

**SHORT THESIS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR
OF PHILOSOPHY (PhD)**

**Regional aspects of minority public education.
The role of family and school environment upon the
development of individual and community identity: the
case of Hungarian pupils from Romania**

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1. Aims of the research

The research that constitutes the core of this doctoral thesis attempts to provide answers to the following question: in the era of incessant cultural and social changes, what could be the objectives and the role of minority school education? For the past few decades, mentalities regarding school have changed, due to industrialization, the growth of job opportunities in the domain of services, the prolonguement of compulsory education, and the rapid spread of information. The reform in the Romanian school system enhanced the shift from the traditional, informative and text-based teaching to more modern, formative and competence-based approaches, and this is still an ongoing process. Our research has analysed the changes occurring in the Romanian education system, highlighting the outcomes and results in one of the segments of this system, namely the schools of the Hungarian minority from Romania.

The most important aim of this thesis is to identify the factors that facilitate the development and performance of minority children learning in their mothertongue. One of our objectives has been to shed light on those personal and system-related factors which may contribute to the improvement of competence-based, facilitative education in mothertongue.

The focal point of our research refers to the following questions: which are the learning conditions of Hungarian pupils attending Hungarian classes in the Romanian education system? What factors determine them to enroll the mothertongue-based education, and who helps them in the learning process? One of the peculiarities of our approach is that we analyse the ways in which the region subjects come from, the learning conditions and learning in mothertongue, and their self-reflective thinking condition each other. The novelty of this research is that we have tried to study the relationship between social phenomena and individual subjects, laying equal emphasis both on the social aspects and on individual, personal aspects. In the case of minority groups, the social aspects and the individual aspects must be analysed simultaneously, as these smaller communities are not as neatly differentiated as larger social groups, and this approach permits a deeper and more accurate understanding of their peculiarities and relations.

2. Research methods

Our thesis presents an empirical research conducted in two phases. The first phase is integrated within the study of essay writing skills, carried out between 2005–2006 on a representative cohort of Hungarian pupils from Romania, enrolled in mothertongue-based classes. The sample's representativity is proven by the fact that the schools included in this research present the same variance in point of school type, school environment and region, as the schools' variance on a national level. The regions are taken into account on the basis of the ratio of Hungarian speakers living there. Thus, we have spoken of three main types of regions: diaspora region (*szórvány*), buffer region (*átmeneti régió*) and block region (*tömb*). The selection of schools followed the principles of cascade sampling, 103 schools and the essays of 1602 pupils were selected to be included in the research. The cohort was representative in point of region, type of location, grade and gender: it included 847 5th graders and 755 8th graders. The essays given in these classes were descriptive essays (*describing someone*) and we applied the method of content analysis. The characteristics of the subjects' social and cultural background were measured with the help of backup questionnaires. The second phase of the study (2014-2015) brought about the application of an extended backup questionnaire, in which we included questions related to the socio-cultural conditions of learning. We carried out the control measurement of person descriptions. The prelevation of samples targeted the consideration of regional sizing, 20 schools and 520 pupils were selected to be included in the research. As the 8th grade is the last year of primary school education, during which pupils have to take an entrance examination to secondary school, I interrogated 8th grader Hungarian pupils. When fashioning the sample cohort, I took into account the differences between different types of regions in point of the number of Hungarian residents.

My research displays an important amount of interdisciplinarity, as the set of concepts, theoretical explanations and research methods that I have applied comes from three disciplines. The sociological perspective has helped me circumscribe the profile of Hungarian people living as an ethnic minority in Transylvania, and I have also studied the networks of relations that exist between identity, family background and school attendance. The pedagogical perspective has contributed to the description of the minority educational system in Romania, but for its economic and political aspects. The psychological perspective has

facilitated a child-centred approach; I have used psycho-pedagogical theories and methods to analyse the individual features and characteristics of pupils, as subjects of the educational process.

In my research I have applied qualitative and quantitative methods as well. Among quantitative methods I mention: statistical analysis, questionnaires targeting learning conditions and school performance. The data have been collected with this specially designed questionnaire, and I have analysed them with quantitative methods. The qualitative part of the research methodology involves the method of written self-characterization, with which I have studied issues like pupils' relationship with family, their interests, recognition of their own skills, and pupils' scale of values. The pedagogical and psychological analysis of the pupils' written works has been carried out with the method of content analysis. This research on self-images with the help of self-characterization and not with personality traits questionnaires is the first such empirical study of this type in the Hungarian schools from Transylvania. My aim has been to let the pupils think and create freely, as this method has gathered an amount of important information, the collection of which would have been impossible with the help of personality traits questionnaire.

