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COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF READING COMPREHENSION IN EDUCATIONAL SYSTEMS OF DINARIC REGION

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COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF READING COMPREHENSION IN EDUCATIONAL SYSTEMS OF DINARIC REGION

Summary: *Educational systems around the world are continuously improving their policies and strategic documents, aiming to improve the curricula. The same approach can be noticed in the countries of so called "Dinaric region" (Western Balkan countries + Croatia + Slovenia). One of the most common strategic direction is work on development of students' language literacy. It is implemented through teachers work, but it must be evaluated through testing of student achievements at national level and through international educational studies, as PIRLS. The aim of this research paper is to explore the possibilities how national curriculums in six educational systems of dinaric countries deal with language literacy and the development of reading skills. We also compare those curricula and try to find the reasons that may also affect students achievement. Despite the conclusion that time recommended for mother language classes in dinaric countries is similar and within the limits of the average time in other European countries, teaching effects are not the same.*

Keywords: *curriculum, reading literacy, PIRLS study, Dinaric region.*

INTRODUCTION

Dinaric region educational systems have a lot of similarities, as well as differences. Similarities arise from geographical and cultural proximity (language, tradition, religion, etc.). Additionally, those countries have common past, especially having in mind that in a certain period of their development they had a common educational system. At the same time, there are some differences, which are due to the different pace, mostly, of the political and economic development. Additionally, Croatia and Slovenia are in EU, while the other five countries are now applying for a membership, and that fact emphasizes differences.

Dinaric region is multicultural region in the most positive sense of the term. Assuch, social diversity is an excellent basis for creative educational solutions that will nurture the differences in language, tradition, and culture, and at the same time, a great challenge for educational policy makers. They must ensure quality education and equal opportunities and possibilities for all the children, regardless of economic and social background (Mihajlovska et al., 2024).

We can see enormous efforts and ambitions of the countries in Dinaric region to follow educational trends worldwide and to implement them in their educational policies. They continuously change strategic documents, they improve curricula, and they create professional teaching materials and new training of teachers. Most of the changes are aimed at improved way of teaching and learning, that will develop analytical and critical thinking, stimulate students' creativity, develop relevant skills.

The other aspect describes the importance of alignment between educational systems, connected to validity of assessment, especially within large-scale international assessment. Additionally, in the recent years, Dinaric region educational systems especially emphasized the implementation of competences for lifelong learning and, especially the literacy competence, first of eight key competencies adopted by the EU Parliament and by the EU Council. The Literacy competence is defined (Cuccurullo et al., 2020) as a combination of knowledge, attitudes and skills, related to the language of instruction. It includes knowledge of writing and reading and a solid understanding of written texts, as well as the ability to use the main types of verbal

interaction in spoken and written form. This orientation towards the development of students' language literacy is practically implemented through the work of teachers, but its effects can be assessed through the students' achievements. One of the increasingly common ways to measure effects and improve them are international large-scale studies, as PIRLS.

PIRLS STUDY AND READING LITERACY

EU strategic direction in education is based on Lisbon Strategy (2000, 2005) and *European Declaration on the Right to Literacy* (2016). "Everyone in Europe has the right to acquire literacy. European Union Member, candidate and associate States should ensure that people of all ages, regardless of social class, religion, ethnicity and gender, are provided with the necessary resources and opportunities to develop sufficient and sustainable literacy skills and knowledge in order to effectively understand and use written communication in print and digital media." (Valtin et al., 2016). *European reference framework of key competences for lifelong learning* (2018) defines literacy as "ability to identify, understand, express, create, and interpret concepts, feelings, facts and opinions in both oral and written forms, using visual, sound/audio and digital materials across disciplines and contexts. It implies the ability to communicate and connect effectively with others, in an appropriate and creative way." (Council Recommendation, 2018). "Education 2030: Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action" (Education 2030), signed in 2015, is a structured pathway to make education accessible to all and some kind of the foundation for peace and sustainable development. UNESCO works with international community aiming to achieve the education goals of SDG 4 (Ensure quality education for all): Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all, through partnerships, capacity development, policy guidance, monitoring and advocacy with the "Education 2030: Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action". The Agenda of Education 2030 places learning outcome indicators in the center of international framework for education-monitoring. The percentage of the students who meet a minimum level of proficiency in reading at grades 23 and at the end of primary education is a part of the global indicator 4.1.1 is (Mihajlovska et al., 2024). PIRLS is a reliable, internationally recognized measurement tool for reading achievement, directly informing this global indicator (Mullis et al., 2023).

