

CREATIVE PARTNERSHIP PROGRAMME IN TWO HUNGARIAN SCHOOLS IN ROMANIA

2023-1-HU01-KA210-SCH-000167270

Main results



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Introduction

Our analysis was conducted as part of the Erasmus+ funded project Promoting Equity in Education by Creative Partnerships Programme. Coordinated by the Budapest-based Creative Learning and Education Foundation and carried out in collaboration with two Romanian partner organizations—the Timisoara-based Minitremu Association and the Gyergyószentmiklós-based Omnibus Kft.—the program took place at two Hungarian-language schools in Romania: the Bartók Béla Theoretical Lyceum in Timișoara and the Salamon Ernő Gymnasium in Gheorgheni. As part of the project, some of the Romanian language and communication lessons in four classes at each school were conducted using the methods of the Creative Partnership educational program between February and June 2025.

In order to evaluate the results of the project, we conducted competency assessments among the participating students before and after the actual school activities. Our analysis presents the main results of the assessments. The primary purpose of the assessments was to examine the impact of the Creative Partnership program on student performance and learning motivation, using Romanian-language competency tests and a questionnaire examining student motivation.

We conducted two measurements: prior to the launch of the project in schools (in Gyergyószentmiklós between January 27 and 30, 2025, and in Timișoara between February 3 and 6, 2025) and after the actual classroom work was completed (in Gheorgheni on June 17, 2025, and in Timișoara on June 16, 2025). At the same time as the input competency tests, the students also completed a family background questionnaire, which included a so-called motivational background sheet – a set of questions related to the school and the students' learning motivations –; the motivational background sheet was also completed by the students during the output measurement. In addition to the classes participating in the program (the so-called project classes), control classes also took part in the measurements – one class from the same grade for each project class – which were not part of the program, but their results in the measurements helped in the evaluation of the project.

In our analysis, we present the results of the competency measurements in various comparative aspects, examining the performance of the project classes in relation to the control classes, the change in results over time (measured in the interval between the two assessments), and the conclusions that can be drawn from the results of the two schools in relation to each other.

The results were examined in relation to family background data and pedagogical added value. Each chapter discusses the family background of the students and the opinions of the students in the project classes about the program.

Framework of the evaluation

During our evaluation, we conducted input and output measurements in the target group (project classes) and control classes in order to gain an understanding of the impact of the educational intervention. The evaluation is based on various comparisons: between schools, between classes, between project classes and control classes.

The evaluation framework was based on previous research experience, the OECD's 2021 recommendations, and consideration of local and regional characteristics. Since we primarily wanted to measure language skills, we used Romanian language comprehension and composition tasks and exercises. Based on international experience, the assessment of reading competencies was built on three pillars: 1. text use, retrieval (i.e., finding information); 2. integration and interpretation of the text (i.e., understanding the texts); 3. reflection on and evaluation of the texts. The three pillars were interrelated, and statistically we were able to characterize each participating student with a score point.

During the measurement, we also completed a background questionnaire with the students, which enabled us to obtain information about their family background and various student attitudes.

At the Bartók Béla Theoretical Lyceum in Timișoara, the classes belonged to three different educational levels – a third (3SBS), a sixth (6B), a ninth (9TT) and a tenth grade (10TT) participated in the program; the four control classes (3H, 6A, 9MI/BK, 10MI/BK) also belonged to the aforementioned grades – at the Salamon Ernő Gymnasium in Gheorgheni (Gyergyószentmiklós), the project was only carried out in secondary school classes – one ninth grade (9D), two tenth grades (10A and 10E) and one eleventh grade (11C); the four classes had three control classes, one class per grade (9E, 10B, and 11B).

The number of students participating in the measurements was similar in both schools: in Timișoara, 161 students participated in the initial measurement (74 from the project class and 87 from the control class), and 177 students participated in the final measurement (80 from the project class and 97 from the control class). In Gheorgheni, 169 students participated in the initial assessment (97 from the project class and 72 from the control class), and 177 students participated in the final assessment (102 from the project class and 75 from the control class). The number of students who participated in both measurements was 152 at Bartók Béla High School and 163 at Salamon Ernő High School, of whom 80 and 95, respectively, attended one of the project classes. A family background questionnaire was completed by 161 Bartók students and 180 Salamon students.

1. táblázat: Number of students by schools and class type.

