



TECHNIUM
SOCIAL SCIENCES JOURNAL

Vol. 9, 2020

**A new decade
for social changes**

www.techniumscience.com

ISSN 2668-7798



9 772668 779000

Reading and writing comprehension in the mother tongue in the Romanian national assessment – objectives, tests, results

Szántó Biborka

Babeş-Bolyai University, Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences,
Department of Pedagogy and Applied Didactics – lecturer
szanto.biborka@ubbcluj.ro

Abstract. In Romania the basic competencies (reading and writing in the student's mother tongue and in Romanian language in the case of students studying in minority schools, mathematical literacy) of students at the end of the 2nd and 4th grade of primary education are assessed starting with the school year 2013/2014. The paper analyses the tests of the national assessment designed and applied for measuring reading and writing skills in the mother tongue (in Hungarian language). The paper concludes that the tests are not carefully designed in order to measure the most important skills and abilities at the end of the 2nd and 4th grade. The study analyses the achievement in reading and writing of 2nd and 4th grade students' attending schools teaching in Hungarian. The analysis fills a gap, because the detailed qualitative analyses of the results of elementary school students whose learning language is Hungarian, is missing from the reports presenting the results of the national assessment. Based on the analyses of the objectives, tests and results of the national assessment for reading and writing in Hungarian, the paper formulates the questions that arise regarding the necessity of this measurement.

Keywords. primary school, national assessment, writing comprehension, reading comprehension, test analyses

1. Introduction

In Romania the National Assessment and Examination Center under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education organizes the national competency assessment for 2nd, 4th and 6th grade students starting from the school-year 2013/2014. The introduction of the competency assessment is required by the current Education Act dated 5th January, 2011. In the 2011/2012 and 2012/2013 academic years, the measuring instruments and the guide booklet of the measurement-coordinators were tested on a national representative sample, the feedback questionnaires were evaluated, after this, the first measurements were organized. In 4th grade experimental measurements were already carried out in the 1994/1995, 1997/1998, 1999/2000, 2004/2005, 2006/2007 and 2008/2009 academic years, but these measurements were not conducted at regular intervals, and the test structures did not yet conform to the international competency assessments' test structure.

The Education Act (2011) introduces the measurement of the core competencies (in 2nd grade: reading and writing competency and mathematics, in 4th grade: basic competencies).

The methodology issued with the Ministerial Decree (No. 3334/24. 04. 2014) overrides the provisions of the Education Act in the case of national minorities and defines the areas of measurement as follows:

– in 2nd grade: 4 tests: 1st test: reading competency in the Romanian language; 2nd test: reading and writing competency in the mother tongue; 3rd test: writing competency in the mother tongue; 4th test: mathematics competency;

– in 4th grade: 3 tests: 1st test: reading/writing competency in the Romanian language; 2nd test: reading competency in the mother tongue; 3rd test: mathematics competency.

The Education Act (2011) defines the following objectives in relation to the national measurements:

1. [...] In 2nd grade, the results of the measurements are used as a basis for developing individual development plans. The results of the measurements and the development plans shall be communicated to the parents and they are part of the pupil's portfolio.

2. At the end of 4th grade the Ministry of Education measures at national level the basic competencies acquired by the end of primary education based on the model of international measurements in order to diagnose its results.

In reference to the 2nd grade measurements the guide for the national competency assessment (Ministerial Decree No. 3051/12. 01. 2016) highlights at the objectives that this measurement is not a summative, but rather a diagnostic evaluation. The assessment of competencies cannot therefore in any way be aimed at summation and rating the pupils' development in the relevant areas, but is primarily addressed to the teacher, the school and the parent.

The objectives of measurements at the end of 4th grade were not changed according to the evaluation reports (EN IV 2014, EN IV 2015, EN IV 2016, EN IV 2017, EN IV 2018) during the six years. These follow the wording of the 2011 Education Act:

1. The measurement of basic and specific competences (knowledge, skills, attitudes and values) in order that education policy-makers be informed about the status of the Romanian education system in the moment of the measurements.

