STUDY ON THE LEVEL OF SATISFACTION AND EXPECTATIONS OF TEACHERS TOWARDS THE USE OF SUPPORTING TEXTS AND STORYTELLING IN MORAL EDUCATION IN PRIMARY EDUCATION

Prof. Dr. Dorin Opriş, DSc.
1 December 1918 University of Alba Iulia (Romania)
Adina Popovici
Babes-Bolyai University of Cluj-Napoca (Romania)

Abstract. The present study starts from the growing interest currently shown in moral education and aims to highlight the level of satisfaction and expectations of teachers towards the supporting texts and stories used to achieve the goals of this classical dimension of education. The research data analyses the results obtained through a survey in which 460 primary school teachers in Romania participated. The results show statistically significant differences between high school and post-secondary graduate teachers, compared to those with doctoral studies, in terms of the level of satisfaction shown to texts with moral content from school textbooks, which are preferred by teachers from rural areas. Moral storytelling is particularly used in Personal Development and Civic Education and is preferred by urban teachers with high teaching degrees. The conclusions also highlight the reasons why teachers seek alternative solutions to school textbooks in achieving moral education.

Keywords: primary education; moral education; didactics; values; curriculum

Introduction

If morality has been considered the fundamental root of the human being (Cooper 2020), moral education is seen as an essential part of the education of each person, it constitutes the dimension of education that facilitates the assimilation of values and positive attitudes (Huo & Xie 2021). Thus, in addition to ensuring academic performance, teachers must pay great attention to improving the moral level of students, in school and extracurricular activities (Cheng et al. 2021).

Since ancient times, values have been transmitted through literature, whether we speak of oral texts or written ones. Literature has always been regarded as a source of teachings (Hobjila 2017), therefore it was considered to be an effective way to

integrate moral values into the curriculum (Lickona 1991). Unconsciously, literary texts determine the moral formation of children, and the school must exploit these valences intentionally and systematically (O'Sullivan 2004).

Literature still plays an essential role in the education of primary-level children, providing them with information about the surrounding world, contributing to the development of their vocabulary (Pulimeno et al. 2020), often being the bridge between abstract notions and their level of understanding, determined by age peculiarities (Gasser et al. 2022). A book offers the child not only the simple pleasure of reading, but also a pretext to live spiritually, to reflect on what is read, an opportunity to see places, realities and times the student has never met (Khan 2014). It produces emotions, affective states, precisely this property giving it educational power. Recent studies show that emotion-based activities result in improved interpersonal relationships and less stress among primary school students (Bottaccioli et al. 2023). Moreover, reading followed by conversations on moral topics is found among the effective strategies used to form children's conscience and moral conduct (Al-Somadi 2012; Birhan et al. 2021; Osuji et al. 2022).

Religious literature contains, according to Armstrong (2019), those texts that are based on themes, ideas and concepts related to spirituality, religion, faith. The contribution that religion has made to the formation of man over time cannot be disputed. Education specialists have often talked about the complementarity of moral education with religious education (Cucos 2000). Many times, reaching the goals of religious education involves the fulfillment of the objectives of moral education of children, morals with religious foundation contributing to the formation and development of aspects such as love for the others, sensitivity, spirit of sacrifice (Opriş 2011), and sacred texts are useful not only for the religious formation, but also for the moral one (Opriş 2010). The books present principles and moral notions possible to assimilate for the little ones in a form translated in examples of behaviors (Lewin 2020), attitudes, in characters with role of model or antimodel. These texts stimulate children intellectually and emotionally (Hunt 2010) by the fact that going through such a work activates different knowledge and experience (Hartvigsen & Haakedal 2023), while making them aware, among other things, that the temptations and dangers to which they are subjected in the current social environment can lead them to failure (Turturean 2021): there are known cases of suicide among children, violence, drug addiction, students with serious emotional problems. On the other hand, the importance of religion in the process of self-knowledge is emphasized, religious literature being an effective way to penetrate into the depths of one's own being (Opriş 2010).

Regarding the formative quality of texts in school textbooks, recent research shows that there have been numerous discussions in the educational space (Moseki et al. 2021). The school textbook serves not only as a source of teaching and learning (Putra & Lukmana 2017), but also as an agent that transmits social, cultural and

moral values to students (Feng 2019; Puspitasari et al 2021; Rezaci et al. 2021), although an accentuation of the information sphere has been observed lately (Setyono & Widodo 2019). Although it is a tool of great importance in primary education, studies show that textbooks may have some limits: the inconsistency of texts with the level of understanding of children (Alemu 2017), the promotion of a certain religion over others (Moseki et al. 2021), or even of certain ideologies (Imelwaty et al. 2024; Jang, 2022; Suuriniemi & Satokangas 2021), to which the possible impairment of teachers' creativity is added, when they rely solely on its use, without exploring other sources in the preparation of lessons (Felhert 2017).

