

‘E-TAP’ CURRICULUM FOR VIRTUE EDUCATION: A FIT ANALYSIS TO THE ‘SKOLA-2030’ CURRICULUM

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Abstract. *The virtue education curriculum ‘e-TAP’ is one of the recent efforts for improving character and virtue education at school in Latvia from preschool till grade nine. The objective of this research was to provide evidence regarding whether this curriculum is appropriate (‘fits’) to the Latvian context, in particular in reference to the Skola-2030 curriculum. Based on fit and feasibility theory, this work addressed the research question: “How does the treatment of virtues of the e-TAP curriculum fit to the treatment of virtues of the new Skola-2030 curriculum?”. The analysis used statistical descriptive frequency analysis of the virtues of each programme and comparative analysis between the two document sets included in each of them, using Excel software. The results show that Skola-2030 programme stresses performance and civic virtues, while the e-TAP programme underlines moral and intellectual virtues. Performance virtues are the most important ones in Skola-2030 (38 %), but account only for 17 % in the e-TAP curriculum. In addition, in Skola-2030 curriculum civic virtues account for 23 %, while in e-TAP they are only 8 %. In the e-TAP curriculum, moral virtues account for half of all the mentions (50 %) and intellectual virtues for 25 %, whereas in Skola-2030 those virtue groups account for 22 % and 18 %, respectively. The high ‘complementarity fit’ of both programmes suggests that the e-TAP curriculum could considerably enrich the Skola-2030 educational offer. Suggestions for e-TAP programme improvement and further research are put forward.*

Keywords: *character education, curriculum research, fit and feasibility analysis, Skola-2030, virtue ethics.*

Introduction

This research analyses one of the recent contributions to the improvement of the implementation of moral education in Latvian schools. Since 2016 Latvia is gradually moving to competence-based education, where the focus is on the student who learns to think creatively, understands how to search and to find answers, uses knowledge in different situations; a student who is able to cooperate, thinks critically, plans his / her development and is civilly responsible

(Skola-2030). The transition to competency-based education imposes a great deal of responsibility and work on teachers, as they need to change the way they organize pupils' learning and to elaborate most of their own teaching materials. This situation was further complicated by the epidemiological situation caused by Covid-19, which required teachers to switch very quickly to the online teaching and learning environment.

The framework of the improved curriculum Skola-2030 also includes virtues and values, which are embedded in the curriculum alongside study areas and transversal skills (Skola-2030, pp. 7-8). This moral dimension of the curriculum is based on the values set out in the Constitution of the Republic of Latvia, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the European Convention on Human Rights (Skola-2030, p. 7). In general, Latvian teachers consider this dimension to be very important (Surikova & Pigozne, 2018).

The online virtue education programme e-TAP is one of the recent efforts for improving character and virtue education at school in Latvia. Elaborated on the bases of previous work of the Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues of the University of Birmingham (<https://www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/1844/character-education/>) and of recent need analysis research in Latvia (Fernández González, 2019; Fernández González et al., 2019), this curriculum for pupils from preschool till grade nine contributes to the goals set by Skola-2030 programme, providing 118 lesson plans for character and virtue education, as well as presentations and worksheets for each lesson, which are organized around 16 topics (e.g., health, cyberbullying, fake news, drug dependence, family, friendships etc.) (<https://www.aretel.lv/parnese-izglitiba/tikumiskas-audzinasanas-programma/>). It includes also an introductory 'Virtue Toolkit' for providing pupils with the vocabulary of virtue ethics and a better understanding of virtue growth processes. See in Table 1 some comparative features of both programmes.

Table 1 Main Topics and Virtues in the Skola-2030 and the e-TAP Programme

Skola-2030 learning areas (subject matters)	'Natural science' (5) 'Cultural understanding and artistic self-expression' (4) 'Mathematics' (1) 'Social and civic education' (2) 'Technology' (3) 'Languages' (10) 'Health and sports' (1).
'e-TAP' topics	'Flourishing individuals' (healthy eating, exercise, harmful substances, screen time) 'Flourishing relationships' (friendships, families, peer pressure, managing conflict) 'Digital flourishing' (time spent online, cyber bullying, fake news, online relationships) 'Societal flourishing' (communities, volunteering, careers, democracy).

