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FACULTY OF EDUCATION AND PSYCHOLOGY**

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**Fostering Autonomous Language Learning
in Institutional German Language Acquisition
in Lower Primary Education:
Curricular Intentions and Their Implementation
in the Classroom Context**

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DISSERTATION SUMMARY

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Table of Contents

Problem Statement and Relevance of the Topic.....	2
Aim of the Research	3
1. Theoretical Background	4
2. Methodology of the Empirical Research	6
2.1. Research Questions	6
2.2. Parts and Methods of the Research	7
2.2.1. First Part of the Research: Document Analysis	7
Motives for Selecting the Educational Documents	8
2.2.1.1. Descriptive Presentation of the Documents Included in the Research	9
2.2.1.2. Word Frequency Analysis of the Documents	9
2.2.1.3. Word Frequency Analysis of the National Core Curriculum 2007, 2012 and 2020...13	
Contextual Analysis of the Selected Word Stems	14
2.2.1.4. Word Frequency Analysis of the German Nationality Educational Documents.....13	
2.2.1.5. Word Frequency Analysis of the Pedagogical Programmes Included in the Research	14
2.2.2. Second Part of the Research: Interviews	15
Preparation of the Interviews	15
Pilot Interviews	16
Presentation of the Interviewees	16
Research Instruments	17
Structure of the Interview Questions	17
2.2.3. Third Part of the Research: Textbook Analysis	17
Criteria for the Selection of the Textbooks	18
3. Main Results of the Research	18
Limitations of the Research	22
Strengths of the Research	22
4. Conclusions	23
New Findings	26
Future Research Directions and Practical Implications of the Results	26
References	29
Publications of the Author Related to the Research Topic	33
Publications of the Author Not Related to the Research Topic	36

Problem Statement and Relevance of the Topic

Since the 1990s, the development of multilingualism within institutional frameworks has been a key objective of the European Union. In Hungary, however, there is a significant discrepancy between the social demand for foreign language proficiency and the actual language competence of the population. While parents of the younger generation increasingly advocate for early foreign language instruction, current statistics show that the language proficiency of the active population remains below the desirable European level. Haugen (1987) refers to Hungary as a peculiar example of a country whose mother tongue is unique and isolated, yet whose population exhibits a remarkably low level of foreign language competence. For this reason, several authors have called for educational policy reforms in the early 2000s (Setényi, 2003b; Halász, 2006). Based on scientific findings, the National Core Curriculum (Nemzeti alaptanterv, NAT) was subsequently revised in 2003, 2007, 2012, and 2020. These revisions also affected the framework curricula and the pedagogical programmes of schools. In addition, 2010 saw the publication of documents specifically regulating German nationality education, which remain valid guidelines for teachers and educators working in nationality education to this day. Examining the changes reflected in these documents provides valuable insight into the directions of educational development.

European Union documents emphasise the fundamental role of public education in laying the groundwork for lifelong learning. The initial phase of schooling plays a crucial role in establishing the foundations upon which later learning, motivation, and the development of key competences can be built. It is essential that pedagogical practice aligns with these objectives. The development of lifelong learning competence requires fostering learners' adaptability, cooperation skills, and reflective thinking (Carnell & Lodge, 2002). Relevant literature supports the importance of an early start in cultivating learner autonomy, particularly in autonomous language learning. At the end of the twentieth century, research increasingly focused on the role of age in language acquisition (Birdsong, 1999; Bialystok & Hakuta, 1999; Weber-Fox & Neville, 1999; Marinova-Todd, Marshall & Snow, 2000, 2001; Ullman, 2001; Hyltenstam & Abrahamsson, 2001; Nikolov, 2004).

The present dissertation addresses a specific aspect of foreign language development and learning: it examines foreign language learning in the lower grades of primary education, focusing in particular on the teaching and acquisition of German as a foreign language and German as a nationality language. Within this context, special emphasis is placed on fostering autonomous language learning.

“The foundation of effective early language learning methodology does not lie in the structure of the language itself, but rather in learning the language under authentic conditions. A form of language pedagogy that is independent of specific languages is beginning to emerge, and this is particularly characteristic of early language education.” (Morvai & Poór, 2006, p. 29)

Within this pedagogical framework, the present dissertation positions itself. Its topic is the development of autonomous language learning in the lower grades of German nationality schools and in German as a foreign language education at the same level.

Aim of the Research

The primary aim of the dissertation is to explore how the education for autonomous language learning manifests itself in the teaching and learning of German, both as a living foreign language and as a nationality language, in the lower grades of primary education, and how the different levels of education interact in supporting the development of learner autonomy.

This overall aim is approached through the following specific objectives:

-To identify how the education for autonomous (language) learning is represented in Hungarian curricular documents developed within the European Union framework, particularly at the lower-primary level.

-To examine how the principles outlined in the National Core Curriculum (Nemzeti alaptanterv) are reflected in the German nationality education documents and in the pedagogical programmes of the German nationality schools included in the research.

-To investigate how teachers of German nationality schools implement the concept of education for autonomous language learning in their classroom practices, and to explore, based on their experiences, how autonomy in learning is represented in the international and domestic German language textbooks they use in lower-primary education.

-To map the classroom realisation of education for autonomous language learning in German nationality language teaching, with a focus on the ways this concept is manifested in the foreign and domestic textbooks employed at the lower-primary level.

In summary, this dissertation undertakes a multi-layered research endeavour, encompassing several interrelated themes: following a theoretical foundation, it traces the implementation of educational policy and curricular intentions through to their manifestation in classroom practice.

1. Theoretical Background

The White Paper of the European Commission set the goal that every European citizen should master at least three languages (White Paper, 1995). The Council of Europe emphasised both the importance and the economic benefits of early language learning (Bérces, 1998). Learning that begins in early childhood and continues throughout life is considered essential for building a knowledge-based society, encompassing all formal and informal activities that serve the development of knowledge, skills, and competences (European Report, 2002; Setényi, 2003). The aim of the European educational policy is to ensure that every learner receives a high-quality basic education, learns *how to learn*, and develops a positive attitude towards learning (Commission of the European Communities, 2000).

The concept of knowledge includes not only content-related knowledge but also competences, which form the foundation of educational effectiveness (DeSeCo, 2001; Csapó, 2002). Among the most important key competences is *autonomous learning*, which research since the 1990s has linked to metacognition, self-regulation, and learning strategies (Oxford, 1990; Wenden, 1991; Dickinson, 1992; Moir, 2023). In Hungarian academic literature, independent learning (*önálló tanulás*) is defined as *self-directed learning*, in which motivation, responsibility, and self-assessment play central roles (Kelemen, 1981; Nagy, 1997; Lappints, 2002; Mező, 2004; Zrinszky, 2007; Csíkos, 2007; D. Molnár, 2013).

