

# The Distinct Features of Hungarian Secondary Schools from the Perspective of Educational Laws and Curricula between 1867 and 1918

ZSÓFIA MOLNÁR-KOVÁCS

## Abstract

This study attempts to reveal the distinct features and structural conceptions of the Hungarian secondary school as a type of institution. The research is based on relevant education acts, regulations, articles, curricula, and academic sources. While analysing official documents, the paper focuses exclusively on the laws concerning secondary education and the curricula of secondary schools. As part of the review, references are also made to Lutheran secondary schools and the structures and tasks of secondary schools for girls.

**Keywords:** secondary school; secondary grammar school; “real” school; history of education

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## Introduction

The expression “secondary school”, according to István Mészáros, appeared in the Hungarian language in the early 1840s (Mészáros 1995, 5). Between 1850 and 1938, “the secondary school meant those schools in which the eight-year study ended with a school-leaving exam, which allowed for further study in a higher education institution” (Mészáros 1995, 5). According to Mihályné Hegedős and Józsefné Tóthpál, secondary schools were, as their name suggests, those educational institutions which prepared students for higher education studies after completing their general basic education (Hegedős – Tóthpál 1984, 83). Only secondary grammar schools met these criteria in the first years of the Austro-Hungarian Empire (and right from the introduction of “Entwurf”). Then, from 1875, the so-called “real” schools (Realschule) were considered secondary schools as well.

This study attempts to reveal the distinct features and structural conceptions of the Hungarian secondary school as a type of institution. The research is based on relevant education acts, regulations, articles, curricula, and academic sources. As part of the review, the Lutheran secondary schools and the structures and tasks of secondary schools for girls will also be referred to. During the analysis of official

documents, the paper focuses exclusively on the laws concerning secondary education<sup>1</sup> and the curricula of secondary schools. Regarding the curricula and their direct antecedents, those documents are highlighted that contain statements and references in connection with the definition and type of institution of the secondary school.<sup>2</sup>

## The roots of the secondary school system

The roots of the secondary school system that prevailed between 1867 and 1918 go back to the writing of the curriculum entitled “Organisationsentwurf” or “Entwurf” and its introduction to Hungary in 1850–1851 (see Entwurf 1849). The eight-year secondary grammar schools and the so-called “real” schools (secondary schools specialized in science), which had only six grades at the time of Entwurf’s publication, were also introduced in Hungary following the requirements of the “Entwurf”. The “Entwurf” was divided into two main parts: the first major unit described the organization of secondary grammar schools, and the second smaller chapter, the organization of “real” schools (see Entwurf, 1849). Therefore, “the requirements of “Entwurf” had become the starting point for the examination and presentation of the construction and curriculum of secondary grammar schools and real schools. This is because “Entwurf” played an important role in the development of the modern Hungarian secondary school as a type of institution” (Zibolen 1990, 9). It also wanted to bring the whole of Western European culture to the entire Hungarian secondary education at once (Fináczky 1896, 76).

## The examination of the term (in the context of “Entwurf”)

According to Entwurf, the aims of the secondary grammar schools were to provide a higher level of general basic education, by using the ancient classical languages and their literature, and to prepare students for university studies at the same time (Entwurf 1849, 38).

In terms of structure, they were divided into two main units: lower-and upper secondary grammar schools, both of which consisted of four classes. Secondary grammar schools could be public or private schools. While public secondary grammar schools were state schools, so they could organise state school-leaving exams and issue State-recognised certificates to their students, the private secon-

1 Act of 1883 on secondary schools and its amendment in 1890  
1883. évi XXX. törvénycikk a középiskolákról és azok tanárainak képzéséről. Retrieved from <https://net.jogtar.hu/ezer-ev-torveny?docid=88300030.TV&searchUrl=/ezer-ev-torvenyei%3Fkey-word%3D1883> [20.12.2020]

1890. évi XXX. törvénycikk a középiskolákról és azok tanárainak képzéséről szóló 1883:XXX. törvénycikk módosítása tárgyában. Retrieved from <https://net.jogtar.hu/ezer-ev-torveny?docid=89000030.TV&searchUrl=/ezer-ev-torvenyei%3Fkey-word%3D1890> [20.12.2020.]

