

UNIVERSITY OF SZEGED
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**THE ASSESSMENT OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOL STUDENTS' NATIONAL IDENTITY:
KNOWLEDGE OF NATIONAL SYMBOLS, STRENGTH OF NATIONAL
IDENTIFICATION AND BELIEFS RELATED TO NATIONAL IDENTITY**

Summary of the PhD dissertation

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THE RESEARCH FIELD AND THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

The aim of diagnostic assessment is to support the process of educational design, to increase the effectiveness of instruction and to promote evidence-based educational policy through systematic feedback. In Hungary there are several research areas where diagnostic assessment is present, but, at the same time, there are domains where diagnostic assessment has not been implemented yet.

In the National Core Curriculum (hereafter, Nat 2012) patriotic education (*hazafias nevelés*) and the development of national identity (*nemzeti öntudat*) appear as educational goals; the role of school is fostering the development of national identity. Hungarian studies have mainly focused on the psychological and sociological aspects of students' national identity, while educational aspects have not yet been addressed in such research. Studies primarily target the national identity of adolescents; thus, we have no information about the development of elementary school students' national identity. We have limited evidence regarding the achievement of curricular objectives, or the impact of schooling on identity development (Dancs, 2016a).

The aim of our study was to begin an exploration into the role of schooling in the construction of students' national identity, and, as a first step we aimed to identify the characteristics of students' national identity. Before gathering empirical data, however, we had to clarify the concept of national identity, and define the components which can be assessed in the case of elementary school students. Related to this task, the constructs to be assessed had to be defined, and the assessment tools had to be collected and new instruments had to be developed.

In our study we defined national identity as a complex set of representations that is formed in a person's self-system through interaction with social and societal variables (Pataki, 2008, 2011). Identity categories are components of the self-concept (e.g. Stryker & Burke, 2000; Bennett & Sani, 2004; Oyserman, Elmore & Smith, 2012). In our understanding, some representations of national identity do have this function indeed, and they enrich self-knowledge. Informed by Barrett's work (2007), in our study a broader meaning of national identity is used. We consider all the cognitive, affective and behavioural representations that are related to a person's group identification to be components of the knowledge structure of national identity (Fig. 1.). Cognitive representations include different type of knowledge structures (e.g. knowledge of national symbols, knowledge of the homeland) and beliefs, while affective representations comprise of attachments and attitudes. Behavioural representations, i.e. routines and habits are studied rarely. As there is little information on the latter, in our study we only focus on the elements of the former two categories. Among cognitive and affective components, those are viewed as the part of the self-concept that enrich a person's knowledge about themselves. Such cognitive representations are self-categorization and beliefs about one's own nation (e.g. stereotypes). Among affective representations, the importance of national identification is considered as enriching self-knowledge and as a part of the self-concept.

