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STUDY OF BELIEFS ABOUT READING STRATEGIES IN THE AGE OF 12–18

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INTRODUCTION

In the course of the last fifty years, the field of reading skills and reading comprehension have been studied systematically in Hungary. Findings of several international as well as Hungarian studies highlighted that a significant proportion of Hungarian students does not acquire a sufficient level of the reading skills required by social norms and situations of everyday life during their school years (e.g. *Balázsi*, *Ostorics*, *Szalay & Szepesi*, 2010; *Józsa & Pap-Szigeti*, 2006; *Molnár & Józsa*, 2006).

In the age of engaged reading (*Alexander & Fox*, 2004), the acquisition of reading skills takes lifelong learning and the reader is actively involved in the process of reading. Modern models of reading emphasize the role of strategy use in reading comprehension (*Cromley & Azevedo*, 2007; *Guthrie & Wigfield*, 2000) and research-based training programs of applying reading strategies have been successfully implemented internationally and in Hungary as well (*Davis*, 2010; *Paris & Oka*, 1986; *Csíkos*, 2007; *Steklács*, 2006). Definitions highlight the functional character of reading comprehension skills (*Balázsi*, *Ostorics*, *Schumann*, *Szalay & Szepesi*, 2010; *Schnotz & Molnár*, 2012). Learning *about* reading contributes to the development of both the learning *of* reading and learning *by* reading. Besides the acquisition of knowledge on written language and text comprehension this involves knowledge of learning strategies as well (*Steklács*, 2013).

Our research studied students' beliefs about reading strategies. It aimed to explore what kind of beliefs students have about their own strategy use and the use of reading strategies in general. Hence, this work involved developing appropriate instruments for measuring the beliefs about reading strategies, which has been one of the methodological pillars of the research described.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Theoretical models of reading highlight the hierarchical organization of the system of reading skills (*Nagy*, 2006) and the comprehensive development of all the compononents of the system (*Stanovich*, 1980; *Walczyk*, 1995). In general, theoretical models of the recent decades distinguish between two levels in the constituents of reading: (a) the lower level including tasks of decoding and (b) the higher level including tasks of comprehension, planning, monitoring and evalutaion (*Csíkos*, 2008).

Reading is related to learning in three different ways in the school system: (1) in the *learning of reading* the goal is to acquire reading skills, while (2) in the *learning by reading* reading becomes a means of learning and (3) the *learning about reading* contributes to the development of both of the former domains. Learning about reading is not a widely spread practice yet, however, any development of any of the above domains results in improvement in both of the other fields as well (*Steklács*, 2013).

Literature identifies different phases in the development of reading skills, where the application of reading strategies occurs between the age of 10 and 14 (*Blomert & Csépe*, 2012). *Garbe*, *Holle*, *Weinhold*, *Meyer-Hamme & Barton* (2010) constructed a model, shown in figure 1, where the shift from learning of reading to learning by reading happens in the phase of adaptive/critical reading. However, the actual age of the acquisition of different modes of reading is the individual learner's characteristic.

	KG	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
Pretending to Read														
Supported Reading														
Fluent/Independent Reading														
Strategy-oriented Reading														
Adaptive/Critical Reading														

Figure 1
School-Year-Related Overlaps Between Plateaus and Modes of Reading
(Garbe et al. 2010. p. 44*)*

Hungarian studies found remarkable development in reading skills in lower grades (*Vidákovich & Cs. Czachesz*, 1999), while insignificant development was detected in higher grades, between age 14 and 18 (*Józsa & Pap-Szigeti*, 2006). It is a significant difference between students measured by PIRLS and students measured by PISA in Hungary that at the age of 10 students are still exposed to purposeful teaching of reading, while this practice is not typical at the age of 15 (*Balázsi & Balkányi,* 2008).

