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**ETHICS TEACHERS' BELIEFS AND ATTITUDES RELATED
TO THE SUBJECT**

Theses

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Problem statement and aims of the research

There seems to be a constant need to renew public education to make it more efficient. Both programs with special focuses or broader, comprehensive educational policy programs, such as curriculum development, appear with varying frequency. The introduction of the subject 'Morality' [erkölcsstan], whose name was later changed to Ethics [etika], was declared in the Public Education Act of 2011 (Act CXC of 2011 on National Public Education) and then described in more detail in the National Core Curriculum of 2012 (Government Decree 110/2012 (VI. 4)). The subject began to be taught in the 2013/2014 academic year, in a phase-in model, in the 1st and 5th years of primary education. Students had to choose between the subjects of 'Morality' and 'Religion and morality' [hit- és erkölcsstan]. Although the subjects of Ethics, Human Studies and Social Studies [etika, emberismeret, társadalomismeret] had previously been offered as one-term modules in primary school education, none of them had been implemented across all years and in every school.

The introduction of the subject was accompanied by all the uncertainty that usually surrounds new implementations, especially those that have not been preceded by proper preparation and followed by evaluation. Few teachers had appropriate qualification and knowledge to teach the subject, and most of them had no previous experience in it, either. The teachers who had to start teaching Ethics could establish their professional work by quick preparation, by applying their general pedagogical knowledge, and by constructing and testing presuppositions regarding the subject.

The introduction of Ethics was an intervention in the educational system, with the inclusion of a new element. This is called *implementation*. The implementation process can be divided into four phases: *initiation* [initiation and testing], *implementation* [the innovation takes place in the entire system], *continuation* [the innovation becomes a routine part of the system], and *outcome* [when the expected results appear] phases (Altrichter, 2005; Fazekas, 2012; Waugh & Godfrey, 1995). Ethics is in the third stage of this process, moving into the fourth. In the past ten years, however, there has been very little research that studied the state and efficacy of Ethics (Fenyődi, 2021; Alexandrov et al., 2015), although the investigation of such a novelty could provide educators with useful information on several aspects of learning and teaching. At present, not only do we know little about the acceptance of Ethics among the actors of education, about the attitude, the receptivity and the professional knowledge of the educators who teach the subject, but also about the daily classroom practice, i.e. how classroom interaction takes place and what kind of development takes place, how effective teaching is. In addition, to gain deeper knowledge of the current state, it is also necessary to explore the factors that might affect it, so that certain aspects of the implementation can be exposed, the future of innovation can be predicted, some problems can be revealed, and development promotion can be outlined. Therefore, we defined the research problem as *the lack of evaluation of the subject Ethics as a systemic implementation*.

Implementation research examines the changes in the operation of the modified system, the success of the intervention or the predictability of this success. One of the key figures in implementation is the teacher: their knowledge, attitudes, motivation, and reactions to surrounding conditions and processes, that is, their behavior (Pischetola, 2022; Reichert et al., 2021). Therefore, in the framework of our research, we focus *on the teacher*.

The success of the implementation can be predicted by the *receptivity* [willingness to accept something] of the actors of the system concerned, which can be influenced by several factors. Research examines, among many factors, teachers' beliefs about knowledge and learning, about the benefits and disadvantages of the invention, about the applicability of the new program; what support from the environment they perceive; and teachers' role in the work environment and in decision-making (Borbély, 2019; Cheng et al., 2022; Janík et al., 2018; Kwok, 2014; Lee, 2000; Pešková et al., 2019; Shapiro, 2018; Waugh & Punch, 1987; Wong et al., 2021). In the present research, therefore, we focus on *the attitudes of teachers towards Ethics, their beliefs and views* regarding the subject, as well as the *circumstances* they perceive.

Since in Hungary, the teaching of Ethics is compulsory at the school level, a teacher's attitude and receptivity do not necessarily impact the decision whether they teach, but rather on how teaching takes place. Our research therefore examines what characterises the teachers' *pedagogical behaviour and practice in the classroom*, according to certain aspects.

