

*Иновации, предизвикателства и тенденции в постмодерното образование  
Innovations, Challenges and Tendencies in the Post Modern Education*

## DOCIMOLOGICAL MODELS IN MOTHER TONGUE TEACHING – AN EXAMPLE OF EDUCATIONAL POLICY IN THE REPUBLIC OF CROATIA

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**Abstract.** When it comes to language contents, European language policies pay special attention to validation of achievements in mother tongue acquisition (The Common European Framework of References for Languages – Learning, teaching, assessment, 2001). In accordance with these guidelines, there is a curriculum approach to educational contents in the Republic of Croatia. The Croatian language curriculum has the largest number of school hours since, apart from learning language and literature contents; it also serves as a basis for acquiring contents of other school subjects. Croatian language as a school subject is divided into four fields: language, literature, language expression and media culture. Therefore, the knowledge of pupils is assessed by these fields. Since validation systems are considered to be an important segment of progress in language learning, individual assessment is recommended. In practice, however, one should make a distinction among assessment, validation and evaluation of acquired contents.

This paper presents the results of empirical research showing the models according to which the teachers in primary and secondary schools in the Republic of Croatia validate the pupils' achievements in learning of standard Croatian language.

**Keywords:** docimological models, assessment, evaluation and validation of language knowledge, Croatian language learning and teaching

### Introduction

Assessment of knowledge is a systematic and complex process encompassing a wide range of activities, from perception and judgement to the numerical measurement of achievement. In addition to necessary qualitative and quantitative factors of objective character, it also includes unavoidable subjective factors and individual criteria of the assessor (teacher). Therefore, the production of pedagogical standard and equalization of docimological models should be one of the most important tasks of educational policy in each country. Since in the Republic of Croatia there are no standardized forms of assessment and validation of knowledge, but only proposed approaches (Težak, 1998; Pavličević-Franić, 2005; Bežen, 2008; Visinko, 2010), the

teachers create their own evaluation criteria according to the educational achievements and defined learning outcomes stated in the Teaching Syllabus (2006).

When it comes to language contents, European language policies pay special attention to validation of achievements in mother tongue acquisition. (The Common European Framework of References for Languages – Learning, teaching, assessment, 2001). In accordance with these guidelines, there is a curriculum approach to educational contents in the Republic of Croatia. The Croatian language curriculum has the largest number of school hours since, apart from learning language and literature contents, it also serves as a basis for acquiring contents of other school subjects. Croatian language as a school subject is divided into four fields: language, literature, language expression and media culture. Therefore, the knowledge of pupils is assessed by these fields. Since validation systems are considered to be an important segment of progress in language learning, individual assessment is recommended. In practice, however, one should make a distinction among assessment, validation and evaluation of acquired contents.

This paper presents the results of empirical research showing the models according to which the teachers in primary and secondary schools in the Republic of Croatia validate the pupils' achievements in learning of standard Croatian language.

### **Theoretical Framework of the Research**

Systematic research in assessment of pupils' knowledge started in early 20's of the previous century when an American psychologist, Edward Thorndike, produced manuscripts defining certain numerical values for validation of school success. Later research resulted in specification of two basic docimological approaches. The first one is characterized by research focused on detection and identification of factors with negative effects on school knowledge assessment at traditional exams, as a result of which the teachers give insufficiently objective and insufficiently reliable marks. The other approach specializes in the research trying to find the procedures by which the achievements would be assessed according to equal and permanent meters for all subjects. In fact, the conducted analyses of evaluation methods point to the fact that the marks do not always correspond to the appropriate knowledge, especially in the case of validation of the contents, which can be affected by the factors of the teacher's subjective approach (Grgin, 2003).

Nowadays, docimology is defined as a science of evaluation in the broad meaning of this word, with special emphasis on evaluation in school. Its scope of research is everything that can influence the mark, such as, for example, the criteria of evaluation, the models of evaluation (numerical, descriptive, analytic, synthetic, etc.), the effect of the mark on the pupil's motivation and alike (Matijević, 2004). The school docimology makes a significant part of the knowledge validation system as it deals with the issues of testing and assessing the pupil's educational achievement in school. The general docimological cognitions are based on methodical cognitions (the level of individual school subject) as well as the cognitions of psychology and didactics (Bežen, 2008).