Skola-2030 virtues	Compassion, courage, grit, honesty, justice, kindness, responsibility, self-control, solidarity, temperance, tolerance, wisdom.
‘e-TAP’ virtues	Compassion, courage, critical thinking, curiosity, flexibility, friendliness, gratefulness, helpfulness, honesty, motivation, respect, self-control, sincerity etc.

Considering that the scientific foundations of the e-TAP curriculum are solidly established, the objective of this research was to provide evidence regarding whether the curriculum is appropriate (‘fits’) to the Latvian context, in particular in reference to the Skola-2030 curriculum. This curriculum research would also be useful to improve the e-TAP programme for further implementation.

The research question guiding the enquiry was: “How does the treatment of virtues of the e-TAP curriculum fit to the treatment of virtues of the new Skola-2030 curriculum?” The methods for answering this question included content analysis, both thematic and quantitative, focussing of the similarities and differences of the sets of virtues that are present in Skola-2030 and e-TAP curriculum.

Literature Review

To outline the theoretical perspective at the foundation of this research, the literature review was chosen as a method of analysis. According to Eldridge et al. (2016), who explored fit and feasibility theory at large, ‘feasibility’ is described as a prevalent notion for studies evaluating whether a forthcoming research or learning programme may be implemented. The ‘fit’ approach emphasizes the necessity for clarity concerning the appropriateness of the research or programme to a concrete cultural or institutional context. Furthermore, specifically in the field of character education, Davison et al. (2014) mentioned that, despite the acknowledged fact that students and teachers have in general a positive attitude towards character education, it is significantly more difficult to provide evidence about what students actually gain from participation in character education learning. Nonetheless, Arthur et al. (2015) argued that providing students with constant self-reflection activities and involving them as co-creators and co-authors of the improvement of character education would help to harmonize educators’ and students’ values and worldviews. In addition, this collaboration would produce new character education resources from which both may benefit, including the exploration of opportunities for combining traditional learning techniques with the Internet technologies.

In this study, the primary reference frame for the analysis of the virtues included in the e-TAP and Skola-2030 programmes was provided by the Latvian

normative documents. In relation to the promotion of virtue education in Latvian schools, the Cabinet of Ministers of Latvia (2016) set the task of helping students to develop critical thinking skills, learning to think freely and independently. Self-awareness, improvement of self-esteem and lifelong learning are to be encouraged in lessons, and students' freedom, self-discipline, healthy-life habits, purposeful attitude towards work, preservation of the values of intergenerational unity, and responsibility for the protection and sustainability of nature and the environment are also promoted. In addition, awareness of national identity, understanding of general human and Christian values, and civic participation in strengthening democratic society are to be fostered in all grades at school through the educational process and beyond. Those values may be taught in form time (*klases stundas*) or in other subject lessons through the whole curriculum. It is suggested that educators may cooperate with parents for obtaining better outcomes both in academic results and in virtue education. Twelve specific virtues, which manifest individual's free thinking and action, are to be nurtured in the process of pupils' upbringing: responsibility, diligence, courage, honesty, wisdom, kindness, compassion, temperance, self-control, solidarity, justice, and tolerance (Cabinet of Ministers, 2016).

Those twelve virtues are completely integrated in the Skola-2030 curriculum, and this is why this list of 'official virtues' was used for the comparison between the Skola-2030 and the e-TAP programme content. The new Skola-2030 curriculum framework, whose implementation started in 2020/2021 in grades 1, 4, 7 and 10 and in preschool education in 2019/2020, includes virtues, transversal skills, understanding and basic skills for each curriculum area. Pupils' and students' learning achievements are formulated in terms of 'competence', and it is assumed that teachers will integrate these content dimensions in the teaching and learning process, focusing both on the students' ability to use practically their knowledge and skills in various situations, and on the development of transversal skills and virtue-based habits. One of the aims of school education, as understood in Latvian legislation (Cabinet of Ministers, 2016), is to develop a common understanding of values such as life, human dignity, freedom, family, marriage, work, nature, culture, the Latvian language and the Latvian State in children and young people, developing a flourishing attitude and responsibility for themselves and their actions. The vision of the student that is at the basis of the Skola-2030 curriculum, includes the systematic reinforcement of crucial habits which would result in pupils' acquisition of the twelve key virtues (Skola-2030, n.d.).