In language education, autonomy manifests on three levels: The autonomous communicator independently applies communication strategies (Rivers, 1975); The autonomous language learner employs learning strategies across different contexts (Ellis & Sinclair, 1989; Dickinson & Wenden, 1995); The autonomous individual consciously shapes their learning goals and environment.

The development of learner autonomy in lower-primary language education takes place under the guidance of the teacher, within a supportive family and school environment, and involves the use of learning strategies and digital tools (Józsa, 2004; Józsa & Zentai, 2007). This process requires deliberate pedagogical support, gradual assumption of learner responsibility, and active participation, serving as the foundation for lifelong learning.

In the context of the present research, which focuses on German as a foreign language and German as a nationality language, it is essential to clarify the concept of bilingualism. According to neurolinguistic and psycholinguistic research, bilingualism does not merely imply the knowledge of two languages but is also associated with cognitive, neurological, social, and economic advantages (Bialystok, 2001). Although earlier studies emphasised the potential risks

of code-mixing and language confusion (Reynold, 1928, as cited in Saunders, 1988), these can be effectively mitigated through appropriate pedagogical support, provided that the age-specific characteristics of language acquisition are duly considered.

The acquisition of the mother tongue is a natural process that occurs in every typically developing child (Gósy, 2005; Pléh & Réger, 2011). By the age of five, children are spontaneously capable of producing complex sentences, having implicitly acquired grammatical rules through unconscious learning (Pléh & Réger, 2011; Meisel, 2006). The acquisition of a second language is influenced by the age of onset (AoO), the linguistic environment, and the socioeconomic background (Hoff et al., 2011). International findings indicate that early language development is most effective when it is integrated into everyday activities and adapted to the child's linguistic competence. In many respects, this process resembles first-language acquisition: the language teacher guides learners toward productive language use through repetition and imitation.

The research focuses on the development of autonomous language learners in German nationality primary schools, where both German as a foreign language and German as a nationality language are taught. The preservation of minority languages depends on several factors: the speakers' commitment, the domains of language use, the legal and political framework, and the community's intention to transmit the language to future generations (Csernicskó & Ferenc, 2012). Education plays a central role in language maintenance (King, 2001), particularly today, when sustaining a language relies on the collaboration of family, school, and community (Klein & Márkus, 2024). According to Vámos (2000, n.p.), the nationality language is no longer the native language of the pupils but rather a language learned within institutional frameworks, which makes the first semester of Year 1 an especially significant challenge for them.

In Germany, several models have been developed to support school entry and integration into the second-language environment, providing a bridge between kindergarten and primary school. A similar approach can be found in Hungary at the Deutsche Schule Budapest, which offers a preparatory year (Grade 0) aimed at developing the linguistic readiness of children from the age of five (Deutsche Schule, 2025).

The foundation of language learning is motivation. According to Réthy (2024), learning and motivation exert a mutual influence: learning experiences shape the motivational system, and conversely, motivation affects learning behaviour. Supporting autonomous learning is essential for maintaining motivation, particularly between the ages of six and ten, when factors such as a sense of achievement, personal interest, and individual learning style are of outstanding

importance (Noels, 2005; Chalupa & ter Haseborg, 2020; Alamer & Alrabai, 2022). The development of learner autonomy and self-reflection enhances self-motivation and intrinsic drive (Nikolov, 2004; Czetó et al., 2020). Furthermore, both linguistic self-confidence and the quality of contact with speakers of the target language significantly influence language learning effort (Clément & Kruidenier, 1985; Csizér & Kormos, 2012).

Metacognitive, self-regulatory, reflective, organisational, and social strategies assist learners in consciously planning, monitoring, and evaluating their own learning processes (Kuhl, 1985; Oxford, 1990; Cohen, 1998; Benson, 2001; Tseng, Dörnyei & Schmitt, 2006). Among children aged six to ten, memorisation and control strategies tend to dominate, although basic organisational, problem-solving, metacognitive, and social strategies are also present (Habók, Magyar & Molnár, 2019; Cole & Cole, 1998). Children at this age are capable of setting learning goals, designing learning plans, correcting errors, and engaging in self-assessment (Balogh, 2006; Csíkos, 2007; Bimmel & Rampillon, 2000). Through social strategies, they learn to collaborate and seek feedback (Parker et al., 2022).

Learning techniques such as note-taking, repetition, and visualisation provide concrete tools for conscious information processing (Balogh, 2006; Lappints, 2002; Weinstein & Mayer, 1986).

2. Methodology of the Empirical Research

The research consisted of three interrelated components, each supporting the others, and together contributing to a comprehensive understanding of how the development of autonomous language learning is supported in the lower grades of German nationality primary schools, both in the context of foreign language education and nationality language education.

2.1. Research Questions

The achievement of the main and subsidiary research objectives was pursued through a set of research questions corresponding to each goal.

When analysing the documents, the overarching research question was:

In what ways does education for autonomous (language) learning manifest itself in Hungarian curricular documents at the lower-primary level?

This general question was elaborated through the following sub-questions:

-How is education for autonomous (language) learning represented in the successive editions of the National Core Curriculum (NAT 2007, NAT 2012, NAT 2020)?

-How do the German nationality education documents (*Leitbild, Leitsätze, Irányelv*) reflect and convey the guidelines on autonomous language learning outlined in the National Core Curriculum?

-In what ways do the pedagogical programmes of the German nationality schools involved in the research (PP 2008, PP 2024) mirror the curricular intentions related to the development of autonomous language learners?

In the interview phase, the research questions were formulated in alignment with the corresponding research objectives:

-How is education for autonomous language learning manifested in the classroom practices of language teachers in Grades 1–4 of primary school?

-How do the German language textbook series used for German as a foreign language and German as a nationality language support the language teacher in fostering autonomous learning at the lower-primary level?

In the textbook analysis phase, the research questions were as follows:

-How is education for autonomous language learning represented in the Hungarian-published textbook series for German nationality language education (*Bunte Welt*)?

-How is education for autonomous language learning represented in the internationally published textbook series used in German nationality language teaching (*Planetino*)?

2.2. Parts and Methods of the Research

In line with the principle of triangulation, the research consisted of three complementary components: the analysis of educational documents, interviews, and textbook analysis.

