TEACHERS' MOTIVATIONS, BELIEFS, AND EXPECTATIONS REGARDING MORAL EDUCATION IN UPPER SECONDARY EDUCATION

Manuel J. Fernández González
Scientific Institute of Pedagogy, Faculty of Education Sciences and Psychology, University of Latvia, Latvia

Andrejs Mūrnieks
Scientific Institute of Pedagogy, Faculty of Education Sciences and Psychology, University of Latvia, Latvia

Reinis Vējiņš
Scientific Institute of Pedagogy, Faculty of Education Sciences and Psychology, University of Latvia, Latvia

Anna Sidorova
Scientific Institute of Pedagogy, Faculty of Education Sciences and Psychology, University of Latvia, Latvia

Gunita Elksne
Scientific Institute of Pedagogy, Faculty of Education Sciences and Psychology, University of Latvia, Latvia

Abstract. *This study explored high school teachers' motivations and preferences regarding adolescents' moral education in the context of the assessment of the newly developed program 'e-TAP+' for virtue education in Grades 10 to 12 in Latvia. The program comprises four modules: personal flourishing, flourishing relationships, societal flourishing, and digital flourishing. The research questions guiding the research were: Which aspects of moral education at high school were most important for teachers, as evidenced by the topics they chose to pilot in their classes? What were teachers' motivations for and expectations of participating in the evaluation of the virtue education program? This mixed-method survey research used an online questionnaire completed by 107 secondary school teachers from all regions of Latvia. In December 2023 – January 2024 teachers volunteered to participate in the piloting of the program, chose their preferred topics, and provided open-ended feedback on their choices and motivations. A total of 225 topics were chosen (90 in Grade 10, 81 in Grade 11, and 54 in Grade 12). Preliminary findings suggest that participants' overall opinion about the program was very positive. Teachers' main motivations were (1) the availability of quality materials for classroom discussion about virtues and values, and (2) the topicality of the program's themes. Teachers in Grade 10 prioritized topics related with flourishing relationships (n=29, 32%), teachers in Grade 11 had a slightly bigger interest in personality than in relationships (n=28, 34% and n=24, 30%, respectively), and teachers in Grade 12 prioritized personality flourishing (n=20, 37%). The results will be valuable for other high*

school teachers and leaders, organizers of professional development courses, policymakers and other education authorities, and moral education researchers.
Keywords: *program assessment, upper secondary education, teachers' motivation, virtue education.*

Introduction

Late adolescence (15-18) is characterized by new abilities of metacognition and abstract thinking, which trigger exploration of identity, moral reasoning, and the establishment of a new belief system (Padilla-Walker, 2016). Consequently, young people in these ages experience a heightened openness to diverse perspectives and a need to search for meaning in life (McNamara Barry & Abo-Zena, 2014). This process, known as the moratorium stage, positively correlates with open mindedness and curiosity (Schwartz et al., 2013).

Identity development during late adolescence is nurtured within respectful and autonomous learning environments that offer emotional support for students to express and reflect on their experiences (Lapsley, 2010; Magolda & Taylor, 2015). This aligns with the growing recognition of the importance of fostering open-minded moral inquiry in high schools through a dialogical approach, which supports the identity formation of high school students (Keiša & Fernández González, 2022)

The topic of moral education at school is a current subject of debate in recent scientific literature (e.g., OECD, 2021; Singh, 2019; Stevenson, 2022; De Ruyter et al., 2022). Similarly, in Latvia there are controversial and overlapping interpretations of what constitutes moral education. This complexity partly stems from Latvia's heterogeneous cultural reality, built on the successive exposure to socialist, post-socialist, and then liberal and neo-liberal moral-values systems. (Maslo et al., 2023). Currently, the need for virtue education (in Latvian – *tikumiskā audzināšana*) is theoretically guaranteed by the State in the article 10 of the Education Law (Saeima, 1997), which stipulates that that the education system shall ensure the moral development of the learner in accordance with the values enshrined and protected in the Constitution of the Republic of Latvia, as well as in the Guidelines for moral education (Cabinet of Ministers, 2016). Nevertheless, the specific method and timing for delivering moral education at schools remain unclear. The recently reformed national education curriculum (Skola2030, 2017) no longer includes a distinct subject labelled 'Ethics' in primary or secondary general education. Instead, ethics is now integrated into the learning area 'Social sciences' within the basic education curriculum, with no equivalent integration in the secondary general education standard. As a result, currently the primary place for pursuing moral education and fostering virtues in secondary education is during the weekly homeroom lessons. It should be noted that the most recent official program outlining topics for these homeroom lessons

