

DOCTORAL (PHD) DISSERTATION
THESIS BOOKLET

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**Alternative Assessment Methods in English as a
Foreign Language and in English Medium Content
Classes in Hungarian Public Secondary Schools**

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Introduction and Research Niche

On an international level, governments and education policy makers are increasingly focused on assessment to understand better how well students are learning and to provide information to parents and society about educational performance and to improve school leadership and teaching practices (OECD, 2013). Although international trends in student assessment show that policy priorities should take a holistic approach, align assessment with educational goals, focus on improving classroom practices and build on teacher professionalism, avoid distortions such as teaching to the test, and put students at the center, “information collected in the OECD Review indicates that the use of innovative assessment approaches remains quite limited within the national assessment frameworks of OECD countries” (OECD, 2013, p. 149). Besides presenting some promising alternative assessment practices in different countries, as Hungary did not opt to take part in the OECD’s country reviews (2013), data could only be collected from official legislation and policy papers in connection with Hungary. Therefore, research is needed to determine what kinds of assessment, if any, takes place in Hungarian public secondary education apart from what is legally required.

Hungarian national legislation (Act CXC on National Public Education, 2011) only requires summative assessment in the form of one to five grades in public primary and secondary education and centralized secondary school leaving examinations, while there are no central frameworks for formative assessment on any levels of education (OECD, 2013). Official policy papers include ideals on different purposes of assessment such as providing learning support, developing students, and carrying out ongoing evaluation and analysis of educational processes (Act CXC, 2011, Section 64), or applying differentiation as a basic principle, taking into consideration the development of talented students, and incorporating different types of assessment (National Core Curriculum, 2012). Although in theory, schools could apply different assessment systems as long as they can also provide grades if requested (Act CXC, 2011, Section 54, paragraph 4), schools’ pedagogical programmes show a similar duality to official legislation. On the one hand, as output requirements refer to grading exclusively, grading procedures are detailed extensively. On the other hand, further purposes and assessment methods are only mentioned, such as “we use guided self-assessment tools”, “we implement open, well-established, predictable, justified and fair assessment”, or “we adhere to the principles of regularity and methodological diversity in assessment” (Gál-Berey, 2022, pp. 88-89) without any

further specifics, practical implications, or guidelines for how teachers should carry them out. As a result, it depends entirely on individual teachers if and how they fulfill the above mentioned purposes. Only few research studies have been conducted in connection with assessment in Hungary focusing on ways that aim to fulfill other roles than grade giving (Hubai & Lázár, 2018). Consequently, research should map how teachers apply alternative assessment methods.

The advancements of the 21st century bring further challenges, for instance, the need for developing and assessing more complex skills and competences. Both international (Vogt & Tsagari, 2014) and Hungarian (Radnóti, 2006) studies show that teachers express the need for further training in assessment of complex competences in English as a foreign language (EFL) and English medium content (EMC) classes. The Covid-19 pandemic resulting in emergency remote delivery worldwide also highlighted the inadequacy of some traditional assessment methods (Farkas et al., 2021). Hence, research needs to explore ways of assessment fulfilling these roles and meeting the challenges of the 21st century.

The present research focuses on the Hungarian public secondary school context; thus, the definition of alternative assessment used in this study is in relation to official rules and regulations of student assessment in Hungarian public secondary schools. Taking into consideration Sadler's (1989) definition of assessment in general: "any appraisal (or judgment, or evaluation) of a student's work or performance" (p. 120) and the Hungarian public educational context where teachers should evaluate students' knowledge, behavior, and diligence in the form of grades from one to five and also develop students with the help of assessment, my own definition of alternative assessment is as follows. The term "alternative assessment" is used in this study to refer to any appraisal, judgment, or evaluation of a student's work or performance that contains different elements in addition to or instead of grades with the purpose of supporting students' development. The development of students is understood here in accordance with the expectations of the Hungarian educational act, which states that the

public education system [should] contribute to the harmonic mental, physical and intellectual development of children and young people through the conscious development of their skills, abilities, knowledge, proficiencies, emotional and volitional characteristics and cultural education corresponding to their age characteristics, thus educating people and

responsible citizens who are virtuous and capable of independent life as well as achieving their objectives, while harmonising private interests with the interests of the public. (Act CXC, 2011, Section 1)

Research Questions

The present research aims to gain insights into the use of alternative assessment methods in EFL and in EMC classes in public secondary education in Hungary. In order to map alternative assessment methods in this context, the following research questions (RQs) are asked: (the first group of questions starting with number 1 refer to teachers' perspectives, and the second group of questions starting with number 2 refer to students' perspectives)

1.1 What do teachers mean by assessment and alternative assessment in particular in English as a foreign language and in English medium content classes in public secondary education in Hungary?

