

## SELF-REGULATORY TEACHING IN INTERPRETATIONS OF SLOVAK TEACHERS

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**Abstract:** The presented study deals with the issue of cursive handwriting, which in Slovakia has not only a long tradition, but also cultural and historical value from the perspective of sample of primary education teachers. The theoretical part focuses on the cultural heritage and its forms, but also on the retrospective development of writing and the current form of self-regulation teaching writing in primary education. The research part of the study primarily focuses on identifying and analyzing the views of primary education teachers on the merits of cursive handwriting of primary school pupils. Based on the realized interviews we managed to interpret categories related to cursive, where not only the pedagogical (professional) side of the issue is declared, but also categories related to attitudes and values, which together create a comprehensive view to retain traditions of cursive handwriting in environment of primary education in Slovakia as a part of the possible cultural heritage of our country.

**Keywords:** cultural heritage, cursive handwriting, primary education, primary school teacher, self-regulation.

### 1 Introduction

"Culture research is an integral part of the processes of preserving national cultural identity, as well as integrating national culture into the further development of a common European cultural space." (The concept of focusing and supporting research in the field of culture for the years 2016 to 2020). Cultural heritage is a summary of both tangible and intangible components which is not only characteristic, but also important to society because it forms part of its own national identity. Since the cultural heritage is not a closed framework, several criteria need to be identified and assessed in terms of its protection. We believe that, in the interest of every society, the cultural heritage should be protected and preserved for future generations. The teacher as a mediator of the content of his own culture reflects the current challenges not only of the pedagogical but also of the societal dimension. Based on this, a high degree of self-regulation can be identified for a teacher who has ideas about his own work, solves the dilemmas of his own professional concept, but also the challenges of ongoing transformation and globalization changes (Kožuchová and Kuruc, 2019, p. 8). By teaching strategies, we mean the procedure that the individual chooses in his teaching (educational strategies), but also those by which the teacher encourages the student to learn certain cognitive strategies (teaching strategies). The strategies chosen by the individual have been discussed by Wolters and Rosenthal (2000). These are the following strategies:

- Considering the consequences when an individual has to finish work at home, even if he has the opportunity to engage in more enjoyable activities. He is considering a strategy to stay in the effort (to fulfill the required role).
- Environmental regulation. In case that an individual encounters an obstacle that prevents him from completing a task, he considers how to change the environment to complete the required task.
- Increased interest. When an individual encounters an obstacle in learning (while completing a task), he is looking for a way to change the task into a fun activity (while completing the task he is looking for a way that will increase his interest).
- Mastering internal speech. The individual is waging an inner struggle with himself. He speaks to himself and convinces of the reasons why it is important to stay in learning. For example, he wants to improve his learning because it is in line with his goal orientation.

- Doing internal speech. The individual speaks to himself and is convinced of the reasons why it is important to stay in learning.

The strategies that individuals chose to persevere in learning have influenced their motivation and emotions (Corno, 2008). Knowing own resources (one's own self) allows the individual to be able to control himself (he does not have to fight with himself). Self-awareness is a prelude to the self-regulation of each individual's behavior. The image we have of ourselves is created by a social mirror (people around us). These are projections of the life stories of people who talk about students, rather than precise reflections of what they really are. On the other hand, the individual is able to learn from his own experience and have an independent will. If a student knows what he or she attributes to the causes of success and failure, he or she can influence other situations in his or her life and act on the basis of his / her own self-awareness. In order for an individual to be able to manage his learning on his own, to work on himself and to improve, he needs to acquire a whole range of specific competencies, especially competences leading to self-regulation of learning, and thus started the lifelong learning process. Schunk and Ertmer (2005 In: Boekaerts et al., 2000) consider the most important skills that form the essence of learning self-regulation competence: setting learning goals; evaluation of own abilities; focus on study and strong will; appropriate learning strategy; be able to search for different sources when learning; efficient time management; monitoring the progress of learning; ability to overcome barriers in learning; monitoring progress; flexible change of learning strategies and their replacement by more effective ones; a positive image of oneself (belief in one's own abilities).

The basic aim of language teaching is to acquire script as a basic tool of literacy, communication and expression (Belešová a Szentesiová, 2017, p. 145). Writing is an integral part of human society created by writing a language of lasting character.

