implicit and explicit values and the implementation of values education. During Phase 3, from 15 December 2025 to 28 February 2026, interviews were conducted with university lecturers teaching in preschool teacher education programmes.

Prior to the commencement of the empirical study, approval was obtained from the Research Ethics Committee of Riga Technical University through Decision No. 04000-10.2.3-e/6 of 10 March 2025, which endorsed the implementation of the study and approved the research protocol. The study adhered to the principles of voluntary participation, informed consent, anonymity, and aggregated data processing. To reduce the risk of socially desirable responses, qualitative and quantitative methods were combined. Leading questions were not used during the interviews, and survey data were analysed anonymously and in aggregated form.

Phase 1 of the study involved 240 preschool teachers employed in municipal or private preschool educational institutions. Participant selection was based on predefined criteria: employment in a preschool educational institution; completed or ongoing teacher education in the field of preschool education; at least one year of experience working with preschool-aged children; voluntary consent to participate in the study; completion of an informed consent form; and the ability to use videoconferencing tools.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews that explored the implementation of the ten values established in regulatory documents in preschool education: life, human dignity, freedom, family, marriage, work, nature, culture, the Latvian language, and the Latvian state. The interview questions focused on the benefits of integrating values, the use of teaching methods, barriers and challenges, and teachers' needs related to the implementation of values.

Data for Phase 1 of the study were collected through online interviews conducted via *Zoom* or *Microsoft Teams* platforms. With participants' permission, the interviews were recorded and transcribed using *Tilde Transcribe* software. Data analysis involved descriptive statistical

methods for the characterisation of sociodemographic data and inductive thematic analysis for the analysis of the interview material. The thematic analysis followed Braun and Clarke's six-phase approach: familiarisation with the data, generation of initial codes, searching for subthemes, reviewing themes, defining themes, and producing the final report (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Phase 2 of the study involved 476 preschool teachers employed in educational institutions implementing preschool education programmes. Participant selection was based on the following criteria: employment in preschool education, completed or ongoing teacher education in the field of preschool education, voluntary consent to participate in the study, completion of an informed consent form, and the ability to use online survey tools.

For the purposes of the study, a survey instrument was developed based on the analysis of the scientific literature and findings from the Phase 1 interviews. The survey consisted of four sections: self-assessment of value implementation, self-assessment of values education implementation, self-assessment of explicit values, and self-assessment of implicit values. Prior to administration, the survey was evaluated in terms of its content, structure, and comprehensibility. Four specialists in the field of preschool education participated in the evaluation process, and their feedback was used to refine the survey instrument.

Data for Phase 2 were collected through an online survey. Invitations to participate in the study were sent to the official email addresses of educational institutions, and the heads of these institutions disseminated the information to preschool teachers. *SPSS* software was used for data processing. Data analysis included descriptive statistical methods, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test for assessing the normality of data distribution, and Spearman's correlation analysis for non-parametric data.

Phase 3 of the study involved seven university lecturers teaching in preschool teacher education programmes at Latvian higher education institutions. The participant selection criteria included: teaching prospective preschool teachers at a higher education institution, holding at least a master's degree in pedagogy or educational sciences, having a minimum of three years of experience in higher education related to preschool teacher education, voluntary consent to participate in the study, completion of an informed consent form, and the ability to use videoconferencing tools.

In Phase 3, data were collected through interviews with university lecturers concerning the implementation of values education aspects in higher education, the education of prospective preschool teachers, professional development, and the interrelations between explicit and implicit values in teachers' practice when implementing values education in preschool education. The interviews were conducted online via *Zoom* or *Microsoft Teams* platforms. With participants' permission, the interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analysed using descriptive statistical methods for the characterisation of sociodemographic data and thematic analysis for the interpretation of the interview content.

The sequential mixed-methods research design provided an opportunity to combine qualitative and quantitative data, strengthen the credibility of the research findings, and implement methodological triangulation. The qualitative data provided an in-depth understanding of value implementation in preschool teachers' pedagogical practice, the quantitative data provided a basis for identifying interrelations between explicit and implicit values within a broader sample, and the lecturer interviews enriched the interpretation of the findings from the perspective of the professional support ecosystem. This methodological approach provides the empirical foundation for the development of a theoretically and

empirically grounded model aimed at improving the quality of values education implementation in preschool education.