In the 'Framework for Character Education' elaborated by the Jubilee Centre (Jubilee Centre, 2017) it is argued that virtues constitute a person's character and that they can and should be 'taught' and 'caught'. It is also stated that the more people enact character traits and virtues, the more society as a whole improves. The Framework provides support for students to both learn and expand their

character development by using self-reflection together with activities that enhance virtues, which are classified in four major categories: ‘intellectual’, which are needed for developing interest in knowledge acquisition; ‘moral’, which allow to act well in various situation; ‘civic’, which are necessary for responsible citizenship; and ‘performance’ virtues, which are useful at work and build up moral and intellectual virtues (Harrison, Arthur, & Burn, 2015; Jubilee Centre, 2017). This classification of virtues is used in the empirical analysis presented further.

Methodology

The documental base of the research included the whole e-TAP and Skola-2030 programmes. The ‘e-TAP document set’ included the 118 lesson plans. For the Skola-2030 curriculum, two sets of documents were analysed. The ‘Preschool education set’ included 8 documents: the ‘Preschool curriculum’ and the seven ‘Instructional materials’, one for each thematic area. The ‘Basic education set’ included all the 26 subject-matter programmes from grade 1 to 9 for each thematic area: ‘Natural science’ (5), ‘Cultural understanding and artistic self-expression’ (4), ‘Mathematics’ (1), ‘Social and civic education’ (2), ‘Technology’ (3), ‘Languages’ (10) and ‘Health and sports’ (1).

Data collection and analysis: In e-TAP programme, at the beginning of each lesson plan a number of target virtues for the lesson are specified. Some of them coincided with the twelve ‘official virtues’ included in the Latvian legislation, but many others did not, and they were labelled as ‘nonofficial virtues’. Regarding Skola-2030, within the ‘Preschool set’, virtues were listed mostly (but not exclusively) in the section ‘Significance’ (*nozīmīgums*) of each document. As some of these virtues were ‘nonofficial’, for facilitating the comparative analysis, the ‘official virtues’ were also retrieved in this document set by using keyword research in each document. As regards the ‘Basic education set’, explicit references to the ‘official virtues’ were included in one of the Appendices of each document (often called “Habits to be developed by students”), and additional references were also retrieved in the text of the instructional materials after each lesson plan.

The quantitative content analysis was implemented in two stages: first, statistical descriptive frequency analysis of the virtues and values of each project was implemented using Excel software. A subsequent comparative analysis between the two data sets was implemented, revealing similarities and differences between e-TAP and Skola-2030 treatment of virtues.

Research Results

Descriptive analysis (see Table 2). In the Skola-2030 *preschool* programme 116 mentions to the 12 official virtues were found: 45 % of them in the 'Social and civic' area, and 22 % in the area 'Cultural understanding and artistic self-expression'. The virtues most often retrieved were 'responsibility' (N=41, 39%) and 'goal-orientation' (N=28, 27%). 'Kindness' was mentioned 10 times. Surprisingly, 'tolerance', 'solidarity' and 'temperance' were mentioned only once, and 'honesty' twice. In addition, also 116 'nonofficial' virtues were retrieved in the preschool document set. The top-three virtues most often mentioned were 'joy' (N=16, 13%), 'enthusiasm' and 'orderliness' (9 times each). 'Self-assertiveness', 'sensitivity/tenderness', 'respect', and 'attention' came next (8-7 times each). Interestingly, 'gratefulness' was mentioned only twice, and 'self-control' 3 times. In the Skola-2030 *basic education* materials (grades 1-9), 1980 mentions to virtues were found. The two performance virtues ('responsibility' and 'grit') were the most often mentioned (n=748). The intellectual virtue ('wisdom') was the second most often mentioned (n=357) after 'responsibility' (n=499). Among the civic virtues, 'tolerance' and 'solidarity' are the most often mentioned (245 and 110 times, respectively), and among the moral virtues – 'courage', 'honesty', and 'kindness' (158, 107 and 106 times, respectively).