1.2 What alternative assessment methods do teachers claim to use in English as a foreign language and in English medium content classes in public secondary education in Hungary?

1.3 What are teachers' views of using alternative assessment in English as a foreign language and in English medium content classes in public secondary education in Hungary?

1.4 What are teachers' motivations and purposes for using alternative assessment in English as a foreign language and in English medium content classes in public secondary education in Hungary?

1.5 What are teachers' experiences with using alternative assessment methods in English as a foreign language and in English medium content classes in public secondary education in Hungary?

1.6 How can alternative assessment methods in English as a foreign language and in English medium content classes in public secondary education in Hungary be adapted to remote delivery?

2.1 What are students' experiences in connection with assessment in English as a foreign language and in English medium content classes in public secondary education in Hungary?

2.2 What are students' perceptions of alternative assessment in English as a foreign language and in English medium content classes in public secondary education in Hungary?

2.3 What are students' experiences in connection with assessment during emergency remote delivery in public secondary education in Hungary?

2.4 What are students' perceptions of the adaptation of alternative assessment methods in English as a foreign language and in English medium content classes in public secondary education in Hungary to remote delivery?

Methods

As the research questions (RQs) are exploratory in nature and aim to interpret social, behavioral phenomena in a given context, they should be explored within the qualitative research paradigm (Guba, 1981). In connection with qualitative research, Maykut and Morehouse (1994) emphasize that research questions should be carefully matched with methods of collecting and analyzing data, which are presented in the following paragraphs.

The research consists of three main phases. In order to answer the first five research questions (RQ 1.1–1.5), an interview study was conducted with Hungarian public secondary school teachers already using alternative assessment methods. In the second phase, to gain more insight into the use of alternative assessment methods (RQ 1.5) and to understand students' experiences with school assessment in general (RQ 2.1) and alternative assessment in EFL and EMC classes in public secondary education (RQ 2.2), an action research project built on the results of the first phase was carried out in the school year 2019/2020. The third phase of the research was not planned originally; however, as the second, action research phase was interrupted by the Covid-19 pandemic resulting in emergency remote delivery, further research questions emerged (RQs 1.6, 2.3, and 2.4). In order to answer these questions, the last three months of the action research project continued online, and a follow-up interview study was organized with the participants of the first interview study to investigate their experiences with emergency remote delivery.

As Guba (1981) explains, social and behavioral phenomena are context bound; therefore, instead of generalizability, the research aims for transferability through describing and interpreting a given context with purposive sampling, collecting thick descriptive data, and developing thick descriptions. For these reasons, the participants of the interviews were chosen through purposive sampling in order to interview teachers already using alternative assessment methods. In addition, I used case sampling (Flick, 2009) to ensure that participants are as diverse as possible (male and female, novice and experienced teachers, EFL and EMC teachers, vocational and grammar school teachers, teaching in the capital and in the countryside). Semi-structured in-depth interviews are suggested when there is a list of topics that are common

to all respondents, and the goal is to identify commonalities and differences across individual respondents on these topics, while also giving space for emerging themes (Lapan et al., 2012, p. 94). For these reasons, semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted in the first and last phase of the study.

Based on the results of the interview study and my former experiences, I designed the second phase of the research: the action research project. Holliday (2007) categorizes “participatory action research” into the postmodern qualitative research paradigm, in which “researchers are part of research settings” (p. 16). My participatory action research project included 44 students from three groups (9th grade IT English, 11th grade mathematics in English, and 11th grade elective advanced mathematics in English) I taught in the 2019/2020 school year in a public bilingual vocational secondary school in Budapest, Hungary; thus, applying convenience sampling (Cohen et al., 2007). Prior to my PhD studies, I also collected data through questionnaires involving 133 students I taught since 2014. The action research phase was documented by a teaching journal including field notes, lesson plans, and self-reflections. In addition, for investigator triangulation (Maxwell, 1992) eight observers’ reports, proformas (Burns, 1999), class recordings, discussions, monthly student questionnaires, and three focus group interviews were further instruments applied. These represent the variety of perspectives: mine as researcher and participant, my student participants, and different observers; in addition to the variety of methods and data sources applied.

