

Dynamics in the Reading Levels of Students from the Same Class in Burgas District, Bulgaria, Compared to the Pisa Criteria

Prof. Tanya Borisova, PhD

Trakia University
Faculty of Education
Stara Zagora, Bulgaria.

Abstract

The article traces the results of a longitudinal study of the dynamics in the level of reading literacy of students from the same class in Burgas district correlated with the criteria of PISA. A class that has been tested in the national external assessments and according to the criteria of PISA in ninth grade. State educational requirements and the criteria for reading literacy of PISA have been compared. The aggravation of the reading literacy of the students is objectively observed and the reasons of it are being discussed.

Keywords: Reading literacy, State external assessments, education in Bulgarian language and literature, levels of reading literacy and language competence;

Introduction

The reading literacy of the students in the Bulgarian secondary school is assessed by conducting national external assessment at the end of primary and lowers secondary primary school level and through the State matriculation exam in Bulgarian language and literature at the end of the secondary education. The Ministry of Education and Science assumes that national external assessment (NEA) can be objective if it is conducted as testing by professionally prepared tests conducted simultaneously across the country. A unit of the Ministry (CMEQE) is in charge of the making of the tests. This ensures that the tests are reliably probed and assessed as valid, so their objectivity is not questioned.

According to the UNESCO definition, reading literacy should be understood as: "a set of skills, including reading and writing, interpreted in their social context," there is no other more suitable subject than Bulgarian language and literature in which to build these skills.

By assimilating the criteria system of PISA, which actually deals with the cognitive categories:

- Finding and extracting information from text;
- Summarizing and interpreting information from the text;
- Understanding and evaluating information from text.

It is not difficult to transform these skills into the main objectives of the education in BLL in Bulgarian schools. Finding and extracting information from text refers to:

1. The reader to be literate, i.e. to master reading and writing in sync.
2. His primary literacy to be directed not only to decoding the text, but also to handling the information in the text.
3. The student to have a reading technique, i.e. construction of none of the properties of the reading – mechanism, awareness, accuracy and understanding, to be missing.
4. The period of initial reading to be connected to reading comprehension, which makes the student able to:
 - understand what is being said (the information from the text);
 - handle predictive reading;
 - answer questions on the text with selective reading.

Generally, the state educational requirements (SER) for reaching the minimum in the educational core "Socio-cultural competence" are arranged this way. They also seek literary competencies which are related to the recognition of artistic and inartistic text and differentiating literary genres represented in the curriculum. To fully understand and grasp the reading material it is necessary very well mastered reading technique. An incorrectly read word can change the meaning and vice versa - misunderstanding the meaning impairs the proper reading.

The summarization and interpretation of information from the text is related to the reading comprehension. This is complex mental information and can hardly be explained by specialists. Understanding includes the ability to convey other person's thoughts and ideas in their own words, according to the mental capabilities of each. Understanding can be separated into two levels - textual and notional. To summarize and interpret information from a text, the student must be able to understand the meaning of text, to find topics, messages, elements of the text; to extract the most important, i.e. significant information in it; to single out parts of the text related in meaning.

The highest criterium in reading literacy must measure whether and how students comprehend and evaluate the text. This is one of the most important tasks which are being carried out in the BLL education. By using the artistic text the teacher forms skills in the students to comprehend the views of the author, to assess characters, events, details related to the entire content or parts of the work, and to comprehend, express and interpret their own attitude towards the text.

Clearly, the path itself to artistic text is the path to any text, especially since all studies so far show that there is no difference between the perception of artistic and inartistic text. Despite having all the signs of reading literacy set in the national curricula, they still need refinement of the strategies of learning and searching for applications, rather than memorizing. For some unknown reason in the tests for external assessment of students in fourth, seventh and twelfth grade questions that measure the grammatical knowledge of students as well as their capability related to reproducing the acquired linguistic and literary knowledge in the education course still prevail.

To establish the dynamics in the level of reading literacy of students of the same class in Burgas district correlated to the criteria of PISA a longitudinal survey of students who passed the external evaluation in fourth grade was conducted - 2007/2008 school year, in seventh grade - 2010/2011 school year, 204 of them were assessed with tests for reading literacy of PISA in 2012/2013 school year. In 2015/2016 school year the same class took external assessment - STATE MATRICULATION EXAMS IN BLL - TWELFTH GRADE, which is the established way to finish secondary education in Bulgaria. The observations and studies of reading literacy in this class lasted more than nine years and give us the opportunity of tracing the dynamics of their level of reading literacy tested with state and international tests of PISA. / Follow Diagram №1 /

The obligatory assessment of graduates with state exams in Bulgarian language is justified by the Law on Public Education in accordance with which they are educated and which is also retained in the new Law on pre-school and school education. The grade in Bulgarian language from SME is included in the assessment scoring and must be recorded in the diploma of secondary education and this makes it compliant throughout the whole European Union. It also serves as application for many professional fields at universities in Bulgaria with humanitarian or educational profile.