Besides beliefs and attitudes, several factors can influence the teacher's behavior and receptivity (Ajzen, 1991; Fiske, 2006; Windschitl, 2002). These include the ambivalence or the consistency of their views or attitudes, their adaptation to the social environment, or the evaluation of external circumstances. In our research, we also aim to find correlations between teachers' beliefs and attitudes, their classroom behaviour and the conditions they perceive.

The structure of the doctoral dissertation

I. Introduction

Rationale for the choice of the topic, research problem statement

II. Theoretical background

The background history and description of the subject Ethics

Conceptual framework: implementation and receptivity; attitude; beliefs; epistemological paradigms: objectivism and constructivism; morality, ethics, children's moral development; theories related to learning and teaching and to Ethics teaching; elements of classroom practice, teaching methods

III. Empirical research

Research questions, research design; research methods and tools; data analysis, results

IV. Summary

Answering research questions; fitting the findings in international research context; limitations, conclusions and recommendations

Research questions

Question group 1

1. What attitudes do Ethics teachers have regarding the subject? How accepted is the subject among them?
2. What beliefs do Ethics teachers hold regarding learning and teaching Ethics?
3. How do teachers perceive the external and internal conditions of teaching Ethics? Which factors do teachers consider as success and benefits and which as difficulties and obstacles in the teaching of Ethics?
4. What characterises the classroom practice of Ethics teachers?

Question group 2

5. Is there a connection between teachers' attitudes regarding Ethics and their beliefs?
6. Is there a connection between teachers' attitudes and the conditions they perceive?
7. Is there a connection between teachers' attitudes and the classroom practice they implement?
8. Is there a connection between teachers' beliefs and the classroom practice they implement?
9. Is there a connection between teachers' beliefs and the conditions they perceive?
10. Is there a connection between the conditions perceived by the teachers and the classroom practice they implement?

It emerged from the literature that three major research trends can be applied to the focuses of the present study: research on pedagogical beliefs, research on attitude, and, within implementation research, on receptivity. Therefore, we have created the following conceptual breakdown:

(1) *Attitude* is examined on three values: *affective*, *cognitive* and *behavioral* components (Fiske, 2006). In this case, the cognitive component is represented by teachers' evaluative beliefs. The behavioral component includes elements related to *behavior* and *behavioral intention*.

(2) *Beliefs* are examined in four categories: a) general epistemological beliefs, b) beliefs regarding children's moral development and learning, c) beliefs regarding general learning and teaching in institutional context, d) beliefs regarding Ethics teaching. For the sake of this research, we applied a dichotomous model in each area, so that the four areas can be compared. The two poles can be characterized by a few traits:

A) Knowledge originates from an objective, external source, its truth or correctness can be verified. Adults know more and better than children, the transmission of knowledge is one-way. Adults are needed for children's learning and gaining quality knowledge. Learning or other capacities are predetermined. In this model, the child is 'not competent'. [The terms we use here are based on theory and are the following: a) *objectivist*; b) *paternalistic*; c) *teacher-centered*; d) *conventional*.]

B) Knowledge is personal, unique, complex and can be developed. Knowledge sharing is mutual, individual opinions may differ. During their development, using their natural abilities, children continuously shape their knowledge in interaction with the environment. They are capable of interpreting and reflecting on observed phenomena and information critically. In this model, children are ‘competent’: they are able and motivated to create knowledge even without direct teaching. [The terms we use here are based on theory and are the following: a) *constructivist*; b) *individualist*; c) *student-oriented*; d) *contextual*.]

(3) Among the large number of circumstances that can influence teachers’ attitude, we have selected those that proved to be significant in the receptivity models, and also fit the specific situation of Ethics. These are the following: the teacher’s identification with the innovation; the opportunities and outcomes of teachers’ professional development and student development; perceived student behaviour; satisfaction with teaching aids; support from the professional community; practical-organizational factors; perceived social assessment of innovation. These can be examined in two categories: external conditions (for example, supporting materials, professional forums) and internal conditions (teacher competence, pedagogical practice). According to the perception and judgment of teachers, these conditions may appear as success/advantage or disadvantage/difficulty.

