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A typology of educational democratic values: perspectives from teachers and students in Vietnamese secondary schools

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ABSTRACT

Educational democratic (ED) values and their manifestation in school are related to the school context and the socio-political-cultural setting. In-depth interviews were conducted with nine participants, including two principals, four teachers, and three students in two secondary schools in Da Nang city, Central Vietnam. The participants indicated sixteen ED values, either instrumental (e.g., friendliness, autonomy) or terminal (e.g., fairness, equality). These ED values can be recognized in both formal and informal school spaces. The findings shed light on the Vietnamese stakeholders' views on ED values, their manifestation, and their contribution to the democratic school, which could be a premise for further exploring stakeholders' democratic commitment in the Vietnamese educational context.

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KEYWORDS


Vietnamese educational values; democratic values; grassroots democracy; school environment; democratic citizenship education; Vietnamese secondary school

Introduction

It has been noted that Vietnam secondary schools are struggling with many emerging issues, including low achievements, inflexible teaching strategies, student passivity in learning, and overloaded curricula (Huong & Hall, 2016; Tran, 2013). Sant (2019) believes that democratic education could be a potential "antidote" to current educational challenges, suggesting possible ways in terms of education policy and practice. Many scholars (e.g., Alviar-Martin, Ho, Sim, & Yap, 2012; Au & Kennedy, 2017) have argued that a democratic education plays an essential role in shaping democratic beliefs, nurturing democratic spirit, and encouraging the voices and active participation of stakeholders, especially students. Similarly, Vietnamese policymakers seem to believe that fostering democracy in schools via encouraging stakeholders' voices and democratic engagement will enhance the quality of education, creating safe and friendly learning environments (MOET, 2020). Noyles (2005) has argued that the voices of teachers and students in school governance are essential for nourishing democracy in school and thus need more attention. However, it seems that such engagement is still limited in the context of Vietnamese schools (Lac & Mansfield, 2018).

The literature has suggested a link between democratic engagement, democratic commitment, and democratic values. Accordingly, many other authors (e.g., Apple & Beane, 1995) have suggested that an individual's active democratic engagement depends on their democratic commitments. Moreover, an individual's commitment to democracy is understood through their perception of democratic values (Gutman & Thompson, 1996). Thus, whether democratic values are the end or the means of democratic education, understanding democratic values is necessary to maintain

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 Supplemental data for this article can be accessed [here](#).

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democracy in schools. Moreover, Daniel et al. (2013) have suggested that schools can be characterized by different values systems embedded in school rules, teaching practices, relationships, and interpersonal behaviour. Describing the shared common values in school can allow researchers to predict the desired behaviours and philosophies that the school and its stakeholders are pursuing. At the same time, based on the suggestion of Lagan and Moran (2005), the school as an organization establishes a core set of values that direct its stakeholders' behaviour. Hence, an individual's behaviour could reflect the goals of their school (Murre, 2017). Van Beurden, van Veldhoven, Nijendijk, and van de Voorde (2017) also indicated that once personal values are aligned with school values, it increases individuals' school commitment. We believe that exploring the principal's, teachers', and students' perspectives on democratic values may reveal the individual's commitment to democracy in their educational practices.

Democratic values are standards by which individuals live democratically in societies. They are performed in individuals' daily lives on account of their ability to build a democratic community (Thomassen, 2009). In the education field, many authors (e.g., Apple & Beane, 1995) have suggested that a democratic educational environment could be built on stakeholders' commitments to educational democratic (ED) values in the school. In other words, interpreting the ED values of its stakeholders is a possible way to understand the democratic culture and norms of the school (Gutman & Thompson, 1996). So, we expect that studying ED values from multiple perspectives will provide insight into what democratic acts in an educational context look like and how a democratic school should be. However, Kołczyńska (2020) has emphasized a lack of consensus in the empirical literature about measuring democratic values. We also found that the literature has failed to provide sufficient insights into ED values in the school context, especially in nondemocratic countries and the Asia-Pacific region. Therefore, this study is expected to contribute to the literature on insights into how students and teachers perceive and practise ED values in their school lives, which will thus enrich perspectives on the democratic school in different political contexts. In this study, we aim to explore the views of Vietnamese upper-secondary school principals, teachers and students on the nature of ED values, including types, concepts, and their manifestations in Vietnamese school life, which may be influenced by Confucian culture and socialist beliefs.

Democracy in the Vietnamese general education context

Studies on democracy and education have mainly concentrated on democratic countries (e.g., Hahn, 1998 [USA, UK, Germany, the Netherlands, and Denmark]; Geboers, Geijsel, Admiraal, & Ten Dam, 2014 [The Netherlands]; Higham & Djohari, 2018 [South Africa]). An important question is whether the link between democracy and education also holds in nondemocratic contexts, such as in education in Vietnam.

The approach to democracy in education in Vietnam

In Vietnam, attention was paid to the link between democracy and education after Doi Moi. At the 6th National Party Congress in 1986, Vietnam officially launched the Doi Moi policy, which literally means "changing for the new" or "the renovation". Doi Moi included a set of policies designed to transform Vietnam's economy from a Soviet-planned model to a market-based model. The wide range of Doi Moi has helped Vietnam attain remarkable achievements in socio-economic, political, and educational fields (Duong, 2019). Especially in 2000, Decree 12 on "grassroots democracy" was officially applied in Vietnamese educational institutions as a positive result of Doi Moi.

