

Egyetemi doktori (PhD) értekezés tézisei

**Ora et labora?**

***Effectiveness of church-run secondary school  
students after post-2010 sector expansion***

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## **The aim of the dissertation, the topic delimitation**

The maintenance of the education system is a duty of governments. In an ideologically pluralistic society it is also their obligation to provide families with opportunity to choose an educational institution for their children which can ensure the transmission and practise of their culture. Therefore in most countries parallel to the public education system private schools with or without public foundation operate. The private sector includes among others church-run schools.

The legitimacy of church-run schools is justified on the one hand by the freedom of education and on the other by the freedom of religion. Views are divided on the joint application of the two rights. There are two options; either religious education is given a greater role in public schools or it is necessary to maintain independent church-run schools. Although there are church-run schools almost in every European country, the historical roots and continuity of their operation show significant differences. In Western Europe it has traditionally been free to operate church-run educational institutions; in Hungary the historical continuity was interrupted in the second half of the twentieth century and only

ten church-run high schools could operate, while in Northern Europe the church-run sector has strengthened in the recent decades.

Church-run schools compared to other maintainers have different religious, philosophical and pedagogical characteristics, nevertheless, the private sector shows a lot of variations in the European context as well. In general it can be stated that due to the different historical traditions between countries significant diversity can be detected in their function and their effectiveness.

Results of previous studies show that the composition and effectiveness of the private sector – including the church-run sector as well – depends on how the public sector operates as the church-run sector is an alternative to the public sector for school users. Consequently in countries with higher levels of education in the public sector and there is a greater selection, the private sector preferably turns towards more disadvantaged, less motivated or lower ability students. Conversely, it is exactly the opposite, where there is a lower level of education in the public sector, the parents of the students with better background and better qualifications are more likely to be

attracted by the private sector where schools are primarily involved in training these students. Hungarian researchers have highlighted that in the Hungarian education system both phenomena can be observed in the private sector including the church-run sector. In the capital city talent management is more emphasized, but rural areas focus on the compensation for students' disadvantages. Overall it can be stated that the emergence and engagement of church-run schools is highly locality-dependent.

The question of effectiveness of church-run schools arises from time to time in our country as well. This question is particularly important at a time when in three academic years the number of church-run vocational education students has increased by two and a half times and the students of church-run vocational high schools has become more than three times higher. Church-run schools were significantly transformed in a quarter of a century following the regime change. The number of church-run schools, and the number of teachers and students in such schools started to increase. It was a strong shock wave when LXII. Law in 2010 gave local governments the opportunity to pass the maintenance of schools in the hands of the churches.

As a result, the question arises as to whether these changes influenced the effectiveness of the church-run sector. It can be an important issue to analyze whether the maintainer-change focused on higher-performing schools or as demonstrated by our previous results with maintainers, they are more open to the less favoured areas and towards vocational training.

Both church schools, and in general the effectiveness of schools and students are frequently discussed topics in the literature, or even a combination of the two issues has wide literature. Continuous monitoring of these is an important stage in getting to know the education system, especially in times of changes such as the recent wave of expansion of the church-run sector. The other important reason for looking at this sector over and over again is that the approaches to effectiveness and its examination also change from time to time. However, the question of effectiveness of church-run schools is not only important for science and researchers, but for decision-makers, maintainers of institutions, the wider environment for schools, school principals, teachers, parents and students as well.

In this dissertation, we undertake to survey the effectiveness of vocational secondary school and grammar school students

studying in the various maintenance sectors of the Hungarian education system, paying particular attention to the church-run sector, separating the institutions already church-run and the ones which became church-run only after 2010.

## **Research methods**

For our research we used the students and institutional database of the Hungarian National Assessment of Basic Competencies 2014. Merging institutional and site data was based on the OM identification code. When merging with the student database a special ID was created which included the OM ID and the number of site and training type was also taking into account. SPSS 19.0. program was used to merge and analyse databases.

For the analysis we only used the data of grammar school and vocational high school students which were declared valid by the Office of Education. The Hungarian National ABC 2014 took place on 28th May 2014. During the investigation in addition to the competency measurement tests, data were collected from students, institutions and sites using three different background questionnaires. In 2014 in the 10th grade 90188 students of 1683 sites of 963 institutions of 352 maintainers participated in the competency measurement.

In our dissertation, we used the data of the Hungarian National ABC 2014. At site level the site and institutional interconnected databases were used, while at the student level the merged data of students, sites and institutions. Data analysis was performed only with vocational secondary and grammar school data, but the various types (4, 6, 8 grades) of grammar schools were treated as one.