2 Curricula from 1868, 1871, 1875, 1879, 1884, 1899, 1916, 1918, as well as “Organisationsentwurf” from 1849 and a regulation on secondary grammar schools from 1861.

dary grammar schools were not public institutions. Therefore, they could neither organise state school-leaving exams nor issue State-recognised certificates to their students. The pupils of private secondary grammar schools could only take state school-leaving exams in public secondary grammar schools. The school-leaving exam consisted of two parts: written and oral. In secondary grammar schools, the language of instruction was adapted to the province's needs. The subjects taught in secondary grammar schools were religion, languages, geography and history, mathematics, nature study, physics, basic elements of philosophy, penmanship or handwriting, art, music, and gymnastics. Appropriate educational background (elementary school certificate – Volksschule) and reaching the age of nine were essential entrance requirements for secondary grammar schools. Also, students had to pay school fees for grammar school training (see Entwurf 1849).

At the time of Entwurf's publication and its introduction in Hungary, "the objectives of the 'real' schools, beyond the general training, were the students' secondary level pre-training for industrial occupations, and the students' preparation for polytechnics" (Entwurf 1849, 188). "Real" schools, like secondary grammar schools, were made up of two units: lower and upper "real" schools. Lower "real" schools consisted of two, three, or four grades, while the upper "real" schools, which build on the three-year lower "real" schools, consisted of three grades. Thus, students who attended the upper "real" schools could finish after a total of six years.<sup>3</sup> After completing the first three theoretical years as well as the subjects of ancient classical languages, the students of lower "real" schools could continue their studies in the upper secondary grammar schools. The "real" schools, following the example of secondary grammar schools, could be public or private institutions, in which secondary grammar school conditions also applied to organise state school-leaving exams and issue State-recognised certificates to their pupils. The subjects covered in the curriculum of the four-grade lower "real" schools were religious studies, geography, and history, mathematics, applied arithmetic; nature study and physical science, technology, knowledge of goods, and separate subjects dedicated to both the native language (with the subject generally being called "mother tongue") and a second living language. The main subjects of upper "real" schools were religious studies, native language ("mother tongue"), second language, history and geography, mathematics, nature study, physical science, art, and penmanship or handwriting. In these institutions, considering the entrance requirements and obligation to pay school fees, secondary grammar school provisions were also in place. The "Entwurf" introduced the final exam of "real" schools, and all students could apply for this at the end of their last semester, so at the end of sixth grade. After completing the final exam, the students got a so-called comprehensive school-leaving certificate (see Entwurf 1849, 207).

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<sup>3</sup> As published by István Mészáros, the first Hungarian upper "real" school opened in Bratislava in 1850 (Mészáros 1988, 82).

## The examination of the term (drawing on the ideas of József Eötvös)

In October 1867, József Eötvös, the minister of religion and public education, issued an order to reorganise the whole secondary education system (Mészáros 1988, 93). In connection with this, in 1868, Regulation Number 14.464 was prepared. This included the curriculum description of secondary grammar schools (see Curriculum 1868). Eötvös envisioned three-stage, nine-grade secondary grammar schools, which consist of the following parts: the small secondary grammar school from first to the fourth class, the high secondary grammar school in fifth and sixth class, and the lyceum from seventh to ninth class. Out of these three, the lyceum section of Eötvös's secondary grammar school concept was not achieved in the end.

The curriculum of secondary grammar schools, published in 1868, included the educational plans of the small secondary grammar school and the high secondary grammar school. Within the meaning of the curriculum, the task and aim of small secondary grammar schools were supposed to prepare students for higher secondary grammar schools. Besides this, another aim for the lower secondary grammar schools would have been to provide sufficient skills for pupils because some of them complete their education when they finish in the lower secondary grammar school (Curriculum 1868). Additionally, the teaching of subjects must have been approached from a practical point of view. After completing the lower secondary grammar school, besides continuing one's studies in the upper secondary grammar school, it would have been possible to attend class IV of "real" schools (Curriculum, 1868). The universal subjects of lower secondary grammar schools were supposed to include religious studies, Hungarian, Latin, and German languages, and additional languages according to the needs of the region, geography, history, mathematics, physical science, art, penmanship, or handwriting, and physical training. Among the so-called minor subjects, music, French and English language may have been found (Curriculum 1868).