The religious text, used for the purpose of forming the conscience and moral conduct of young schoolchildren, finds utility in the activities carried out at primary school (Popovici & Opriş 2024). Its efficient choice and fit in a certain scenario is related to the creativity and mastery of the teacher, who has the freedom to apply the curriculum through custom strategies (Opriş 2020) depending on the objectives pursued, but also on the individual characteristics of the students.

Methodology

Through this research, we aimed to find out the level of satisfaction of the teachers regarding the presence of literary texts with moral valences in the textbooks used by the teachers in the Romanian primary education, with what frequency the moral story is used in some educational disciplines and what are the sources of selection of literary texts (less the online environment) that support the moral training of schoolchildren at this age.

For this purpose, we administered an opinion questionnaire to which 460 primary education teachers in Romania answered, classified by us in five age categories (3% under 25 years old; 10% between 25 – 35 years old; 33.3% between 36 – 45 years old; 38.7% between 45 – 55 years old; 15% over 55 years old). This distribution of the sample is consistent with the reality in Romania, where there is an aging of the teaching staff, over 50% of the total teaching staff being over 45 years old.

The respondents have different degrees of work experience, expressed both in years of seniority in education (6.3% under 5 years; 15% between 6 – 15 years; 28.7% between 16 – 25 years; 50% over 25 years) and in the didactic degrees they obtained (5% beginners, 8.9% definitive, 10.7% grade II and 75.4% with grade I). Depending on the last form of education, the distribution is as follows: in teachers with high school education (4.1%), post-secondary education (2.4%), Bachelor's degree (59.6%), master's degree (32.6%) and doctoral studies (1.3%). Out of the total respondents, 49.6% work in urban areas and 50.4% in rural areas. These data were also included in research variables.

The data was collected using a Google Forms form sent to teachers via social media, participation in the study was voluntary. The research was carried out in compliance with the academic ethics guide, throughout the research the

confidentiality of data was ensured and respected.

In the data analysis we used basic statistical indicators, frequency, average, median, mode, statistical analysis was carried out through the SPSS program. By means of nonparametric tests we have made comparisons between groups, taking into account the type of variables: Kruskal-Wallis H (χ^2) test, Mann-Whitney U test, Somer's d-association coefficient.

Results

Satisfaction with the moral message of textbook texts used in the classroom

In order to find out the degree of satisfaction of teachers with the moral message of the texts in the textbooks used in the classroom, the research participants were asked to choose one of the options, coded ascending by us, on a scale of five steps: 1 – "very dissatisfied"; 2 – "dissatisfied"; 3 – "moderate"; 4 – "satisfied"; 5 – "very satisfied". The response frequencies in percentage values were illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1. Satisfaction with the moral message of texts in school textbooks

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	8	1.7	1.7	1.7
	2	27	5.9	5.9	7.6
	3	200	43.5	43.5	51.1
	4	188	40.9	40.9	92.0
	5	37	8.0	8.0	100.0
	Total	460	100.0	100.0	

As can be seen in Table 1, most respondents chose "moderate" (43.5%), this category being closely followed by those who are satisfied with the formative value of texts in textbooks (40.9%). The fewest respondents are very dissatisfied (1.7%), but small percentages also recorded the options "dissatisfied" (5.9) and "very satisfied" (8.0). The moderate degree of satisfaction towards "satisfied" is also reflected by the values of the basic statistical indicators: average = 3.84, median = 3, mode = 3, standard deviation = 0.796. The fact that the average value is above the median and mode values supports the fact that less than half of the respondents chose the variants that reflect the grateful presence of moral messages in the texts in the textbooks used.