Table 2 *Virtues Retrieved in the Skola-2030 and the e-TAP Programme*

<i>Virtue category</i>	Skola-2030 (only official virtues)		e-TAP (all virtues)	
	(examples by frequency)	N (%)	N (%)	(examples by frequency)
Moral virtues	Courage, honesty, kindness, compassion, temperance, self-control	474 (24 %)	104 (50 %)	Compassion, respect, courage, gratefulness, honesty, sincerity, self-control, humility, kindness
Civic virtues	Solidarity, justice, tolerance	401 (20 %)	16 (8 %)	Friendliness, helpfulness, voluntariness
Intellectual virtues	Wisdom	357 (18 %)	53 (25 %)	Curiosity, critical thinking, self-confidence, reasoning, wisdom, reflectivity
Performance virtues	Responsibility, grit	748 (38 %)	36 (17 %)	Motivation, flexibility, perseverance, initiative, responsibility
	<i>Total</i>	<i>1980</i>	<i>209</i>	<i>Total</i>

In the e-TAP materials, overall, 209 explicit mentions to virtues were found (53 of them in the preschool document set). Moral virtues were the most often mentioned (n=104, 50%), in particular ‘compassion’ (20), ‘respect’ (19), ‘courage’ (14), ‘gratefulness’ (12) and ‘honesty’ (11). ‘Motivation’ and ‘flexibility’ were the performance virtues most often mentioned (12 and 11 times, respectively), and among the intellectual virtues (n=53, 25%), ‘curiosity’ and ‘critical thinking’ came first (18 and 11 times). Only 16 civic virtues were mentioned, the most important of which was ‘friendliness’ (8 times).

The comparative analysis was done at two levels: First, a comparison of the most often mentioned in both data sets at different education levels is presented at the level of single virtues (Table 3); and then, a general comparison between both programmes at the level of virtue categories (Figure 1). See below the top 10 virtues in the different data sets (Table 3).

Table 3 Top-ten Virtues by Education Level in Skola-2030 and the e-TAP Programme

Rank	Preschool		Basic education	
	e-TAP	Skola-2030	e-TAP	Skola-2030
1	Respect	Responsibility	Compassion	Responsibility
2	Curiosity	Goal-orientation	Curiosity	Wisdom
3	Courage	Joy	Respect	Grit
4	Gratefulness	Kindness	Flexibility	Tolerance
5	Honesty	Enthusiasm	Critical thinking	Courage
6	Helpfulness	Orderliness	Motivation	Solidarity
7	Compassion	Self-confidence	Honesty	Kindness
8	Motivation	Initiative	Courage	Honesty
9	Self-control	Courage	Sincerity	Self-control
10	Friendliness	Wisdom	Friendliness	Justice

Only three virtues in the top 10 were common between e-TAP and Skola-2030: ‘courage’ appeared in all education levels in both sets; ‘honesty’ also, except in Skola-2030 preschool (in fact, it appeared later, in 16th position); and ‘self-control’ (top ten in e-TAP preschool and Skola-2030 basic education sets but appeared in a lower position in the other document sets). Seven of the top 10 virtues were the same in preschool and in basic education in e-TAP programme, while only four virtues appeared both in preschool and in basic education top ten in Skola-2030.

At the level of virtue categories (see Figure 1), the most striking difference between the two programmes was the treatment of moral virtues, which accounted for 50% of the e-TAP virtues and only 22% in Skola-2030. Contrarily, performance virtues were the most important in Skola-2030 (38%), but accounted only for 17% in the e-TAP programme. Another striking difference was that in

Skola-2030 civic virtues accounted for 23%, while in e-TAP they were only 8%. In the e-TAP programme intellectual virtues accounted for 25%, while in Skola-2030 – for 18%.