School	Type of classes	Number of students			
		input assesment	Output assessment	Both assessment	Family background quest.
	project	74	80	72	74

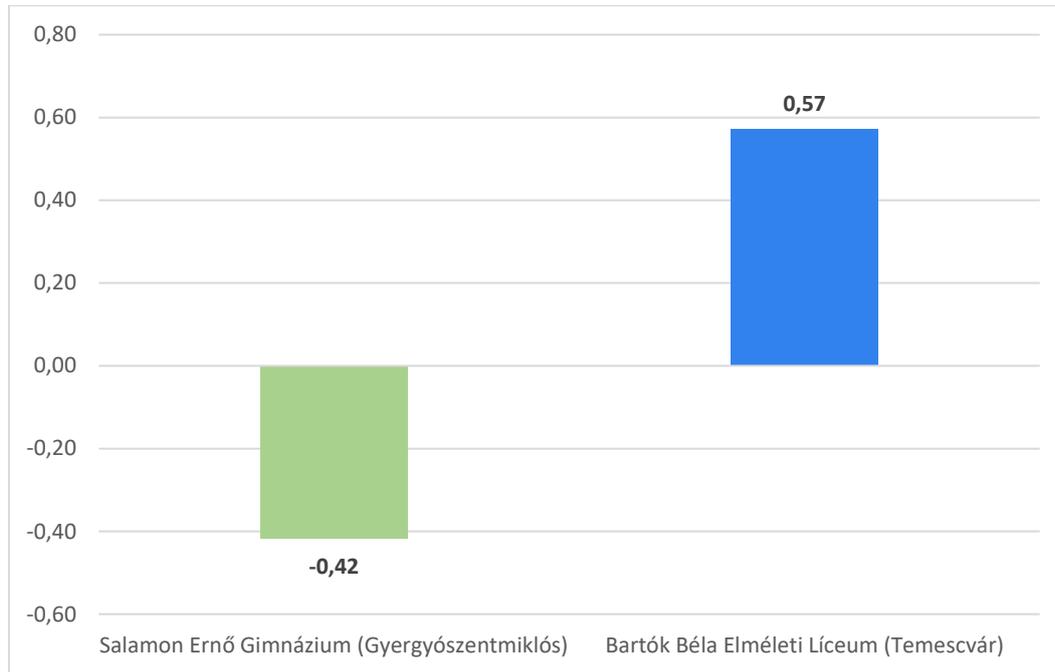
Bartók Béla Theoretical Lyceum (Timisoara)	control	87	97	80	87
	SCHOOL TOTAL	161	177	152	161
Salamon Ernő Gymnasium (Gheorgheni)	project	97	102	95	104
	control	72	75	68	76
	SCHOOL TOTAL	169	177	163	180

Family background

There are a few issues related to family background where there are significant differences between the students at the two schools participating in the project:

- Language spoken at home: 56 percent of students at the school in Timișoara speak Romanian at home, compared to only 3.4 percent of students at the school in Gheorgheni.
- Parents' labor market activity: while the proportion of fathers active in the labor market exceeds 95 percent for students at both schools, the difference for mothers is nearly 15 percentage points in favor of students in Timișoara (91.6 percent of mothers in Timișoara 78.7% of mothers in Gheorgheni are active in the labor market).
- Parents' educational attainment: at the school in Timișoara, more than two-thirds of fathers (68.9%) and nearly three-quarters of mothers (73.3%) have a higher education degree, while at the school in Gheorgheni, these rates are 25.6% (fathers) and 43.3% (mothers), respectively, which is a significantly lower difference.
- In terms of living conditions and material possessions owned by families, there is generally no significant difference between the students of the two schools, but there is a significant difference in the number of books, which is a decisive factor in terms of cultural capital: the families of students in Timișoara, and especially the students themselves, own a higher proportion of books than the students in Gheorgheni and their families. This is also reflected in reading habits: 46 percent of students in Timișoara read books at least once a week, compared to only 31.6 percent of students in Gheorgheni.
- The differences in family background can also be seen in the aggregate indicator known as the linguistic-cultural-economic family background index (NYKG_CSHI): the two schools differ significantly in this area (the NYKG_CSHI of the school in Timișoara is 0.57, while that of the school in Gheorgheni is -0.42). However, there is another significant difference within the schools: while in Gheorgheni there is no significant difference between classes within each grade according to the family background index, in Timișoara there is a kind of internal segregation.

