

## Implementation of the Shoah Events into Teaching According to the Experience of Czech University Students

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**Abstract:** In this paper, we present partial results of a quantitative research investigation, the aim of which was to find out the preconceptions and misconceptions of students of teaching in implementation of the Shoah phenomenon into the teaching. We present the results of two questions: 1. The opinion of respondents on the implementation of the term Shoah in the *Framework Educational Program for Primary Education* (2021); and 2. The opinions of the research participants on the inclusion of the phenomenon of the Shoah in the cross-cutting topics that are part of the normative Czech educational curriculum. The research was carried out by means of a non-standardized questionnaire. A total of 319 students, 300 women and 19 men, participated in the research an overwhelming majority of respondents, total 73 %, believe that the concept of the Shoah should be made explicit in the *Framework Educational Program for Primary Education*. A total of 96 % prospective teachers believe that Shoah problematic should be integrated into Education for Thinking in European and Global Contexts. Based on these findings, it will be possible to undertake targeted intervention in teacher education in this area.

**Keywords:** Shoah, Holocaust, Pre-concept, Misconception, Czech Framework Educational Program for Primary Education, Implementation, cross-cutting themes

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### Introduction

The main aim of this paper is to present partial results of a research investigation aimed at finding out the experiences of students of teacher education programs at the Faculty of Education of Palacký University in Olomouc in the Czech Republic with the implementation of the Shoah phenomenon into the teaching of various educational disciplines within the institutional education in the Czech Republic.

The implementation of Shoah themes in teaching involves utilizing various methods and resources to educate students about the Holocaust. Research emphasizes the importance of incorporating artistic narratives, historical images, and survivor testimonies to effectively teach this sensitive subject (Mašát & Sladová, 2019a). Teachers play a crucial role in presenting the Shoah theme, guiding students through the complexities of this historical

event while fostering critical thinking and empathy. Perelberg (2022) finds that the significance of the Shoah, or Holocaust, for contemporary society is multifaceted and profound. The Shoah represents the abolition of traditional familial structures and the rise of narcissistic power dynamics, leading to the creation of the abject.

We are convinced that the Shoah should become an integral part of the educational curricula of various countries, as the relevance of the Shoah to the present is evident in various ways. Studies on genocides, including the Holocaust, have deepened our understanding of history, memory, and cultural representations (Vásquez, 2023). The rhetoric of never again is a ubiquitous anti-racist device in Italy, drawing on historical analogies and the memory of the Shoah (Schwarz, 2022). The impact of the Shoah extends to education and pedagogy, as knowledge and connections to the Holocaust are passed between generations and shape contemporary society (Chernivsky et al., 2022). Moreover, the need for Holocaust education in India highlights the importance of recognizing the connections between different historical events and fostering awareness of the Holocaust as a unique and catastrophic event (Urban, 2022). Overall, the Shoah continues to influence our understanding of history, shape anti-racist discourse, influence educational practice, and highlight the importance of Holocaust education in different contexts. Countries like India and Germany face challenges with the implementation of Holocaust education. In India, there is a lack of mandatory Holocaust education in schools, leading to misconceptions and overshadowing the uniqueness of the event (Burza, 2022). Author (2022) further notes that on the other hand, Germany struggles with inclusivity in Holocaust education due to its status as an immigration country with diverse historical narratives, making traditional educational approaches exclusive to certain groups, particularly those with migrant backgrounds (Ambrosewicz-Jacobs, 2017). Drahi (2015) states that teaching the Shoah in France is a socially sensitive issue and therefore teachers adopt different approaches and roles when teaching the Shoah.

It is the indicated topicality of the Shoah events that led us to carry out the research investigation, as finding out the preconceptions of pupils - future teachers is a key prerequisite for improving the situation in the field of integrating of the Shoah into various levels of education. Finding out the current situation in the given area and with emphasis on the misconceptions in the given area can lead to a straightening of the approach of Czech teachers, but also of Czech society in the given issue, e.g. in perception of the victim of the Shoah. The victim paradigm that emerged in the mid-20th century sacralized the Holocaust and privileged Jewish victims, separating them from other groups persecuted by the Nazi New European Order (Courcelle, Fijalkow & Victor, 2022) However, this framing of Jews exclusively as victims led to the erasure of the pre- and post-war periods and experiences of other persecuted social groups (Silveira, 2023). At the national level, the Czech primary and secondary education system is governed by the *Framework Educational Programs*, which are currently undergoing a certain restructuring in terms of content, from requirements to master a certain amount of curriculum to the mastery of certain competences. The *Framework Educational Programs* set the boundaries for the school curricula, which schools themselves develop to profile them. We do not encounter the term Shoah in the *Framework Educational Programs*, the term Holocaust is part of the curriculum in the third year of lower-secondary school within the subject curriculum of History (Faltýn et al., 2021, p. 57).