We were interested to find out if these choices are influenced by the age of teachers. The results obtained by correlating the age of the study participants and the options expressed were summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. Satisfaction of respondents, depending on age

Age \ Level of satisfaction	Very dissatisfied %	Dissatisfied %	Moderate %	Satisfied %	Very satisfied %
under 25 years old	7.1	7.1	14.3	57.1	14.3
between 26-35 years old	2.2	4.3	50	26.1	17.4
between 36-45 years old	3.3	5.9	42.5	41.8	6.5
between 45-55 years old	0.6	5.1	43.8	43.8	6.7
over 55 years old	0	8.7	46.4	37.7	7.2

The results of the research show that over half of the youngest respondents declare themselves satisfied (57.1%), in contrast to the other age categories, where most of the respondents chose the "moderate" variant, except for the 46 – 55 years old category, where the teachers ticked in the same share (43.8%) the "satisfied" and "moderate" variants.

In order to analyze the existence of a statistically significant association between the age of teachers and the degree of satisfaction regarding the moral content of the analyzed texts, we calculated *Sommer's d* coefficient of association, the data given in Table 3.

Table 3. Directional Measures

			Value	Asymp. Std. Error[a]	Approx. T[b]	Approx. Sig.
Ordinal by Ordinal	Somers' d	Symmetric	-.018	,042	-.430	,667
		Satisfaction Dependent	-.017	,040	-.430	,667
		Age Dependent	-.019	,045	-.430	,667

a. Not assuming the null hypothesis.
b. Using the asymptotic standard error assuming the null hypothesis.

The value of d = -, 017, p=, 667 (p > 0.05) shows that there are no statistically significant differences between the choices made by teachers of different age categories regarding the degree of satisfaction with the moral content of textbook texts.

Correlating the level of studies of the research participants with the options expressed by them, regarding the degree of satisfaction in relation to the moral message of the texts in the textbooks, we find that the most satisfied in all categories are post-secondary school graduates (72.8%), followed by those with high school

education (63.2%), results obtained by summing the percentages for the answers "very satisfied" and "satisfied". Moreover, the rank averages for these groups of respondents have the highest values ($MR_{high\ school}$ = 275.74, $MR_{post\text{-}secondary}$ = 307,27). For the higher levels of education, the average of the ranks has lower values, the minimum being for the respondents with a doctorate (MR_{PhD} = 275.74), which shows a lower degree of satisfaction.

To see if there are statistically significant differences we applied the nonparametric test Kruskal Wallis H (χ^2), its value being H (4) = 7.438 and p=, 114 (p > 0,05), where it follows that there are no significant differences according to the level of studies in terms of the level of satisfaction related to the moral content of the texts of the primary school textbooks.

The analysis of the data depending on the environment in which the respondents operate also reveals the absence of significant rural-urban statistical differences, the values for the nonparametric test Mann-Whitney U being U = 24295, z = -1,639, p=, 101 (p > 0.05).

The use of moral storytelling in educational disciplines

Another item of the questionnaire asked teachers to specify the frequency of their use of moral storytelling, regardless of the class in which they teach, in some school subjects selected by us from those included by the Ministry of Education in the framework plans valid for primary education.

We designed the frequency on a four-step Likert scale, coded by us as follows: 0 – "Not at all"; 1 – "Rarely" (once a month), 2 – "Often" (once every two to three hours) and 3 – "Very often" (every hour). The answers were summarized in Table 4, where we ranked the disciplines according to the highest frequency. In Table 4 we have also specified the classes for which the respective subjects appear in the primary school framework plan.

Table 4. Frequency of use of moral storytelling in some educational disciplines

Frequency / Discipline (class)	Not at all %	Rarely %	Often %	Very often %
Personal Development (P-II)	4.1	2	15.7	80
Civic Education (III-IV)	11.1	2	15.4	71.5
Communication in Romanian/ Romanian Language and Literature	0.6	2	45.7	51.7
History (IV)	17.4	21.5	42.4	18.7
Visual Arts and Practical Skills (P-IV)	5.7	40.7	42.2	11.5

The data from Table 4 reveal that moral storytelling is used very often in the disciplines of Personal Development (80%), Civic Education (71.5%) and, at a

difference of more than 20 percentage points, Communication in Romanian/ Romanian Language and Literature (51.7%). For the frequency "Often" we have choices with very close percentage values (between 42 – 47%) in the case of subjects: Communication in Romanian (45.7%), History (42.4%) and Visual Arts and Practical Skills (42.2%). In the case of the discipline Visual Arts and Practical Skills there is a high percentage also for the frequency "Rarely" (40.7%). Moral storytelling is also rarely used in the History discipline (21.5%). For the "Not at all" option, the highest percentage values are recorded in History (17.4%), respectively in Civic Education (11.1%). For the "other" option, where respondents could fill in with other subjects, very low percentages were recorded.