Conducted every 5 years since 2001 (2001, 2006, 2011, 2016, 2021), PIRLS is recognized as the global standard for assessing trends in reading achievement (Mullis et al., 2023) at the fourth grade of their primary schools. PIRLS 2021 was the fifth cycle of assessment, and it provides 20 years of trend results.

The need for measurement in education, in order to raise the quality, was taken over and introduced into educational systems from industry, aiming to improve and standardize the education quality at the national level, but also of educational systems at the international level. The establishment of a quality system is necessary in all areas of activity and work, naturally also in education, which has a huge and long-term impact on the development of society as a whole (Karalic et al., 2020).

Many educational systems used the survey data to reform their education systems. For example, in Norway PIRLS 2006 results led to decision to start reading instruction earlier, early interventions for all weak learners, and continued emphasis on reading throughout the entire primary level. Slovenia participates in large-scale reforms, during the past ten years. There is a transition from an 8- to 9-year elementary school system, aiming to improve students' literacy skills. The Ministry of Education follows, supports and widely uses the results of TIMSS and PIRLS and monitor the impact of the reforms in a global context (Pavešić & Svelik, 2012; Doupana-Horvat, 2012 in Mullis et al., 2012). The Russian Federation has participated in IEA studies over the last 20 years (Kovaleva, 2011 in Mullis et al., 2012). Spain has announced a national goal to promote reading and the use of libraries (Núñez-Arenas, 2010 in Mullis et al., 2012, Mullis et al., 2012).

PURPOSE OF THE PAPER AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Dinaric region educational systems have a different pace in participating in ILSAs, including PIRLS. Slovenia participated in all cycles of PIRLS, Macedonia and Croatia have participated with interruptions, and other countries participated for the first time in PIRLS 2021. Therefore, for most of the countries, it is not possible to make a multi-year or multi-cycle comparative review of the development of education through the prism of the achievements in the PIRLS, nor to make comparisons between countries in relation to previous achievements. One cycle of the study is not enough to draw

general and final conclusions about the similarities and differences of educational systems, but still, PIRLS 2021 is a solid basis and great opportunity for more detailed comparisons of the treatment of reading comprehension, as a particularly important educational aspect.

The purpose of the research paper is to review the main and most important characteristics of language curricula in Dinaric region countries, especially national educational policies towards reading comprehension, and to compare them to find similarities and differences that may affect students' achievement. We will also partly compare the national curricula with PIRLS Framework to find out the attention dedicated to reading comprehension processes that are integrated and are the basis of PIRLS assessment. The analysis will be focused on two main aspects and, respectively, two research questions.

- 1. What are the differences and similarities of the structure of national language curricula in Dinaric region countries?*
- 2. What are the main characteristics of the national language curricula dedicated to reading comprehension?*

The obtained findings are good basis for further research on the factors that affect students' achievement. They are also good starting point for further improvement of the quality of national curricula, especially in promoting reading comprehension.