Several studies have shown that civic education in Vietnamese schools has changed after Doi Moi (e.g., Duong, 2019). However, in essence, socialist morality is still the central orientation of the civic education programme in Vietnam (Duong & Phan, 2018). Still, democracy is promoted through decentralized informal learning paths in Vietnamese schools. The key focus is to build a democratic school environment by complying with regulations and guidelines for implementing grassroots

democracy in educational institutions (McAleavy, Tran, & Fitzpatrick, 2018). In the last years of the first decade of the 21st century, a series of educational policies promoting student-centred pedagogies have been implemented in Vietnamese educational institutes (Pham, 2016). According to Huong and Hall (2016), learners should be encouraged to openly participate in various educational activities (formal and informal learning spaces) and learn to raise their voices. In addition, teachers in Vietnamese schools have advocated the dynamic pedagogies such as project-based learning or problem-based learning. These educational policies align with a participatory approach to democratic education, first proposed by Dewey (1916). Besides, grassroots democracy regulations in Vietnamese schools require decision-making based on consensus and deliberation on the part of stakeholders. Considering the voices of teachers and students in school affairs has been encouraged, even though the actual results have not been very satisfactory (Truong & Hallinger, 2017).

Democratic schools in Vietnam

So far, discussions on democratic schools in Vietnam have been focused on identifying how democracy should be understood and manifested in schools. A public educational institution is considered a democratic school when complying with the democratic centralism principle in various school aspects, with the ultimate goals of ensuring stakeholders' ownership, enhancing a democratic school environment, and ensuring high-quality education (see Figure 1).

Specifically, the principle of democratic centralism requires that all documents and regulations reach a consensus at the grassroots level before being issued. Hence, staff, teachers, and students can raise their voices in school decision-making processes (i.e., face-to-face, workshops, feedback sheets, email) (Article 11, MOET, 2020). However, no one can violate an issued regulation until an alternative regulation is adopted. To engage stakeholders in the operation of schools, school principals must make critical issues public, such as finances, recruitment, etc. (Article 9, MOET, 2020). Staff and teachers are also required to monitor school management practices. Regarding relationships among stakeholders in Vietnamese schools, the spirit of democracy is communicated by promoting core democratic values. Depending on the position of stakeholders in the educational management hierarchy, they need to follow the different values. For example, staff must strictly follow their leaders while superiors are required to commit to being non bureaucracy and impartiality with their subordinates (Article 18, 19, MOET, 2020). However, which values should be promoted

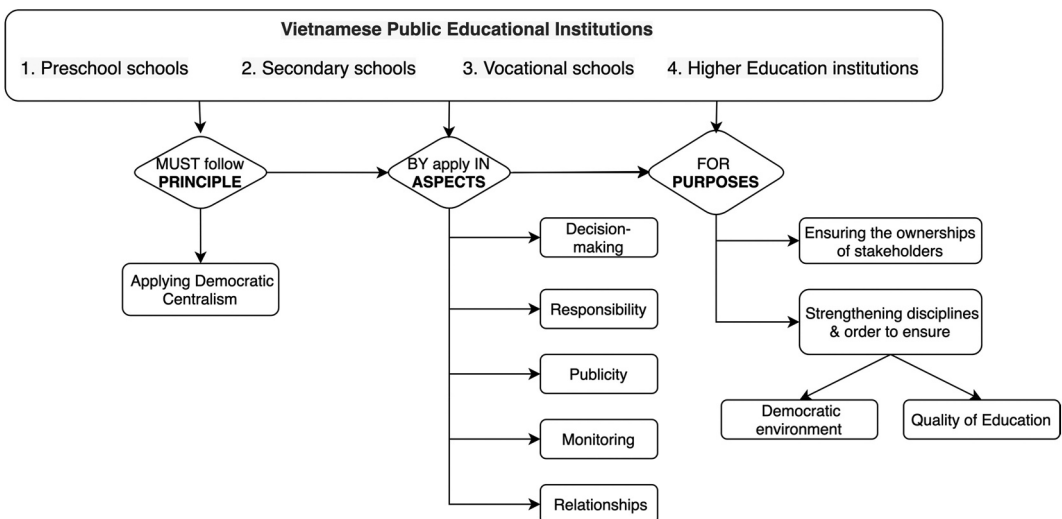


Figure 1. Model of implementation of "grassroots democracy" in Vietnamese public educational institutions.

in teacher-learner relationships are not explicitly mentioned in the guidelines for implementing democracy in schools. This “omission” inhibits an adequate identification of democratic individuals and democratic interactions in schools.

Educational democratic values: nature, functions, and manifestations

Value theory

ED values carry within themselves the essence of a value type. Hence, gaining insights into the nature of values from related theories is needed to understand better the notion of ED values.