(4) When exploring the field of learning and teaching Ethics, an important area is the existing classroom practice. One of our focuses is on the methods and procedures used by teachers during the lessons. It can provide information about how rich and various the methodological repertoire – and their knowledge – of teachers is, and whether there is any specific methodological model for teaching Ethics. For this aim, we have made a list of instructional methods and techniques, deriving it from the recommended methodology of Ethics and similar subjects [e.g. humanities, social studies, civic and character education]. Another focus studies the way how teachers apply the chosen methods [i.e. inclining to the student or the teacher-centered model], and is examined through the behaviour of the teachers while organizing and leading the learning process. Based on the theory, we use the *conventional/contextual* conceptual categories here, as well. A third focus is whether classroom practice and teacher’s behaviour are connected with epistemological and pedagogical beliefs.

In our research, we asked the teachers about the abovementioned areas, with the awareness that the information we received is affected by a subjective filter.

Research strategy and methods

According to the nature of the objectives, this is applied research (Falus, 2004a). Since its aim is not to test a theory, we did not set up any hypotheses. For the research, we used an integrated [mixed method] model that combines quantitative and qualitative methods (Sántha, 2009). Within the framework of the *convergent parallel design* described by Creswell and Plano Clark

(2011), quantitative and qualitative data collection takes place in parallel, and the results of the analyses are compared through a partly descriptive, partly correlational data analysis strategy (Falus, 2004a). The structure of the research is a concurrent triangulation design, in which the qualitative and quantitative methods weigh equally (Creswell, 2009).

As research methods, we applied a questionnaire, oral interviews and metaphor analysis. A self-developed online questionnaire, which included both closed and open-ended questions, and semi-structured interview were designed for the study. We found the method of metaphor analysis to be particularly suitable for the purposes of the research, since the questions refer to a definite central concept, and this is the *teaching of Ethics*. The two parts of the concept denote both the subject and the teacher's activity, so the evoked metaphor presumably might reveal this combination, and the connection of the two phenomena. Since the creation of a metaphor is a completely unique, personal construction, the analysis can reveal evaluative or attitudinal relations, or instructional circumstances. Metaphor elicitation was included in the questionnaire as an open question, and also in the interview. For the latter, we used metaphor provocation (Vámos, 2003), not as a linguistic, but a visual tool, and the images were designed in accordance with the specific traits of Ethics.

In order to ensure reliability and validity, several types of triangulation were used during the development of the research design, the design of the instruments, data collection and analysis (Sántha, 2015). The target population of the research is the teachers who have been teaching Ethics/Morality in Hungarian primary school grades since 2013. The subject is taught in one lesson per week and higher qualification is less required than in the case of other subjects, so we assumed that there is a large fluctuation in terms of who teaches it. That is why we also involved teachers who were not teaching, but already had experience. The mandatory questions of the questionnaire were filled in by 513 teachers, the optional question for the metaphor was answered by 483 people. The interviews were conducted with 22 participants.

The data were subjected to quantitative and qualitative analyses. Among statistical procedures, we performed univariate descriptive analyses of the four investigated areas [1) attitude, 2) beliefs, 3) context, 4) classroom practice]. For dimension reduction, we created derived variables and principal components (by Principal Component Analysis). We also examined the relationship between target variables and background variables (Mann-Whitney, Kruskal-Wallis test, ANOVA and Spearman and Pearson correlation tests). In order to explore the correlations between each of the four areas, correlation tests were performed (Spearman, Pearson).

Qualitative analyses were carried out in a multi-phase coding process, codes and categories were created theoretically or data-driven. In some cases (disjunct codes) quantification was also possible.

Answering the research questions

1. What attitudes do Ethics teachers have regarding the subject? How accepted is the subject among them?

In the examination of the attitude, we separated the affective, evaluative (cognitive) and behavioral components. The quantitative results in all three areas indicate a rather positive, but not strongly positive attitude of the teachers. (The average values are between 3.3–3.78, in a range of 1–5.) The affective component reached the highest value, the data are more even. The respondents like to teach the subject, but they find it less motivating. The evaluative component shows that while the respondents generally consider the goals of Ethics to be important, some of them do not think that the implementation of these objectives needed the introduction of an extra school subject. The others, on the other hand, do not consider Ethics education through a subject superfluous, and they evaluate the functioning of the subject as adequate. The inferential analyses shows that mainly teachers in the lower grades feel that the presence of Ethics as a subject is less important and necessary. The behavioral attitude component shows a slightly positive attitude: while most of the respondents would teach the subject by their own decision, they only have a moderate willingness to professional self-development and knowledge sharing. All three attitudinal components have a weak positive correlation with the variable number of years spent teaching Ethics (i.e. with the experience and knowledge gained from praxis), and, similarly, with level of qualification.