2. Comparison of the results of the national assessment of competences with the results of the international competence assessments.

3. To provide feedback from the education system, to operate the prognostic, predictive dimension of measurements, in order to plan learners' development at the elementary school's upper secondary level.

4. To provide transparent and accessible information for all the participants of the educational process (educational policy specialists, school inspectors, elementary-school teachers, educational advisers, developers of curricula, textbooks and teaching materials, parents, pupils, etc.) in order to raise awareness of their responsibilities in the process.

5. To create a database in order to compare the results of the measurements in different academic years. (For example, this way the performance changes due to the introduction of the preparatory class could be measured.)

6. The development of measuring instruments, which may be used by primary school teachers, for example, when measuring and comparing the performance of children in their class to the national average.

After the assessment of competences, the National Evaluation and Examination Centre prepares evaluation reports analyzing in detail the tests and the results achieved. Five evaluation reports were published on the measurements until the 2018/2019 school year. The

national reports on the results of the measurements do not cover the performance of elementary school students studying in Hungarian, the analysis of their results is missing from the reports. For the 2013/2014 and 2014/2015 academic years, the report only provides figures for the performance of Hungarian learners in the annexes, in the following years even the figures (number of participants, performance averages, etc.) are missing from the reports. In the evaluation report, which was made in the 2013/2014 academic year, the tables of the annexes provide the results achieved in reading and writing in the native language (Hungarian) of seven counties (Bihar, Cluj, Covasna, Harghita, Mures, Salaj and Satu Mare). The report on the assessment of the academic year 2014/2015 includes a short section regarding the results of reading and writing competencies in the Hungarian language. Here, the objectives of the measurement are communicated, the measuring instruments are briefly presented, after this comes a general description of the results, and two tables summarize the students' performance in rural and urban areas, and then a table displays the national average. However, the results are not broken down into counties, so teachers do not have the opportunity to identify how have pupils in their county, school or class performed compared to students of other counties or other schools. In my study I want to fill this gap.

2. Tests for measuring reading and writing competency in the mother tongue

For 2nd graders, two test variants for each measured competency (reading and writing competency) and one additional test variant are developed each year by the working groups of the National Assessment and Examination Center. Students solve each test in 30 minutes. In 4th grade reading competence in native Hungarian language is measured, students also have 2 + 1 test variants. Therefore, children do not read the same text and do not solve the same tasks on the measurements. Students have 60 minutes to solve the tasks related to the text.

Table 1 shows the texts of the reading comprehension test. It can be seen that the tests contain diverse texts with regard to text-types. In the 2nd grade tests the number of informational texts¹ is much more numerous than the number of literary texts, and the number of informational texts in 2nd grade tests exceeds the number of informational texts in the 4th grade tests, although the ability to understand informational texts in the 4th grade would be worthwhile to measure². When selecting the types of texts, the designers of the tests did not ensure at all times to include the same text type in the test variants: for example, in the 2017/2018 academic year in the 1st test variant the tasks are associated with a literary text, in the 2nd test variant pupils had to understand an informational text (see Table 1). Next to the texts there are illustrations in the test, but the task of reading images or interpreting the image and text together does not occur in any single test – although this would be extremely important, especially in the case of informational texts.

Table 1. Text types in the reading comprehension tests – 2nd grade

The year of measurement	Test variant	The title of the text	Text type
2013/2014	1 st test variant	<i>Seven headed dragon – drawing competition</i>	informational

¹ The primary function of informational text is to provide information, many informational texts are straightforward presentations of facts.

² As young students develop their literacy abilities and are increasingly required to read in order to learn across the curriculum, reading to acquire information from books and other print materials becomes more important.