Well developed reading comprehension presupposes usage of effective reading strategies (*Pressley*, 2000). These strategies, characteristic to experienced readers involve for instance determining the purpose of reading, primary review of the text, activating prior knowledge, summarizing what has been read, evoking questions, imagining what is being read, monitoring the reading process (*Duke & Pearson*, 2008; *Paris*, *Wasik & Turner*, 1991). Introducing students to reading strategies, developing strategic reading and reading comprehension would develop the metacognitive knowledge of students as well (*Józsa & Steklács*, 2012) and with the explicit teaching of reading strategies teachers can assist students to develop a rich repertoire of applied strategies (*Alexander*, 2005).

Learning related beliefs influence strategy use and impact students' motivation as well (*Hofer*, 2001). These beliefs determine the perception of the given task, hence they influence the learning goals, the strategies selected to achieve these goals and eventually, the achievement (*Muis*, 2007; *Muis & Franco*, 2009).

A number of instruments have been developed to measure students' beliefs about strategy use. *Jacobs* and *Paris* (1987) constructed the *Index of Reading Awareness* questionnaire. They found low reliability (Cronbach's α: .61, subscales: .15-.32) in their study conducted among grade 3, 4 and 5 students. Similar results were found in the same grades with the Hungarian adaptation (*Csíkos*, 2008) of the questionnaire (Cronbach's α: .41-.53). *Metacognitive Awareness of Reading Strategies Inventory* (MARSI) was later developed by *Mokhtari* and *Reichard* (2002), validated in grades 6-12. This questionnaire consisted of 30 items with acceptable reliability levels (Cronbach's α: .86-.93) in three subscales: Global Reading Strategies (generalized strategies which set the stage for the reading), Problem-Solving Strategies (needed when the text becomes difficult to read) and Support Reading Strategies (outside reference materials). *Sheorey* and *Mokhtari* (2001) used *Survey of Reading Strategies* (a version of MARSI) in measuring college students with good reliability (Cronbach's α: .89).

OBJECTIVES OF THEORETICAL INVESTIGATIONS

The review of prior research findings implied the following research question: What kind of beliefs are held by 12-18-year-old Hungarian students about their own reading strategy use and about reading strategy use in general? In order to get an answer to this question, the methodological objective of adapting and developing questionnaires to adequately measure students' beliefs about reading strategies was defined. The questionnaires intended to map (1) Hungarian students' awareness of strategy use and (2) their agreement with strategy use in general in the context of reading for learning. Finally, it was also investigated (3) how these students apply adaptive strategies across various reading situations, i.e. if they consider different strategies appropriate in different reading situations.

Adaptation and development of measurement instruments

Due to the lack of existing and available instruments in Hungarian, all three research questions required either adaptation of instruments used in international research or development of new questionnaires. The MARSI questionnaire, developed by *Mokhtari* and *Reichard* (2002), was selected to be adapted to Hungarian for measuring *awareness of strategy use*. Based on this questionnaire, a new instrument was planned to be developed for measuring *agreement with strategy use*. This latter questionnaire intended to assess students' beliefs on how each strategy would support reading comprehension. In addition, adaptive strategy use was also measured by a newly developed questionnaire.

Characteristics of beliefs about strategy use

Regarding the awareness of strategy use, prior international studies found that students tend to apply the Problem-Solving Strategies most frequently, while they use the Support Reading Strategies the least frequently (*Mokhtari & Reichard*, 2002; *Sheorey & Mokhtari*, 2001). *Mónos* (2005) found corresponding strategy use in her study among Hungarian university students. Girls reported more frequent strategy use than boys in both *Sheorey* and *Mokhtari*'s (2001), and *Mónos'* (2005) studies. One of the objectives of the research was to find out whether these tendencies are present in the 12–18-year-old population in Hungary and whether they can be detected in the results of the *Agreement with strategy use* questionnaire as well. Prior research (*Józsa* és *Pap-Szigeti*, 2006) suggested that no differences could be found between the students regarding their beliefs about reading strategies.