The currently valid form of continuous cursive handwriting, which is currently taught in primary schools in Slovakia, has undergone a long development. The font model from 1932 has not been modified since its introduction, except for a few minimal changes. In 2018, the event "Font for Schools" organized by the Slovak Design Center in Bratislava as part of the exhibition "100 Years of Design" was a unique example focused attention to the issue of writing. During the exhibition, the museum organized creative workshops for beginning writers - primary school pupils and a panel discussion about writing in historical and contemporary context, with an account of the advantages and disadvantages of cursive handwriting (Slovak Design Center). Representatives of graphic and writing designers, children's book designers and illustrators, together with a former primary school teacher, discussed the indisputable quality and aesthetics of cursive handwriting, but they emphasized the limitations, in the modern approach to teaching, encountered by barriers to pupils, teachers and graphic designers. The group of experts thus demonstrated the ambition to seek a solution in the form of a modernized cursive handwriting. It is not the only one discussion and challenge to explore changes in the form of teaching written scripts in primary school, because the issue of cursive handwritten scripting is a topic discussed in professional circles. This is mainly related to the existing proposals for modifying the shapes of the written Latin alphabet, which are currently accepted in the form of alternative Comenia Script and its teaching in primary schools.

According to several experts, the current typeface in the classroom does not meet the current needs of society, which is associated with the effort to change the font by introducing an alternate discontinuous Comenia Script that does not have a fixed shape, allowing pupils to adapt the letter shape to their own requirements. In connection with this issue there are arguments

about the appropriateness and inadequacy of teaching writing in the case of cursive handwriting or alternative script Comenia Script. Our aim was to find out and interpret the opinions of primary school teachers in elementary schools on the current type and its alternative.

## 2 Methodology

The methodology of qualitative research with corresponding design was chosen for the processing of the issue. The decision to realize a qualitative examination was based on the consideration that we are finding opinions and attitudes that cannot be calculated and expressed as a percentage. Qualitative research also suited us because it emphasizes individual understanding of the issue. The aim of the research was not to assess and evaluate, but to find out the opinions of research subjects (teachers of primary education) on the examined phenomenon.

The research problem arose from observing and analyzing specific cultural discussions in the school educational context. The main aim of the research was to find out, analyze and interpret the opinions of primary education teachers on the form of written script. Based on the above, our intention with regard to the title of the study was:

- To identify the positives of the current cursive handwriting.
- Identify the negatives of the current cursive handwriting.

Research questions:

- What aspects do primary education teachers consider as positive of cursive handwriting?
- What aspects do primary education teachers consider as negatives of cursive handwriting?
- What aspects do primary education teachers consider as positive of Comenia Script?
- Which aspects do primary education teachers consider as negatives of discontinuous Comenia Script?

The selection of research subjects was intentional, and the selection of specific teachers was conditional with at least five years of teaching experience at primary school. The inclusion of participants in the research was always preceded by a personal interview with a request for approval to record the interview, information about the objective of the research and clarification of the ways that each research informant will be anonymous. The research sample consisted of primary education teachers in amount of twenty subjects from Bratislava and Trenčín regions, aged 31 to 52 years. The exact number of informants that made up the research sample was determined during data processing when we reached the desired level of saturation.

The research tool used was an in-depth interview. An in-depth interview was realized as a non-standardized questioning to one researcher through several open questions (Švaříček, Šed'ová et al., 2007, p. 159). The reason for the selection was that it captures statements and words in a natural way, which allows data to be obtained in the form of information on the views and attitudes of research subjects. We conducted a unstructured interview. The questions in the interview met specific criteria by using direct questions that were wide enough, not describing the objectively given phenomenon, and focusing on the type of writing that teachers teach. We only realized a direct interview with both the written and the audio recording of the answers, on the basis of which we created the transcript.

The transcription of research data was the first step of a thematic analysis carried out by open coding. Open coding was a "process of disassembling, examining, comparing, conceptualizing, and categorizing data" (Strauss a Corbinová, 1999, p. 42). In the research data record, we wrote code names in the form of conceptual designations in parallel with the unit boundaries. Open coding was performed through successive and repeated analysis of data in individual paragraphs, lines and transcript

words. We understood coding as a procedure through which we specified variables related to the set research questions. We then moved on to a systematic categorization where the category names are related to the identified data.

After the end of open coding, we implemented another analytical method called "cards on the table", which is an extension of open coding. The choice of the research technique of cards on the table was favored over other research data processing techniques because all induced categories were interconnected and related to the research questions (Švaříček, Šed'ová et al., 2007, p. 226). An essential condition of this technique is just established link between the induced categories.

## 3 Interpretation of research results

In the following part of the study, we present research findings that constitute a repertoire of primary school teachers' opinions and attitudes about written script. This conceived theory was based on induced categories of relevance to the research objective of the study, which we present with samples of data units and codes identifying individual subjects of research.

Table 1 Gives an overview of the identified concepts and their respective categories. Source: own processing.