	2 nd test variant	<i>Storks</i>	informational
2014/2015	1 st test variant	<i>The donkey, the fox and the lion</i>	literary
	2 nd test variant	<i>The hedgehog baby who was littering the forest</i> (after Vígħ Anita)	literary
2015/2016	1 st test variant	<i>Dogs</i>	informational
	2 nd test variant	<i>The budgerigar</i>	informational
2016/2017	1 st test variant	<i>Trees (Children's Encyclopedia)</i>	informational
	2 nd test variant	<i>Butterflies</i> (Géczi Zoltán: <i>Children's Encyclopedia</i>)	informational
2017/2018	1 st test variant	<i>The vineyard owner and the thrush</i> (after a Bulgarian folktale)	literary
	2 nd test variant	<i>Mazsola and Tádé</i> (book review)	informational
2018/2019	1 st test variant	<i>The world of insects</i>	informational
	2 nd test variant	<i>The ladybug</i>	informational

The 2nd grade children's competency in native language is measured along the writing capability also. We note here that there is no point in the measurement of writing ability at the end of the skills-foundation phase of primary education it would make sense at the end of 4th grade when the process of acquiring writing skills reached an appropriate level in optimal cases. However, it is an overly demanding task for a 2nd grade student to create a coherent text in two text types in 30 minutes. Table 2 shows the type of texts that children were supposed to create in the years of measurements. It can be seen that there were years (e. g. 2014/2015, 2015/2016) when different types of texts had to be created by children who solved the two test variants.

Table 2. Text types in the writing competence test – 2nd grade

The year of measurement	Test variant	Type of the 1 st text	Type of the 2 nd text
2013/2014	1 st test variant	narrative text based on image sequences	descriptive text
	2 nd test variant	narrative text based on image sequences	descriptive text
2014/2015	1 st test variant	written message	narrative text (description of a particular tale based on two images)
	2 nd test variant	invitation	narrative text (storytelling based on image sequence)
2015/2016	1 st test variant	written message	narrative text (storytelling based on image sequence)
	2 nd test variant	invitation	narrative text (storytelling based on image sequence)
2016/2017	1 st test variant	written message	narrative text (storytelling based on image sequence)
	2 nd test variant	written message	narrative text (storytelling based on image sequence)

2017/2018	1 st test variant	written message	narrative text (storytelling based on image sequence)
	2 nd test variant	written message	narrative text (storytelling based on image sequence)
2018/2019	1 st test variant	written message	storytelling (narration of an event)
	2 nd test variant	written message	storytelling (narration of an event)

The tests measuring the capability of producing written texts provide criteria that warn students to comply with the instructions regarding the content of the text (e. g. You are going to make a fruit salad at school. Write a message to your mother to buy the ingredients!), and with the linguistic patterns that characterize the text type (e. g. Check if you've followed the instruction! Have you written the date? Have you written a salutation? Have you signed the message?).

In the second task requiring written text production, children should write a story or narrate an event based on image sequence. In some tests the text production is helped by questions (e. g. Where did Longwhiskers live? Where did he start off one day? What happened to him? Who shot at him? When did he get home? What lesson has learned Longwhiskers?). The task gives pupils questions to check their text: Have you given the story a title? Have you answered the questions in whole sentences? Have you formulated your text clearly? Have you checked your spelling? Have you used correctly the punctuation marks? Among the checking questions there are some that are spelling-related, and some which focus on very general aspects of drafting (e. g. Have you formulated your text clearly?). If a student is serious about solving tasks of the checking questions, for example to answer the questions in full sentences (and write the text accordingly), he/she can easily come up with a less coherent text. For example, if the student interprets the whole/full sentence as a sentence in which there is always present the word or phrase that indicates what he/she is talking about (subject), he/she can create a text similar to the following: Longwhiskers lived in the forest. Longwhiskers went for a walk one day. Longwhiskers met a hunter who shot at him. etc. (In Hungarian language there is no need to repeat the so called 'topic' when it remains the same in the text, as we know from the previous sentence who/what we were talking about.) Sometimes it happens (e. g. in the test version 2013/2014) that the task that requires the creation of a narrative text resembles to a task of recalling a known tale: the two images in the task are not enough to make a story based on the picture sequence, and the task requires the narration of a particular tale (Write down the story entitled The Grasshopper and the Ant using the pictures!). The description of the full tale is too difficult a task for a child of 2nd grade, the given words and phrases (cheerfully played the violin, worked diligently, (time) has gone by, summer, cold winter, hungry, asked for food) suggest which elements of the tale are to be included in the created text. Starting with the measurements from school-year 2016/2017, in the 2nd task requiring the creation of a written text, the images, the layout of the text and the criteria for solving the task have changed. The images are all larger than those in previous years' tests, the text-creation questions are placed below the images and are written in larger font sizes. The choice of title for the created text is not included in the checking criteria of the text, but it is formulated as an instruction (Give the text a title!). Among the checking criteria there appears a new one (the good layout of the text on paper), and the too general criterium in the previous tests regarding the clarity of the created text is replaced by the more accurate Have you arranged your sentences to form text? criterium. It is a formal change compared to

