

BRATISLAVA INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL OF LIBERAL ARTS

IS THE MATURITA EXAM READY FOR THE 21ST CENTURY?

BACHELOR'S THESIS

Damián Karas

Bratislava, 2023

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Declaration of Originality

I hereby declare that this bachelor thesis is my own work and has not been published in part or in whole elsewhere. All used academic and other sources of literature are referenced and listed in Bibliography.

Bratislava, February 15, 2023

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Signature: _____

Is the Maturita exam Ready for the 21st century?

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Is the Maturita exam Ready for the 21st century?

Abstract

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The Maturita has been a high school-leaving exam in Slovakia for many years. However, it needs a restart to better address the skills required for life in the 21st century. Living in a world that undergoes constant changes and is highly unpredictable is challenging. Robotisation and digitalisation will undoubtedly bring a lot of improvements but also problems that young people will have to deal with. That is why it is more than necessary to teach students skills that will help them survive and prosper in this unforeseeable future. Nevertheless, this topic is still largely neglected in Slovakia. There is still too much focus on encyclopaedic knowledge and memorisation of facts. This problem is also represented in the high-school leaving exam—Maturita, especially in the context of grammar schools. What is more, there is almost no research or academic literature analysing the Maturita exam. Therefore, this Bachelor's thesis aims to map different problematic areas of this exam and provide a basis for further research. I conducted in-depth interviews with experts, teachers, and students who gave me valuable insights. The critical issue is that there is no clear consensus among educators and experts about the role of this exam in Slovak society. Is it a summary of knowledge, a qualification exam for a job, a selection of suitable candidates for higher education, or a transition ritual (test of maturity)? No one knows.

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Abstrakt

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Maturitná skúška sa používa na Slovensku už mnohé roky. Avšak, potrebuje reštart, aby lepšie zodpovedala zručnostiam potrebným pre život v 21. Storočí. Žiť vo svete, ktorý sa neustále mení a je čoraz viac nepredvídateľný je náročné. Robotizácia a digitalizácia nepochybne prinesú mnoho vylepšení, no aj problémov, ktorým mladí ľudia budú musieť čeliť. Preto je viac než žiadúce učiť študentov také zručnosti, ktoré im pomôžu prežiť a rozvíjať sa v tejto nepredvídateľnej budúcnosti. Ničmenej sa zdá, že na Slovensku je táto téma stále do veľkej miery zanedbávaná. Ešte stále sa kladie príliš veľký dôraz na encyklopedické vedomosti a memorizovanie faktov. Tento problém sa odzrkadluje aj v stredoškolskej záverečnej skúške—Maturite a to najmä v kontexte gymnázií. A čo viac, neexistuje takmer žiaden výskum či akademická literatúra, ktorá by analyzovala Maturitnú skúšku. Preto táto bakalárska práca má za cieľ zmapovať rozličné problematické oblasti tejto skúšky a tým položiť základ pre ďalší výskum. Spravil som rozhovory s expertmi, učiteľmi a študentmi, ktorí mi poskytli hodnotný vhľad do tejto problematiky. Najzávažnejší problém je fakt, že neexistuje konsenzus medzi pedagógmi a expertmi ohľadom účelu Maturitnej skúšky na Slovensku. Je to sumár vedomostí, kvalifikačná skúška na pracovné pozície, výber vhodných uchádzačov na univerzitu, či prechodový rituál—skúška dospelosti? Nikto nevie.

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Introduction

Green ribbon, green tablecloth, suit, stress, anxiety, head about to explode from the amount of information stored in it. That is the Maturita exam, as I remember it. This exam has been present in the Slovak region for many years. It is a tradition that everyone has to go through, and many retain their Maturita as if it was yesterday. I remember my teachers mentioning this exam so frequently that it scared me and many of my classmates to death. After the exam, I felt it was unnecessary to be so stressed out. The experience resulted in certain strange feelings as well. I realised the whole Maturita was not as necessary as I thought. I could not see the reason why the importance of it was so exaggerated.

What is then the role of such an exam, and why is it so significant? Some say it is an exam of adulthood/an initiation ritual, some that it is a qualification for a job or preparation for a university, and some say it is an objective summary of the student's acquired knowledge. Which one is true? Unfortunately, there seems to be no clear answer to that. It is a high-school leaving exam, so it probably tests things necessary for young people to master in the 21st century. But is that the case?

Are Slovak students ready to face the challenges of the next decades brought about by automation and digitalisation? It is essential for them to be good communicators, be creative, be great team players and be able to adapt to a constantly changing world. However, reading textbooks and retelling what they read does not serve this purpose. How will that help them to find a job or be emotionally stable? Nobody wants students to feel lost and overwhelmed when they enter the life of adults. Yet, many will be if there is no change to come.

The Maturita exam cannot be analysed in isolation since it should directly correspond with what is taught at schools. Therefore, the Maturita exam should test only such things, topics, and skills that the students have been learning during their high school studies. If the belief is that high schools should prepare students for life in the 21st century and develop 21st-century skills, then there is a mismatch between what is tested and what should be tested. It needs to be emphasised, however, that there is no

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consensus among the policymakers, experts, and educators on the ultimate goal of high school studies (Burjan, personal interview, May 23, 2022).

This bachelor's thesis rests on the assumption that the aim should be mainly about developing 21st-century skills and preparing students for their life after school. These skills include problem-solving, creativity, teamwork, digital, and communication skills (Gonzalez Vazquez, et al., 2019). Since many Slovak schools are more focused on encyclopaedic knowledge and memorising facts (Rehúš, 2018), there is only a little focus on 21st-century skills. That applies to the Maturita exam as well. It is often more about memorising and repeating.

There is no extensive research about the Maturita exam and its function or effectiveness in the Slovak context. Because of that, this bachelor's thesis focuses on the following questions: To what extent do the things students learn at school and the Maturita exam itself correspond to 21st-century skills? Is there too much focus on memory? How are students dealing with stress and external pressure? How motivated are students to take the exam? Why do we call Maturita "the exam of maturity"? The hypothesis is that the Maturita exam should be changed in terms of structure and content to better address the skills needed for life in the 21st century for the following reasons:

1. It is not aligned with the 21st-century skills, which are essential to acquire for young people.
2. The students are only extrinsically motivated by the obligation to take the test and their fear of it. Moreover, the phenomenon of high-stakes test anxiety worsens the situation and can harm students' self-image.
3. Evaluation of this exam, especially in the case of the oral part, is not objective.

Methodology:

For this thesis I chose to conduct in-depth interviews. To fully understand the issue and context of the Maturita exam, I interviewed six education experts. They are all professionals in close contact with students and teachers. Moreover, they are well aware of the problems that Slovak schools face. These experts are chosen based on convenience and the network of contacts I have at my disposal. Namely Juraj Hipš,

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Vladimír Burjan, Michal Rehúš, Arnold Kiss and Jan Zeman (from the Czech Republic). Furthermore, I interviewed Romana Kanovská, the former director of the National Institute for Certified Measurements (NÚCEM).

It is even more important to know the opinions of the key actors directly involved and influenced by the Maturita exam. Six teachers were interviewed to understand better their stances, feelings, and experience with this exam. It is again a convenience sample coming from different regions of Slovakia. Four of them teach at grammar schools and two of them at vocational schools. Some of the interviewees are teachers who try to think innovatively in terms of their profession. Some attended additional training or mentoring to improve their teaching. Therefore, the sample of teachers approached for interviews does not represent the opinion spectrum of the population but was purposely sought to include the ideas of those teachers who are invested in teaching and learning development and think thoroughly about potential improvements in the education system.

Students are the third category of respondents. Specifically, I interviewed eleven students who had their Maturita exam in the spring months of 2022. They still have vivid and fresh memories of the exam and can tell me more about their experience. Students chosen for these interviews studied mainly at grammar schools. They are from different parts of Slovakia (Košice, Dubnica nad Váhom, Skalica, Bánovce nad Bebravou).

However, the majority was from and also studied in Bratislava.

Using in-depth interviews in this thesis is a helpful tool to understand the problems, authentic experiences, and opinions concerning the Maturita exam. In total, I interviewed twenty-three respondents for the purpose of this bachelor's thesis. The interviews were semi-structured, and the questions were, to a large extent, the same for each group. Since no academic literature maps the thoughts and feelings of the main actors, there has to be a starting point. This bachelor's thesis does not aim to explain every possible variable or topic connected to the Maturita exam. It is just a beginning that is supposed to, ideally, start a broader discussion that would lead to further research and, potentially, a reform. My questions revolved around topics like the subjectivity of evaluation, the role of the Maturita exam, connection to 21st-century skills, stress, and motivation, and focusing on memory. Answers to such questions can only sketch some trends or

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tendencies towards particular trajectories, which, for example, the Slovak Ministry of Education could take into account.