2.2.1. First Part of the Research: Document Analysis

The first phase of the research was conducted in 2024, incorporating the pedagogical programmes from 2008 that had already been examined in an earlier study. This research component, focusing on the analysis of documents, was structured along the lines of the theoretical background and research objectives established in the previous chapters. It comprised the following elements: A descriptive presentation of the educational documents included in the research, focusing on the theme of education for autonomous language learning, and a word frequency analysis of the documents, based on a predefined list of 40 lexical stems ($n = 40$) related to autonomous learning and organised into five thematic groups ($n = 5$), as well as an analysis of their contextual occurrences within the National Core Curriculum 2020.

In this first part of the research, two types of comparative analyses were carried out:

1. Temporal comparison: The aim was to identify the direction of change over time by comparing different editions of the same type of document. Specifically, the successive versions of the National Core Curriculum were compared in order to detect changes in the frequency of lexical stems associated with autonomous learning. The same type of comparison was applied to the pedagogical programmes of German nationality primary schools in Pest County, using documents available from 2008 and 2020, to reveal temporal changes in discourse related to learner autonomy.

2. Cross-document comparison: Comparisons were also made between documents simultaneously in force, in order to examine — in line with the research aims — the extent to which the German nationality education documents and the pedagogical programmes of the German nationality schools reflect and operationalise the guidelines set out in the National Core Curriculum, which was developed within the broader European educational framework (NAT vs. PP; NAT vs. German nationality education documents).

Motives for Selecting the Educational Documents

The research encompassed all levels of education. In interpreting these levels, the framework of five curriculum levels described in *Thijs and van den Akker's* (2009) *Curriculum Development Handbook* was adopted: the supra-national, national, institutional, classroom, and learner levels (Thijs & van den Akker, 2009; Vass, 2022; Fazekas, 2016).

The supra-national level has already been addressed in connection with the European guidelines. The national (macro) and institutional (meso) levels were explored through the descriptive analysis of Hungarian educational regulatory documents: at the national level through the National Core Curriculum and the educational documents of German nationality education in Hungary, and at the institutional level through the pedagogical programmes of German nationality schools.

The individual level, representing the learners, is embodied in the research by the teachers, who, through the interviews, presented their language teaching practices with pupils. Within classroom settings, the differentiated instruction, individual attention, and the learner portfolios included in the examined German language textbook series represent the individual learner level.

The research initially incorporated the 2007 edition of the National Core Curriculum (NAT 2007) and the 2008 pedagogical programmes of German nationality primary schools in Pest

County. These documents were available from an earlier study conducted in 2008. In order to trace the developmental continuity of curricular intentions, the subsequent editions of the National Core Curriculum (NAT 2012 and NAT 2020) were also included.

In the case of pedagogical programmes, the aim was to compare the 2008 and 2024 states. Therefore, the publicly accessible pedagogical programmes (2024) of German nationality primary schools currently operating in Pest County were also included among the analysed documents.

In the 2008 study, the pedagogical programmes of 16 German nationality primary schools were analysed. By 2024, 11 of these schools had made their pedagogical programmes publicly available on their websites. For reasons of comparability, the 2008 investigation was replicated using the pedagogical programmes of these 11 schools only.

When selecting the documents, attention was paid— in accordance with the focus of the dissertation— to ensuring that they pertained to institutions of German nationality education and targeted the 6–10-year-old age group.

2.2.1.1. Descriptive Presentation of the Documents Included in the Research

In this part of the research, a descriptive presentation of the selected documents is provided first. Although brief reference is made to the National Core Curriculum (NAT) of 1995 and 2003 to illustrate the developmental process, these editions were not included in the actual analysis.

In the descriptive presentation of NAT 2007, NAT 2012, and NAT 2020, particular emphasis was placed on the themes relevant to the dissertation, namely: autonomous learning, autonomous language learning, foreign language education, nationality language education, multilingualism, and lifelong learning. Furthermore, all document sections corresponding to these main themes — and previously examined in the theoretical part of the dissertation — were included in the description, with special attention paid to the parts addressing the specific characteristics of language learning in the chosen age group.

2.2.1.2. Word Frequency Analysis of the Documents

Following the descriptive presentation, a word frequency analysis was conducted. The aim was to draw conclusions from the frequency of occurrence of selected word stems, thereby

determining to what extent the frequency and distribution of these lexical elements and word combinations represent the themes they denote.

Presentation of the Word Frequency Analysis Applied in the Research

Several established research methodologies were reviewed, demonstrating that the analytical approach adopted in this dissertation shares common features with multiple recognised text analysis techniques.

In the present study, word frequency analyses were carried out, focusing on the frequent or infrequent occurrence of words and word stems. Both the absolute and relative frequencies of words were identified within the examined documents. The analysis was based on a list of 40 selected word stems thematically related to autonomous (language) learning.

For the sake of comparability, the relative frequency values were expressed with seven decimal places, as this level of precision was necessary to ensure accurate differentiation between the values (Radvai, 2023).

Definition of Word Stems

In the present study, the term word stem refers to the word units included in the word stem list used for the frequency analysis. This terminology was deliberately chosen to avoid the imprecise adoption of linguistic or statistical jargon. By *word stem*, we mean that initial segment of a word consisting of a sequence of letters that remains unchanged during inflection. This approach enables the search functions of Microsoft Word and Adobe Acrobat Reader to identify all occurrences of a given stem within the analysed documents.

The number of word stems identified by the software's search function was also manually verified by repeatedly reading the documents. In this way, every occurrence of each word stem was consistently identified and recorded.

The list of word stems was compiled deductively, based on the conceptual framework and themes discussed in the theoretical section. Through multiple readings of the documents, it was ensured that all words relevant to the research topic were included in the final word stem list. The length of the documents made manual verification feasible in each case.

The analysis was first conducted on both the absolute and relative frequencies of the word stems. Subsequently, the stems were organised into thematic categories, corresponding to the topics discussed in the theoretical framework. Furthermore, the current National Core Curriculum (NAT 2020) was examined in terms of the contextual occurrences of the identified word stems within the document.

Following the identification of the key terms derived from the theoretical framework, all other relevant word stems and collocations appearing in the texts were also included. Compared to the 35-item list used in the earlier 2008 study, the list applied in the present research was expanded by five new stems: *motivá-*, *metakog-*, *stratég-i-*, *refle-*, and *önmotivá-*.

The Role of the Documents from the 2008 Research

The earlier research was conducted within the framework of the 2009 Research Support Programme for Studies Aiding Minority Education, announced by the Ministry of Education and Culture. The project supported the research activities of lecturers at the Department of Foreign Languages and Literature of Eötvös Loránd University, Faculty of Primary and Pre-School Education (ELTE TÓK), with the aim of developing German nationality teacher and pre-school teacher training.