the previous tests that the children had to write on paper with added lines, but starting from the academic year 2016/2017, they have to write on a paper without added lines. This change is likely to make difficult for children to work because in Romania children of 2nd grade write in notebooks with added lines in school (see figure 1.). Here we note that in all tests the solution of the 1st task is helped by the layout of the lines, with a separate line indicating the location of the date, salutation, and signature.

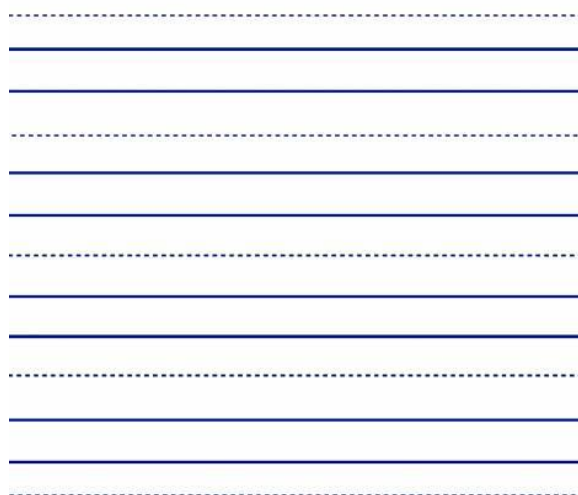


Figure 1. Paper with added line in 2nd grade

In 4th grade there is no specific test to measure writing skills. Only the last task of the reading comprehension test requires the creation of a short text from the children each year, usually writing a letter on behalf of one of the characters of the read text (the children only once had to write an argumentative type of text: 2013/2014, 4th grade, 1st test version, task no 15: Why do you think the phone is useful? Argue for in 3 – 4 sentences!) The text does not have to be longer than the length of the text written by the children of 2nd grade.

In the reading competence test for 4th graders solely literary (narrative) texts had been selected to be used. Informational texts are not represented in the tests although the measurement of comprehension of informational texts would be of practical relevance to the study participants of ages 10–11: texts with an information function represent basic texts for learning, fundamental acquisition of knowledge, and extraction of information. The development of the ability to learn from text is one of the most important tasks of primary education, since the school is heavily based on learning from textbook. It would be therefore important to know to what extent the ability of the children to understand informational texts had evolved by the end of 4th grade.

Table 3 presents the text types used in the reading comprehension tests for 4th graders during the 6 years of measurement.

Table 3. Text types in the reading comprehension test – 4th grade

The year of measurement	Testvariant	The type of the text
2013/2014	1 st test	literary: fairy tale by Döbrentey Ildikó (<i>Messzidédi</i>)

	variant	
	2 nd test variant	literary: part of Fodor Sándor's book with the title <i>Fülöpke beszámolóí</i>
2014/2015	1 st test variant	literary: part of Fodor Sándor's book with the title <i>Fülöpke beszámolóí</i>
	2 nd test variant	literary: part of Fodor Sándor's book with the title <i>Fülöpke beszámolóí</i>
2015/2016	1 st test variant	literary: fairy tale by Döbrentey Ildikó (<i>A kapzsi földesúr</i>)
	2 nd test variant	literary: fairy tale by Döbrentey Ildikó (<i>A háromfejű sárkány</i>)
2016/2017	1 st test variant	literary: fairy tale by Bajor Andor (<i>A cukrász meg a kéményseprő</i>)
	2 nd test variant	literary: fairy tale by Bajor Andor: (<i>Kormosképű</i>) literary
2017/2018	1 st test variant	literary: story by Móra Ferenc (<i>A ködmön</i>)
	2 nd test variant	literary: Hungarian folk tale (<i>Aranyszóló pinytőke</i>)
2018/2019	1 st test variant	literary: Hungarian folktale (<i>Az aranyparázs</i>)
	2 nd test variant	literary: fairy tale by Boldizsár Ildikó (<i>Füvetrágó Erdei Csuda</i>)