METHODS AND DATA

We implemented mostly qualitative analyzes of the available documents aiming to provide most accurate answers to the research questions. We had in mind the tripartite curriculum model which is the basis of IEA studies. It represents an excellent opportunity for establishing a connection between educational policies, teaching practices and results. Curriculum that is:

- intended (national contexts, social contexts, and educational contexts)
- implemented (home contexts, school contexts, teacher, and classroom contexts)
- attained (student achievement and student attitudes)

Those three aspects represents what students are expected to learn as it is defined in countries' curriculum policies and publications and how should the educational system be organized (Mullis et al., 2017) to facilitate this learning. What is taught actually in classrooms, how it is taught, and the characteristics of those teaching it; and, finally, what have students learned and what they think about learning these subjects.

This model has been also applied since the very beginning of the TIMSS study, but also for wider international studies that employ the IEA framework with one Tri-Partite Model of Curriculum and develop even more thorough, rigorous data-gathering methods to document all what countries intend to teach (Houang et al., 2008).

In order to get all relevant information about the intended curriculum in the Dinaric region countries, the first step was collecting documents of all countries and reviewing the structure, the main goals and standards included in the national language curricula. We used the official and publicly available curricula of Albania (Kurrikula, 2017 differences ducted (school year 2020/2021). We also used country chapters in PIRLS 2021 Encyclopedia, which contain the perspective of the national coordinators and which offer a lot of informations about education systems of all PIRLS participating countries (Reynolds et al., 2022), especially those chapters that describe the education systems of Albania (Vrapi et al., 2022), Croatia (Elezovic, 2022), Montenegro (Radovic, 2022), Macedonia (Mihajlovska, 2022), Serbia (Randjelovic et al., 2022) and Slovenia (Klemenčič, 2022). We singled out the main elements and characteristics of the curricula, which we then compared in order to see possible similarities and all differences between those seven countries (Shepherd et al., 2023). We used the descriptive method, in combination with a tabular overview of certain characteristics. We also selected a few variables from the PIRLS 2021 Curriculum Questionnaire that can show part of the perspectives of educational policy makers towards reading comprehension (Mullis et al., 2023; Mayben, 2013):

- “R2. How is reading addressed in the curriculum?
 - a) Reading is presented as a part of the curriculum for language instruction
 - b) Reading is presented as a separate curriculum area
 - c) Reading is integrated across the curriculum?
- R3. A. In what year was the 2020/2021 language/reading curriculum introduced into classrooms?

- R3 B. Is the language/reading curriculum currently being revised?
- R4: Does the curriculum specify a percentage of total instructional time to be devoted to language/reading instruction at the fourth grade of primary/elementary school?
- R7: During the fourth grade, how much are the following reading processes emphasized in the language / reading curriculum?
 - A. Focus on and retrieve explicitly stated information
 - B. Make straightforward inferences
 - C. Interpret and integrate ideas and information
 - D. Examine and evaluate content, language, and textual elements.
- R8: How much emphasis does the language/reading curriculum place on the following purposes for reading?
 - a) Reading to improve reading skills and comprehension
 - b) Reading for literary experience
 - c) Reading to acquire information
 - d) Reading for enjoyment”

MAIN RESULTS

Similarities and differences of the national language curricula structure

All community context information is collected using curriculum questionnaire, Those questionnaires are filled by national research coordinators. Each PIRLS NRC summarized its education system structure, the reading curriculum in primary school, reading instruction in primary school, requirements for teacher-education and assessment and examination practices, and prepared one chapter for PIRLS 2021 Encyclopedia ([Mulis et al., 2023](#)). NRC also completed Curriculum Questionnaire for its educational system. This questionnaire is also about curriculum or reading (including also national reading policy), goals and standards for reading instruction, specified reading time, provision of books and other literary resources, impact of the pandemic COVID-19.

The national curricula and programs of the Dinaric region differ in the structure of the national mother tongue curriculum and programs, which stems from educational policies but also from the non-linearity of subjects. The mother tongue is a language of communication and a language of instruction in school. Therefore, language expression at school and in everyday life depends on the success of knowing the mother tongue.