The document Regulations on the methods, procedures and elements of validation of pupils in primary and secondary school, defines the basic notions of the validation system in the Republic of Croatia (MZOS, 2010, art.2). Validation means a systematic collection of data in the process of learning and the achieved level of competences: knowledge, skills, abilities, independence and responsibility to work, in accordance with the previously defined and accepted methods, procedures and elements, its constituent parts being monitoring, testing and evaluation. Monitoring is defined as a systematic identification and recording of observations on the achieved level and competences and the set tasks defined by the national and subject curriculum, syllabus and the vocational and school curriculum. Testing implies assessment of the achieved level of competences in the school subject or field and other forms of work in school during the school year. Evaluation (giving marks) is attributing the numerical or descriptive value to the results of monitoring and testing of the pupil's work in accordance with the components of evaluation of each particular school subject.

Distinguishing among the notions of assessment, testing and validation is also proposed by the authors Valdevit and Jelaska (2009). They see the assessment as judging one's language knowledge and skills based on a standardized form of assessment (language exam, observation), but based on expectations. Testing is judging one's language knowledge and skills based on expected achievements while validation is judging not only one's language knowledge and skills but also the success of the completed programme. Such approach points to the conclusion that validation includes both assessment and testing and, therefore, also evaluation since it represents the mark given on the basis of assessment and testing (Aladrović Slovaček and Kolar Billege, 2011).

### **Docimological models in assessment of language skills in the mother tongue**

The basic European document directing the experts in the process of determining language competences and validation of language contents is the Common European Framework of References for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment (Council of Europe, 2001). Its publishing has been warmly welcomed since the results of the previous research have shown a large discrepancy not only in the validation methods conducted by teachers but also in the levels of their interpretation of marks. This is a framework document whose intention is to provide support in setting clear and transparent common standards for knowledge validation, based on determining the language competence level. The examples are offered for their application and the manners are shown how they can be levelled. Unfortunately, the competence can never be tested directly. Our only guideline is a series of language productions which can generally point to a conclusion on knowledge. Within this context, the knowledge can be seen as a competence put into use. Therefore, all tests validate only language production out of which one can draw the conclusion on the competence (ZEROJ, 2005).

In language teaching, one of possible docimological models is evaluation based on language portfolio (European Language Portfolio, ELP, 2004). This manner

of validation includes both the official recognitions obtained during the language learning and the informal experience with other languages and cultures. In combination with other models it gives a complete picture of the pupil's achievements and it can also motivate the pupils since all accomplishments collected during the validation process testify of their progress. Due to its characteristics, the portfolio is more appropriate for foreign language teaching and is therefore less frequently used in teaching of the mother tongue.

Despite large disagreements on key competences, Rychen and Hersch Salganik (2001), still conclude that the key competences should definitely include oral and written mastery of the mother tongue and reading comprehension – the ability to read in the manner to quickly acquire and accurately process written information. In accordance with the awareness of the importance to learn and teach the mother tongue, the mother tongue competence is regarded as the first and the most important of the eight key competences (CEFRL/ZEROJ, 2001/2005).<sup>1)</sup>

In the Republic of Croatia, synthetic evaluation is mostly used, with the exception of subjects which develop particular abilities (visual arts, musical art, physical education) and only in the first four grades of primary school. Synthetic evaluation implies a docimological solution according to which one synthetic mark, usually a number or a letter with agreed meaning, is given for several different variables, which means several different educational targets (Matijević, 2004/13). In Croatia, there are numerical marks from 1–5 (1 – insufficient, 2 – sufficient, 3 – good, 4 – very good, 5 – excellent).

