

Teachers' Perspectives on the Implementation of Moral Education: Empirical Evidence and Implications for Pre-service Teacher Education

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Abstract

Teaching practice is one of the key components of preparing future teachers, as it allows them to connect theoretical knowledge with real school practice. There is an increasing emphasis on the need for innovation in teaching practice, including the development of moral education. This paper focuses on the implications of empirical findings for the preparation of future teachers, based on research conducted in Slovakia on a sample of 371 teachers, which focused on their views on the application of moral education. Respondents on a five-point Likert scale evaluated moral education in comparison with other educational components. The results showed that although teachers consider moral education to be an important part of education ($M = 4.76$), its implementation in everyday practice is rated lower ($M = 3.39$). These findings point to the need for systematic training of future teachers in this field, including through targeted and reflective teaching practices.

Keywords: *University teaching practice; implications; research; teachers; moral education;*

1. Introduction

The current school environment faces an increasing number of behavioural problems among students, which place greater demands on teachers' professional preparedness (Porta & Hudson, 2025). In this context, international professional discourse emphasizes the need to innovate the training of future teachers, not only in the area of didactic and subject competence, but also in the area of educational influence (Cochran-Smith et al., 2016). Traditionally, teacher training has focused primarily on the development of didactic skills, with significantly less emphasis on managing student behaviour and the systematic development of the moral dimension of education (Evertson & Weinstein, 2006). This imbalance between didactic and educational

training is most noticeable to beginning teachers. One of the most common concerns of novice teachers is not the teaching of the subject matter itself, but rather working with students in terms of maintaining discipline, managing problem behaviour, building positive relationships, and maintaining professional authority (Klassen & Chiu, 2011). Moral education and character education are an integral part of the teaching profession, but despite this, several studies point out that this area often remains marginalized or implicit in the training of future teachers, without systematic methodological anchoring and without sufficient connection to practice. Innovations in the training of future teachers are urgently needed in this context (Jones, Ryan & Bohlin, 1998; Berkowitz, 1999; Milson, 2000; Gonzáles, et al, 2020; Olishkevych, 2018). Moreover, the national curriculum explicitly incorporates character education and addresses its implementation as a cross-curricular dimension of schooling (MŠVVaM SR, 2023). The aim of this paper is to highlight the importance of teaching practice as a key area for the development of future teachers' competences, including in the field of moral education, and to present empirical findings based on research conducted in Slovakia, focusing on teachers' views on the real-life application of moral education in the school environment.

2. Innovations in pedagogical practice in the context of moral education

Although moral and character education is increasingly perceived as a key component of future teacher training, its implementation is uneven and often more theoretical than practical, often depending on the type of study program or specific school (Revell & Arthur, 2007). Although teacher training students often have good theoretical knowledge in this field, in order to increase the effectiveness of its practical integration into teaching, mentoring by experienced teachers (Gede et al., 2024) is necessary, among other things, which teacher training students can acquire during their teaching practice. The discrepancy between theoretical preparation and practical application of character education is also highlighted in a study by Olishkevych (2018), which identified a lack of practical exercises specifically focused on character education in teacher training programs at American universities. The importance of implementing moral education directly into the teaching practice of pre-service teachers is supported by several studies. As reported by Eraut (1994), Píšová (2005), Kasáčová (2005), and Korthagen (2011) in Kosová and Tomengová (2015), teachers actually use only a certain part of all their theoretical knowledge, namely that knowledge which has been sufficiently integrated with their personal experience and, through reflection, has become the dominant theoretical interpretation of practice. However, the pedagogical practice of students in teacher training programmes traditionally focuses more on the didactic competencies of future teachers. while moral education has received less attention in practice. In the context of this paper, we consider it necessary to distinguish between the concepts of moral education and character education. Moral education focuses primarily on the development of moral reasoning, ethical reflection, and the ability to make decisions in situations involving a moral dimension (Killen & Smetana,