The curriculum in Albania consists of two parts: core and elective (Vrapi et al., 2022). The core curriculum consists of subjects/areas that are expected that any preuniversity student has been studied. The core curriculum is the same for each student (Vrapi et al., 2022). The elective curriculum is provided by the school and is chosen by students according to the interests of their curriculum and career. The choice begins in first grade and advances throughout schooling (Vrapi et al., 2022). In Croatia, the document is not a curriculum per se, but more of a catalogue of education goals presented separately for each subject, grade, and teaching unit; syllabus contains the education plan for all subjects from Grades 1 to 8. In North Macedonia, the curricula for all compulsory and elective subjects in primary education are defined at the national level. The curricula for all languages taught in fourth grade have similar structure and determine various elements as goals of teaching, learning outcomes, basic concepts etc. In Montenegro and Serbia, the curriculum is based on results, i.e., on the learning process and achievements of students. In Slovenia, teachers are completely autonomous regarding subject-specific didactics and methods used for teaching. Optionality can be described in two ways: (1) optional/elective subjects that schools with different education levels need to or can offer and that students can choose, and (2) especially in vocational and professional programs at the upper secondary level, optionality is characterized by open curricula where part of the education program is determined by the schools themselves and with social partners, local and regional associations, and the economy. On the contrary, the content framework of the textbook is determined by the subject-specific syllabus (that is determined nationally).

The educational systems of the Dinaric region have begun curriculum reforms aimed at the functionality of knowledge and the development of home competencies. According to NRCs answers (*Question R3 in the PIRLS 2021 Curriculum Questionnaire*), actuality of the curriculum

according to which students attended mother tongue classes in 2021 when they participated in the PIRLS survey is different. The curriculum in Croatia, Macedonia and Slovenia were introduced in 2006, 2008 and 2011 respectively, but during the years, Croatia and Slovenia made revisions, while Macedonia introduced new curriculum in 2021, right after the PIRLS 2021 assessment. The other three countries (Albania, Montenegro and Serbia) used newer language curriculum, introduced in 2014, 2017 and 2018, respectively.

In Albania, Croatia, North Macedonia and Slovenia reading is just one part of the language instruction curriculum, except while in Montenegro where reading is, also, integrated across the curriculum and in Serbia where reading is a separate area in curriculum (*NRCs answers on Question R2 in the PIRLS 2021 Curriculum Questionnaire*).

Main characteristics of language curricula structure

All the curriculum documents examined begin by explaining the importance of mother tongue, both as a curriculum subject and for personal development. Language literacy refers to the ability of students to express feelings, ideas, opinions and facts orally and in writing, in the mother language, in various social, cultural and communicative contexts (in the family, in the work and social environment, in work and free time). The value of language development as a first principle of mother tongue is outlined in all the jurisdictions' curriculum documentation.

Albania. The goals of the Albanian language course program in basic education are: developing the skills to speak, listen, read and write various types of literary texts and non-literary texts, as well as the cultivation of critical and creative thinking through these texts; searching, finding, critically judging and using information obtained from the media and the Internet; recognition and appreciation of Albanian and world literature through the study of the creativity of representative writers of different periods (texts suitable for the age of the students); creating the belief that through literature and non-literary texts the way of thinking, the spiritual world and the personality of man; possessing the right knowledge, skills, abilities and attitudes about the Albanian language system; valuing the Albanian language as a value of our national culture and as a means of communication. Regarding the representation of literary texts and non-literary texts, during the first two levels it is advisable to respect

approximately the ratios: 70% by 30% (Kurrikula, 2017) Students in Albania gain knowledge and skills about the language system, although the emphasis might be in one of the competencies: Listening to different texts (5 hours), Speaking in order to communicate and to learn (5 hours), Reading different literary and non literary texts (75 hours) Reading for personal and functional aims (30 hours), Right use of language (60 hours).