Human values are often defined as abstract ideals that guide people’s behaviour. Of the many theories that have emerged, three have influenced empirical research (i.e., Allport et al. (1960), ; Rokeach, 1973; Schwart 2012). Allport’s value theory proposed that human values should be categorized into six types, including theoretical, economic, aesthetic, religious, social, and political matters. However, Rokeach (1973) criticized Allport et al.’s (1960) theory measuring attitudes rather than values. Instead, Rokeach proposed to measure values with 36 items, which should be ranked based on their importance as guiding principles in one’s life. Using this approach, Rokeach (1973) obtained abundant evidence linking the importance of values and diverse attitudes and behaviour. Rokeach distinguished two domains of values: terminal values and instrumental values. He referred to terminal values as the desired states or the goals that individuals (i.e., personal-focused value typology) or organizations (i.e., social-focused typology) aim to achieve throughout their lives or development. The instrument values refer to modes of conduct (i.e., morality–relation-focused value typology) and reflect behavioural characteristics (i.e., competence-focused value typology), considered socially desirable and helpful in achieving terminal values. In his research, Rokeach also argued that terminal values always have a more highly desirable position in the hierarchy of personal values than instrumental values. Therefore, the terminal values are assumed to influence an individual’s behaviour more strongly than the instrument values. Based on Rokeach’s conceptualization of values, Schwartz and Bilsky (1987) introduced a theoretical perspective examining motivational differences between values. Schwartz et al. (2012) postulated the existence of 19 value types which could be ordered with two dimensions: a personal focus (openness and self-enhancement) and a social focus (conservation and self-transcendence).

Hanel, Litzellachner, and Maio (2018) have critiqued Rokeach’s value model for lacking a method for making predictions about connections between different values and attitudes and behaviour. However, an advantage of Rokeach’s theory is its usefulness for gaining insight into individual values with respect to organizational values. Rokeach (1973) stressed that terminal and instrumental values might vary among individuals because these should be compatible with the personal perspectives and the social context to which an individual belongs. So, this means there is no fixed set of instrumental or terminal values. A value belongs to a given typology depending on its “priority” level in individuals’ and societies’ hierarchies. Like Rokeach, more recent research (i.e., Tuulik, Öunapuu, Kuimet, & Titov, 2016; Woodward & Shaffakat, 2016) has argued that every individual, organization and society has their own value system; however, together, they can share common values. Hence, Rokeach’s approach is useful for gaining insights into the manifestation of ED values in stakeholders’ school lives.

Functions of ED values

Everyone and every organization has its value system or hierarchy, which means that everyone and every school prioritizes ED values. Reasoning from Rokeach’s theory, terminal ED values in an educational context can be understood as the most desirable ED values which stakeholders embrace to build their ideal democratic school. Instrumental ED values refer to the democratic behavioural modes of an individual in a school to pursue his or her democratic goals.

The literature reveals diverse views on ED values in Europe, the Middle East, South Africa, and the USA. Some studies have been conducted using a questionnaire with predetermined ED values either based on previous work (e.g., Işıkğöz, 2016) or developed by the authors (e.g., Shechtman, 2010). Although conducted in different socio-cultural contexts, these studies revolve around “essential ED values”, such as fairness, freedom, equality, respect, and tolerance. Such an approach can help examine expected ED values’ existence and perceived importance in participants’ school practices. However, a questionnaire with predetermined ED values may limit both the width and depth of the ED values found since participants are framed in the suggested list of values and indicators. In contrast, qualitative studies (e.g., Botha, Joubert, & Hugo, 2017) have depicted participants’ perspectives on ED values in their school practice more profoundly. Nonetheless, these studies have not highlighted the expression and nature of ED values in each specific context.

Manifestations of ED values

Within schools, ED values can be manifested in both formal and informal spaces. *Formal school spaces* are directly related to the curricula (Le Clus, 2011), such as textbook lessons, teacher’s instruction, the collaboration between teachers and students, and students, leadership, or extracurricular activities. *Informal school spaces* refer to settings that help learners acquire knowledge, skills, attitudes, perspectives, and values outside of the educational institutions’ curriculum and outside of the programmes offered by various social agencies (Schugurensky & Myers, 2008; Van Noy, James, & Bedley, 2016). Livingstone (1999) argued that there was insufficient attention to informal learning in citizenship education research. Despite that, Schugurensky and Myers (2008) indicated that informal learning fosters citizenship education, especially participatory democracy spirit.

This study

In the current study, we focus on clarifying the concept of ED values and their presence in the Vietnamese secondary school context to contribute insights into ED values and their influence on stakeholders’ school lives. A conceptual framework was developed to explore the formation and reflection of stakeholders’ ED values embedded in the Vietnamese secondary school context (see Table 1). The proposed conceptual framework consists of three levels, including (1) the social level, which refers to external factors, such as the sociopolitical context and cultural characteristics of Vietnam; 2) the school level, which refers to school internal factors, such as school norms and general educational policies; and (3) the personal level, which refers to central processes enabling the identification and the manifestation of ED values.

Concerning the central processes in school, the manifestation of ED values indicates stakeholders’ beliefs concerning ED values. Meanwhile, internal, and external factors are school norms and culture, educational policies, the sociopolitical context, and cultural characteristics. For example, a secondary student could stay seated in many countries and answer a teacher’s question without consequences. However, in Vietnamese school culture, such behaviour is believed to be disrespectful towards the teacher. As such, cultural perspectives shape how stakeholders perceive ED values and how the ED values are manifested. Reversely, the implementation of ED values can also affect school internal and external factors. For example, in many schools, teachers appreciate students’ voices when they freely express their views. A student view can contribute to changing the school regulation. The current study aims to contribute insights into the ED values in Vietnamese secondary education and their manifestation in stakeholders’ school life. We have formulated the following research questions: (1) *What types of ED values are identified by stakeholders in Vietnamese secondary schools?;* (2) *How are these ED values manifested in formal and informal school spaces?;* and (3) *How do these ED values contribute to the democratic school in the Vietnamese context?*

Table 1. Description of conceptual framework.