The attitude of the teachers participating in the interviews seems strongly positive. However, when Ethics was introduced, the majority of respondents had a negative or indifferent attitude towards it. They developed their knowledge by taking part in formal training, as well as in self-education, and then from practice. In this process, teachers formulated a kind of identification with the subject – the respondents expressed their conscious evaluation of these changes. Getting to know – and at the same time implementing – Ethics formed a positive evaluative attitude: now the participants see the presence of the subject as a special opportunity, which provides an opportunity for a deeper relationship with the students, and also, for greater freedom, which means teachers can behave differently as professionals, In short, they feel more like facilitators in class, they handle the syllabus in a flexible way, and they compile the teaching materials themselves.

The behavioral attitude component also seems positive: teachers are usually happy to continue teaching the subject and devote a lot of energy to preparation, but they have less need for further formal training. However, they would need and take part in informal horizontal sharing of knowledge with colleagues. Data related to this component can be found in one of the open questions of the questionnaire, where the participants also show a need for both training and self-training.

Based on the data obtained from the verbal metaphor study, nearly three-quarters of the respondents have a positive attitude towards Ethics, 8% have a negative attitude. (This result shows the general attitude, not the three attitude components.)

2. What beliefs do Ethics teachers hold regarding learning and teaching Ethics?

The pairs of conceptual poles formed for exploring the beliefs are objectivist (A) and constructivist (B) approaches [general learning and knowledge]; the paternalistic (A) and individualistic (B) [moral learning]; teacher-centered (A) and student-centered (B) [general learning-teaching]; and the conventional (A) and contextual (B) approaches [teaching Ethics]. Based on the quantitative analyses, the beliefs that the respondents hold are closer to model B, but we find differences in the some areas. In the epistemological field, the constructivist model is stronger: the importance of the child's independent learning and interpretative capacity, the use of diverse sources of knowledge, considering the existence of prior knowledge. The general pedagogical viewpoint shows a similar picture: the student-centered approach is moderately strong, according to which the teacher must take into account the individual interpretations of the students, help them with appropriate methods, and give them time to deepen their understanding. A marked duality can be observed in the beliefs about moral development and Ethics teaching. The quantitative analysis shows that the beliefs related to Ethics teaching are more in line with the contextual model (it is important to consider the students' needs, to apply a flexible teaching approach, the teacher should take the role of a facilitator and raise thought-provoking questions and dilemmas), but one view does not fit here, namely that the teacher in the Ethics class should not try to influence the students' opinions. In this matter, beliefs slightly tend towards the conventional model, according to which the "correct" values and rules must be explicitly stated in class. This idea may be in connection with teachers' views on children's moral development, which generally represent the paternalistic model. While they would put a great emphasis on developing learners' thinking in moral learning, they seem to have less confidence in children's constructing the "correct" moral knowledge by themselves, without the help or the influence of adults.

The teachers participating in the interview consider it essential to ensure freedom of opinion and self-expression for students, but, for moral reasons, they would set certain limits even in the expression of opinion. Otherwise, beliefs about Ethics teaching are more characteristically student-centered/contextual: the central idea is cooperation between teacher and students; the students develop their individual knowledge, as they filter and interpret any information in their own way. However, amongst younger, lower year students, teachers prefer to designate themselves the role of the leader or the role model.

Based on the verbal metaphors for teaching Ethics, the respondents tend to accept the student-centered approach, their role is that of being a facilitator and a helper, but the concept of "formation" also appears prominently. This also reflects the duality according to which at the level of peripheral beliefs, teachers consider learning to be the construction of knowledge

and the adult's role is helping this process (so they move towards the learner-centered model in the case of Ethics); but the deeper epistemological beliefs may still reflect the objectivist understanding of cognition. This can be, therefore, considered a moderated constructivist understanding as a whole. From this duality of views it might be concluded that in learning Ethics, students can enjoy a great deal of freedom, their opinions are expressed and respected, still, the output goal must be evident and clear, and this goal is formulated and interpreted by the teacher, and during teaching it can be indicated directly or indirectly.