was developed already eight years ago by the National Centre for Education (2016).

These challenges for moral education are being addressed by one of the activities of a recent project (2022-2024) implemented at the University of Latvia. A moral education program ('e-TAP+') for grades 10 to 12, based on personalist virtue ethics (Fernández González, 2019) and addressing existential questions mostly in a dialogic form, was elaborated and is being piloted in 67 high schools in Latvia. The goal of this study was to explore high school teachers' motivations and preferences regarding youngsters' moral education, in the context of the piloting of this program. The research questions guiding the inquiry were:

RQ1: Which aspects of moral education at high school were most important for teachers, as evidenced by the topics they chose to pilot in their classes?

RQ2: What were teachers' motivations for and expectations when getting involved in the validation of the virtue education program?

Methodology

The program offers four modules for each Grade (10-12): 'Personal flourishing personalities', 'Flourishing relationships', 'Societal flourishing and 'Flourishing in the digital world'. Each module focuses on a specific topic per grade (see Table 1), which is developed further in three 40- minute lessons.

*Table 1 **Modules and topics of the program** (compiled by authors)*

Module	Module topic
Grade 10	
Flourishing personalities	Who am I? What am I like?
Flourishing relationships	With whom am I? (non-chosen relationships)
Flourishing society	"Me" within society, the world and the universe
Flourishing in digital world	"Me" in the digital world
Grade 11	
Flourishing personalities	What do I want to be like?
Flourishing relationships	What am I like and what do I want to be like in relationships?
Flourishing society	Relationships, society, and justice
Flourishing in digital world	Growth in the digital world
Grade 12	
Flourishing personalities	Why do I exist? In search for meaning and happiness
Flourishing relationships	Who would I like to be with? (chosen relationships)
Flourishing society	The local and the global
Flourishing in digital world	Meaning, relations and globalisation on the internet

Research design, instruments, and methods

This exploratory study employed a mixed-methods approach using a survey research design. An online questionnaire with closed and open questions was used for data collection. The questionnaire had three sections: in section 1 participants

were asked to select the topics to pilot in their classes among the 36 topics offered. The second section contained demographic questions about the location and size of the school, participants' seniority, and the topics they taught. The last section included four open questions regarding what motivated their participation in the project, their motivations, and their expectations. The questionnaire was available online (Microsoft form).

Data collection happened from December 15, 2023, till January 15, 2024. The selectin criteria for participants were: 1) Teachers (either homeroom teachers or subject teachers); 2) working in secondary schools and in vocational training institutions; 3) working with the appropriate age group (pupils with 16-19 years of age); 4) voluntary participation. Invitation to participate in the project was disseminated in the social media and through personal emails sent to the heads of all education authorities Latvian cities and districts (n=43), and to all directors of the secondary and vocational education schools in Latvia (n=270).

Participant teachers and schools

Overall, 107 teachers participated in the research. 92 of them (86%) were homeroom teachers. As regards their teaching areas, 23% taught languages, 21% - cultural awareness and self-expression, 16% - natural sciences, 13% - social and civic education, 8% - mathematics, 4% - technology, 2% - health and physical activities, 3% were career counsellor, 4% were only homeroom teachers, and 4% worked in school administration. Teachers' length of service ranged from 2 to 40 years. The average seniority was 23.5 years (*Mode* = 32, 34; *Median* = 26), and only 6.5% of participants (n=7) had less than 5 years of service.

