

## Students' views on ethical issues in Slovak education

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### Abstract

The authors of the contribution closely follow the published results of their sociological research regarding views of Slovak teachers at primary and secondary schools in the area of relationships with students, parents, colleagues and superiors (Gluchman, & Gluchmanová, 2016). The present contribution analyses views of students at the second level of primary school and at secondary schools by means of evaluating their relationship to teachers, as well as relationships between parents and teachers while students' views regarding the presence of violence and bullying at school are also addressed. The research results indicate that almost a third of students do not perceive their teachers as ethical models of behaviour and actions; moreover, they have also witnessed instances of corrupt behaviour on the part of teachers. On the other hand, almost two thirds of students appreciate that teachers, when addressing problems at school, proceed in accordance with ethical principles and norms. Unlike teachers, students do not believe serious problems are present when it comes to the behaviour of parents toward teachers. They, however, believe the behaviour of students towards teachers is a more problematic area.

*Keywords:* students; teachers; school; parents; education; Slovakia.

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### 1. Introduction

The presented study directly follows the published results of the authors' sociological research among teachers of primary and secondary schools in Slovakia, carried out in 2013-2014. In the previous study, the authors paid attention to an analysis and evaluation of the views of Slovak teachers regarding relationship ethics in the teaching profession. A significant finding suggested that a majority of teachers positively assess their relationships with students; they reject discrimination of students; they behave to each other with respect and tolerance and they also positively assess their behaviour towards the students' parents. They, however, perceive their superiors as models of ethical behaviour for their inferiors to a lesser extent. The behaviour of students and their parents towards teachers is considered a serious problem (Gluchman, & Gluchmanová, 2016, 10-15).

Since the present contribution is a direct continuation of the previous study regarding relationship ethics in the teaching profession in Slovakia, the theoretical background and methodology of the research is primarily based on opinions contained in works by Elizabeth Campbell, David Carr, Gunnel Colnerud, Vasil Gluchman, Ján Kalajtzidis, Kenneth A. Strike and Jonas F. Soltis, (Campbell, 2003; Carr, 2005; Colnerud, 1997; Gluchman, 2017; Kalajtzidis, 2013; Strike, & Soltis, 2004). As a majority of them was analysed and evaluated in great detail in the contribution in question, they will not be dealt with in the present paper (Gluchman, & Gluchmanová, 2016, 1-7). This also applies to the social context of the research, presented in the above study (Gluchman, & Gluchmanová, 2016, 7-8).

The sociological research carried out implies that actual relationships between teachers and students on the one hand and parents and teachers on the other are a

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burning issue. The authors of this contribution were, therefore, interested to find out whether, according to students, teachers perceive students as persons worthy respect, whether they accept their rights and respect the opinions they present in class, provided they are in accordance with generally desirable and valid norms in society, whether teachers attend to them also outside class, whether they are helpful, especially should a student address them outside a lesson. In their behaviour and actions, teachers are often expected to be role models. Is it truly so? Do teachers decide on the requirements and demands placed on students fairly and, also, do they attend to their students more than they are obliged? Do teachers solve problems at school according to ethical rules and principles not only in relationship towards students but also their colleagues, or, possibly, parents? What is the present situation at primary and secondary schools in Slovakia regarding bribery? How do parents and teachers behave towards one another? The above are only some of the questions students were asked in the sociological research in question.

It is important to point out that the research into students' views was carried out at the same schools as its equivalent into the opinions of teachers. It is not the aim to compare and contrast these two groups of results at individual schools. The fact that the same schools were concerned can, however, make a statement about how teachers and students perceive and mutually assess their behaviour and actions.

## 2. Research

### 2.1 Goals of the research

The aim of the empirical research was to study, apart from other areas, how students at primary and secondary schools perceive and assess the ethical dimension of relationships within schools. The research in question is necessary in the context of a great number of ethical and moral problems occurring at present-day educational institutions in Slovakia. Several studies dealing with similar issues in the school environment and outside of it point out that this area is rather problematic (Búgelová, & Baňasová, 2003; Darák, 2001; Džuka, 2010; Džuka, & Dalbert, 2007; Džuka, & Jenčová, 2005; Gajdošová, 1999/2000; Jusko, 2002; Kačmárová, 2011; Kačmárová, & Kravcová, 2011; Kasáčová, 2001; 2003; Kosová, 2006; Pastrňáková, 2016; Rychnavská, 2003; Straková, 2005; Zelina, 1994; Žilínek, 1997).