Level		Description
Social level	Socio-political context	Involving Democratic centralism state where the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV) is the leadership group to make the final decision on all issues, after encouraging discussion among CPV members. Whether they are party members or not, Vietnamese citizens will be required to accept all the decisions and the undertakings of CPV and are not allowed to act beyond CPV's Directive and Guideline. In terms of education, the school Party decides issues within their respective powers but must not go beyond the principles, lines, and policies of the Party at higher levels.
School-level	Culture characteristics	We involve characteristics of Confucianism and Buddhism, which appreciate harmony, collectivism, and tolerance.
	Moral Education	The focus of Moral Education in Vietnamese secondary schools is character and personality building. This is not incorporated in the formal curriculum and taught as a single subject but instead integrated into social science. Moreover, secondary students are required to engage in many forms of forging ethics and manners in their schools, such as joining Monday flag-raising hour.
	Citizenship Education	In Vietnamese secondary schools, Citizenship Education emphasizes the notion of developing as a socialist citizen. In addition to topics on ethical education, Citizenship Education provides students with knowledge of the Vietnamese Constitution, fundamental rights and obligations of Vietnamese citizens, and current social policies. Citizenship Education also emphasizes introducing the philosophy and principles of Marxism and Leninism.
Personal level	Beliefs on ED values	Involving the types and concepts of ED values that stakeholders hold.
	Commitment to ED values	We involved the manifestation of ED values in stakeholders' schools. The formal and informal school spaces were set as the "essential spaces" for the participants to implement their ED values.

Methodology

Participants

The study was carried out during the spring semester of the 2018–2019 academic year. A consent letter from the research team was sent to the Department of Education and Training of Danang, Vietnam (DET). With the DET director's approval and recommendation, we have worked with the principals of six local upper secondary schools from an urban and rural area. As a result, two principals allowed us to study their school. To contribute to the research, we sent invitations to all teachers and students of these two schools. Finally, nine participants, including two principals, four teachers, and three students, joined the interviews (see [Table 2](#)). We expect that the diversity in demographics of the sample (i.e., school district, position in the school hierarchy, gender, and age) will provide rich and interesting perspectives on ED values.

Data

Semi-structured individual interviews were carried out to elicit the ED values identified by the stakeholders. After reviewing relevant documents on determining democratic values in education, an interview protocol was developed, which identified the crucial topics (see [Appendix](#)). Accordingly,

Table 2. The demographics of participants.

Position	Code	Teaching experience	Age	Gender	School area
Principal	Principal 1	> 15 years	42	M	Urban
	Principal 2		38	F	Rural
Experience teacher	Teacher 1	> 10 years	33	F	Urban
	Teacher 2		37	F	Rural
Novice teacher	Teacher 3	< 3 years	22	F	Urban
	Teacher 4		26	F	Rural
K-12 student	Student 1		18	M	Rural
	Student 2		18	F	Urban
	Student 3		17	F	Urban

the participants were asked to describe the ED values which would help build their ideal democratic school and to demonstrate them. In addition to these two main questions, participants were encouraged to share any ideas about what should be included in their ideal democratic school. We conducted the pilot stage with the first three teachers, who later did not participate in the study. The pilot interviews included probing questions in the interview protocol to expand and clarify the answers. Minor adjustments to the interview questions and approach were made for further more efficient discussions. The “official” interviews were scheduled right before or after participants’ school time. Each interview lasted about 30 minutes. Participation was voluntary, and it was explained to the participants that the data would be kept confidential and would only be available for research purposes.

Data analysis

All the audio files were converted verbatim into Vietnamese scripts and then translated into English. Each interview was summarized, and the summary was member checked with the participants. The transcriptions were transferred into Atlas.ti. Here, a system of codes related to the ED values and their manifestations was formed based on two ways. First, the participants’ ideas were recorded intact via in-vivo coding. The ED values and their manifestations were built upon what emerged from the data. Secondly, we used open coding to name the ED values based on the participant’s descriptions compared to the literature review (see Figure 2). The outcomes of the analyses were discussed by the research team in several rounds to ensure adequate interpretation. The resulting codes will be presented and described as part of the findings.