5. RESULTS

5.1. Results of Phase 1 of the Study

In Phase 1 of the study, the implementation of the ten values – life, human dignity, freedom, family, marriage, work, nature, culture, the Latvian language, and the Latvian state – established in regulatory documents in preschool education was analysed through semi-structured interviews with preschool teachers. Thematic analysis revealed that preschool teachers primarily implement these values through everyday pedagogical practice, children's social interactions, conversations, play, practical activities, thematic events, and teachers' personal example.

Teachers promote these values through situations that are meaningful and understandable to children, using experience-based, emotionally significant, and practical methods. The values of "life", "nature", "work", and "human dignity" are most frequently associated with children's everyday experiences, care, responsibility, empathy, practical engagement, and the development of social skills. In contrast, the values of "culture", "the Latvian language", and "the Latvian state" are implemented through the promotion of traditions, celebration of cultural events and holidays, singing Latvian folk songs, developing awareness of national symbols, and storytelling.

The interviews revealed that the implementation of the value of "freedom" in preschool education is closely associated with children's autonomy, opportunities for choice, self-directed learning, and a sense of responsibility. At the same time, teachers emphasised the need to balance children's freedom with safety, boundaries, and shared rules. The value of "family" was characterised as a foundation for children's emotional security, sense of belonging, and cooperation with parents. However, its implementation is influenced by family diversity, parental involvement, and teachers' professional readiness to address sensitive issues. The value of "marriage" was the least systematically addressed in preschool education. In teachers' responses, it appeared mainly indirectly through discussions about family, play activities, fairy tales, and children's spontaneous interests. The implementation of this value is constrained by teachers' professional uncertainty, the social sensitivity of the topic, and concerns about parental reactions.

The findings of Phase 1 demonstrated that the values declared in regulatory documents take diverse forms in preschool teachers' professional practice. Teachers employ conversations, discussions, morning circle activities, practical tasks, nature observations, role play, dramatisation, stories, fairy tales, thematic events, projects, celebrations, family involvement, excursions, collaborative activities, and personal example. These methods contribute to children's emotional, social, moral, linguistic, cultural, and civic development.

At the same time, the findings revealed several challenges in the implementation of values. Teachers reported difficulties in explaining complex and socially sensitive topics in ways appropriate to children's developmental level, for example when discussing death, marriage, family diversity, national independence, or differences in societal values. Additional challenges included differing parental views, insufficient cooperation with families, children's individual needs, limited methodological support, restricted resources, teachers' emotional workload, professional uncertainty, and insufficient support from educational institutions.

The implicit values identified in teachers' responses indicated that teachers' attitudes towards the values established in regulatory documents do not always fully correspond to their

implementation in everyday pedagogical practice. Positive implicit values were reflected in care, respect, responsibility, empathy, patriotism, language preservation, professional commitment, and respect for children's needs. At the same time, certain situations revealed professional uncertainty, avoidance of discussing sensitive issues, stereotypical assumptions, controlling attitudes, excessive caution, or inconsistencies between teachers' declared values and their actions. These findings confirm that implicit values significantly influence the quality of values education implementation and highlight the need for teachers' reflection and professional support.

5.2. Results of Phase 2 of the Study

In Phase 2 of the study, the Teachers' Values Survey and the Early Values Education Scale were used to identify the indicators of preschool teachers' explicit and implicit values, the implementation of values education, and the interrelations among these variables. Data analysis showed that the subscale data of the Teachers' Values Survey and the Early Values Education Scale did not correspond to a normal distribution; therefore, non-parametric methods were used in the subsequent analysis. The assessment of the internal consistency of the measurement instruments demonstrated generally good and very good indicators. After the refinement of certain subscales, high overall Cronbach's alpha and McDonald's omega coefficients were obtained for both the Teachers' Values Survey and the Early Values Education Scale, confirming the suitability of the instruments for the purpose of the study.

The descriptive statistics showed that preschool teachers' attitudes towards values were generally positive. At the explicit level, the highest ratings were given to the values of "work", "human dignity", "family", "the Latvian language", and "the Latvian state". At the implicit level, high indicators were also found for several values; however, in most cases, the indicators of implicit values were lower than those of explicit values. This tendency indicates that teachers consciously declare values at a high level, yet these values are not always revealed with the same consistency in implicit attitudes and pedagogical practice.