### 2.2 Target group

The target group of the present empirical research was made up of 1768 respondents – students of primary and secondary schools. The total number comprised 981 (55.5%) girls and 787 (44.5%) boys. With regard to their *age*, 45.3% students were aged 11-14 years while 54.7% were aged 15-18 years. A majority of respondents (31.1%) attend schools residing in towns with a population of 20,000-50,000. Students whose schools reside in towns with 50,000 inhabitants or more were the second most common with 27.5%. . Next (17.3%) came students whose schools are in villages, while 13.5% of residents attend schools in towns with a population of 10,000 or less and the last place (10.7%) was taken by students whose schools resided in towns with 10,000 – 20,000 citizens.

More than a half of the total number of the respondents (59.8%) was represented by students of the second level of primary schools, 20.1% of the respondents were students at secondary vocational schools, 9.8% of the students asked attended grammar schools, 8.7% of respondents were students of hotel or business academies and 1.6% of the target group was represented by students of other types of schools (Secondary art school, Secondary vocational school of hotel services and trade, or non-specified type of school).

Whether the respondents were students with good school results was found out by asking about their *average grades* on the last report cards and those aimed at their attendance. As many as 37.8% of the respondents stated that the average of their grades on the last report cards was 1.5 or lower; 29.9% of all students stated an

average of 2.0 or lower; 25.4% of students achieved an average of 3.0 or lower and 6.8% of the respondents stated an average of above 3.0 (in the Slovak school system, 1 being the best and 5 the worst grade). Regarding their attendance and especially the *number of unexcused absences*, 72.9% of the students involved stated that in the previous school year they did not miss a lesson without a valid reason; 12.6% of the respondents reported up to 10 unexcused lessons; 6.9% up to 35 unexcused absences; 4.8% up to 70 absences while 2.8% missed more than 70 lessons without having a valid reason.

### 2.3 Results

From a broader research study, only those results were selected for the purposes of this contribution which concern students' opinions regarding ethical aspects of their relationship with teachers, those among students themselves as well as relationships between parents and teachers.

#### 2.3.1 Teacher-student relationships

In Slovakia, education is among those areas about which one often finds out from the media they are not able to rid themselves of negative manifestations regarding corrupt practices. Oftentimes, it is directly linked to the controversial issue of accepting gifts. That is why the respondents were asked where *they have experienced as situation at school when, for any reason, they offered a teacher a gift*. As many as 39.3% expressed agreement with the statement and a very similar percentage (39.2%) stated they had not offered any gifts while 21.5% did not provide a clear answer to the question. As a follow-up to the above responses, the respondents were offered an optional question regarding the reason for giving the gift at school; i.e. in those respondents who had offered a teacher a gift and wished to specify why. The aim was to differentiate intentions of gift giving and to what extent it was a potential manifestation of corrupt practice. On the one hand, it could mean sincere appreciation of a teacher's work and/or their approach to the students. In this context, as a *thank you for good grades or accommodating behaviour*, the highest percentage of respondents (32.8%) were sure to never have given a gift, while 25% likely did and 19.8% were sure to have offered one. On the other hand, however, explicit corrupt behaviour was expressed by 18.5% of respondents who, to various extents, stated they offered a teacher a gift *for getting/in order to get a better grade*. 60.1% of the asked students, however, provided a firm statement they had never offered a gift *in order to get a better grade*. Similarly, signs of corrupt behaviour were also present in responses to the question whether they would provide a teacher a gift in order to *influence the decision of a different teacher* in favour of another student, as 16.1% would, to various extents, offer a bribe. 58.5% of respondents claimed they were sure to not have offered a bribe in any situation.