Croatia. The *Croatian Language Syllabus* (MSES, 2006) was used to foster students' ability to read; understand; and, after evaluating what was read, develop their way of thinking about the given information throughout primary school education. It emphasized that the fundamental goal of the study of Croatian language was to prepare students for effective communication that would enable them to acquire knowledge in all subjects and engage in lifelong learning. Therefore, the tasks of all domains focused on achieving this fundamental teaching goal. The *Croatian Language Syllabus* set particular themes (key terms and tasks) for its four correlating domains: Language, Language Expression, Literature, and Media Culture. The instruction time was 175 hours per school year or five 45-minute Croatian Language classes per week. As a means of expression and communication, language is the basis for intellectual, social, emotional, spiritual, moral, cultural, aesthetic and physical development of a person and advancement in persons life and broader community and responsible action in society and nature. It is expressed through the language cultural heritage and culture of living, which includes the norms, values and customs of the community.

Montenegro. The stated learning outcomes of Montenegrin, Serbian, Bosnian, Croatian language and literature are implemented within four communication activities framework: listening, reading, speaking and writing. In this way, students master communicative language competence and thus acquire reading basics, media, information and intercultural literacy, as one of prerequisites for personal development, schooling, lifelong learning and a critical attitude towards a number of phenomena in (social and business) life (see <https://www.eurokd.com>). Each of the two main areas in the subject—language and literature—has subareas. There are three subareas within language instruction: (1) reading non-artistic texts of various types (which includes media and information literacy), (2) creating texts based on the readings (oral expression and written expression),

and (3) grammar and spelling. The subareas in literature instruction include: (1) reading and interpreting literary and artistic texts, (2) creating texts based on the readings (oral and written expression), and (3) adopting literary theoretical concepts (by age). Grammar and spelling in the mother language, along with a systematic literacy program in Latin and Cyrillic are the key elements of language instruction. Of the 170 hours a year for the mother tongue in Montenegro, 90 hours are planned for language teaching, 60 hours for literature teaching and 20 hours for the so-called open part of the curriculum (ZSh, 2017).

North Macedonia. The curriculum determines the learning outcomes, basic concepts, activities and methods in teaching, standards for assessment of student achievements, and standards for teaching staff. Special curricula for all languages taught in fourth grade (Macedonian, Albanian, Turkish, Serbian, and Bosnian) were adopted in academic year 2007–2008, but all have the same structure and differ only in those parts that are specific to the respective language. According to the curriculum, teaching the mother tongue allows students to develop an interest in learning and applying the mother tongue as a basic means of communication, artistic expression, and learning the language as the most characteristic feature of national identity. Through learning the mother tongue, students become acquainted with the structure and system of standard language and develop the skills for listening, reading, writing, oral and written expression, comprehension, experience, and interpretation of literary and other texts. The goals are specified in four program areas with several sub-areas, i.e.: Language (Grammar and Spelling), Reading, literature and assigned reading (Reading: Literature – Prose, Poetry, Selected titles, and texts – Assigned reading), Expression and creation (Oral expression and Written expression) and Media culture. Recommendations for the use of the annual lesson fund (180 hours per year, 5 hours per week) by subject areas: Language – 70 hours; Reading, literature and reading - 70 hours; Expression and creation - 30 hours; Media culture – 10 hours (subjects can be connected to each other) (BDE, 2009).

Serbia. The goal of the Serbian language teaching is that students learn the basics of the Serbian language, proper oral and written expression, fostering awareness of the importance and the role of language in national identity preservation, to have ability to interpret