Figure 1: Average linguistic, cultural-economic family background index by school



Results of competency assessments

We examined the results of competency assessments using two methods: competency averages, which are aggregate indicators calculated from the answers given by students, and the percentage of correct answers to test questions. Based on these two methods, we can conclude the following:

- At the Bartók Béla High School in Timișoara, the average of the project classes deteriorated in the lower grades, while the average of the control classes improved between the two assessments – this is contrary to our preliminary expectations, as the opposite would have been expected due to the intervention of the KP program. However, in grades 9–10, the opposite was partially observed: the averages of the project classes increased, while those of the control classes decreased. At the school in Gheorgheni, the average of the project classes changed only slightly between the two measurements (it decreased slightly in 9D and 10E, increased slightly in 10A, and stagnated in 11C), and in the case of the control classes, only 10B showed a significant change (an 18-point increase), while the other two classes showed a slight decrease.
- Looking at the proportions of correct answers to the tasks, it is generally true for both schools that the proportion of correct answers increased between the initial and final measurements (except for task R3 in the case of Bartók Béla). Based on participation in the project, we also observed that in the school in Gheorgheni, the project classes performed better in all tasks in the input measurement, but the difference compared to the control classes mostly decreased in the output measurement (especially in tasks

R1 and R2). At Bartók Béla, the control classes performed better in three of the four tasks in the initial assessment, while the difference increased slightly in two tasks in the final assessment, but a significant improvement was observed in the results of the project classes in one task (R4).

- Comparing the results of the two schools, the difference is striking according to both assessment methods: in the grades that took the same test, the average competence of the Timisoara classes was clearly higher than that of the Gheorgheni classes; even the lowest-performing Timisoara class (10TT) performed better on the test than the highest-performing Gheorgheni' class (11C); the difference between the averages of the best-performing class in Timișoara and the worst-performing class in Gheorgheni exceeds two standard deviations (200 average points). The results calculated from the correct answers to the tasks also show that the students from Timișoara performed better, with the difference reaching 25–30 percentage points in two tasks (R3 and R4).

Figure 2: Average competencies in 3rd grade classes by the type of the class (BB Timisoara)

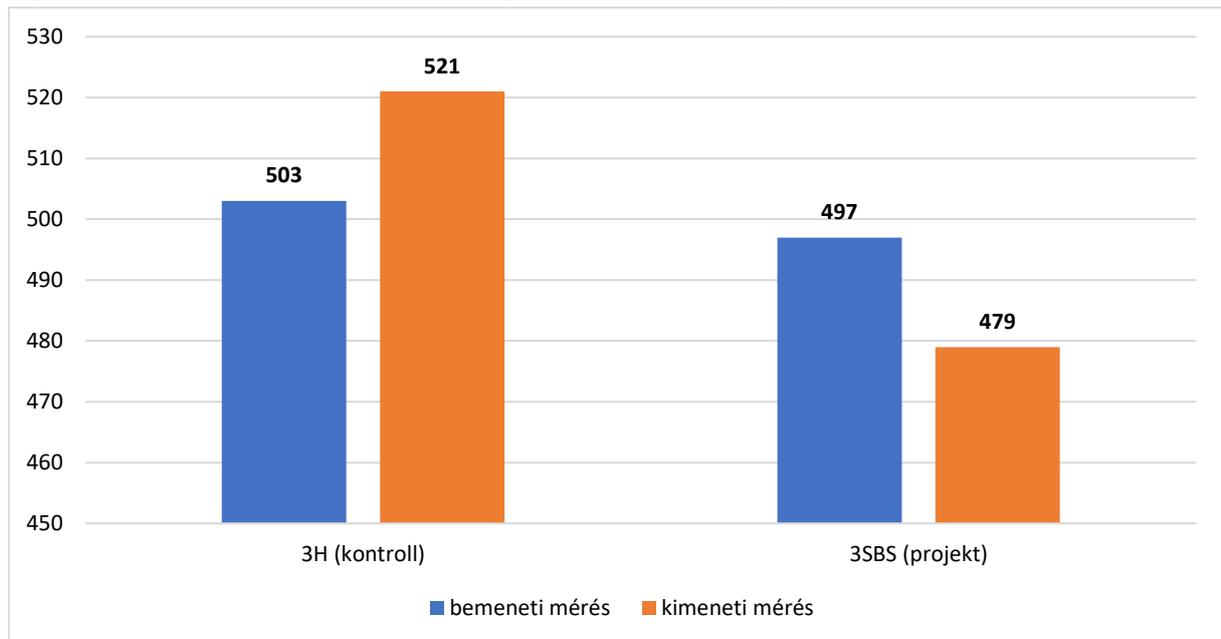


Figure 3: Average competencies in the 6th grade classes by the type of the class (BB Timisoara)