Another series of questions referred to what teachers require from students, mutual relationships between teachers and students, their communication, behaviour and actions, etc. One of the statements of which the asked students were supposed to express their views was whether *teachers are aware of and exercise study requirements of their students to an appropriate extent* (cf. Table 1).

**Table 1.** Teachers are aware of and exercise study requirements of their students to an appropriate extent

I strongly agree	462	26.1%
I mostly agree	548	31%
I cannot say	512	29%
I mostly disagree	158	8.9%
I strongly disagree	88	5%

With regard to the question whether *teachers also attend to students outside their obligation*, 29.3% of the respondents could not take a clear stand, which, as the authors of the present paper believe, is a rather high percentage. 24.3% mostly agreed with the statement and 18.2% of those asked strongly agreed, while 18% of the respondents mostly disagreed and 10.2% strongly disagreed with the statement. Erich Petlák (as well as other authors) emphasises that teachers should empathise with the thinking and actions of their students and in that way influence their behaviour. They should bear in mind that they do not only educate their students by direct actions, but also their personality as a whole, their relationship towards work, students, etc. By asserting humanisation in education, teachers should take a share in eliminating fear in education. If teachers accept their students as equal partners, if students witness their teacher being interested in them, wishes to talk to them, help them with their personal troubles and problems and if they engage in informal conversations about the topical and global problems of mankind, then they can be successful. Motivation is an important factor in “teacher – student” relationships, which can contain the need for understanding, helping others, satisfaction from achieving a goal, i.e. helping students in education, developing their skills, abilities and personality maturity (Petlák, 2000, s. 206; Ondrejko, & Verešová, 2003, s. 213; Ďuríčková, 1999, s. 203).

In a great number of papers one can find that teachers should be models for their student in all situations, primarily in their behaviour and actions. What were the responses of the asked students to the question whether *teachers at their school are their models in behaviour and actions*? The results varied but were not uniform with high percentages expressing a clear answer, which, therefore, suggests this area provides enough space for improvement by teachers themselves, as well as faculties training teachers to be (cf. Table 2).

**Table 2.** At schools, teachers are models for students' behaviour and actions

I strongly agree	338	19.1%
I mostly agree	432	24.4%
I cannot say	463	26.2%
I mostly disagree	245	13.9%
I strongly disagree	290	16.4%

The fact that 16.4% of respondents strongly disagreed with the above statement, meaning teachers are not their models in their behaviour and actions, should be a warning sign. In this context it could be stated that, in teachers, as well as employees of other areas who are often found in the public eye, it was possible to observe manifestations of bending and breaking but also of strengthening of character, as well as displays of cowardice, buttering up, toadying, but also rational thinking, braveness, dignity and strong civilian duty. Matej Beňo claims that, by means of school management bodies, laws, regulations, decrees, and directives regarding economic provision, pay rises, bonuses and other types of gratification, the teaching profession could be controlled and lead to obedience (Beňo, 2001, s. 268). Beáta Kosová states that it is especially the “breaking of ethical principles in interpersonal relationships on the part of teachers which significantly decreases the status of this profession in the public eye... Even those who cause shame to the teaching profession can live happy lives” (Kosová, 2006, p. 4). This is what teachers should realise, as their profession is one of those where they are constantly in full view of not only their students, but also parents and society as a whole. Their work is also often judged by those who are not involved and, on a number of occasions, it is discussed whether the actions and behaviour of a teacher outside school is of importance too.

The opinion that teachers are only responsible for the professional ethics of their actions and behaviour in the school environment is held by many. How do the asked students perceive the situation? *Are the actions and behaviour of the moral agents in question also important outside school?* (cf. Table 3).

