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Slovenian Language Teachers' Attitudes Towards Introducing Comics in Literature Lessons in Primary School

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☞ The present article highlights the views of Slovenian language teachers on the introduction of comics in literature lessons in primary school. We were interested in Slovenian language teachers' views on the introduction of comics as an art-literary type of text as part of the literature curriculum as well as the use of comics as a literary-didactic method in literature classes. This was investigated via a questionnaire, which was fully completed by 121 Slovenian language teachers of the first to the ninth grade. The results show that factors such as gender, educational period taught, professional experience, field of study, highest level of completed education, source of skills related to the introduction of comics in the classroom, teachers' reading habits and attitudes towards reading comics, and agreement with stereotypical claims about comics per se have no influence on teachers' attitudes towards the use of comics in the forms studied. However, their attitudes towards the use of comics in the classroom are influenced by certain stereotypical attitudes of teachers towards comics. The most important limitation of our research was also the most important finding: teachers are neither empowered to introduce and use comics as an art-literary type of text in the literary curriculum, nor are they able to use comics as a literary didactic method in literature classes. There is a great need for teacher training and teachers should be empowered to use and introduce comics in all forms.

Keywords: comics in education, literature lessons, primary school, teacher attitudes

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Stališča učiteljev slovenščine do uvajanja stripa v pouk književnosti v osnovni šoli

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☞ Članek predstavlja stališča učiteljev slovenščine do uvajanja stripa v pouk književnosti v osnovni šoli. Zanimala so nas stališča učiteljev slovenščine do uvajanja stripa kot likovno-literarne vrste besedila v književnovzgojni kurikulum pa tudi do uporabe stripa kot (produktivne) literarnodidaktične metode pri pouku književnosti. To smo raziskali s pomočjo anketnega vprašalnika, ki ga je v celoti izpolnilo 121 učiteljev slovenščine od prvega do devetega razreda. Izsledki kažejo, da dejavniki, kot so: spol, vzgojno-izobraževalno obdobje, v katerem učitelji učijo, delovne izkušnje, smer končanega študija, najvišja stopnja dokončane izobrazbe, lokacija in velikost šole, na kateri poučujejo, vir kompetenc, ki se navezujejo na uvajanje stripa v pouk, bralne navade učiteljev in odnos do branja stripov, sami po sebi nimajo učinka na stališča učiteljev do uporabe stripa v raziskovanih oblikah pri pouku književnosti, vplivajo pa na njihova stališča do uporabe stripa pri pouku določena stereotipna stališča do stripa. Kot pogloblitna omejitev raziskave se je pokazala prav najpomembnejša ugotovitev – učitelji niso opolnomočeni ne za uvajanje in uporabo stripa kot literarno-likovne vrste v književnovzgojni kurikulum in ne za uporabo stripa kot (produktivne) literarnodidaktične metode pri pouku književnosti. Kaže se velika potreba po izobraževanju učiteljev, v okviru katerih bi se učitelje opolnomočilo za uporabo in uvajanje stripa v vseh oblikah v pouk slovenščine oz. maternega jezika.

Ključne besede: osnovna šola, pouk književnosti, stališča učiteljev, strip v izobraževanju

Introduction

Attitudes are socially acquired by adopting social knowledge, experiences and norms. We acquire attitudes throughout our lives from parents, peers and the social environment (Olson & Kendrick, 2008); we have no biological predispositions to them. By learning attitudes from others, individuals become similar to members of their group (Albarracín et al., 2018). Attitudes and beliefs also guide teachers and influence their work (Darling-Hammond, 2000) in terms of their practices (Cash et al., 2021; Süer & Oral, 2021), behaviour (Glock et al., 2018; Mellom et al., 2018), improvement of the learning process (Xu, 2012) and the learning environment (Russo et al., 2021), motivation (Kulikowski et al., 2022), language (Smajla, 2021), knowledge (Rosli et al., 2020) and skills (Lefler, 2019). Some research (e.g., Ballantine & Spade, 2006; OECD, 2009) even concludes that understanding the role of the teacher is key to understanding the education system, as teachers' views are important for the educational environment and for understanding and improving the learning process.

Comics are almost synonymous with stereotypes and attitudes. Even today, comics are still making their way into libraries and classrooms. Doubts exist especially about the criteria for selecting quality comics and the possibilities of using them in the classroom, but all too often there are still stereotypical and negative attitudes towards the use of comics in literature classes, as expressed in our previous research (Kerneža, 2016). The origin of comic stereotypes in the educational environment is presented by Groensteen (2009). The first comics were intended for adults, and were published in America in the nineteenth century. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the same comics found their way to Europe, where they were published mainly in children's and youth press. Since teachers were the first to comment on comics and the idea of comics, their views (which were anything but positive due to their being the wrong audience) prevailed over other opinions. Comics were condemned as harmful to children, supposedly spoiling an already limited audience. As a result, they are still often criticised for their lack of narrative ambition, considered entertainment and/or trivial literature and lumped into popular genres (e.g., adventure, fantasy, historical, etc. stories), even though they are essentially an original medium.

In the context of research, we are mainly interested in the use of comics in literature classes. Teachers most often use comics in literature classes as an art-literary type of text or as a literary-didactic method. We typically think of comics as literary works, but their most recognisable feature distinguishing them from other types of reading texts is the need to assemble meaning from both the text and the illustrations, which Batič and Haramija (2014) define as multimodality

in the case of a picture book. Like the picture book (Batič & Lebar Kac, 2020), the comic book has at least two codes of communication: literary and artistic. It is an interweaving of text, illustrations and the content-formal relationship between them (Haramija & Batič, 2015). A study conducted among 443 preschool and classroom teachers (Batič, 2021) showed that teachers consider picture books to be suitable and appropriate for preschool and school children. Moreover, the participants did not have difficulties selecting an appropriate picture book (like picture books, comics are also a multimodal text). However, research on comics as a literary-didactic method for reducing gender differences in reading literacy at the primary level of education has shown that there are prejudices and negative attitudes among Slovenian language teachers towards the use of comics in the classroom (Kerneža, 2016). As stated above, both picture books and comics represent a similar concept of text, that is, multimodal text.

