

Implementation of the Shoah Theme in the Teaching of Literary Education

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Abstract

The paper presents partial results of a quantitative research survey that deals with the views of teachers of Czech Language and Literature at lower-secondary schools in the Vysočina Region on the implementation of the Shoah theme when teaching literature. In the paper we present the results of this hypothesis validation: 1) teachers whose second field of study is History have a higher implementation rate index than teachers otherwise certified; 2) teachers looking for books with historical themes to read during their own leisure time have a higher implementation rate index than other tested teachers; 3) male teachers show a higher implementation rate index than female teachers; 4) teachers with 20 years' experience (inclusive) and more show a higher implementation rate index than those with experience of 19 years or less.

Key words: *Shoah, teacher, lower-secondary school, Literary Education, implementation*

Introduction

The aim of this paper is to present partial results from mixed-design research that deals with the opinions of Czech Language and Literature teachers about the implementation of the Shoah theme in the teaching of Literary Education at lower-secondary schools.

The Shoah phenomenon is becoming increasingly topical today. Society is affected by a significant rate of migration accompanied by renewed issues of intolerance, racism, xenophobia and other forms of defamation of groups. A considerable amount of attention has recently been paid to the re-emerging manifestations of open anti-Semitism (for example, France) that can be demonstrated by research carried out within seven European countries under the management procedure of the *Fondation pour l'innovation politique* (see Due Enstad, 2017). The high political representation of the Czech Republic has adopted a **universal definition of anti-Semitism** based *inter alia* on issues of racist intolerance and feelings of racial superiority, as well as on the definition used by the **International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance**.

We believe citizens of democratic societies should become acquainted with different manifestations of the Shoah phenomenon at the youngest age. It is also our opinion that early presentation of the Shoah issue's various aspects may result in a situation where pupils will be able to define the manifestations of inhumane behavior in their surroundings, and therefore it can be assumed that, to a certain extent, it will be possible to prevent the development of such behavior from the beginning. "The family, the health system and psychiatry, but especially the educational system, are the major agents in constituting subjects" (Resnik, 2003, pp. 299–300; compare Sydnor, 1987, Lindquist, 2010).

Obviously, the Shoah theme should be anchored in the curriculum of **History**, the subject designed to present historical and event-driven matters. In addition to this educational field, the educational area of **Education for Citizenship** provides an appropriate implementation area that differs from History by focusing emphasis on human, intercultural or sociological issues in the field of human beings. We believe that the educational field **Czech Language and Literature** is also suitable as an appropriate educational field for the implementation of questions connoted by the term Shoah, specifically the literary component of the subject (see Kokkola, 2003).

At this point it is necessary to mention the existence of so-called cross-sectional themes in the *Framework Educational Program for Primary Education (FEP PE)*. The main purpose of anchoring cross-curricular subjects in aspects of normative education is to emphasize the overlaps among certain topics (interdisciplinarity), and the associated introduction of different views on an issue as seen through an overarching, cross-cutting theme.

In the *FEP PE*, which sets the guidelines for what, how and when to teach in institutional education, the term Holocaust is anchored in the subject History within the thematic unit "Modern Times" (see Carrier et al., 2015).

Methodology of Research

The quantitative research, the partial results of which are presented here, was preceded by a qualitative part involving eight teachers of Czech Language and Literature and took the form of semi-structured interviews. In determining the sample size for the first phase of the research, we used the statistical formula for a minimum number of respondents in a qualitative research survey, $N_{min} = 0,1 \cdot \sqrt{\text{number}}$ (Chráská, 2007, p. 26). The first (qualitative phase) had as its main objective covering, through these interviews, the semantic field of the larger mixed research project that was primarily aiming to discover the opinions of Czech Language and Literature teachers at lower-secondary schools on the implementation of the Shoah theme when teaching Literary Education. The interview results were used to compile questionnaire items for the second (quantitative) research survey. Through the chosen approach we wanted to limit the degree to which respondents might choose the option of “other” option in the questionnaires, thereby, to some extent, simplifying the statistical processing of the data obtained in the quantitative stage.

Table 1. The distribution of teachers according to length of practice in the Vysočina Region during the first phase of the research, the data are current at the end of 2017

Length of teachers' practice	Representation (%)
to 2 years	3.8
3–6 years	7.5
7–12 years	11.4
13–19 years	21.1
20–27 years	22.9
28–32 years	14.6
over 32 years	18.8
	100

Source: Pedagogical staff in regional education according to data from the Payments Information System (ISP), 2017.