The indicators of values education implementation revealed uneven integration of values in preschool education. Relatively high indicators of values education implementation were found for the values of "freedom", "human dignity", "the Latvian language", and "work". These values form a more stable core of values education implementation, as they are closely related to everyday pedagogical practice, children's self-regulation, respectful relationships, language use, and the acquisition of responsibilities. By contrast, the values of "marriage", "culture", and "the Latvian state" are implemented less consistently in practice. The lower indicators for these values and the greater dispersion of respondents' answers point to differing interpretations, professional uncertainty, social sensitivity, and insufficient methodological support.

Correlation analysis showed positive, statistically significant associations between teachers' explicit and implicit values. The strongest interrelations between explicit and implicit values were found for the values of "culture", "work", "the Latvian state", "the Latvian language", and "family". These results indicate a relatively coherent value structure in areas where teachers' consciously declared values are more closely linked to their implicit attitudes. Weaker associations were found for the values of "life – protection" and "marriage", indicating more complex implementation of these values and possible inconsistency between declared attitudes and professional practice.

The associations between explicit values and the implementation of values education were positive and statistically significant, although generally weaker than the associations between explicit and implicit values. Stronger associations were found for the values of "life" and "culture", whereas weaker associations were found for "marriage" and "the Latvian state". The association between implicit values and the implementation of values education was even weaker, although statistically significant in most cases. These findings show that teachers' values alone do not automatically ensure their consistent implementation in pedagogical practice. The implementation of values education is also influenced by professional experience, methodological support, the educational institution environment, parental involvement, and teachers' reflection skills.

The results of Phase 2 empirically substantiate the significance of the interrelations between explicit and implicit values in the implementation of values education. A contradiction between explicit and implicit values can be identified in cases where a declared value is not manifested in pedagogical practice or where actions inconsistent with that value repeatedly appear in practice. By contrast, a complementary interrelation is observed when a declared value takes the form of specific behaviour, communication, and pedagogical decisions. In this study, the interrelations between explicit and implicit values are assessed according to whether the declared value corresponds to the teacher's pedagogical actions and whether this correspondence is consistently manifested in everyday situations.

5.3. Results of Phase 3 of the Study

In Phase 3 of the study, interviews with university lecturers were used to analyse the components of the professional support ecosystem necessary for recognising, aligning, and effectively implementing explicit and implicit values in values education within preschool education. The findings revealed that aspects of values education are often incorporated into teacher education programmes indirectly and in a fragmented manner, primarily through their integration into various study courses. While this approach provides a theoretical understanding of the significance of values in child development, it does not always sufficiently develop prospective teachers' ability to reflect on their own values and their manifestations in pedagogical practice.

The lecturers' interviews revealed the need for a stronger connection between theory and practice in teacher education, more purposeful integration of values education into the curriculum, and systematic development of reflection skills. It is important not only to provide knowledge about values but also to develop prospective teachers' ability to analyse pedagogical situations, recognise manifestations of values, evaluate their professional actions, and align their personal values with educational goals. Lecturers' own actions, communication styles, and professional positions also shape a learning environment in which prospective teachers indirectly acquire value-oriented professional practice.

Phase 3 identified several challenges in integrating values education into teacher education: limited time, the fragmented nature of values education content, insufficient methodological tools, discrepancies between prospective teachers' personal experiences and professional expectations, the formal nature of pedagogical practice, and uneven quality of mentoring. Lecturers emphasised the need for more time within study programmes for reflection, analysis of dilemma situations, evaluation of video recordings, supervision, modelling of practical situations, and the development of professional attitudes.

At the level of professional development, lecturers highlighted the need to support practising preschool teachers in becoming aware of their value systems, analysing their everyday actions, and improving value-oriented pedagogical practice. The findings showed that professional development opportunities are often fragmented and focused more on theoretical information than on the development of practical skills. Teachers' participation in professional development is frequently influenced by external conditions or administrative requirements rather than by intrinsic professional motivation.

