

Austrian Secondary School Teachers' Perspectives on Character Education and Life Skills: First Quantitative Insights from a Mixed Methods Study

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Abstract : There has been an increased interest in school-based whole-child development in the Austrian education system in the last few years. Although there is a consensus among academics that teachers' beliefs are an essential component of their professional competence, there are hardly any studies in the German-speaking world examining teachers' beliefs about school-based character education. To close this gap, we are conducting a mixed methods study combining qualitative interviews and a questionnaire in Austria (doctoral thesis at the University of Salzburg). In this paper, we present preliminary insights into the quantitative strand of the project. In contrast to German-speaking countries, the Anglo-Saxon world has a long tradition of explicit character education in schools. There has been a rising interest in approaches focusing on a neo-Aristotelian form of character education in England. The Jubilee Centre strongly influences the "renaissance" of papers on neo-Aristotelian character education for Character and Virtues, founded in 2012. The quantitative questionnaire study (n = 264) is an online survey of teachers and school principals conducted in four different federal states in spring 2023. Most respondents (n = 264) from lower secondary schools (AHS-Unterstufe and Mittelschule) believe that character education in schools for 10-14-year-olds is more important for society than good exam results. Many teachers state that they consider themselves prepared to promote their students' personal development and life skills through their education and to attend further training courses. However, there are many obstacles in the education system to ensure that a comprehensive education reaches the students. Many teachers state that they consider themselves prepared to promote their students' character strengths and life skills through their education and to attend further training courses. However, there are many obstacles in the education system to ensure that a comprehensive education reaches the students. Among the most cited difficulties, teachers mention the time factor associated with an overcrowded curriculum and a strong focus on performance, which often leaves them needing more time to keep an eye on nurturing the whole person. The fact that character education is not a separate subject, and its implementation needs to be monitored also makes it challenging to implement it in everyday school life. Austrian teachers prioritize moral virtues such as compassion and honesty as character strengths in everyday school life and resilience and commitment in the next place. Our results are like those reported in other studies on teacher's beliefs about character education. They indicate that Austrian teachers want to teach character in their schools but see systemic constraints such as the curriculum, in which personality roles play a subordinate role, and the focus on performance testing in the school system and the associated lack of time as obstacles to fostering more character development in students.

Keywords : character education, life skills, teachers' beliefs, virtues

Conference Title : ICMECD 2024 : International Conference on Moral Education and Character Development

Conference Location : New York, United States

Conference Dates : October 10-11, 2024