



## PERSONAL EMPIRICAL RESEARCH REGARDING DEVELOPMENT OF MORAL ATTITUDE OF ROMANIAN AND FLEMISH TEENAGERS

Valentin Cosmin Blândul

**Abstract:** The adolescence represents one of the most complex and unpredictable period of human life. A teenager could be considered mature from physical, intellectual or moral point of view, but not from emotional one, because he is like a “sponge” able to absorb a lot of information, care and love. On the other hand, moral behaviour could be associated with social competence to establish a good relationship with others, to help them, to cooperate in a team and to have a positive attitude regarding general society. In the following paper, we will try to analyse the moral attitude of 182 Romanian teenagers and 210 Flemish ones regarding to different life’s situations. Our conclusions are that in spite of all intercultural differences, the majority of interviewed teenagers have an honest conduct and a respect form law and moral values.

**Key words:** morality, structure of personality, moral education, positive behaviour, social values

### 1. Theoretical framework

One of the most important purposes of education is represented by forming of moral profile for human being. So, moral education means passing from the social morality to the individual one. This objective could be accomplish by including moral values of society into the children personality structures, developing of their moral profile and transforming those values in concrete behaviour, applied in different specific life situations. Moral education is a very complex process, because the structures of phenomenon and of human behaviour are very complex too [3]. On the other hand, the same author remarks some over reactions regarding to promoting of intellectual education, in spite of the other educational dimensions, which can produce a lack of poise in children personality construction. Moral education could be accomplished by stimulating and developing of moral attitude, and also, by reducing of undesirable behaviour. In the same time, moral education needs knowing by every person of moral values, theoretical explanation of them, development of feeling to accept these values, creating a habit to act according with them, and so on [5, p. 67]. We can conclude that forming of human moral profile has to represents the main task of education, in the contrary, all the other educational components having an insignificant relevance [7].

Moral education is a long and complicate process, which take place across the whole life [1]. We can consider that a person is autonomous from moral point of view in the moment in which he is able to apply his own rules, as an expression of internalization of moral norms promoted at the society level. So, the extern values are assimilated by every person and then, he expresses them in their behaviour, without any coercion from outside [5, p. 66].

The development of moral autonomy is not influence only by the social factors, but also by the age and psycho-individual features of person. In this sense, L. Kohlberg identified 3 levels of moral autonomy development. In *pre-moral level* (between 4 and 10 years old) children respect moral rules because, in that way, they can obtain a reward or avoid a punishment. But it’s very important that those reward / punishment come immediately after children’ action, and their signification have to be correctly and completely understand by them. The *conventional morality* is specific by teenagers, the

respect moral rules because they want to be accepted and integrated in different social groups (to make friends, teenagers must respect some social rules and assimilate those moral values which are promoted by their group). The *level of moral autonomy* – normally accomplish, by a person, after 20-25 years old – means that, after he assimilates those relevant values in his personality, he is able to act independent by any extern coercion [2, p. 23].

The same problem was approached by J. Piaget. So the *level of moral realism* has two stages. In the first one – which takes place until 7-8 years old – the respect between child and adult is from one side to other, which means that child respects the moral rules because he wants to be appreciated by the adult. During the time, this kind of respect becomes mutual, teenagers and adults becoming partners to accomplish moral education. The *level of cooperation* is around 18-25 years old and supposes the accomplishment of moral autonomy, which means that teenagers internalized those values that allowed them to treat others with the same respect which they like to be treated themselves [9, pp. 210-212]. We can observe that development of human being morality is a very long and complex process. Therefore, any wrong step could have extremely negative effects, sometimes for a whole society [4].

## 2. Objectives

Starting with these theoretical conclusions, we intent to make a practical research to observe prosocial attitudes of high-schools pupils regarding some dilemmatic situations, in which the possibilities for answers at different challenges were multiple. Concrete, for this research, we want to identify the way in which teenagers should like to spend their free-time and the persons in whom company they prefer to do this, the impact of moral or material values in their life and the way in which teenagers would like to assume risks for helping other people who are in danger.