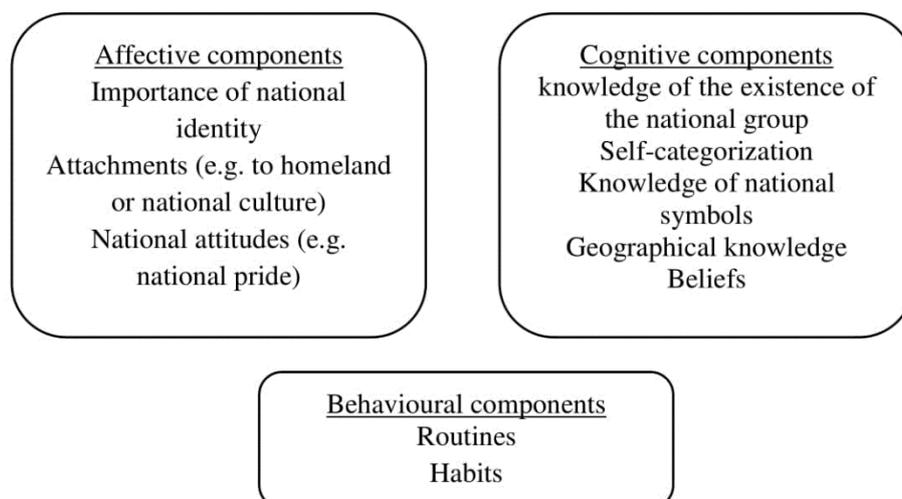


Figure 1.
Set of representation related to students' national identity

In our study we investigated students' national identity from an educational perspective, therefore we assessed those representations which are related to educational objectives and the curriculum. The Hungarian National Core Curriculum, in addition to its objective of the development of students' national identity, aims to foster the development of key competences including civic competence – which also promotes the development of national identity. The literature holds national identity as a crucial premise of civic participation (e.g. Zalewska & Krzywosz-Rynkiewicz, 2017). Accordingly, studying elementary school students helps to form a better understanding of students' civic competence, and make it possible to investigate the antecedents of phenomena important and receive ample research attention in adolescence. The importance of national identity is a core affective representation of national identity. Through its assessment, valuable information can be collected about the development of children's affective characteristics. Studies among adolescents investigate participants' attitudes (e.g. Murányi, 2006), while the investigation of elementary school students would help to reveal the tendencies present in earlier ages.

From the cognitive representations we investigated children's performance of recognizing national symbols and typical Hungarian landscapes. This helps to reveal the effectiveness of schooling in this domain and enables the exploration of the connections between students' knowledge levels and the other components of national identity. Consequently, the dissertation helps to decrease the shortcomings in assessments of history knowledge (Porogi, 2007) and civic knowledge (Kinyó, 2015), which have investigated students' performance along other dimensions. No tests assessing children's performance on the familiarity with national symbols has been developed before.

History studies classify these items as national symbols, which are important elements of national culture (Smith, 1991; Assmann, 1999). National symbols mark the borders of the imagined community of the nation (Anderson, 1983/2006), and a strong emotional meaning is attached to them. An event, a landscape, a person or an artefact is regarded as a national symbol if members of the nation attribute them symbolic meaning (Cohen, 1985/2001). The events,

places and persons situated in communicative memory are also called sites of memory (*lieu de mémoire*, Nora, 2009) in history studies. They have properties similar to national symbols. Both consist of events, persons, landscapes and cultural artefacts, to which the members of a nation attribute symbolic meaning. Their meaning is partly canonical, derived from the consensus of the members of the nation, but they are open to individual interpretations as well. Finally, emotions are attached to both. The term of national symbol is more widely used, and it also implies that the events, places, persons and artefacts have further meanings beyond their literal one. Because of these characteristics, hereafter we will only use the term national symbol.

A recurring issue in identity studies is the changes in the evaluation of the own group (in-group) and other groups (out-groups). Hence in our study the stereotypes related to Hungarians and other nations are also investigated. In the National Core Curriculum, the development of national identity and tolerance appear as educational objectives related to the contents of the domains of social science subjects. Through the investigation of students' national stereotypes valuable information can be gathered about their openness to national groups, and whether they prefer or reject any of them. So far, Hungarian studies assessing students' stereotypes have mainly focused on adolescents (e.g. Csapó & Czachesz, 1995; Murányi, 2006; Polyák & Szabó, 2012, Dancs, 2013), thus the investigation of elementary school students' stereotypes provide information about this age-group, missing so far.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The paradigm of social identity theory states that, in addition to making information processing more efficient, categorization also enables orientation in the social world. In intergroup situations self-categorization occurs, i.e. a person identifies themselves with a (national) group. Maintaining positive self-esteem is a general motive, which researchers interpret as suggesting that a person is motivated to positively evaluate positively the identity categories (the group memberships important to the person) which are parts of the self-concept. In intergroup situations this is achieved by the higher appreciation of the own group and the derogation of other groups (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

The theory highlights the role of self-esteem in the process of group evaluations. Presumably this connection is present in children's evaluations of national groups, thus students with higher self-esteem are less likely to evaluate other nations negatively than those with lower self-esteem. Finally, in-group preference must be mentioned: it is probable that children tend to evaluate their own group the most positively. Although the findings that point to the existence of this phenomenon are from studies on adults, there are findings which support that in-group preference is present among children, too (Nesdale, Lawson, Durkin & Duffy, 2010; Dunham, Baron & Carey, 2011; Buttellmann & Böhm, 2014). As a consequence of the integration of the group into the self-concept, the basic motivations of the self-system (Fiske, 2006) are present in the functioning of the group identities as well. For example, it is important to maintain not only the individual's positive self-esteem, but also the positive evaluation of the group (Smith, 2006). There are findings indicating that this process is present in children and their positive self-esteem goes hand in hand with the preference of their own-group (Davis, Leman & Barrett, 2007).