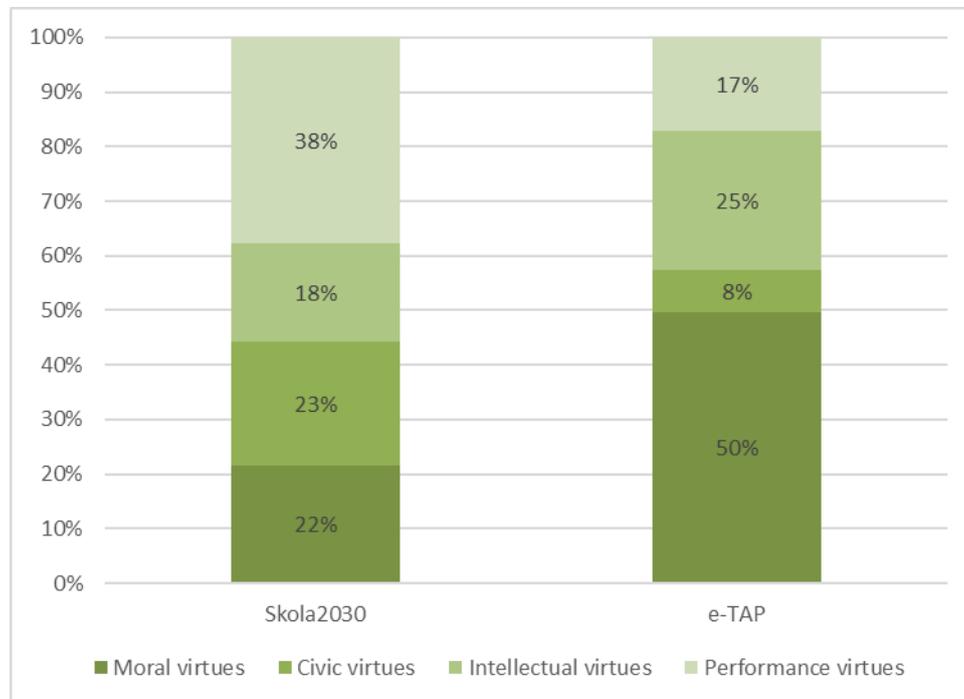


Figure 1 Skola-2030/e-TAP Comparison by Types of Virtues (%)

Discussion

This discussion of the results highlights the complementarity of those two programmes. While the Skola-2030 programme stresses performance virtues, the e-TAP programme underlines moral and intellectual virtues. This complementarity suggests that the e-TAP programme considerably enriches the educational offer of the Skola-2030 programme and has therefore a high 'complementarity fit' with Skola-2030. Given that both programmes are just entering the Latvian education system, this study makes a significant contribution to both Skola-2030 in-depth understanding and e-TAP further potential for integration within the Skola-2030 curriculum.

However, the different accent points of those two programmes presents some challenges. Skola-2030 subject curriculum proposes values and virtues as a desired outcome that can be achieved mainly through how the activity takes place, for example by placing musical instruments in the intended place, developing responsibility, (<https://mape.skola2030.lv/resources/312>, p. 16). The e-TAP programme also helps to recognize and understand these values and virtues through questioning: "what is responsibility", "what are you responsible for?"

(Preschool – 6-year-old group, Internet safety, 3rd lesson). However, the emphasis on some different virtues in the programmes could lead to a situation where not all the virtues which Skola-2030 intends to put forward would receive a similar treatment (the overlapping virtues would be better understood than the others), while some of the specific virtues actualized by e-TAP would not be given sufficient attention in the rest of the learning process. However, in turn, these different emphases, provide a wider range of virtues.

The programme e-TAP offers a thematic approach to understanding virtues. Many of those themes are closely related to the content of the Skola-2030 curriculum, so the integration of the e-TAP programme and Skola-2030 programmes can be realized not only in form time, but also in concrete subject lessons. For example, in the 4th grade, the thematic area ‘Social sciences’ includes the topic “How to preserve traditions and participate in the community” (<https://mape.skola2030.lv/resources/200>, pp. 133) and the e-TAP programme offers the topic “Participation in democracy-building” for 4th grade. However, it must be acknowledged that this work direction (thematic comparison) requires a more detailed study of common topics grade by grade. Another possibility of using the e-TAP programme can be to implement it during form time lessons within the six thematic groups proposed by the National Centre of Education of the Republic of Latvia (NCE, 2016).

The results of the research indicate also future directions for improving the e-TAP programme in practice. First of all, by elaborating lessons that address performance virtues and civic virtues, which are currently the weakest virtue categories in this programme. Given the educational trends of the 21st century, as well as the fact that new online materials are being developed (e.g., <https://www.tavaklase.lv/>), especially now, when distance learning is taking place, the e-TAP programme is also a timely response to the need of constantly reviewing and supplementing the teaching materials. At a time when the goal of education and school, the content of curricula, and the forms of work organization are topical issues around the world and each country is looking for ways to overcome the education crisis, the e-TAP programme provides serious support to teachers in implementing education reform in Latvia.

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