Teaching about the Shoah at the university level is crucial for combating fascism, negating revisionist theories, and fostering a new moral and ethical understanding post-war (da Silva Palmeira & Schurster, 2019). Mašát & Sladová (2019a) state that teaching about the Shoah in Czech universities involves various challenges and considerations. Research in the Vysočina Region highlights the importance of integrating the Shoah theme into literary education at the primary school level. Understanding the historical significance of the Holocaust through images is crucial for constructing a comprehensive history curriculum (von Borries, 2017). When designing courses on Shoah literature and history, educators face complex challenges, including personal connections to the Holocaust and potential perceptions of bias or political motivations (Alaniz, 2018).

One study focuses on the representations of Shoah and Holocaust terms in curriculum documents, comparing the Israeli curriculum with the Czech curriculum. The study highlights the need for strategies regarding historical, social, and geographical aspects in curriculum documents and emphasizes the importance of implementing these issues into the Czech curriculum (Mašát & Sladová, 2019b). Another study examines the effectiveness of a teaching proposal on the Holocaust for high school students. The study finds positive results in using historical documents, internet sources, and group work to promote ethical and critical thinking about the Holocaust (López-García, 2022). Additionally, a comprehensive guide for educators preparing to teach about the Holocaust emphasizes the fundamental issues and approaches in Holocaust education (Kaiser & Salmons, 2016). These studies demonstrate the significance of including the Holocaust in educational documents and the potential impact it can have on students' understanding and awareness of this historical event.

It is precisely in the non-normative anchoring of the defined events that we see room for identifying the preconceptions and misconceptions of future teachers in this area, with an emphasis on their opinion on the (un)need to anchor the concept of the Shoah in normative educational documents, or to extend the concept of the Holocaust to other educational disciplines besides History. The potential of anchoring the term Holocaust in educational documents is a topic of interest in various studies.

## Method

The research part of the present project was carried out by means of a non-standardized questionnaire, which was verified in the framework of a research that focused on finding out the opinions of teachers of Czech Language and Literature professionally working at the lower-secondary schools on the implementation of the Shoah theme into the teaching of Literary Education. Mahsin (2022) states that quantitative research is a systematic approach that involves collecting numerical data to analyze and draw conclusions about a particular phenomenon. It focuses on quantifying variables such as attitudes, behaviors, and opinions through methods like surveys and questionnaires, allowing for mathematical and statistical manipulations to be performed on the data. The findings of quantitative research are typically disseminated through reports that can be understood by both laypersons and experts, aiding in the communication of results to various stakeholders (Mohajan, 2020). This

type of research is crucial in fields like engineering education, where it is used to reach larger sample sizes, ensure quick data collection, and generalize findings to make informed decisions and predictions based on empirical evidence (Frierson-Campbell & Froehlich, 2022). Given the focus of quantitative research and its objectives, we are convinced that the chosen methodological approach is adequate for the main objective of the research investigation. It allows us to obtain a sufficient amount of data on the basis of which it will be possible to describe the current situation and propose possible partial solutions to improve the observed situation.

The statistical processing of the data obtained by this research instrument was used to verify the validity and reliability of the questionnaire. We believe that using the same research instrument for the quantitative research investigation that we plan to carry out in the proposed project ensures that its objective will be met.

## Respondents of the Research

The respondents of the quantitative research were students of the Department of Czech Language and Literature at the Faculty of Education of Palacký University in Olomouc. Students of full-time, combined and extension studies of all study programs implemented at the given department or whose study plans include a course professionally and staffed by the given department were contacted with a request to participate in the research.

A total of 319 students, 300 women and 19 men, participated in the research. A very significant gender discrepancy is because there is a significant representation of female students at the faculties of education in the Czech Republic, because the profession is financially undervalued in the Czech Republic. The age distribution of respondents is shown in Table 1. The age statistics of the respondents are shown in Table 2.