Regarding the geographical distribution of participants, most of them were from the regions of Latgale (30.8%) and Riga and its region (28%). There were also participants from Vidzeme (20.6%), Kurzeme (13.1%) and Zemgale (7.5%). 44.9% of teachers were from schools in one of the ten state cities (over 22,000 residents), 45.8% from other towns (at least 2000 residents) and 9.3% from school villages.

A total of 67 schools participated in the research. Most of schools had only one teacher participating (n=46, 69%). 9 schools had 2 teachers, 9 schools – 3 teachers, 2 schools – 4 teachers and 1 school – 8 teachers. Schools size was very diverse. Some schools had around 100 pupils, while others had over 2000. The average size was around 700 students. The most often represented school size was under 200 students (16% of respondents), 700-800 students (11%) and 200-300 and 1100-1200 (11%).

Data processing and analysis

The primary data were collected in an Excel file containing participants' choices about the topics the intend to pilot in their classes, as well as their answers to the 4 open questions (1580 words).

Quantitative analysis was done using SPSS 22 for descriptive analysis of frequencies and difference analysis (χ^2 test)), and MS Excel (pivot tables). The

Cronbach's Alpha test indicated an acceptable reliability of the data set (α = 0.625). For making sense of the qualitative data, thematic analysis was implemented. First the researchers read all participants' comments, looking for themes and relevant quotations revealing participants' motivations and expectations, and structured the information. Then, for the initial thematic structure, artificial intelligence (ChatGPT 3.5) was used, using the prompts "what motivations respondents expressed in the text? and "what were the expectations of respondents?". A set of 10 motivations and 10 expectations was produced by the computer. Researchers jointly crosschecked and discussed the output with their own observations for ensuring reliability of the results, deciding the final items to be included in the structure of the results.

Results and interpretation

RQ1: Which aspects of moral education at high school were most important for teachers, as evidenced by the topics they chose to pilot in their classes?

Overall, 225 topics were chosen: 90 in Grade 10, 81 in Grade 11 and 54 in Grade 12 (see Figure 1). 37 teachers chose topics only from Grade 10, 32 teachers – only from Grade 11, and 22 teachers – only from Grade 12; 16 teachers chose lesson topics from different grades. Regarding the number of topics chosen by teacher, 55 teachers chose 1 topic, 25 teachers – 2 topics, 17 teachers – 3 topics, 5 teachers – 4 topics, and 5 teachers – between 6 and 12 topics.
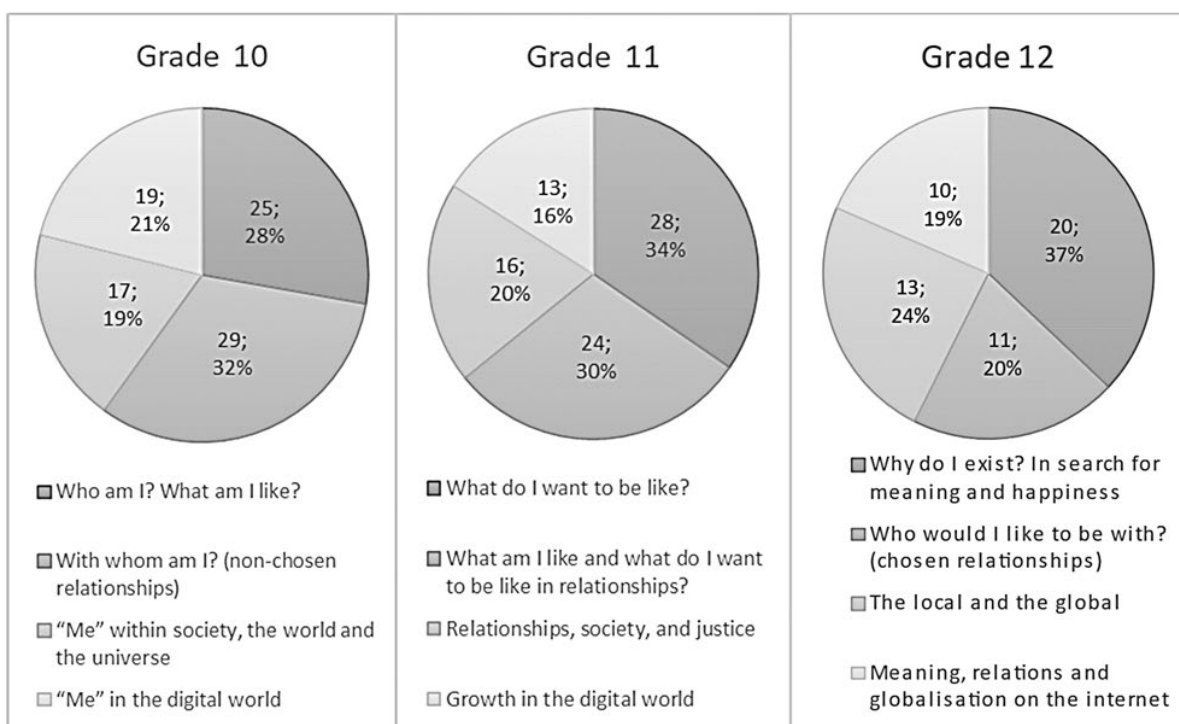