During that research, a word frequency analysis was performed on the National Core Curriculum 2007 (NAT 2007) and the Pedagogical Programmes 2008 (PP 2008). The study involved 16 German nationality primary schools in Pest County, specifically those whose pedagogical programmes were publicly accessible on their school websites in 2008.

The analysis was conducted using a list of 35 word stems, which was further expanded in the 2024 study. The research method proved to be appropriate for achieving the research objectives. The earlier study examined the frequency of word stems related to autonomous learning in both the publicly available pedagogical programmes and the National Core Curriculum that was valid at that time.

The present research was able to build upon these materials because the pedagogical programmes of the 16 German nationality schools in Pest County had already been collected during the 2008 study. The word frequency analysis was repeated for the current research; however, it included only 11 schools, as the pedagogical programmes of these institutions were still publicly accessible in 2024.

It was essential to use the same word stem list across all documents and at every stage of the research in order to ensure the comparability of the National Core Curriculum indicators (2007, 2012, 2020) and the word frequency data from the pedagogical programmes (2008, 2024) and the German nationality education documents.

Formation of Thematic Groups

The formation of the thematic word stem groups was carried out deductively. Based on the theoretical background, the categories were defined with reference to the content and structure of the analysed documents, as well as the semantic relations of the selected word stems to the main topics of the research. In other words, the grouping was determined by the theoretical framework, rather than through inductive, data-driven methods. This approach ensured that the categories remained aligned with the focus and conceptual framework of the present dissertation.

Efforts were made to construct groups of approximately equal size in order to facilitate subsequent statistical analysis. For this reason, word stems that could have belonged to more than one category were assigned to the group with the smaller number of items, maintaining a balanced distribution.

The thematic groups of word stems were as follows: Theoretical Background / General Descriptors, Self-awareness and Self-actualisation, Learning Process, Reflective Competences, Social Competences.

Descriptive statistical indicators were calculated for each of these thematic groups in the National Core Curriculum documents (NAT 2007, NAT 2012, NAT 2020). Furthermore, pairwise comparisons were conducted between document editions — NAT 2007 vs. NAT 2012 and NAT 2012 vs. NAT 2020 — to identify changes and trends across time. The aim of this part of the research was to explore the temporal trends, dispersion, outliers, and stability patterns of the word stems ($n = 40$) and their thematic groups ($n = 5$). Each word stem was examined individually, as well as by group, by document pair, and by year. All indicators were calculated for both absolute frequency (raw count) and relative frequency (proportion) values. For the pedagogical programmes of the German nationality primary schools in Pest County, the frequency indicators were also analysed by thematic group. However, for the German nationality education documents, this step was omitted due to the limited length of the documents and the low number of word occurrences within them.

Documents Included in the Word Frequency Analysis

The documents included in the word frequency analysis are presented in Table 1. The table provides an overview of the number of documents analysed, as well as their total word counts, both individually and in aggregate.

Documents Included in the Word Frequency Analysis

- National Core Curriculum (NAT) 2007
- National Core Curriculum (NAT) 2012
- National Core Curriculum (NAT) 2020
- Gyökerek és szárnyak. A magyarországi németek nevelési, oktatási és közművelődési programja (*Wurzeln und Flügel. Leitbild des ungarndeutschen Bildungswesens*) (Roots and Wings. Educational, Teaching and Cultural Programme of the Germans in Hungary)
- A magyarországi német nemzetiségi oktatási rendszer irányelvei és fejlesztési terve. Középtávú fejlesztési terv 2016-ig (*Leitsätze und mittelfristiger Entwicklungsplan für das ungarndeutsche Schulwesen. Mittelfristiger Entwicklungsplan bis 2016*) (Guidelines and Development Plan for the Hungarian German Nationality Education System. Medium-Term Development Plan until 2016)
- A nemzetiség óvodai nevelésének és a nemzetiség iskolai nevelés-oktatásának irányelve (*Guidelines for the Education and Teaching of National Minorities in Kindergartens and Schools*)
- Pedagogical Programmes of German Nationality Primary Schools in Pest County (2008)
- Pedagogical Programmes of German Nationality Primary Schools in Pest County (2024)

Total number of documents: 28

Total word count:

– *National Core Curricula (NAT 2007, NAT 2012, NAT 2020)*: 206,104 words

– *German Nationality Education Documents*: 6,077 words

– *Pedagogical Programmes*: 347,229 words

Overall total word count: 559,410 words

2.2.1.3. Word Frequency Analysis of NAT 2007, NAT 2012, and NAT 2020

During the analysis, descriptive statistical indicators were examined separately for each year, for pairs of years, and for the thematic word stem groups. In addition, percentage changes were calculated for the National Core Curriculum documents published in different years. Based on the magnitude of these percentage changes, the results were classified into categories.

Following the examination of frequency indicators, a separate analysis was conducted for the highlighted word stems that appeared prominently within the National Core Curriculum. Out

of the five thematic groups, three were represented in this part of the research, thereby increasing the representative value of the results with respect to the overall word occurrences within the complete documents.

Contextual Analysis of the Highlighted Word Stems

The highlighted word stems (n = 6) were also analysed in terms of their contextual use within the NAT 2020 document. This contextual analysis aimed to provide a more nuanced understanding of the meanings and conceptual associations of these terms, identifying the chapters and subject areas in which they occurred.

2.2.1.4. Word Frequency Analysis of the German Nationality Educational Documents

The analysis began with a separate descriptive statistical examination of each of the three documents included in the research — Leitbild, Leitsätze, and Irányelv — taking into account their respective word counts. The next step involved a comparative analysis of the three nationality education documents. The analysis was based on the occurrence data of the 40 word stems related to autonomous language learning in these documents, in relation to their actual total word counts. Outlier values within each document were also identified and examined.

Subsequently, the German nationality education documents were compared with the National Core Curricula of 2007 and 2020. The NAT 2007 served as a point of comparison because it was in force at the time when the nationality education documents were created. The NAT 2020, as the currently valid curriculum, was also compared with the unchanged nationality education documents in order to illustrate their current position and alignment. Finally, the NAT 2012 was also included in the analysis to provide a longitudinal perspective and to trace the developmental trends over time.