CATEGORY	CONCEPTS
WRITING IN THE ELEMENTARY YEAR	Central nervous system, cognitive functions, graphomotors, print hand, handwriting, writing practice, teacher and pupil motivation, selection of a written model.
STUDY PROBLEMS IN WRITING	Health indications, dysgraphia, attention deficit disorder, visual discrimination, visual memory problem, neurosis.
CULTURAL TRADITION	Conservatism, cultural heritage, protection of traditions, generational differences, globalization, lack of interest in society, refusal of change.

Writing in the elementary year - Part of the current typeface is a form of printed and written writing. The frequency of printed fonts in our society is much higher than the frequency of written fonts. The child gets in touch with the printed form from the earliest age of life and thus becomes natural for him. The nature of the printed script is presented by an interview sample: "I think the more natural is the printed script for them, it is easier. They have been encountering the printed alphabet from their childhood more in their everyday life, in shop signs and so on. Or in the newspaper, there is a printed font everywhere" [R11]. This is also described by the statement: "I think from the beginning the printed is more natural for them, because in kindergarten they also meet with printed capital letters" [R16].

A printed font is considered to be easier to imitate than a written font. Writing capital letters occurs to pupils at the first stage of primary school. "Pupils tend to use print hand. They connect it to such a whole ... basically they want to imitate each other. It's like an uniform, print hand is just like that" [R6]. The look at the script that pupils perceive and prefer is also related to the impact of technologies that are an integral part of our lives. "I think it is also this computer era and mobile phones, there are a lot of used mainly printed and discontinuous font" [R4].

When teaching Comenia Script with its innovative concept of contemporary didactics of writing, the emphasis is not on perfect typography and unnecessary difficulty, but primarily on the writer's interest in the content (Fasnerová, 2018, p. 53). "Unbound and simple scripts allow students to express themselves more quickly, making learning more interesting and efficient. But I do not want to say that the one who writes in cursive handwriting will not achieve the same goal, only the road is more difficult" [R14].

The cursive handwriting is linked differently than the print hand, it is flowing and runs from bottom to top. Teaching cursive handwriting is considered more difficult for the writer. "Cursive handwriting is more difficult than print hand script because there are several elements involved that participate in a demanding psychomotor process such as writing" [R5]. "When I compare the cursive handwriting with Comenia Script, the script is more

complicated. In fact, there are fewer things that pupils have to keep in mind when writing a Comenia Script, so it's easier for them. The opposite is cursive handwriting, when they have to remember the individual shapes and ways of linking" [R10]. Although cursive handwriting fonts are considered more difficult than printed hand fonts, they are still considered manageable. It declares the statement: "Cursive handwriting is not unmanageable. We have learned to write in this way for generations" [R2].

Writing by cursive handwriting with all its elements (continuity, arc, loops) is considered important from the psychological point of view, but also from the point of view of the development of fine motor skills. "They are very beneficial, because the writing is such a graceful movement of the writing and the children encounter it from a young age, it is a follow-up to the first circular movements" [R18]. Individual elements of arc and loops positively affect the memory of the writer, which declares the statement: "It also develops memory, I remember it from many previous brain exercises, that the different loops, eights I do with pupils and also before the dictate, so of course I find it beneficial" [R3].

The current concept of teaching is based on the directivity of the teaching of the script. If the school has a cursive handwriting as a typeface, the task of the pupils is to write it on all subjects with observance of its rules. By living in a modern technology society, we are in touch with a lots of printed scripts; pupils do not consider a cursive handwriting template which they have to use in the school environment as part of them. An example of the interview says this: "They only consider that as this is the script I use at school at the Slovak language subject or somewhere else, because I have to write it there, but they do not consider it as part of their life" [R4]. An exception to the directive is the object of a foreign language, which we declare in the data unit: "For example, when I teach English, where I give them a choice" [R12].

Current teachers would welcome the choice of writing in the educational process. The existence of the choice of fonts is recorded in one of the testimonies of the subject: "But perhaps at the school, the quality of teaching may be better. I personally would give it as an alternative to classical script. It can improve the quality of teaching, it may be faster, it may be easier for children, so they don't burden so much by writing and maybe have more time for other things. Because when it is written in cursive handwriting, it takes a lot of time. If the script is easier, they may have more time to read and do other things" [R20].