selected literary and other topics from the Serbian and world heritage, in order to foster Serbian tradition and culture and the development of interculturality. Key goals of teaching Literature are developing students' ability to read literary texts with understanding, encouraging a love for reading, developing a sense of a text's beauty and value, and cultivating taste and perseverance in reading and experiencing a literary work. It is necessary to nurture students' ability to describe their experience of reading literary works, to express opinions, to understand the various characteristics and actions of characters, and to make judgments about those characteristics and actions. Reading takes time, perseverance, and dedication, characteristics needed for all further learning. Reading literature encourages empathy as students immerse themselves in the aesthetic world of the work and experience it emotionally. Reading literature strengthens students' national and cultural identity as they learn about their own literature and culture as well as the literature and culture of other nations. The curriculum for learning Serbian language is based on results, i.e., on the learning process and student achievements. For students in fourth grade, the curriculum consists of three areas: Literature, Language, and Language Literacy. Reading classes are held in all three areas. The recommended number of hours per subject area is: Literature - 80 hours, Language - 50 hours and Language Culture - 50 hours. All areas are intertwined and none of them can be studied in isolation and without cooperation with other areas (Curriculum, 2019).

Slovenia. The objectives of the course are realized through language and literature lessons as part of four communicative activities: listening, reading, speaking and writing. The main goal of language lessons in Slovenia is to develop communication skills in language, i.e., practical and creative use of all communication activities, as well as foundations of the language system. In literature classes, students encounter artistic/literary texts, and through them, in addition to communication skills, they develop creative imagination, evaluation and intellectual skills. By perceiving the cultural, ethical, spiritual and other dimensions that the visual arts have as one of the most universal achievements of civilization, which is essential for the existence of Slovenia, cultural, patriotic and civic education as well as intercultural and broad social skills are strengthened. The goals and contents of the curriculum are mandatory and optional. The fundamental goal of

Slovene lessons, i.e., the development of communication skills as the ability to receive and create texts of various types, is derived from the consideration of non-artistic and artistic texts, suitable for the student age in particular educational period. 60 percent of the hours of the course are devoted to the treatment of informative texts, and 40 percent to the work with artistic texts (the exception is the 1st grade, where this ratio is 50 : 50) (MESS, 2018).

In Albania, mother tongue teaching is not divided by subject areas, but by competences. In Croatia, in addition to language teaching, literature and language culture is the domain of media culture. In North Macedonia as well, media culture is an integral part of the curriculum for the mother tongue. In Montenegro, mother language teaching is carried out through the teaching of language and literature. We single out one of the subfields of language teaching that refers to the reading of non-artistic texts of various types (which includes media and information literacy. In Slovenia and Montenegro, the mother tongue curriculum is realized through communicative language competence. In Serbia, mother tongue teaching is a combination of language teaching and teaching literature, while both are functionally connected through teaching the culture of expression.

Emphasis on reading comprehension processes in Dinaric countries curricula

PIRLS study “assesses four processes of comprehension, typically used by the readers in fourth grade: focus on and retrieve explicitly stated information; make straightforward inferences; interpret and integrate ideas and information; and evaluate and critique content and textual elements” (Randjelovic et al., 2022). “PIRLS 2021 International Results in Reading” presents relative achievement in “retrieving and straightforward inferencing” and “interpreting, integrating, and evaluating” which are combination of the four processes, more specifically explained as:

- “Retrieving and Straightforward Inferencing (often related to a small portion of the text) is based on combining the items categorized as focus on and retrieve explicitly stated information and make straightforward inferences” (50% of the items) (Mullis et al., 2023);
- “Interpreting, Integrating, and Evaluating (often related to larger portions or the entire text) is based on combining the items categorized as interpret and integrate ideas and information” and

evaluate and critique content and textual elements (50% of the items).” (Mullis et al., 2023)

The reading comprehension processes were further detailed in 10 items (as illustrated in table 11) and NRCs estimated emphasis placed on these processes in their national curricula (at three levels: “major emphasis”, “some emphasis” and “little or no emphasis”). Out of the total number of participants (countries and benchmark participants) that completed the CQ (Curriculum Questionnaire), in 11 participating countries there is a “major emphasis” on all 10 items, in 3 participating countries there is “some emphasis” on all items, and in 1 participant country there is “little or no emphasis” on all items (Fishbein et al., 2023). The NRCs of all other participants estimated that there was different emphasis for the 10 items i.e., a combination of two or three levels (NRCs answers on Question R7 in the PIRLS 2021 Curriculum Questionnaire).