In analyzing the results it is important to take into account the epistemological content of the analyzed educational disciplines, but also their formative character, given the scientific content circulated, which is why comparisons between groups were made for each educational discipline.

We also carried out statistical analyses according to different variables in order to observe the existence of statistically significant differences.

Through the nonparametric Mann-Whitney U test, we tested whether the frequency of use of moral storytelling in different educational disciplines is significantly influenced by the environment in which respondents perform their work. The only discipline in which statistically significant differences are recorded (in favor of urban respondents) is personal development, coefficient $U = 24195.5$, $z = -2,271$, $p =, 023$ ($p < 0.05$), $r = 0.10$, $MR_{urban} = 240.38$, $MR_{rural} = 220,79$. We can say that urban respondents use moral storytelling significantly more frequently in this educational discipline than rural teachers.

In order to analyze the existence of an association between the didactic degree of the respondents and the frequency with which they use moral storytelling in some educational disciplines, we calculated *Sommer's d* coefficient. The obtained values show that there are positive associations between these variables, only in the case of the subjects History ($d = 0.115$, $p = 0.010$, $p < 0.05$) and Civic Education ($d = 0.114$, $p = ,022$, $p < 0.05$). In these cases, the value of *d* has also an effect role, the value obtained, according to Cohen, being considered weak. Teachers with high teaching degrees more often use moral storytelling in History and Civics than beginners or definitive teachers.

Resources used by teachers for moral stories

Regarding the sources that teachers use to procure moral stories, the respondents had to choose three variants from those proposed by us. As we mentioned, we intended to see the existence of the teachers' connection with the book in physical, printed format, therefore we did not propose the online resources variant.

Choice results in percentage points in descending order are as follows: a) 89.80% story books with moral-civic substrate; b) 62.60% school textbook; c) 55%

story books with religious-moral substrate; d) 42.20% compose stories with moral substrate for children; e) 18.70% Bible.

We were interested to find out if there are statistically significant differences between the respondents' work experience in education and the sources from which they take their moral stories. Taking into account the nature of the variables involved, we applied the nonparametric test Kruskal Wallis H (χ^2). The data show that only in the case of using the Bible as a source for moral stories there are statistically significant differences, the coefficient value being H (3) = 11.685 and p =, 009 (p < 0.05), where it follows that work experience in education influences the decision on choosing the Bible as an inspiration for moral stories, as shown in Tables 5 and 6.

Table 5. Ranks

	Work experience in education	N	Mean Rank
	Under 5 years	29	243.02
	Between 6-15 years	69	250.83
The Bible	Between 16-25 years	132	241.52
	Over 25 years	230	216.50
	Total	460	

Table 6. Test Statistics[a,b]

	The Bible
Chi-Square	11.685
df	3
Asymp. Sig.	,009

a. Kruskal Wallis Test

b. Variable Grouping: Work experience

Since the test Kruskal Wallis does not show us between which intervals of work experience in education the differences are statistically significant, following the observation of the rank averages, we notice that the group of respondents having work experience between 16 – 25 years has the highest value $_{MR16-25}$ = 250,83. In order to know between which of the four seniority groups there are significant differences, we applied the test Mann-Whitney U for the six pairs that can be formed and we adjusted the materiality threshold to the number of comparisons (α = p/ 6 = 0.05/6 = 0.008). We also calculated the effect size for each simple

comparison. We present the results only for pairs where statistically significant differences occur:

– there are statistically significant differences between respondents with 6 – 15 years of work experience and those with more than 25 years, regarding the choice of the Bible as a source for moral stories (U = 6750,5; z = -2,958; p = ,003; r = 0.17). The average rank is higher in the case of respondents with work experience in education between 6-15 years, compared to those with over 25 years of work experience in education: MR_{6-15} = 167.17, respectively $MR_{over 25}$ = 144,85.

– there are statistically significant differences between respondents having 16-25 years of work experience and those having over 25 years, regarding the choice of the Bible as a source for moral stories (U = 13529; z = -2,675; p = ,007; r = 0.14). The average ranks are higher for respondents with work experience in education between 16-25 years, compared to those with over 25 years of work experience in education: MR_{16-25} = 194.01, respectively $MR_{over 25}$ = 174,32.

It follows from this that teachers with work experience between 6-15 and 16-25 years prefer the Bible in choosing moral stories at a statistically significant difference compared to teachers with less than 5 years of work experience and those over 25 years.