According to Eötvös's plan, the upper secondary grammar schools would have included six classes. They covered the fifth and sixth classes, which build on the four classes of lower secondary grammar schools. The education would have started in lower secondary grammar schools and continued in upper grammar schools. The upper secondary grammar schools were supposed to prepare their students for lyceum studies, and within this framework, there would have been a strong emphasis on teaching classical studies (Curriculum 1868). The universal subjects of upper secondary grammar schools would have been religious studies, Hungarian, Latin, and German languages, and other languages according to the region's needs, mathematical and physical geography, universal history (with special attention to Greek and Roman history and later Hungarian history), algebra and geometry, regular nature study and physical training. The minor subjects of the upper secondary grammar schools would have been art, music, stenography, as well as French, English, and Italian languages (Curriculum 1868). On 7 April 1870,

Eötvös submitted his bill about secondary school to Parliament, but he was unable to pass the bill due to his death.

Five years later, the 1875 curriculum increased the study duration by two years in “real” schools (see Klamarik 1881, 236–245). As far as the significance of this curriculum is concerned, eight-year “real” schools come into existence, which have now become purely secondary schools (Klamarik 1893, 158).



Picture 1: The building of the only eight-grade upper “real” school in Southern Transdanubia, the State Upper “Real” School in Pécs (1915)  
(Source: Gallovich 1915)

## The examination of the term (in the context of the curricula of secondary schools)

The instructions for the 1879 secondary grammar school curriculum refer to the nature of secondary grammar school education, which is primarily aimed at scientific preparation (Instructions, 1880:1; see also Grammar school curriculum, 1879). In addition, it is stated that undoubtedly, among the subjects of the secondary grammar schools, Hungarian language education is somewhat directly related to all the other subjects (Instructions 1880, 3).

The Act of 1883 on Hungarian secondary schools defined two types of secondary schools: secondary grammar schools and “real” schools.<sup>4</sup> Their main task was to provide the higher possible level of general basic education for young people and prepare students for higher-level scientific training.<sup>5</sup> To that effect, secondary grammar schools focused mainly on ancient classical studies, while the “real” schools focused on modern languages, natural sciences, and mathematics. The act stated that both types of schools consisted of eight classes. The following were present among the regular subjects of the secondary grammar school and the “real” schools: divinity and ethics, Hungarian language and literary history, German language and literature, geography, history of Hungary, universal history, psychology and logic, mathematics, physical science, chemistry, writing, and physical

4 1883. évi XXX. törvénycikk a középiskolákról és azok tanárainak képezéséről. Retrieved from <https://net.jogtar.hu/ezer-ev-torveny?docid=88300030.TV&searchUrl=/ezer-ev-torvenyei%3Fkeyword%3D1883> [20.12.2020]

5 See *ibid.*

exercises. Whereas Latin language and literature and Greek language and literature were only provided in secondary grammar schools, French language came to the fore in the “real” schools. Free-hand drawing was also taught in the “real” schools.<sup>6</sup> The prerequisites for attending a secondary school were a minimum age of 9 and the successful completion of the first four grades of the elementary school (or proving the appropriate educational background in an entrance examination) (Márkus 1912a, 489). In the secondary schools, the school year lasted for ten months (there was no teaching in July and August). Students took a school-leaving exam at the end of the eighth grade. This exam consisted of two parts: written and oral.