It can be seen that the selection of texts in most cases has been chosen carefully: they have the same level of difficulty, style, length – this was achieved by selecting texts in the same genre by the same author. However, this aspect could not be enforced in the 2017/2018's year: the first test version contains a story by Ferenc Móra from 1918, the second one a Hungarian folk tale. Children encounter more often the genre of the folk tale by 4th grade, at the same time the world, the language of the Ferenc Móra-texts can be too foreign for children of the modern age.

In 2nd grade, each year there are 12 questions or tasks related to the texts of both test versions of the reading comprehension tests. The first year of testing, the year 2013/2014, is an exception: the children had to solve 10-10 tasks. In 4th grade, the number of tasks related to texts is 15. For both grades, there are two basic types of tasks in the tests: multiple choice reading tasks and open-ended assessment tasks, which require students to construct their own responses. When answering multiple choice questions, the students should choose the correct answer from the ones offered. Worksheets have four options for each question, one is correct, the others are clearly incorrect (e. g. 2nd grade, 2017/2018, 2nd test version: Which season is not in the story? a) spring b) summer c) autumn d) winter). There are also multiple choice tasks where one has to decide whether multiple statements are true or false (e. g. 2nd grade, 2017/2018, 1st test version: Are these sentences true (T) or false (F)? The farmer was negligent. The thrush has repeatedly refused to answer the farmer's call. The thrush was happy to help harvesting.). Tasks that require chronological ordering of the events of the narrative can also be listed here (e. g. 4th grade, 2017/2018, 2nd test version: Read the following sentences, which present the events of the fairy-tale in a mixed order. Circle the correct sequence letter!).

For open-ended tasks, the students have to give a longer or shorter answer in writing (e. g. 4th grade, 2013/2014, 1st test version: Why do you think Messzidédi needed reading glasses?;

4th grade, 2013/2014, 2nd test version: Write a short letter to a friend / girlfriend about your vacation experience!)

In the reading comprehension tests for 2nd graders, the type of task that requires information retrieval is prevalent, which is justified in this age group. To solve the tasks, the student must pay attention to the data scattered throughout the text and read selectively to find the desired data. The difficulty of tasks requiring information-identification is the fact that a superficial reading of the text may be enough to identify each element, which reinforces the practice of (too) fast reading and skimming reading and this increases the risk of errors due to misunderstanding of the text (Balázs et al., 2014, 15). It is difficult to solve this type of assignment if the student has to choose from the given answers that were not in the text (e.g. 2nd grade, 2017/2018, 2nd test version: Which season is not in the story? a) spring b) summer c) autumn d) winter). There are also test-tasks that require students to draw conclusions (e. g. 2nd grade, 2017/2018 1st test version: What is the farmer like? Underline the right answers! hard-working, slow, understanding, negligent – the student has to deduce from his behavior) or summarize data (e. g. 4th grade, 2014/2015, 1st test version: Mark the correct order by numbering!). However, it is noticeable that this type of assignment is only related to literary texts, while the tasks related to informational or document type texts almost exclusively ask students to retrieve specific explicit information from the text (although summarizing data or deducing conclusion could be a good task type in case of these types of texts). We can also meet tasks in the tests that do not measure reading comprehension (e. g. 2nd grade, 2017/2018, 1st test version: Fill in the missing punctuation! Where are you thrush pug). We may also encounter tasks which, although very good in type because students have to draw conclusions when solving it, are flawed because they cannot be answered based on the text (e. g. 2nd grade, 2017/2018, 1st test version: Write two explanations based on the full text of why a stork is a loyal bird!), because the text contains only part of the answer (It is loyal because it returns to its old nest year after year.).