List of questions asked during interviews:

Teachers & Students:

1. What words or emotions come to mind when I say the Maturita exam?
2. The Maturita exam is often called an “exam of adulthood.”
3. What do you think about that?
4. A Czech education analyst said Maturita is based on the principle of “remember and repeat”. Do you agree with this statement? Why or why not?
5. What do you think about the degree to which are your students prepared for the future?
6. Are you satisfied with the Maturita exam? Would you change something?
7. What should the ideal Maturita look like?
8. A phenomenon called “high-stakes test anxiety” is present when writing a test or taking an exam. It is a stress reaction that negatively influences the performance of the student. Do you know whether your students experience something like that? (only teachers)
9. How well can you/your students deal with stress when taking such exams?
10. What influences your students’ motivation in the preparation phase before the exam?
11. What skills do you think are essential for young people to be successful in the world of the 21st century?

Experts:

Apart from the already mentioned questions, I asked education experts about some additional topics.

1. What should a high school graduate know?
2. In other words, what does the graduate profile look like? I wanted to know what core competencies students should acquire during their studies.
3. Should the Maturita exam be cancelled?

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4. I wanted to know whether the experts have ever thought about such a solution, and what consequences would that lead to.
5. What is the aim of the Maturita exam?
6. It is not certain and it is something essential to know.

In Chapters 4-11, there is a summary and content analysis of the interviews. It is divided into sections based on the identified codes and topics. I looked for the certain significant commonalities within these sections. These interviews gave me insights and opinions of the key educational actors. From those, I could not draw conclusions or generalisations. However, what I could do is find out the areas and connections. Based on that, I formulated what further research should focus on.

Research limitations:

Since this research was conducted through in-depth interviews, the results are subjective. It is not possible to make generalisations based on the answers of the respondents. However, they still illustrate ways of thinking about the exam and education in Slovakia. Another limitation that should be considered is the fact that I was talking to some students and teachers who are mostly from Bratislava. Some are in close contact with innovative, non-formal education organisations or some graduated from the best grammar schools in Slovakia. It is necessary to look even more at other regions of Slovakia and interview more people from vocational and art schools. These topics are probably a different reality for excluded groups, like some of the Roma students. Unfortunately, some of them do not even have the chance to experience the Maturita exam because of the education system. So interviewing them may give this topic a broader range of perspectives or opinions.

Nevertheless, this research opens up many questions that need to be studied in detail. One of my respondents, education analyst Michal Rehúš (personal interview, December 9, 2022), argued that many, if not all, of the topics I cover in this bachelor's thesis, deserve detailed research. When other researchers gather enough information about specific issues like stress, external motivation, and memory testing versus focusing on skills, it is possible to make generalisations that would help us determine what and how to change the Maturita exam.

Chapter 1: Maturita Exam Definition and Structure

1.1 Definition and Structure

The Maturita exam is a state school-leaving exam. The primary responsibility for the organisation in terms of content and all the technicalities is on the Ministry of Education, National Institute for Certified Measurements (NÚCEM), and schools. Passing this exam means the student obtains valid certification about finishing their high school studies and can continue at the university or apply for specific jobs. Usually, students who take this exam are 18 or 19 years old. The Maturita exam consists of two main parts. The external part and the internal part. The external part is a written test, and the internal part consists of a written part—an essay—and an oral examination. The external part of the Maturita exam is centralised. In other words, there is a standardised test for the Slovak language, foreign language, and mathematics. Although, the test from mathematics is compulsory only for those who choose it as their Maturita subject. Since 2005, the Maturita has consisted of an external part and a written form of an internal part in foreign languages and mathematics. Since 2007, there has been the addition of a national language. In 2008, the National Institute for Certified Measurements—NÚCEM is in charge of the preparation, organisation and realisation of the external part and written form of the internal part (NÚCEM, n.d.). According to NÚCEM, the external part aims to evaluate such knowledge and skills that cannot be evaluated within the oral internal part of the exam. Such skills are reading, listening comprehension, and grammar (NÚCEM, n.d.). The internal part of the external exam consists of an essay in Slovak and foreign languages.

Moreover, this part also includes the oral exam, which will be in this thesis analysed more closely. Students have the option to choose from four subjects. However, Maturita from the Slovak language and one foreign language are compulsory. Then students have to choose two subjects that they prefer. That is at least the case for grammar schools. There are, of course, minor differences between private schools, vocational schools, and schools of art. Nevertheless, the main focus of this thesis is put on grammar schools.

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The oral part of the examination is structured in the following way: Depending on the subject, there are topics or questions that a student should be able to answer since they should reflect the curriculum. The Maturita commission consists of two teachers from the given school and one external teacher, who is supposed to be an objectifying factor in the evaluation process. Students have time for preparation, and then they have to prove their knowledge of the subject or the given topic. The commission should not evaluate the student based solely on what they presented during the oral examination. They should take the holistic approach and compare their Maturita exam with the results during the studies. It is quite ambiguous and unclear what the criteria for this part of the exam are. It is highly subjective and varies from school to school, from teacher to teacher.

1.2 History

The Maturita exam has become a tradition that has changed only in small details during the last decades. It is a solid part of the culture of Slovak high school education, and that is likely to stay the same in the near future. However, this school leaving exam has existed on our territory for a long time. The first form of the Maturita exam appeared during the Austro-Hungarian Empire (Reiterová, Hamplová, 2019). The exam's purpose was to ensure that only the best students could apply for the university and work for state administration. In other words, the initiators of the exam set certain limits or expectations about the level of students who finish high school (Reiterová, Hamplová, 2019). In 1908, there was a Marchet reform. Since then, the Maturita evaluated the degree of education acquired during high school, and both the written and oral part was reduced. For instance, the written part in mathematics was cancelled.

Throughout the last century, Maturita went over different changes in its structure. There were various models and different numbers of subjects that the student was obliged to take exams in. Around the 1960s, it took approximately a similar shape as today. The only difference was that the Russian language was compulsory, and so was the oral exam in mathematics (Reiterová, Hamplová, 2019). The aim or purpose has undergone

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certain changes as well. At its beginnings, it was about being ready for university. Then, as partially mentioned, the aim was to determine the level of knowledge or education acquired during high school. That has pretty much stayed the same until this day. Even the website of NUCEM, which is responsible for the organisation of the Maturita exam and other certified exams, states the following: “The Maturita exam is an objective measurement of knowledge, skills and general competencies of a high school graduate” (NUCEM, n.d.). There was, however, still a significant difference between the Maturita a century ago and today. At its beginnings, it was a highly demanding exam where students were examined in churches in front of directors, university professors, and other teachers. With the start of socialism in Czechoslovakia, this exam also changed. It was not an exam for the elite group of students anymore. It became much more accessible to the children of working-class people (in Križanová, 2020).

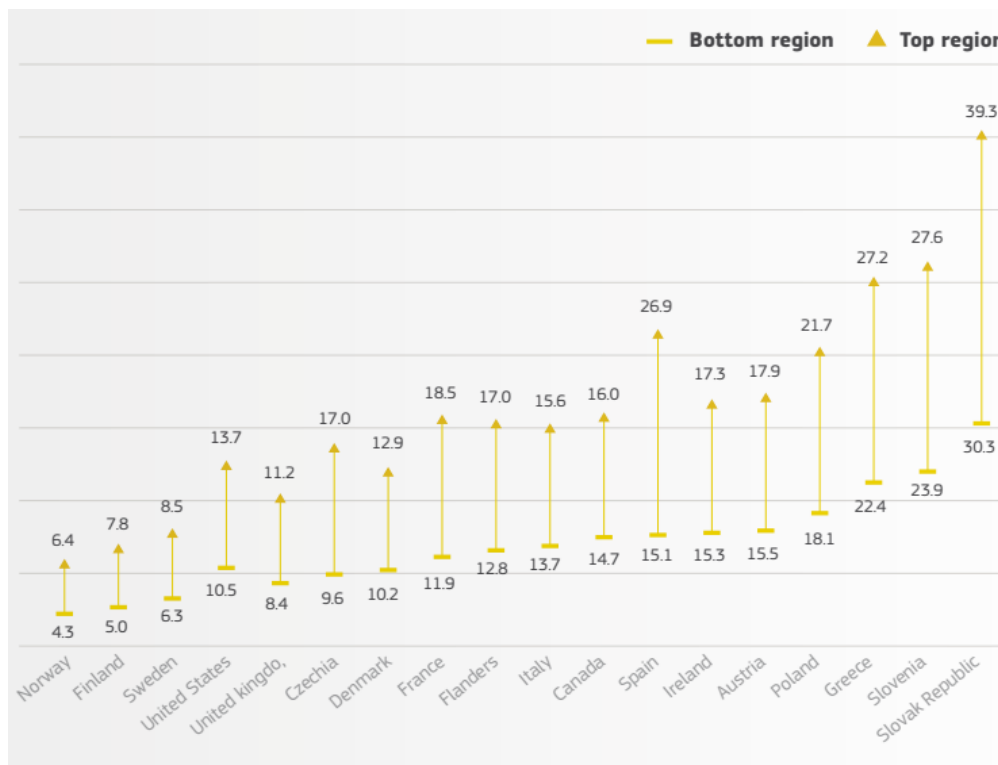
This thesis, among other things, takes a closer look at the goal or aim of Slovak high school education and the Maturita exam itself. It is essential to know what the word “Maturita” means. It comes from the Latin—“Maturitas” which means maturity or adulthood (Reiterová, Hamplová, 2019). Because of that, it is generally referred to as the exam of maturity or adulthood. It may be said that it is or should be a moment when the child becomes an adult. Whether it lives up to this definition or description is questionable and is analysed throughout this thesis.