Some authors consider the synthetic evaluation not fully appropriate for mother tongue (Težak, 1998; Rosandić, 2002; Pavličević-Franić, 2005; Visinko, 2010). For evaluation of Croatian language, the analytical model would be much more efficient, taking into consideration several different factors for assessment of educational achievements. For the mother tongue, in accordance with the Common European Framework of References for Languages, these factors would be the basic language activities of reading, writing, listening and speaking. Visinko (2010), proposes the analytic approach tools for validation of pupils' essays based on descriptors (keys for correction) referring to the content, structure and language formation of the essays. Težak (1998) proposes each school work to be evaluated with several marks, while the final mark does not need to be made on the basis of the arithmetic mean. Development of communicative competence is also considered as an important factor in the accomplishment assessment (Pavličević-Franić, 2005; Bagarić and Mihaljević-Djigunović, 2007), and the communicative competence is also included in the basic goal of Croatian language learning defined in the National Syllabus for Primary School (MZOS, 2006/25). Bežen (2006) also made a research in the components of evaluation in Croatian language, especially as it regards initial reading and writing in the first grade of primary school. First of all, he promotes validation of language competences (knowledge, skills and attitudes), as opposed to the validation officially conducted in school which is based on division of the Croatian language subject into

several areas (initial reading and writing, literature, language, language expression and media culture).

New action research conducted in the Republic of Croatia shows that in the primary school, during Croatian language lessons, much more attention is paid to teaching of linguistic rules (metalinguistic knowledge), than acquisition of communicative competence on the level of usage (Pavličević-Franić, 2005; Barbaroša-Šikić and Češi, 2007). This fact is also confirmed by the external knowledge validation in the primary schools of the Republic of Croatia conducted in the school year 2007/2008. The data show that the average result of the Croatian language knowledge test (based on language activities of reading, writing, listening and speaking) is only 57,2%. The conclusion of the work group is that more practical exercise should be introduced into the mother tongue teaching, which implies more actual oral and written language expression in all grades of primary school. Otherwise we will have the pupils who, at the end of their language education (after they have finished their primary school), have not reached the adequate level of language knowledge and confidence and have not become the competent speakers of Croatian language.

Therefore, the results of the PISA project (2009) testing the pupils' reading competence, which ranked the Republic of Croatia as 35th out of 65 countries, are not surprising at all. Unfortunately, as much as 22% of pupils do not show even the basic knowledge and skills necessary to complete the tasks of reading literacy in different areas of life. Only 3.2% of Croatian pupils are able to solve complex tasks, critically judge texts and bring conclusions based on the relative data given in the text. The results point to discrepancy between the pupils' marks at the end of particular educational periods and the clearly defined educational accomplishments (knowledge, abilities, skills) which they should have acquired in school.

In view of the above-mentioned facts, definition of the required competences as well as identification and classification of their main components should be the main task when drawing the future educational standard. Only in this way one can list and describe the manners of learning, teaching and validating language contents by which one would realize the actual goals and validate the accomplishments in learning of the mother tongue.

### **Material and Method**

Since in the Republic of Croatia evaluation of Croatian as a school subject has not been standardized, only possible docimological approaches have been proposed in educational documents instead, the goal of this paper is to investigate the manners in which Croatian teachers validate pupils' written works, if they are prone to subjective assessment and which problems they have when forming the final mark.

In accordance with the mentioned goal, the following research problems have been defined:

1. Identify the number of marks by which the teachers validate their pupils' written works.
2. Identify the elements based on which the teachers form the mark of the written work (composition, essay...).
3. Investigate if the attitudes of the teachers on the manners of validation differ depending on their age and type of school where they work (primary school, vocational school, gymnasium).
4. Investigate self-assessment of the teachers' competence in evaluation of written works and the connection between the training in evaluation and the level of competence.

In accordance with the basic goal and problems of the research, the following hypotheses have been set:

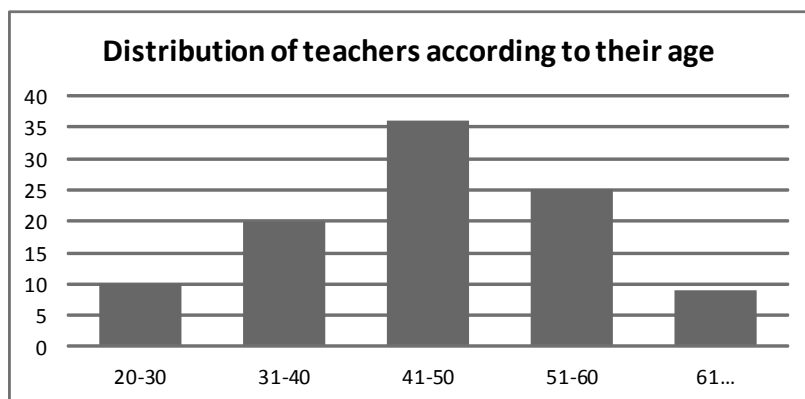
H1 – The Croatian language teachers are expected to validate their pupils' written works with only one mark.