Today, more and more research demonstrates the positive effect of comics (e.g., mathematics: Azamain et al., 2020; science: Phoon et al., 2020; art: Osterer, 2012; foreign language learning: Zhang, 2019; reading comprehension: Liu, 2004; attitudes towards reading: Kerneža & Košir, 2016; transaction between literary texts: Oppolzer, 2020). Therefore, there should no longer be doubts about the effectiveness of comics as part of the curriculum.

Since students directly observe their teacher's views daily (Greene, 2006), teachers often pass on attitudes that are either positive or negative through instruction, by addressing or not addressing certain topics in the classroom (Gal et al., 1997; Lawal, 2020; Rensaa, 2019; Ugur-Erdogmus, 2021) and in the learning environment (OECD, 2009). Teachers' attitudes are frequently highly resistant to more complex changes, but they often depend on the personal characteristics of the teacher (ibid). When people talk about teachers being 'hard to move', it is usually referring to their views. However, some research shows that teachers' attitudes and practices can easily be changed if the programmes we use to influence their views are implemented with sufficient quality (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Hu, 2022). Of course, we need to know what teachers think and what they know about the issues we want to present to them. With the goal of helping teachers create more powerful learning environments, Schoenfeld (2020) even suggests that we influence their perceptions, inclinations and orientations in the field of their knowledge.

The present study

Since we did not find any research on the described topics, we designed a study based on the theoretical foundations and empirical findings. The aim of the present study was to investigate the attitudes of Slovenian language teachers

in primary schools towards the introduction of comics as an art-literary type of text and the use of comics as a literary-didactic method in literature classes. We sought to investigate Slovenian language teachers' attitudes towards the most common ways of using comics in literature classes. The research questions we developed were divided into two groups for better transparency:

- 1 What are the attitudes of Slovenian language teachers towards the introduction of comics as an art-literary type of text in the literary curriculum?
 - 1.1 Which factors influence Slovenian language teachers' attitudes towards the introduction of comics as an art-literary type of text in the literary curriculum?
 - 1.2 Which stereotypical attitudes do Slovenian language teachers have towards the introduction of comics as an art-literary type of text in the literary curriculum?
- 2 What are the attitudes of Slovenian language teachers towards the use of comics as a literary-didactic method in literature classes?
 - 2.1 Which factors influence Slovenian language teachers' attitudes towards the use of comics as a literary-didactic method in literature classes?
 - 2.2 Which stereotypical attitudes do Slovenian language teachers have towards the use of comics as a literary-didactic method in literature classes?

As a general hypothesis, we concluded that the attitude of Slovenian language teachers to the introduction of comics as an art-literary type of text in the literary curriculum and to the use of comics as a literary-didactic method in literature classes depends on gender, the educational period in which the teachers teach, professional experience, field of study, the highest level of education completed, the source of skills related to the introduction of comics in the classroom, teachers' reading habits, their attitudes towards reading comics, and the level of their stereotypical thoughts about comics. The use of comics in the classroom is also affected by teachers' stereotypical attitudes towards comics, as shown in a study that examined comics as a literary-didactic method as well as their use for reducing gender differences in reading literacy at the primary level of education (Kerneža & Košir, 2016). Wilson (2020), Sahara (2020), and Cheung and O'Sullivan (2017) state that there not only stereotypical attitudes towards comics, but also towards reading comics. Blank (2017), Jogie (2015), Hall (2011), and Armour and Ilda (2014) suggest that problems with the acceptance of comics may stem from a lack of appreciation of pop culture, with teachers fearing that such texts are frivolous, lack educational meaning (Lim, 2012)

and are generally inappropriate (Clarke, 2013). In the existing literature, we find a great deal about stereotypes in comics (Chavez, 2021; Cruz, 2018; Dittmar, 2020) and breaking down stereotypes using comics (Loizou & Symienidou, 2019; Ostrow Seidler, 2015), but not about stereotypes about comics themselves. This also relates to teachers' stereotypical attitudes towards comics.

Method

Participants

A total of 139 teachers who were currently teaching the Slovenian language in a primary school from the first to the ninth grade (both class and subject teachers) participated in the research. Of them, 121 identified as female (87.1%) and 4 identified as male (2.9%), while 14 respondents chose not to answer the gender question (10.1%). Due to the small number of male teachers, the gender variable was excluded from further consideration.

At the lower level of primary education, the sample of teachers is evenly distributed (1st grade – 18.7%, 2nd grade – 17.3%, 3rd grade – 15.8%, 4th grade – 13.7%, 5th grade – 12.2%). This is also the case regarding the upper level of primary education (6th grade – 33.1%, 7th grade – 33.1%, 8th grade – 37.4%, 9th grade – 38.8%). One respondent did not answer the question (0.7%).

Most of the teachers had 10–20 years (30.9%) of experience, while slightly fewer had taught for up to 10 years (23.0%), 20–30 years (22.3%) and over 30 years (21.6%). Three respondents did not answer the question (2.2%).

Most of the participating teachers had graduated from primary education programmes (54.7%), followed by Slavic studies/Slovenian studies or Slovenian language/literature (41.0%), while a few of the teachers had graduated from other fields (3.6%).