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Chapter 2: 21st-Century Skills

According to a recent study: *The Changing Nature of Work and Skills in the Digital Age*, Slovakia is the most exposed to or faces the highest risk in terms of automation. In other words, the highest number of jobs at risk of being replaced by robots are currently here (see Figure 1). Positions that will not be possible to substitute by any digital technology are those that are somewhat unpredictable and dynamic, and the person can use a large set of skills (Harari, 2019 in Gonzalez Vazquez, et al., 2019).

Figure 1: The exposure of regions to the challenge of automation



Note: Highest percentage of jobs at risk of automation are in Slovakia, Gonzalez Vazquez, et al., 2019

On the other hand, repetitive physical tasks will decline and could be easily replaceable by robots or other technology (Gonzalez Vazquez, et al., 2019). That is why the importance of discussing 21st-century skills is so high and is addressed in this thesis. What are they exactly? They are usually referred to as soft skills or non-cognitive skills.

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Here is the list of non-cognitive skills (Gonzalez Vazquez, et al., 2019):

- Open-mindedness
- Openness to learn and change
- Flexibility
- Curiosity
- Innovation
- Creativity
- Entrepreneurship
- Resilience
- Planning
- Responsibility
- Persistence
- Teamwork
- Communication
- Empathy
- Emotional control

The most important are these:

- Communication
- Teamwork
- Planning

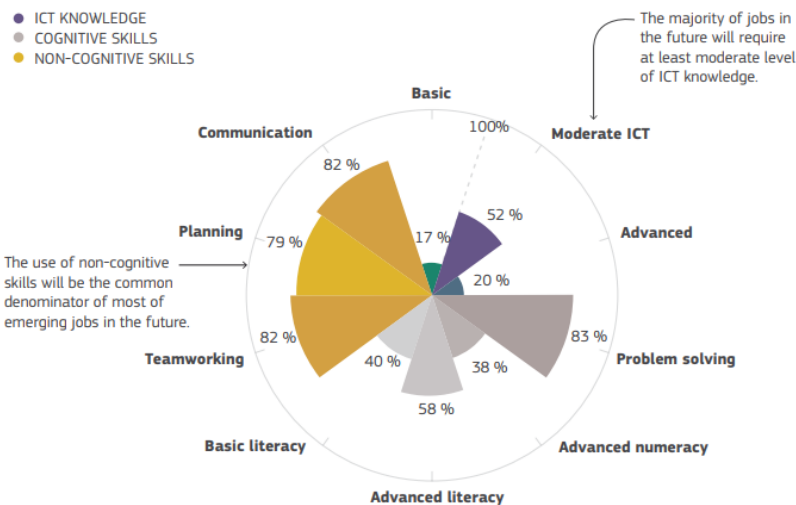
As shown in Figure 2, skills that are connected with the use of digital technologies or cognitive skills like problem-solving, advanced literacy and numeracy will be highly needed as well.

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The changing nature of work-study especially highlights the importance of communication, planning and teamwork. Moreover, adding to the list digital skills and also some cognitive skills such as problem-solving and advanced literacy (Gonzalez Vazquez, et al., 2019).

Figure 2: Skills requested for jobs of the future

A moderate level of digital skills and strong non-cognitive skills are expected to be requested for most of the jobs of the future.



Note: Use of non-cognitive skills grows in importance, Gonzalez Vazquez, et al., 2019

2.1 Situation in Slovakia and Approach to 21st-Century Skills

Studies conducted by TO DÁ ROZUM show that many headmasters are extensively focused on knowledge of the subjects, reading comprehension, and financial literacy (Fridrichová, 2018). What is even more, Slovak schools are too focused on encyclopaedic knowledge and retention (Rehúš, 2018). There is only a little space for students to discover things on their own, solve different problems or experiment if they “just” have to remember by heart what the teacher told them yesterday. Students should be able to understand what they read, have at least some basic knowledge and overview of this world, and, without a doubt, they should behave responsibly when it

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comes to finances. Nevertheless, these are not the things that should be the utmost priority for students to learn. These skills will likely not help Slovak students get jobs in the 21st century. Not to forget that digital skills are demanded in many different work fields, and Slovak schools still do not pay that much attention to them (Fridrichová, 2020). Moreover, all of these skills that Slovak schools are now focused on can be acquired through different group projects, activities, and field trips where students can also work on their soft skills.

Looking at a grammar school graduate's core competencies (Statpedu, n.d.), some of the mentioned skills are included. For instance, there are different sections addressing these skills.

One of them is problem-solving skills:

- Students should be able to solve problems, use suitable methods of analytical-critical thinking or can come up with an argument and defend it.

Social and personal skills

- Emphasis is on independence, self-reflection, effective teamwork, achieving goals, and responsibility.

Work skills

- Students should be flexible and able to adapt to changes, think like an entrepreneur, plan, gather information and achieve their goals.

What is written in the national education program is one thing, and reality is another. There may be some teachers or schools that try to implement different activities and approaches that develop 21st-century skills. However, we need data on that and know the extent of specific activities. On the other hand, looking at the PISA results, it is clear that Slovak schools are doing something wrong (OECD, 2019). Being below average is not something to be proud of (see Figure 3).

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Figure 3: 2018 PISA results

	Mean score in PISA 2018			Long-term trend: Average rate of change in performance, per three-year-period			Short-term change in performance (PISA 2015 to PISA 2018)			Top-performing and low-achieving students	
	Reading	Mathematics	Science	Reading	Mathematics	Science	Reading	Mathematics	Science	Share of top performers in at least one subject (Level 5 or 6)	Share of low achievers in all three subjects (below Level 2)
	Mean	Mean	Mean	Score dif.	Score dif.	Score dif.	Score dif.	Score dif.	Score dif.	%	%
OECD average	487	489	489	0	-1	-2	-3	2	-2	15.7	13.4
Slovak Republic	458	486	464	-3	-4	-8	5	11	3	12.8	16.9

Note: Slovakia performed below average, OECD, 2019

The content of the Maturita exam should be a reflection of high school studies. It is, to a large extent. However, it must be mentioned that this does not necessarily mean a positive thing. The whole exam is largely focused on knowledge, a vast amount of knowledge. Encyclopaedic, textbook-like sentences or phrases with little use after high school studies. For some, it may be useful for university studies, but even that is not a generally applicable argument.

Chapter 3: Motivation And Stress

3.1 Motivation: Building Autonomous Learners:

Motivation is an essential topic in the context of the school environment. What is motivating for students? When do they feel joy, and when do they avoid or even fear school? How do they react in more challenging situations?

In general, motivation is a force that makes us active, directs us, and sustains goal-oriented behaviour (Liu, et al., 2016). Nowadays, when everything changes rapidly, and we can never be sure what new challenges will arise in the future, it is crucial to consider young learners' preparedness to face frequent changes. What should we do to make their lives easier so they can quickly adapt to new situations and environments? Is it adequate to teach encyclopaedic knowledge and definitions? Since many things taught in the present days in Slovak schools will soon be outdated, the approach needs to be reconsidered. If we focus too much on knowledge rather than skills, the system produces students who may know a lot but will get easily lost in the rapidly changing world of the 21st century.

According to the book *Building Self-Autonomous Learners* (2016), the main aim should be to create such environments where students are taught to learn independently, and teachers focus on improving their students' self-determination (Liu et al., 2016).

An essential notion in the theory of motivation is the Self-determination theory. It consists of three main elements: the need for autonomy, competence, and forming relationships (Deci & Ryan, 2002). It is also based on the idea that people are active and engaged by nature (Liu et al., 2016). The authors present it through the example of children exploring the world based on curiosity and intrinsic motivation. Their basic claim is that schools should create an environment for students to be autonomous. It should not be about controlling the outcomes or behaviours but instead giving the children more space, freedom, and responsibility. Then intrinsic motivation to learn can flourish, bringing inner feelings of joy and satisfaction to students (Liu et al. 2016)

When it comes to motivation, Slovak students do not seem very motivated. Only 6,8% per cent of Slovak secondary school students enjoy learning new things (Kuruc, 2017).

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Many are motivated by feelings of shame or fear of punishment (Kuruc, 2017). If a student lives in an environment where receiving a bad grade leads to different forms of punishment or feelings of shame, it deteriorates his or her self-image. Others may see me in a bad light if I receive a bad grade. That is very unhealthy and can lead to more significant problems. This is the reason why discussing motivation is important. When teachers know what motivates their students and what does not, they are better able to work with them.