The lecturers recommended strengthening a culture of reflection, offering flexible professional development formats, developing professional learning communities, providing supervision, creating repositories of methodological materials and ideas, and using video recordings and pedagogical situation analysis. Interinstitutional cooperation among universities, professional development providers, and preschool educational institutions was identified as particularly important. Such cooperation creates a professional support ecosystem in which values education is understood as a shared long-term objective that connects research, teacher education, professional development, and the practical experience of educational institutions.

The findings of Phase 3 confirm that inconsistencies between explicit and implicit values may generate contradictory messages for children, weaken trust in adults, and reduce the educational impact of values education. When teachers' declared values do not correspond to their actions, children perceive this contradiction through everyday experience. Such inconsistency may also affect teachers themselves, creating professional tension, uncertainty, and emotional distance. Therefore, reflection was identified in this study as the central mechanism for recognising teachers' implicit values, aligning explicit and implicit values, and ensuring the effective implementation of values education.

Based on the findings of the theoretical analysis and empirical study, a theoretical model of the interrelationship between preschool teachers' explicit and implicit values was developed to improve the quality of values education implementation in preschool education. The initial theoretical model developed during the theoretical phase of the study was refined, restructured, and empirically substantiated through the empirical findings.

In the model, the implementation of values education in preschool education is conceptualised as a dynamic multilevel system comprising interconnected elements: the regulatory framework and state-defined values, systemic support, institutional support and implementation of values education, teachers' professional practice in values education, teachers' self-reflection, teachers' attitudes towards values, and explicit and implicit values. The model emphasises that the quality of values education is determined not only by the presence of normatively declared values within the curriculum but also by the alignment of these values with teachers' everyday pedagogical actions, attitudes, and professional choices.

Within the model, teachers' attitudes towards values are viewed as an important intermediary stage between self-reflection and the manifestations of explicit and implicit values. Attitudes influence which values teachers consciously declare and how these values are expressed in pedagogical practice, while the consistency or inconsistency between explicit and implicit values highlights the need for reflection and methodological, institutional, and systemic support.

The model substantiates the need to improve the quality of values education in preschool education not only at the level of individual teachers' professional practice but also through strengthening methodological, institutional, and systemic support. Consequently, the developed theoretical model may be applied in initial teacher education, professional development,

methodological work within preschool educational institutions, and educational policy planning.

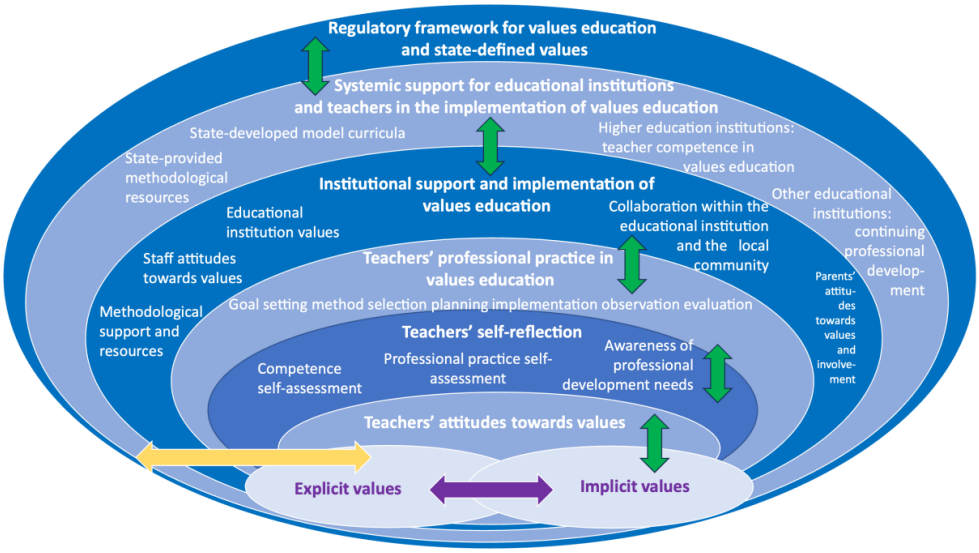

Fig. 5.1. Theoretical model of the interrelationship between preschool teachers' explicit and implicit values for enhancing the quality of values education implementation in preschool education (developed by the author).