2.2.1.5. Word Frequency Analysis of the Pedagogical Programmes Included in the Research

A descriptive statistical analysis was carried out as part of the word frequency analysis of the 2008 pedagogical programmes of the German nationality primary schools in Pest County. Both PP 2008 and PP 2024 contain the pedagogical programmes of the same 11 schools from Pest County, which were included in the word frequency analysis. First, descriptive statistics were produced for the 2008 pedagogical programmes. This was followed by the same descriptive statistical analysis of the 2024 pedagogical programmes, collected during the 2024/25 school year. The next step involved comparing the occurrence frequencies of the examined word stems between NAT 2007 and PP 2008. This comparison was based on the calculation of differences

(PP 2008 – NAT 2007) and included a categorisation of the results. The differences were grouped into four categories: outlier values, stable values, declining values, and zero values. Subsequently, the word frequency data of the examined stems in NAT 2020 and PP 2024 were compared. Additionally, percentage changes were calculated for both absolute and relative frequencies for all 40 examined word stems between PP 2008 and PP 2024. Finally, a comparative analysis was also conducted between PP 2008 and PP 2024, structured according to the thematic groups established earlier in the research.

2.2.2. Second Part of the Research: Interviews

The second phase of the research consisted of a situational exploration conducted in selected German nationality primary schools in Hungary, focusing on classroom practices related to the development of autonomous language learning. The investigation was carried out through interviews with language teachers working in German nationality education. The aim of this exploratory phase was not to construct qualitative theory in the classical sense, but rather to gain insight into the real conditions and practices of classroom work, and to provide a basis for the selection of textbooks to be analysed in the third part of the research.

The third phase of the study, therefore, consisted of the analysis of two German-language textbook series, selected on the basis of the findings from this interview phase and examined in light of the theoretical framework and research questions.

Preparation of the Interviews

The population of the research consisted of teachers working in German nationality primary schools in Hungary. The list of these schools was compiled using the Public Education Information System (KIR) database of the Educational Authority, which provided the sampling frame. The interview participants were selected through voluntary participation: teachers were invited to take part, and those who responded positively formed a volunteer sample.

As a first step, a list of German nationality primary schools was generated from the KIR database, which contained 83 schools. The Budapest schools (eight institutions) were supplemented with an additional eight schools known to the researcher through personal professional experience but not listed in the database. As a result, the national list comprised 91 German nationality primary schools. An invitation to participate in the interview was sent to all schools on the list. A total of 12 teachers responded, all of whom were qualified language teachers with German nationality teaching credentials, actively working in lower-primary

education. Finally, 10 interview appointments were successfully scheduled. One interview was interrupted due to an urgent phone call received by the participant. After transcription, the interview texts were sent back to the interviewees for review and approval.

One participant requested that their responses not be included in the study. Consequently, a total of eight interviews were processed, representing approximately 9% of the national sample of 91 schools.

Pilot Interviews

Two pilot interviews were conducted with the aim of refining the interview questions. During the pilot phase, one participant's response revealed that multiple textbooks were being used in lower-primary teaching. Consequently, this aspect was incorporated into the final version of the interview protocol. In the subsequent interviews, additional questions were therefore included, such as: If several textbooks are used, which ones are they? and What are the reasons for changing textbooks?

Since both participants in the pilot phase provided detailed answers to these additional questions, there was no need to repeat the pilot interviews. The two pilot interviews were consequently included in the main dataset of the research.

Presentation of the Interviewees

Participation in the interviews was voluntary. Four of the interviewees were teachers working in the lower-primary section of German nationality primary schools in Budapest, representing 25% of the 16 German nationality schools in the capital. The other four respondents were teachers from four different counties across Hungary, thus representing 21% of the 19 counties and 5% of the 44 rural German nationality primary schools. Although representativeness could not be achieved due to the small sample size, the findings nonetheless provide valuable insights and contextual guidance for the dissertation. The interviews also offered direction for the third phase of the research, namely, the selection of textbooks for analysis. It must also be acknowledged that motivational bias may have influenced participation: those who volunteered were likely to be highly interested in the topic, deeply committed to their profession, confident in their professional competence, and willing to share their experiences. The group of respondents was heterogeneous in terms of educational background, yet all possessed degrees in German nationality education and were actively teaching German in the lower grades of German nationality primary schools.

Research Instruments

Semi-structured interviews were conducted for this phase of the research. An interview template containing the set of questions was developed to ensure a consistent structure across all interviews, thereby facilitating smooth data processing and analysis. Based on the pilot interviews, the interview questions were subsequently expanded and refined.

The duration of the interviews ranged from 35 to 55 minutes, with an average of 45 minutes. For teachers, this corresponds to the length of a typical lesson, and this psychological time limit was deliberately observed. All interviews were conducted in Hungarian, the native language of the participants, between March 2024 and June 2025, using the Zoom online platform. Both the interviews and their written transcriptions were carried out by the author of the dissertation. The responses were presented using the initial letters of pseudonyms to ensure anonymity.

Structure of the Interview Questions

The interview questions were organised into three main thematic areas:

- I. Opportunities for fostering autonomous learning in Grades 1–4 of primary school, with particular emphasis on language teaching.
- II. Characteristics of the textbook series used for German nationality language instruction in the interviewee's school.
- III. Opportunities for promoting autonomous learning within the selected textbooks.

In designing the sequence of questions related to autonomous learning, the principle of progression from general to specific was applied. Based on the responses of the interviewees, the textbook series for analysis in the third part of the research were subsequently selected.

2.2.3. Third Part of the Research: Textbook Analysis

Prior to the textbook analysis, an extensive literature review was conducted, which forms an integral part of this research phase. In this review, the central concepts related to the definition of textbooks and textbook analysis were clarified. The various classification approaches of foreign language textbooks found in the German-language literature were mapped, including generational classifications, classifications based on country of publication, and the concept of foreign language learning without textbooks. The fundamental concepts related to textbook analysis and textbook research (*Lehrwerkforschung*, *Lehrwerkanalyse*, *Lehrwerkkritik*) were also reviewed, alongside the analytical frameworks commonly applied to foreign language textbooks.

Particular attention was given to the criteria for foreign language textbooks designed for lower-primary learners, as outlined in the German-language literature. The set of analytical criteria compiled by Gladysz & Gladysz (2021) served as the basis for the textbook analysis phase of the present study and guided the interpretation of the findings. The Hungarian national textbook list and its criteria for foreign language textbooks were also introduced and discussed.

Criteria for the Selection of the Textbooks

The two textbook series examined in this research were: *Bunte Welt*, published by Műszaki Könyvkiadó (Hungary), and *Planetino*, published by the Hueber Verlag (Germany).

The analysis was based on the textbook choices and practices of schools that used both an international (German) and a domestic (Hungarian) textbook series. This provided an opportunity to examine, within the context of the dissertation, two textbooks designed for different target groups. A further contribution of this research lies in the exploration of how an internationally published textbook can be adapted to the Hungarian educational context, particularly within the framework of German nationality primary education.