**Table 3.** The actions and behaviour of teachers are also important outside school

I strongly agree	644	36.4%
I mostly agree	473	26.8 %
I cannot say	295	16.7%
I mostly disagree	198	11.2%
I strongly disagree	158	8.9%

Should teachers' behaviour and actions be observed more closely, the teaching profession should be compared and contrasted with other occupations, as teachers do not merely operate by their words (in contrast to, e.g. the judicial profession), a different organ (in contrast to some manual profession), but rather by a complex of all their characteristic features, their entire actions and behaviour at and outside school, in their public, private as well as family life (Štefanovič, 1967, p. 15). One could agree that the teaching profession is different and singular, just like it could be said about many other professions, as they are all specific in one way or another. Nevertheless, the authors of the present paper do not agree with the opinion that teachers, simply because they are teachers, have to behave like that in their private home environment. That is not to say that they should behave differently in public and in private or that their actions and words should diverge. What we mean here is that maximalist requirements are also placed on teachers outside school, which denies the moral view of an equal approach to all morally mature adult individuals. In the same way, from the viewpoint of professional ethics (in this case teaching ethics) the requirement of teachers' universal bond to their profession cannot be accepted. Teachers are only teachers at school, or at school-related events, which could take place outside school and the teaching process; however, in no way can they be expected and, even less so, required to be fully subordinated to their profession. Just think about it, how many other professions could be found where the person is to behave in the same way in the workplace and at home, for instance in the family environment, among their closest relatives? Why should a teacher be also a teacher at home? If he has a family, he should be primarily a parent.

It is also open to discussion how teachers should behave towards students, should they need advice or help. Various responses were recorded to the question whether *some teachers are rather unwilling towards their students, especially if asked outside the teaching process*. That is why it could be presumed there is a dilemma present which should be given a clearer direction within school, as well as work, regulations. The authors of this contribution believe that, in this area, neither teachers nor students have a clear idea. This is also supported by the respondents' answers (cf. Table 4).

**Table 4.** In their relationship towards students, some teachers are unaccommodating, especially if students approach them outside the teaching process

I strongly agree	272	15.4%
I mostly agree	323	18.3%
I cannot say	448	25.3%
I mostly disagree	427	24.2%
I strongly disagree	298	16.9%

A variety of responses proves that, in future, it is necessary to work on making such dilemmas clear in order to prevent misunderstandings, confusion, or faltering of mutual relationships between teachers and students or among teachers as a group. It is presumed that, by clearing up the above issue, relationships among teachers could strengthen as, in spite of the fact that the respondents' responses were more straightforward, still, a third of them were either unsure or disagreed. Some teachers might not be aware of it, but students closely watch their actions, as well as ways they behave to one another. As many as 34.7% of the asked students mostly agreed and 32.2% strongly agreed with the statement that *mutual relationships between*

*teachers are good*. 22.5% were not able to take a stand, while 5.8% strongly disagreed and 4.9% mostly agreed with the above statement. The same question was responded to in a similar way by teachers themselves, especially when it comes to the opinion that the relationships among teachers are not good, as 10.1% of the asked teachers stated, to various extents, problems in this area. On the other hand, 74.5% perceived the relationships in a positive way (Gluchman, & Gluchmanová, 2016, 11-12).

### 2.3.2. Teacher-parent relationships

With respect to the fact that teachers (whether at school or outside of it) come across the parents of their students, attention was also paid to this area. Do they consider them equal partners or do they behave in a superior way and, also, what is the relationship of parents towards teachers? In the context of relationships between teachers and parents, it is necessary to realise that, morally, parents and teachers are equal partners in the issue of a child's education, which is why teachers should always respect this fact. For this reason, they should treat parents with the respect they are due. On the other hand, one also needs to realise that, during the teaching process, teachers take the place of parents in their educational role, which is why parents should also respect the opinions and views of the teachers of their children, which should result in mutual cooperation between teachers and parents in the process of education. That is also an area in which the ethical and moral dimension lies in the relationship between teachers and a child's family, or the parents themselves. One of the questions dealing with the above issue was asked to find out whether *some teachers are impolite to parents*. On the one hand, it is praiseworthy that a majority of responses were of strongly disagreeing (40.4%) or mostly disagreeing (25.7%) nature. Moreover, 79.7% of the asked teachers assessed the communication between teachers and parents rather positively (Gluchman, & Gluchmanová, 2016, 13). On the other hand, it is worth a bearing in mind that almost a third of the respondents feel differently about the issue in question in that teachers in their profession do not represent a moral model of behaviour and actions and it seems to be clear there is a need to, within teacher-training programmes, emphasise the fact that parents and teachers are equal partners (cf. Table 5).