The reading comprehension tests in native language for 4th graders also mobilize various thinking activities. There are some simple tests that require information identification that require a single element to be retrieved by the student (e. g. 4th grade, 2013/2014, 1st test version: Circle the letter of the sentence that continues the given sentence: Fox-kicked rheumatism, A. live dear grandmother! B. very mischievous grandchild! C. stronger is the grandmother!). The difficulty of the tasks requiring information authentication depends on the presence of misleading content elements (distractors) (Balázs et al., 2014, 15). It is of this type the 4th question in the 1st test version in 2013/2014 where the student has to choose from multiple choice of what Messzidédi first brought as a gift to her great-grandchildren. The task is difficult because the options include food that rabbits still like (carrots, cabbage leaves) in addition to actually what Messzidédi brought to her great-grandchildren (silky grass). The operation of deducing involves tasks in which students have to draw a simple conclusion about who the main characters in the story are, or to draw conclusions about the causes or purposes of a given action, or analyze its effects.

The last set of tasks in the reading comprehension test belongs to the interpretation process type. The interpretation of the text is based on understanding, but it is also a creative activity, thus presupposing a reflective relation to the text. In case of tasks related to the process of interpretation, one has to reflect on the text, to evaluate the whole text or the role of a part in the whole of the text. In task no. 14 of the 2013/2014 test versions students have to interpret and integrate ideas, because the task requires giving a different title for the story. Here the aim

is to interpret the whole text (Balázsi et al., 2014, 17). Tasks in which the student is expected to explore underlying or occasional meaning also require interpretation (e. g. 4th grade, 2017/2018, 2nd test version: Circle the letter of the correct answer! What does the idiom “to bite off more than one can chew” mean? a. He did stupid things. b. He's got a hard time. c. He made the wrong decision. d. He has good dexterity.). Those types of tasks in which children need to understand the message of the text also require interpretation (e. g. 4th grade, 2017/2018, 1st test version: Circle the letter of the correct answer! Which proverb fits the tale? a. Small rain lays great dust. b. Birds of a feather flock together. c. Early bird gets the worm. d. Don't look a gift horse in the mouth.). In order to successfully complete the 15th task of the tests, which also includes written writing skills, students must also have knowledge of other types of text (letter, argumentative text).

3. Presentation of results

Following the competency measurements, the National Assessment and Examination Center prepares evaluation reports that analyze in detail the tests and the results achieved. So far, five evaluation reports have been published on measurements. The evaluation report for the academic year 2013/2014 did not include the presentation/analysis of the tasks of the test in the reading comprehension test for Hungarian students, nor did it contain an analytical-evaluative presentation of the results of students studying in classes in which the language of instruction is Hungarian regarding their native language comprehension competence. Only the tables in the Appendices supplementing the report provided information on the results of the reading in the mother tongue of students of seven counties (Bihar, Cluj, Covasna, Harghita, Mureş, Sălaj, Satu-Mare). (For the presentation and interpretation of results see Szántó, 2015.)

The report, made in the 2014/2015 academic year, contains a brief section on the reading comprehension test in Hungarian native language. The objectives of the measurement are presented here, the measuring tools are briefly described, the results are presented, and in two tables the results of the students in the countryside, then in the city are summarized, then the national average is shown in the table. However, the results are not presented by counties, so we do not get information on how the pupils performed in each county. So teachers do not have the possibility to determine how their school, their students have performed compared to students in other schools.

Since the full presentation of the results would go beyond the scope of the paper, here only the results of the 4th class tests are presented regarding the 2014/2015 academic year.³ Table 4 shows the results that can be read from the measurement report (code 10: complete and correct solution; codes 11 and 12 and 13: partial solution for a higher complexity item; code 79: incorrect solution or incorrect answer, illegible or irrelevant signs code 99: no answer). The table does not include the results of students in rural and urban areas separately, but only the national average. Otherwise, there is usually a difference of between 5% and 10% between the results of rural and urban students in favor of urban students.