Figure1 Choice of the topics (made by authors)

A chi-square test of independence showed that there was no significant association between grade (10, 11 and 12) and chosen modules (χ^2 (10, N = 255) = 3.85, p > .05). Overall, the personality modules were chosen most often (73 times) and had a gradual increase (28% in Grade 10, 34% in Grade 11 and 37% in Grade 12). The relationship modules were the second most popular (64 times) but showed a gradual decrease across the grades (from 32% in Grade 10 to 30% in Grade 11 and only 20% in Grade 12). Teachers chose less often topics related to global society (46 times) and to digital life (42 times), which nevertheless are very topical nowadays (Rubene, 2018), and more often related to students' personality and interaction with others.

Teachers' choice of topics on digital issues was comparatively small. This differs from a previous study capturing student teachers' preferences about the same program (Fernández González et al., 2023), in which it was found that student teachers were more likely to choose topics related to digital life. The different approach of the teachers in the current study indicates that for them the human aspect of education (personal experiences and self-understanding) is more important or at least as important as the ability to adapt to the challenges of new technologies. A harmonious and holistic values education in the future will obviously have to balance these two dimensions (human and technological). This is also one of the goals of the moral education program e-TAP+ for secondary schools.

Teachers in Grade 10 prioritized topics related with relationships (n=29, 32%). This priority could be related to teachers' awareness of pupils' need to create a new group of friends when starting secondary education. Teachers in Grade 11 had a slightly higher interest in personality topics than in relationship topics (n=28, 34% and n=24, 30%, respectively), which could be due to their perception of pupils' need for a better self-knowledge, as the new national curriculum requires Grade 11 students to choose subjects to study in depth in secondary school with a view to their future career choice (career issues are integrated into the curriculum). Teachers in Grade 12 prioritized the personality topics (n=20, 37%), probably due to the fact that at the end of secondary education, the search for happiness and meaning in life are topical issues for pupils. Overall, in all 3 secondary school grades (10, 11 and 12), teachers' choices indicated an increasing interest in topics related to human self-understanding. These include questions about the meaning of life, the value of the person, temperament and character, the problem of suffering, and existential issues.

Four teacher age group were created for exploring eventual differences in the choice of topics by seniority group: group 1 = 2-10 years of seniority, group 2 = 11-20 years, group 3 = 21-30 years and group 4 = 31-40 years. Using χ^2 test it was found that there was a statistically significant difference by seniority group regarding the topic 10.1. – *Who am I? What am I like?* (χ^2 (3, N = 107) = 8.37, p = .039). This topic was chosen more often by group 4 than by the other groups. It

can be assumed that experienced teachers are more aware of the current educational situation, in which there is relatively smaller focus on values (philosophy, ethics, history of religions) in secondary schools, and that they therefore seek to compensate for this lack with the choice of appropriate topics for homeroom lessons.