## 3. Subjects

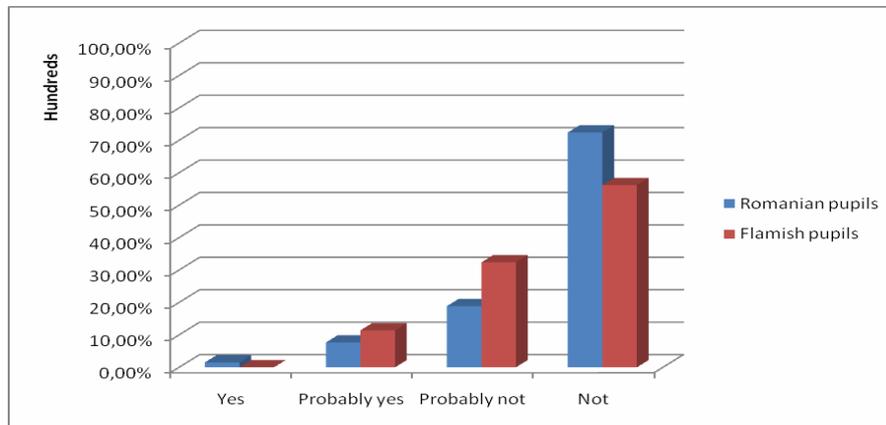
A first aspect which we considered was about choosing subjects group representative for students who frequent superior secondary school from Oradea and Bihor County (Romania), also from Kortrijk and Waregem (Belgium). In all, student's group was formed from 392 subjects and 182 (46,42%) were Romanian students, rest were 210 Belgian students (53,58%). Romanian student's group had 182 students from 6 high schools (two high schools from Oradea city – 25,27% and four of them from Bihor County – 74,73%), subjects were between 15-18 years old, 51,7% mails and 48,3% females and they were selected by randomization sample methods. Belgian sample had 210 students, from three superior secondary schools from Kortrijk and Waregem. Age, sex and sample methods' data were described for Romanian population. In this sense, chronological ages of Belgian students were between 15-18 years old, 47,3% were boys and 52,7% were girls. All of 392 subjects were invited fill in a questionnaire, for translation and some extra information for Belgian students about these, being solicited help of teachers or scholar psychologists from schools of Kortrijk and Waregem.

## 4. Methodology

In this paper, the used method was represented by inquiry based on questionnaire, and its instrument was composed by 27 items with following indicators: spending free time modalities, alcohol/drugs consumption among adolescents and effects of such a behavior, adolescents' participation at chance games, Internet use and its components, prosocial behaviors among adolescents, and adolescents' information sources about risk behaviors. For this present paper, we kept just 3 items which ask student's opinion about some dilemmatic situations: their moral behavior in front of "risky offer", of "burglary temptation" and their attitude about helping person who is in danger. The questionnaire was in Romanian language and after that was translated into Dutch – the official language in Flanders Belgium. Quantitative interpretation of data was made by discussion of each indicator of questionnaire and it was leading to interesting findings.

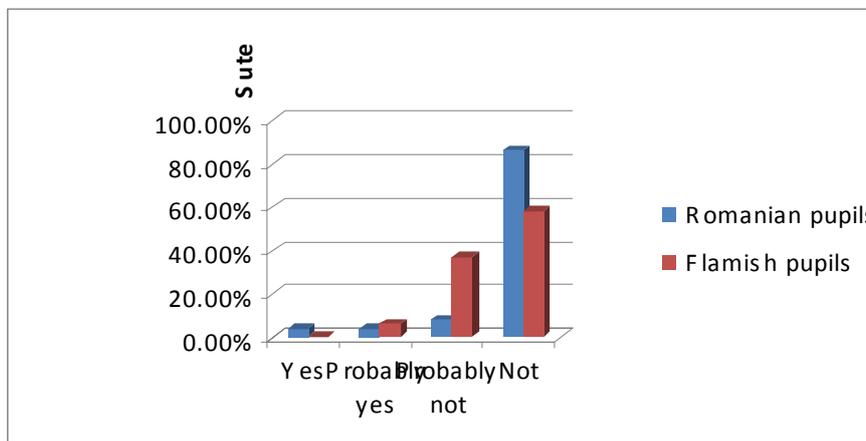
### 5. Results

The quantitative interpretation of questionnaire offer the following results.



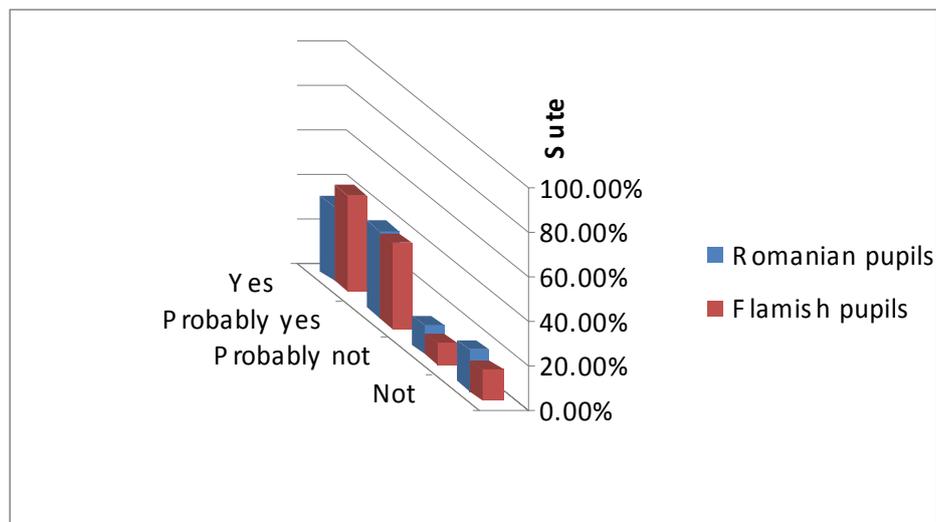
**Picture 1** Moral behaviour of Romanian and Flemish pupils about to a "risky offer"