Problems of pupils in writing - The current typeface, the classic cursive handwriting typeface, is considered to be a challenging process, but a process manageable by the normal healthy population, which, according to pedagogical practice, presents the subject to the researcher: "Only pupils with some educational disorders have a problem" [R4]. For pupils with learning disabilities, the current typeface is often difficult. There are several writing problems associated with the complexity of the cursive handwriting for learners with learning disabilities. "Transferring the image into the written form is sometimes very difficult for these pupils. They have a problem both to remember the shape and to remember what they saw. Visual discrimination and memory, that is not sufficiently developed, can make a particular chart difficult for him. He / she cannot transfer it from one shape to another, either printed to written or written to printed" [R3]. As a result of the problems in writing these pupils, the script becomes unreadable. "We meet with this often, that children have problems with attention, memory and motivation. I think this affects readability" [R6]. In many cases, pupils often do not practice a certain shape of the letter, have a problem with the fixation of letters, at which time they tend to print hand letters. Children without a health problem use classical cursive handwriting letters. The testimony of the subject says: "Children many times do not finish the shape and it happens in those children who do not properly practice the written form and they do not know many times in the third, fourth class how the written form looks like. So, I would say that they have a problem

with the letter fixation. Those children who have no problem with learning know the letters, so they still write by cursive handwriting, but those who have some difficulties to learn and have some kind of disorder, or dysgraphia, dysortography, so for them print hand is simpler version. Because they don't even know how to connect it" [R1]. The form of cursive handwriting is considered more difficult eg. dysgraphers may have trouble writing it. "The scripture of such a student will never be readable and neat, which can be disincentive to further learning" [R11].

Comenia Script is easier for pupils with specific learning disabilities, dysgraphers, left-handers and for bilingual learners (Lipnická, et al., 2019, p. 169). Pupils are better at managing it and their writing is more neat and readable even in higher grades (Lencová, 2011, p. 39). "But if I see that the child has any problems, I have no problem using that font. I see it as a great benefit especially for those troubled pupils" [R4].

Cultural tradition - The view of the present script is largely influenced by the traditions of our culture. The form of preserving cursive handwriting as part of our history is a common argument for maintaining the current typeface and do not include an alternative font in the curriculum. "There are a number of reasons why students currently do not have to learn cursive handwriting, which we all learned and used. On the other hand, it is our cultural heritage. It is something that belongs to this country. I am probably very conservative and advocate of traditions that belong to our culture. I agree that pupils should learn what belongs to us, distinguishes us from others, so that we do not give up what is typical for our country" [R3].

The globalization of individual countries of the world and its associated English language, which is the most frequently learned foreign language in Slovak schools, also has an impact on the contemporary type of writing - cursive handwritten script. Typical of the English language is printed letters, which is used in most countries as the primary form of writing. With the introduction of the English language into the curriculum of the various levels of education, there is, in part, an incentive for the use of the printed form from school side, what caused also inclination from students to use it. "At English lessons, pupils automatically write in printed letters. English is mostly in printed or printed-written form without linking. I encountered the case that one student who went from Slovakia to study in England and used handwriting, had a huge problem in their schools. Because they couldn't decipher what she wrote, they didn't know the graphemes" [R13]. On the other hand, the current typeface contains both printed and written form, which enables pupils to know and master both types and can then use the form that is more appropriate in the context of international communication. "We are looking for our own way and adjust the font to the current requirements. We have the advantage because we know more options" [R2].

At present, only teachers of primary education are strictly committed to adherence to cursive handwriting script. "Twenty years ago, when I came to teach, everyone cared about writing, not just at school, but the parent also tended that you had to write nicely, because that's the first-class basis and now the automatic answer is, that it is never going to be necessary. Everyone thinks it's not needed. In general we don't really need it, but it is necessity. Overall, there is an opinion in society that in adulthood there is no need for written scripts, and each adult writes completely differently than he learnt in the first year of primary school" [R17]. As a rule, although everyone learns to write according to an identical written template in the first year of primary school, everyone writes differently in adulthood. Genetic predispositions as well as way of teaching writing cause the differences. In order to fulfill the socio-communicative function, written script must be readable, neat and reasonably fast written. Often cursive handwriting does not have this feature and especially the writing of older pupils tends to be unreadable and uncomely.

#### 4 Conclusion

Based on the research data obtained through our realized qualitative research, we can evaluate the fulfillment of the objectives: Identify the positives and the negatives of the current cursive handwriting. Through research findings, we consider it important to point out a possible change in the written pattern that is related to the replacement of cursive handwriting script by its alternative form. The introduction of the alternative Comenia Script from the perspective of the research sample is not justified for all pupils except those with specific learning disabilities.

Research findings of a specific research sample of primary education teachers in Slovakia raise the question of preserving the form of cursive handwriting not only from a pedagogical and methodological-didactic point of view, but also from a cultural point of view (if we understand culture in two meanings, where the core of both contains ideas and values along with high self-regulation of the individual). From our point of view, we consider it important to accept the relationship between heteroregulation and self-regulation as necessary aspects that are, as far as possible, the most suitable for the primary school student himself.

The effort to preserve the tradition, which in our culture is also connected with the teaching of cursive handwriting, is an impulse to reflect on the cultural identity of our country, which currently does not belong to the attributes of cultural heritage.

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