For this chapter, we extracted only the results for Dinaric region countries. According to the data shown in Table 1, all countries put different emphasis to different processes, except for North Macedonia with “little or no emphasis” on all processes.

Table 1: Reading comprehension processes that are emphasized in the language/reading curriculum

Country	Focus on and retrieve explicitly stated information		Make straightforward inferences			Interpret and integrate ideas and information			Examine and evaluate content, language, and textual elements	
	Retrieve explicitly stated information from a sentence or phrase	Locate and reproduce details from a clearly defined section of text	Connect two or more pieces of information or ideas	Identify main ideas	Recognize plot sequences and character traits	Describe the overall message or theme	Compare information within and across texts	Make generalizations and draw inferences with text support	Describe the style or structure of a text	Determine the authors perspective or intention
Albania	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	○	○	○
Croatia	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	○	○
Montenegro	●	●	●	●	●	○	○	○	○	○
N. Macedonia	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Serbia	●	●	○	○	●	●	○	○	○	○
Slovenia	●	●	●	●	●	●	○	○	●	○

●Major Emphasis

○Some Emphasis

○Little or No Emphasis

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Relative average achievement in the straightforward processes (Mullis et. al., 2023) and in the integrative comprehension processes, compared to average reading achievement overall can be seen in the PIRLS 2021 International Results Report. In this section, we extracted only the results of Dinaric region countries.

Table 2: Relative Average Achievement in Reading Comprehension Processes

Country	Overall PIRLS Average Scale Score		Retrieving and Straightforward Inferencing					Interpreting, Integrating, and Evaluating				
			Average Scale Score		Difference from Overall PIRLS Score			Average Scale Score		Difference from Overall PIRLS Score		
Albania	513	(3.1)	508	(3.4)	-4	(2.2)	▼	518	(3.1)	5	(1.9)	▲
Croatia	557	(2.5)	552	(2.6)	-4	(1.4)	▼	561	(2.7)	5	(1.2)	▲
Montenegro	487	(1.6)	484	(1.9)	-3	(1.3)	▼	491	(2.4)	4	(1.8)	▲
Serbia	514	(2.8)	510	(3.0)	-3	(1.4)	▼	516	(2.7)	3	(1.4)	▲
Slovenia	520	(1.9)	520	(1.9)	0	(0.7)		519	(1.8)	0	(0.9)	
North Macedonia	442	(5.3)	443	(5.4)	1	(1.1)		439	(6.0)	-3	(1.3)	▼

▲Process score is significantly higher than overall PIRLS score
 ▼Process score is significantly lower than overall PIRLS score
 () Standard errors is in parentheses. Because of rounding some results may appear inconsistent.⁴(Mullis et.al., 2023)

As illustrated by Table 2, Slovenia is the only country that has no significant differences between the overall PIRLS average scale score and the average achievement in all reading comprehension processes. North Macedonia has no significant differences in the average achievement in retrieving/inferencing comprehension processes but shows weakness in the interpreting or integrating/evaluating comprehension processes. The other four countries (Albania, Croatia, Montenegro, and Serbia) have a relative good interpreting/integrating/evaluating comprehension processes, but at the same time they have a relative weakness in the inferencing/retrieving comprehension processes, compared to overall reading achievement. Such results can be particularly interesting for further in-depth analysis of the national curricula, especially in Albania, Croatia and

⁴SOURCE: IEA's Progress in International Reading Literacy Study - PIRLS 2021; Downloaded from <https://pirls2021.org/results>

Montenegro, because, according to the estimates of the NRCs, in their curricula, major emphasis is put on the processes where the results show relative weakness, compared to those processes where the results show relative strength. Considering the information that in the meantime a new curriculum has been adopted in North Macedonia (BDE, 2021), it remains to be seen whether in the next PIRLS cycle there will be an improvement in the results and whether the situation with "little or no emphasis" on all reading comprehension processes in the curriculum will be overcome.