The highest level of education achieved, reported by more than half of the respondents (56.8%), is specialisation according to a higher professional programme, university programme (VII.) or master's degree (2nd Bologna level), followed by a higher education programme (until 1994) or a post-secondary professional programme (VI/1.) (21.6%) and specialisation according to a higher education programme or higher professional programme (VI/2.) or a higher professional and university programme (1st Bologna level) (17.3%). Four of the participants (2.9%) had completed a specialisation according to a university programme or master's degree (VIII/1.), while two of the participants (1.4%) are Doctors of Science (VIII/2. or 3rd Bologna level).

The reading habits of the teachers were more favourable in the pre-adult period, and comics are less likely to be read by teachers in adulthood (Table 1).

Table 1

Number (f) and structural percentage (f%) of teachers according to their reading habits and their attitude towards reading comics

| Period | Until adulthood | | Today | | Comics until adulthood | | Comics today | |
|----------------|-----------------|-------|-------|-------|------------------------|-------|--------------|-------|
| | f | f% | f | f% | f | f% | f | f% |
| Never | 0 | .0 | 3 | 2.2 | 15 | 10.8 | 54 | 38.8 |
| Very rare | 6 | 4.3 | 13 | 9.4 | 32 | 23.0 | 43 | 30.9 |
| Rarely | 10 | 7.2 | 24 | 17.3 | 43 | 30.9 | 34 | 24.5 |
| Often | 55 | 39.6 | 64 | 46.0 | 33 | 23.7 | 6 | 4.3 |
| Very often | 68 | 48.9 | 35 | 25.2 | 15 | 10.8 | 1 | .7 |
| Did not answer | 0 | .0 | 0 | .0 | 1 | .7 | 1 | .7 |
| Sum | 139 | 100.0 | 139 | 100.0 | 139 | 100.0 | 139 | 100.0 |

Note. Until adulthood – frequency of reading until adulthood. Today – frequency of reading today. Comics until adulthood – frequency of reading comics until adulthood. Comics today – frequency of reading comics today.

Most of the teachers (45.7%) believe that they did not acquire competencies related to the introduction of comics in the classroom at the faculty. This is followed by those who believe that competencies related to the introduction of comics in the classroom were acquired during teaching itself (38.4%). Some 8.7% of the respondents acquired their knowledge at the faculty and 2.2% acquired it while working in study groups. One teacher (0.7%) gained her knowledge from her partner, one (0.7%) through online training, and one respondent did not give information about the origin of their knowledge (0.7%).

We were also interested in the attitude of Slovenian language teachers towards comics according to their reading habits in the period until adulthood and today. Overall, the reading habits of teachers have not changed, but there has been a reversal in those who enjoyed reading comics very much, or still enjoy reading them, as well as in those who did not read comics or do not like to read them today. The data are shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Number (f) and structural percentage (f%) of teachers' attitudes towards reading comics

| Period | Until adulthood | | Today | |
|---------------------------------|-----------------|-------|-------|-------|
| | f | f% | f | f% |
| Attitude towards reading comics | | | | |
| Really like | 29 | 20.9 | 10 | 7.2 |
| Like | 51 | 36.7 | 57 | 41.0 |
| Don't/Didn't like | 14 | 10.1 | 28 | 20.1 |
| Don't/Didn't like at all | 15 | 10.8 | 10 | 7.2 |
| Unformed | 28 | 20.1 | 33 | 23.7 |
| Didn't have access to comics | 2 | 1.4 | - | - |
| Did not answer | 0 | .0 | 1 | .7 |
| Sum | 139 | 100.0 | 139 | 100.0 |

Note. Really like – I really like/liked to read comics. Like – I like/liked to read comics. Don't/Didn't like – I don't/didn't like to read comics. Don't/Didn't like at all – I don't/didn't like to read comics at all. Unformed – I don't/didn't have a formed attitude towards comics.

Most of the research that focuses on teachers' reading habits and attitudes towards reading is related to pre-service teachers. Research findings show that pre-service teachers are aware of the importance of reading and enjoy reading, but often do not find enough time to read (Uzum & Alincak, 2021), and that their reading habits are predicted by their attitudes towards reading (Aisiyah & Hakim, 2020). Sahin and Bayrak (2021) state that teachers' reading habits are influenced by many factors, such as gender, teaching experience, the institution from which they graduated, level of education and level of job satisfaction. However, we did not find any studies comparing teachers' reading habits until adulthood and today, nor did we find any studies comparing teachers' reading habits to teachers attitudes towards reading comics.

The teachers in the present study also expressed agreement with stereotypical claims related to comics. Although they do not show explicit stereotypical attitudes towards comics, we can nevertheless see that there are differences even between the teachers who disagree with stereotypical claims (Table 3).

Table 3

Number (f) and structural percentage (f%) of teachers' agreement with stated stereotypical claims

| Agreement | 1 | | 2 | | 3 | | 4 | | 5 | | 6 | | Sum | |
|-----------|----|------|----|------|----|------|----|------|----|------|---|----|-----|-------|
| | f | f% | f | f% | f | f% | f | f% | f | f% | f | f% | f | f% |
| S1 | 72 | 51.8 | 48 | 34.5 | 18 | 12.9 | 1 | .7 | 0 | .0 | 0 | .0 | 139 | 100.0 |
| S2 | 72 | 51.8 | 48 | 34.5 | 18 | 12.9 | 1 | .7 | 0 | .0 | 0 | .0 | 139 | 100.0 |
| S3 | 1 | .7 | 1 | .7 | 15 | 10.8 | 75 | 54.0 | 47 | 33.8 | 0 | .0 | 139 | 100.0 |
| S4 | 0 | .0 | 4 | 2.9 | 35 | 25.2 | 66 | 47.5 | 34 | 24.5 | 0 | .0 | 139 | 100.0 |
| S5 | 71 | 51.1 | 56 | 40.3 | 10 | 7.2 | 1 | .7 | 0 | .0 | 1 | .7 | 139 | 100.0 |
| S6 | 94 | 67.6 | 41 | 29.5 | 3 | 2.2 | 1 | .7 | 0 | .0 | 0 | .0 | 139 | 100.0 |
| S7 | 40 | 28.8 | 46 | 33.1 | 33 | 23.7 | 18 | 12.9 | 2 | 1.4 | 0 | .0 | 139 | 100.0 |
| S8 | 60 | 43.2 | 57 | 41.0 | 21 | 15.1 | 1 | .7 | 0 | .0 | 0 | .0 | 139 | 100.0 |
| S9 | 60 | 43.2 | 51 | 36.7 | 25 | 18.0 | 3 | 2.2 | 0 | .0 | 0 | .0 | 139 | 100.0 |
| S10 | 92 | 66.2 | 42 | 30.2 | 4 | 2.9 | 1 | .7 | 0 | .0 | 0 | .0 | 139 | 100.0 |
| S11 | 78 | 56.1 | 55 | 39.6 | 5 | 3.6 | 1 | .7 | 0 | .0 | 0 | .0 | 139 | 100.0 |