3. How do teachers perceive the external and internal conditions of teaching Ethics? Which factors do teachers consider as success and benefits and which as difficulties and obstacles in teaching Ethics?

Based on the results of the quantitative analyses, it can be stated that Ethics teachers are generally satisfied with the conditions of teaching and their own professional competence as well. They regard the topics of Ethics as important and can accept the pedagogical concept. Students are perceived as motivated, teachers develop a good relationship with them, and they can handle complex classroom situations. The respondents consider their professional knowledge adequate, and they have the opportunity for methodological development. Based on their self-report, they acquired their professional knowledge mainly from self-training and practice, while formal trainings had less impact on them. They are less satisfied with the aids and the amount of time needed for preparation. The opinion of the surrounding actors (teachers, parents) is mixed: teachers experience positive, negative and indifferent attitudes.

Similar elements are mentioned in the interviews. The relationship between teachers and students, the experience of cooperation, and getting to know the students better are most highlighted. When listing elements of success, participants emphasize the impact of Ethics lessons on the students, and they mention behaviour change, "opening up", showing attention, and helping each other. These experiences can initiate professional development on the part of the teacher, which can have an impact in other areas, too; and students will be more motivated. According to the data from the interviews, teachers also experience it as a success when they are able to function in a role corresponding to the subject profile they have created, when they do not judge or control, but rather facilitate students' activity. Since the topics of Ethics and the trustful relationship with the students let more serious problems be brought up in class, handling such situations is clearly a success for educators. However, some of the difficulties are also related to this: they have to cope with mentally demanding situations, often without adequate preparation and external help. Other factors that are reckoned as difficulties are of organizational nature: group size, timetable, problems with complementary materials. The complaint that promoting community development is not really feasible in Ethics classes might come from the division with Religion and Morality. The participants also mention the difficulties of assessment: it is not clear for them what and on what basis can evaluation occur in the subject. They lack a classroom environment that is more suitable for Ethics class

activities (which is more like a community space). In the results from metaphor analysis, the students' points of view are emphasized: Ethics is adapted to the students, the lessons provide them the opportunity to talk and solve problems in a confidential atmosphere, which they have a great need for.

The results obtained from the quantitative and qualitative analysis show that teachers consider the possibility of improving the students' skills to be moderate. According to the interviewees, there are some visible changes in student behaviour during the Ethics class, still, they cannot assess whether the development goals will be realized in the longer term. The metaphors refer to student or teacher development in general, but this development is rather spontaneous, with sudden surprise changes, and less planned development. The latter concept appears more in negative metaphors, which refer to the teacher's futile work, or struggle to achieve changes, against which the environment and the lack of interest from the student's side work.

4. What characterises the classroom practice of Ethics teachers?

Methodological practice was examined through the application of the methodological repertoire on the one hand, and through the teaching practices on the other hand. Both quantitative and qualitative analyses show a similar picture: the most common method in Ethics teaching is the whole group discussion: free discussions and debates, which are focused on some topic or question that has arisen or related to some case or story. Play has a prominent role (situational or dramatic play, and classic games). Teachers require easy-to-use visual aids, videos, films, pictures, this idea was accentuated in the descriptions of the teaching aids given to the open questions, too. Using and processing texts, pieces of literature and fairy tales shows a medium frequency, as do creative work and conversation in pairs or small groups. The teacher's frontal teaching methods are even rarer than this, but they are still used with moderate frequency. The students' independent work is more rarely mentioned, but the project task (often conducted in groups) has a major role in the practice of the interview participants. According to the reasons revealed in the interviews, the teachers do not want to burden the students in Ethics, as in other subjects, but rather keep the subject's informal nature. That is why homework, research work or student lectures are rare. Outdoor activities, like visits to nearby places are rather infrequent due to organizational conditions. Overall, it can be said that Ethics teachers know a wide range of educational methods and apply them with more or less frequency. Most of these methods encourage students to engage in active and interactive tasks.