The second phase of the research used a non-standardized questionnaire based on the answers of eight respondents participating in the qualitative phase. At the same time, the questionnaires contained an item that allowed respondents to leave their contact information if they wanted to divulge more about certain answers to the questionnaire within the framework of the questionnaire (after completing

the questionnaire and during the third phase of the research). Participation in the questionnaire survey was anonymous and the respondents agreed to publication of the results. The questionnaire was distributed through an electronic template that allows you to enter items in the required form. The link to the electronic questionnaire was sent via e-mail to the principals of all the complete primary schools in the Vysočina Region with the request to forward it to teachers of Czech Language and Literature at that school. In this way, we ensured that the theoretical questionnaire came to all the teachers of the given educational field in the chosen region. We chose the Vysočina Region especially because there is no university there oriented toward educating future teachers. At the same time, we are of the opinion that the region has been “delayed”, to some extent, in the educational research field; this fact may stem from the absence of faculties of education in the region. We decided to fill the gap with the assumption that, based on the facts outlined above, we expected a greater willingness of educational institutions to participate in the research. We also believe that the demographic composition of the Vysočina Region ensures, to a certain extent, that respondents from both urban and village schools participated in the research. Based on these facts, we assumed a greater willingness of teachers (principals) to engage in research (for time reasons and so on). This assumption has largely been fulfilled.

Respondents to the quantitative phase of the research

Before the quantitative research started, we determined the quantum numbers of teachers needed for this phase. Quotas were compiled according to the document *Pedagogical staff in regional education according to data from the Payments Information System*. The data obtained from the ISP were supplemented by information from e-mail correspondence with Ing. Jiří Teplý from the *Regional Administration of the Czech Statistical Office in Jihlava*. The information we found was then confronted with the information in the *Statistical Yearbook of the Vysočina Region 2017*.

The total number of respondents was set at 114. The sum was obtained by estimating the range of selections in the case of nominal or ordinal data with the required relative precision of 4 %, with a confidence factor of 95 % and a relative frequency of 0.05 (Chráska, 2007, p. 25). At this point it is necessary to emphasize that the number of respondents was derived from the total number of teachers of all certifications operating at any lower-secondary institutional education in the Vysočina Region. For this reason, we did not meet the quota, but received 80 fully completed questionnaires. If we assume that there are currently 134 complete primary schools in the Vysočina Region, each of which has two teachers of

Czech Language and Literature on average, and when we consider the fact that the quantitative stage was preceded by a qualitative research phase, we believe that the number of respondents achieved is, as a whole, substantial.

Table 2. Nominal data and percentage of respondents who participated in the questionnaire survey

Age of teachers	Representation relatively	Representation percentage	Practice length	Representation relatively	Representation percentage
to 24 years	1	1.3	to 2 years	10	12.5
25–29 years	10	12.5	3–6 years	11	13.8
30–34 years	11	13	7–12 years	6	7.5
35–39 years	10	12.5	13–19 years	20	25
40–44 years	11	13.8	20–27 years	11	13.8
45–49 years	11	13.8	28–32 years	9	11.3
50–54 years	10	12.5	over 32 years	14	17.5
55–59 years	10	12.5		$\Sigma 80$	$\Sigma 100$
60–64 years	6	7.5			
65+ years	0	0			
	$\Sigma 80$	$\Sigma 100$			

The questionnaire was viewed by a total of 132 people, and the research tool was filled in by 80 people. The return on questionnaires (in the sense of completion) is therefore 60.6 %. Most respondents (96.3 %) said they had a certificate (i.e., graduate degree) for Czech Language and Literature.

Hypotheses

The aim of the paper is to present the results of testing these hypotheses:

- 1) Teachers whose second field of study was History have a higher implementation rate index (hereinafter “IRI”) than teachers with a different field of certification;
- 2) Teachers looking for books with historical themes to read in their own leisure time have a higher IRI than other tested teachers;
- 3) Male teachers show a higher IRI than female teachers;
- 4) Teachers with 20 years’ experience (inclusive) and above show a higher IRI than those with 19 years of experience or less.

Falsification or verification of the postulated hypotheses was performed based on the IRI, our index reported by a numerical value. Respondents would be

awarded as many points as they ticked for the answers to questions. The IRI shows the personal initiative of educators with regard to the Shoah as a subject.

Instrument and Procedures

Before verifying hypotheses via the IRI, it was ascertained whether the respondent had answered the question “*For which grades do you assign the Shoah theme?*” by choosing the answer “None”. If the respondent chose the option “None” in this questionnaire, that hypothesis verification was not considered. There was no qualified teacher selected who chose that option. We believe this situation is mainly due to the orientation of our research on the topic of classifying the Shoah in Literary Education teaching and hence the respondents’ need to respond as expected or as “desirable” (despite the anonymity of the questionnaire).