Note. S1 – Comics are less worthy or worthless literature. S2 – Comics represent low culture. S3 – Comic art is diverse and rich. S4 – Comics are first-class graphic texts. S5 – Comics are for kids only. S6 – Comics are just for nerds. S7 – All comics include superheroes. S8 – Comics promote racial stereotypes. S9 – Comics promote gender stereotypes. S10 – Young people should not read comics. S11 – Comics do not belong in the school environment. 1 – I do not agree at all. 2 – I do not agree. 3 – I neither agree nor disagree. 4 – I agree. 5 – I very much agree. 6 – No answer.

The Slovenian language teachers' attitudes towards the introduction of comics as an art-literary type of text in the literacy curriculum are categorised in Table 4. According to the responses, the teachers' attitudes were categorised as positive or negative. Most of the teachers did not justify their opinions, but those who did justified their views with the objectives of the curriculum. One fifth of the teachers did not answer the question. The responses of the teachers who wrote a response reflected a lower level of knowledge in this area.

Table 4

Number (f) and structural percentage (f%) of expressed views of teachers about their attitudes towards the introduction of comics as an art-literary type of text in the literary curriculum

| Teachers' views | f | f% |
|--|-----|-------|
| Positive attitude related to the goals of the literary curriculum. | 30 | 21.6 |
| Positive attitude related to the goals of the language part of the curriculum. | 5 | 3.6 |
| Positive attitude related to the beliefs of the teacher. | 2 | 1.4 |
| Positive attitude under certain conditions. | 7 | 5.0 |
| Positive attitude. | 56 | 40.3 |
| Neutral position. | 6 | 4.3 |
| No answer. | 33 | 23.8 |
| Sum | 139 | 100.0 |

The same applies to the teachers' attitudes towards the use of comics as a didactic method in literature classes (Table 5). Most of the teachers expressed positive opinions about the use of comics. In most cases, the teachers did not state reasons for their position, and if they did they expressed their reasons vaguely. About a third of the teachers did not answer the question. When we examined the responses more closely, we again concluded that the teachers were unaware of the field of comics.

Table 5

Number (f) and structural percentage (f%) of expressed views of teachers about their attitudes towards the use of comics as a literary-didactic method in literature classes

| Teachers' views | f | f% |
|---|-----|-------|
| Positive attitude. | 64 | 46.0 |
| Positive attitude related to the goals of the literary curriculum. | 2 | 1.4 |
| Positive attitude related to the goals of the language part of the curriculum. | 2 | 1.4 |
| Positive attitude emanating from students. | 5 | 3.6 |
| Positive attitude resulting from the multimodal/cultural characteristics of comics. | 1 | .7 |
| Positive attitude under certain conditions. | 2 | 1.4 |
| Neutral position. | 5 | 3.6 |
| Negative attitude (time consuming). | 4 | 2.9 |
| I don't know the method, I don't use it. | 5 | 3.6 |
| No answer. | 49 | 35.3 |
| Sum | 139 | 100.0 |

The frequency of responses showing the teachers' attitudes towards the introduction of comics as an art-literary type of text in the literary curriculum and towards the use of comics as a literary-didactic method in literature classes is consistent with previous research (Kerneža, 2020), which indicates that the teachers have positive attitudes towards the use of comics in the classroom, but do not know how to justify their attitudes. This may indicate insufficient competencies for teaching with comics or using a comic book.

Instruments

In order to test the research questions and hypotheses, a descriptive and causal-non-experimental method of quantitative empirical educational research was used. We approached answering the research questions comprehensively by using a questionnaire, which gave us a large and representative sample of teachers. In accordance with the objectives of the quantitative approach, we chose the direct technique, a four-part questionnaire.

In the first part of the survey, the teachers provided general information about themselves, which we used as independent variables: gender, educational period taught, professional experience, field of study, highest level of education completed, source of skills related to the introduction of comics in the classroom, reading habits, attitudes towards reading comics and agreement with stereotypical claims about comics

In the second part of the questionnaire, the teachers assessed the extent to which they agree (1 – I do not agree at all. 2 – I do not agree. 3 – I neither agree nor disagree. 4 – I agree. 5 – I very much agree. 6 – No answer.) with the stated stereotypical statements about comics, which were arranged in a random order: *comics are less worthy or worthless literature*, *comics represent low culture*, *comic art is diverse and rich*, *comics are first-class graphic text*, *comics are for kids only*, *comics are just for nerds*, *all comics include superheroes*, *comics promote racial stereotypes*, *comics promote gender stereotypes*, *young people should not read comics*, and *comics do not belong in the school environment*. Attitudes are most commonly measured with Likert scale questionnaires (Taherdoost, 2019).

In the third part, the teachers answered two open-ended questions. They were asked about their views on the introduction of comics as an art-literary type of text in the literary curriculum and about their attitudes towards the use of comics as a literary-didactic method in literature classes.