Based on their reflections on some fictitious classroom situations, the respondents' teaching practices can be regarded as strongly contextual, thus student-centered. However, these data might be distorted by recalling and reflecting on their own behaviour. From the qualitative analysis, the principle of flexibility and adaptation to the students, the flexible management of teaching plans, and the critical assessment and revision of the curriculum stand out. It is common (if it is possible) that teachers and students rearrange the classroom furniture and sit

in a circle. For Ethics class behaviour, they often create explicit rules that match the specifics of the subject, for example “There is no wrong answer”. The ERR [evocation/ realization/ reflection] model is frequently applied for the planning and management of classes, the typical ways to start are: lead-in, calling words, associating with images, then the introduction and elaboration of the topic turns into a structured or free conversation.

5. Is there a connection between teachers’ attitudes regarding Ethics and their beliefs?

Weak correlation can be shown between some belief and attitude components. In this regard, beliefs are divided into two groups: one include beliefs about knowledge construction, learning, learning support and learner autonomy, the other about the child’s moral learning and development. While the former show positive correlation with attitude – the stronger the belief in student independence, knowledge construction or the teacher’s flexibility, the more positive the affective, evaluative and behavioral attitude factors are –, the moral development belief group shows no significant correlation, except in one case: individuals holding more paternalistic views on the adult’s role in children’s moral learning evaluate Ethics more positively. The reason for this can be that they might see more opportunities for education within the framework of the subject.

6. Is there a connection between teachers’ attitudes and the conditions they perceive?

All ‘context’ factors correlate with each attitude component, which means the more positive or supportive teachers perceive the attitude of the environment – especially the students –, the more they identify with the subject concept, the more satisfied they are with their professional knowledge and development, and the more student development they realize, the more positive attitude to Ethics and its teaching is developed. Based on the effect size in this correlation analysis, we can say that the affective attitude component is related to teacher's perceived student motivation and personal interest in Ethics, while the evaluative component is more closely related to environmental support and the behavioral component is more strongly related to personal interest.

Qualitative data analysis also reveals what factors the respondents consider to be affecting the attitude. The development of a positive attitude is mainly helped by the motivated behaviour of the students, as well as the assumed positive effects of Ethics. The teacher’s personal involvement, the feeling that he or she “gets a lot” from teaching Ethics, and the strengthening professional confidence also improve the attitude. A negative attitude can be formed due to incomplete teaching conditions, organizational difficulties, and the rejection of Ethics by the environment, or if the teacher does not notice any development in students’ behaviour or views.

7. Is there a connection between teachers' attitudes and the classroom practice they implement?

Regarding the methods, we found correlation with all the three attitude components. Both the number of the applied methods and the frequency of their use are in positive correlation with the attitude, especially with the affective and behavioral factors. These are related to the use of almost all groups of methods, so the more someone likes Ethics teaching, the more often they organize creative and autonomous student activities, as well as using case analysing and frontal teaching methods. The evaluative aspect of attitude is in correlation only with methods based on student activity. We found few correlations between the teaching strategies and the attitude components: the positive affective attitude co-occurs with the teacher's flexible response in class when students indicate their needs.

8. Is there a connection between teachers' beliefs and the classroom practice they implement?

Numerous but weak correlations can be shown between teachers' beliefs and classroom practice. Belief components related to developing students' thinking, supporting their autonomous learning and the teacher's flexible thinking are connected to most components of method usage and the divergent and flexible teaching strategies, in positive correlation, however, frontal teaching methods show negative correlation with them. Those teachers who believe that the children's opinions and dilemmas should be given space in the Ethics lesson, prefer to use contextual lesson management and teaching strategies.

9. Is there a connection between teachers' beliefs and the conditions they perceive?

We found several connections between the context variables and the belief components. A teacher who considers developing students' thinking skills, the role of children's knowledge construction, or the educator's flexible thinking important, perceives higher student motivation, shows stronger personal interest in Ethics, and is satisfied with their own professional competence. However, beliefs related to students' expressing their opinion freely in Ethics lesson are in negative correlation with the degree teachers find their environment supportive, which can be interpreted in two ways. One is that respondents who prefer students' expressing their opinion freely may be less satisfied with the available teaching aids and resources, or they might be bothered if other people do not consider Ethics valuable. The other interpretation is that those who consider the role of the teacher in teaching Ethics more important, they may not need such a variety of aids, or they may be more satisfied with the existing ones. They might perceive the external assessment of the subject to be better.