After the successful completion of the secondary grammar school final exam, the students could take an entrance exam at any university faculty whereas, with the help of a successful final exam of the “real” schools, the students could only apply to study polytechnic, mathematics and natural sciences, or attend mining, forestry, and economic academies. After completing eight years of “real” school and passing the school-leaving exam, students may have taken a further examination in Latin and Greek languages at a public upper secondary grammar school. The successful completion of the exam related to the Latin language gave students the opportunity to enter law and medical faculties at universities while successful exams in both Latin and Greek meant that students could apply to any university faculty (Márkus 1912a, 493). Under the provisions of the law, Hungary was divided into twelve school districts in terms of secondary schools.<sup>7</sup>

The amendment of the Act of 1883 on secondary schools in 1890 stated that students did not need to study the subject of Greek language and literature in secondary grammar schools. Instead, students had the opportunity to study Hungarian literature in greater depth.<sup>8</sup> In addition, the geometric and free-hand drawing were also optional subjects (Márkus, 1912b: 327–328).

The instructions for the 1884 “real” school curriculum emphasised the aim according to which the curricula in lower secondary education needed to facilitate the transitions between “real” school and secondary grammar schools (Real school curriculum, 1884:19). The introductory part of the instructions for the 1889 “real” school curriculum also outlined the main aims of the 1883 and 1890 Act on secondary schools (Real school curriculum 1899, 1; see also Grammar school curriculum 1899).

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<sup>6</sup> See *ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> See *ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> 1890. évi XXX. törvénycikk a középiskolákról és azok tanárainak képezéséről szóló 1883:XXX. törvénycikk módosítása tárgyában. Retrieved from <https://net.jogtar.hu/ezer-ev-torvenyi?docid=89000030.TV&searchUrl=/ezer-ev-torvenyei%3Fkeyword%3D1890> [20.12.2020.]



Picture 2: The Hungarian Royal State Upper Secondary Grammar School in Munkács (1896)

(Source: Fankovich 1896)

## Secondary schools for women

A ministerial decree of 1895 allowed women to begin their university studies, at first either at the faculties of humanities and medicine or pharmaceutical courses.<sup>9</sup> In this context, female students were allowed to take private school-leaving exams in secondary grammar school for male students. The first state secondary school for women, the so-called upper girl school, started to operate in 1875 (Rébay 2009). In 1896, the first Hungarian secondary grammar school for women was opened in Budapest, where in 1900, the first school-leaving exam was organised (Mészáros 1995, 51).

From 1915 onwards, girls were allowed to enrol in secondary schools for boys as private students in places where a secondary grammar school for women did not exist, but a secondary grammar school for boys did. Girls had a separate place to sit in the classroom, and they had to stay in the so-called girls' room during breaks between lessons. They could only enter or leave the classroom at the end of class with the teacher. In fact, this practice continued until the early 1950s (see Mészáros 1988, 110; see also Rébay 2009, 123).

In 1916, a decree defined the three types of secondary school for women in Hungary: the upper girl school, the secondary grammar school for women, and the female upper commercial school.<sup>10</sup> According to this decree, the number of grades in the upper girl school increased to seven. Also, the decree made certain that the upper girl school remained an educational institution for the girls of the educated middle class (MRT 1916, 1370). The education was completed with a final exam that was similar to a school-leaving examination; this exam was not compulsory. After successfully passing the final examination, it was possible to enter commercial academies and academies of dramatic art, and, with a successful equivalency exam, students could continue learning at an institute of elementary school teacher

9 „A vallás- és közoktatásügyi m. kir. minister 1895. évi 72.039. számú rendelete valamennyi tanterületi kir. főigazgatósághoz, leányoknak érettségi vizsgálatra bocsátása, és polgári vagy felsőbb leányiskolából a középiskolába átlépése tárgyában.” (MRT 1895, 1689–1691)

10 „A m. kir. vallás- és közoktatásügyi miniszter 1916. évi 86.100. eln. számú rendelete valamennyi tanterületi és felsőkereskedelmi iskolai kir. főigazgatóhoz és a felsőbb leányiskolák miniszteri biztosságához, a leányközépiskolák szervezetének, rendtartásának és tanításterveinek életbeléptetéséről.” (MRT 1916, 1369–1375)

training (entering its fourth year) (MRT 1916, 1371). The female upper commercial school closely integrated with the upper girl school and supplemented the general basic education with special knowledge on matters of commerce (MRT 1916, 1371). The aims of the eight-grade secondary grammar schools for girls were to provide women the highest possible level of general basic education whose level was equal to that of the secondary grammar schools for boys and to prepare their students for higher education studies (MRT 1916, 1372; see also Curriculum 1916). At this point, each of the three types of secondary school for women was built on four grades of common lower secondary education (MRT 1916, 1371). Two years later, in 1918, a reform was carried out again, but this did not result in a profound change (see Curriculum 1918). These three types of institutions continue to operate according to the previous principles and organisation (Rébay 2009, 126).