Heightened interest in international comparative studies on this issue resulted in investigations of the national identity of 6-15-year-old students in the 1990s and 2000s. The findings revealed significant differences among the participants from various countries (Barrett, 2007). As regards the strength of national identity, among 7 and 11-year-old English students it was younger participants who expressed stronger identification (Clay & Barrett, 2001). The study of Dutch participants showed their identification was the weakest at the age of 14, while at the ages of 8, 10 and 16 participants expressed stronger than 14-year-olds (Oppenheimer, 2011a). At the same time, no age difference was found among 6-12-year old Cyprian students (Mertan, 2011).

The findings are also heterogenous in the case of stereotypes, though some general tendencies have also emerged. In-group favouritism is a general phenomenon, however, not all other nations are devaluated automatically. Researchers claim that, as the result of the narratives present in society, nations regarded as traditional enemies are viewed less favourably (Barrett, 2007). For example, the Germans are evaluated negatively by Italian students (Inguglia & Musso, 2013), Cyprian Greeks by Cyprian Turks (Mertan, 2011) and Germans by English participants (Clay & Barrett, 2011).

Findings are also often contradictory regarding the strength of national identification and group evaluations. In certain studies, no connection is found between students' stereotypes of other nations (Clay & Barrett, 2011; Mertan, 2011; Stavranides & Georgiou, 2011), while in others a connection clearly emerged (Gallagher & Cains, 2011). Still, the relationship between the evaluation of the in-group and the strength of national identification is a general result (Oppenheimer, 2011b).

The diverse international findings are attributed to the patterns of national enculturation. Several variables shape the narratives and factors affecting the development of national identity. On the societal level, the media and societal discourses have an important effect on national identity, parallel to family, school and peer effects on national enculturation. Finally, students' individual characteristics also shape what information they choose to process and how they interpret it (Barrett, 2007; Barrett & Oppenheimer, 2011).

Studies on national symbols mainly focus identifying which events, places, persons and artefacts can be considered as symbols (Kapitány & Kapitány, 1998; Hidegkuti & Münnich, 2012). Up to this point only one test assessed students' performance on the recognition of national symbols. Kinyó (2015) assessed grade 1-6 pupils' performance on civic knowledge. In his online test there are items related to Hungarian history, the country and Hungarian culture. However, these items make up only a small part of the whole test. According to his findings, students' performance was between 47-60 percentage points on the whole test. Grade 2 pupils had the best performance, while grade 6 students had a lowest average score. Significant gender difference was found, with girls outperforming boys. The findings from a study with the most recent version of the test showed performances between 45-70 percentage points, with girls having higher average scores again, but only in grades 3, 5 and 6 (Kinyó & Dancs, 2015).

THE AIMS OF THE STUDY

The aim of our study was to explore students' performance on the recognition of national symbols and typical Hungarian landscapes. First, the set of events, persons, places and artefacts

had to be identified which can be regarded as national symbols. Thus, besides investigating students' performance, further sub-goals had to be defined. Before developing tests for students, we asked teachers to evaluate historic events, persons, geographic places and cultural artefacts as to whether they can be considered as symbols. Our second sub-goal was developing test which can assess pupils' performance reliably.

In our study, the strength of national identity was also assessed. Up to this point there was no information about this aspect of students' national identity. Using a questionnaire adapted from international studies we aimed to gather data on the strength of national identity and compare it to international outcomes. Stereotypes about students' own nations and other nations are also components of national identity, our goal was exploring participants' beliefs related to these phenomena. The assessed components of national identity make it possible to explore the characteristics of elementary school students' national identity, to investigate the connections between the components and to explore the patterns of national enculturation in Hungary.

METHODS

Sample

Data was collected in two rounds of assessment. In the first one, 1771 pupils participated from grades grade 1 through 6. The data collection took place in May 2017. Participants responded to our online test related to national symbols and typical Hungarian landscapes. They also filled in our questionnaire assessing their strength of national identification. The second data collection round took place in November 2017. 1648 grade 5 and grade 7 students participated and responded to the questionnaire on the strength of identification and national stereotypes. Schools from the whole of Hungary could volunteer to participate in the studies. Thus, our primary concern was to involve an appropriate number of respondents for the planned statistical analyses. In both data collection rounds the eDia platform (Molnár & Csapó, 2013) was used to deliver the tests and questionnaires to the schools, where participants filled them out anonymously, using an assessment code. In both rounds, participants were allotted one lesson period to respond to each instrument.