Good strategy users apply more reading strategies and can select the strategies adequate to the purpose of reading (*Pressley*, *Borkowski & Schneider*, 1989). One obective of measuring the adaptivity of beliefs was to gain information on whether students consider the use of different strategies appropriate in different situations.

Relationships

The relationships were analysed with regards to internal and external relationships. Here, internal relationships meant the correlations of individual subscales and reading strategies within one instrument.

In the findings of *Mokhtari* and *Reichard* (2002) those students who reported to be better readers also reported more frequent strategy use. This study intended to explore the

relationships between self-reported levels of reading skills, awareness of strategy use and agreement with strategy use. The findings of PISA suggest that in Hungary family and social background have an above average influence on reading skills (*Balázsi*, *Ostorics*, *Szalay & Szepesi*, 2010), therefore the variables concerning the students' social-cultural background were also involved in the analysis of external relationships.

Based on prior research, the analysis of the relationship with teachers' and parents' beliefs were also in the scope of this research. On the basis of *Hofer*'s (2001) model, the investigation of agreement with strategy use involved teachers as well. Since *O'Sullivan* (1992) found that parents' reading related beliefs also influence students' beliefs, parents were also included in the research.

HYPOTHESES

Based on the above objectives, results were hypothesised in seven separate fields:

1. *Methods*: Reliable instruments measuring awareness of strategy use and agreement with strategy use can be adapted and developed in Hungarian.

2. *Domain-specific characteristics*: Significant difference can be found between the use of certain strategy types and the agreement with their use. Differences are similar to the findings in international studies, i.e. the use of Problem-Solving Strategies is the most frequent, while the use of Support Reading Strategies is reported the least frequent.

3. *Differences between subsamples:* No differences can be found between students in different age groups. Girls report more frequent strategy use and agree with their use to a higher degree than boys.

4. *Internal relationships*: Significant correlations can be found between the Awareness of strategy use and Agreement with strategy use questionnaires and theis subscales and individual items.

5. *External relationships 1.*: Variables of social-cultural background and reading related self-concept are related to awareness of strategy use and agreement with strategy use. The regression can be modeled with the inclusion of the background variables.

6. *External relationships 2.*: Significant correlation can be detected between the beliefs of the teachers and the parents and the agreement with strategy use of the students.

7. *Adaptivity*: Students consider different strategies appropriate in different reading situations.

EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

Data collection

The studies were conducted between spring 2008 and spring 2012. Figure 2 displays the characteristics of the samples of each study and the instruments applied. The Awareness of strategy use questionnaire was used in the first and second studies and in the central study conducted in spring 2012.
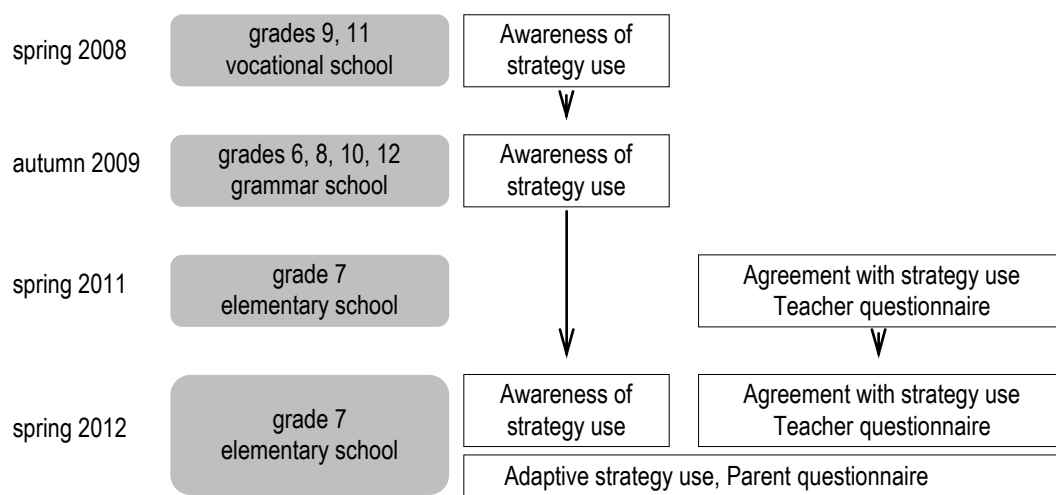
spring 2008 | grades 9, 11 vocational school | Awareness of strategy use