Nationally, for the June session of the state matriculation exams in BLL there were 52,820 students, 3006 of them from Burgas district / with 3075 seniors admitted - 97.75% /. When the situation of the graduates in the Burgas district is observed, the difference in the number of students from the same class can be clearly outlined - from 5078 students who took the exam in IV grade in BLL, in VII grade 4656 took the exam, i.e. 422 students fewer. Only 3075 of them are admitted state matriculation exam. Elementary mathematics shows that 2073 students who have completed fourth grade, somewhere along the "way" of the education system have strayed far from the Bulgarian language education and have not reached the final exam. This difference is a disturbing percentage of the total number of students, assuming that the number of the fourth grade students who took the exam represents 100% of all the students graduating from the initial stage of primary education, then 92% remain till VII grade. Since according to the Law the external evaluation after VII grade is also mandatory for all students, at least in its first module, along with the question of why and where the remaining 8% of students have dropped out, an essential question is why and where are 39.56% of the students who have not reached the June session?

For a district like Burgas these are 2003 students, i.e. these are adolescents which have not reached the minimum requirements for proficiency in their native language in order to be admitted to the SME.

What are the reasons?

It is possible that part of the students have decided to skip the first appearance for the exams. If the cause is not a serious disease, this can mean two things: they are either with a supplementary examination, or do not intend to obtain a certificate of secondary education. The law allows the issuance of a certificate of completion of 12th grade without taking matriculation exams. This certificate gives them right to go to the labor market, but does not allow them to apply for university. The graduate student reserves his/her right to take the matriculation exams whenever he/she decides, without time limitations. On the September session in Burgas district appeared only 314 graduates, most of whom failed to appear on the previous session. Part of the students in this eight-year period may have left the country with their parents and continued to study abroad. The biggest part, however, are students who left school early, who are mainly of Romany origin and constitute the so-called drop-out of the education system students who are between 5 and 6% nationwide; if we assume that this is also applicable for the Burgas district, then the statistics coincides with the national statistics. For eight years drop-out students (for any reason) are about 7%. Therefore, for the remaining 32.44% mastering of the literary Bulgarian language to the extent of taking the state matriculation exam has proved an impossible obstacle.

According to the conducted studies, students from fourth grade have the diagram for reading literacy as follows:

3% of them remain below the level IB at the initial very stage of primary education. Out of 5078 surveyed students those are 152 students who have shown that they finish the fourth grade without primary literacy being acquired. Another 3% - i.e. 152 more students reach very basic level of reading literacy, which means that their reading technique and spelling skills have yet to be developed - they have not connected in unity both branches of primary literacy - reading and writing in sync. By this point there are already 304 outlined problematic students who are nevertheless allowed to continue in the primary school level without being literate. The law allows this by forbidding the repetition of the same grade in primary school degree. Among these students the most numerous are the bilingual students of Romany origin who have not mastered the Bulgarian language. 17% of the students / 863 / reach the basic level IA, which according to the PISA criteria means that they master reading and writing in sync, their primary literacy is targeted not only to decoding of the text but also to handling the information in the text. Students have acquired reading technique, i. e. none of the qualities of reading is missing - mechanism, awareness, relevance and understanding. The period of primary reading is related to reading comprehension, which makes the student able to understand what is being said (the information from the text); to handle predictive reading; to answer questions on the text with selective reading.

The remaining 82% consist of 35% who cover the second level of reading literacy and 47% - rather going towards third level / total 3911 students /. They know how to find information in the text related to several criteria - for example qualities and deeds of characters, deal with the one and the same information represented in a different way, and at summarizing and interpreting level they can determine the topic of the text, to explain the meaning of obvious information in it, to explain unfamiliar words and make simple deductions and judgments. They make such rationalization on texts that are familiar and relative to children's perception. So at the end of fourth grade in 2007/08 school year the surveyed students in Burgas district show that they have covered the test for external evaluation more than 80%. The difference in achievements between boys and girls is less than 2%, i.e. it can be said that in this age students cannot be compared in reading literacy on gender basis. The reached level of the educational minimum by more than 80% allowed the Ministry of Education and Science to announce that the fourth grade students have a relatively good reading and language literacy. Moreover, they have considered that the highest achievements of the students are right in the reading comprehension field. This conclusion cannot be agreed with for at least two reasons:

1. All questions in the test are with a structured response (one of three). Moreover, the reading comprehension is associated only with finding and extracting information from the text or reproducing of memorized one. Assuming that in this age reading and writing in sync can be seen as the first step to reading literacy, the conclusion of MES that the lowest achievements are admissions related to rules and definitions, how was it concluded that reading literacy should be interpreted as reading comprehension without spelling and language skills. It is accepted, however, that more than 80% of the students have passed the minimum of SER. The remaining 20% at this very point have shown that they do not cover SER - this means that they are practically primary uneducated.