Other (statistically non-significant) differences were found. Seniority group 3 (21-30 years) chose less often (n=1, 3.7%) the topic 11.2. - *What am I like and what do I want to be like in relationships?* than group 1 (n=6, 27%), group 2 (n=5, 28%) and group 4 (n=12, 30%). Seniority group 3 chose less often (n=4, 15%) the topic 10.2 – *With whom am I? (non-chosen relationships)* than group 2 (n=8, 44%). And seniority group 3 chose significantly more often (n=9, 33%) the topic 12.1 – *Why do I exist? In search for meaning and happiness* than group 4 (n=4, 10%).

As a limitation of the study, it should be noted that the assumption was made that the choices of topics denoted teachers' preferences. However, it is possible that in some cases teachers chose the topics after consultation with their pupils, not only based on their own preferences.

RQ2: What were teachers' motivations for and expectations when getting involved in the validation of the virtue education program?

Participants comments indicated a range of positive attitudes towards the educational materials and a genuine interest in improving their teaching and learning experience. The terms 'materials' or 'resources' were mentioned 64 times, and the term 'interest' or its variants (interested, interesting) was mentioned 61 times. The motivations for participating in the project included the interest in the topics covered by the program materials, which address important societal and educational issues (17 times), the need for additional teaching materials, lesson plans, and resources (8 times), and a desire to improve their teaching methods and provide better homeroom lessons (8 times). Several respondents appreciated the quality and preparation of the materials of the program (19 occurrences), and some respondents were just curious about trying something new (10 times). The motivations also included the belief that the materials and topics would be valuable and relevant for students (7 times), and the willingness to support this concrete educational initiative (3 times). Some participants mentioned previous positive experiences with the validation of similar materials for grades 1 to 9 (5 occurrences).

As regards participants' expectations, they expected the materials to be of high quality, practical and easy to integrate into their teaching (4 times). Some participants expressed interest in taking part in professional development, including workshops or training about the learning opportunities that the materials could provide (3 respondents). A few respondents expressed a willingness to collaborate with other teachers in their educational community (2 respondents).

Expectations also included materials that would engage students and topics that would stimulate their interest and understanding. Respondents also expected clear communication regarding the implementation of the piloting and the feedback to be given by them (3 times), and the desire of receiving insights into what worked well in other schools (3 times). These expectations collectively reflect a desire for effective, relevant, and supportive educational materials that contribute to the professional development of teachers and to positive learning experiences for students.

Conclusions

After the COVID pandemic, teachers often experience difficulties to reinvigorate a communicative school culture. The research findings revealed that the aspects of moral education at high school which were most important for teachers were related to pupils' personality (self-knowledge, self-value) and to friendly relationships peers and family members. Teachers' main motivations for participating in the validation of the virtue education program were the practical teaching materials and a willingness to improve their teaching practices. They expected collaborating with colleagues and exchanging experiences about what worked well in other schools in the field of moral education.

The results of this study may be useful for other high school teachers and school leaders, organizers of teachers' continuous professional development courses, educational policy makers and other educational authorities as well as for moral education researchers.

Acknowledgements

References

Cabinet of Ministers. (2016). *Izglītojamo audzināšanas vadlīnijas un informācijas, mācību līdzekļu, materiālu un mācību un audzināšanas metožu izvērtēšanas kārtība* [Guidelines for pupils' moral education and procedures for assessment of the information, learning tools, materials, and methods for moral education]. Regulation No 480 of 15.07.2016. Latvijas Vēstnesis, 25.07.2016, No 141. https://www.vestnesis.lv/op/2016/141.4

De Ruyter, D., Oades, L., Waghid, Y., Ehrenfeld, J., Gilead, T., & Chatterjee Singh, N. (2022). Education for flourishing and flourishing in education. In O. Ergas, T. Gilead, & N. C.