H2 – When forming the mark, the teachers are generally expected to take into consideration the content of the written work, accuracy in terms of grammar and orthography and the style of expression.

H3 – Older teachers are most often expected to validate written compositions with only one mark, no difference being expected as it regards the type of school.

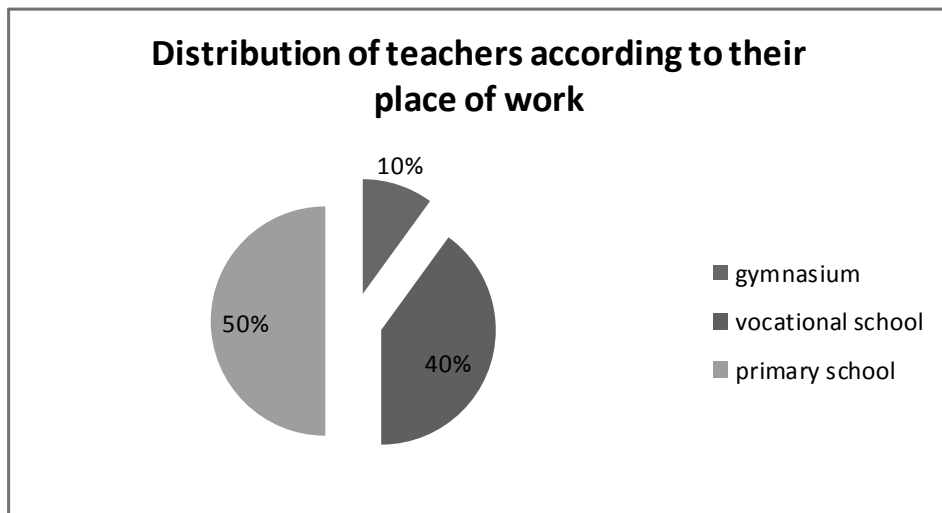
H4 – The teachers which have been trained in validation of written works are expected to be more competent in evaluation.

The research was conducted in November 2012 and the test sample included 300 teachers of Croatian language (N = 300) which attended the symposium of Croatian language teachers. All participants were female, mostly between the age of 40 and 50 (*graph 1*).



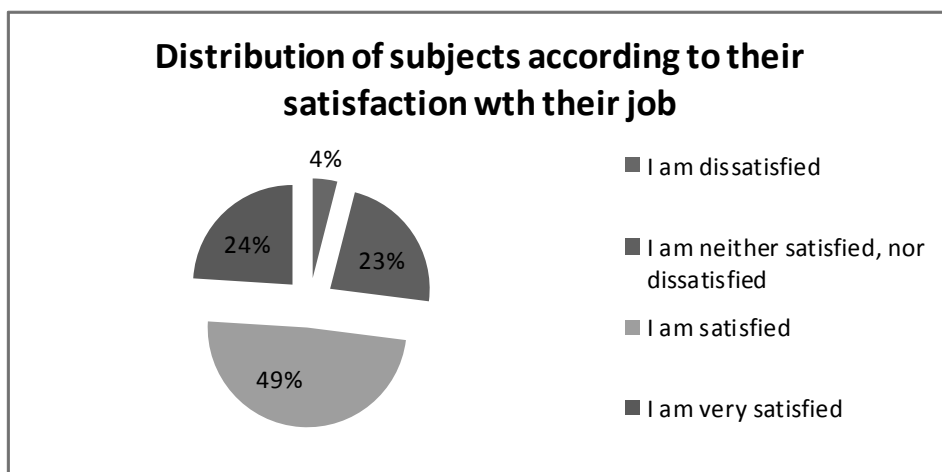
**Graph 1.** Distribution of teachers according to their age

A half of the test sample (50%) works in primary schools, 40% of teachers work in vocational schools and only 10% of tested teachers work in gymnasiums (*graph 2*).