DISCUSSION

The findings of the study confirm that the values established in regulatory documents are most frequently implemented in preschool education through everyday pedagogical practice, including conversations, play activities, thematic events, practical activities, the organisation of the learning environment, and the modelling of teachers' behaviour. Such implementation of values is consistent with the theoretical foundations of values education, which emphasise that children acquire values primarily through social interaction, experience, and observation of adults' actions rather than through declarative instruction alone (Halstead & Taylor, 2000; Lin et al., 2025; Wu & Tan, 2022). Therefore, in preschool education, values education cannot be reduced to a separate curriculum component or the abstract explanation of values, as values acquire concrete meaning through children's everyday experiences.

The findings of Phase 1 indicate that values such as "life", "human dignity", "freedom", "family", "work", "nature", "culture", "the Latvian language", and the "Latvian state" are implemented in preschool education through a variety of pedagogical situations. Children acquire values by caring for plants and animals, participating in discussions about emotions and relationships, practising responsibilities, celebrating cultural events and holidays, learning about national symbols, using the Latvian language, and engaging with their families and local communities. These findings are consistent with studies linking values education in preschool education to the development of children's moral, social, emotional, and communication skills (Döring et al., 2024; Lin et al., 2025).

At the same time, the findings reveal that the implementation of values defined in regulatory documents is not uniform. The values of "human dignity", "freedom", "work", and "the Latvian language" are implemented more consistently in preschool teachers' pedagogical practice because they are more directly connected to everyday educational activities, including respectful communication, support for children's autonomy, promotion of responsibility, cooperation, and language use. In contrast, values that are more socially, morally, or culturally complex, such as "marriage", "culture", "the Latvian state", and, in some cases, "life", are addressed less consistently in practice. The implementation of these values is influenced by teachers' professional uncertainty, personal experiences, the diversity of family beliefs, insufficient methodological support, and institutional conditions (Alt & Dolev, 2024; Hwa, 2024; Karousiou et al., 2025; Lin et al., 2025).

The findings also demonstrate that teachers perceive certain topics as either too complex for preschool-aged children or too sensitive because of differing family beliefs. Discussions about the life cycle, death, family diversity, or marriage are sometimes limited because teachers experience professional uncertainty or fear parental dissatisfaction. Similar tendencies have been identified in other studies (Hwa, 2024; Karousiou et al., 2025), which emphasise that teachers often refrain from addressing sensitive and controversial issues due to insufficient preparation and concerns about potential conflict. Therefore, the implementation of values in preschool education is not merely a matter of regulatory requirements but also the result of the interaction among teachers' professional beliefs, family perspectives, the culture of educational institutions, and the values of society more broadly (Schwartz & Ragnarsdóttir, 2025; Shen, 2025).

The findings of Phase 2 deepen the understanding of the interrelations between explicit and implicit values. Overall, preschool teachers' explicit and implicit values are positively

associated; however, this association is not equally strong across all values. Teachers' value systems are generally relatively coherent, yet this coherence is only partly translated into the implementation of values education. This interpretation is consistent with the psychological perspective on values, in which values are understood as important motivational guides whose expression depends on the situation, social norms, the interpretation of the professional role, and institutional conditions (Rokeach, 1973; Sagiv & Schwartz, 2022; Schwartz, 1992). Studies on explicit and implicit educational values also indicate that these levels of values are interrelated but not identical and do not always manifest themselves in the same way in educational practice (Yu et al., 2024).

The distinction between recognising a value and implementing or defending it in pedagogical practice is particularly important. The findings concerning the values of "life" and "marriage" show that recognising a value as significant does not necessarily imply teachers' readiness to actively represent this value in socially sensitive or professionally complex pedagogical situations. This finding makes it possible to distinguish several levels of value functioning: conscious recognition of a value, consolidation of the value within teachers' professional beliefs, and implementation or defence of the value in pedagogical practice. Such a distinction expands the understanding of the interrelations between explicit and implicit values and helps to explain why the declaration of values does not always translate into consistent pedagogical action (Rokeach, 1973; Schwartz, 1992; Yu et al., 2024).