Singh (Eds.), *Reimagining education: International science and evidence-based education assessment* (pp. 72–131). UNESCO MGIEP.

Fernández González, M. J. (2019). Relational-Self-of-Virtue: Classical, Modern and Christian Perspectives in Moral Education. In L. Daniela (Ed.) *Human, technologies and quality of education. Proceedings of scientific papers* (pp. 22-32). Riga: Latvijas Universitātes Akadēmiskais apgāds. http://doi.org/10.22364/htqe.2019.02

Fernández González, M. J., Mūrnieks, A., Keiša, P. M., & Elksne, G. (2023). Student teachers' insights about a curriculum for moral education in secondary education. In: L. Daniela (2022), *Human, technologies and quality of education - 2023. Proceedings of scientific papers*, pp. 84-102. Riga: Latvijas universitāte. https://doi.org/10.22364/htqe.2023.06

Keiša, P. M., & Fernández González, M. J. (2022). Teacher's role and attitude during Socratic conversations for moral education at high school. In L. Daniela (Ed.), *Human, technologies and quality of education - 2022. Proceedings of scientific papers* (pp. 545-558). Latvijas universitāte. https://doi.org/10.22364/htqe.2022.54

Lapsley, D. (2010). Separation-individuation. In I. B. Weiner & W. E. Craighead (Eds.), *The Corsini encyclopaedia of Psychology* (4th ed., pp. 1554–1555). Wiley.

Magolda, M. B., & Taylor, K. (2015). Developing self-authorship in college to navigate emerging adulthood. In J. J. Arnett (Ed.), *The Oxford handbook of emerging adulthood* (pp. 299–315). Oxford University Press.

Maslo, I., Fernández González, M. J., & Surikova, S. (2023). Comprehension of character education and virtue education in Latvia: Analysis and synthesis of school actors' views. *Journal of Moral Education* (Published online). https://doi.org/10.1080/03057240.2023.2236800

McNamara Barry, C., & Abo-Zena, M. M. (2014). The experience of meaning-making: The role of religiousness and spirituality in emerging adults' lives. In J. J. Arnett (Ed.), *The Oxford handbook of emerging adulthood* (pp. 464–480). Oxford University Press.

National Centre for Education (2016). Ieteikumi klases stundu programmas īstenošanai. [Recommendations for implementing the homeroom lesson program]. National Centre for Education. Retrieved from: https://registri.visc.gov.lv/audzinasana/dokumenti/metmat/ieteikumi_klases_st_progr_ist.pdf

OECD. (2021). *Embedding values and attitudes in curriculum: Shaping a better future*. OECD Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1787/aee2adcd-en

Padilla-Walker, L. M. (2016). Moral development during emerging adulthood. In J. J. Arnett (Ed.), *The Oxford handbook of emerging adulthood* (pp. 449–463). Oxford University Press. https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2015-46837-028

Rubene, Z. (2018). Digital childhood: some reflections from the point of view of philosophy of education. In L. Daniela (Ed.), *Innovations, technologies and research in education* (pp. 64 – 77). Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Saeima (1999). *Izglītības likums* [Education Law]. Latvijas Vēstnesis, 17.11.1998, No. 343/344. https://likumi.lv/ta/id/50759-izglitibas-likums

Schwartz, S. J., Zamboanga, B. L., Luyckx, K., Meca, A., & Ritchie, R. A. (2013). Identity in emerging adulthood: Reviewing the field and looking forward. *Emerging Adulthood*, *1*(2), 96–113. https://doi.org/10.1177/2167696813479781

Singh, B. (2019). Character education in the 21st century. *Journal of Social Studies*, *15*(1), 1-12. https://doi.org/10.21831/jss.v15i1.25226

Skola2030. (2017). *Education for modern competence: description of study content and approach*. Nacional Centre for Education. [Retrieved from https://static.lsm.lv/documents/ge.pdf]

Stevenson, M. (2022). *Education for human flourishing*. Centre for Strategic Education.