**Graph 2.** Distribution of teachers according to their place of work

Most of subjects are satisfied with their job (73%), only a small percentage (4%) is dissatisfied with their job and 23% of teachers are indifferent – they are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied (*graph 3*).



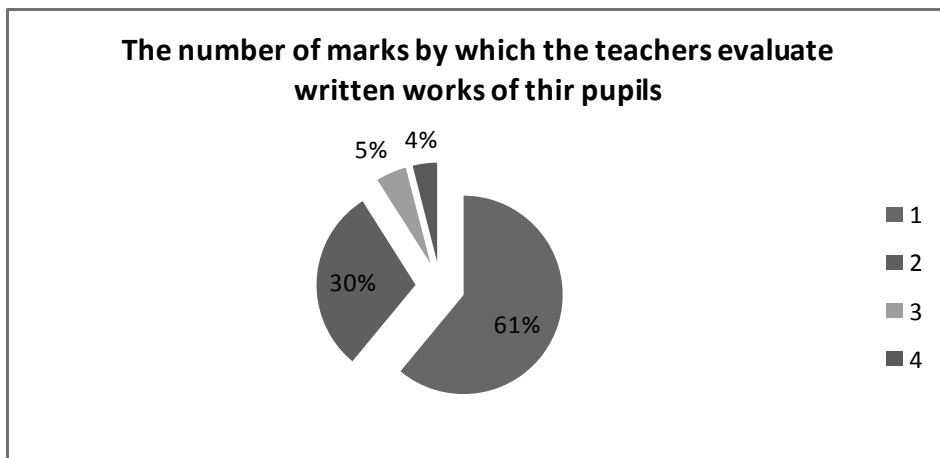
**Graph 3.** Distribution of subjects according to their satisfaction with their job

Out of the total number of tested teachers, 80% conduct extra school activities related to Croatian language: drama, literary, recital, radio, film or journalism groups. Some of them also conduct additional Croatian language lessons and some teachers are also the leaders of county or city professional councils. Only 20% of subjects do not conduct any extra school activity related to Croatian language.

All subjects completed a questionnaire with open-ended and closed-ended questions. The aim was to receive the clearest possible picture on the manners how they evaluate their pupils, with emphasis on validation of written works (compositions and essays) of the pupils. The questionnaire was formed and used only for the purpose of this research. The data were processed in the SPSS statistics programme using the Pearson's correlation coefficient and analysis of variance.

### Research Results

*The first goal of the research* was to identify the number of marks by which the teachers validate their pupils' written works. The results have shown that 45% of teachers validate their pupils' works with only one mark, while 21% validate with two marks. Only 5% of teachers validates the pupils' written works with three marks and 2% with four marks (*graph 4*).



**Graph 4.** The number of marks by which the teachers evaluate written works of their pupils

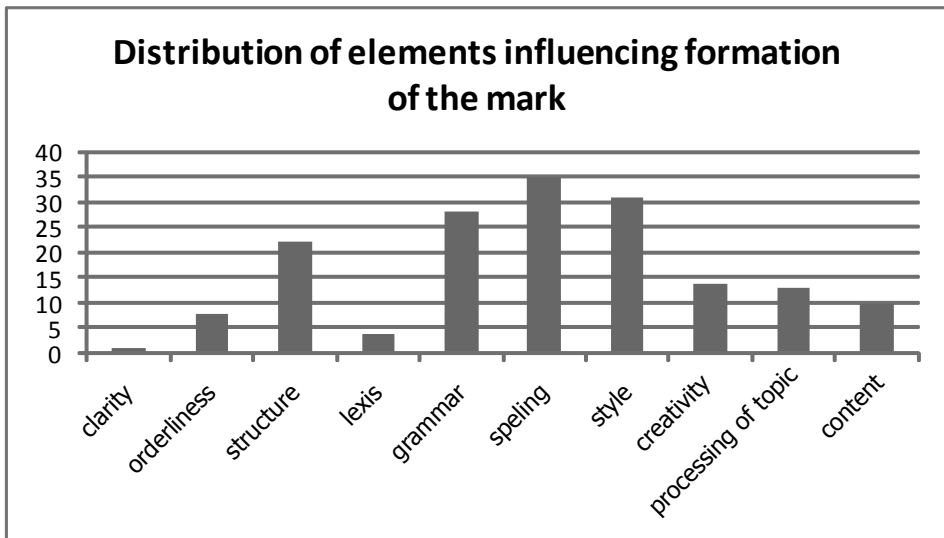
As the results show, the first hypothesis that most teachers will validate written works of their pupils with only one mark has been confirmed.