Regarding strictly to the problem of moral behaviour in dilemmatic situations, first item of our survey ask the pupils' point of view about the possibility to accept – or not – some money from an underworld person, in condition in which those pupils have big financial problems. The results were rather predictable, which means that majority of interviewed pupils refused the underworld person' offer, no matter how much they need money. However, while 72,44% from Romanian pupils gave a strong negative answer, only 56,2% from Flemish pupils have the same categorial attitude. It is very interesting that 32,38% from Flemish pupils probably would like to refuse "the offer" and 11,42% from them would like to accept it. On the other side, very few over 26 percent from Romanian pupils are unsure, 18,87% probably would refuse this "offer" and only 7,65% would accept it (Picture 1).



**Picture 2** Moral behaviour of Romanian and Flemish pupils about a "burglary temptation"

We can remark almost the same distribution of the answers or the following item about the situation in which, to obtain some money, the pupils have to enter by burglary in a private location. 86,02% from interviewed Romanian pupils and 57,62% from Flemish ones definitely refused "his invitation", while 10,44% from Romanian pupils and 42,37% from Flemish ones stile analyse it, their answers oscillating between "probably not" and "probably yes" (Picture 2).



**Picture 3** *The attitude of Romanian and Flemish pupils about the person who is in danger*

Finally, last item selected for our research was about attitude of pupils expressed by their curiosity and help as well, to a person who is in danger. 33,18% from Romanian pupils would like to help this kind of persons, while that 42,5% from Flemish one want to do the same. Very interesting is that 18,47% from Romanian's wouldn't like to help people in danger, while only 9,52% from Flemish pupils have the same attitude (Picture 3).

## 6. Discussion and conclusions

The qualitative interpretation of those obtained data offers an interesting support for discussion. So, at the first two items, Romanian pupils seem to offer more precise answers, comparative with their colleagues from Belgium, they avoiding assume any risks involving in relationships with any underworld persons, or having a delinquent behaviour. We have a few explanations for this fact. First, it is very important to mention that selected population for our research was composed from high-schools pupils, who are at adolescence age. It is well-known that this period is very critical for every person, their tribalism, their wishes to become famous among their colleagues / friends, their intention to have access as soon as possible at adult' life, "the illusion of invulnerability" based on their conviction that they couldn't have any problems, being only a few characteristics of that period from human life. In this context, we are not surprised that a few teenagers are ready to engage themselves in some delinquent or risky behaviour, which could be regretted later [6].

Second, Flemish culture and life style seem to be more permissive and tolerant comparative with Romanian one, which can encourage some young people to assume any risks. In Belgium, the law is not a coercion factor, but it lets people feel rather free to express and act. In that country, are created premises for citizens to respect the norms, with not too much effort from their side. In other words, in Belgium is easier to respect the law, than to break it. However, this mention freedom is reflected in young people conscious as well, some of them being encouraged to assume different forms of risks behaviour.

Finally, the Romanian educational system seems to be more strictly, keeping an accent on teaching different theoretically knowledge, than forming some practical competences. In Romania, at cultural and civic education or at form-master classes, the majority of professors prefer to inform their pupils about signification of moral behaviour, or the way in which they should react at different challenges from daily life. Therefore, the Romanian pupils know how to act in some situations in which strange persons ask them to break the law. By contrary, the learning system from Flanders encouraged their pupils to express their personality and feel free to decide for them how is better to react in different concrete life situations. We can explain in this way why in Belgium some risky behaviour such as alcohol / drugs consumption, unprotected sexual relationships, gambling or Internet dependence are increasing than in Romania.

The other side of coin is that Flemish pupils are more altruists comparative with their colleagues from Romania. That means they are more concerned to help other persons who are in danger. The accent puts on education of formative personality dimension or their opening towards others problems, make Flemish teenagers more sensitive and available to involve in different difficult situations. By contrary, even theoretically, the Romanian pupils are aware about what should they do, however they avoid put in practice what did they learned, oscillating to help or not other persons who are in difficulty [8].

As a conclusion, the learning system and cultural mentality existent at one community level, can play a fundamental role in moral education of young generation. Of course, the development of pupils' moral conscience with all its 3 components – cognitive, affective and volitional one – represents a very important aim which can help them to make the difference between good and bad, justice and injustice. But from development of moral conscience till development of moral behaviour is some distance and putting in practice of learned things represents the essence of moral personality. School has a decisive role in this sense, because the way in which it accomplishes this objective will be influenced the future of whole society.

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## Author

**Valentin Cosmin Blândul**, University of Oradea, Oradea, România, e-mail: [bvali73@yahoo.com](mailto:bvali73@yahoo.com)