The environment in which teachers work influences the choices they have expressed, in the case of the school textbook, that the difference between rural-urban being 17.2 percentage points (D = 71.1 – 53.9 = 17.2), as can be seen in Table 7.

Table 7. The sources of moral stories, depending on the environment in which they work

Sources / Environment	a) composing stories with moral substrate %	b) the Bible %	c) books with moral-civic stories %	d) books with religious-moral stories %	e) the school manual %
Urban	42.2	20.2	88.2	53.9	53.9
Rural	42.1	17.2	91.4	56	71.1

The urban-rural difference is statistically significant in favor of rural respondents, who prefer the school textbook as a source for moral stories presented to primary school children, as shown by the results of the non-parametric test Mann-Whitney, coefficient U = 22303, z = -3,465, p =, 001 (p < 0.05) r = 0.16, MR_{urban} = 212,32, MR_{rural} = 248,37.

Limits of research

The research included only Romanian teachers, but the data confirm a series of conclusions of recent research conducted at national and international level. The

research data can also be used in other countries where the interest shown to moral education achieved in primary education is similar, which values storytelling as a method of moral education, where official textbooks and other relevant materials are made available to teachers to support the formative side of education at this age. This study is supported by the depth of the data and the statistical analyses carried out.

Discussion and conclusions

The research data confirm the results of recent investigations that highlight the importance of moral literature in reaching the formative goals of education (Pulimeno et al. 2020; Gasser et al. 2022). Also, our results confirm the role of the school textbook and other texts with formative content in reaching the goals of primary school education disciplines, differentiated in relation to their particularities (Moseki et al. 2021; Feng 2019).

The results show that teachers, regardless of age, level of training, the environment in which they work, have the ability to evaluate the content of school textbooks. Even if there are percentage differences between different categories, the values of statistical indicators show that they are not statistically significant. The research confirms the interest of the scientific environment (Alemu 2017) for the evaluation and use of school textbooks on aspects related to the presence of moral texts, the degree of satisfaction of teachers being in our research a moderate to satisfied one. This fact justifies, on the one hand, the need to use moral storytelling in different educational disciplines, and on the other hand, the need for teachers to seek new material resources with moral character, in order to fill the shortcomings of the current textbooks on the aspects related to supporting the formative side of education.

The educational disciplines in which primary school teachers often use moral storytelling are: Personal Development, Civic Education and Communication in Romanian Language/Romanian Language and Literature. In the case of the first two subjects, these choices are justified by the pursued goals, which intersect at certain points with the formation of the consciousness and moral conduct of the students. In the situation of Communication in Romanian Language classes, in preparatory, first and second grade, Romanian Language and Literature, in grades III and IV, the literary text is frequently used in order to achieve the objectives of the discipline, therefore, activities based on moral storytelling (Birhan et al. 2021) represent a framework conducive to the combination of the two types of approaches (the formation of the competences proper to the Communication in Romanian Language/Romanian Language and Literature discipline of study and moral training).

For the selection of moral stories used in the classroom, teachers mostly consult story books with moral-civic substrate, but a good part of primary school teachers rely heavily on the school textbook, especially those who work in rural areas. This

difference can be explained by the fact that the access to publications of those from cities is easier than those who work in rural schools. The role of storybooks with religious-moral substrate is also confirmed (Opriş 2010), more than half of the respondents turning to them. The choice of the Bible as a resource for moral stories is found, with statistically significant differences, for teachers between 6 – 15 and 16 – 25 years of work experience, compared to those who are under 5 years and over 25 years of work experience in education.

We also highlight the fact that the analysis of the data of this research shows that almost half of primary school teachers who are over 25 years of work experience prefer to compose stories with moral substrate, the rich experience allowing them to easily overcome the limits imposed by the quality of school textbooks and to create texts according to the objectives pursued and the particularities of the students in the class they coordinate. The research reconfirms the need for initial and continuous training of teachers for contextualized use (Opriş 2020) for moral education of didactic strategies indicated by the curriculum for primary education.

NOTES

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Prof. Dorin Opriş, DSc.
ORCID iD: 0000-0002-2646-7122
WoS Researcher iD: CCJ-8303-2022
Faculty of History, Letters and Educational Sciences
"1 Decembrie 1918" University of Alba Iulia
Alba Iulia, Romania
E-mail: dorin.opris@uab.ro

Mrs. Adina Popovici, PhD student
Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences
Babes-Bolyai University of Cluj-Napoca
Cluj-Napoca, Romania
E-mail: adnppvc@gmail.com