Table 4. The results of reading comprehension test (4th grade, 2014/2015)

1 st test version						
Item	Code 10.	Code 11.	Code 12.	Code 13.	Code 79.	Code 99.
1.	90, 65%				9,17%	0,11%

³ The reports of the following years do not contain data on the results of Hungarian students.

2.	71,91%	0,80%	8,03%	4,78%	9,92%	4,55%
3.	88,19%				11,33%	0,43%
4.	85,12%				14,42%	0,41%
5.	55,73%				43,45%	0,75%
6.	89,74%				9,74%	0,48%
7.	41,84%				57,60%	0,57%
8.	82,07%				17,31%	0,57%
9.	77,68%				21,54%	0,73%
10.	78,14%				21,25%	0,57%
11.	85,15%				14,04%	0,73%
12.	63,72%				35,28%	0,93%
13.	68,11%				31,16%	0,66%
14.	80,55%				18,47%	0,80%
15.	31,32%	22,29	16,15	15,67	9,35%	3,71%
2nd test version						
Item	Code 10.	Code 11.	Code 12.	Code 13.	Code 79.	Code 99.
1.	70,95%				28,60%	0,45%
2.	71,87%				27,78%	0,35%
3.	65,64%				33,72%	0,62%
4.	84,53%				15,00%	0,42%
5.	87,02%				12,55%	0,42%
6.	68,51%				30,87%	0,62%
7.	88,74%				10,83%	0,40%
8.	73,65%				25,78%	0,55%
9.	85,77%				13,43%	0,77%
10.	77,59%				21,59%	0,80%
11.	81,56%				17,62%	0,75%
12.	85,90%				13,13%	0,87%
13.	58,85%				40,23%	0,85%
14.	87,67%				10,98%	0,87%
15.	34,40%	21,52%	17,37	15,25	8,37%	3,09%

In the 1st test version in two cases (task 2 and 15), in the 2nd test version in one case (in task 15), it can be observed that students solved the problem partially. In the case of the 2nd task in the 1st test version one might think that the task mobilizes higher-order cognitive processes, and that is the reason why students solved the task at different levels. But on closer inspection, we can conclude that this matching task is complex only in that respect that it consists of subtasks of the same difficulty: but the tasks only require students to retrieve explicitly stated information from the text. Task no 1 from the 2nd test version is related to sentences 2 and 3 of the text: “Everyone was happy. My parents, because they enjoyed the peace and quiet that awaited them in advance, Aunt Anci and Uncle Béla were happy to have a child for two weeks, my sister was glad that I did not rip her doll's eyes out (I managed to tear its hair off), and I was happy because I like to go on vacation.”

2. Match the sentences based on the question and fill in the table.

What made each person happy?

- | | |
|-----------------------------|---|
| 1. Philip's parents | a. they will have a child for two weeks |
| 2. Philip's sister | b. there will be peace and quiet |
| 3. Aunt Anci and Uncle Béla | c. being on vacation |
| 4. Philip | d. the doll's eyes remain intact |

1.	2.	3.	4.

In both test versions, most of the tasks required students to identify and retrieve information, only in three or four of the 14 reading comprehension tasks required to draw simple conclusions from the text in both tests (tasks 6., 7., 11. in the 1st test version; tasks 1., 8., 11., 12. in the 2nd test version). In these higher-order tasks, students generally performed as well or better than those in which they simply had to retrieve information. It might have been difficult if they had not understood the sentence by which they had to draw conclusions because of the words or idioms less common in everyday language (e. g. ‘végett’ – because of or e. g. ‘ez lett a veszte’ – this became its fall).

The other phenomenon, which is striking, is the low percentage point in item no. 15 on both tests (in the 1st test version 31.32% solved it correctly, 3.71% did not solve it at all; in the 2nd test version 34.40% solved it correctly, 3.09% did not solve it at all). This task required an essay type answer, the students had to form a coherent answer (letter) consisting of several sentences. Thus, this task, which required the mobilization of higher-order cognitive processes such as analysis, synthesis, problem-solving, and evaluation, was partially or incorrectly solved or not solved at all by a significant percentage of students.

