

## FACTORS DETERMINING L2 READING COMPREHENSION DEVELOPMENT IN FOUR COHORTS OF EIGHTH-GRADERS BETWEEN 2007 AND 2018

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**Benó Csapó \*, Edit Tóth\*\*, Marianne Nikolov \*\*\***

*\* University of Szeged, Institute of Education*

*\*\* University of Szeged, Institute of Education; MTA-SZTE Research Group on the  
Development of Competencies*

*\*\*\* University of Pécs*

*Keywords:* language learning; cohort analysis; large-scale assessments

Proficiency in additional languages (L2) is particularly important in countries where the first language limits access to a broad range of relevant information. This is the case in Hungary, where learning languages has been a priority. Despite investments into language programs, results have been below expectations (Nikolov, 2011). Several studies have inquired into the reasons for this by exploring the conditions and processes of language teaching (Nikolov & Szabó, 2014; Óveges & Csizér 2018), whereas research has also used a theoretical framework for identifying the factors impacting language achievements over time (Nikolov & Csapó, 2010, 2018). The present study analyzed the correlates of L2 proficiency results using longitudinal data of four cohorts ( $N_{\text{sum}}=10,089$ ) in the Hungarian Educational Longitudinal Program (Csapó, 2007). Participants (equal ratio of girls and boys) were in grade eight when their L2 reading comprehension was tested in 2007, 2010, 2015 and 2018. Students solved English (Cronbach's alpha: .941–.953) and German (Cronbach's alpha: .914–.939) reading comprehension tests. The instruments (paper-and-pencil for the first two cohorts and online for the others) were based on the same construct, and used the same text and test types (Csapó & Nikolov, 2009). Over the eleven years, students achieved somewhat better results in English (between 49.25 and 54.02%) than in German (between 38.37 and 48.86%), respectively. There was no clear tendency of change in the given period in English, but a slight decrease was found in German. We found minimal or insignificant differences between results of girls and boys on the English tests, whereas small but significant differences on the German tests, always in favor of girls. The attitudes towards learning L2, measured on a five-point scale, increased from 3.63 to 4.03 for English and from 3.43 to 3.63 for German. Strong correlations were found between attitudes and achievements (English: .32, .39, .38, 45; German: .34; .36, .36, .55). The strongest relationships were observed in the latest assessment. These findings may indicate that the role of attitudes has grown in L2 learning. More sophisticated analysis (e.g., multiple regression) utilizing the large number of variables available in the longitudinal program indicate that scores in L1 reading, mathematics, science and problem-solving, as well as in self-concepts (general academic, verbal and mathematics self-concept), interest in reading and competition orientation are among the variables that explain the largest proportion of the variance of L2 achievements. These results related to the larger picture of students' achievements may contribute to a better understanding of the reasons why L2 learning still poses a challenge, and help identify ways of improvement.