The questionnaire was checked by relevant experts and tested on a sample of ten Slovenian language teachers. The validity, reliability and objectivity of the questionnaire were ensured. The reliability of the rating scales was checked using the Cronbach's alpha (α) coefficient. It was found that the scales

are reliable ($\alpha = .603$ for the teachers' reading habits rating scale; $\alpha = .603$ for the teachers' stereotypical attitudes rating scale).

Research design

A web link to the questionnaire was sent to all Slovenian public and private primary schools, together with a request for participation, while a link to the survey was also posted on social networks.

The data from the questionnaires were statistically processed according to the objectives and predictions of the survey using the statistical software package SPSS for Windows. Descriptive statistics (frequencies and structural percentage) were used, as well as the chi-squared test.

Results

Introduction of comics as an art-literary type of text in the literary curriculum

We were interested in factors that influence Slovenian language teachers' attitudes towards the introduction of comics as an art-literary type of text in the literary curriculum, and which stereotypical attitudes of Slovenian language teachers influence their decision. The results presented in Table 6 show no statistically significant differences in this context.

Table 6

The results of the chi-squared test of differences in terms of Slovenian language teachers' attitudes towards the introduction of comics as an art-literary type of text according to the factors studied

| Factor | χ^2 | P |
|---|----------|------|
| Educational period | 25.815 | .104 |
| Professional experience | 13.844 | .739 |
| Field of study | 8.221 | .768 |
| Highest level of education completed | 23.287 | .503 |
| Source of skills related to the introduction of comics in the classroom | 33.925 | .568 |
| Reading habits until adulthood | 24.421 | .142 |
| Reading habits today | 22.921 | .524 |
| Frequency of reading comics until adulthood | 21.412 | .614 |
| Frequency of reading comics in adulthood | 31.560 | .138 |
| Attitude towards reading comics until adulthood | 20.045 | .915 |
| Attitude towards reading comics in adulthood | 17.804 | .812 |

When investigating the influence of the stereotypical attitudes of Slovenian language teachers in relation to the introduction of comics as an art-literary type of text, only the correlation with the stereotype that *comics represent low culture* was statistically significant (Table 7).

Table 7

The results of the chi-squared test of differences in terms of Slovenian language teachers' attitudes towards the introduction of comics as an art-literary type of text in the literary curriculum

| Stereotypical attitudes | χ^2 | P |
|---|----------|------|
| Comics are less worthy or worthless literature. | 22.767 | .200 |
| Comics represent low culture. | 30.769 | .031 |
| Comic art is diverse and rich. | 15.117 | .917 |
| Comics are first-class graphic texts. | 9.746 | .940 |
| Comics are for kids only. | 11.368 | .878 |
| Comics are just for nerds. | 12.494 | .821 |
| All comics include superheroes. | 19.822 | .707 |
| Comics promote racial stereotypes. | 16.485 | .559 |
| Comics promote gender stereotypes. | 16.042 | .590 |
| Young people should not read comics. | 16.300 | .572 |
| Comics do not belong in the school environment. | 12.946 | .795 |

A more detailed analysis, presented in Table 8, shows that the teachers who disagree with the claim that comics represent low culture are mostly positive about the introduction of comics as part of the literature curriculum, and that slightly less than one third of the teachers express positive opinions in relation to the goals of the literature curriculum. Most of the teachers who disagree with the statement give a positive opinion, while a positive opinion is associated with a positive attitude related to the goals of the literature curriculum.

Table 8

Number (f) and structural percentage (f%) of teachers according to their attitude towards the introduction of comics as an art-literary type of text in the literary curriculum by agreement with the statement that comics represent low culture

| Agreement | 1 | | 2 | | 3 | | 4 | | 5 | | Sum | |
|-----------|----|------|----|------|----|------|---|----|---|----|-----|-------|
| | f | f% | f | f% | f | f% | f | f% | f | f% | f | f% |
| S1 | 19 | 13.8 | 8 | 6.0 | 3 | 2.2 | 0 | .0 | 0 | .0 | 30 | 21.7 |
| S2 | 2 | 1.5 | 2 | 1.5 | 1 | .7 | 0 | .0 | 0 | .0 | 5 | 3.6 |
| S3 | 2 | 1.5 | 0 | .0 | 0 | .0 | 0 | .0 | 0 | .0 | 2 | 1.5 |
| S4 | 4 | 2.9 | 2 | 1.5 | 1 | .7 | 0 | .0 | 0 | .0 | 7 | 5.1 |
| S5 | 30 | 21.7 | 19 | 13.8 | 7 | 5.1 | 0 | .0 | 0 | .0 | 56 | 40.6 |
| S6 | 3 | 2.2 | 1 | .7 | 1 | .7 | 0 | .0 | 0 | .0 | 6 | 4.3 |
| S7 | 11 | 8.0 | 16 | 11.6 | 5 | 3.6 | 1 | .7 | 0 | .0 | 32 | 23.2 |
| Sum | 71 | 51.4 | 48 | 34.8 | 18 | 13.0 | 1 | .7 | 0 | .0 | 138 | 100.0 |

Note. 1 - I do not agree at all. 2 - I do not agree. 3 - I neither agree nor disagree. 4 - I agree. 5 - I very much agree. S1 - Positive attitude related to the goals of the literary curriculum. S2 - Positive attitude related to the goals of the language part of the curriculum. S3 - Positive attitude related to the beliefs of the teacher. S4 - Positive attitude under certain conditions. S5 - Positive attitude. S6 - Neutral position. S7 - No answer.