*The second goal of the research* was to identify the elements based on which the teachers validate the written works of their pupils and which influence formation of the final mark. The results have shown that orthographic accuracy is the most important element in validation of written works. It is followed by the style of writing, grammar structures and shaping of the written work in terms of composition. A troublesome fact is that only a small number of teachers take into consideration the criterion of interesting or creative approach to the topic as the important one. Even the teachers who evaluate the written work with several marks usually form the first mark on the basis of grammatical and orthographical accuracy and the second mark based on the manner in which the content was processed and the creativity of approach (*graph 5*).

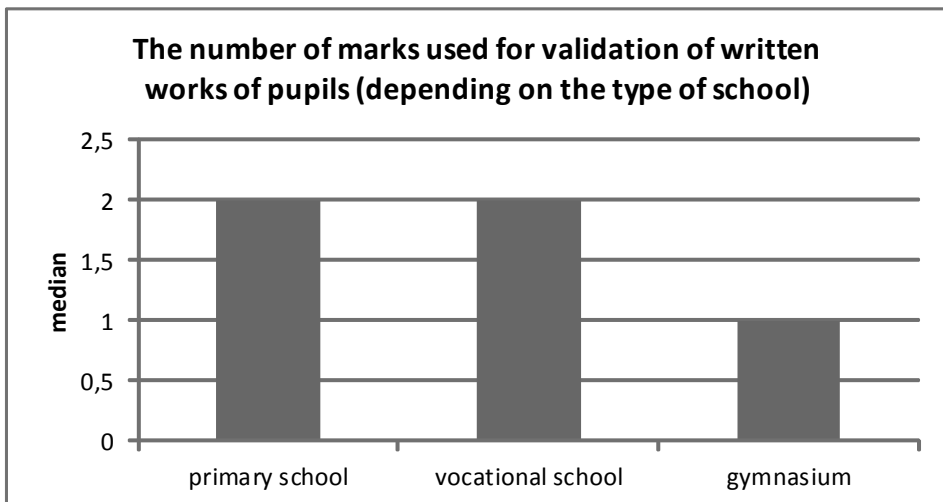
Though the second hypothesis assumed that the teachers will pay the largest attention to the content of the written work, the research showed that, when forming the mark, the teachers find the orthographic accuracy and the manner of expression to be of crucial importance while creative shaping of the content followed behind. This finding contradicts the first part of the hypothesis which assumed that the content would be the most important element when forming the mark of the written work, while the second part of the hypothesis assuming that grammatical and orthographical accuracy would also be important in the final validation of the pupils' written works has been accepted.

*The third goal of the research* was to investigate if the attitudes of the teachers on the manners of validation differ depending on their age and type of school where they work. The analysis of variance shows that there is no statistically important difference in the age of the teachers ( $p > 0,05$ ,  $df = 2$ ) regarding the number of marks by which they evaluate written works of their pupils and regarding the criteria which they consider important. Moreover, the analysis of variance shows that there is no statistically important difference in the assessment of competence in validation of written works regarding the age of the teacher ( $p > 0,05$ ,  $df = 2$ ), which means that the teachers of all age groups validate the written works of their pupils in approximately the same manner.