3. Main Results of the Research

Key Findings from the Descriptive Analysis of the National Core Curriculum (NAT):

The concept of independent learning appears—albeit only in passing—even in the 1995 edition of the National Core Curriculum (NAT). This document also places emphasis not only on foreign language education, but also on nationality language teaching, defining as its primary objective the facilitation of access to higher education abroad. From the 2003 edition onwards, the objectives of foreign language learning were redefined to focus on enabling learners to use the language authentically and effectively in real communicative situations, according to their own intentions and communicative needs.

All editions—NAT 1995, 2003, and those that followed—draw a clear distinction between the concepts of a living foreign language and a nationality language. However, none of the versions provides detailed guidance on foreign language education in the first three grades of primary school. Consequently, the question of fostering autonomous language learning at this early stage is not addressed explicitly in any of the curricula.

Key Findings from the Word Frequency Analyses:

In NAT 2020, the absolute frequency of the analysed word stems related to autonomy is higher than in the 2007 and 2012 curricular versions. However, the combined and average relative

frequency values are highest in NAT 2007, while the 2012 curriculum occupies an intermediate position between the other two documents. Overall, the findings indicate that the concept of autonomous learning, as represented by the selected word stems, appears in the curricula not uniformly, but organised around specific core concepts. Certain components receive greater emphasis, while others remain marginal. This tendency is further supported by the pairwise comparison of frequency variations across years.

Regarding the direction of change within the *thematic groups*, the “Theoretical Background / General Descriptors” group showed a decrease in frequency between 2007 and 2012, followed by a significant increase by 2020. The remaining groups display smaller fluctuations but remain relatively stable overall, with the “Learning Process” category being the only one to show a consistent decline throughout the examined period.

The contextual analysis of *the highlighted word stems* reveals that their distribution within the document is uneven and scattered throughout the text. From the perspective of this research, it is particularly noteworthy that the highest proportion of occurrences is found in the subject area of foreign languages (approximately 20%), followed by ethics / religious and moral education (around 15%) and visual culture (about 10%). The word stem “stratég-i-” appears in roughly 40% of its total occurrences within the foreign language subject area, suggesting that in NAT 2020, the development of learning strategies plays a prominent role in the process of fostering autonomous language learning.

The descriptive statistical *analysis of the German nationality educational documents* is consistent with the findings of Hungarian academic literature, which indicate that the support of autonomous learning in Hungarian nationality education materials cannot yet be considered systematic. When comparing the word frequency data of the nationality documents with the corresponding values from NAT 2007, which was in force at the time of their publication, it becomes evident that the focus of these texts lies primarily on the preservation of identity.

Key Findings from the Analysis of the Pedagogical Programmes: The 2008 pedagogical programmes (PP 2008) display low average frequency values, indicating that education for autonomous language learning was not among the central elements of these documents but appeared implicitly or indirectly. Thus, the support of learner autonomy was not widely integrated into the pedagogical programmes but rather concentrated around a few key word stems, while other elements relevant to autonomous learning — such as metakog-, stratég-i-, motivá-, refle-, and önmotivá- — were entirely absent.

In contrast, the 2024 pedagogical programmes (PP 2024) show a clearer emphasis on certain terms. Word stems such as egyéni- (individual), önálló- (independent), önkormány- (self-

governance), and *motivá-* (motivation) appear considerably more frequently than others. However, expressions such as *metakog-*, *önmotivá-*, *önazonos-*, *önelemz-*, *önmegfigyel-*, and *autonóm tanulás* remain absent, despite their conceptual significance for a comprehensive, multidimensional approach to autonomous learning. The emergence of the “*stratég-*” word stem as a new lexical item in PP 2024 indicates a strengthening of the strategic dimension of autonomous learning within the most recent pedagogical programmes.

Key Findings from the Interviews:

The interviewees unanimously agreed that education for autonomous language learning should begin as early as the first grade. Within the process of fostering learner autonomy, the principle of gradual progression is considered fundamental; hence, a process-oriented approach must be applied consistently. The respondents concurred that the development of learner independence cannot be postponed to later grades but should be deliberately integrated from the very beginning of language learning.

Several teachers noted the absence of inductive reading texts and the authentic literary materials, previously common in textbooks written by native German authors, as well as the related classical text-processing activities, which would promote target-language thinking and independent comprehension.

Most teachers reported that they follow the requirements and recommendations of the framework curriculum, though minor deviations occur when the difficulty level of the material or the students’ current competence level makes adaptation necessary.

Five of the interviewed teachers expressed the view that independent task performance becomes realistically feasible only from the fourth grade onwards, while during the first three grades, teacher guidance remains dominant, albeit gradually decreasing. This perspective aligns with findings in the academic literature, which suggest that conscious learning typically begins around this age, as the first years of schooling still represent a phase of language acquisition rather than deliberate language learning. The development of learner autonomy is achieved through visual, playful, and stepwise activities that progressively require greater independence. Teaching methods such as *Stationenarbeit* (learning through stations), cooperative games, the explicit instruction of dictionary use, and the integration of online learning tasks all contribute to the enhancement of self-regulatory learning skills. Moreover, online tasks play an important role beyond the classroom, effectively supporting the emergence and reinforcement of autonomous language learning in out-of-school contexts.

Overall, the respondents' views reflect a pedagogical consensus: early, structured, and scaffolded opportunities for autonomous learning are essential in the development of young foreign language learners, especially within the framework of German nationality education.

Key Findings from the Analysis of the Hungarian Textbook Series

Applying the analytical framework and guiding questions proposed by Gladysz & Gladysz (2021), the following results were obtained:

1. Does the textbook offer suggestions for supporting or strengthening the learning process? The textbook does not provide direct guidance for supporting the learning process. However, through the use of pictograms and several playful tasks that allow for independent task completion, it implicitly suggests the importance of learner independence.

2. Does the textbook itself offer any form of support or assistance (e.g. symbols such as happy or sad faces)?

Yes, it does. The textbook employs pictograms to make instructions comprehensible to first-grade pupils who are not yet able to read, thus providing visual support that aids understanding and engagement.

3. Does the textbook provide opportunities for pupils to assess their own performance (e.g. self-assessment tools, mini-portfolios, knowledge descriptions, or mind maps)? Are learning objectives and progress clearly identifiable to learners?

No such tasks were found within the textbook series. In the teaching plan, however, methodological competence is explicitly listed among the competences to be developed, defined as “the independent practice of vocabulary using learned techniques.” From the perspective of the present research, it is encouraging that this area of competence development is included from the very beginning of Grade 1.

The *Bunte Welt* volumes designed for Grade 1 and Grade 2 in German nationality primary schools contain some elements that support autonomous learning, though these are few in number and not presented in a structured or systematic way. Consequently, the intended gradual reinforcement of learner autonomy is not fully realised within this textbook series.