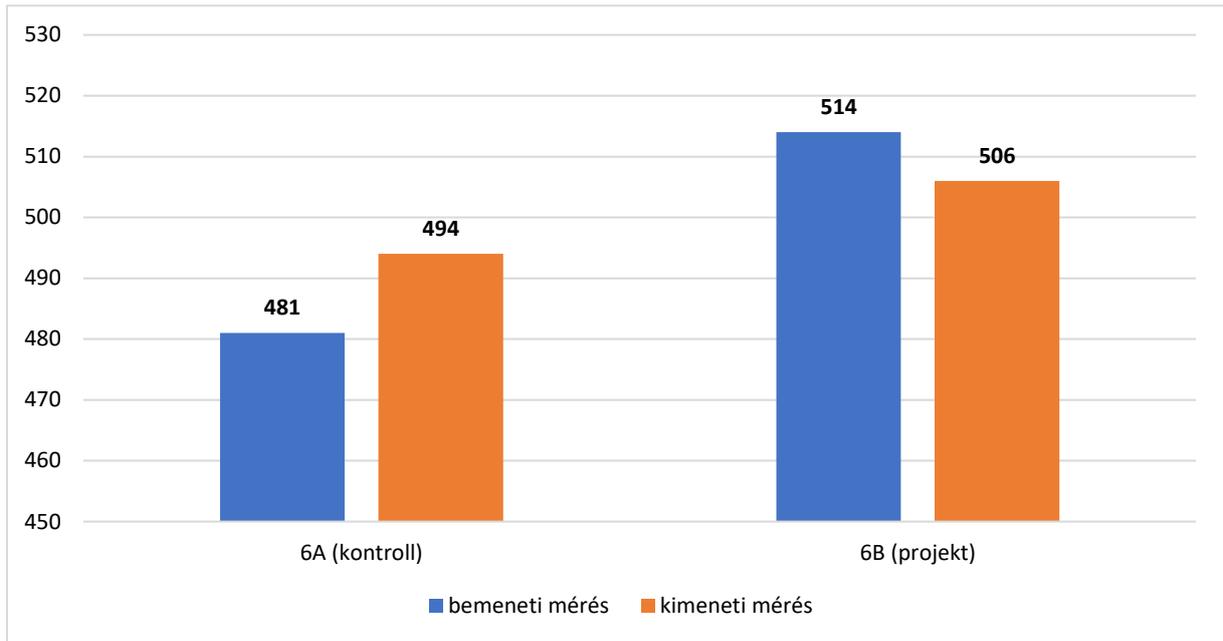


Figure 3: Average competencies in the 9th and 10th grade classes by the type of the class (BB Timisoara)