The IRI itself consists of four questionnaire items identifying the reported leisure time interests of the teachers tested in association with the Shoah issue (history):

- (1) *Which of these publications have you read?* – Teachers had a choice of 11 selected Shoah-themed books (intentional and non-intentional literature, professional literature), including the answer “none of these”, and this was also associated with their own initiatives in presenting Shoah texts to pupils;
- (2) *What method do you use when working with the Shoah theme?* – A total of 16 different working methods in the field of Literary Education were postulated (including the open entry “other”, where teachers could freely describe methods that were not listed), and the IRI counted positive answers for each method; each method written under “other” was awarded one point;
- (3) *Which of the previously mentioned institutions (provided materials) have you used in teaching?*– This identifies the teachers’ own initiatives in the field of further education as part of the activities offered by different institutions dealing with the Shoah. The respondents were given eight choices (including the option “not listed” and “other”); the scoring procedure was, again, one point per positive answer and one for each initiative written about with respect to activities;
- (4) *Which materials – in addition to readers – do you use in lessons of Literary Education?* – This focused on teachers’ initiatives within educational reality: whether they only work with the materials provided to them by school facilities, or whether they exhibit a certain amount of invention and materials on the Shoah issue are actively sought by them individually and subsequently used in school practice. There were eight different methods available to choose from (for example, talks with witnesses, movies, theatrical perfor-

mances or documents), and this item also included the “other” option that teachers could complete.

The evaluation process for the calculation level of the IRI was the same as for the previous questionnaire items used in the hypothesis verification area.

For each respondent, based on his / her choices, the IRI (the sum of points awarded for the four questionnaire items) was calculated. Subsequently, respondents were divided into groups according to the verification requirements for the established hypotheses, the total IRI was summed up for the groups and, based on statistical hypothesis validation, the postulated thesis was either **accepted** or **rejected**.

We were led to the hypothesis “Teachers whose second field of study was History have a higher implementation rate index than teachers with a different field of certification” by the fact that educators teaching History somehow implement lessons about history into the other subjects they teach.

To formulate the second hypothesis: “Teachers looking for books with historical themes show a higher IRI rate than other tested teachers” we were guided by the fact that people largely implement their interests into their working life, have a larger amount of knowledge about and skills related to their leisure activities, and these are somehow reflected in the lessons.

The hypothesis “Male teachers show a higher IRI than female teachers” was determined especially because of the assumption that men are more interested in war events than are women. We were also guided by a certain influence from gender studies to find possible distinctions in different aspects of men’s and women’s lives: we tried to find out whether statistically significant differences between the genders in this area can be traced. We are aware that due to the unequal representation of women and men in the Czech education system, and thus the unequal gender distribution of the respondents in our research, the hypothesis cannot be generalized as to women in the present research. Nevertheless, we believe that postulating this hypothesis (prior to the start of research) could have produced interesting results: this assumption was not, however, fulfilled. It should be noted at this point that the predetermined quota for male representation in the second research phase was 26. A total of just 11 male teachers participated in the research, however.

The hypothesis of “Teachers with 20 years’ experience (inclusive) and above show a higher IRI than those with 19 years of experience or less” was determined, in particular, by the particular curiosity of one researcher who believes teachers with more experience have a training time of greater scope for discovering other facts (including from other fields), in particular because they already have

a certain amount of already-prepared materials for teaching and have accumulated active teaching practice over a period of two decades. We are aware that this hypothesis is based on the assumption that the teachers in charge have had a constant amount of time to prepare for teaching during their practice; we realize that many respondents with 20 years experience or more, due to the availability of certain materials and already-prepared materials use their own leisure time, to something other than searching for further information about or education about World War II (or its particular lines of inquiry).

Research Results

The characteristic statistical general aspects of the data set we investigated can be summarized as follows: ($n = 80$): min. = 3, max = 65; mean ($M = 35.8$), standard deviation ($SD = 11$). The independent variable was always binary (nominal-dichotomous), so testing through a two-sample t-test (parametrically) or through the Mann-Whitney U-test (non-parametric) was considered. First, the normal distribution of the IRI in all test groups was verified by the Shapiro-Wilk test each time. When this condition was met, a parametric test was performed, and the homogeneity of variance (Levene's test) was still verified. If the variances were not homogeneous, the Welch correction was used to interpret. **All hypotheses were tested unilaterally with respect to formulations.**

The **first hypothesis** was verified through the Shapiro-Wilk test ($p > 0.05$ for each group), assuming normal data distribution. The results of the t-test show that there is no difference between teachers in the "History" and "others" in IRI ($t = -1,190$; $p = 0.119$), so we **reject** the hypothesis (see **Figure 1**).