autumn 2009 | grades 6, 8, 10, 12 grammar school | Awareness of strategy use

spring 2011 | grade 7 elementary school | | Agreement with strategy use Teacher questionnaire

spring 2012 | grade 7 elementary school | Awareness of strategy use | Agreement with strategy use Teacher questionnaire

Adaptive strategy use, Parent questionnaire

Figure 2
Data collection points and instruments used

The Agreement with strategy use questionnaire was initially used in the third study, in spring 2011, once developed, and later on it was involved in the central study in 2012 as well. The teachers' agreement with strategy use was first measured in the third study and teachers were also involved in the central study. In addition to these questionnaires, this study also used the Adaptive strategy use questionnaire and the Parent questionnaire. All the studies collected background variables in addition to the target variables. The first study further involved detailed research on the use of school library as well (*Kelemen-Molitorisz*, 2010).

Samples

The studies were conducted in the 12–18 age range, since no published prior research was found in this age range in Hungary in the field of reading strategies. The choice of the age cohorts is supported by the fact that the MARSI questionnaire was developed for 12-year-old and older students (*Mokhtari & Reichard*, 2002).

The first study involved 412 students from two vocational schools in Budapest. The sample of the second study consisted of 254 students from one grammar school in Eger and one in Budapest. The third study was carried out on a sample of 605 students from 11 elementary schools from Csongrád county in 2011, while the central study involved 525 students from the same schools a year later. The size of the teacher sample was 255 in the third study and 162 in the central study. The Parent questionnaire was filled in by 366 parents. The teachers and the parents responded to the questionnaire voluntarily.

Due to the specifics of sample selection, the findings of the first two studies have limited generalizability. In the third and fourth data collection the sample was representative according to settlement type for Szeged and its agglomeration as a culture bearing unit.

RESULTS

Functioning of the instruments

The *Awareness of strategy use* questionnaire, the adaptation of MARSI, proved to be sufficiently reliable. The Cronbach's α values of subscales calculated by grades were found to be between .65 and .81 grade in the first study (*Kelemen-Molitorisz*, 2009). In the second study, these values were between .56 and .77 calculated again for subscales by grades in the grammar school sample (*Molitorisz*, 2012a). In spring 2011, the questionnaire was reviewed with the method of verbal interview on a sample of grade 11 vocational school students (*Molitorisz*, 2012b) and as a result, six statements were recomposed, the emphasis has been changed in three additional statements and six other have been simplified, based on the student answers. This modified version was used in the central study, resulting in reliability indices between .73 and .79.

Along with the modification of the *Awareness of strategy use* questionnaire, the initial version of the *Agreement with strategy use* questionnaire has been administered to grade 10 students in 2010. The questionnaire consisted of 22 items, with a Cronbach's α value of .78 (*Molitorisz*, 2011a). As an outcome, the *Agreement with strategy use* questionnaire was finalized and used in the third study, in 2011, on grade 7 sample (*Molitorisz*, 2011b). The reliability indices of the subscales were between .63 and .81. The reliability analysis suggested that leaving out any of the items would decrease the reliability of the instrument.

In the case of the questionnaire developed to measure *adaptive strategy use*, students had to recommend adequate reading strategies in ten imagined reading situation. The strategies were based on the strategies used by experienced readers (*Mokhtari & Reichard*, 2002. p. 257). The evaluation of student responses involved three expert opinions. Kendall's W for the expert opinions were between .57 and 1 in 10 different situations.