The results obtained should be considered from the perspective of the research of Alexio et al. (2020), who noted three different teacher views on comics in education: comics are considered a medium of children's entertainment and are not related to educational practice; if comics are used in education, they should be used primarily with students who need additional support; comics represent a 'missed opportunity in education' and have not reached their full potential due to the lack of comic resources for use in the classroom. The idea that comics represent low culture, an assertion that had statistically significant results, shows that culture covers a wide range (the term culture includes all products of an individual, group or society of intelligent beings) and can also include negative attitudes towards comics, as presented in the aforementioned study (Alexio et al., 2020), showing the relatedness between culture and attitudes, and confirming that teachers evaluate comics through the culture of society.

The use of comics as a literary-didactic method in literature classes

We were also interested in factors that influence Slovenian language teachers' attitudes towards the use of comics as a literary-didactic method in literature classes and which stereotypical attitudes of Slovenian teachers influence their literature teaching.

As in the analysis of the influence of the research factors on the attitude of Slovenian language teachers towards the introduction of comics as an art-literary type of text as part of the literature curriculum, there is no statistical effect of the studied factors on the attitudes of teachers to the use of comics as a literary didactic method in literature classes (Table 9).

Table 9

The results of the chi-squared test difference in terms of Slovenian language teachers' attitudes towards the introduction of comics as a literary-didactic method in literature classes according to the factors studied

| Factor | χ^2 | P |
|---|----------|------|
| Educational period | 28.798 | .371 |
| Professional experience | 38.237 | .074 |
| Field of study | 14.439 | .700 |
| Highest level of education completed | 27.139 | .856 |
| Source of skills related to the introduction of comics in the classroom | 59.486 | .283 |
| Reading habits until adulthood | 20.062 | .828 |
| Reading habits today | 20.794 | .980 |
| Frequency of reading comics until adulthood | 43.995 | .169 |
| Frequency of reading comics in adulthood | 28.411 | .812 |
| Attitude towards reading comics until adulthood | 29.084 | .968 |
| Attitude towards reading comics in adulthood | 28.474 | .810 |

In the stereotypical attitudes of Slovenian language teachers towards the use of comics as a literary-didactic method in literature classes, there are statistically significant differences in agreement with the assertions that comics are diverse and rich, that young people should not read comics, and that comics do not belong in school (Table 10).

Table 10

The results of the chi-squared test of Slovenian language teachers' stereotypical attitudes towards the use of comics as a literary-didactic method in literature classes

| Stereotypical attitudes | χ^2 | P |
|---|----------|------|
| Comics are less worthy or worthless literature. | 27.696 | .427 |
| Comics represent low culture. | 36.065 | .114 |
| Comic art is diverse and rich. | 107.402 | .000 |
| Comics are first-class graphic texts. | 38.181 | .075 |
| Comics are for kids only. | 17.287 | .924 |
| Comics are just for nerds. | 32.514 | .214 |
| All comics include superheroes. | 41.125 | .256 |
| Comics promote racial stereotypes. | 35.665 | .123 |
| Comics promote gender stereotypes. | 35.768 | .120 |
| Young people should not read comics. | 58.622 | .000 |
| Comics do not belong in the school environment. | 50.174 | .004 |

The results presented in Table 11 show that most teachers who consider that *comic art is diverse and rich* have a positive attitude towards comics. Other responses are scattered among the views expressed.

Table 11

Number (f) and structural percentage (f%) of teachers according to their attitude towards the introduction of comics as a literary-didactic method in literature classes by agreement to the statement that comic art is diverse and rich

| Agreement | 1 | | 2 | | 3 | | 4 | | 5 | | Sum | |
|-----------|---|----|---|----|----|------|----|------|----|------|-----|-------|
| | f | f% | f | f% | f | f% | f | f% | f | f% | f | f% |
| S1 | 0 | .0 | 0 | .0 | 7 | 5.0 | 33 | 23.7 | 24 | 17.3 | 64 | 46.0 |
| S2 | 0 | .0 | 0 | .0 | 0 | .0 | 0 | .0 | 2 | 1.4 | 2 | 1.4 |
| S3 | 0 | .0 | 0 | .0 | 0 | .0 | 0 | .0 | 2 | 1.4 | 2 | 1.4 |
| S4 | 0 | .0 | 0 | .0 | 1 | .7 | 4 | 2.9 | 0 | .0 | 5 | 4.6 |
| S5 | 0 | .0 | 0 | .0 | 0 | .0 | 1 | .7 | 0 | .0 | 1 | .7 |
| S6 | 1 | .7 | 0 | .0 | 0 | .0 | 1 | .7 | 0 | .0 | 2 | 1.4 |
| S7 | 0 | .0 | 0 | .0 | 0 | .0 | 3 | 2.2 | 2 | 1.4 | 5 | 4.6 |
| S8 | 0 | .0 | 0 | .0 | 3 | .2 | 1 | .7 | 0 | .0 | 4 | 2.9 |
| S9 | 0 | .0 | 0 | .0 | 0 | .0 | 1 | .7 | 4 | 2.9 | 5 | 4.6 |
| S10 | 0 | .0 | 1 | .7 | 4 | .9 | 31 | 22.3 | 13 | 10.1 | 49 | 32.4 |
| Sum | 1 | .7 | 0 | .0 | 15 | 10.8 | 75 | 54.0 | 47 | 34.5 | 139 | 100.0 |

Note. 1 – I do not agree at all. 2 – I do not agree. 3 – I neither agree nor disagree. 4 – I agree. 5 – I very much agree. S1 – Positive attitude. S2 – Positive attitude related to the goals of the literary curriculum. S3 – Positive attitude related to the goals of the language part of the curriculum. S4 – Positive attitude emanating from students. S5 – Positive attitude resulting from the multimodal/cultural

characteristics of comics. S6 – Positive attitude under certain conditions. S7 – Neutral position. S8 – Negative attitude (time consuming). S9 – I don't know the method; I don't use it. S10 – No answer.