Table 1. The Age Distribution of Respondents

Age of respondents	Frequencies	
	absolute	relative
19 years	16	5.0 %
20 years	52	16.3 %
21 years	45	14.1 %
22 years	37	11.6 %
23 years	49	15.4 %
24 years	27	8.5 %
25 years	18	5.6 %
26 years	8	2.5 %
27 years and more	67	2.0 %
<b>Total</b>	<b>319</b>	<b>100 %</b>

Table 2. The Age Statistics of The Respondents

Characteristics	Values
Average	23.03
Median	23
Modus	27
Standard deviation	2.62

The relatively large dispersion of the age of respondents is mainly due to the possibility of Czech students to study according to their interest, professional focus, or external motivation (e.g. the need to broaden their qualifications based on the employer's request). Dopita & Poláchová Vašátková (2021) state that this is one of the signs of the neoliberal set-up of higher education policy in the Czech Republic.

The university year that respondents were attending at the time of the survey is shown in Table 3. The level of study that the respondents of the presented research were pursuing at the time of the research is shown in Table 4.

Table 3. The University Year That Respondents Were Attending at The Time of The Survey

Answers	Frequencies	
	absolute	relative
1. year	89	27.9 %
2. year	67	21.0 %
3. year	64	20.1 %
4. year	40	12.5 %
5. year	53	16.6 %
6. year and higher	6	1.9 %
<b>Total</b>	<b>319</b>	<b>100 %</b>

Table 4. The Level of Study of The Respondents

Answers	Frequencies	
	absolute	relative
Bachelor's degree program (BA)	151	47.3 %
Master's degree program (MA)	102	32.0 %
Postgraduate Master's degree program (MA)	54	16.9 %
Doctoral study program (Ph.D.)	5	1.6 %
Lifelong learning	5	1.6 %
Other	2	0.6 %
<b>Total</b>	<b>319</b>	<b>100 %</b>

The levels of education were completed by respondents in different forms: full-time, combined or extension (lifelong learning). The distribution of respondents according to this stratification is presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Form of Study Respondents

Answers	Frequencies	
	absolute	relative
Full-time	214	67.1 %
Combined	99	31.0 %
Lifelong learning	4	1.3 %
Other	2	0.6 %
<b>Total</b>	<b>319</b>	<b>100 %</b>

## Results and Discussion

Data collection was carried out via an online questionnaire, which was sent to the respective potential respondents at their university e-mail addresses. This phase of the research was conducted in cooperation with the management of the Department of Czech Language and Literature of Palacký University in Olomouc and its secretariat.

The main research tool was a non-standardized questionnaire, which was verified in the framework of a research that focused on finding out the opinions of teachers of Czech Language and Literature professionally working at the lower-secondary schools on the implementation of the Shoah theme into the teaching of Literary Education.

We present selected results of the questionnaire survey, specifically the question in which we asked a defined group of respondents whether they would welcome the inclusion of the term Shoah in the *Framework Educational Program for Primary Education*. As we have already indicated, this term is not part of this normative curriculum document, which was the main reason why we decided to include this question in the questionnaire. Another factor for including this question in the questionnaire is the fact that the issue of the Shoah and the aspects it connotes are very topical now. Although in the mentioned Czech normative educational document there is the term Holocaust, which is perceived by the majority of the Czech society as a synonym of the term Shoah, we believe that the perception of one line of events of the Second World War from the position of the experience of persons of Jewish nationality may have a different narrative value and may lead to the internalization of the warnings that this line of the Second World War presents to the contemporary society, because the significance of the Shoah for contemporary society lies in its impact on memory, victimhood, and cultural understanding. This statement is not only part of the Czech consciousness, but of the general consciousness. Mills' statement (2023) is that the Holocaust, also known as the Shoah, refers to the systematic genocide of millions of Jews and other targeted groups by the Nazis during World War II. The Nazi regime, led by Adolf Hitler (compare Bartov, 2023 or Haseljić, 2022). The Shoah challenged traditional notions of

genealogy and filiation, leading to the destruction of social structures and the creation of the abject (Perelberg, 2022). It also influenced the formation of the Jewish identity (de Lima & Lopes, 2023). The explicit focus on the issue of the Shoah, i.e. the mass murder of Jews during the Second World War, can, in our opinion, direct the possible misconceptions of future teachers in this area, which we consider to be one of the key aspects of the thematization of the defined phenomenon. A summary of the responses for this question is presented in Table 6.