Characteristics of the awareness of strategy use and agreement with strategy use

The most frequent strategy use was found in the field of Problem-Solving Strategies, based on students' self-report, followed by the Global Reading Strategies and the Support Reading Strategies were reported to be the least frequently used strategies (*Kelemen-Molitorisz*, 2009; *Molitorisz*, 2011b; *Molitorisz*, 2012a). The majority of the students reported at least medium level strategy use. Low levels of strategy use were only reported in the case of the Support Reading Strategies subscale. These findings supported hypothesis 2 and correspond to the findings of prior research as well (*Mokhtari* és *Reichard*, 2002; *Sheorey* és *Mokhtari*, 2001; *Mónos*, 2005).

In the third and fourth studies, more than two third of the students agreed that strategy use supports reading comprehension. The students tended to agree most with the use of Problem-Solving Strategies, again followed by the Global Reading Strategies and Support Reading Strategies were considered to be least helpful in reading comprehension.

Differences between subsamples

No development was found in the awareness of strategy use between grade 9 and grade 11 (*Kelemen-Molitorisz*, 2009). Grade 6 students, however, reported more frequent strategy use in the fields of Global Reading Strategies and Problem-Solving Strategies than grade 8, grade 10 and grade 12 students. The three latter subsamples did not show statistically

significant differences. No significant differences were found in the awareness of strategy use regarding Support Reading Strategies between the subsamples (*Molitorisz*, 2012a). Hence, hypothesis 3 was partially supported, the more frequent strategy use of grade 6 students could probably be explained by the reading comprehension development in that age.

Girls in vocational schools reported significantly more frequent strategy use in all three strategy types than boys (*Kelemen-Molitorisz*, 2009). In the case of the grammar school samples, girls reported more frequent use of Support Reading Strategies and Problem-Solving Strategies than boys. No differences were found in this sample in the field of Global Reading Strategies (*Molitorisz*, 2012a). Similarly, in the central study it was found that girls tend to use more Problem-Solving Strategies and Support Reading Strategies than boys, based on their self-report. These findings supported both hypothesis 3 and prior research findings (*Sheorey* és *Mokhtari*, 2001; *Mónos*, 2005).

In the case of the two vocational schools in Budapest, the only significant difference was found in the use of Problem-Solving Strategies between the two schools, in all the other subscales, the mediating effect of gender was detected. In the second study, the only difference between the grammar schools was found in the use of Problem-Solving Strategies on grade 12.

In the *Agreement with strategy use* questionnaire in the third study, girls reported higher level of agreement with the strategy use in Support Reading Strategies than boys (*Molitorisz*, 2011b). In the central study, girls tended to agree more with the use of Problem-Solving Strategies than boys, as well. No gender related difference was detected, however, in the case of Global Reading Strategies.

In the central study, the subsamples of students who *agreed* that strategy use supports reading comprehension, who were *insecure* and who *did not agree* reported significantly different awareness of strategy use. Those, who agreed reported more frequent use of reading strategies than those who did not agree or were insecure.

Internal relationships

The answers given to the subscales of the *Awareness of strategy use* questionnaire have shown significant correlations, Pearson correlations were found between .54 and .72. The strongest relationship was detected between the subscales of Global Reading Strategies and Problem-Solving Strategies. The Pearson correlations between the subscales of *Agreement with strategy use* questionnaire were found betwen .58 and .64.

Some strategies were found to have closer relationships in the dendrograms of the cluster analyses in case of each studies in all the three strategy types (subscales) both in terms of the frequency of use and in terms of the agreement of their use. In case of the Global Reading Strategies subscale such strategies were skimming and; critical analysis and predicting; the usage of tables and having a purpose of reading. In the case of the Problem-Solving Strategies the following strategies were closely related: paying closer attention and rereading; careful reading and stopping from time to time; guessing the meaning of unknown words and visualizing. In the case of Support Reading Strategies the closely related strategies included taking notes, summarizing and underlining; questioning and going back and forth in the text to find relationships. The findings supported hypothesis 4 and the interrelations of strategies can provide a reference for teachers during teaching reading strategy use.