3. Research outcomes

The starting point of the research has been the ambivalencies within the Hungarian sector of the public education system from Romania, both in point of organization and operation. The theoretical background of the thesis has been provided by the literature on the topic of Romanian public education system and its minority education component. I have designed a tripartite model comprising three major topics, in order to identify and circumscribe the systemic and personal factors involved. This model focuses on the presentation of issues related to education, ethnic minority and ethnic identity, against the background of the very special status of Hungarian pupils from Romania.

In the topics related to the Hungarian sector of the public education system from Romania – structure and organization, learning environment and learning conditions – I have relied on the writings of Kozma, Fóris–Ferenczi and Péntek, Murvai, and Márton. The very special situation of Hungarian teacher training has been presented in accordance with the works of Péntek, Pletl, Csata, and Stark, whereas the specificities of learning in mothertongue, the evolution of school

enrollment and the learning environment have been presented on the basis of Murvai's, Pletl's, Veres', Gereben's, and Gergely's researches.

The presentation of the issues regarding ethnic minorities springs from the books of Veress, Kiss, Murvai, and Gereben-Tomka, who have debated upon demographic particularities of the Hungarian minority from Romania, its regional specificities and socio-cultural peculiarities. Within the components of the socio-cultural environment, special emphasis has been laid upon data regarding family structure, family type, childbearing, matrimonial willingness and divorce rate (relying on the 2011 Census apud Veres).

National and individual identity issues have been presented based on the works of Pataki, Csepeli, Erikson, and Kozma. The features of the Hungarian identity from Transylvania and the influence of mothertongue usage upon identity formation are approached through the lenses of Gereben, Pletl, Gergely, and Veress. The researches carried out by Nagy, Koncz, Vajda, Marsh-Shavelson, Markus-Nurius, and Rogers have highlighted essential aspects of the network of connections and conditions which exist and operate between the shaping of one's schoolchild identity and the formation and development of one's self. The effects of family background on school performance and collective and individual identity have been analysed with the help of Pataki's, Pusztai's, Vajda's and Kósa's, Ranschburg's, and Engler's studies.

The theoretical model I have designed and the meta-analytical presentation of scientific writings have converged into the working hypotheses along which my empirical research has developed. The hypotheses and the presentation of the research results follow the guidelines and clues represented by the role of systemic, environmental and individual factors.

One of my hypotheses has stated that the highly centralized public education system displays significant differences between the learning conditions of Hungarian pupils coming from different regions. Another supposition has been linked to the existence of potential differences between learning conditions in urban and rural area, i.e. we have assumed that pupils from villages have less favourable learning conditions than pupils from urban areas.

Once the research finished, it turned out that despite the integrated and organic nature of public education system in Romania, pupils belonging to ethnic minorities had different learning conditions. What does this mean? Their learning conditions involve a more laborious attitude, as they have more subject matters to study and more exams to pass, therefore they spend more time at school (fact proven by

the school documents and by the pupils' responses). They are often forced to shift schools in order to be able to learn in their mothertongue, pupils living in diaspora regions have to travel to school larger amounts of time. Teacher migration is frequent, and although they have school books, these often do not follow the curriculum. One of the most important results we have got is that, despite these aspects, there are no significant differences between the academic success of pupils from different regions. The demographic factors affecting school performance (gender, parents' educational attainment, type of settlement, accessibility to school) all concord with the results of previous researches. I have concluded that boys are less effective learners and they spend less time on learning outside school. The academic success of pupils is influenced by where the pupil lives during school year: commuting children and pupils living in boarding schools learn less well than those who live at home. The latter category does not spend time and energy on travelling. Thus, the years spent in one's birthplace are more favourable to academic achievements. The difference between social and economic conditions in urban and rural areas is echoed in the learning conditions, since pupils learning in villages display poorer academic achievement and teacher fluctuation is more frequent. In this respect, our hypothesis regarding the factors that influence learning conditions has been validated.

We have searched the answers to the following questions: what motivates pupils to learn in their mothertongue, despite the disadvantageous learning conditions and which are the factors that enhance their development and achievement and support the process of identity formation? Our hypothesis was that among these factors we would find: the common linguistic and cultural background, family support, the subjects' inner resources such as national identity, positive personality traits, such as satisfaction, ability to rejoice. We also assumed that these would compensate the negative effects of the system induced flaws of learning conditions (more classes to attend, more time spent on reaching school, etc).