Most of the teachers interviewed disagree with the statement that *young people should not read comics*. Moreover, most of those who disagree with this statement also expressed a positive attitude towards the use of comics as a literary-didactic method in the classroom, and half as many teachers did not answer the question (Table 12).

Table 12

Number (f) and structural percentage (f%) of teachers according to their attitude towards the introduction of comics as a literary-didactic method in literature classes by agreement to the statement that young people should not read comics

| Agreement | 1 | | 2 | | 3 | | 4 | | 5 | | Sum | |
|-----------|----|------|----|------|---|-----|---|----|---|----|-----|-------|
| | f | f% | f | f% | f | f% | f | f% | f | f% | f | f% |
| S1 | 49 | 32.4 | 14 | 10.1 | 1 | .7 | 0 | .0 | 0 | .0 | 64 | 46.0 |
| S2 | 2 | 1.4 | 0 | .0 | 0 | .0 | 0 | .0 | 0 | .0 | 2 | 1.4 |
| S3 | 2 | 1.4 | 0 | .0 | 0 | .0 | 0 | .0 | 0 | .0 | 2 | 1.4 |
| S4 | 3 | 2.2 | 2 | 1.4 | 0 | .0 | 0 | .0 | 0 | .0 | 5 | 4.6 |
| S5 | 0 | .0 | 1 | .7 | 0 | .0 | 0 | .0 | 0 | .0 | 1 | 0.7 |
| S6 | 1 | .7 | 1 | .7 | 0 | .0 | 0 | .0 | 0 | .0 | 2 | 1.4 |
| S7 | 4 | 2.9 | 0 | .0 | 1 | .7 | 0 | .0 | 0 | .0 | 5 | 4.6 |
| S8 | 1 | 0.7 | 1 | .7 | 2 | 1.4 | 0 | .0 | 0 | .0 | 4 | 2.9 |
| S9 | 5 | 4.6 | 0 | .0 | 0 | .0 | 0 | .0 | 0 | .0 | 5 | 4.6 |
| S10 | 25 | 18.0 | 23 | 16.5 | 0 | .0 | 1 | .7 | 0 | .0 | 49 | 32.4 |
| Sum | 92 | 64.3 | 42 | 30.1 | 4 | 2.9 | 1 | .7 | 0 | .0 | 139 | 100.0 |

Note. 1 – I do not agree at all. 2 – I do not agree. 3 – I neither agree nor disagree. 4 – I agree. 5 – I very much agree. S1 – Positive attitude. S2 – Positive attitude related to the goals of the literary curriculum. S3 – Positive attitude related to the goals of the language part of the curriculum. S4 – Positive attitude emanating from students. S5 – Positive attitude resulting from the multimodal/cultural characteristics of comics. S6 – Positive attitude under certain conditions. S7 – Neutral position. S8 – Negative attitude (time consuming). S9 – I don't know the method; I don't use it. S10 – No answer.

Most of the teachers who disagreed with the statement that *comics do not belong in the school environment* also expressed a positive attitude towards the use of comics as a literary-didactic method in the classroom (Table 13).

Table 13

Number (f) and structural percentage (f%) of teachers according to their attitude towards the introduction of comics as a literary-didactic method in literature classes by agreement to the statement that comics do not belong in the school environment

| Agreement | 1 | | 2 | | 3 | | 4 | | 5 | | Sum | |
|-----------|----|------|----|------|---|-----|---|----|---|----|-----|-------|
| | f | f% | f | f% | f | f% | f | f% | f | f% | f | f% |
| S1 | 45 | 32.4 | 18 | 13.0 | 1 | .7 | 0 | .0 | 0 | .0 | 64 | 46.0 |
| S2 | 2 | 1.4 | 0 | .0 | 0 | .0 | 0 | .0 | 0 | .0 | 2 | 1.4 |
| S3 | 2 | 1.4 | 0 | .0 | 0 | .0 | 0 | .0 | 0 | .0 | 2 | 1.4 |
| S4 | 3 | 2.2 | 2 | 1.4 | 0 | .0 | 0 | .0 | 0 | .0 | 5 | 4.6 |
| S5 | 0 | .0 | 1 | .7 | 0 | .0 | 0 | .0 | 0 | .0 | 1 | .7 |
| S6 | 1 | .7 | 1 | .7 | 0 | .0 | 0 | .0 | 0 | .0 | 2 | 1.4 |
| S7 | 1 | .7 | 3 | 2.2 | 1 | .7 | 0 | .0 | 0 | .0 | 5 | 4.6 |
| S8 | 1 | .7 | 1 | .7 | 2 | .4 | 0 | .0 | 0 | .0 | 4 | 2.9 |
| S9 | 4 | 2.9 | 1 | .7 | 0 | .0 | 0 | .0 | 0 | .0 | 5 | 4.6 |
| S10 | 19 | 13.7 | 28 | 20.1 | 1 | .7 | 1 | .7 | 0 | .0 | 49 | 32.4 |
| Sum | 78 | 56.1 | 55 | 39.5 | 5 | 4.6 | 1 | .7 | 0 | .0 | 139 | 100.0 |

Note. 1 – I do not agree at all. 2 – I do not agree. 3 – I neither agree nor disagree. 4 – I agree. 5 – I very much agree. S1 – Positive attitude. S2 – Positive attitude related to the goals of the literary curriculum. S3 – Positive attitude related to the goals of the language part of the curriculum. S4 – Positive attitude emanating from students. S5 – Positive attitude resulting from the multimodal/cultural characteristics of comics. S6 – Positive attitude under certain conditions. S7 – Neutral position. S8 – Negative attitude (time consuming). S9 – I don't know the method; I don't use it. S10 – No answer.