2006). By contrast, character education has a broader scope, as it aims not only at the development of moral reasoning but also at the cultivation of specific virtues, attitudes, and habits that are manifested in an individual's everyday conduct both in and beyond the school setting (Arthur et al., 2017). Examples of good practice in implementing moral education into the pedagogical practice of teacher training students can be seen at Boston University and St. Francis University, where theoretical courses are specifically linked to pedagogical practice through internships and collaboration with experienced teachers-mentors (Olishkevych, 2018). At UIN Antasari Banjarmasin University, English teacher training students systematically integrate values such as honesty, responsibility, and respect directly into their lesson plans and microteaching (Ashfihana, 2021). Similarly, the Faculty of Education at Comenius University in Bratislava emphasizes the educational dimension of teaching practice, with students reflecting on the moral aspects of teaching and the school environment (Portfolio of Teaching Practice A, internal material of the faculty, 2025). Such approaches reflect current international trends, particularly the OECD Learning Compass 2030, which stresses that 21st-century education must integrate values and attitudes alongside cognitive development as part of teachers' professional competence. According to Korthagen (2017), innovation should move towards so-called "Pedagogy 3.0," which, within the framework of reflective practice, emphasizes in-depth reflection on moral dilemmas and the student's inner attitudes. The absence of systematic training in character education, as confirmed by research by the Jubilee Centre (Arthur & Kristjánsson, 2015), requires that pedagogical practice be not just passive observation, but purposefully designed training in ethical decision-making and social-emotional skills (Casel, 2020).

3. Methodology

In the context of innovations in pedagogical practice, we consider it important to reflect on teachers' views on the actual application of moral education in schools. This paper presents partial results of a study examining teachers' opinions on the implementation of moral education in comparison with other components of education, such as environmental, aesthetic, emotional, and global education. The research had an applied and quantitative design and was conducted through a questionnaire survey. The sample consisted of 371 primary school teachers from different regions of Slovakia. Data were collected across several schools in order to ensure a more balanced representation of participants. Nevertheless, the distribution of the sample in terms of selected factors such as age, gender, qualification, or region is not entirely balanced. In terms of gender, women dominated the sample (89.2%), while men accounted for 10.8% of participants. Teachers aged 31–44 were the most numerous (48.8%). They were followed by teachers aged 45–55 (26.4%), those younger than 30 (12.9%), and teachers over 55 (11.9%). The average age was 42.3 years. An online questionnaire of our own design (MS Forms) was used to collect the data. The questionnaire consisted of demographic items, and opinions were

surveyed using a five-point Likert scale. The data was processed using Python 3.10 data and statistical packages in the Google Colaboratory cloud environment. Verification of the internal consistency of the questionnaire: McDonald's ω (0.900), Guttman's λ -2 (0.892), and Spearman-Brown's split-half coefficient (0.889). The results of the internal consistency analysis confirm the high reliability of the scale used.

4. Results

Before focusing on the results concerning the actual application of moral education in practice, we consider it important to briefly point out how teachers evaluate its importance in comparison with other components of education. This step is particularly important because the results indicate a difference between the perceived importance of moral education and its actual application in practice. The results concerning the importance of individual components of education are only descriptive, and we focus in more detail on those findings that are related to their actual application in practice, in line with the focus of the paper. Moral education received the highest average rating in terms of importance ($M = 4.76$; $SD = 0.57$), with most respondents giving it the highest possible rating (median = 5, $Q1 = 5$, $Q3 = 5$). This was followed by intellectual/rational education ($M = 4.61$; $SD = 0.67$) and environmental education ($M = 4.23$; $SD = 0.81$). These results indicate a high degree of consensus among teachers that moral education is of fundamental importance to the educational process. Table 1 presents an overview of the mean scores, variability of responses, and the distribution of results for individual components of education in relation to their implementation in practice.

Table 1. Evaluation of the actual implementation of individual components of education (n = 371)

The educational component	M	SD	Min	Q1	Mdn	Q3	Max
Ra	4.20	1.00	1	4	5	5	5
Mo	3.39	1.09	1	3	3	4	5
Wo	2.97	1.04	1	2	3	4	5
Ae	2.77	1.01	1	2	3	3	5
Ph	3.50	0.97	1	3	3	4	5
Re	3.11	1.05	1	2	3	4	5
Me	2.80	1.00	1	2	3	3	5
Mu	2.68	1.02	1	2	3	3	5
Re	2.78	1.06	1	2	3	3	5
Se	2.13	1.00	1	1	2	3	5
MaP	2.28	1.03	1	1	2	3	5
Em	2.60	1.09	1	2	3	3	5
Gl	2.49	0.97	1	2	3	3	5

En	3.41	0.96	1	3	3	4	5
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Note. M = mean; SD = standard deviation; Q1 = first quartile (25th percentile); Mdn = median; Q3 = third quartile (75th percentile); Ra = rational; Mo = moral education; Wo = work; Ae = aesthetic; Ph = physical; Re = religious; Me = media; Mu = multicultural; Re = regional; Se = sexual; MaP = marriage and parenthood education; Em = emotional; Gl = global; En = environmental.