The dissertation used dual a approach to church-run schools by taking into account whether they were included in the Hungarian National ABC Database 2010 or not. We have distinguished one group of church-run schools which started to operate before 2010 and another group which started to operate after 2010. The first group is named formerly church-run sector, the second one is named newly church-run sector. Newly church-run institutions include institutions which have been transferred or newly founded. It was necessary because it is not clear on the website of the Education Office whether one institution is transferred from the public sector or was newly founded by the church-run sector.

One of the central concepts of our research is mapping student effectiveness of the Hungarian educational system by sectors.

After the conceptualization of the student effectiveness we tried to take advantage of the opportunities of the Hungarian National ABC database for be able to map this. The dependent variables of the studies were Mathematics and Reading competency scores, prominent extracurricular activity, higher education aspiration, Mathematics and Reading competency scores controlled by the cultural capital of the family.

During the analysis we attempted to apply one type of value added measurement. After controlling the impact of the cultural capital of the family the students' effectiveness was examined on Mathematics and Reading competency results per maintainer sectors. In each of the analysis, only those cases were used which have data in the database. The missing data were not replaced by the average of students with similar attributes. The main reason for this concept was that reliability was considered a major factor. Our research basically combines exploratory, descriptive and explanatory research.

The question of school effectiveness goes beyond the level of students' achievement, as there are contextual impacts in schools that are also influencing their attitudes towards learning. However, SPSS is not fully suitable for context-level



testing. Therefore in this dissertation site data were involved in the investigation of school composition.

Four types of maintainers were distinguished: state-run, formerly church-run, newly church-run and other private maintaining. Dimensions of variables focus on school enrolment opportunities of sites, students' family structure and status, site composition, parent-school relationships, and school environment.

During the investigations cross-tables, variance analysis, cluster analysis, linear and logistic regression analysis were used. During the examination of our statistical hypotheses, we also tested the significance level as well.

## **Research findings**

The main purpose of the dissertation was to map out how well the ideal-type character of the church-run school was able to survive as a result of the expansion. To map this it was necessary to examine the characteristics of the newly church-run sector compared to the formerly one. It is an important aspect to know what kind of background students come from

and how effective these students are compared to the formerly church-run sector.

The novelty of the investigation is that such details have not yet been explored to reveal the effects of post-2010 church expansion waves and no one has undertaken to illustrate the church-run sector in such a depth and to present effectiveness such a versatile way. In our dissertation we broke with the one-sided approach of effectiveness. We also studied the controlled results of competency measurement and we observed two forms of non-academic effectiveness as well.

During the analysis it was important to separate grammar and vocational secondary school education, thus avoiding traps of comparing types of schools with different functions and our results clearly demonstrated its usefulness. Another remarkable result of the dissertation is that school environments was created taking into account school size and the type of the settlement of the schools. School environment was compared separately by maintainers, which helped to avoid the risk of treating small sized rural schools and big sized central schools in the same way.

It was an important achievement to merge student, site and institutional database. We had previous knowledge about merging site and institutional data but about merging with students database we didn't have any therefore it was necessary to create a figure out our own method by creating a special identifier. When establishing variables special attention was paid to assign adequate data to each student.

In our analyses, we have attempted to type institutions on the basis of the recruitment criteria. By cluster analyses two clusters of secondary vocational schools site and grammar school site was funded. By grammar school site the first cluster concentrated only on learning outcomes but the second one used multi-criteria selection. The recruitment concentrating only on the learning outcomes was dominant in the public sector. The reason for this is that in the institutions of the public sector there is not a unique approach that would hinder the socialization of students in school when adapting to it. In contrast, the so-called multi-criteria selection had paramount importance mainly in the formerly church-run and the other private sectors. In the case of vocational training, the public sector dominantly took into account only the learning outcomes

during admission, whereas in the majority of the formerly church-run and other private sectors, the recruitment takes into account an expanded suitability. In addition to the learning outcomes, the selection criteria here were the results of the entrance examination and the conversation with the student.

Three dimensions of the site composition were studied for both types of training: students and parental composition and typical learning attitudes of the site. Based on the cluster analyses, three characteristic groups were isolated.

In the case of student composition, a group of sites with a challenging composition of the students were outlined for both grammar school and secondary vocational school training. Two favourable categories were observed at grammar school site, only the ratio of the number of commuting students gave reasons for differentiation. In contrast, by secondary vocational school site the sites with medium and favourable student compositions were well separable.