One of the most important outcomes of this research is that the subjects we have included in the study acknowledge the importance of learning in their mothertongue, almost 90% of them intend to continue their studies in Hungarian, almost all of them define themselves as being Hungarian and consider that Hungarian is their mothertongue. We have found some significant differences regarding national identity and use of mothertongue among the different regions. There is a significant difference between the diaspora and the other two regions with regard to the usage of mothertongue within the nuclear family, and

the difference is even more relevant with regard to linguistic habits when communicating with relatives, friends, neighbours. Our data have shown that in the diaspora mothertongue is solely used within the family and at school, whereas communication with others implicates the language of the majority. In the block region Hungarian is spoken in all circles: family, school, friends and neighbours. The buffer region has proven to be a transition zone indeed, as pupils model their linguistic habits according to the requirements of the communicational situation (they alternatively speak Hungarian and Romanian, depending on who they are talking to: family members, relatives or neighbours). The diaspora has shown the biggest rate of Hungarian pupils who intend to continue their studies in Romanian, and this is due to the scarce opportunities for further education and to the overwhelming effect of speaking Romanian in all the environments outside the family. Despite these differences concerning the linguistic environment, we have not found significant differences among regions with regard to type of family, assessment of the financial situation, facilitation of learning and scale of values. In all three regions of the sample, pupils live in relatively similarly structured families, and the single-parent run family model is less common.

We have demonstrated that the most important factors influencing further education are pupils' own interests and their own abilities, and the parents' proposals and recommendations come third on the list. The supportive role of families has also proven important, as pupils involve their mothers especially in the process of learning, solving problems and making decisions regarding school. Fathers and siblings play an important role as well, but fathers spend less time with their offspring.

Another essential aspect is that the scale of values embraced by pupils converge towards the more traditional, family-centred and humanistic system of values, as the top virtues pupils have specified are a secure family environment and true friends. In the same time, the current social environment, that emphasizes money-driven, global economy focused values, can also be spotted. Pupils have rejected gratuitous exercise of power over others, and they have also displayed an attraction for a varied and eventful lifestyle and a special longing for freedom (which is typical for adolescents).

Another outcome of the research has not validated my hypothesis, as a surprisingly large rate of pupils (almost 45%) intend to emigrate in the future (less than 15% would like to move to Hungary, whereas 30 % would like to go to other European countries), which means that not even half of them picture their future in Transylvania.

With regard to this aspect, we have found significant differences between regions, as more than half of the pupils from the diaspora region would like to live abroad, while in the other two regions this proportion is only around 40%. This intention to emigrate may be linked to the type of settlement, as pupils coming from urban areas or mixed language schools intend to leave in a higher proportion than pupils from rural areas or monolingual schools. It is rather contradictory that pupils cherish their national identity, their mother tongue, their family members and cultural background (nationality, family), still, quite a lot of them intend to live elsewhere. However, our data suggest that this could be an effect of the mainstream migratory tendency of the Romanian population, as according to the 2011 census, the Romanian society is characterised by these long-term migratory intentions. Emigration is a complex social phenomenon affecting the active working population between 20 and 40 years, but the pupils' answers suggest that a more detailed examination of this phenomenon is required.

An important result of the research is that the majority of pupils are happy and satisfied, despite the difficult learning conditions. The pupils' self-satisfaction may be associated with their academic performance and the dominance of nuclear family types, as the pupils with poor results or coming from monoparental families are less satisfied with themselves. Our research results also support the view that cultures- in our case the Hungarian culture- may provide pupils with the necessary amount of value supplies. The values of one's own culture are essential in the process of social and personal integration. The age-related differences in the descriptive essays show that the implementation of values within the deeper layers of pupils' personalities is an ongoing process in adolescence, and this helps the development of identity and provides subjects with the amount of consistency and security that will be essential in their later, adult life.

Our third hypothesis was that individual components (such as skills, emotions, satisfaction, interests, and personality traits) would not differ according to regions, as the pupils who have the same ethnic identity also have a self-reflective thinking which reflects the same characteristics of their native culture.

One of the most important outcomes in this respect is the fact that culture plays a key role in the development of self-reflective thinking, as pupils living in different regions have shown similar structures of self-characterization and self-image. This similarity can be noticed both on the level of physical description and on the level of character description. In the self-characterizations of pupils living in

different regions, the frequency of physical self-image components is similar, which means that the pupils' self-portrait structures are similar. We have also spotted structural similarities in the features related to the inner abilities, interests, emotions and personality attributes in the self-characterizations of pupils living in different regions.