The findings of Phase 3 show that aligning explicit and implicit values is not merely a matter of an individual teacher's professional competence. The quality of these interrelations is significantly influenced by the professional support ecosystem: initial teacher education, professional development, methodological and institutional support, mentoring, supervision, a culture of reflection, and interinstitutional cooperation among universities, professional development institutions, and preschool educational institutions. The lecturer interviews revealed that issues related to values education are often included in teacher education and professional development in a fragmented and predominantly theoretical manner, insufficiently developing teachers' ability to analyse their own values in specific pedagogical situations. This interpretation is consistent with studies on teachers' professional development, which emphasise the importance of reflection, practice analysis, mentoring, coaching, and feedback in the transformation of professional practice (Formosinho et al., 2024; Lee et al., 2025; Machado & Oliveira-Formosinho, 2024).

Reflection emerged in the study as the central mechanism linking teachers' personal and professional values with pedagogical action. Reflection helps teachers become aware not only of what they declare as important but also of what is actually manifested in their attitudes, behaviour, emotional responses, communication, and decision-making. Without reflection, implicit values may remain unrecognised and continue to influence pedagogical practice regardless of teachers' explicit positions. The importance of reflection is supported by studies demonstrating that reflective methods help teachers become aware of their values, identities, and pedagogical choices, as well as articulate their implicit and explicit beliefs about teaching and learning (Johannessen, 2024; Khoo et al., 2024).

The significance of institutional and organisational support emerged in the study as an essential prerequisite for the quality of values education. Limited time, insufficient methodological resources, formalised practice, uneven quality of mentoring, and the fragmented nature of professional development restrict teachers' opportunities to engage in an in-depth analysis of values education issues. These findings are consistent with the understanding that values in education are transmitted not only through formal curriculum

content but also through teachers' actions, the culture of relationships, everyday interactions, and the hidden curriculum (Halstead & Taylor, 2000; Kärner & Schneider, 2024; Lin et al., 2025; Press et al., 2020). Consequently, the interrelations between explicit and implicit values should also be considered at the institutional level, as teachers' value alignment may be strengthened or weakened by the environment in which they learn, work, and undergo professional socialisation.

The findings also highlight the importance of interinstitutional cooperation. Consistency in values education within preschool education cannot be ensured solely through individual teacher reflection; it also requires shared methodological principles, collaborative professional learning, and institutional continuity. Professional learning communities, supervision, the co-creation of methodological materials, mentor preparation, and cooperation between universities and preschool educational institutions can strengthen teachers' ability to implement values education consistently in practice. This interpretation is supported by studies on professional learning communities and collaborative teacher professional learning (Denee, 2024; Liu et al., 2024; Ren et al., 2025).

Overall, the findings demonstrate that the quality of values education in preschool education is not determined solely by the presence of values defined in regulatory documents or by teachers' positive attitudes towards these values. What is crucial is whether teachers are provided with professionally supported opportunities to recognise their implicit values, align them with their explicit professional values, and implement them consistently in everyday pedagogical practice. Therefore, improving the quality of values education implementation requires a systemic professional support ecosystem in which reflection, practice analysis, mentoring, supervision, professional learning communities, and interinstitutional cooperation function as interconnected support mechanisms.

The theoretical model developed in this Doctoral Thesis provides a progressively developed and empirically grounded explanation of the interrelations between preschool teachers' explicit and implicit values in the process of implementing values education. The model demonstrates that the quality of values education is shaped through a dynamic multilevel process in which the regulatory framework, systemic and institutional support, teachers' professional practice, self-reflection, attitudes towards values, and the alignment of explicit and implicit values are interconnected.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the analysis of the theoretical literature, the findings obtained during the three phases of the empirical study, and the developed theoretical model of the interrelations between preschool teachers' explicit and implicit values for improving the quality of values education implementation in preschool education, the following conclusions were drawn.