Comics are widely used as a didactic method to achieve the curriculum goals in the classroom and are generally accepted as a didactic method that can be used in the classroom in a variety of subjects and domains (e.g., Chu & Toh, 2020; Matuk et al., 2019; Sagri et al., 2019). This is consistent with the findings of our study showing that teachers who expressed positive attitudes towards the use of comics as a literary-didactic method in the classroom disagreed with the statement that comics do not belong in the school environment.

Discussion

The study shows that the factors of gender, educational period taught, professional experience, field of study, highest level of education completed, source of skills related to the introduction of comics in the classroom, teachers' reading habits and their attitudes towards reading comics, and agreement with stereotypical claims about comics have no influence on Slovenian language teachers' attitudes towards the use of comics in literature classes, either in the form of an art-literary type of text or in the form of a literary-didactic method.

Statistically significant differences appeared only when teachers' stereotypical attitudes towards comics were introduced as a variable. The analysis shows a statistically significant difference between teachers who agreed with the introduction of comics as an art-literary type of text in the case of the claim that *comics represent low culture*. The attitudes towards claims about comics that influence attitudes towards the use of comics as a literary-didactic method are: *comic art is diverse and rich, young people should not read comics* and *comics do not belong in the school environment*. Many of the questions either remained unanswered or the teachers did not provide an answer corresponding to the question asked. It was found that teachers do not understand the difference between the two researched uses of comics, nor can they confidently place the researched uses of comics in the curriculum. Since comics are part of the Slovenian language curriculum (Poznanovič Jezeršek et al., 2018), there is an urgent need to train teachers in the field of using comics in Slovenian language teaching, where we can apply the method mentioned by Schoenfeld (2020), that is, by influencing teachers' perceptions, inclinations and orientations in the field of using comics in Slovenian language teaching. How can this be achieved? Since both picture books and comics are multimodal texts (Batič & Haramija, 2014), picture books and teachers' knowledge about picture books would be an important tool to influence teachers' attitudes towards comics.

We can now answer the research questions. Slovenian language teachers' attitudes towards the introduction of comics as an art-literary type of text in the literary curriculum are predominantly positive. They are most often associated with the aims of the literary curriculum and are influenced by teachers' stereotypical attitudes towards the claim that *comics represent low culture*. Fewer teachers supported the use of comics as a literary-didactic method in the classroom; the answers were more scattered and more teachers expressed a negative opinion, stating that they do not know the method and therefore do not use it. This is also reflected in the teachers' responses, as most of them simply stated that they have a positive attitude towards the use of comics as a literary-didactic method, without giving any further reasons for their decision. The results show that the attitude of Slovenian language teachers towards the use of comics as a literary-didactic method is influenced by their attitude towards claims that *comic art is diverse and rich, young people should not read comics* and *comics do not belong in the school environment*. The results also confirm the assumption that stereotypical attitudes towards comics still exist among teachers (Kerneža, 2016).

The results presented partially confirm the hypothesis. The most important finding of the study is that teachers' concerns about the use of comics in the classroom are mainly due to insufficient knowledge about the researched ways

of including comics in the literature classroom. Block (2013) also notes that the majority of teachers use graphic novels at most once a year, even though they believe this text format is useful and motivates students. Most teachers have not received training on the use of graphic novels and indicate that they would probably use them more often if they had more knowledge about them. The specified data contrasts with the research of Batič (2021) on the use of picture books, which shows that teachers have no problems selecting suitable picture books for use in the classroom. This highlights the need for quality educational programmes. In order to reach the widest possible range of teachers, it would be appropriate to familiarise pre-service teachers with quality (didactic) comic contents. Since a comic consists of a picture and a text, this training should cover both concepts: the artistic one that students should learn in art classes, and the literary one that students should learn in literature classes. For in-service teachers (and pre-service teachers) we see great value in sharing best practices, whereby teachers who have a good, positive and unencumbered attitude towards comics would most likely share their experience and knowledge of using comics in Slovenian language classes. Research shows the influence of enthusiasm on student performance (Mahler et al., 2018), which could be the most important element to influence teachers' perception, inclination and orientation (Schoenfeld, 2020) towards comics. The findings are consistent with the previously discussed findings of Abdulrauf et al. (2016) that teachers' subject knowledge and skills are closely related to their views and the transmission of their views to their students (Zhang et al., 2018). Teachers' confidence is stronger when we talk about comics as an art-literary type of text. Comics as a literary-didactic method are not sufficiently known among teachers to be able to confidently report their use in literature classes and teachers are hesitant to use them due to their lack of knowledge.

Conclusion

The present study attempts to address gaps in the research on teachers' attitudes towards the use of comics in Slovenian language classes. It extends the limited research on understanding teachers' attitudes towards the introduction of comics and literature instruction in primary school. It is also one of the first studies to address specific stereotypical attitudes towards comics, and it has even greater relevance to the field of the use of comics in literature instruction, as – to the best of authors' knowledge and based on a search of peer-review databases – no previous research has examined teachers' attitudes towards the use of comics in native language instruction. This is especially important since

it was found that teachers do not have enough knowledge about the two forms of comic use in the classroom: they do not distinguish between comics as an art-literary type of text and comics as a didactic method. The teachers' responses are therefore questionable at some points of the research, as they may not have interpreted the above uses of comics correctly. The results reflect the great need for teacher training to enable teachers to use and introduce comics in all forms in literature classes. Two target groups are proposed in identifying the need for additional teacher training. The first is future teachers of Slovenian language, who, through well-designed didactic units, can learn that comics can also be texts of literary and artistic quality. Another way to promote teachers' positive opinions about the use of comics in Slovenian language teaching is to share the best practices of teachers who already use comics in their teaching. These teachers could, through their good example and enthusiasm, adequately motivate other teachers to use comics as an art-literary type of text as part of the literature curriculum and as a literary-didactic method in literature classes.

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