3. 2 High-stakes test anxiety:

When analysing the Maturita exam, it is important not to omit a phenomenon called high-stakes test anxiety. What are high-stakes tests? The difference between high-stakes testing and low-stakes testing is in its consequences. The form is still the same, but the results are used differently (Edglossary, n.d.). If the successful completion of the test ensures that a student receives a high school diploma or is accepted to a university, it is a high-stake test. On the other hand, Low-stakes tests are usually insignificant. For instance, teachers can see where their students are performing well and poorly. Large-scale testing, like school-leaving exams, is used in different ways. Some countries use them only for informational purposes. They want to determine which areas to focus more attention on or which field more resources should be allocated. Yet, some nations use tests as a form of control. The U.S. is quite known for its extensive use of standardised testing. Their tests are often referred to as high-stakes tests because there are certain consequences for the student and the school (Liu et al., 2016). There are rewards and punishments based on the test score. It is important to mention that according to research presented in the already mentioned book: Building self-autonomous learners (2016), the high-stake and competitive environment can increase effectiveness but also bring about behaviours like teaching to have good scores on tests. Moreover, the research points out that behaviour leading to cheating also increased (Liu, et al., 2016).

High-stakes testing, which has been widely used for quite some time, is putting much pressure on students. This pressure can lead to anxiety. For some students, it can be a

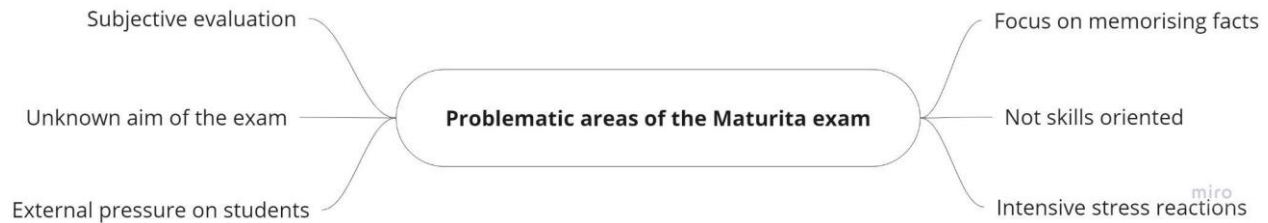
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positive thing, and it boosts their performance. However, for others, it leads to worse concentration or limited ability to prepare for the test (Jerrim, 2022). According to a study conducted in 2018 (Heissel et al., 2018), students taking the American SAT test had increased cortisol/stress levels by 15% on average. High-stakes tests, evidence shows, led to a worsened performance on tests due to higher stress. For students from less stable backgrounds, meaning they have family problems or experience violence, the cortisol levels were even higher - 35% (Heissel, et al., 2018). However, that research also found out that it may not be about the test but rather about “prolonged stress exposure.” Then the children are too exhausted from stress, which can lead to low test scores (Heissel et al., 2018). What is even more, many experiences the poor quality of sleep and poor health behaviours—smoking, unhealthy diet, and no exercise (Hamilton, et al., 2021). Once again, it may not necessarily be about the test itself but its consequences. Its high-stake character makes students think more about their future and what to do if they fail, rather than studying for the exam (Hamilton, et al., 2021). In the interviews section, the analysis shows that Slovak children are not very well prepared for such pressures. Only small numbers of my respondents teach their students about stress resilience. According to Arnold Kiss, students need to go through stressful situations. However, he adds: “It should not be done in a way, like in the case of Maturita, that you have no previous experience” (Kiss, personal interview, June 21, 2022). He argues that stress can be largely present also because of anticipation anxiety. That means that students do not know how much stress they should expect. On the other hand, Romana Kanovská—the former director of NUCEM, is not entirely against high-stakes testing. “High-stake testing is something I would support. It should be connected with the acceptance of the student to a university. Since some people experience high-stakes test anxiety, there could be repeated attempts if they fail the exam. However, they should be financially covered by the state. Students should not pay for such tests like in the case of SCIO tests” (Kanovská, personal interview, November 22, 2022). There seem to be different opinions regarding this problem. Nevertheless, the key is to prepare students for stressful situations, no matter if the tests they write are high or low stakes.

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Interview Summary:

Image 1: Problematic areas of the Maturita exam



Note: Mind map showing six areas of the Maturita exam that the interviews closely focused on. Own work.

The answers of the respondents are presented in the following chapters. They are divided into sections based on the specific topic. Throughout these chapters, the problematic areas of the Maturita exam are uncovered and later analysed. All of them begin with a mind map with the concrete problem in the middle and with excerpts of the responses on the sides. These mind maps should help readers to have a better overview and make the whole structure clearer.

These chapters are structured in a way that students and their responses are at the beginning of the chapter, then teachers follow, and lastly, there are additional comments from education experts. When it comes to student interviewees — they are all around twenty years of age, six of them are from Bratislava, two from Košice, one from Dubnica nad Váhom, one from Bánovce nad Bebravou and one from Skalica.

Teachers' ages range from around thirty up to around fifty. They are mostly from Bratislava or even if they are not, they teach there. However, one teacher is from Martin and one is from Liptovský Mikuláš. There are two teachers who teach at vocational schools and the rest teach at grammar schools.

Chapter 4: The Exam Is Subjective

Image 2: Subjective evaluation



Note: Mind map with partial responses of the interviewees on this subject. Own work

4.1 Subjective Evaluation: Students

According to many of my respondents, the evaluation process of the Maturita exam is quite subjective. Interviewees stated that it was not fair, and cheating was present as well.

The oral exam should have stricter rules because it is unfair. (Female participant, 20 years of age, Bratislava)

Teachers were helping us and that should not happen. (Female participant, 20 years of age, Košice)

An essential factor that intervenes in the objectivity of this exam is the behaviour or way of examining teachers or the Maturita commission. Especially, when it comes to the oral part of the exam. As one of the respondents said:

Quite a lot depends on the teacher who examines you. (Female participant, 20 years of age, Bratislava)

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In other cases, the teacher does not like a given student or a class, and that creates unfairness as well.

If only someone who does not know me and has never seen me before was evaluating me. That would have been better. I am saying it because my teacher did not like me and my class in general. So she evaluated me and some of my classmates unfairly. (Female participant, 20 years of age, Bratislava)

Moreover, some of the students emphasised that it is about something other than how much you learned during the four years or how much time you spent preparing for the exam. One of them said:

It is a matter of luck and randomness. (Female participant, 20 years of age, Dubnica nad Váhom)

Then another of my respondents argued that:

It is difficult to say to what extent everything should depend on that one day, and there is a factor of coincidence because you do not know which question you pick. You can be well prepared, but the question does not suit you so well and you can be poorly prepared, you have luck and pick a good question. (Male participant, 20 years of age, Bratislava)

The Maturita exam should be a summary of the high school studies and assess what a student has learned throughout that time. Nevertheless, as one of my respondents pointed out:

This exam is more about how much a student can learn within one week. That may be connected to the problem of examining mainly memorised facts and focusing on the student's memory. (Female participant, 20 years of age, Bratislava)

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4.2 Subjective Evaluation - Teachers & Experts

When I asked teachers about their stance on the topic of subjectivity connected to the Maturita exam, their responses leaned more towards the opinion that it is not very objective. Interestingly, there are similarities between the answers of students and teachers to this question. I was told this for instance:

The oral exam is too subjective. A student can say that the teacher does not like him so they gave that student a worse grade. (Mathematics teacher in Bratislava)

This was mentioned already in the previous section with the analysis of the student's answers. Another teacher added this:

I do not see Maturita as an objective exam. The teacher can be thirsty, hungry, or have slept badly. All of that influences their approach when examining students. (Marketing and economics teacher in Bratislava)

What should be emphasised is that this problem does not apply only to teachers but to students as well. I received this answer to this issue:

The student should ideally take responsibility for what he learns. The Maturita exam is supposed to be the result of 4 years. What does the Maturita exam tell us? How did he manage to study for that day? Many things can happen in the family, something happens to him, and so it's about how he manages that given day. (English language and culture and art teacher in Bratislava)

When it comes to the problem of objective evaluation of the Maturita commission, one teacher described it as follows:

I evaluate my students, but I probably don't specifically evaluate only their answer, but I look at the student as a whole. When a good student fails, I don't

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give him a 4. Then some disputes can arise between an external member of the Maturita commission and the other teachers. The external member doesn't know the student and only evaluates that answer, but I know the student, and he didn't do well that day, so I won't give him a bad grade. What do we evaluate, then? That one answer? So I guess it is quite subjective. (English language and culture and art teacher in Bratislava)

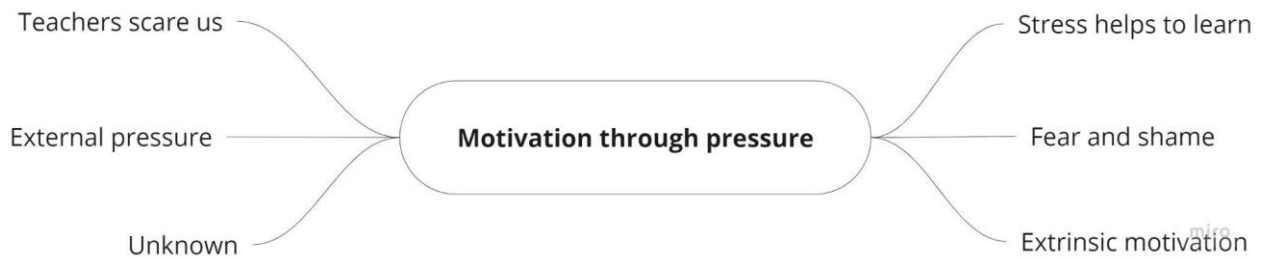
From this response, it seems that even though there is a mechanism for making the oral part of Maturita objective, it fails to some extent. The external member of the commission does not know the student, and teachers of the student can assess him or her more holistically. Even the former director of NÚCEM admitted that an external assessor is not necessarily always objective. She also provided her vision of the solution to this problem.