The analysis of variance also shows that there is no statistically important difference in assessment of competence of the teachers regarding the type of school where they work (primary school, gymnasium, vocational school). However, there is a statistically important difference in the number of marks given by teachers of different types of schools (*graph 6*). The Scheffe post hoc test confirms the existence of a statistically important difference between the teachers in vocational schools and the gymnasium teachers regarding the number of marks by which they evaluate written works of their pupils. Actually, the majority of gymnasium teachers evaluate written works with one mark, whereas the teachers of vocational schools and primary schools use one, two or even more marks.



**Graph 5.** Distribution of elements influencing formation of the mark

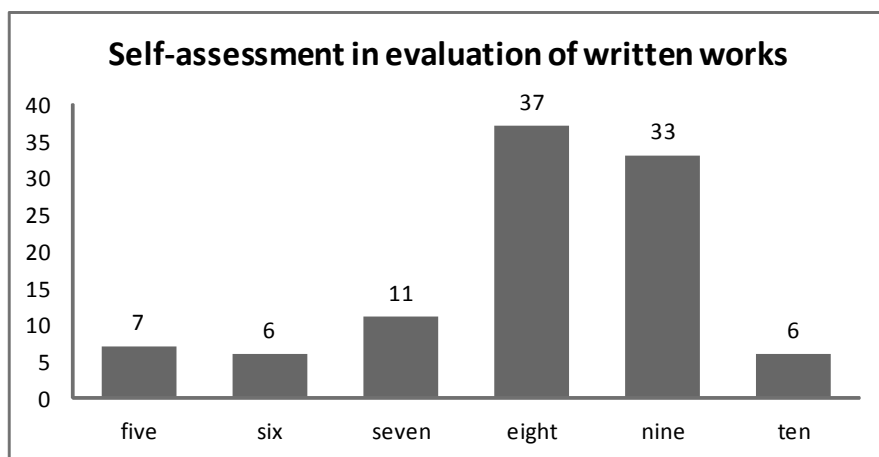


**Graph 6.** The number of marks used for validation of written works of pupils (depending on the type of school)

The results have confirmed the first part of the third hypothesis which assumed that older teachers would validate written works with only one mark. However, the second part of the hypothesis has been confirmed only partly, since the results have

shown that the teachers of vocational schools evaluate written works with two (or even more) marks.

*The fourth goal of the research* was to investigate how many teachers have been trained in evaluation of written works of the pupils and whether there is a correlation between the self-assessment of competence and the training of the teacher. The results have shown that 73% of the teachers have been additionally trained in validation of written works of the pupils. There is no statistically significant difference among the teachers regarding the type of school where they work. Secondary school teachers were trained in evaluation of the essay written as a part of the national exam at the end of the secondary school, some teachers were trained by the Croatian Education and Teacher Training Agency while some attended elective courses in evaluation at their faculty. The results show that on the scale of 0 to 10 the teachers most often evaluate their competence in validation with mark 8 (graph 7).



**Graph 7.** Self-assessment in evaluation of written works

Pearson's correlation coefficient shows that there is a statistically significant difference regarding the connection between the teacher's training in validation of written works and the self-assessment in evaluation of written works. The correlation is negative, which means that the trained teachers do not necessary self-evaluate themselves better. This might point to the problem of the validation system since the teachers who have not been trained are often not aware of the fact that they should be trained, thinking instead that they already know everything, while the trained teachers feel more critical towards themselves.

In accordance with the received results, the fourth hypothesis is not accepted since it assumes that the training will be connected with self-assessment in evaluation,

but the results have shown that the trained teachers do not necessarily self-evaluate themselves better, which means that they do not feel more competent.

### **Discussion**

Four hypotheses were made in the research, all four related to assessment of validation of the pupils' written works and the self-assessment of the own value system as it regards validation of written works of each teacher participating in the research.