I recorded, transcribed, and analyzed the collected verbal data (both from the interviews and the action research) using the constant comparative method (Dörnyei, 2007). Student questionnaires contained some quantitative data as well, so I also used descriptive statistics.

Results

Results are presented by answering each research question. All research questions refer to the context of English as a foreign language and English medium content classes in public secondary education in Hungary. The thesis booklet ends with pedagogical and policy implications and suggestions based on the findings of the study.

What Teachers Mean by Assessment and Alternative Assessment (RQ 1.1)

The interviewed teachers define assessment as information, evaluation (Bachman, 1989), measurement, or feedback highlighting its different purposes. For example, assessment provides information for students about their work and also for teachers about theirs, measurement that

creates comparisons among students, classes, schools, and so on, which provides information for other stakeholders such as parents and schools, too. The interviewed teachers share examples for both norm- and criterion referenced assessment (Gipps, 1994) as well as assessment *of* learning, assessment *for* learning, and assessment *as* learning (Earl, 2006). All diagnostic, formative, and summative purposes of assessment (Rea-Dickins, 2000) appear in the interviews. There seems to be a common understanding of what traditional assessment means in public secondary education in Hungary: the one to five compulsory grading defined by the law that traditionally happens through written or oral tests. Participants define alternative assessment as anything that is different from that with a great variety of their different practices determined by their pedagogical goals.

What Alternative Assessment Methods Teachers Claim to Use (RQ 1.2)

The twelve interviewed teachers claim to use numerous alternative assessment methods. Their main alternative for grading is using different point-collecting systems inspired by gamification, adapting game design elements to non-game contexts (Deterding et al., 2011). Participants also apply alternatives for both oral and written testing. Instead of the traditional oral tests in which students are randomly chosen and asked by the teacher in front of the class, students can volunteer and know the date and the exact criteria in advance. The interviewed teachers prefer live or recorded student presentations to oral tests, which some of them call vlogs. Traditionally unannounced and graded pop quizzes are also turned into opportunities for formative feedback without high stakes for students.

The interviewed teachers introduce alternatives for achievement tests as well. Students can write tests in pairs or groups, compile tests for themselves, or the tasks of the test are in order of increasing difficulty making differentiation possible by, for example, having optional challenging tasks at the end of the test. In addition to alternatives for achievement tests, interviewees use further methods for summative purposes such as essays, translations, extended reports, reflective journals, project journals, further project work, creative individual or group products, posters, and portfolios. An additional category is achievement tests presented in a gamified framework such as a board game, for which students can create task cards, questions, or even design the whole game; a treasure hunt; a mystery game; a quiz show, for example, Jeopardy! or Who wants to be a millionaire?; or an escape room activity that can happen both in class or online.

The teachers also apply assessment activities that help process the material. They provide countless opportunities for students to collect points for their grade in addition to tasks for their own sake such as different kinds of collaborative group work. Diagnostic assessment frequently appears including feedback that participating teachers ask from students through anonymous online forms, exit tickets, or Q&A sessions. The interviewed teachers include various forms of peer assessment and students' self-assessment, too. They also provide diverse forms of feedback to their students: from highlighting students' individual strengths to using detailed rubrics in addition to individual formative feedback that informs students not only about their current level and the goal but also how they can alter the gap between the two (Sadler, 1989).

Teachers' Views of Using Alternative Assessment (RQ 1.3)

Answering the third research question, during data analysis several themes emerged. The interviewed teachers display competences for democratic culture (Council of Europe, 2016), and their attitudes, skills, knowledge, and values affect their views as their student-centered approaches influence their teaching and assessment practices. For example, they choose their assessment methods based on the pedagogical goals they would like to achieve. Their views on learning also affect how they teach and assess. They believe in creating a safe environment for learning by minimizing stress and making the learning process enjoyable. In connection with their subjects, their view of English as a lingua franca results in focusing more on developing communication. As a general tendency, the interviewed teachers believe in giving a lot of freedom of choice to students within a set framework, such as selecting from varied tasks and materials involving students' interests. The interviewed teachers use alternative assessment as a result of their views mentioned above, in addition to the further views more directly linked to assessment. They believe that through alternative assessment, they have wider possibilities in facilitating the learning process. They express their views on what assessment should be like: fair, transparent, individualized and comparing students to themselves, supportive, and motivating, in addition to focusing on students' needs and developing assessment methods to facilitate their improvement.