We have discovered some important weaknesses and shortcomings such as lack of knowledge of their own skills. Pupils tend to think about their own abilities in terms of *smart* and *stupid*, as they have described themselves as clever, i.e. having quick-absorbing abilities or not clever. They rarely refer to their own communication skills or musical abilities. The results of the control measurements have confirmed the phenomena outlined in the first section, i.e. there is a need for self-awareness activities regarding the recognition of skills. Despite the fact that, by the time of the second phase of the research (2014-2015), the pupils have been involved in reformed education for more than ten years, being taught according to the new curriculum requirements, focusing on the development of competences, the data do not reflect significant changes in pupils' thinking. I have compared the skills and abilities occurring in self-characterizations with the highest rated own abilities and interests career factors. I have found a sharp contradiction, as pupils consider their own abilities to be very important, and still, do not recognize them. I have demonstrated a correlation between the description of skills and interests, and academic success, as students with above-average school performance refer to their skills, and interests in higher rates than the average and below-average performers.

The data obtained from self-characterizations have shown that a significant number of these children often refers to positive emotions, such as happiness, joy and the bulk of students seem satisfied with themselves. Regional differences of displaying emotions require further investigations, meant to clarify why in the block region a higher proportion of students are dissatisfied with themselves, why in the buffer region pupils mention their emotions more often, and what can account for these differences overall.

Through the identification of personality traits I have demonstrated that teenage students follow a traditional system of values, reinforced by the Hungarian national culture. The most frequently mentioned personality traits are: *kind-hearted, nice, funny, hard-working, sensitive, quiet, honest*. I have found no difference regarding these traits when comparing the regions and settlement types. Amongst the most important results I mention the fact that I could not identify any major change in the value system during these 10 years, as

the frequency of certain features and traits has changed, but the feature-structure has not changed. During the second phase of the research, features like *ambitious*, *aspiring*, *persistent* have come to the fore, showing that pupils have started to integrate the self-assertive values of modern society into their own inner world.

Yet, the stability and consistency of the system of values is proven by the fact that self-centred and self-motivated behaviours do not exceed the more traditional, family-centred and humanistic attitudes, and these enhance the pupils' development. I have shown, that that personality traits reflect the same language – ethnic consciousness. Under the influence of literary works and everyday experiences which transmit a common set of values, pupils living in different regions but belonging to the same ethnic culture express a similar set of values through their self-characterizations. This is reflected both in the distribution of positive and that of negative personality traits as well.

My research has confirmed the hypothesis according to which the pupil can be an interesting subject of study not only in relation with his school performance. Researchers can disclose valuable and quality information when considering the pupil – a developing human personality – within the framework of his narrower or wider environment (family and school). The data regarding the position of the minority, Hungarian-speaking pupils may contribute to the development of minority education programs and to designing effective career guidance activities. They constitute, in the same time, a kind of feedback for teachers, families with regard to their attitudes towards education in mothertongue. The research findings outlined in the thesis may contribute to increase the efficiency of the education process, to implement better teacher training programs, adding, in the same time, new dimensions to educational researches in general and minority educational researches in particular.

List of relevant publications

2015

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A PhD értekezés alapjául szolgáló közlemények

Magyar nyelvű könyvrészlet(ek) (4)

- 1. Horváth Z.I.:** A tanárképzős diákok tanárképe.
In: Anyanyelvoktatás: A magyar tannyelvű szakközépiskolai oktatás helyzete. Szerk.: Pletl Rita, Ábel Kiadó, Kolozsvár, 89-96, 2015. ISBN: 9789731142104
- 2. Horváth Z.I.:** Írásos önjellemzések vizsgálata tartalomelemzéssel.
In: Anyanyelvoktatás : Irányok és törésvonalak. Szerk.: Pletl Rita, Ábel Kiadó, Kolozsvár, 51-61, 2014. ISBN: 9789731141909
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Magyar nyelvű tudományos közlemény(ek) hazai folyóiratban (1)

- 5. Horváth Z.I.:** A serdülők énképösszetevőinek vizsgálata kisebbségi és többségi helyzetben élő diákok körében.
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Idegen nyelvű tudományos közlemény(ek) hazai folyóiratban (1)

6. **Horváth, Z.I.:** The comparative study of minority and majority adolescents' self-image based on their own self-characterizations.
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7. **Horváth, Z.I.:** Study of adolescents' multifactorial self-image components based on their own self-characterizations.
Romanian J. Appl. Psychol. 14 (2), 53-61, 2012. EISSN: 1454-8062.

Magyar nyelvű konferencia közlemény(ek) (3)

8. **Horváth Z.I.:** Értudat, érfogalom pedagógiai nézőpontból.
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9. **Horváth Z.I.:** Erdélyi magyar serdülők onjellemezésének vizsgálata.
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