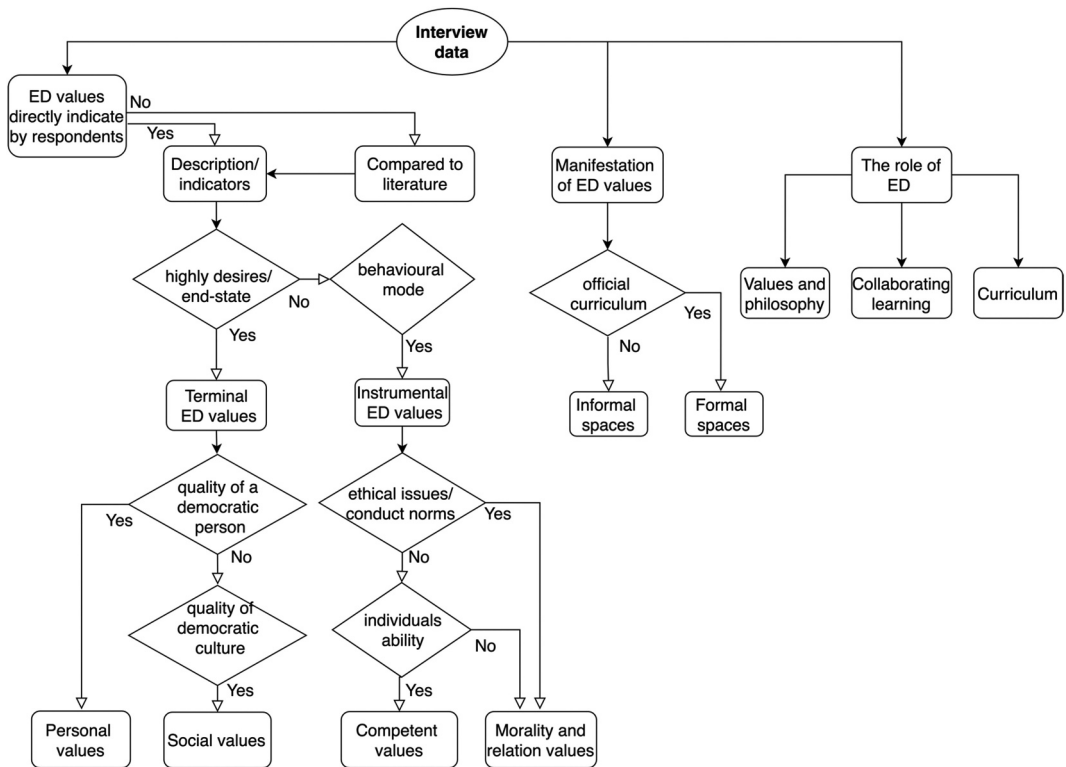


Figure 2. The development of the coding scheme.

Researcher's background

The researcher (first author of this paper) has five years of Vietnam's teacher education (TE). At that time of the study, she was an adviser for student-teacher interns of the TE programme in Vietnam. She had various discussions with teachers and interns about teaching, classroom management, school leadership, and other school issues, such as democratic commitments and implementing them in school. This fostered her "insider's perspective" on management style and teaching practices in Vietnamese upper secondary schools. Consequently, such experience helped to develop the conceptual framework (see Table 1) and link the data with the actual school life to have a panoramic view about the process of educational democratization in Vietnam, from policy to practice and vice versa. Besides, thanks to being a PhD student in the Netherlands, she could develop her Vietnamese education study from an "outsider's perspective". Moreover, having the opportunity to adopt an insider and outsider perspective provided a unique position for her to reflect on knowledge and experience about democratic education in various contexts.

Findings

Types of ED values

Sixteen essential ED values have been identified by students, teachers, and principals in Vietnamese secondary schools. Based on the behavioural indicators and notion of mentioned ED values, we have categorized them into terminal ED values and instrumental ED values. Also, from what participants interpreted, these value groups are implemented in informal and formal school spaces, including school norms, interpersonal interaction, classroom management, group work, and learning/teaching styles (see Table 3).

Terminal ED values

Terminal ED values were mentioned as the essential values contributing to the "end state" of democracy in school. According to the participants, the end state of the educational democratization process should be evidenced by fairness, equality, freedom, transparency, solidarity, and self-esteem. Based on the suggestion of Rokeach's values typology, these terminal values are divided into two

Table 3. The summary of the ED values.

Type	Group	ED values	Description	Manifestation	Role
Terminal values	Other-focused	Fairness	"rationality", "decision-making"	school norms	values and philosophy;
		Equality	"accessibility to opportunities"		
		Freedom	"express yourself", "within a framework".		
		Transparency	"being clear in school governance", "publicizing"		
		Solidarity	"mutual support"		
		Self-esteem	"face-concern"		
Instrumental values	Self-focused	Sincerity	was not described	interpersonal interaction	relations;
		Relationship-focused	Frankness		
		Friendliness			
	Morality-focused	Respect the others	"care for the others".		values and philosophy;
		Tolerance	"sympathy"		
		Enthusiasm	"dedication", "effort"		
		Love	"spare the rod, spoil the child"		
	Competence-focused	Activeness	"proactive engagement"	teaching/ learning	collaborative learning organization
		Cooperation	"school network"		
		Autonomy	"self-discipline", "self-development"		

small categories based on their self-focused and other-focused perspective. The other-focused ED values are embedded in rationality, accessibility to opportunities, express yourself, clearness, and harmonious environment, which correspond to the values of fairness, equality, freedom, transparency, and solidarity. This group of values evokes a sense of democratic school culture, which guides the school's behaviour and interaction. Meanwhile, the self-focused ED (i.e., self-esteem) evokes the typical characteristic of a democratic person in a democratic school.

Instrumental ED values

Instrumental ED values refer to the mode of democratic behaviour that aligns with Vietnamese socially desirable characteristics and helps achieve terminal ED values. This type of ED value has been categorized into three groups that focus on relationship, morality, and competence (see Table 3). The participants tended to connect helpfulness, sincerity, frankness, and friendliness by focusing on the **relationship's aspect**. There is no clear definition given for these ED values. However, the data suggest that participants refer to the willingness to support and harmonious attitude and interaction among stakeholders in their school, especially in a teacher-student relationship. The discussion on the **morality-focused values** revolved around Vietnamese moral norms, which are conveyed within typical values, such as respect, tolerance, enthusiasm, and love. Respondents believed that promoting morality-focus ED values is extremely necessary because *"the model of a democratic school is likely to fail without an ethical background"* (Principal 1). Also, an interviewee reported, *"the nature of a democratic school is to build democratic people . . . and democratic people are those who have social capacities"* (Principal 2). Therefore, it would be flawed not to mention the **competence-focused ED value** group, as the participants suggested. The interviewees agreed that activeness, cooperation, and autonomy are necessary for stakeholders in a democratic school.