Teachers' Motivations and Purposes for Using Alternative Assessment (RQ 1.4)

The interviewed teachers' motivations and purposes for using alternative assessment come from two main sources: their criticism of traditional assessment and the further pedagogical goals they would like to achieve through assessment. Participants find the compulsory grading in

Hungary inadequate or even impedimental for reaching different pedagogical goals, hence their need for alternative assessment. They find traditional grading practices unfair and believe that grades in themselves cannot provide adequate feedback either to students on their work or to teachers on theirs. As a result, they would like to give grades to students that reflect students' effort and energy invested in studying, their development compared to themselves, in addition to their performance and knowledge of a certain section of the material as compared to standards described in the curriculum. They would also like their students to understand what is behind a certain grade and find it fair.

Furthermore, participants criticize the exclusively summative nature of grade giving in contrast to the need for supporting students' development. They are also concerned that traditional assessment affects students' learning strategies. As they are required to memorize lexical knowledge, they apply rote learning of materials, which participating teachers find difficult to change. Moreover, the interviewed teachers have diagnostic purposes, such as obtaining information about what students already know and what they still need to practice in a transparent way, so that the information is not only accessible for the teacher but also for the students.

In addition to summative and diagnostic goals, most goals described by the participating teachers are in connection with formative assessment. They would like to reflect on the learning process, and not just the outcome. Their aim is to facilitate students' learning through assessment, such as providing help on how to improve and achieve set goals. It leads to one of their main purposes: enabling students to reflect on their own work and become self-monitoring learners, thus developing students' autonomy.

The interviewed teachers also expressed purposes related to learning and subjects in school in general, students' lives beyond school, the teachers' own perspectives, and goals that emerged during emergency remote delivery, too. Teachers aim to develop intrinsic motivation in their students by fulfilling their students' needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 1985) through, for instance, differentiation providing individualized possibilities for students.

In connection with educational goals, they would like to prepare their students for exams, such as the secondary school leaving matura exams or language exams, and their further studies of tertiary education, or work, and lifelong learning in general. Consequently, the participating

teachers wished to develop complex skills and competences. Based on the list of Trilling and Fadel (2009), the following 21st century skills appear as developmental goals in the interviews: critical thinking, problem solving, communication, collaboration, creativity, innovation, digital literacy, initiative and self-direction, social and cross-cultural interaction, flexibility and adaptability, leadership and responsibility, and productivity and accountability skills. All the interviewed teachers were very concerned about how their students could cope with the pandemic, which fundamentally influenced their goals by placing their students' support at the center.

Teachers' Experiences With Using Alternative Assessment Methods (RQ 1.5)

As the teachers' introduction of alternative assessment highly depends on their pedagogical goals, their experiences are also linked to their evaluation of being able to reach their purposes. The interviewed teachers have found that students receiving grades through their various point-collecting systems can achieve the goal of giving the compulsory grades that also reflect students' effort and energy invested in studying and their development compared to themselves, in addition to their performance and knowledge of a certain section of the material as compared to standards described in the curriculum. In the interviewed teachers' experience, their students find their point-collecting systems fair. For their students to understand their methods, they regularly carry out teacher-student discussions. Participants believe that their alternative assessment methods develop learner autonomy, which seemed to be proven during the emergency remote delivery. They also experience that their alternative assessment methods inspire other colleagues and can result in some changes in the pedagogical programme of some of the participating schools as well. In connection with alternatives for tests, the interviewed teachers experience that their students are less stressed and enjoy the freedom and flexibility they have in different ways of presenting what they know.