An external member of the commission is supposed to be a guarantor of objectivity, but it seems that this is not always the case. University teachers could sit on the committee if the Maturita was more practical. At vocational schools, people from employer unions go to the commission. (Kanovská, personal interview, 2022)

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Chapter 5: Motivation Through Pressure

Image 3: Motivation through Pressure



Note: Mind map with partial responses of the interviewees on this subject. Own work

5.1 Motivation Through External Pressure - Students

Whether the use of external pressure, as a form of motivation, is the right way through which Slovak schools will produce more successful people is questionable. Through my interviews, I wanted to find out whether teachers still use this tool to motivate their students. It turns out that it is still used. These are some of the responses I received:

Our teachers were exaggerating everything about Maturita and they scared us unnecessarily. (Female participant, 20 years of age, Bratislava)

Our teachers scared us but some, fortunately, also tried to be nice and prepared us for the exam well. (Male participant, 20 years of age, Košice)

Of course, the teachers tried to scare us with Maturita. (Female participant, 20 years of age, Bánovce nad Bebravou)

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It seems that, in general, this exam is considered something to be afraid of.

However, there were different responses about the consequences of this fear and the creation of stress.

The teachers told us many times that we should study because we do not know anything. However, in my opinion, the stress is needed because I would not have had such a drive or motivation to learn. (Female participant, 20 years of age, Bratislava)

For some, this external pressure was demotivating.

It was all quite unknown and scary. From time to time, I even lost the motivation to learn because there was so much external pressure. (Female participant, 20 years of age, Skalica)

What was quite interesting is that all my respondents had their Maturita exam when the invasion of Ukraine started and the Covid-19 pandemic—though a bit more stabilised, it was still not gone. Nevertheless, only one of my respondents mentioned that the war influenced her negatively regarding her motivation to learn.

My motivation was influenced by external factors like the war in Ukraine or Covid, and so in my eyes, Maturita seemed not so important. (Female participant, 20 years of age, Dubnica nad Váhom)

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5.2 Motivation Through External Pressure - Teachers & Experts

External pressure is exerted by teachers, parents, and sometimes by universities. Students from my sample, however, were usually among those who did not feel the pressure from family or because of university applications. Nevertheless, here I want to show what teachers thought about motivating students through fear and about external pressures that are placed on students. The expression some of my respondents used was that the Maturita exam is a “*bogeyman*.” This respondent added:

Fear and shame are there. Moreover, Because of tests and grades, intrinsic motivation is rarely present. (Marketing and economics teacher in Bratislava)

The pressure was also described like this:

There is often a pressure from outside. Others have expectations of them. The children cannot distinguish whether their motivations are theirs or their parents. Children often cry because of grades. Those kids look like the world is about to come crashing down when they don't graduate the way they want. (English language and culture and art teacher in Bratislava)

What is even worse, these students often narrowly focus on the exam because they are expected to perform well.

They do not learn because of intellectual curiosity but they learn for Maturita and University. (History teacher in Bratislava)

To all of this, Jan Zeman adds that the situation in the Czech Republic is to a large degree the same in this regard. “*Teachers often tell their students that they will fail the*

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exam” (Zeman, personal interview, June 10, 2022). If students learn because they have to write a test, satisfy the expectations of others, or because of university applications, but feel no joy when learning, then there is a problem. Michal Rehúš sees it in a similar way. He claims that external pressure serves as a pedagogical tool but not as a correct one.

This exam is a kind of external motivation. It is a wrong motivation if we push students to learn because of it. Some teachers may say that if we cancel Maturita we lose the “whip” on students. However, that is a wrong pedagogical tool to use. (Rehúš, personal interview, December 9, 2022)

Chapter 6: Stress Reactions

Image 4: Stress



Note: Mind map with partial responses of the interviewees on this subject. Own work

6.1 Intensive Stress - Students

Stress was one of the key elements I asked about and wanted to analyse in this thesis. The responses varied, but the level of stress in the case of some of my respondents was alarming. Fortunately, some students could keep their heads and stress levelled, and handled it quite well. Although, it was not their utmost priority to perform well and that may have helped. Nevertheless, I was told this:

I did not take this exam too personally, so I was not so stressed. There were more important things. (Female participant, 20 years of age, Košice)

I felt only some kind of natural stress, nothing serious. (Male participant, 20 years of age, Košice)

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I get stressed a lot in these situations, and I was quite stressed, especially before the written test. Other than that I handle it better than I expected. (Female participant, 20 years of age, Bánovce nad Bebravou)

However, many of my respondents had quite a different experience.

I do not have pleasant memories of the academic week before the exam. The night before the exam, I could not sleep and I was shaking. (Female participant, 20 years of age, Bratislava)

At the end of the academic week, I had a mental breakdown. (Female participant, 20 years of age, Bratislava)

I had a lot of stress and I felt really bad in the morning before the exam. As I saw my classmates who were also stressed out, it got even worse. Fortunately, the stress did not influence my results. (Female participant, 20 years of age, Skalica)

Fortunately, some students came to realise that being stressed out so much only because of this exam was not worth it.

It did not make sense to be stressed out so much, I did not achieve anything by it. No exam is so important that we should be so stressed about it. (Female participant, 20 years of age, Bratislava)

The environment influenced me. I was not able to say that it is nothing and that it does not matter what my results will be. I do not know whether there was a moment when I felt worse than at the Maturita exam. But now I realise that it is not worth it to be so stressed about such things. (Female participant, 20 years of age, Bratislava)

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One of my respondents also pointed out that the high stake character of the exam and focus on performance left him worried and stressed.

This stress was very much focused on performance. It was an unknown situation. It felt almost like a football match where you have a certain limited time, and my performance within that time determines maybe the next five years. (Male participant, 20 years of age, Bratislava)

6.2 Intensive Stress: Teachers & Experts

Some of the teachers emphasised that stress resilience or ways of handling stress should be taught at schools.

Everyone reacts differently to stressful situations, some are more resilient than others. I care about teaching my students about resilience but it is only my initiative. It is not a rule for the whole school. (Marketing and economics teacher in Bratislava)

When it comes to real experiences these teachers witnessed, I received these responses:

Here and there we see someone shaking, passing out but we don't know what those kids are going through. (English language and culture and art teacher in Bratislava)

There is not so much of it. Often there are one or two students who have a breakdown but then we try to help them. (History teacher in Bratislava)

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My respondents mentioned that there is a group of students who are more likely to be stressed than others.

Those who were responsible during high school are often more stressed than those who did not care. (Marketing and economics teacher in Bratislava)

They are mostly overly responsible students focused on performance. (History teacher in Bratislava)

Some described that the perceived seriousness of the exam does not help students to stay calm.

It is not such a meaningful stress, because it is nothing, it does not matter so much. Meaning, there are more important things in life. But not everyone can realise that. (Mathematics teacher in Bratislava)

The name Exam of Maturity gives it too much importance. There are much worse things than failing the Maturita exam. (English language and culture and art teacher in Bratislava)

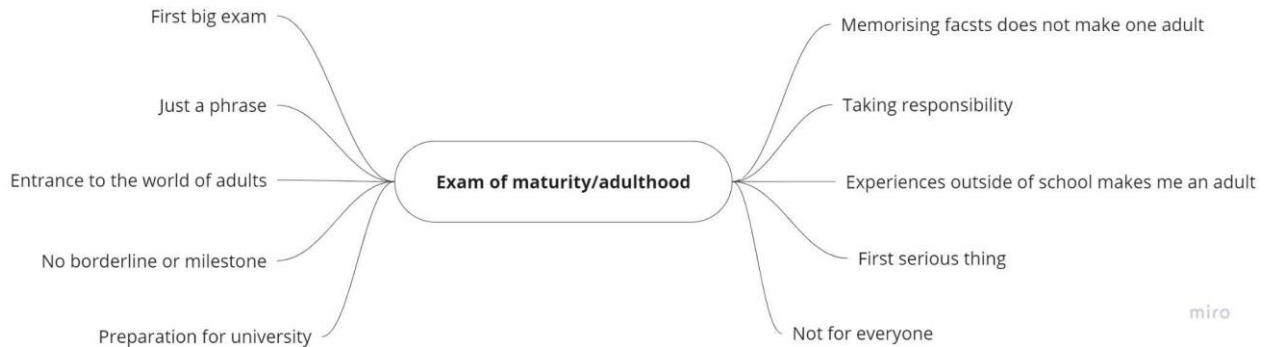
Both Juraj Hipš and Michal Rehúš do not see the stress experienced during Maturita as a helpful one. It does not prepare students for real-life situations.