Description of ED values

The Meaning of terminal ED values

The interview data suggested that **transparency** is the essential value for enhancing democracy in participants' ideal schools. According to them, being clear is necessary but not enough for the meaning of transparency. Their ideas about transparency related more to publicizing the school's data, such as finances, policies, issues relating to the teaching-learning process, and decision-making. *"Although publicity is still implemented in their schools, not all needed information is public, and not all stakeholders can access it"*, a teacher shared. Besides, *"what is the purpose of the democratising schools if its destination is not equality?"* (Principal 1). The interviewees seemed to connect the concept of **equality** to "accessibility to opportunities", which was explained later as opportunities to connect resources, share information, engage, speak, and be heard.

In addition, the interviewees mainly raised the issue of rationality while discussing fairness. A principal admitted that *"fairness is not necessarily an equal distribution of power and leadership in schools because the position of the stakeholders in the school hierarchy is different"* (Principal 2). According to this participant, teachers cannot interfere much with school management. Moreover, students should also focus on learning instead of other school affairs. These arguments imply that fairness from their perspectives was far from "being the same". Instead, they referred to this terminal ED value as *"a reasonable allocation of resources, rights, and responsibilities to ensure the school's goals"*.

Concerning **freedom**, the participants stated that "free to express yourself" is one of the core meanings of this ED value. The students stressed that in a democratic school, all stakeholders' voices must be considered, regardless of where they are on the ladder of the school hierarchy. However, teachers and principals seemed to disagree with this student's view. A principal even argued that *"the school order could be threatened if students have 'full freedom' since the mind of secondary*

students is still immature. They could even become more rebellious and difficult to control" (Principal 2). Hence, these respondents agreed that freedom should be understood as "being free within the framework" of the ethical standards, the traditional cultural rules, and the school rules.

The participants shared that **solidarity** evokes a harmonious environment in which mutual support is considered vital. The interview data suggest that the participants focus on "the tacit rules about consensus" in managing and solving all school issues. As one participant revealed, "*you may disagree with policy, but once the majority has approved it, you must comply with it. Any discussion on the sideline is supposed to go against the school's spirit of consensus*" (Teacher 2). Furthermore, the interviewees' views on school solidarity were closely related to their meaning of self-esteem. The participants referred to **self-esteem** as a sense of protecting one's face from public criticism. They admitted that "*losing face is not a pleasant or even a painful experience*" (Principal 1, Teacher 1). That is, they tended to avoid judging or even hid other people's mistakes to respect them and save their honour. This action could help stakeholders maintain the harmonious atmosphere, strengthening the school community's solidarity, as believed. Besides, Principal 1 reiterated a famous Vietnamese proverb: "It is an ill bird that fouls its own nest" ("*không nên vạch áo cho người xem lưng*"). He may have been implying that protecting each other's faces is a practical way to protect the school reputation. In this sense, solidarity may be a form of self-esteem from a collective perspective.

The meaning of instrumental ED values

It is worth mentioning that the participants did not describe relationship-focused ED values (i.e., sincerity, frankness, friendliness) in detail. They found it challenging to find a specific definition for these ED values even though they "*understand very well what these ED values were about*".

Regarding morality-focused ED values, the participants shared similar views about enthusiasm, respect for others, tolerance, and love. In terms of **enthusiasm**, stakeholders connected this ED value to the teacher's dedication and effort. Accordingly, the teacher's effort is reflected in their differentiated teaching, elaborately preparing teaching content, methodology, materials, and tools. The students reported that although it is challenging to measure teachers' enthusiasm in the classroom, they "*can feel if the teacher is trying their best to help them in class*" (Student 4). Principal 1 stated that teachers' dedication could be visualized through, for example, their investment of time in experience-based innovations or teacher collaboration activities. **Respect for others** was explained as listening to other voices, accepting diversity, and considering other choices or personal matters. Hence, conflict, bullying, and discrimination in school would be harmful to the democratic culture of the school. In contrast, the teachers suggested that a democratic school should vigorously promote tolerance and love. A teacher defined **tolerance** as "*sympathy and openness to others' differences or mistakes in school*" (Teacher 4). However, with respect to students, all four teachers in this study believed in the saying "spare the rod, spoil the child". They argued that the most visible expression of a teacher's **love** for their students is their rigour. Hence, they tended to narrow students' freedom within the framework of school rules and discipline.

Regarding competency-focused ED values, there were some thoughts on the concepts of activeness, cooperation, and autonomy. Activeness and cooperation are closely related to each other. The participants identified **activeness** as the participation of stakeholders in school issues. According to the teachers, learners' activeness is interpreted as proactive engagement in learning activities, including preparing the lesson in advance, discussing, debating, or questioning. They believed that student activeness is crucial in enhancing positive interaction in a democratic classroom. Besides, from the principals' view, **cooperation** was considered a type of teacher activeness. They interpreted cooperation as a capacity for mutual learning and complementing each other to accomplish a common goal. Furthermore, stakeholders in this study argued that **autonomy** is a crucial factor in building a democratic school environment. The interviewees mainly focused on self-development and self-discipline when discussing the definition of autonomy. As they explained, autonomous teachers are creative, critical thinkers and are progressive. They use these skills to hone

their professional competence and contribute to school development. Besides, the participants defined autonomous students as self-disciplined learners who always adhere to school norms, set specific goals, and push themselves to work hard to achieve them.