In case of the central study, the relationships of the two questionnaires were analyzed as well. The strongest correlations (r=.65) between awareness of strategy use and

agreement with strategy use were detected in the fields of Global Reading Strategies and Support Reading Strategies. Weaker correlations were found between the awareness of Support Reading Strategies and agreement with the use of Global Reading Strategies and Problem-Solving Strategies (values of Pearson correlation: .53 and .52).

External relationships 1

In the case of vocational students, significant correlations were found between the use of Global Reading Strategies and listening to tales in childhood and the number of books at home. The frequency of attending the school library and satisfaction with the school library also found to be related to all the three subscales in the questionnaire. The strongest correlations were detected with Support Reading Strategies (.23-.27) (*Kelemen-Molitorisz*, 2009).

In the case of the second study on grammar school sample, the only background variable found to be related to the awareness of strategy use was the love of reading (*Molitorisz*, 2012a). The strengths of the correlations were between .19 and .21 in the three subscales. The level of the mothers' qualification, school achievement, self-reported level of reading skills and the number of books at home did not show significant correlation with the awareness of strategy use.

In the third study, the following background variables were related to the agreement with strategy use: self-reported level of reading skills, effort and school achievement. Correlation coefficients were between .12 and .28. The achievements in certain school subjects were mostly related to the use of Problem-Solving Strategies.

In the central study, significant relationships were found with the love of reading, time spent with learning activities, usage of school books for learning. The Spearman correlation coefficients were between .11 and .39. The strongest correlation was found between the love of reading school books and the use of Problem-Solving Strategies.

The highest explained variances in the regression models involving the background variables were found in the cases of Support Reading Strategies and Problem-Solving Strategies. In the vocational sample the following background variables were involved: gender, discussion about books, frequency of listening to tales in childhood and satisfaction with the school library, resulting in explained variances between 6% and 19%. In the second study involving the grammar school sample, love of reading and grade were found to have significant impact, between 4% and 11%. In the third study, agreement with strategy use was explained by one indicator of reading related self-concept (parents' perception), effort, school achievement and a learning related belief (students tend to like the subject taught by a strict teacher) with impacts between 7% and 14%. In the central study, two background variables, the love of reading (both for delight and for learning) and the usage of literature school book in learning explained 8% and 19% of the variance found in the subscales of the two questionnaires. Hence, hypothesis 5 was supported, students' beliefs are most strongly related to the background variables regarding reading and learning.

External relationships 2

The teachers' agreement with strategy use was explored in the third study. It was found that teachers tend to agree more with strategy use than students. In the third study there were only four statements where no significant differences were found between the teachers' and the students' responses, whereas in the central study there was only one such

statement. These exceptions were the following: guessing the meaning of unknown words, getting back on track when losing concentration, reading aloud, paying closer attention when text becomes difficult, underlining or circling information.

The analysis of both student and teacher subsamples by schools showed significant relationships between the agreement with strategy use of students and teachers in all cases in the third study. In the central study two schools did not demonstrate significant relationship, due to the small number of participating teachers. The values of the Spearman correlation coefficients were between .55 and .81 in the third study and between .53 and .75 in the central study.

Parents' reading related beliefs were only found to be related to students' beliefs in one case. The use of Problem-Solving Strategies correlated significantly (r=.16) with the importance of help in home learning. Hypothesis 6 was partially supported by these findings. Clear relationship was demonstrated between teachers' and students' beliefs. However, parents' beliefs were only found to be directly corresponding to students' beliefs in one case, suggesting that family background has less impact on learners' beliefs about reading strategies than school.