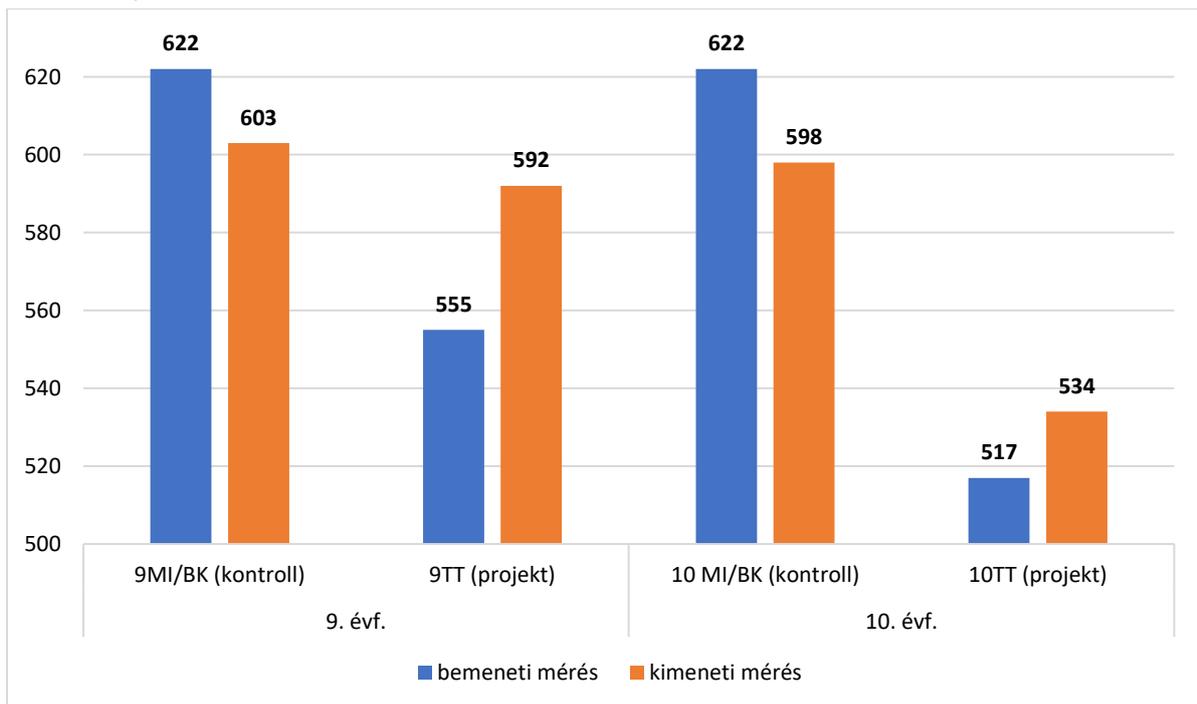
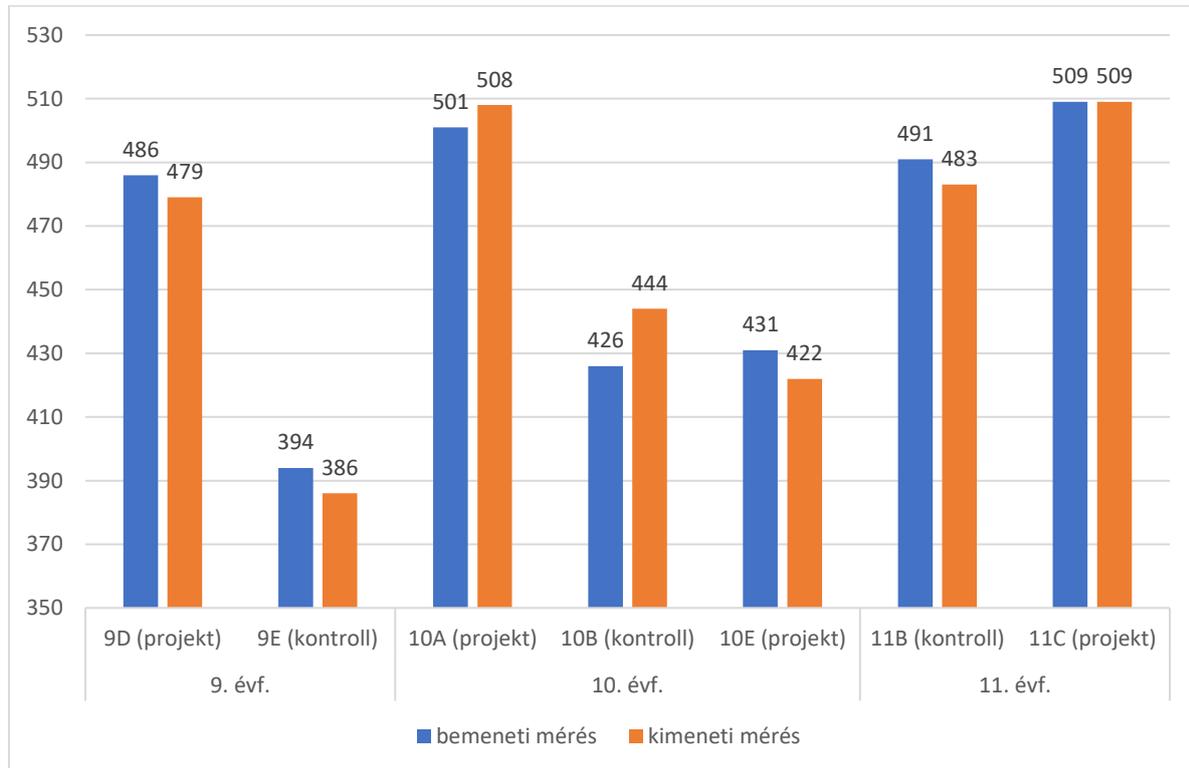


Figure 5: Average competencies in the 9th, 10th and 11th grade classes by the type of the class (SE Gheorgheni)



Pedagogical added value (PAV)

Although the differences between raw competency scores reflect real differences, it is also worth asking what lies behind these results. The measured competency results cannot be separated from the social environment from which the students come. To map this, we created the linguistic-cultural-economic family background index (NYGK_CSHI) described earlier. Family background can generally influence school performance, but in this assessment, linguistic background also has an impact on the results: it matters whether or not the student uses Romanian at home. For example, about half of the students in Timișoara use Romanian at home, while this is rare among students in Gheorgheni.