The first hypothesis has been fully accepted since it assumed that most teachers validate the written works of their pupils with only one mark, which was confirmed by the results. The same research, only on a smaller sample, was conducted in 2011 (Aladrović Slovaček and Kolar Billegge), also confirming that most teachers validate the written works of their pupils with one mark only. The second hypothesis has been partially confirmed since it assumed that the content of the written work would be the most important validation criterion, while the orthographic and grammatical accuracy proved to be the most important criterion instead. The first part of the third hypothesis has not been accepted since the results showed that there is no significant difference in the attitude towards validation depending on the age of the teacher. The second part of the same hypothesis has been partly accepted since the results showed that the teachers of vocational schools evaluate the written works of their pupils with two marks. The fourth hypothesis assumed the connection between training in evaluation and the self-assessment regarding the competence in evaluation. The results have shown that the difference is statistically significant and that the correlation between the training and self-assessment in validation competence is negative, which means that the trained teachers did not necessary show a higher level of self-confidence in their self-assessment. This points to the fact that not all teachers are aware of the importance of their training in evaluation of pupils and additionally points out the need to standardize the validation process. In this way the subjectivity in evaluation would be reduced and it would greatly help the teachers to solve the problems which they have when forming the final marks of their pupils' written works.

### **Conclusion**

The problem of non-standardization in validation of all elements and criteria influencing the final mark in the mother tongue (Croatian) language can also be seen in a "wide range" of marks with which the pupils transfer from the primary to the secondary school or from one class to another. There is a large discrepancy in evaluation not only among different schools (it is well-known which ones are demanding and which are not), but also in the "strictness" of particular teachers of the mother tongue and their personal criteria. Since the non-standardized criteria are prone to subjective assessment and different approach to evaluation, standardization is, therefore, truly needed, especially as it regards validation of written works of the pupils. Partial standardization is proposed for validation of the essay written as a part of the final exam

at the end of the secondary school – the national exam. Each assessor participating in the validation procedure is given the descriptors based on which they validate the content of the written work, while the judgement on the orthographic, grammatical, lexical and stylistic accuracy or appropriateness is based on insight to other elements, so finally the assessor validates the written work of the pupil with one mark which results from the assessment of the content, creativity and innovativeness, composition or structure of the work, grammatical and orthographic accuracy, richness of the lexis and stylistic appropriateness. Though some authors (Težak, 1998; Pavličević-Franić, 2005; Aladrović Slovaček and Kolar Billege, 2011) consider the system of validation with one mark only as inappropriate, the tendencies in validation of the final written works show that this is the direction where we are heading. This research has confirmed that most teachers follow the same rule in their schools, though some teachers emphasize that in addition to the numerical mark they also write their comment, which Težak (1998) considers necessary in validation of written works of pupils.

The research results also show that the teachers consider themselves competent for validation of written works since on the scale from 0 to 10 they self-assessed their knowledge as 8. However, the troublesome fact is that 30% of the teachers have never been trained in validation and they still consider themselves competent. The subjectivity in validation is still very much present, which is confirmed by the fact that at the national exam the written work (essay) is validated by three independent assessors which sometimes validate the same work with completely different marks, though they have been given the same criteria. The research conducted by Aladrović Slovaček and Kolar Billege (2011) also shows that the teachers can give up to four different marks to the same work, based on the criteria which are extremely subjective (depending on the element which the teachers consider the most important: orthography, grammar, content or composition).

Such misbalance should be avoided in schools since it often happens that after a few subjective assessments of the teacher, a pupil becomes marked as the one who writes well and almost always receives the best mark or the one who does not write well and due to their poor orthographic and grammatical skills always receives a bad mark. In this case the teachers forget about the content of the written work and the creativity which the pupil might possess or the innovativeness by which they approach the subject. If the element of creativity of the pupil is not recognized, it can happen that the pupil will create a negative attitude towards Croatian language as a school subject and this attitude is then reflected on all aspects of their life and use of Croatian language in life, as well as the attitude towards the mother tongue in general.

In view of all above-mentioned facts, it is extremely important, as confirmed by the results of the research, to standardize the process of validation of written works of the pupils in order to avoid all subjective assessment. One mark definitely cannot be the adequate indicator of the pupil's accomplishments in the mother tongue since it does not include all elements and criteria which it should include and whose

nature and characteristics are completely different (orthography, grammar, lexis, style, content, innovativeness, composition, tidiness).

## NOTES

1. Eight key competences are the following: communication in the mother tongue, communication in foreign languages, mathematical competence, digital competence, learning to learn, social and civic competences, sense of initiative and entrepreneurship, cultural awareness and expression.

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