1. The analysis of the scientific literature confirms that values education in preschool education is a significant process in the development of children's personality, moral orientation, social responsibility, attitudes, and behavioural patterns. The acquisition of values in preschool education occurs not only through purposefully organised pedagogical activities but also through everyday interactions, teachers' attitudes, communication, pedagogical choices, and actions. Therefore, preschool teachers' professional practice plays a crucial role in the implementation of values education.
2. The conceptual distinction between explicit and implicit values makes it possible to view them as interrelated yet distinct levels of the value system. Explicit values are manifested in consciously formulated positions, pedagogical goals, and values established in regulatory documents. Implicit values are revealed through teachers' everyday actions, attitudes, spontaneous pedagogical choices, communication, and interactions with children.
3. The study found that preschool teachers' attitudes towards the values established in regulatory documents are generally positive and that their level of value awareness is high. At the same time, the findings confirm that a positive attitude towards values alone does not ensure their consistent and purposeful implementation in pedagogical practice.
4. The values established in regulatory documents – life, human dignity, freedom, family, marriage, work, nature, culture, the Latvian language, and the Latvian state – are most frequently implemented in preschool education through everyday pedagogical practice. For example, they are promoted through conversations, play activities, thematic events, practical activities, children's participation, and the modelling of teachers' behaviour. This confirms that values education in preschool education is implemented as an integrated pedagogical process.
5. The findings demonstrate that preschool teachers' explicit and implicit values form an interrelated but uneven structure. For example, the values of "work", "the Latvian language", "family", and "culture" exhibit greater alignment between consciously declared values and their implicit manifestations, whereas the values of "marriage" and "life-protection" show weaker alignment, indicating different levels of value consolidation within teachers' professional practice.
6. The study identified that certain values are implemented more consistently in preschool education and form a relatively stable core of values education. For example, the values of "freedom", "human dignity", "the Latvian language", and "work" are implemented more consistently because they are closely linked to everyday pedagogical practice, support for children's self-regulation, respectful communication, language use, and the acquisition of responsibilities. In contrast, the values of "marriage", "culture", and "the Latvian state" are addressed less consistently in practice. This unevenness is associated with differences in the complexity of value interpretation, social sensitivity, teachers' professional beliefs, and insufficient methodological support.

7. The relationship between teachers' explicit and implicit values and the implementation of values education in pedagogical practice is not linear. Pedagogical action is shaped situationally and contextually and is influenced not only by teachers' individual values but also by professional experience, the institutional environment, methodological support, the social context, and interactions with children, parents, and colleagues.
8. The findings broaden the understanding of the significance of implicit values and the hidden curriculum in preschool education. Children's acquisition of values is influenced not only by teachers' declared pedagogical goals but also by the values embedded in everyday actions, attitudes, communication, non-verbal expressions, and pedagogical situations.
9. The components of the professional support ecosystem significantly influence the quality of values education implementation in preschool education. The findings show that values education is implemented more consistently when teachers have access to targeted professional development, methodological resources, collegial collaboration, leadership support, opportunities for reflection, and cooperation with parents. These support mechanisms help teachers not only declare values but also recognise their manifestations in everyday pedagogical practice, analyse complex or sensitive situations, and align explicit values with implicit value manifestations. Conversely, insufficient methodological and institutional support, fragmented professional development, and a lack of reflection increase the risk that values will be implemented inconsistently in practice or remain merely declarative.
10. Reflection emerged in the study as a central mechanism for recognising teachers' implicit values, evaluating professional practice, and improving the implementation of values education. The practice of reflection helps teachers critically evaluate their attitudes, pedagogical choices, and everyday actions, thereby promoting greater alignment between explicit and implicit values.
11. The developed theoretical model conceptualises the implementation of values education in preschool education as a dynamic and systemic process in which the regulatory framework, systemic and institutional support, teachers' professional practice, reflection, professional self-evaluation, attitudes towards values, and teachers' explicit and implicit values interact. The model provides a theoretical foundation for improving the quality of values education implementation in preschool education.
12. The findings of the study can be applied in preschool teacher education at higher education institutions, in the development of professional development programmes, in the methodological work of preschool educational institutions, and in educational policy planning. The findings substantiate the need to purposefully strengthen reflective practice, value awareness, methodological support, and professional support systems in both initial teacher education and professional development in order to promote more consistent and higher-quality implementation of values education in preschool education.
13. The study confirms the need for further development of the methodology for researching implicit values by combining self-report data with observations of pedagogical practice, situation analysis, reflection materials, and repeated measurements. Such an approach would enable a more in-depth analysis of how teachers' explicit values are related to observable manifestations of implicit values in everyday pedagogical practice and how these interrelations change under the influence of professional experience, education, and institutional support.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND PROPOSALS

Based on the findings of the study and the developed theoretical model, recommendations and proposals are put forward for improving the quality of values education implementation in preschool education. The recommendations concern initial teacher education at higher education institutions, preschool teachers' professional development, preschool education practice, cooperation with families and the community, interinstitutional cooperation, and further research. The proposals concern the improvement of educational policy.