With regard to parental composition, the density of parental contact was the main intersection point, so groups of poor, loose and active parental involvement of sites were formed. In the formerly church-run sector among grammar school sites

there was minimal ratio of sites with poor parental involvement. Our results are similar to results of previous studies, according to these one of the resources of the church-run institutions is to manage parental involvement into the school life well. Compared to this, the newly church-run sector showed a strong lag. In the case of vocational secondary schools, the old church-run sector was also able to show more active parental involvement, which indicates that it is a general feature of formerly church-run high schools.

In connection with the learning atmosphere also the three-cluster solution mirrored the highest validity resulting in three groups of sites: learning-disruptive, learning-normative and learning-supportive atmospheres. Among the sites of the formerly church-run sector, both in grammar school and vocational secondary school training, the proportion of learning-disruptive institutions was exceptionally low, which is a characteristic of the new church-run sector as well, to a lesser extent though.

During our research, we undertook to test several hypotheses. According to our first hypothesis, which was based on previous research, the students of formerly church-run secondary

schools are more effective than the students of the public sector in the field of competency measurement, non-academic achievement and the competency measurement controlled by cultural capital of the family. The majority of our results confirmed this assumption, only the controlled Mathematics effectiveness of the formerly church-run sector was below the results of the public sector. It is worth noting that in many cases this advantage stemmed from the dominance of the grammar school training. There were also effectiveness variables which obviously appeared to be typically church-run school attributes, for example the non-academic effectiveness of the formerly church-run sector especially the high percentage of higher education aspiration of vocational secondary students.

The second hypothesis was worded as follows: Our assumptions suggest that the social composition of formerly church-run schools is more favourable than those in the public sector. In examining our results at the student's level, the advantages of the formerly church-run sector were evident in grammar school training, while in the case of vocational training, the public sector was in a more favourable situation.

However, when we turned from the student level to the site data, in case of parental composition we found a much better parenting disposition by formerly church-run sites, and the active contact parental involvement was outstanding for both grammar school and secondary school sites.

According to our third hypothesis: The effectiveness of the formerly church-run secondary schools can be influenced by several factors, such as the dominance of grammar school training, better family background of students and/or the more favourable school composition because of the first two characteristics. Our analyses testified the significant impact of each factor. However, testing of impacts clearly outlined by different composition, the factors team up differently to one effect system.

In our fourth hypothesis, it was stated that the newly church-run sector, which emerged as a result of the expansion of the sector, is more focused on vocational secondary schools and probably because of vocational training the family background of the students is less favourable, and as the result of this process the institutional compositions are also less favourable. The two important concepts of the schools maintainer change

were to increase the number of vocational secondary schools and to turn to the more disadvantaged groups. The results show that there is indeed a bigger increase in vocational secondary school training, however, in the Hungarian National ABC database, grammar school and vocational secondary school students in the newly church-run sector participated in almost similar number, vocational secondary school students were 7% higher proportion. In the case of grammar school training the family background status of the newly church-run is really lower than in the formerly church-run sector. In the case of vocational secondary schools there was no significant difference between the two church-run sectors at student level but at the contextual level there was a significantly lower proportion of sites with favourable student composition than in the formerly church-run sector.

As a consequence of our previous hypothesis, we assumed that the effectiveness of the newly church-run sector was far behind the effectiveness of the formerly church-run sector. This is confirmed by our investigations, as there were better results found for the formerly church-run sector in case of all the variables of effectiveness. However, it should also be pointed



out that, taking into account the type of training and the school environments, in some cases the newly church-run sector could be more effective than formerly the church run-sector. Without separating the types of training, the small sized schools in the newly church-run sector could achieve better results both in the competency measurement and in the controlled competency measurement performance. Exploration of the causes can be subject to further analysis, probably these sites have more favourable values in composition and learning attitudes, or because of their size, and the effect of a better teacher-student relationship may be in the background of their results. By treating the types of training separately, the students of rural vocational secondary schools of the newly church-run sector were able to achieve better results than in the formerly church-run sector. Moreover, from the controlled Reading competency results middle sized vocational secondary schools in the capital city provided better performance as well. Students of big sized grammar schools also had better results in fields of Reading competency, controlled Mathematics and Reading competency in the newly church-run sector than in the formerly church-run sector.

In our sixth hypothesis, based on our earlier interviews, we assumed that the newly church-run sector would be more effective than the public sector in the field of non-academic performance because of the religious pedagogical mission (or rites taken from formerly church-run schools) that can already be discovered in its germ. We could not confirm this assumption. However, grammar school students of medium and large sized rural schools and large sized county-seat schools performed better than the public sector in the field of extracurricular activity. In the case of vocational secondary school students we found similar results in middle sized rural schools. By discovering the higher education aspiration there were also settlements in which the newly church-run sector proved to be more effective: by grammar school training shown better performance in small sized rural and county-seat schools, by the vocational secondary school training the students of middle or big sized rural schools had higher aspiration.