The **second hypothesis** was verified using data from a group of teachers who do not search for historical books and showed a slight right-sided skew ($S-W p < 0.05$), so we proceeded to a non-parametric test. Based on the Mann-Whitney U-test, no significant difference was found between teachers seeking books with historical themes and those who do not ($U = 947,50$; $Z = 1,468$; $p = 0,071$) (see **Figure 2**). We **reject** the hypothesis.

As expected with respect to the number of men ($n = 11$) in the group, data from this group did not show a normal distribution ($S-W p < 0.05$). Based on the Mann-Whitney U-test, men do not show a higher IRI than women (they practically do not differ), therefore the **third hypothesis** was also **rejected** (see **Figure 3**).

The last hypothesis has been screened through binary coding, the condition of normal data distribution in both groups was met ($S-W p > 0.05$), so we took the

t-test. However, no difference was found between the two groups in the IRI ($t = 0.032$; $p = 0.513$) (see **Figure 4**). We therefore **reject** the **fourth** hypothesis.

We have also tried to ascertain whether a correlation between practice length and IRI (unilateral testing – with the length of practice of IRI) could be found. Due to the ordinal nature of the practice, Spearman’s correlation ($\rho = -0.028$; $p = 0.403$) was chosen, but no significant correlation was found between the variables studied.

History			Other			Levene’s Test		t-test for Equality of Means						
N	M	SD	N	M	SD	F	Sig.	T	df	Sig. (1-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% CI	
													Lower	Upper
22	38,14	12,345	58	34,88	10,360	,112	,739	-1,190	78	,119	-3,257	2,737	-8,706	2,192

Figure 1. Statistical data to verify hypothesis 1.

Historical		Other		Mann-Whitney U-test		
N	Average order	N	Average order	U	Z	Sig. (1-tailed)
37	44,61	43	36,97	947,50	1,468	,071

Figure 2. Statistical data to verify hypothesis 2.

Men		Women		Mann-Whitney U-test		
N	Average order	N	Average order	U	Z	Sig. (1-tailed)
11	39,68	69	40,63	388,500	0,126	,550

Figure 3. Statistical data to verify hypothesis 3.

< 19 years (inc.)			> 20 years (inc.)			Levene’s Test		t-test for Equality of Means						
N	M	SD	N	M	SD	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (1-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% CI	
													Lower	Upper
47	35,81	9,586	33	35,73	12,822	2,791	,099	0,032	78	,513	0,081	2,505	-4,905	5,068

Figure 4. Statistical data to verify hypothesis 4.

Conclusions and Discussion

This paper has presented the partial results of mixed-design research that deals with the implementation of the Shoah theme in Literary Education teaching from the perspective of literature teachers.

We realize that the number of research participants is, to a certain extent, marginal. It is necessary to emphasize that the predetermined quota number corresponds to the total number of teachers with any qualifications at lower-secondary schools in the Vysočina Region. We believe it was precisely based on this fact that the calculated quota representation of respondents was not fulfilled. There are no specific statistics about how many teachers of the Czech Language and Literature there are in the Vysočina Region. We believe that in the context of teachers, the number is meaningful and sufficient: we assume that there are on average two teachers in the given field at the 134 primary schools; comparing that with 80 fully completed questionnaires, and taking into account the fact that the quantitative research was preceded by a qualitative phase of research with eight teachers from the Vysočina Region leads to the assertion that the postulated research is of a certain informative value.

In our opinion, the 60% return on the questionnaire was mainly due to it being a relatively large questionnaire. We are of the opinion that respondents are more likely to stop filling out an “online” questionnaire because they do not have to “justify” their decision to do so, although submitting a paper questionnaire “*en face*” may also be incomplete or prematurely interrupted. We believe that a greater return on questionnaires and thus a higher representation of teachers in this educational field could be achieved, to a certain extent, by carrying out a survey through a paper questionnaire: this procedure is much more time-consuming than the form of data collection we chose (online), but in our opinion the return would be significantly higher.

We were forced to reject all hypotheses. Based on statistical evaluation of the data (see Figures 1–4), it is apparent that in most cases this situation occurred mainly due to insufficient conclusiveness caused by a numerically relatively limited sample of respondents. The quantitative research section, partial results from which were presented in the paper, is part of a comprehensive research project, the main objective of which is to give a comprehensive description of how the Shoah theme is implemented in Literary Education at the lower-secondary schools (especially in the area of how selected Shoah-related texts are received and interpreted). Based on the results of these two research surveys, a monothematic reader will be compiled on the topic of the Shoah. In that anthology, knowledge gained by

researching teachers' opinions and the reception and interpretation of Shoah-texts by pupils will be combined and, at the same time, knowledge about contemporary didactics of literature will be integrated into the monothematic reader, especially regarding how to postulate questions and set tasks.

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