CONCLUSIONS

In this paper we examined the ways how national curriculums in six educational systems of dinaric countries deals with language literacy and the development of reading skills. We also compared those curricula in order to find the reasons that may also affect students achievement. Despite the conclusion that time recommended mother language classes in dinaric countries is similar and within the limits of the average time in other European countries, teaching effects are not the same.

The analysis of the curricula of the Dinaric region and comparison with PIRSL 2021 results shows that a greater focus of teaching on non-linear and non-artistic texts is needed. Also, it is necessary to raise the awareness of all teachers about the reading importance. It is not possible to find direct connections between achievements in reading purpose/comprehension processes and estimations of NRCs about emphasis on reading purposes/ processes in the curricula. But overviews shown in this paper can be an interesting source for researchers for further in-depth analysis of the student's achievement on different types of texts, analysis in context of students' enjoyment during reading different types of PIRLS passages, analysis connected with teachers professional development needs and their practice in context of strengthening students comprehension abilities. These overviews can be also useful to education policy makers, during the process of revising national curricula.

Finally, more initiatives are needed that raise literacy at all levels of society. Launching national plans for the development of reading literacy can raise the awareness of the importance of reading in schools and wider society as a whole and bring educational resources to school libraries and students' family environment. Slovenia and

Croatia are the only two countries in the Dinaric region that have National Reading Strategies. Awareness of the reading importance became important in recent period, and it could be assumed that PIRLS was a direct and indirect cause for this development. *Slovenian National Strategy for the Development of Reading Literacy 2019–2030* has been updated in accordance with the advancement of the profession, based on the Slovenian PISA and PIRLS results. In Croatia programs to promote the reading culture, culminating in the National Strategy to Revive Book Reading 2017–2022 are introduced. Due to the low achievement of students in PIRLS in North Macedonia, a special emphasis was placed on language literacy in the new Primary School Law (2019) and in the national testing program (2020), and mother tongue curricula were expanded to improve comprehension read (2021). Serbia prepares and conducts national examinations in Grades 3 and 7 in elementary school and in Grade 3 in high school. After the adoption of new student achievement standards for the end of primary and end of secondary school in Serbia which are aimed at developing key competencies for the lifelong learning and functional knowledge, the revision of the curriculum begins.

The findings from this paper apply to six countries from the Dinaric region but can be a useful starting point for other education professionals whose interest is closely related to reading comprehension, as well as for the educational policy makers and teachers from other countries facing similar challenges.

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КОМПАРАТИВНА АНАЛИЗА РАЗУМЕВАЊА ПРОЧИТАНОГ У ОБРАЗОВНИМ СИСТЕМИМА ДИНАРСКОГ ПОДРУЧЈА

Резиме: Образовни системи широм света континуирано унапређују образовне политике и стратешке документе, како би унапредили наставне планове и програме. Исти приступ се може приметити и у земљама тзв. „динарског региона“ (земље Западног Балкана + Хрватска + Словенија). Један од најчешћих стратешких праваца је рад на развоју језичке писмености ученика. Реализује се кроз рад наставника, али се мора вредновати кроз тестирање ученичких постигнућа на националном нивоу и кроз међународне образовне студије, као ПИРЛС. Сврха овог рада је да се испита како се национални наставни планови и програми у шест образовних система динарских земаља баве језичком писменошћу и развојем читалачких вештина. Такође упоређујемо те наставне планове и програме и покушавамо да пронађемо разлоге који такође могу утицати на успех ученика. И поред закључка да је време препоручено за часове матерњег језика у динарским земљама слично и у границама просечног времена у другим европским земљама, наставни ефекти нису исти.

Кључне речи: наставни план и програм, читалачка писменост, ПИРЛС студија, Динарско подручје.