In initial teacher education at higher education institutions, it is recommended to purposefully include the analysis of explicit and implicit values, understanding of the hidden curriculum, and evaluation of value dilemmas in pedagogical practice. In the study process, it is important to develop prospective preschool teachers' reflection competence regarding personal and professional values, as well as to strengthen the connection between theory and practice in the implementation of values education. Such an approach would promote prospective teachers' ability to recognise their own values, analyse their manifestations in pedagogical practice, and make professionally grounded decisions in complex situations.

In preschool teachers' professional development, it is recommended to develop long-term programmes aimed at aligning personal and professional values with pedagogical practice. It is particularly important to include reflective supervision, professional learning communities, methodological tools for recognising implicit values, and the analysis of value conflicts in the content of professional development. Such support would help teachers become aware of the influence of values on pedagogical action, strengthen professional resilience, and develop more consistent values education practice.

In preschool education practice, it is recommended to systematically integrate reflection into teachers' everyday pedagogical work and to promote the alignment of explicit and implicit values in the pedagogical process. Implicit values can be made more visible through pedagogical documentation, collegial reflection, case analysis, and evaluation of children's everyday experiences. In the acquisition of values, pedagogical activities based on experience, dialogue, participation, and the natural environment are particularly important, as they promote children's social, emotional, and moral development.

At the level of educational institutions, it is recommended to strengthen cooperation with families and the community in order to develop a more coherent understanding of values important for children's development. Preschool educational institutions are encouraged to develop a shared value framework by involving teachers, families, and community representatives, as well as to ensure transparent communication about the institution's values and pedagogical principles. Such cooperation would strengthen trust among the parties involved and reduce contradictory messages in the process of children's value formation.

For the development of interinstitutional cooperation, it is recommended to establish cooperation models among higher education institutions, professional development institutions, and preschool educational institutions. Such cooperation may include joint professional development projects, interinstitutional supervision, the improvement of mentoring, co-creation of methodological materials, and joint research initiatives. Interinstitutional cooperation would strengthen the professional support ecosystem and ensure a closer connection between theoretical foundations, teacher education, and pedagogical practice.

At the level of educational policy, a proposal is put forward to develop a unified conceptual framework for the implementation of values education in preschool education by integrating the dimensions of explicit and implicit values. It is important to include reflective practice in

the evaluation of preschool education quality, recognise the significance of the hidden curriculum in children's value formation, and provide systemic, coordinated, and long-term professional development support for preschool teachers.

In further research, it is recommended to examine in greater depth the influence of implicit values on pedagogical practice, develop and validate methodological instruments for identifying and analysing implicit values, conduct longitudinal studies on the impact of values education on children's development, and evaluate the impact of professional development programmes on the development of teachers' competences and the quality of values education implementation in preschool education.

THESES FOR DEFENCE

1. Preschool teachers' explicit and implicit values form an interrelated value system that influences the implementation of values education in preschool pedagogical practice; however, explicit values alone do not guarantee their consistent integration into everyday pedagogical practice.

2. The alignment between teachers' explicit, or declared, values and implicit values, which are revealed in pedagogical action, develops through reflection and professional experience, in which teachers' personal beliefs, professional confidence, and social conditions play an important role.

3. The implementation of values education in preschool education is a systemic process in which teachers' individual value systems interact with factors of the professional support ecosystem, including teacher education, professional development, institutional support, and cooperation with families.

4. Teachers' professional reflection functions as the central mechanism of correction and alignment, promoting awareness of explicit and implicit values, helping to reduce inconsistencies between declared values and pedagogical action, and supporting more consistent implementation of values education.

5. The theoretical model developed in this Doctoral Thesis structures the interrelations between preschool teachers' explicit and implicit values in the process of implementing values education and offers a conceptual framework for improving the quality of values education implementation in preschool education.

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