The evaluation reports in the following years do not contain any data on the results of the Hungarian students, so it is not at all possible to know what the results of the tests were.

4. Closing thoughts

The purpose of the study was to present, analyse and reflect on the aims, tests and results of the national competency tests. All in all, the introduction of national competence measures follows international practice, and the structure of the tests also tends to conform to the tests of international measures. However, when examining the tests, we may be wondering, for example, whether at the end of the 2nd grade, the ability to produce written text can or should be measured – because writing is considered to be the most complex language ability, and by the end of 2nd grade, we can only expect children to learn writing skills and we cannot yet speak about writing ability or competence. The question mark in this regard is even greater if we see that children in the 2nd grade have to compose two types of text (message and narrative text) within 30 minutes. It is also thoughtful that if in 2nd grade, in classroom work we focus on completing assessment tasks for hours in order to prepare children for the tests, this shortens the time for actual competence development. A deficiency of tests in the 4th grade is that they measure reading comprehension ability in only one type of text (literary tests), while most comprehension tasks require only information retrieval. Measurement of producing written texts would make sense at the end of the 4th grade, at the completion of primary education, but this does not take place in the current form of tests.

If the goals set for the national competency assessment were to be achieved in practice, there could be many positive benefits of the tests. If, for example, the results of the measurements of children in the 4th grade were passed to the teachers who would use them to plan their work in the 5th grade, then the children could benefit from the results of the

measurements. It is also worth considering what may be the reason why we do not know anything in the last three years about the national measurements' results of children studying in schools with Hungarian as the language of instruction. Thus, the goal of comparing the performance of classes or children to the national or county average cannot be achieved at all – so the tests of national competence measurement can only serve as a class level assessment. An objective of the measurements is to analyze the results of the introduction of the preparatory class in the light of the tests. We do not know of any such analysis. Under these circumstances, the question of the reason of national competence measurements can be rightly raised by educators, parents, and education professionals.

References

- [1] BALÁZSI, I., BALKÁNYI, P., OSTORICS, L. et al. The framework for the national competency assessment. ISBN 978-615-80018-1-6, Institution of Education, Budapest, 2014.
https://www.oktatas.hu/pub_bin/dload/kozoktatas/meresek/unios_tanulmanyok/AzOKMtartalmikeretei.pdf 22.05.2020.
- [2] NATIONAL ASSESSMENT AND EXAMINATION CENTER. Evaluările Naționale la finalul claselor a II-a, a IV-a și a VI-a. Raportul administrării. Ministry of Education, Bucharest, 2014
- [3] NATIONAL ASSESSMENT AND EXAMINATION CENTER (CNEE). *Evaluările Naționale la finalul claselor a II-a, a IV-a și a VI-a. Raportul administrării*. Ministry of Education, Bucharest, 2015
- [4] SZÁNTÓ, B. Fourth grade students' comprehension level reflected in the results of the 2013/2014 national assessment. *Pedacta*, ISSN 2248 – 3527, 5(1), 1–10., 2015
http://padi.psiedu.ubbcluj.ro/pedacta/article_5_1_1.pdf 20. 05.2020.
- [5] ***Metodologia de organizare și desfășurarea Evaluărilor Naționale la finalul claselor a II-a, a IV-a și a VI-a în anul școlar 2013-2014. Anexă la Ordinul Ministrului Educației Naționale nr. 3334 din 24.04.2014.
- [6] ***Metodologia de organizare și desfășurarea Evaluărilor Naționale la finalul claselor a II-a, a IV-a și a VI-a în anul școlar 2015-2016. Anexă la Ordinul Ministrului Educației Naționale nr. 3051 din 12.01.2016
- [7] ***Legea educației naționale 1/2011, in. Monitorul Oficial al României anul 179 (XXIII), nr. 18., luni 10 ianuarie 2011. <http://www.edu.ro/index.php/legaldocs/14847> 20.05. 2020.