**Table 5.** Some teachers are impolite towards parents

I strongly agree	127	7.2%
I mostly agree	120	6.8%
I cannot say	352	19.9%
I mostly disagree	454	25.7 %
I strongly disagree	715	40.4 %

One can often find out about mutual relationships between parents and teachers from mass media, especially in those cases where a parent does not hesitate to physically assault a defenceless teacher, particularly if a male parent attacks a female teacher. The authors of this paper presume that interaction between teachers and parents is a significant part of their mutual relationship. Teachers should be acceptable partners for not only parents, but also other professionals (psychologists, medical doctors) with whom they come into contact in the interest of students' development. Not all teachers realise how close students are to the families they come from. They only realise this fact when, as Marta Černotová points out, they deal with a problematic "case" – underachieving, truancy, drug use, as well as, unfortunately, theft or underage pregnancies at primary schools, etc. To only realise the complexity of the student – family – school relationship when problems appear is too late. At present, children often do not respect their parents; they deny them the right to interfere in "their business" (especially in the periods of puberty and adolescence). They spin out of their control and sometimes even emotionally terrorise the family. It is questionable whether it is the family where, in the case of problems at school or outside of it, the child finds a place of warmth, safety, or a refuge of emotional

support. In such children whose parents are too indifferent and do not provide them with enough love, attention, or supervision, behavioural disorders may occur (Černotová, 1994, pp. 227-230).

For this reason, the authors of this papers were interested to find out how the asked students felt about the issue of *some parents verbally or physically assaulting a teacher (by verbally threatening him and attacking him)* (cf. Table 6).

**Table 6.** Some parents verbally or physically assaulted a teacher (by threatening him verbally and attacked him)

I strongly agree	60	3.4%
I mostly agree	88	5%
I cannot say	279	15.8%
I mostly disagree	353	20%
I strongly disagree	988	55.9%

It could be assumed that, if parents do not hesitate to threaten teachers, their children do not feel any inhibitions to act in that way either. Then, aggression and violence towards teachers can also be observed. The authors of the present paper believe the number of problems in the teacher-parent relationship (especially ethical and moral) that need addressing is growing. However, what also often needs addressing is parents' disinterest in children. A lack of support on the part of the parents or children or youths then makes the teachers' role even more difficult. It is also proved by statements of the asked teachers out of whom 50.5% claimed they have experienced, to various levels, aggressive behaviour by parents towards teachers (Gluchman, & Gluchmanová, 2016, 13).

### 2.3.3. School violence - professional ethics of teachers

What is the situation at schools whose students were approached with the question whether *there are manifestations of violence and aggression on the part of students towards teachers present at their school?* The results show that children are not "left trailing" by their parents but, rather, are even more "active" in this area (cf. Table 7).

**Table 7.** At school, manifestations of physical violence and aggression by students towards teachers are present

I strongly agree	197	11.1%
I mostly agree	205	11.6%
I cannot say	356	20.1%
I mostly disagree	380	21.5%
I strongly disagree	630	35.6%

It could be stated that the data are rather alarming. It seems, however, that in spite of the awareness of this fact, not much is being done to remedy the unfavourable situation in the school as well as out-of-school environment. Similar responses were also recorded in the question asking whether *some students are impolite towards teachers (insult and threaten them)*. Almost half of the respondents agreed (26.4% strongly and 23% mostly) with the above statement, 20.4% of the asked students could not take a clear stand, while only 13.1% of the respondents mostly disagreed and 17.3% strongly disagreed with the statement. It is possible that the fact that the above problem is not addressed makes teachers feel somewhat helpless and, for this reason, resort to physical punishment which is, at present, illegal.