Table 6. Would you like to see the term Shoah anchored in the Framework Educational Program for Primary Education?

	Frequencies	
	absolute	relative
Welcomed	233	73.0 %
I find it unnecessary	27	8.5 %
I don't care	52	16.3 %
Other	7	2.2 %
<b>Total</b>	<b>319</b>	<b>100 %</b>

As the table shows, almost three-quarters of respondents would welcome the inclusion of the term Shoah in the *Framework Educational Program for Primary Education*. In our opinion, this finding is related to the above-mentioned confusion between the terms Shoah and Holocaust and their semantic perception as synonyms. Less than a fifth of student teachers do not care, which we attribute to the fact that they perceive the issue in a narrowly specific way, not realizing its significance for contemporary global society. In the frame of the item other, one respondent answered: “Probably at the lower-secondary school would welcome it because I know from my own experience that we don't have much time left for this topic” and “partly students should be introduced to it”. We believe that these answers are related to the perception of the Shoah only in terms of mass murder, which is an inappropriate topic for younger pupils than those attending the lower-secondary school. On the other hand, these events must be perceived primarily as a warning of the extent to which stigmatization and persecutory practices can reach, with an emphasis on developing pupils' abilities to recognize these manipulative and other practices in their embryonic stages, which can prevent them from developing. At this level, in our view, it is appropriate to introduce pupils to the Shoah already in pre-primary education (see Achituv, Muller, Alexander & Alexander, 2023).

The above question is to some extent related to the respondents' answers to the question in which cross-cutting topic it is appropriate to implement the Shoah theme. Neudecker et al. (2023) state that cross-cutting topics are issues that are relevant across different levels and perspectives of a system or sector. They are concerns that need to be addressed to achieve success or understand the impact of certain scenarios. The *Czech Framework Educational Program for Primary Education* includes the following cross-cutting themes: Personal and Social Education, Education of a Democratic Citizen, Education for Thinking in European and Global Contexts, Multicultural Education, Environmental Education, and Media Education. All of them are based on the premise



that they represent “current issues of the contemporary world and become an important and integral part of basic education. Cross-cutting themes are an important formative element of basic education, creating opportunities for individual pupils to work individually and collaboratively, and helping to develop pupils’ personality, especially in attitudes and values” (Faltýn et al., 2021, p. 124). Cross-cutting themes need to be integrated by individual schools in their school curricula, but “not all cross-cutting themes need to be represented in every grade. During primary education, it is the school’s duty to offer pupils all the thematic areas of each cross-cutting theme in turn; the scope and implementation of each cross-cutting theme is determined by the curriculum. The cross-cutting themes can be used as an integrative part of the educational content of a subject or in the form of separate subjects, projects, seminars, courses, etc.” (Faltýn et al., 2021, p. 124).

For the relevant question in the questionnaire, all the cross-cutting themes were presented to the respondents to assess whether the area was suitable for the integration of Shoah events. In Table 7 we show the positive (i.e. answer “yes”) responses of the respondents, i.e. how many of them indicated that the cross-cutting theme is suitable for the inclusion of the Shoah phenomenon. Respondents could give any number of answers, i.e., the maximum number of cross-cutting themes presented to them.

Table 7. Is It Appropriate to Integrate the Shoah into This Cross-Cutting Theme?

	Frequencies	
	absolute	relative
Education for Thinking in European and Global Contexts	305	21.9 %
Education of a Democratic Citizen	301	21.6 %
Multicultural Education	297	21.3 %
Personal and Social Education	266	19.1 %
Media Education	152	10.9 %
Environmental Education	73	5.2 %
<b>Total</b>	<b>1394</b>	<b>100 %</b>

As the table shows, the cross-cutting themes Education for Thinking in European and Global Contexts, Education of a Democratic Citizen and Multicultural Education received the most positive responses. These choices are not surprising given their postulation and focus. Democratic Education emphasizes the development of democratic competences and the understanding of power and privilege (Helland, 2023). Multicultural Education, on the other hand, focuses on recognizing and valuing the diversity of ethnic groups while maintaining the unity of national identity (Kim, 2023). Global Citizenship Education, which is closely related to Democratic Education, promotes universal values and virtues in the global society, contributing to the resolution of global problems (Lott, 2023). Democratic Education, being cosmopolitan in nature, implies the inclusion of diverse experiences and worldviews, regardless of nationality or cultural background (Nussbaum, 2023). Therefore, Education of a Democratic Citizen in European, and global contexts encompass elements of



Multicultural Education, Global Citizenship Education, and the recognition of equal moral status for all students (Li, 2023).