Key Findings from the Analysis of the International Textbook Series

The guiding research question for this stage of the study was:

How is education for autonomous language learning represented in the internationally published textbook series used in German nationality language teaching?

Applying this question to the Planetino textbook series, the following results were obtained:

1. Does the textbook offer suggestions for supporting or strengthening the learning process? Yes, it does so in several ways. It provides learning tips (Lerntipps), introduces reading strategies, and supports individual learning through differentiated tasks. These features explicitly encourage learners to take an active and self-directed role in their learning process.

2. Does the textbook itself offer any form of support or assistance (e.g. symbols such as happy or sad faces)?

Yes, the series provides varied forms of support for the independent learning process of pupils aged 8–11. Its most effective tool is the use of the portfolio method, which, in an age-appropriate way, fosters the development of reflective thinking even at the early stages of language learning, with an emphasis on lifelong learning. The portfolio tasks promote self-assessment and support the process of becoming an autonomous learner.

3. Does the textbook provide opportunities for pupils to evaluate their own performance (e.g. knowledge descriptions, mini-portfolios, mind maps)? Are learning goals, success experiences, and progress recognisable to pupils?

Yes, the portfolio contains all these elements. The learning objectives and content descriptions are clearly indicated in the upper corners of the workbook pages. Tasks designed for self-checking and encouraging individual differentiation help learners to develop realistic self-evaluation skills.

The Planetino international textbook series places strong emphasis on fostering learner autonomy. The teacher's manual provides clear, step-by-step guidance for teachers on how to implement this process effectively. Moreover, through the use of portfolios and other supportive activities, learners are encouraged to reflect on their own learning, thereby gaining an objective understanding of their progress. The progressive expansion of the portfolio from one module to the next reinforces learners' sense of achievement and advancement.

Limitations of the Research

During both the 2008 study and the 2024 research, a recurring issue emerged: the pedagogical programmes of all schools were not consistently available on their official websites. The 2008 study already noted this limitation in its summary: "It is recommended that those schools which do not yet have a website, or have not published their documents online, should address this shortcoming. The accessibility of these documents does not merely serve a bureaucratic function: in those institutions where attention was given to formal presentation, content completeness, and the transparent publication of their pedagogical programme, greater

emphasis was also placed on the conscious development of the programme itself. Consequently, such documents more frequently contained concepts related to autonomous learning.” (Radvai, 2013). In 2024, the same issue persisted: in several schools, the pedagogical programme was still not available online. Additionally, two institutions had uploaded their programmes in JPG image format, which significantly complicated the word-search process. Furthermore, one school included in the 2008 sample had ceased minority education by 2024, resulting in a reduction of the examined sample from 16 institutions (2008) to 11 institutions (2024).

In the word frequency analysis, the sample size of the word-stem list ($n = 40$) and the length of the documents were not sufficient for complex statistical analyses. Therefore, descriptive statistics were employed. The analysis was carried out within thematic categories, and percentage differences were calculated, complemented by contextual analysis, in order to approach the information conveyed by the frequency of word stems from multiple perspectives. Regarding the interviews, the sampling procedure also presented limitations. The sample was not representative, due to the small number of participants, their voluntary participation, and the homogeneity of the group in terms of qualification. In oral interviews, a motivational bias must also be acknowledged: those who volunteered to participate were typically highly interested in the topic, strongly committed to their profession, confident in their professional competence, and willing to share their experiences.

Strengths of the Research

The strength of this research lies primarily in the novelty of its focus—that is, the development of autonomous language learning in lower primary education—as well as in its comprehensive, multi-level approach to the educational process.

The findings may be utilised in multiple ways: in the development of future German-language textbooks, in curriculum and materials design, and in the revision of pedagogical programmes. Furthermore, the interview findings and examples of good practice provide valuable insights that can be directly applied to classroom work by language teachers.

A notable contribution of the textbook analysis phase is that it allowed for an examination of how an internationally published textbook can be adapted to domestic educational aims, thereby bridging international and national pedagogical perspectives.

4. Conclusions

In response to the research question related to the descriptive analysis of the National Core Curriculum (NAT), the findings indicate that education for autonomous language learning is

present in every version of the NAT, though with different emphases and approaches. While the theme remains consistently integrated into the curricular texts, the focus has shifted in different directions across editions.

Overall, it can be concluded that the interpretation of learner autonomy in the curriculum has increasingly moved towards an emphasis on the conscious application of learning strategies and on identity-based autonomy, which strengthens the learner's sense of self and identity. At the same time, the explicit support for complex self-regulatory processes has become less prominent.

Although earlier curricular versions placed stronger emphasis on self-regulation, self-development, and self-reflection, these elements have gradually receded, while learning strategies and identity-based autonomy have come to the forefront. This shift provides teachers with a stable foundation for developing learners' strategic competence and for supporting their identity formation (Tseng et al., 2006).

Nevertheless, the decline of several elements associated with the broader concept of autonomous learning presents a challenge for the development of autonomous learner attitudes. This tendency highlights the importance of strengthening the curricular focus on self-assessment, self-reflection, self-direction, and metacognitive processes in future curriculum development (Pléh & Lukács, 2015; Gósy & Kovács, 2001). A reinforced curricular framework in these areas would be of particular significance for language teachers, enabling them to consciously foster self-regulatory, reflective, and self-directed learning attitudes. Based on the theoretical foundations, the targeted development of self-monitoring, self-reflection, self-direction, and metacognition remains crucial (Pléh & Lukács, 2015; Gósy & Kovács, 2001).

The results of this research therefore reveal that in this respect, the National Core Curriculum still requires further strengthening to fully support the development of autonomous language learners.

If foreign language education begins as early as Grades 1–3, teachers of the respective institutions may draw guidance from the document entitled *“Foreign Language Programme for Grades 1–3: Recommendations for Teaching Foreign Languages to Six- to Nine-Year-Olds.”* However, it would be advisable to develop more detailed and practically applicable recommendations and guidelines specifically for these early grades, particularly to support the development of autonomous (language) learning.

The learning environment of autonomous learning is defined by the tools and digital platforms that accompany it, which create opportunities for the development of independent language learning. On this basis, it is essential that this area of development be strengthened at a systemic

level within educational policy documents, ensuring that education for learner autonomy is presented coherently and consistently from the earliest stages of schooling.