The question how they reached fourth grade arises. The explanation is that the strategy of MES set in all laws, rules and regulations is of not repeating classes in the initial stage of primary education. The studied class in the experiment was not allowed to repeat only first grade. And the result is in evidence - nearly 20% of the students have failed and have no knowledge on which scientifically based knowledge in BLL to be built. Even if it is assumed that the students are little (9-10 years old) and they must be motivated with positive results, the test still turns out to be too easy, with very few questions checking the reading literacy of the students and directed mainly at checking the memorized rules and statements that the students cannot apply to a non-standard academic situation. Only in tests for IV grade have the things changed (see the analysis above).

2. Only 4 out of all the 15 questions in the test measure the reading literacy. Here reproduced knowledge is being relied on, too. There are no open-answer questions to assess whether the students can summarize and interpret information, and with such questions can also be checked their linguistic culture.

The way those students were taught in BLL is not structured according to the inspected by PISA learning strategies. The abundance of new knowledge that is being taught and the lack of enough exercise lessons is one of the main reasons. To these are added and the organization of educational process in the Bulgarian school. A small percentage of teachers apply interactive teaching methods; most widely applied is the reproductive focused methodology to assimilate and improve the knowledge and skills of students which leads to a discrepancy in the assessment - internal and external (internal with estimations, external with points that are equated to the digital assessments by formula that is established only after checking all the tests of the students in the year). This way the comparison of the performance of two consecutive graduate classes becomes meaningless and the dynamics in students' performance becomes undetectable.

It is no secret that primary education teachers still use identical forms of examination and assessment of the students' performance – there is no quality assessment of their knowledge and no reasonable criteria scale which to remove the subjectivity in the evaluation.

Still many teachers do not work enough on the test evaluation of the students' knowledge. Moreover, there are still no objective and reliable tests with which teachers can verify both entry level and to periodically navigate the dynamics of the achievements of their students.

Another problem is the effective use of additional work with the students who lag behind although in recent years an all-day organization of educational process was established.

MES believes that the improvement of the methodical work of primary teachers towards the use of tests, especially in teaching BLL, could lead to increased students' performance in national external assessment. The problem, however, is not so easy to solve. First, it should be clear:

- What and how will the students learn, i. e. will we continue to think that learning by heart and memorizing of certain rules and definitions will compensate for the reading illiteracy of the students;
- With what books and curriculum we will form a new type of literacy in students;
- With what methods and techniques we will teach and to what extent are they applicable to the European educational strategies;
- How and what of the students' achievements will be subject to external evaluation.

The same class in 2010/2011 year was subjected to external evaluation which serves as an entry to specialized and profiled schools with admission after VII grade.

The exam consists of two parts - a test and a detailed retelling of a text changing the narrator of the story. The previously made analyses show that the appearance of questions with open answers and especially the second module seriously troubled the students. The average scores in the achievements between boys and girls differs by 3.5% and, unlike the test in fourth grade, showed significant difference.

Questions that check the reading comprehension bother students, especially in open-answer questions. They are new in the external evaluation of graduates because in fourth grade the questions in the test were only structured. The difficulties also come from the fact that the external test evaluation for V and VI grade was removed. Here is the dynamics of reading literacy of the same students in the Burgas district who are already in seventh grade. 4656 students took the exams on the external evaluation. 422 students are already gone. If some of them are no longer in the district what has happened to those 304 illiterate students who showed their illiteracy at the external evaluation in fourth grade. The optimistic version is that they had already become literate and continue forward.

But the tendency of dropping out of school of so many students between fourth and seventh grade indicates that exactly the illiterate students by fourth grade tend to lose motivation to go to school further. Anyway, from the education system in the Burgas district students for nearly 20 classes have dropped out for three years. / How and why if according to the Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria education is compulsory up to the age of 16 years, it is unexplainable!!!! Or rather an explanation should be given by the government institutions /.