The results show that teachers consider the intellectual/rational component of education to be the most realistically applied ($M = 4.20$, $SD = 1.00$), which also achieved the highest median and upper quartile values ($Mdn = 5$; $Q3 = 5$). Physical education ($M = 3.50$, $SD = 0.97$) and environmental education ($M = 3.41$, $SD = 0.96$) also achieved high values. Moral education was rated slightly above average ($M = 3.39$, $SD = 1.09$), which indicates that although previous results showed that teachers attribute significant importance to it in the educational process, they rate its actual implementation lower than intellectual or physical education. Conversely, the least applied components were sex education ($M = 2.13$, $SD = 1.00$), marriage and parenthood education ($M = 2.28$, $SD = 1.03$), and global education ($M = 2.49$, $SD = 0.97$). These results indicate that although all components of education are part of the curricular framework, their implementation in practice is uneven and some areas remain in the background. The results suggest that in the school environment, there is still a tendency to place emphasis primarily on intellectual development and performance. In the next phase of the analysis, we focused on the application of moral education and other components of education from the perspective of various factors. In the analysis, we therefore looked at factors such as the age of teachers and the level of school at which they work. Due to the limited scope of the paper, we present only the results related to the age of teachers. The youngest age group of teachers (under 30) rated intellectual (rational) education (Ra) highest, considering it to be the most widely applied in practice. Conversely, sex education (Se) and marriage and parenthood education (MaP) were rated lowest in this group. The 31–40 age group shows relatively balanced ratings across most of the components of education monitored. The highest average values were again achieved by rational (Ra), moral (Mo), and work education (Wo). Teachers in the 45–55 age group attach high importance to rational education (Ra) in particular. At the opposite end of the spectrum are once again sexual education (S) and education for marriage and parenthood (MaP). The oldest age group of teachers considers moral education (Mo) to be the most widely applied component of education. This is followed by intellectual (rational) education (Ra). Once again, sexual education (Se) and education for marriage and parenthood (MaP) receive the lowest ratings. The distribution of responses is less variable than in younger groups, which indicates greater uniformity in the value attitudes of older teachers.

5. Discussion and implications for pre-service teacher education

The results of the research point to a discrepancy between how teachers assess the importance of moral education and how they perceive its actual implementation in practice. Although moral

education received the highest rating in terms of importance, it ranked lower than other components of education when it came to its daily implementation in the school environment. Similar findings were reported in the TEPACE project study (Bernhard et al., 2025) and in a study by Zhang et al. (2022). The results of our research, pointing to the predominance of the cognitive component over the educational one in real practice, correlate with the critical reflection on contemporary education, which Gert Biesta (2010) defines as the 'age of measurement'. In this context, education is reduced to a qualification function, where measurable knowledge outputs dominate at the expense of deeper personality formation and moral character of the student. This trend is also confirmed by Carr (2011), according to whom current pedagogical practice is influenced by so-called 'technicteaching', where the teacher becomes more of an instructor than a moral actor. The low rating of the implementation of moral education in our sample of respondents confirms the existence of a "competence gap." Teachers recognize the axiological value of education, but under the pressure of performance-oriented curricular requirements and due to the absence of targeted preparation for dealing with ethical situations during university studies (Sanderse, 2013), they resign from integral education in favor of the rational component. These findings are a clear imperative for the transformation of pedagogical practices, which should equip future teachers not only with didactic techniques, but also with the ability to reflect on and practically implement educational goals in everyday school reality.

6. Limits of the research

Despite the high reliability of the self-designed instrument, the interpretation of results is limited by sample representativeness (gender and age imbalance), the subjectivity of self-assessment, and the specific context of Slovak primary schools. Further validation across different educational settings and control of socioeconomic variables would strengthen future research.

7. Conclusion

The proposed changes in the concept of teaching practice aim to ensure that future teachers no longer perceive moral education as an isolated, theoretical component, but understand it as an integral part of their professional identity. Innovation in training must overcome the traditional emphasis on qualifications (knowledge) and create space for subjectification—that is, the formation of an ethically competent teacher personality capable of facing the challenges of today's schools (Biesta, 2010). The main contribution of our study is the identification of the need to reconstruct pedagogical practices. The practical implications for teacher education lie primarily in strengthening the connection between theoretical courses and teaching practice, for example through the planning and implementation of lessons with explicit moral education objectives, the integration of specific values into microteaching, and the systematic reflective

evaluation of these experiences (Olishkevych, 2018; Ashfihana, 2021; Korthagen et al., 2017). Mentoring during teaching practice also appears to be important, as experienced teachers can support student teachers in applying the moral aspects of education in classroom teaching (Gede et al., 2024). Teacher preparation conceived in this way may help reduce the gap between the declared importance of moral education and its actual implementation in school practice.

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