In the strengthening of cultural identity, self-awareness, self-identity, and self-expression play a crucial role. At the same time, in the context of preserving and transmitting nationality language and culture, the significance of self-organisation, self-governance, and self-management must also be emphasised. Although the primary focus of the nationality education documents does not entirely coincide with the central theme of the present research, the frequent occurrence of the analysed word stems suggests that the development of learner autonomy is also a relevant and important objective within nationality education. It would be desirable for this aspect to appear even more prominently in future policy documents.

Education for autonomous language learning was identifiable in both the 2008 and 2024 *pedagogical programmes of the German nationality primary schools* of Pest County. However, its presence was mostly limited to a few word stems, rather than being integrated comprehensively into the documents. While the frequency of expressions referring to autonomous language learning has increased, their uneven distribution indicates that—despite signs of development—certain conceptual and structural gaps remain, which call for deliberate enhancement and conceptual reinforcement.

The teacher responses emerging from the *interviews* reflect a conscious, strategically oriented pedagogical approach, grounded in the active participation and individual responsibility of pupils from the earliest stages of formal education. All respondents unequivocally supported the early promotion of autonomous language learning. The development of learner independence appears as an educational objective encompassing the entire lower-primary stage, yet the opportunities for fostering learner autonomy are only partially realised in the currently available textbook series. Nonetheless, these limitations are largely compensated for by teachers' methodological awareness, creativity, and the diverse range of tools they employ in their classroom practice.

The respondents articulated a clear need for the development of a modern, comprehensive teaching material system that would support — both from didactic and pedagogical perspectives — the development of learner independence, recognised as one of the core competences of 21st-century learning (OECD, 2018). According to the interviews, the promotion of autonomous learning in current classroom practice arises not primarily from the explicit tasks provided in the textbooks, but rather from the teachers' conscious and reflective methodological work. In other words, it is the pedagogical awareness and strategic approach of teachers that

enables the systematic development of learner autonomy in the absence of explicit textbook guidance.

In contemporary language education, the teacher's manual has become an indispensable accompanying component of any textbook series. The teacher's guides accompanying internationally published textbooks effectively support language teachers in ensuring a smooth and efficient transition between traditional and modern, learner-centred materials.

However, the absence of such supporting resources considerably complicates teachers' work. Lesson preparation becomes more time-consuming, leading to an inevitable redistribution of effort and attention, often at the expense of direct pedagogical engagement with learners.

New Findings

In relation to second language development, the examination of fostering learner autonomy among lower-primary pupils remains a relatively under-researched area, particularly in the context of language acquisition. Consequently, the topic of the present study may be regarded as novel and innovative within the field.

The aim of this research was to provide a comprehensive overview of the current state of education for autonomous learning. By analysing the implementation processes linking different levels of educational regulatory documents, as well as the classroom practices and the available textbooks, the study traced how curricular intentions are realised in educational practice.

The novelty of the research lies in its integrated examination of multiple levels of the educational process, combined with its focus on an age group for which very limited empirical evidence has previously been available — especially regarding autonomous language learning. Another major strength of the research is the multidimensional realisation of its comprehensive approach. It encompasses various levels of education and also incorporates multiple temporal dimensions. Within this framework, the study compared the 2008 and 2024 pedagogical programmes, analysed the German nationality education documents in the light of the 2012 and 2020 editions of the National Core Curriculum, and conducted a comparative analysis of the different NAT versions themselves.

Future Research Directions and Applicability of the Results

The continuation of this research appears both justified and promising, particularly through the expansion of the range of analysed documents—for example, by including the pedagogical programmes of additional counties and the framework curricula. Studies involving parents and

pupils could render the findings even more complex and nuanced, providing a multi-perspectival view of the processes explored. Furthermore, the integration of European Union educational policy documents into future research could open new analytical dimensions, the scope of which would have exceeded the framework of the present dissertation.

To enhance the transparency of the trends and tendencies identified, as well as the language-pedagogical objectives articulated in curricula and pedagogical programmes, it is our intention to disseminate the results through teacher training courses, online educational platforms, and interactive workshops. The methodological repertoire for promoting autonomous learning will be illustrated through good practices recorded on video and developed in collaboration with experienced language teachers, thereby expanding teachers' professional competences and classroom toolkit.

Our future plans also include the creation of a supplementary toolkit specifically designed for teachers of German as a foreign language and German nationality language in lower primary education (Grades 1–4). This toolkit will aim to support the development of learner autonomy, with a focus on the specific features of language acquisition among German nationality pupils, employing a multidimensional and playful approach. The proposed methodology will be interculturally oriented, linking the teaching of language learning strategies and techniques with the promotion of cultural awareness and the preservation of nationality traditions.

The practical applicability of this research is expected to manifest primarily at the classroom implementation level, particularly if a new textbook series is developed in the future for the teaching of German as a foreign or nationality language in lower primary education, incorporating the findings of the present study. For such textbooks, the deliberate integration of the principles of autonomous language learning, alongside age-appropriate and language-acquisition-sensitive content, should be regarded as a central aim.

Through the results of this study, it is our intention to contribute to the strengthening of this pedagogical approach and to encourage textbook developers to integrate autonomous learning principles more consciously into future educational materials.

Our research results are not statistically significant, yet they provide valuable guidance for the promotion of autonomous language learning in the lower primary years.

In the dissertation, we presented several language preparation models, the so-called “*zero-grade*” classes, whose aim is, on the one hand, to facilitate the transition between kindergarten and primary school, and on the other hand, to prepare five- to six-year-old children for participation in school education conducted in a foreign, in this case, nationality, language. The programme operating in the federal state of Hesse (Germany) supports the integration of

children with a migration background, while the *Deutsche Schule Budapest* offers a preparatory “zero class” for children who do not yet possess any knowledge of the German language. A shared feature of both models is that the participating pupils enter the group with A0-level German proficiency, and by the end of one school year, they reach a level of linguistic competence sufficient for active participation in first-grade classes conducted in German.

We propose that, following the example of the language preparatory year already successfully implemented in Hungarian secondary education, a similar programme could be introduced in the pre-primary stage. Such a transitional year could serve as a bridge between kindergarten and primary school for those children who wish to enrol in nationality or bilingual classes but have not yet acquired prior language competence. Considering that German nationality language now functions as a heritage or foreign language in most families, this form of linguistic support would be of inestimable value for pupils preparing for either nationality or bilingual education.

In conclusion, we believe that this research has fulfilled its objectives: it has provided a comprehensive overview of the curricular guidelines concerning education for autonomous language learning within Hungarian institutional language education, and has explored their implementation potential at the institutional and classroom levels. On the lifelong journey of language learning, the first steps are taken during early childhood education. Guiding children along this path is both a challenge and a profound responsibility. Fostering autonomous language learners represents one of the most effective means to support them in this lifelong endeavour.

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