It was stated in the past that parents were supposed to show kindness and respect when bringing up their children. Physical punishment of children was not only pointless but also harmful. Every parent who favoured physical punishment was to take into consideration that it chases out of the child all honest coyness, warm-hearted love and desire for honour and praise. A smart educator never punished the children

when he wished to teach them something good (Lehocký, 1786, pp. 43-56). 7.9% (139) of the respondents strongly agreed and 6.3% (112) mostly agreed with the statement that *teachers use physical punishment against students*. 13% (229) could not take a stand and it is praiseworthy that 22.5% (397) students mostly disagreed and 50.4% (891) of those asked strongly disagreed with the above statement. The respondents were offered the option to express their views of mutual relationships between moral agents participating in the teaching process; responses to the question whether *manifestations of discrimination are common in the teacher-student relationship* were of special interest. Even though 27.6% of the respondents did not take a clear stand and almost a quarter (24.2%) disagreed with the above statement, still, 13.7% rather admitted manifestations of discrimination in the relationship in question and 14% of the respondents strongly agreed with the above statement. Let us point out that 10.1% of teachers agreed, to various extents that, in the teacher-student relationship, discrimination is present (Gluchman, & Gluchmanová, 2016, 10).

In this context, the question arises whether, in such cases, teachers apply in their work knowledge of teaching ethics. How to behave and act in such circumstances? Do teachers perceive students with respect; do they accept students' rights and act justly? To answer the above questions, the respondents were asked whether *teachers solve school-related problems according to ethical principles*. To what extent do they use the knowledge gained during their studies, seminars, or workshops they might have attended within further education of teachers? (cf. Table 8).

**Table 8.** Teachers deal with school-related problems according to ethical principles

I strongly agree	495	28%
I mostly agree	592	33.5%
I cannot say	402	22.7%
I mostly disagree	161	9.1 %
I strongly disagree	118	6.7%

Similar responses were also recorded with regard to the question whether *a majority of teachers perceive students as individuals worthy of respect. They accept the students' rights and respect the opinions they present in class provided they are in accordance with generally desirable and valid norms in society*. As many as 30.7% of the respondents mostly agreed and 28.4% strongly agreed with the above statement; 22.3% could not take a stand while 11.9% mostly disagreed and 6.8% of those asked were of a very different opinion. Responses very similar to those above were also recorded in the question concerned with *teachers deciding on the requirements and demands of students fairly*. It seems that teaching ethics as well as ethical principles in the teaching profession are only applied by some teachers, which indicates a future need to use the space and take the opportunity to emphasise the consequences following actions and behaviour of moral agents involved in the teaching process (Gluchmanová, 2012).

### 3. Discussion

What follows is an effort to summarise some topical issues of teaching ethics in Slovakia from the viewpoint of students based on the results of sociological research. In this context, Mária Rychnavská's statement is befitting that the main activity of school is to educate children and students, which is why educational strategies should be defined in a way which aids and strengthens students' key competences (Rychnavská, 2011, p. 19). In spite of the fact that individual responses in the survey were perceived positively, still, a great number of respondents took a negative stand toward some questions or could not take one at all. This concerned such issues as corruption, about which almost a fifth of those asked stated they had offered a bribe with the aim of gaining for themselves or a classmate of theirs an undeserved advantage, or benefit. Responses to the question whether teachers at their school are their models in behaviour and actions gave rather negative evidence, as more than

42% of the respondents either could not take a stand or strongly disagreed with the statement, which means they do not perceive teachers as models in their behaviour and actions. It is, thus, clear that there is still a lot that needs doing not only by teachers themselves but also by faculties educating students for the demanding profession that teaching is.

The authors of the present paper assume that, in future, issues regarding actions and behaviour of the moral agents in question in and outside of the school environment will not only require serious thought but rather serious action. Almost two thirds of the respondents agreed with the statement that the actions and behaviour of teachers and students is also important outside school. Based on the responses in the above dilemma, clearer instructions would be necessary within the school, as well as work, regulations. It could be assumed that, at present, it is clear to neither teachers nor students. In their relationship to students, some teachers are unaccommodating, especially if approached outside the teaching process, which is why such ethical dilemmas will need addressing in future in order to clear them up.