The teachers also experience more freedom and flexibility from their own point of view as they perceive more chances for differentiation and involvement of a wider range of methods to apply and skills to be assessed. Through providing continuous feedback on students' work, the participants believe that they can facilitate students' development more effectively. Due to the variety of assessment activities that help process the material, students are more motivated by experiencing autonomy through their freedom of choice. Students also seem to enjoy the learning process more. In addition, they have the chance to experiment and see which learning methods

work for them and learn accordingly. This seems necessary as the interviewed teachers experience a great diversity in students' answers. According to the interviewed teachers, some of their students show signs of intrinsic motivation through experiencing the above mentioned autonomy, competence, and relatedness by, for example, performing better after studying and preparing together in study groups. However, not all students seem to develop intrinsic motivation; according to the teachers' experiences, point collecting can also stay an extrinsic motivation for some students.

Applying diagnostic assessment, the teachers can acquire information for their pedagogical decisions in addition to experiencing further benefits. As students also have to provide feedback to their teachers and their peers, they have the opportunity to learn and practice how to give constructive feedback and formulate their criticism in a way that others and themselves can learn from it. Students also seem to enjoy learning from each other and improve in several skills through such situations, for instance, when organizing mock exams.

How Alternative Assessment Methods Can Be Adapted to Remote Delivery (RQ 1.6)

Regarding the teachers' point of view, the last research question reflects on the emergency remote delivery situation caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. One of the main findings of the study is that most of the alternative assessment methods do not depend on the medium, and for this reason could easily be adapted to remote delivery. In fact, the closer to traditional grading practices assessment was, the more difficult it was to adapt online. The interviewed teachers also applied various solutions for grading and testing. They mostly kept their point-collecting systems and adapted the ways in which points could be collected by students. However, there were also examples of grading single assignments chosen by students. The participants reported different ways of handling live online classes as well, such as giving lectures for EMC classes where students had no coursebooks, providing consultation opportunities if students had problems with the material or the tasks they collected the points with, using live calls for speaking practice or exam preparation, and also varying interactive tasks together as a class and individual tasks to process the material. As all the interviewed teachers had already abandoned traditional testing before the pandemic, they had to make only smaller adaptations taking into consideration the special circumstances of the emergency remote delivery. For instance, they did not test students' lexical knowledge; instead, students had to apply, analyze, and evaluate (reflecting the higher

order thinking skills of Bloom et al., 2001) the information they accessed on the internet or they were encouraged to solve tests together.

Students' Experiences in Connection With Assessment (RQ 2.1)

In questionnaires prior to the introduction of any alternative assessment practices, based on 150 students' 415 expressions that they associate with school assessment, more than two-thirds of the students (67%) mention grades. The second most frequent association is tests (written or oral) including 12% of the words. These associations, in addition to further questionnaire responses and discussions with observers, all reflect the prevalence of grading and the most frequently used forms of assessment being oral and written tests in traditional public education in Hungary. Moreover, students write more than twice as many negative associations as positive ones and detail their criticism against traditional assessment in EFL and EMC classes. The participating students mostly criticize the practice of traditional grading. They do not find it fair because, according to them, graded tests do not reflect their diligence, class participation, homework, the fair amount of work they invest in studying, their real knowledge, their continuous work, or their various skills. Students feel that tests require them to remember lexical knowledge that they have to cram and only show their performance at a given moment. They suggest instead textual feedback, corrections with explanations, personal discussions with the students and their parents, and more oral tasks, projects, and cooperative tasks. They also express the need for flexibility, individualization, and lots of different opportunities for students to choose from. Students often ask for individualized assessment, support for their learning processes, and the possibility to express themselves in varied ways that suit them as part of their assessment.

Students' Perceptions of Alternative Assessment (RQ 2.2)

The findings show that alternative assessment practices can fulfill the above mentioned student needs. Students seem to enjoy point-collecting systems for several reasons. Most students feel that their efforts and diligence matter and appreciate the chances to correct and improve their results. They find the point-collecting systems transparent, logical, understandable, meaningful, and easy to follow, which might refer to the fact that students can follow their progress by getting points for each activity they carry out. Students also report point-collecting systems being fair for providing equal opportunities to diverse students. Another aspect of fairness is that with the diversity of tasks, students do not feel that they always have to perform everything perfectly. In

addition, students feel that the point-collecting system is easier and manageable, which might be a connection between feasibility and fairness in the sense that they all feel that everybody has the possibility to achieve good results.