10. Is there a connection between the conditions perceived by the teachers and the classroom practice they implement?

Among the variables of the two fields, the use of creative methods, the application of methodological diversity, teachers' personal involvement, student motivation and the perception of professional development show the most connections with other variables. The perception of positive internal and external sets of conditions co-occurs with the choice of creative methods, the frequent use of various methods, and increased awareness and consideration of the students' needs and interests in the lesson.

Summary

The aim of the presented research was to gain information about the state of the implementation of Ethics (Morality) ten years after its introduction through the views and perceptions of the teachers who have experience related to it. The results provide insight into the process in which teachers had to implement an unexpected innovation, accompanied by insufficient preparation and support. In this process, educators obviously constructed their professional interpretations and views about Ethics, applied their prior beliefs that suited the new situation, and their evaluative and affective attitudes formed. All of these create the framework in which teachers relate themselves to Ethics and work.

The novelty of the research stems from its focusing on a unique Hungarian innovation. This can also be of international interest in comparative educational studies, whereas, primarily, it can fill in the gap of monitoring the subject's implementation in national context.

Our research fits into the international trends that examine implementation processes from teachers' perspective; into receptivity research, which analyses correspondence between teachers' willingness to accept change and contextual factors, and thus can also help find the necessary conditions for successful implementation. The third stage of implementation is a focus that is less presented in the literature, so our findings can contribute to the comparison of the stages. In narrower perspective, our study can be compared with the research done in Central and Eastern European countries, aiming at similar issues. The research is also connected to research on teachers' beliefs as such variables were included and examined in both quantitative and qualitative data analysis processes.

Our findings are in line with the research that observed the development of more positive attitudes of the actors as the implementation progressed. Typically, when an innovation is introduced into a system, both positive evaluative views and fear of novelty or the feeling of uncertainty can be present together (Kwok, 2014; Thae et al., 2022; Wong et al., 2015). Research conducted in the second phase of implementation reports a moderately positive attitude (Borbély, 2019; Shapiro, 2018, Yin et al., 2011), which may be due to teachers' becoming familiar with the innovation and their increasing self-efficacy. In the later

implementation phase, all of these can become constant (Lee, 2000), however, in other cases, innovation fatigue can appear, and teachers fall into either slightly rejecting or slightly accepting (receptive) groups (Porubský et al., 2015), or they become more indifferent towards the innovation (Janík et al., 2018). Our belief analysis concluded similar findings as Walker et al. (2012), according to which teachers' epistemological beliefs lean more towards the constructivist perspective, nevertheless, although they consider children capable of independent moral learning, they attribute a significant role to the adult in it, especially when it comes to forming and presenting rules.

Our findings present some of the correspondences revealed by research on receptivity, as well. From the factors that impact attitude formation, our research showed that components are separated into internal and external factors (Cheng et al., 2022; Kim & Na, 2021; Pan & Wiens, 2024); and find connection with the supportive environment and the innovation's perceived usefulness (Lee, 2000; Shapiro, 2018; Thae et al., 2022; Waugh & Punch, 1987; Wong et al., 2021). While in most research, institutional and collegial support has a greater effect on attitude (receptivity) (Li & Choi, 2013; Pan & Wiens, 2024; Waugh & Godfrey, 1993), in our case, student motivation, the teacher's personal identification with the subject and the supportive environment are mostly related to the attitude. This indicates that the benefits of the innovation are perceived by teachers mainly in the field of personal relationships, since the development of students' skills shows much weaker correlation. Some receptivity studies include the comparison with the previous system as a variable, which, in our results, appears in the view that "Ethics is unnecessary, as we could reach the goals in other subjects", and is expressed mostly by teachers of lower grades.