The manifestation of ED value types

The findings revealed that teaching/learning is the formal school space where the participants' ED values should be implemented. Besides, interpersonal interaction and school norms were also mentioned as informal school spaces for practising ED values.

The terminal ED values should be mainly manifest in the **school norms** aspect. More specifically, the presence of fairness, equality, transparency, freedom, and solidarity is found in a school's policies. For example, school transparency represents clear rules on the rights and responsibilities of the school board, teachers, and students. School internal expenditures are also public and monitored by teachers. Besides, regulations on the assessment of teaching and learning are always related to fairness. The principals and teachers argued that an individual's freedom in school is set out in the school's internal rules and is bound by uniform appearance, speech, and standards of conduct.

From the participants' perspectives, the interpersonal interaction in the informal school space is conducive to implementing relationship-focused ED values and morality-focused ED values. Accordingly, the value group of sincerity, friendliness, frankness and respect for others should be found in the daily communication and behaviour among stakeholders in their school, for example, candid feedback on teaching among teachers, open discussion between teachers and students, the and the honest friendships between classmates. Besides, tolerance and love could be manifested in the way teachers manage and treat their students.

The data indicated that the manifestation of competency-focused ED values was most evident in **teaching and learning**. Teachers often collaborate during professional career activities such as curriculum development, the design of extracurricular activities, and cultivating students' conduct and behaviour. Students' activeness and autonomy are usually found in the classroom, such as when students engage in a Q&A activity, group discussion, completing homework or preparing for the new lesson. In addition, students' cooperation could be demonstrated through joining extracurricular activities, such as sport or art. However, the students in this study admitted that they were "*not good at cooperating with classmates*". A lack of confidence and conflicts arising with partners were significant causes that were pointed out. According to the students, their teacher's encouragement was necessary but not enough to step out of their comfort zone. They expected that teachers differentiated and that scaffolding instruction would help students to engage in learning activities confidently. In addition, encouragement and cooperation from their peers were significant to students' autonomy. Moreover, the teachers suggested that enhancing students' conflict management skills would be useful for students' cooperative experience.

The contribution of ED value types to a democratic school

Values and philosophy. Together, the terminal ED values seem to convey the Vietnamese participants' perspectives on the philosophy of the democratic school. Although some were afraid that the exaggeration of individual rights might threaten their school hierarchy and lessen respect for superiors, they seemed to agree that protecting individual rights and empowerment is the core idea of a democratic school. To create a democratic environment, the participants believed that protecting the stakeholders' education rights is essential. By promoting equality, fairness, and freedom, stakeholders' educational rights and voice would be guaranteed. Moreover, strengthening the school community was also an essential point that participants wanted to emphasize to strengthen solidarity. That is why the participants tried to link this value to their beliefs about a democratic school. Nevertheless, advocacy for morality-focused ED values is an expression of appreciation for tradition in a democratic school. Accordingly, a traditional Vietnamese school always emphasizes teachers' tolerance and love for their students, which is a professional philosophy of Vietnamese teachers.

Relations. The participants in this study explained that a harmonious atmosphere is what their current school community cultivates. To achieve a democratic school, the spirit of consonance would still be the essential goal to pursue. The teachers believed that promoting relationship-focused ED values, such as sincerity, frankness, friendliness, and respect, could help eliminate the seeds of conflict in relationships with their colleagues and students. The interviewees explained that the sense of power distance had been inherited and spread widely in Vietnamese society. Consequently, the school hierarchy makes a gap between principals, teachers, and students that is not easy to fill. The following illustration is from the interviews: *“Principals or teachers often create boundaries with their students to protect their dignity. Similarly, students often keep a distance from their teachers as a way to show their respect”* (Teacher 4). As such, the participants implied that their society’s hidden rules might threaten their desired harmony in a democratic school. Hence, the commitment to relationship-focused ED values, especially friendliness and respect for others, is essential to narrow the distance.

Collaborative learning organization. By focusing on competency-focused ED values, participants in this study believed that a democratic school is a collaborative learning organization. Accordingly, activeness and autonomy are core values that help build a school in which teachers and students develop through cooperative activities.

Discussion and conclusion

The interviewees mentioned sixteen ED values, which could be clustered into four sets. The first set consists of morality-focused ED values, including tolerance, love, and enthusiasm. The second set focuses on relationship values, namely sincerity, frankness, friendliness, and respect. The third set is competence-focused ED values, including activeness, cooperation, and autonomy. While the above three sets belong to the instrumental ED values group, the last set refers to the terminal values group, including fairness, equality, freedom, transparency, solidarity, and self-esteem.

This empirical research approached ED value types based on Rokeach’s suggestion while providing an opportunity to review his idea of value classification. Rokeach proposed a tool for rank-order scaling of 36 human values, including eighteen terminal and eighteen instrumental values. In contrast to Rokeach’s study with predetermined values, the current research included the ED values of stakeholders based on semi-structured interview data. This means that each value’s type was determined later based on the participant’s descriptions of the ED values. The results show a relative consistency between what was found in this study and Rokeach’s classification (1973). However, in considering human values in terms of democratic desires, this study has added autonomy and transparency to terminal values and put cooperation and enthusiasm in the instrumental values. Moreover, the results provide in-depth descriptions of the ED values with respect to their concepts and manifestation in formal and informal school spaces, which were not explored in previous studies.