That stress should be meaningful in some way. They should experience real situations that they will face in some form in the future. (Hipš, personal interview, June 1, 2022)

It is a “bogeyman”. However, I do not think that this kind of stress helps the students to be more successful. (Rehúš, personal interview, December 9, 2022)

Chapter 7: Is It An Exam Of Maturity?

Image 5: Exam of maturity/adulthood



Note: Mind map with partial responses of the interviewees on this subject. Own work

7.1 Exam of Maturity: Students

For many years, the Maturita exam, as the name suggests, has been labelled an exam of maturity or adulthood. I asked my respondents what they think this name represents and whether it is true or appropriate to call the Maturita exam this way. Students were often critical of this. Many think that other life situations make them more adult or mature than this exam.

I do not think that the content of the format of the exam somehow prepared me or made me an adult. A bigger “exam of the adulthood” is to live on my own and pay for the rent. (Male participant, 20 years of age, Bratislava)

There are other situations, outside of school, that make you an adult or at least more mature. But the Maturita exam has not made me an adult. (Female participant, 20 years of age, Bratislava)

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I do not even understand why it is described like that. I have to learn a lot of things, learn a lot by heart, and write down some notes, but how does that help me in my life? I do not know why it is connected with adulthood. (Female participant, 20 years of age, Skalica)

Not for everyone... It is the first contact with some kind of self-presentation. However, choosing a university and taking care of personal finances is a bigger test of adulthood in comparison to Maturita. (Female participant, 20 years of age, Dubnica nad Váhom)

On the other hand, some of them saw certain relevance or could connect the exam with adulthood:

It is like a first gate to the world of adults, but I would not say that it is an exam of adulthood. (Female participant, 20 years of age, Bratislava)

I think I agree. Those who did not have Maturita can now see what it means to learn. I think that Maturita prepared me well for university studies. (Female participant, 20 years of age, Bratislava)

It is the first serious thing in the life of a young person, however, it is unnecessary how much fear is connected with it. One can find out whether he or she can learn something under pressure and can handle a stressful situation. (Female participant, 20 years of age, Bratislava)

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7.2 Exam of maturity: Teachers & Experts

Other than learning a large amount of information and handling pressure and stress, teachers were also quite sceptical about using the phrase “Exam of maturity”.

It is just a phrase. It is some kind of an entrance to the world of adults but those students are no adults. (Headmaster in Martin)

It is hard to say whether it is correct to call it this way. It is the first big exam but I honestly do not know in what way it is an exam of adulthood. (Marketing and economics teacher in Bratislava)

The first big exam that prepares them... I do not even know for what exactly. (English language and culture and art teacher in Bratislava)

Maybe in the sense that they have to learn a lot within a certain amount of time. Memorising facts is however not something useful for life. Some practical preparation for the university is missing. (History teacher in Bratislava)

Some respondents also connected it with a sense of responsibility.

If the student wants to present themselves as a mature and serious person and takes responsibility, then yes. However, then some such students procrastinate and the teacher feels as if he or she was teaching poorly. It is childish to aim at doing just enough to pass. For those students, it is not an exam of adulthood. On the other hand, some students are too responsible and get stressed and may fail. It should be an exam of maturity but it often is not. (Mathematics teacher in Bratislava)

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It is not about becoming adults. It is the first big exam after which they decide for themselves what to do next. There is a higher form of responsibility. It is something that when I do not pass, I stay at the basic level of education.

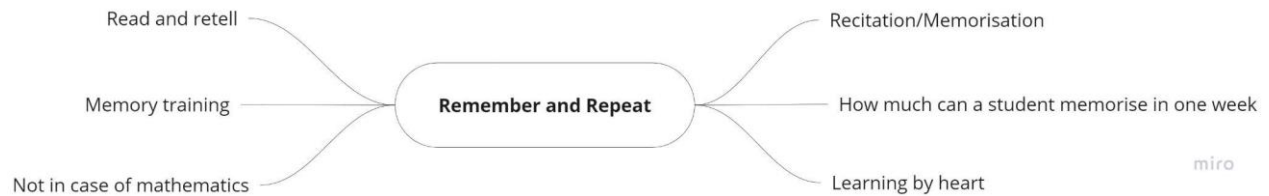
(Marketing teacher in Liptovský Mikuláš)

From the point of view of Juraj Hipš, there are several problems regarding the connection between the exam and maturity. *“What is adulthood? Probably, out of everything that we can name as adulthood, Maturita follows maybe 5%. Maturita is considered a ritual and rituals are quite underestimated nowadays. It is not a challenge, however. It's not a test of maturity. Memory comparison is not a test of maturity for me. A student is like a parrot who just shows what he or she was learning. It is not a ritual where students show their skills. But, it should not be cancelled because it is crucial to have initiation rituals in our society”* (Hipš, personal interview, June 1, 2022). Michal Rehúš complements this argument and claims: *“There is some tradition attached to it, some kind of initiation ritual. However, I do not necessarily think that it fulfils this role. There are other things that define adulthood”* (Rehúš, personal interview, December 9, 2022). On the other hand, Romana Kanovská (personal interview, November 22, 2022) sees the experience as the initiation ritual and as a representation of maturity since it is the first big exam in students' life.

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Chapter 8: Remember And Repeat

Image 6: Remember and Repeat



Note: Mind map with partial responses of the interviewees on this subject. Own work

8.1 Exam of Memory - Students

Czech education analyst Jan Zeman said about the Maturita exam that it is based on the principle of “remember and repeat.” I wanted to know the reactions and thoughts to this aspect of the exam. The responses varied. Some students agreed without a doubt:

I agree with this statement. I remember learning many things by heart. (Female participant, 20 years of age, Bratislava)

I agree... It is more about what the student can memorise. Some students do not make any effort during high school and they learn everything within a week. So it does not test the knowledge acquired during four years. (Female participant, 20 years of age, Bratislava)

I agree... It is about our ability to train our brains to store a large amount of information. It was like you read and learn something and then retell it. (Female participant, 20 years of age, Bratislava)

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For others, it was not so easy to say. It often depended on their Maturita subjects.

The oral exam in German was not so much about my memory but yes, other than that the exam was more focused on memory. (Male participant, 20 years of age, Bratislava)

Since I had mathematics as one of my subjects, it was more about logic than memory for example. So it is hard to generalise. (Male participant, 20 years of age, Košice)

It is true. It is more about our memory. Apart from mathematics, I learned many things by heart. It was about remembering and reciting. (Female participant, 20 years of age, Bánovce nad Bebravou)

8.2 Exam of Memory - Teachers & Experts

Teachers mostly agreed with the statement saying that this exam is based on the principle of “remember and repeat”.

It is a recitation of what they learned. It is an exam of memory and nerves. (English language and culture and art teacher in Bratislava)

To a large extent, it is true. It is possible to include some argumentation or something practical to the oral part but in reality, not many people do it. When they write essays there are genres that those kids will never use. But we do not demand a CV or motivation letter from them. (History teacher in Bratislava)

However, there are differences in responses also among those teachers who teach specific subjects. There they do not think that it is solely about memory.

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Depends on the teacher. If the teacher leads the exam as a dialogue and does not focus too much on the memorised facts, then I do not think it is a memory exam. Students should be able to defend their opinions. (Mathematics teacher in Bratislava)

Not all subjects are about memorising facts. (English language and culture and art teacher in Bratislava)

As Juraj Hipš points out, during Maturita “*we test memory way more than any other skill.*” He continues: “*Let’s test memory on computers, but not on young people*” (Hipš, personal interview, June 1, 2022). However, it needs to be taken into consideration that focus on memory varies based on the type of high school “*Exam of memory? It can be said in the context of grammar schools but it cannot be generalised in this way*” (Kanovská, personal interview, 2022). Vocational schools and their school-leaving exams are structured a little differently, and part of it is also a practical exam. That already suggests a different approach and less focus on memorising facts.

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Chapter 9: What Should Be Changed?

Image 7: What should be changed?