Instruments

During the first data collection, participants' test performance on national symbols and typical Hungarian landscapes were assessed. The test development process was carried out in several steps. First, based on the literature, the notion of national symbols was defined, then teachers were interviewed (N=12) to test our definition of national symbols and to collect possible national symbols (Dancs, 2016b). The next step was the broadening of the set of possible national symbols using the findings of the literature review and a curriculum analysis. Finally, this broadened list of national symbols was evaluated online by teachers (N=160). The symbols targeted in our tests were selected based on the results of these steps (Dancs in press a).

To examine the knowledge of 1st to 6th graders, four subtests were developed: there were 13 items in the first one, 16 in the second, 17 in the third and 21 in the fourth. These four

subtests were arranged in three test versions (Table 1). This kind of arrangement enabled us to use modern test theory during data analysis. The pictures used in the recognition of typical Hungarian landscapes were first evaluated by adults, then a set of 10 pictures were selected to represent this area; these were included in all three test versions and were presented to all participants.

Table 1. Number of items in the different test versions

	1st subtest National symbols	2nd subtest National symbols	3rd subtest National symbols	4th subtest National symbols	5 th subtest Typical Hungarian landscapes	Total number of items
Grades 1-2	13	16			10	39
Grades 3-4		16	17		10	43
Grades 5-6			17	21	10	48

The questionnaire used during the first data collection included the Hungarian version of the Strength of Identification Scale (Barrett, 2007), which consists of 5 attitude statements (with 5- and 7-point Likert-scales) to assess participants' strength of national identification. The instrument included questions about the participants' socioeconomic status and their attitudes towards schooling, too.

During the second data collection only the questionnaire was used, but in two versions. Both included the same questions; however, the order of the questions was different in the two versions. The Hungarian version of the Strength of Identification Scale (Barrett, 2007) was included in the battery again, complemented with a trait attribution task (Barrett, 2007) of 6 positive and 6 negative adjectives to collect data on students' national stereotypes about Hungarians, Romanians, Polish people and Americans. Participants had to decide which adjective they find typical to describe the listed nations. The battery also included the Hungarian version of the Coopersmith Self-esteem Scale (Tóth, 2005). Furthermore, participants were asked about their travel experiences and they were presented with a task of identifying the countries featured in the previous attribution task on a map of Europe recognition of Poland and Romania on the European map. Again, data was collected on socioeconomic status and attitudes towards school.

Hypotheses

I. Characteristics of students' national identity

- H₁: Pupils in higher grades perform significantly better on the recognition of national symbols and typical Hungarian landscapes.
- H₂: Students in higher grades have significantly weaker strength of national identification.
- H₃: Participants' stereotypes towards Hungarians are the most favourable.
- H₄: Students' stereotypes towards other nations are not unfavourable in all cases. There are nations the evaluation of which is also favourable.
- H₅: Older students have significantly less favourable stereotypes than younger ones.

II. Internal correlation system of students' national identity

H₆: Students' performance on the recognition of national symbols and typical Hungarian landscapes is correlated with their strength of national identification.

H₇: Participants strength of national identification is correlated with their stereotypes towards Hungarians and other nations.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Based on the findings of the preliminary studies, a set of national symbols was defined. It can be established about these events, places, persons and artefacts that teachers attribute a symbolic meaning to them and they appear in the curriculum. Targeting these national symbols, tests were developed for grade 1-6 pupils to assess their performance. The tests proved reliable and thus appropriate for gathering information about students' performance. However, the item analysis revealed some special traits in the knowledge structure under study. Not all the items can be integrated into a coherent structure, thus the reliability of the tests did not reach the desirable .90 value, they were 0.76, 0.78 and 0.84 respectively. Especially the of items containing pictures seemed separate from the knowledge structure tapped by the test (Dancs in press b). For example, the items assessing the recognition of typical Hungarian landscapes proved unsuitable for the ages involved in the study. To respond to these items correctly requires complex knowledge, fully formed concepts in which the prior experiences of the individual are summarized. Our results indicate that grade 5 and 6 students have these concepts, while younger ones do not have them yet.

The comparison of the test performances based on modern test theory indicated that students in higher grades have higher logit values associated with their performance. Grade 1 students had the lowest average performance, while grade 6 students had the highest (H₁). At the same time, there was no significant difference between grade 4 and grade 5 participants. Students' socioeconomic status in different grades differed significantly, still, this variable explained only 6% of the variance of test results. Only a small proportion of the variance of students' performance could be explained in this study. Thus, further variables need to be considered in order to better understand the factors underlying student performance. The aim of the preliminary studies was collecting national symbols present in the curriculum and develop tests for the knowledge of these symbols. The assessed knowledge structure is related to several school subjects (e. g. Hungarian language and literature, history, science, geography, arts and music). The findings support the role of school in the teaching of national symbols, as older students know more about them than younger ones.