Limitations and further research aims

The generalizability of some of the findings is reduced by the fact that the representativeness of the sample could not be ensured, as access to the official demographic descriptive data of the target population was insufficient; and also by the fact that voluntary participation of the respondents may have caused self-selection bias. In the qualitative analysis, we were unable to examine the background, perceived teaching context, and viewpoint of teachers who hold rather negative, rejective, or indifferent attitudes to Ethics. Conclusions about methodological practice in the classroom have not been confirmed by data from different sources, for example, from lesson observation or data from students' experiences. Consequently, the results can only be applied to the implementation itself and to its several factors in a limited way.

The research focused on a wide range of factors related to Ethics and Ethics teaching, however, a complete analysis of all the data is beyond the scope of the thesis. Therefore, we will do this in further publications. We see possibilities for analyzing the same set of data from different perspectives (a) and for further research directions (b) in the following:

a) to explore the relationships between teachers' attitudes, beliefs and context more deeply by using the currently developed variable system for the purpose of model building;

to reveal the factors and processes that affected the changes in attitudes of teachers' in the long term, and that promoted or hindered teachers' learning about Ethics by conducting a qualitative analysis of data;

to supplement the examination of Ethics teaching practice with the focus on evaluation and assessment, and to unfold their connections to other variables;

b) to continue the examination of the state of Ethics by involving other actors of education: revealing the views of parents, students, school management; including classroom observation as method;

to study the beliefs and perceived experiences of teachers who reject or are indifferent to Ethics in qualitative analysis in order to reveal the reasons for developing negative attitudes;

to formulate and test a more complex model of teachers' beliefs on Ethics;

to examine teacher beliefs related to moral learning and knowledge in their complexity more deeply;

to gain further experience in the use of visual metaphors in other contexts, as well.

Recommendations for Ethics teaching and teacher education

- Although in the third stage of the implementation process there should already be a sufficient number of qualified professionals, this process did not take place due to the regulation of the law. The mild regulation may also indirectly suggest that teaching Ethics does not require any specific competences, thereby it can reduce the public reputation of the subject. In teacher education, it would be necessary to develop or complement Ethics methodology, and to place more emphasis on it. Ethics' characteristic and distinguishing features should be highlighted, as well, for example, that the focus is on the child's personal experiences and specific reflections instead of the subject matter defined in the curriculum. It may also be needed to shape an epistemological approach: to strengthen the theory that even young children are capable of reflective thinking, although they may require adequate support.

- Another target area could be to support the self-training of Ethics teachers. According to research findings, they would first and foremost need short, "workshop"-like trainings, where they can personally discuss their thoughts and ideas with their colleagues, and from which they could become inspired. Although these shorter sessions probably would not deepen their knowledge, they could motivate the participants for further self-training and the horizontal sharing of knowledge.

- On the part of the teachers, there is a demand for access to resource banks of teaching materials. It would be necessary to collect additional information about the nature of materials and tools: what type and content, what level of learning materials educators would like to use. However, establishing this resource bank will require dealing with infrastructural and copyright

issues, as well. If there was an institute which could provide the digital, online frameworks, e.g. database programs and an administrator, then Ethics educators could participate in filling the bank with teaching ideas. Furthermore, as there are numerous implementation and teaching materials that have been produced so far, such as Ethics textbooks, and supplementary publications, these could be made available for public.

- The research revealed that most Ethics teachers constructed rich methodological expertise by applying their general professional knowledge and experience acquired in formal or informal learning, in other areas, as well. This knowledge could be utilized both in the resource banks and in professional discussion. In the latter, teachers who have achieved success in teaching Ethics, see themselves as effective, are motivated for self-development, but also notice potential challenges and difficulties and strive for solutions, they can be role models or mentors for colleagues who are just starting to teach Ethics.
- We recommend that the whole community of professionals continue the discussion on the teaching approach and methodology of Ethics, as well as its importance. Between 2013 and 2017, several initiatives specifically focusing on this took place, in which representatives of previous subjects and programs also participated, so the approaches of these earlier programs were also implemented in the new subject. Ethics (Morality) was enriched by them, and parts of the programs were able to live on in the subject. This professional discussion can be most useful if it reaches a great number of educators, regardless of their qualifications.
- The overall goal of all of this is to reveal and reflect on the character of Ethics, which has been developed during practice, and to present this character it to all actors in education, but most importantly to strengthen the professional knowledge and identity of Ethics educators.

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