Another topical issue of teaching ethics in Slovakia within the present sociological research was the ethical and moral dimension in the “teacher-family (parents)” relationship also following the fact that parents and teachers are morally equal partners in the child’s education, which is why teachers should always bear this in mind. It is assumed that everyday school practice makes it clear that (especially ethical and moral) problems are also present in the above relationships, which should present a challenge to search for common teacher-parent solutions. However, parents’ disinterest in their child makes teachers’ work much more difficult, especially if there is a lack of support on the part of the parents of children or youths. This is connected to manifestations of physical violence and aggression in students towards teachers, as more than a fifth of the respondents had come across physical aggression on the part of students towards teachers. Some students are impolite to teachers (they insult or threaten them). With regard to verbal aggression towards teachers, almost a half of those asked claimed that, to various extents, they had come across manifestations of this kind. Terézia Rohn studied personality requirements placed on teachers and the influence of a teacher’s personality on students. She stated that, in several research studies into a teacher’s personality, increased levels of neuroticism were observed. A neurotic, hostile, aggressive, or indifferent teacher directly, or through the class ambience, influences the students and can, thus, negatively affect their psyche, their personality development as well as their relationship to the school and education (Rohn, 2011, p. 26). In spite of the above negatives, most teachers perceive students as individuals worthy of respect. They accept their rights and respect the opinions they present in class, provided they are in accordance with generally desirable and valid norms in society. However, teaching ethics and ethical principles in the teaching profession are only consciously and purposely applied by some teachers, which suggests that, in future Slovak education, it will be necessary to pay more attention to training teachers in the area of ethical and moral problems at school, including their awareness of teaching ethics. In this context, consequences following the actions and behaviour of all moral agents participating in the teaching process must be emphasised.

#### **4. Conclusion**

According to Martha Nussbaum, society is supposed to support the development of the key internal abilities of an individual and, by means of education, develop the physical and emotional health of children and youths, family care, love, etc. (Nussbaum, 2011, p. 21). Undoubtedly, education plays a significant role in the process of the development of individuals and society. Fundamentals of all development in an individual are acquired in the process of family upbringing on the one hand, but, primarily within the formal process of education. It is, however, questionable to what extent Slovak society or, Slovak governmental institutions, realise this fact and what role they ascribe education within the development of society. Certainly, it is a constituent of common welfare for which the government

and its institutions as well as the nation as such and the entire society should strive. That means that clear educational criteria as well as criteria of assessment should be determined. First of all, however, socio-economic conditions must be created for the process and result of education to become a value. This is still merely at the level of discussion in Slovakia and very little is done, which is exemplified by a year-long discussion about documentation regarding a general educational reform (*Učíace sa Slovensko – Learning Slovakia*), which, at present, reached a “dead end” due to a political crisis and it seems that, after the new minister starts his function, it could fall into oblivion, just like similar projects did in the past.

In post-communist countries, socio-economic conditions for education are among the worst among EU countries, which is also proved by the percentage of GDP spent on education, or teachers’ average pay in comparison to “old” EU member countries. On the other hand, it must be stated that it is also reflected in the PISA results of Slovak primary school students in comparison to other OECD countries. In general, the government and the Ministry of Education settle for the statement that, considering the ratio of expenses used in education and the results of Slovak students, Slovakia is not that badly off. The above statement is, however, a reflection of the political elite not realising the short-sightedness of its policies limited by the election period and the next upcoming parliamentary election, as they are not truly interested in the development of Slovak society but primarily in maintaining their political power and the ability to use it, or abuse it for the purposes of enrichment at the expense of the country and public finances. Or is it because they do realise that and count on an immature society with insufficiently developed intellect and cognitive potential of its citizens is easier to control and manipulate? It often seems to be the true goal of political elites in Slovakia, regardless their left, right, central-left or central-right orientation.

It is also reflected in the studied ethical and moral problems at the level of primary and secondary schools in Slovakia. The educational system is, in many ways, the image of the state of society, as it never functions as an island where beautiful and noble reform projects can be pursued regardless the social reality. Problems including the presented ethical and moral problems of Slovak education at the level of primary and secondary schools (in a great number of cases this is also valid for universities) are a mirror of Slovak society in the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The above mentioned reform material *Learning Slovakia*, prepared by a great number of renowned professionals from all areas of education fairly described these problems and even drafted possible solutions; it, however, seems sufficient political intention for their realisation is missing.

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