Data was collected about the strength of national identification of students during two assessment rounds from grade 1 to grade 7. We presumed that the attitude statements can be used as a reliable means to investigate participants' strength of national identification. Both data sets, collected from grade 1-6 and grade 5 and grade 7 students confirmed this hypothesis. The youngest participants showed the weakest identification, while grade 3 and grade 4 students the strongest. National identification appears to be weaker in grades 5, 6 and 7 than in the other grades (H₂). These results suggest that national identification becomes stronger at the beginning of schooling, while at the beginning of adolescence there is a weakening tendency.

A comparison of our findings with those of Oppenheimer (2011a) indicates that similar tendencies are present. Hungarian students' strength of national identification is the highest in the lower grades, and later it weakens. However, the results of the two studies cannot be compared without restrictions. First, in his research 4-point Likert-scales were used to investigate 8, 10, 12, 14 and 16-year-olds, thus the responses are less differentiated. He did not find a significant difference between 8,10 and 12-year-olds, while 14-year-olds showed significantly weaker identification. This interesting similarity to our results offers the opportunity to compare the Dutch and the Hungarian data. The comparison suggests further research questions, for example how Hungarian high school students' strength of identification can be characterized. Further investigations are needed to answer this question.

During the test development process, we presumed that the knowledge of national symbols and the recognition of typical Hungarian landscapes are components related to national identity, thus there is a connection between the strength of identification and test performance. The results showed significant correlation ($r=.51$, $p=.000$) for grade 1 and grade 2 students, while in the higher grades weaker correlation coefficients were found (H_6). Students' knowledge is heterogenous at the beginning of school, it mainly related to family background. Our results confirm that this statement is valid in the case of national symbols, too. Participants with stronger national identification have better test performance, suggesting that the role of national symbols in the construction of national identity is considerable. They may be present primarily in preschool education. National symbols are present in the curriculum, so as years of schooling accumulate, their recognition gradually turns into a learning outcome, and therefore the connection between strength of identification and test performance becomes weaker.

During the second assessment round, grade 5 and grade 7 participants' stereotypes related to Hungarians, Americans, Romanians and Polish people were investigated. It was presumed that the evaluation of Hungarians will be the most favourable, but this was only confirmed in grade 5 (H_3). A surprising result was that older students have the most favourable evaluation of Polish people. At the same time, the ranking of nations other than Hungarians is the following: Polish people have the most favourable position, while Romanians the least favourable one (H_4). As regards age differences, older participants evaluated Hungarians and Romanians less favourably (H_5).

International comparative studies proved that students in different countries see various nations positively and negatively (Barrett, 2007). The researchers explain this phenomenon with the differences of historical narratives present in societies. The most recent findings of a Hungarian attitude research show that Romanians are one of the least favoured groups among Hungarian high schoolers (Csákó, 2017). In addition, the narrative analysis of school textbooks and novels confirmed that a special narrative patterns appear in these texts – for example, Romanians are usually mentioned in a negative context. (László, 2012). Knowing this background, it is not surprising to see that these narrative patterns are present in everyday discourses and that they also appear in students' responses. In the case of the Polish hetero-stereotypes our results also confirmed that they are the most favoured out-group; grade 7 students prefer them even to Hungarians. As Romanians' negative evaluation appears in written and oral narratives, it can be hypothesised that the preference towards Polish people is also present in the discourses.

The connection between the strength of national identification and stereotypes was investigated, too. Not surprisingly, the general evaluation of Hungarians is related to national identification, with the correlation stronger among grade 7 students. Of the other nations targeted, only the evaluation of Polish people was related to the strength of identification in both age groups, and the correlation coefficients were of the same magnitude in both grades (H₇). This result can also be interpreted as societal discourses having an impact on students' beliefs.

It was presumed that there will be significant differences between the results of the two questionnaire versions regarding the strength of identity and stereotypes. Research on adults has shown examples of how a change in national context resulted in a change of respondent behaviour (Li & Brewer, 2004; Reicher, Hopkins & Harrison, 2007). By using two versions of the questionnaire, we aimed to test what impact can it have on participants' evaluations on nations when they are put in a quasi-intergroup situation. The results show that students' strength of national identification did not change meaningfully as a function of the order of questions.

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