According to our further hypothesis the effectiveness cannot be decoupled from the environment in which the school operates, but it is influenced by different influences and impacts. So the environment which contains the type of school settlement and

the size of schools affects the effectiveness of students in each sector. This statement has been proved. However, it is worth pointing out that there were no significant differences between outcomes of county-seat and capital city. Moreover several cases in school environments examination showed that school size can compensate the differences arising from the settlement to some extent, let us think about the different outcome of students in big sized rural schools and small sized country-seat schools. The students of big sized rural schools were able to achieve better results than students in small small-sized county-seat schools.

According to our hypothesis, within the church-run sector the students of big sized institutions of the capital city are the most successful. This may be explained by the finding of a national literature which stated that the private sector, including the church sector, in the capital city is more emphasized in talent management but rural areas focused on the compensation of students' disadvantages. Our results have shown that the big sized institutions of the capital city are indeed prominent, but the middle sized capital city schools are also outstanding and

the advantage of the big sized capital city schools is not the most emergent in all the variables of efficiency.

During our research we found that in the case of the whole sample, the formerly and the newly church-run sectors, the most powerful effects by the different effectiveness variables were different. One of the most important factors was the higher education aspiration, which is the result of complex factor in the learner. Although this was not a pure effect, but a result of the combined effect of several factors, we believed that it independently expressed a sense of planning and determination in the studies as well. Results showed that this factor, not only proved to be the strongest in several cases, but sometimes also modified the effect of parental background.

Context-level variables were also of considerable significance, which are also considered strongly influential by the literature. Three elements of this were examined more thoroughly: students and parental composition and the typical learning attitudes of the site. The student's composition appeared as a factor explaining the formation of competency and controlled competency scores especially for the whole sample and the new church-run sector. Not surprisingly our results show that

schools with challenging student's composition are facing handicap start in these areas.

The most striking factor in parent composition was the relationship between the parents and the school. According to our results, parental involvement has an effect on several variables of effectiveness, especially the effect of active parental involvement was especially strongly positive for formerly church-run schools.

The role of learning atmosphere has also emerged in many cases, to the greatest extent, of course, in the case of the learning-supportive atmosphere. Mostly, the formerly church-run sector was characterized by a high proportion of sites with learning-support atmosphere. In the formerly church-run sector by the grammar school students the learning-support atmosphere had really high impact but the learning-normative atmosphere had chance-increasing effect as well, but by the whole sample, the effect of this factor was also perceptible. This factor is remarkable in the case of controlled effectiveness, which shows that such sites can be more effective in overcoming the disadvantages of student status.

Prominent extracurricular activity had a significant effect on both examined training types, especially in grammar schools, this effect did not have a greater impact on the formerly church-run sector than expected, although it would have been expected based on the literature. At the same time, we believe that the positive correlation of the extra-curricular activity with the competency-measured effectiveness indicates that such extracurricular activity events are important field of value transfer.

For each sector, we could identify more outstanding school environments, mainly the benefit of big sized schools was outlined. In the case of the whole sample, the big sized county-seat and capital city school impact were prominent. In contrast, by the formerly church-run sector middle and big sized capital city school and big sized rural schools were outstanding. By the newly church run sector big sized county-seat and rural schools and middle sized rural schools had big impact. Smaller school size probably hides away the effect of other disadvantageous factors.

In summary, a transition from the public sector to the formerly church-run sectors can be seen in characteristics of the new

ecclesiastical sector, and in many aspects it resembles the public sector. However, for some factors, the germs of ideal typical church-run school characteristics can already be observed, for example, more and more sites use multi-criteria selection, and a minimal shift can be observed to the characteristics of the formerly church-run sector in the learning atmosphere as well. These results demonstrate which factors are those that can really be shaped. Significant part of impact of the factors studied in the dissertation are difficult to influence, such as school environments, therefore increasing the efficiency can be achieved only by focusing on the factors which can be influenced.



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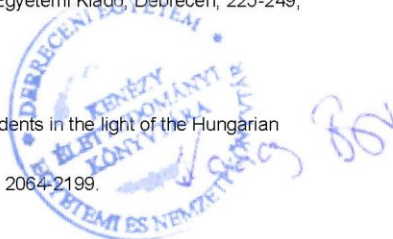
### List of publications related to the dissertation

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