Note: Mind map with partial responses of the interviewees on this subject. Own work

9.1 What Should Be Changed? - Students

When I asked a question about whether they like the format, and content of Maturita, what is missing for them, or what should change, I received a huge variety of answers. However, there are some commonalities between them. For instance, there were some complaints about the written part of the exam:

The written test seemed useless to me. When they read my essay, they know everything they need to know about me. (Female participant, 20 years of age, Bratislava)

English listening exercises, in the written test, are not so much about listening comprehension skills but more about questions that are tricky to answer. (Female participant, 20 years of age, Košice)

The English test is much more difficult than the official language certificate tests. It is a difficult test that has no value. (Female participant, 20 years of age, Bratislava)

Other respondents described their view about the nature of information and quantity that is demanded in the exam:

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Sometimes, it seems to me that it is not so much for students who want to know more. But it is as if the system sees the students as workers. I mean they want to give us as much information as possible, and when we have that amount of information all will be satisfied, or the state will be satisfied. (Male participant, 20 years of age, Bratislava)

To know the syntax or main characters of some story does not seem so important to me. The focus should be more on the essay for example. However, we should also spend more time practising it during high school. (Female participant, 20 years of age, Košice)

9.2 What Should Be Changed? - Teachers & Experts

Some teachers argued that to make the whole Maturita exam more objective, to cancel the oral exam, and only administer a written centralised test.

It should be only a written, centralised test. There should be no subjective factor. Only then, it has some value. However, questions should be closed and clear. (Mathematics teacher in Bratislava)

It should be centralised and objective so that it has some value. (Headmaster in Martin)

It should be just a centralised test. But the exam should remain and should not be cancelled. It is something that ends high school studies and that is good. (Marketing teacher in Liptovský Mikuláš)

These respondents were also missing some practical elements, and criticised the memorisation of facts:

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Students only memorise facts and then present them. There is no practical application. (History teacher in Bratislava)

We should learn for life, we should learn such things that we can use in our future job. But those things are not asked of students at Maturita. (History teacher in Bratislava)

Students often do not like my questions because they just memorise something but they cannot associate it with other things they learned. (Marketing teacher in Liptovský Mikuláš)

Changing the Maturita exam is something that the experts agree on. However, it seems that competent people at the ministry of education are not thinking the same way. *“Maturita needs a restart but nobody is considering the change or what should be done”* (Kanovská, personal interview, November 22, 2022). A recurring problem is the missing reasoning for the things taught at school. *“We should change it in a way so it is more meaningful for students. They do not know why they are doing it”* (Hipš, personal interview, June 1 2022). Moreover, teachers are largely limited by the exam and cannot teach what they would like to. *“Oftentimes, teachers have to teach not what they want to teach or what would be interesting for their students. They have to teach things that are prescribed by the state because those things are tested at Maturita”* (Burjan, personal interview, May 23, 2022).

Chapter 10: Skills For The Future

Since my respondents mostly agreed on the skills needed for young people to be successful in the 21st century, this section is just a short summary of their answers.

Skills that were mentioned most frequently:

- Teamwork,
- Digital Skills,
- Presentation skills,
- Communication,
- Creativity,
- Critical thinking.

Apart from these, some respondents emphasised the importance of skills such as adapting to a non-familiar environment, self-regulation, the ability to learn, analytical thinking, and self-reflection.

Additionally, some of the experts when asked about necessary skills for the 21st century told me this:

Even though it is important to have some knowledge, students should also acquire skills such as teamwork, creativity, and the ability to solve problems. However, Maturita does not take that into account. (Hipš, personal interview, June 1, 2022)

A student should be prepared for lifelong learning, and also be able to communicate and associate. (Kanovská, personal interview, 2022)

Schools should teach 21st-century skills. The Maturita exam only verifies what students learned during high school. (Burjan, personal interview, 2022)

Chapter 11: Opinions Of Experts

The comments of the experts are placed in the previous chapter only as an addition. In this chapter, I want to focus on two most important questions: What is problematic or what could change in the current situation with the Maturita exam, and what is the actual function of Maturita?

Some argued that some things at the Maturita do not quite make sense

We should change it in a way so it is more meaningful for students. They do not know why they are doing it. It is nonsensical to pick a random question, for example about “Štúrovci”, and talk about them for 20 minutes. (Hipš, personal interview, 2022)

Then some complaints are difficult to group under one name:

If the Maturita exam is designed for the 20th century, we cannot expect that it will develop skills for the 21st century. (Kiss, personal interview, June 21, 2022)

Even if you have not read all the compulsory books you can still easily pass the exam. (Zeman, personal interview, June 10, 2022)

It is all about one day when everything is decided. (Zeman, personal interview, June 10, 2022)

The exam is following what is taught but not what should be taught. (Zeman, personal interview, 2022)

When it comes to the function of the exam, I was told, for instance, this:

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There is no clear definition of the purpose of the exam. (Rehúš, personal interview, 2022)

It is not quite clear what the function of Maturita is. We do not have it clearly defined. It is something that can serve many different purposes, and many experts have different views on this. First, we need to come to a consensus about the function or aim of the Maturita exam, and then we can talk about the way it should look. (Burjan, personal interview, May 23, 2022)

Vladimír Burjan (personal interview, May 23, 2022) also gave me a more elaborate answer on the purpose of the Maturita exam. He argued that now the Slovak system uses a mix of these functions, and that is a problem.

Balancing at the end of the studies - I will check the acquired knowledge - asking about what they were supposed to learn —meeting the goals—looking into the past.

Qualification exam - Verifies whether I can perform the activities for which I want to be qualified, a guarantee of the objectivity of the exam.

Selection of suitable candidates for higher education - If you have a high school diploma, you can function at a higher education institution, but it does not work like that in reality—a prerequisite for higher education—selection, and prediction for the future.

Transition ritual (Maturity test) - There doesn't have to be fear around it, there doesn't have to be such a buzz around it, it doesn't have to be an external exam, it doesn't have to be evaluated, a celebration where the project is presented and people applaud me.

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Discussion:

According to the respondents, there is still a heavy focus on memorised facts rather than on skills in the context of grammar schools. Knowledge is essential, undoubtedly, but in these times, it is not enough. Skills should be a vital part of the Maturita exam. They should be developed throughout high school and presented by a student during the Maturita exam. They are, for instance, teamwork, creativity, or problem-solving.

When the national education program (Statpedu, n.d.) is compared with the Maturita exam, certain mismatches can be seen. Things that should be reflected in the exam but are not. For instance, teamwork is quite an obvious case. Students prepare and take their exams on their own. Or at least that is the case in grammar schools. It is different for vocational schools. Another key skill that needs to be better addressed in the Maturita exam is the ability to solve problems. If there were some case studies or model situations, there would be problem-solving elements involved. However, by memorising and retelling, this exam could have reflected or developed this skill better.

It is also quite problematic that Slovak students seemingly learn because of tests or because of the Maturita exam and not because they want to know more or are curious. This approach does not encourage lifelong learning and likely needs to develop the ability to learn new things.

An intensive stress reaction is also connected to the Maturita exam, especially for those more responsible. I do not mean to claim that stress is always negative and should not be present in schools. However, there are a few factors that need to be taken into consideration. Slovak students do not attend courses where they learn about stress resilience or mindfulness techniques. If they are taught about such things, it is usually an individual initiative of certain teachers. Then when an unknown and likely scary situation comes, many students have problems staying calm. It cannot happen that a student passes out or has a mental breakdown because of Maturita. To all of this comes external pressure from teachers, parents, universities, time stress, and collective stress, all of which can be overwhelming. As mentioned, students are not taught to handle such stressful situations and so much pressure. However, they should be.

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Most of my respondents do not see the Maturita exam as an exam of maturity or an initiation ritual. They do not quite understand the reason for taking this exam. For some, memorising all those facts that are likely not so useful in the future was nonsensical. Since the prevalent opinion was that it is also subjectively evaluated, the significance of this exam is exaggerated. The problem is that it should be an objective exam, yet it seems to be something other than that.

Conclusion:

I introduced the critical issues connected to the Maturita exam throughout this thesis. The reasons why this topic is essential may be obscure to some. Nevertheless, as mentioned, the Maturita exam reflects high-school education. When different objective measurements, complemented by my findings, show problematic results, it means there needs to be a change. The education of young people is often neglected in Slovak society. That is a problem because, without the mentioned 21st-century skills and other competencies, Slovak people will not be able to face the challenges of the next decades very well.

Moreover, well-educated people can contribute to better-performing and more stable democracies. It is risky, even naive, to let things as they are and wait for a miracle. It is necessary to analyse the way high-school students finish their education. There is a lot of potential in the Maturita exam, and it can be a borderline, a meaningful ritual where a student can present the acquired knowledge and skills. For instance, Maturita can be done in a form of a project, research or academic essay, where students can demonstrate many different skills. There are many ways of improving this exam and making it more modern and relevant.