Several students say that they prefer point-collecting systems to traditional assessment because they have to work more, they are more motivated, and experience less stress, which reflects the blissful productivity element of gamification (Rab, 2013). Students appreciate that assessment is more individualized and facilitates their learning. The grades they receive as a result of point collecting depend on their class participation, homework, and test results all together.

However, students do not agree on the ratio of how much these grades contain their diligence and knowledge of the given material. Some students are satisfied, while others express concerns that these grades reflect more their diligence than their knowledge. Further disagreement concerns the fact that for some students it is difficult to reach grade five through collecting points, while for others it might not be challenging enough. The last piece of criticism that students experience is in line with teachers' views that some students, after collecting the necessary points to reach a certain grade, lose their motivation; thus, collecting points for grades seems to be extrinsically motivating for some of them, but not intrinsically.

Students' Experiences in Connection With Assessment During Emergency Remote Delivery (RQ 2.3)

The last two research questions focus on students' experiences of assessment during the emergency remote delivery in general and in connection with alternative assessment. Students' main experience in general was that most of their teachers were replicating online the same practices they carried out in person. This general principle was true in many aspects: those teachers who held frontal classes face-to-face also gave lectures online and tried to apply the same traditional testing and grading procedures as well. Students experienced various problems with such lectures and the following tests. According to them, as tests mostly required remembering lexical knowledge, they often used their notes or the internet, which they categorized as cheating. As a response, some teachers asked for the use of cameras, set short time limits, or gave a higher number of tasks. The overwhelming amount of tasks was a recurring experience that students reported in addition to teachers using different platforms and ways of assessment that students found difficult to follow. As the study reflects only on the first wave of

the pandemic, further research is needed to determine students' and teachers' experiences of the following school year that also happened mainly in remote delivery.

Students' Perceptions of the Adaptation of Alternative Assessment Methods to Remote Delivery (RQ 2.4)

Students' responses also support one of the main findings of the study, which is that most alternative assessment methods can easily be adapted online. As one student summarizes: "the advantage of this assessment system is that it works both online and offline, so we haven't had to change much". Most students expressed that the reason why they liked these alternative assessment methods is that they could be maintained during the emergency remote delivery.

Students participating in the action research felt that their learning process was supported through assessment. They did not feel the need for cheating in tests for different reasons, for example, their alternatives for tests did not have high stakes and required problem solving skills instead of memorization. Some students even preferred online solutions, such as the freedom to solve tasks according to their own time management, giving presentations through screen sharing and having live discussions afterwards, and collecting points in more varied ways than in person. Students also enjoyed live online lessons in which they were actively involved. Their reactions to online group work and further assessment activities online varied.

As the study focused only on the emergency remote delivery period, further research is needed to explore assessments carried out online for longer periods of time. Although all stakeholders faced various adversities during the emergency remote delivery, the findings of the study show that alternative assessment methods might have mitigated some of the problems.

Pedagogical and Policy Implications and Suggestions

Although the study presents thirteen teachers' alternative assessment methods in depth, based on their experience, they are the exceptions to the rule when they experiment with alternative assessment methods. As one of them expresses this in an interview: "it is difficult to always swim against the current". The reason why they might feel this way could be attributed to the duality in Hungarian legislation. On the one hand, international trends in assessment are reflected in the texts of policy documents (Hubai & Lázár, 2018): providing learning support, developing students, and carrying out ongoing evaluation and analysis of educational processes (Act CXC, 2011, Section 64), or applying differentiation as a basic principle, taking into consideration the development of talented students, and incorporating different types of

assessment (National Core Curriculum, 2012) are all described as vital. On the other hand, output requirements do not reflect these ideals. Although the effectiveness of the one to five grading has been questioned for more than a century (Kemény, 1912), it remains the only compulsory element of assessment. Moreover, the requirements of the curriculum (National Core Curriculum, 2012) and the standardized central examinations (Government Decree 100/1997) also contradict these ideals. As another participant alerts:

this system doesn't care about the student, it is not the student that is in the focus, but the material, the lexical knowledge... and as long as the output requirements only focus on these, there is no use for all the skills and competence development in the curriculum, [...] as nobody cares about them.