The link between people’s ED values and their socio-cultural-political background

The world society theory has promoted the idea that schooling is an essential element to transmit global cultural messages, including educational values, such as ED values, individualism, or human rights (e.g., Ramirez, Meyer, & Lerch, 2016). Indeed, several studies in nondemocratic countries have consistently found a reciprocal relationship between democratic values and education (e.g., Abolfazli & Alemi, 2013 [Iran]; Alshamy, 2014 [Egypt]; Jamal, 2006 [Egypt and Jordan]; Zhang, 2020 [China]). In line with this, Kołczyńska (2020) mentioned a positive association between education and democratic values, regardless of the political regime. However, the way ED values are defined could be different in different socio-cultural-political contexts. The findings of this paper have revealed that Vietnamese stakeholders’ views on ED values are not entirely consistent with those in the literature, but they do add to a richer understanding of what democracy in education can entail.

In comparison with the previous studies, the current study has provided new insights into ED values in the context of Vietnamese high schools. Firstly, there are differences in determining what the ED values between Vietnamese stakeholders and literature are. For example, Vietnamese participants considered self-esteem, friendliness, enthusiasm, and frankness essential ED values in their ideal democratic school. However, these values were absent from the previous work done outside the Vietnamese context. Secondly, however, previous work listed ED values, such as openness to innovation, openness to communication, consistency, humanity (Kesici, 2008), self-confidence, the pursuit of happiness, and sensitivity (Genc, 2008), which have not been touched upon by the participants of the current study.

Furthermore, the findings from the current study also show that the Confucian cultural background related to how participants conceived and implemented ED values in their schools. This impact was most evident in stakeholders' face concern and respect for the school hierarchy. Regarding hierarchical culture, Hofstede (2001) used a similar concept, "power distance", which harms the democratic tendency in educational institutions (Terzi, 2011). Nguyen (2016) argued that a sense of hierarchy is inherited in every family in Vietnam, where children are obligated to show respect to their parents and grandparents. The profound imprint of the hierarchical structure model displayed in each family is a solid root for respecting the school hierarchy of each Vietnamese teacher and student. Regarding face concern, the findings provide clues about the influence of the stakeholders' sense of school hierarchy and face concern on the concept of democratic values (i.e., self-esteem, freedom, fairness, and equality). Bich (1999) seemed to agree with participants in the current research that protecting the face is a prominent feature of Vietnamese culture. Borton and Ryder (2000) also emphasized that losing face is a painful wound in any society, but it is unacceptable in Vietnam. This has added new meanings to the concept of these ED values compared to previous studies (see Mathews, Spearman, & Che, 2013; Uyaniker, 2017).

Limitations and future research

Four limitations should be acknowledged for this study. Firstly, in terms of the small sample, the study results may have been more comprehensive had more representatives of the Vietnamese secondary's population (i.e., participants from private schools and international schools) been included. Secondly, the restricted geography of this study could also be a limitation. Participants from areas more open to Western cultures, such as Ho Chi Minh City, or vibrant traditional culture places, such as Hanoi, could contribute to broader diversity in the ED values. Thirdly, regarding the research method, this qualitative approach offers a view of essential ED values and how they should be reflected in Vietnamese secondary schools. However, it may be difficult to determine how crucial different ED values are to stakeholders. Finally, for some reason, the principal and students were not involved in the pilot stage. The modifications to the interview protocol were derived from personal experiences with interviewing some volunteer teachers. Hence, some (official) interviews with the students did not start smoothly which may reduce the rich of information.

The acknowledged limitations also suggest some ideas for possible future research. First, we think a large-scale quantitative study on ED values from various educational levels and perspectives, in both public and private sectors, may provide additional interesting insights. Second, it may also be promising to explore possible links between democratic beliefs and democratic participation of stakeholders in the school. Furthermore, the differences between previous work and the present study's findings suggest a possible link between people's democratic beliefs and their socio-cultural-political background. From what is implied in the results, it would be interesting to conduct a cross-national study identifying ED values. Finally, a comparative study between Confucian cultures on supporting the ED values in schools would bring additional insights into how cultural values are associated with ED values.

Practical implications

This study provides an understanding of ED values and suggestions on how they should be implemented in schools in Vietnam. The way stakeholders understand ED values is believed to shape their actual behaviour and indirectly affect their school environment. Hence, the findings could be a reference for Vietnamese policymakers struggling with promoting democracy at the grassroots level in the Vietnamese educational system.

First, the results of this study suggest that defining a core educational value system (including ED values) is necessary for school operation and management. Based on the democratic regulations issued by MOET Vietnam, each school needs to proactively and flexibly identify the terminal and instrumental ED values. Moreover, the commitment to these ED values should be coherently reflected in school regulations, policies, and development strategies. Second, the current democratic regulations in Vietnam's education system seem to focus extensively on the macro and meso levels but lack attention to the micro-level of learning activities and classroom interactions. We believe that democracy in schools can only be guaranteed and promoted when teachers and students are empowered. The empirical data suggest that the empowerment of teachers and students can be achieved by promoting autonomy and the rights of stakeholders (i.e., equality in opportunities, freedom of expression). Third, teachers, and especially students, need to be involved in school decision-making processes on a broader scope. Four, teacher professional development could be improved by access to diverse resources, participation in professional courses, and the performance of group-learning activities. Last, schools need more autonomy in managing and developing the educational programme, curriculum and in organizing extracurricular activities depending on the circumstances. In addition to the aspects included in current democratic regulations (i.e., decision-making, responsibility, publicity, monitoring, relationships), democratic culture in school needs to be nourished in learning and the classroom.

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Data availability statement

Data not available due to ethical restrictions.

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