This thesis is just a beginning and a first attempt to map the issues connected to the Maturita exam. Different areas need to be studied in detail. They are the following: Subjective evaluation, intensive stress reactions, motivation through fear or shame and creating external pressure, an initiation ritual, focus on memory abilities, and lack of focus on skills. Maturita needs a restart. However, the restart should be well thought through. Experts and policymakers should come to a consensus about the goal or

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functions of the Maturita exam. When this is sorted out, the competent authorities can consider changing the exam.

Nevertheless, there needs to be thorough research on the issues uncovered by this thesis. I do not mean to claim that these are the only issues connected to this exam. I hope that one day Slovak students will experience the Maturita exam, which will be more meaningful to them. It can be difficult and stressful to some degree, but it should give students the opportunity to show what is really in them, not just what is in their memory.

Resumé

Táto bakalárska práca sa zaoberá Maturitnou skúškou a jej problematickými časťami. Dôvodov na výber práve tejto témy bolo niekoľko. Neexistuje žiadna akademická práca či výskum, ktoré by mapovali nedostatky Maturitnej skúšky. Taktiež nie je veľa odborníkov a ministerských pracovníkov, ktorí by sa zaoberali touto témou. Treba zdôrazniť dôležitosť výskumu v tejto oblasti, keďže Maturita priamo odzrkadľuje to, čo sa študenti učili na strednej škole. Teda tie problémy, ktoré súvisia s touto skúškou, je možné potom v nejakej miere hľadať už na strednej škole. Mojm cieľom bolo zistiť, respektíve dokázať, že Maturitnú skúšku treba zmeniť či už po obsahovej alebo štruktúrálnej stránke. Prvoradým problémom a podnetom na zmenu je to, že táto skúška nehodnotí zručnosti žiakov, ktoré by mali v 21. storočí ovládať. Ďalším problémom je to, že študenti si Maturitu často spájajú len s niečím, čo im bolo zhora dané a musia tým prejsť. Teda inými slovami, sú motivovaní len externe. Faktor, ktorý treba brať do úvahy, je takzvaná "high-stakes test anxiety". Fenomén, ktorý vyvolá takú stresovú reakciu, že žiak môže byť až paralyzovaný, má problém sa sústrediť, či zabudne naučené učivo. Takáto reakcia sa prejavuje najmä pri spomínaných "high-stakes" testoch. Teda takých, kde ide o veľa a výsledok skúšky môže do značnej miery ovplyvniť budúcnosť študenta. V neposlednom rade, hodnotenie, najmä ústnej skúšky, nie je objektívne a tým pádom hodnota známky nemá v podstate žiadnu výpovednú hodnotu.

V rámci teoretickej časti som sa venoval niekoľkým kľúčovým témam. Išlo najmä zručnosti pre 21. storočie, o motiváciu v školskom prostredí a stres. V samotnom úvode som opísal štruktúru a vývoj Maturitnej skúšky na území Slovenska. Táto skúška má už dlhú históriu a prešla mnohými zmenami. Kedysi nebola pre každého a k tejto skúške sa dostali len tí najlepší. Postupne sa z Maturitnej skúšky stalo niečo, čo je pre každého. Časom sa menil aj význam tejto skúšky. Na základe výskumu sa dá povedať, že momentálne Maturitná skúška kombinuje mnohé účely a významy a nikto presne nevie, prečo ju tu máme. Hovorí sa jej skúška dospelosti, ale zároveň jej podstata je o overení veľkého množstva vedomostí. Okrem toho, do nejakej miery môže študentovi pomôcť sa uchádzať o určitú vysokú školu alebo pracovnú pozíciu. Maturita sa teda z hľadiska

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účelu stala hybridom a odborníci sa nevedia zhodnúť, čo vlastne touto skúškou sledujeme.

Dôležitou súčasťou tejto práce bolo zameranie sa na zručnosti pre 21. storočie. Ide o takzvané mäkké zručnosti. Sú to napríklad: komunikácia, tímová spolupráca, schopnosť riešiť problémy, schopnosť plánovať, kriticky myslieť či učiť sa nové veci. Tieto zručnosti budú mimoriadne dôležité pre mladých ľudí v 21. storočí. Avšak, skutočne veľkým problémom je, že Slovensko sa veľmi málo sústreďuje na spomínané zručnosti. Zároveň je krajinou, ktorá je najviac ohrozená robotizáciou a digitalizáciou. Nevieme predpovedať, aké nové príležitosti a pracovné pozície vzniknú v najbližších rokoch. Aj preto je dôležité učiť mladých ľudí prispôbiť sa novým a rýchlo meniacim sa podmienkam. Slovenské školstvo je stále veľmi upäté na memorovanie encyklopedických faktov.

Ďalšou témou, ktorá je s Maturitnou skúškou spojená, je motivácia a stres. Mnohé deti motivuje strach, známky či pocit hanby. Spôsob, akým sa v Slovenských školách pristupuje k motivácii, nie je zdravý. Učitelia by mali podporovať deti k samostatnosti, objavovaniu svojich silných a slabých stránok či formovaniu vzťahov. Nemali by sa snažiť vytvárať príliš kontrolujúce prostredie a fungovať na systéme odmiern a trestov. Do tohto všetkého ešte prichádza aj nátlak od učiteľov a rodičov. Často využívajú zastrasovanie, aby motivácia k učeniu rástla. Takéto metódy však nie sú z dlhodobého hľadiska prospešné pre študentov.

Najrozsiahlejšou časťou tejto bakalárskej práce bolo zhrnutie a analýza kvalitatívnych, hĺbkových rozhovorov. Rozhovory som robil so šiestimi odborníkmi na vzdelávanie, šiestimi učiteľmi a jedenástimi študentmi. V tejto práci som sa primárne zameriaval na gymnáziá. No na lepšie pochopenie som mal niekoľko rozhovorov s učiteľmi a študentmi aj odborných škôl. Témy, ktoré som sa snažil rozobrať, boli nasledovné: Je Maturita skúškou dospelosti? Čo je účelom tejto skúšky? Je hodnotená objektívne alebo subjektívne? Aké stresové reakcie sa s ňou spájajú? Je viac zameraná na zručnosti alebo memorizovanie faktov? Ako do tohto celého zasahuje externá motivácia a tlak okolia? Aké zručnosti potrebujú mladí ľudia v tejto dobe? Je dôležité priznať fakt, že viacerí respondenti sa pohybujú v inovatívne myšliacim prostredí. Teda napríklad niektorí učitelia majú absolvované rôzne mentoringy či tréningy a aktívne sa zamýšľajú

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nad zmenami v školstve. Netreba zabúdať na to, že na základe tohto výskumu sa nedajú robiť konečné závery a generalizácie. V rámci tejto bakalárskej práce boli len zmapované témy, ktoré potrebujú svoj vlastný výskum. Až na základe týchto čiastkových výskumov z jednotlivých oblastí, bude možné robiť ucelené závery. Vďaka tomu bude následne možné správne nastaviť zmenu obsahu a štruktúry Maturitnej skúšky.

V poslednej časti zhŕňam, na základe rozhovorov, prevažujúce názory na jednotlivé témy. Memorizovanie faktov je podľa všetkých skupín respondentov jeden z najväčších problémov. Zameranie na zručnosti pre 21. storočie, teda značne absentuje. Taktiež bolo niekoľkokrát spomenuté, ako neobjektívne sa Maturity hodnotia. Pri ústnej skúške často veľmi závisí od toho, kto daného žiaka skúša, aký má učiteľ s ním vzťah, prípadne v akom stave je študent alebo učiteľ. Faktory ako smäd, únava a stres môžu urobiť veľa s priebehom skúšky a správaním zúčastnených aktérov. Nehovoriac o tom, že niektorí respondenti spomenuli aj celkom častý výskyt podvádžania pri tejto skúške. S Maturitnou skúškou si veľká väčšina respondentov spája aj intenzívne stresové reakcie. Často sa stáva, že práve tí najviac zodpovední sú aj najviac vystresovaní. To niekedy môže viesť až k tomu, že zo stresu odpadnú, nevedia sa sústrediť alebo nevedia niekoľko dní pred skúškou poriadne spať. Takmer úplná zhoda bola na názore, že Maturitná skúška nie je skúška dospelosti. Študenti poukázali na iné životné udalosti, ktoré ich lepšie pripravili na život dospelých. Maturitu nevnímali ako nejaký iniciačný rituál dospelosti.

Základné problémy Maturitnej skúšky boli skrze tento výskum pomenované. Je to výzva do budúcnosti, aby sa odborníci, akademici alebo ďalší študenti pozreli bližšie na jednotlivé témy. Zároveň si nemyslím, že problémy zmapované touto prácou sú tie jediné, ktoré sú s Maturitou spojené. Preto je nevyhnutné, aby vznikla širšia diskusia medzi odborníkmi a ministerstvom na tému Maturit. Na základe ďalšieho výskumu a odbornej diskusie, sa môžu začať robiť zmeny, ktoré Maturitnú skúšku posunú na novú a vyššiu úroveň.

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