Using the family background index, we can calculate a so-called pedagogical added value (PHE), which expresses the extent to which students' performance deviates from the estimate based on the family background index. PHE thus shows how language skills develop when factors attributable to family background are kept under control. From this perspective, we obtained the following main results:

- There are significant differences between the input and output PHEs of schools in Gheorgheni and Timișoara: the former are higher, while the latter are generally lower. This can be interpreted as meaning that schools in Timișoara are better able to utilize the (linguistic) skills brought from home.

- However, the differences between input and output PHEs reveal the "true" added value: in this respect, the added value of the schools operating in the two settlements is almost identical.
- Among the project classes in Gheorgheni, classes 10A and 11E achieved a positive shift in added value, while in the control classes this was only evident in class 10B.
- The project classes in Timișoara achieved convincing results compared to their own control classes: in the 9th grade, the project class is clearly more successful than the control class, while in the 10th grade, although the PHE difference is negative, it is smaller than in the control class. We interpreted this as meaning that KP as an intervention contributed more successfully than the control class to preventing a decline in student performance.

School attachment

There is no significant difference between the two schools in terms of school attachment – students in Timișoara show slightly higher attachment – and a slight downward trend can be observed between the two measurements. There is no significant difference between the project and control classes in either school – thus, a slight decrease in school attachment can be observed at both levels. The assessment of Romanian language classes also deteriorated slightly in the project classes of both schools, so it seems that the expected impact of the KP program is less noticeable in this area.

Attitudes towards the use of Romanian, motivation to learn, self-image and coping

The background questionnaire used in the survey also allowed us to assess whether there had been any change in students' attitudes towards the use of Romanian and in their various attitudes towards school.

- Based on the fact that the use of the Romanian language is also influenced by socio-psychological factors, we attempted to measure this using two attitude scales. Based on the first, we found that while there was no shift in the search for opportunities to use the language among students in Gheorgheni, a positive shift was evident among students in Timișoara (both at the project and control class levels).
- In the case of the other item (which examined whether students feel uncomfortable when they have to communicate in Romanian), it is clear that there was a significant shift in both schools in the case of the project classes.

Student attitudes can also influence school performance, so we also examined whether there was a demonstrable shift in learning motivation, self-image, and coping levels during the project

- Self-image significantly decreased in the project classes in Gheorgheni, while the opposite was true in the control classes in Timișoara.

- In terms of motivation, at least in Gheorgheni, a significant decline can be observed in both types of classes: this indicates that this shift is probably unrelated to the KP project intervention, but at the same time, it is thought-provoking at the level of the entire educational process that learning motivation has demonstrably declined in just a few months.

Assessment of the KP program

Overall, the opinions expressed by students participating in the Creative Partnership lessons are not positive in either school, but there is a significant difference between the two schools: the average score at Bartók Béla Lyceum in Timisoara was 1.51, while at Salamon Ernő Gymnasium it was 2.1 on a scale where the median is 2.5 and positive assessment is represented by a score between 1 and 2.5. The analysis by class shows that while even the 10TT class at the school in Timișoara, which was most critical of the program, had an average of 2 (i.e., falling within the range indicating a positive opinion), there was one class at the school in Gheorgheni (10A) that rated the program slightly negatively (average of 2.81).

The students' opinions about the program, expressed in their own words, primarily highlight playful learning, artistic/creative activities, and creativity in relation to KP lessons as characteristics that most distinguished these lessons from traditional, normal Romanian lessons. At the school in Gheorgheni, there were also many comments emphasizing the more relaxed, freer lesson structure and the less stressful, calmer atmosphere—not entirely unrelated to the fact that, for students living in a predominantly Hungarian environment in Székely Land, the KP lessons helped to break down barriers to communication in Romanian.

At the same time, the most critical opinions regarding the effectiveness of the program came from students attending the school in Gheorgheni, who questioned whether the program had actually helped them improve their Romanian language skills or better understand the curriculum.



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