Literary representations of the Shoah or Holocaust include various cross-cutting themes such as aesthetics, ethics, memory and the challenges of narrating such a traumatic event. These themes are integral to the cross-cutting themes that respondents assessed in relation to the possible implementation of Shoah themes in them (Oliveira Santana Júnior, 2012). Educational initiatives focus on introducing the Shoah theme into institutional education through artistic narratives and emphasize the role of teachers in facilitating student engagement with this sensitive topic, and in as wide a range of educational disciplines as possible, thus including cross-cutting themes (Mašát, 2019 or Mašát & Šmakalová, 2019).

## Conclusion

In this paper, we present selected results of a quantitative research investigation, the aim of which was to determine the preconceptions and misconceptions of students of teacher education programs in the field of integration of the Shoah into the teaching of various subjects at different levels of education in the Czech Republic.

We have presented the results of two questionnaire items: 1. The opinion of respondents on the (non)implementation of the term Shoah in the *Framework Educational Program for Primary Education* and 2. The opinions of the research participants on the inclusion of the phenomenon of the Shoah in the cross-cutting topics that are part of the normative Czech educational curriculum. The postulation of these questionnaire items was mainly driven by the prevailing misconceptions between the semantic meaning of the concept of the Holocaust and the Shoah and because of the possible application of the Shoah phenomenon to cross-cutting themes that should conceptualize the various topics holistically with an emphasis on the personal, social, and axiological development of the students.

An overwhelming majority of respondents, 233 out of 319, believe that the concept of the Shoah should be made explicit in the *Framework Educational Program for Primary Education*. We consider this finding to be positive, especially considering the current anti-Semitic sentiment in society. Current anti-Semitic sentiment in society is a global phenomenon that is on the rise, affecting various countries and cultures. It takes different forms, including anti-Zionist antisemitism, neo-traditionalism, Holocaust relativization, and anti-Judaism (Arnold, 2022). The reasons for this increase in Jew-hatred are complex and multifaceted, involving factors such as political influences, the internet, and modern media (Lange, Mayerhofer, Porat & Schiffman, 2021). Hate crimes against Jews have increased significantly, making it crucial for social work educators, practitioners, and researchers to act and create a more socially just society for the Jewish community (Tkáčová, 2022). A total of 305 out of 319 prospective teachers believe that Shoah problematic should be integrated into Education for Thinking in European and Global Contexts, a total of 301 out of the tested sample believe that Education of a

Democratic Citizen is an appropriate basis for implementing the defined line of the Second World War, and a total of 297 out of 319 respondents believe that the Shoah phenomenon should be part of Multicultural Education.

We are aware that the undertaken research investigation is limited by its specific focus, or rather by the specific sample of respondents, i.e. students of selected teaching disciplines implemented by the Department of Czech Language and Literature of the Faculty of Education of Palacký University in Olomouc. However, we believe that based on its results it is possible to trace the direction of the opinions of future teachers and Czech society in general towards the issue of the Shoah, its perception, and the awareness of the importance of its constant commemoration. It is important that we learn from history, therefore it is important to introduce its significant milestones to pupils who are completing their primary (compulsory) education and at the same time to make a targeted intervention in the education of Czech teachers in this area.

We consider it important to mention the limitations of the presented research investigation. Probably the most significant of these is the participation of respondents who wanted to take part in the research. It can be inferred from the given that these are students with some relation to the researched issue. Khatri & Karki (2022) state that while quantitative research is valuable, it has limitations that need to be acknowledged. These limitations include the possibility of a smaller sample size and time-consuming methods. Also, conducting a research investigation at one university does not guarantee the possibility of generalizing the results: on the other hand, we see the research undertaken as a probe into the current situation with the possibility of extending such oriented research to other educational institutions. To this, Boeren (2019) adds that quantitative research may not always capture the depth of understanding provided by qualitative methodologies that aim to understand complex realities and contextual meanings.

In any case, it can be concluded that the results of this research have indicated a direction of travel in the field, and based on these results it will be possible to undertake a targeted intervention in the education of future as well as current teachers.

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