The study presents how the interviewed teachers align their assessment methods with their educational goals and improve their classroom practices, so policy makers could rely on such teacher professionalism as advised by the OECD (2013). The findings of the present research strongly suggest that it is not enough to include ideals in the texts of official policy documents if practice can hardly follow it. I believe that on the one hand, autonomy to teachers and schools should be provided to make professional decisions taking into consideration their local contexts. On the other hand, support should also be given for the development and implementation of such innovative assessment frameworks.

The Covid-19 pandemic also shed light on the need for implementing nationwide innovative assessment frameworks. Monostori (2021), analyzing Hungarian public education during the pandemic, states that most teachers “identified assessment and grading as the most problematic issue [... namely] how the grades would be given [..., and] in the 2019/2020 school year, very few teachers came to the realization that grading [should not be] the most important element of assessment” (p. 11). Further research is needed to map the views of teachers in the whole country in connection with assessment. However, as output requirements did not change during the remote delivery periods either, even if teachers would not consider grading as the most important element of assessment, it remained the only mandatory one.

Teachers, schools, and families did not receive much help during the emergency remote delivery period. According to Lánkos and Christián (2021), schools could not implement the recommendations published by the Educational Authority, on the one hand because they “came with considerable delay [...] since the schools were bound to transition to digital teaching

mid-March, the recommendations issued mid-April were no longer considered relevant by the respondent schools” (p. 90), and on the other hand, “the recommendations were too generally framed and were difficult to adapt to the diverse situations in which the different (public, private or church-run) schools and the affected students and families found themselves when the closures were announced” (p. 90). It is also true for the second version of the recommendations (Oktatási Hivatal, 2020, August 25). Then the 277-page-long volume, entitled *Collection of Digital Pedagogical Methodological Recommendations* (Farkas et al., 2021), was published by the Educational Authority during the school year of 2020/2021, which was already the second semester of remote delivery.

The content of the *Collection of Digital Pedagogical Methodological Recommendations* (Farkas et al., 2021) is in line with the findings of this study. It repeatedly emphasizes that the current situation only accelerated the necessary paradigm shift caused by the advancements of the 21st century and urges that “traditional” practices need to be changed. The following is referred to as traditional: the source of information is the teacher, the focus is on transmitting pieces of information from the teacher to the students, the students are passive recipients of this information transmission, and assessment is mainly evaluating acquired knowledge in written or oral tests (Farkas et al., 2021). Instead, Farkas et al. (2021) recommend that teachers renew their approaches and practices by, “for example, providing interactivity, personalization, support for learning instead of or in addition to teaching, opportunities for alternative learning and knowledge acquisition, acceptance of knowledge gained elsewhere, supportive assessment approaches, and encouraging community learning” (p. 87). The exact assessment methods detailed in the recommendations (Farkas et al., 2021) can be tools in this renewal; however, the authors of the recommendations neglect the issues of the compulsory grading or the lexical knowledge based curriculum and other factors that hinder such renewal. All in all, publications of the Educational Authority support the necessary paradigm shift in education; however, if they stay on the level of theoretical suggestions without exact policy changes reflecting these ideals, they do not and will not result in the renewal of practices on a large scale.

On a small scale, however, both international (Vogt & Tsagari, 2014) and Hungarian (Radnóti, 2006) studies show that teachers express the need for further training in assessment that would help them meet the challenges of the 21st century such as assessing complex skills and competences. The findings show that it is possible to carry out such assessment while complying

with existing rules and regulations. Further research is needed to determine the effectiveness of these alternative assessment methods in different contexts (e.g., having more, or having fewer external regulations) and the potentials that lie in the professional development of teachers' assessment literacy. However, according to the interviews analyzed in the present study, teachers base their assessment methods on their pedagogical goals influenced by their views and experiment with different practices until they reach their goals. Their student-centeredness shines through their constant involvement of their students in the decision making processes reflecting a democratic approach in practice. They model the behavior they require from their students through lifelong learning.

All the interviewed teachers and myself as the researcher in this study are dedicated to practice and disseminate alternative assessment practices. Professional conferences, workshops, online and in-person communities such as the Pestalozzi Fridays (Lázár, 2015) provide such development opportunities on a small scale. However, my dream would be to teach in an education system where policy makers do not only promote democratic goals in theory, but also in practice by including them in the content of the curriculum, the output requirements, the assessment frameworks, and the professional development of teachers, providing both the indispensable autonomy to teaching staff and the necessary support for innovation and teachers' professional development.

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