Adaptive strategy use

Results of the central study suggest that students consider different reading strategies adequate in different reading situations, supporting hypothesis 7. Figure 3 shows that the majority of grade 7 students selected 11-13 strategies for the ten situations. The students selected at least six of the 17 strategies provided.
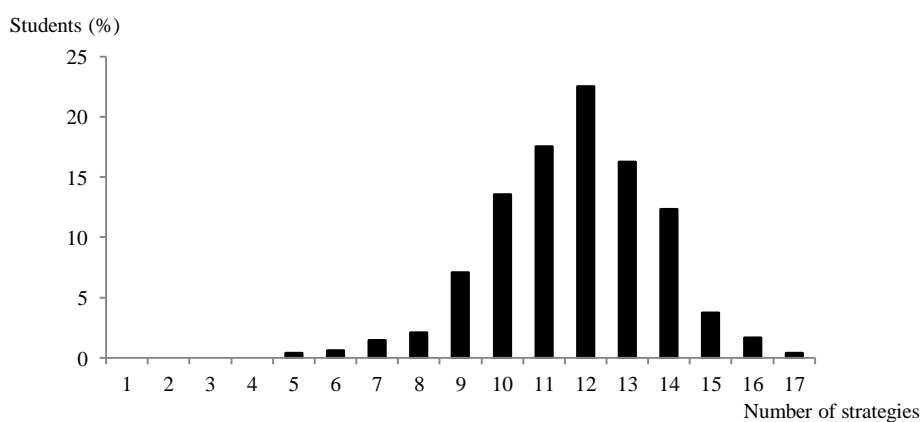

Figure 3
The number of selected strategies by the proportion of strudents in the ten different reading situations

Few significant correlations were found with awareness of strategy use and agreement with strategy use, one exception being the use of Problem-Solving Strategies. The regression model suggests that adaptive strategy use significantly (6.5%) determines reading comprehension.

POSSIBILITIES OF THE APPLICATION OF THE FINDINGS

Few Hungarian instruments are available for studying reading strategies. The adapted and developed questionnaires (*Awareness of strategy use*, and *Agreement with strategy use*) can be applied from the lower secondary level of education to measure students' beliefs about strategy use. Using these quesionnaires in school practice can provide teachers with information on what kind of knowledge students have about reading strategies. These questionnaires support the teaching process of reading strategies, help the denomination of the strategies, and can be used in classroom discussions.

The developed questionnaires can be used in intervention programs. They are suitable to monitor students' own reading process and meditate about it. The questionnaires provide a starting point to test unknown or unused strategies in different situations and enrich students' repertoire of strategies.

The findings of this resesarch provide information to the educational system about how Hungarian students are familiar with reading strategies used by skilled readers. They can further support the definition of teaching reading strategies as a curricular objective and the development of detailed curricula.

The findings of the *Adaptive strategy use* questionnaire highlighted that already grade 7 students are aware that different reading situations can require the use of different reading srtategies. This knowledge is worth strengthening and can be supported by a number of practical examples. Students can gain the necessary practice for adaptive/critical reading by the constant extension of their repertoire of strategies and regular practice of these strategies in school This can provide them with sufficient ground for success in their further studies and for the flexible solution of any tasks related to reading in their adult life.

FURTHER RESEARCH

The research assessed 12–18-year-old Hungarian students' beliefs about reading strategies. Further research can involve online assessment (*Veenman*, *Van Hout-Wolters* & *Afflerbach*, 2006) of students' strategy use. Research including the method of eye-tracking can answer the question whether students' beliefs are adequate with their actual activities. This further research could serve as a ground for developing training programs of reading comprehension based on the use of reading strategies. In addition, these methods can measure the effectiveness of the existing training programs.

Further research can also include the investigation of the effect of beliefs and strategy use on reading comprehension, involving the motivational characteristics of students. Results can support the practice of teaching, since it provides information on the influence of such constructs on reading comprehension that can be influenced by the educational system, fostering the students' development.

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