## Some Thoughts on Lutheran Secondary Schools

Considering the opportunities of new, continuously emerging research directions and perspectives, I bring to light the Hungarian Lutheran secondary schools in the observed period separately. Therefore, I would like to add this segment to my previous examination. However, the overview of the Lutheran secondary schools of the period and the intensive analysis of this type of institution is still in an early phase, so in my paper, I will write briefly and broadly about them. Regarding the history of Lutheran educational affairs, one of the fundamental readings is the volume of Ödön Szelényi written in 1917, “The History of Hungarian Lutheran Schools from the Reformation to the present day. With Special Focus on Secondary Schools” (Szelényi 1917). Another important starting point is the work of István Mészáros published in 1988, entitled “Chronology and Topography of Hungarian Secondary Schools, 996–1948” (Mészáros 1988).

Focusing on the period discussed in this study and based on the data of István Mészáros, it can be stated that the number of Protestant secondary schools, especially that of secondary grammar schools, has increased steadily over the years (see Mészáros 1988). The oldest secondary schools which have been in the service of the Lutheran education since the century of Reformation until the analysed period can be found in Selmecebánya, Besztercebánya, Eperjes, Késmárk, and Sopron. In addition, an institution in Bratislava, which was established a century later, can also be associated with them (see Szelényi 1917, 116).





Picture 3: Lutheran Secondary Grammar School in Besztercebánya (1895)  
(Source: Varga 1896)

As Szelényi puts it, it was generally not considered compatible with the Protestant principles of freedom that all schools had to be of the same organisation. Neither the number of classes nor the order of studies was the same. The local traditions and the local claims were the dominant ones (see Szelényi 1917, 116).

As mentioned above, the Austrian minister of religious affairs and education, Leo Thun, made the “Organisationsentwurf” compulsory for all secondary schools in Hungary in 1850. Institutions that did not adapt to “Entwurf” became private institutions. In the case of Lutheran institutions, this transformation took several years and involved great difficulties (see Szelényi 1917, 138).

All universal curricula were established in the nineteenth century, and, looking back at the history of the Lutheran secondary school curriculum, it can be concluded that the following years were important in this respect: 1806–1810 (Schedius curriculum), 1841–1846 (Zayugróc curriculum), 1861 (Pest curriculum), 1869 (Acsa curriculum) and 1886 (Budapest curriculum). The curriculum, published in print in 1886, was the last autonomous curriculum for Lutheran secondary schools. As a result, Lutheran secondary grammar schools have completely blended in with public schools (see Szelényi 1917, 117, 151, 152).

## Conclusion

This study attempted to examine the Hungarian secondary school as a type of institution between 1867 and 1918. The analysis was based on relevant education acts, regulations, articles, curricula, and (academic) sources.

Based on the examined sources, it is widely accepted that there were two types of secondary schools, eight-year secondary grammar schools, and eight-year “real” schools at the time of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. However, in the second half of the observed period, at the beginning of the twentieth century, the tripartite structure and the competencies of the types of secondary schools for girls (the

upper girl school, the secondary grammar school for women, and the female upper commercial school) were also identified. In addition, different institutional roles and priorities emerged due to the clear focus on acts, regulations, and other documents of the studied period. This offers an excellent opportunity to both examine the Hungarian secondary school system more broadly and interpret it in a wholly complex way.

The aim of this study was to provide some introductory thoughts on the educational system and curricula of the era of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. In the research process, the idea of a more detailed study on Hungarian Lutheran secondary schools has emerged; therefore, in the future, I hope to expand this research to focus on these schools and provide a more in-depth analysis of their curricula.

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