What happens to the dynamics of the reading literacy of the remaining 4656 students? The diagrams shows that 3% / 139 students / again find themselves below level IB, i.e., where the level of reading literacy is below the level of the elementary literacy. 10% / 465 students / reach level IB and 15% / 698 pupils / have reached IA level. 35% reach level II or in other words 63% of seventh graders remain at the level of primary school degree in terms of reading literacy. 27% confirm III- level but there are other 10% of the seventh graders who work on transforming retelling and can be considered moving towards IV level of reading literacy.

The requirement for a detailed retelling of the text refers to the skills to find and extracting information, combining elements of it, searching for literal and notional coincidences which lead to the reproduction of its own but close enough to the text that they read. The second requirement - for a transforming retelling on behalf of a character or indirect witness is much more complex task which is gets closer to a reconsideration of the text and at the same time verifies the literacy as ability for co-ordinating gender, number, verb tenses, spelling and punctuation. In order to cope with this task, the student must:

- recognize the idea which is repeated several times in the text;
- interpret all the unfamiliar words or phrases from an unstudied by that moment text;
- recognize the main theme and purpose of the author as clearly presented information in the text;
- combine key elements of the text understanding their interrelationships;
- show that he/she understands the text by transforming it from a different perspective.

These tasks were handled only by those seventh graders who worked in accordance with the second module and achieved marks between 5.50 to 6.00. If we study what knowledge and skills for working with text the students should master we will find out that they can be easily correlated to the requirements set in the state curricula. One of the main tasks of the education in BLL is continuing the process of achieving skills for understanding a read text, and interpreting, understanding and evaluating the information in it. The book is now being called literature and is definitely aimed at working with literary texts (which are becoming increasingly long and complex). In their work the teachers keep on developing the following skills:

- Interpretation and summary of facts and ideas - it is connected to the interpretation as a cognitive process;
- Analysis and assessment of the content, the structure of the text, and the language of the author - the analysis is definitely a skill for finding and extracting information from text, for summarization and interpretation relative to the criteria of PISA;
- Making direct deductions and conclusions - it is connected to the third criterion - understanding and evaluating the information.

The work on the process of understanding and strengthening the motivation, the purpose for reading the text, continues. The constructing of receptive culture of the students - the ability to digest and analyze text as well as skills of retelling, transforming retelling and retelling with elements of reasoning also continues. It is constantly stressed that the education in BLL is focused on communication and speech. If by communicative focus it is also meant communication with text it should be expected that this leads to improving reading competence by building upon the achievements of the reading comprehension in the fourth grade with more skills for deeper interpretation, understanding and evaluation of the text. From V to VII grade the studying of terms from the literature, studying of more abstract stylistic figures (metaphors, metonymies, synecdoche) by which authors portray not only explicit information in the text, but also implicit one, also begins.

The achieved knowledge about the specifics of the artistic style should lead students to the detection, interpretation, understanding of information hidden in the context, i. e. not literally shown building the reading competence and skills of rationalization in unusual situation and personal assessment of the impact of the text. Knowledge and skills of the rotation of the interpretation of the reader (retelling with elements of reasoning) are being formed as a higher level.

Experts from the MES who know the process of building this type of skills well very quickly took into consideration the fact that students are unprepared for this level of reading literacy and for this reason the second module of the test for external evaluation after VII grade requires that students memorize and retell in detail a text by transforming it on behalf of other characters in the text. This is done to verify whether the student can memorize (or learn by heart) a relatively long unstudied text which, however, has a theme similar to his/her life experience and also to check the morphological and syntactic knowledge of the students (conversion in person, number, time, etc.). The skills to transform a text are very well trained in learning a foreign language. They make their way into native language education for a short time now. Achieving skills of transforming a text means that the student extracts, summarizes and processes the read text. This processing can lead to a new transformation of the text.

From V to VII grade the work on achieving skills of discovering the meaning of a text and referring to a global or universal theme also continues. The students acquire knowledge to characterize the actions and qualities of the literary characters which to relate to an interpretation of global topics such as "Man and others", "Man and reality" and so on.

The requirement for justification of the reader's claims deepens by seeking for support in the text. The selective reading is more and more often used as a method. It makes the student find and extract from the text that information which correlates to the question most precisely. Work on the aesthetic and ethical response of the reader to the text begins, too. Skills for selecting information by various criteria, which requires analysis, distinguishing a statement (thesis), argument and interpretation are build.

In VI grade students learn about texts in the science field of communication. They start working with interrupted texts. This should develop skills of finding and forming theses on the studied text as well as arguments for their confirmation and rejection. It should be worked more thoroughly in this direction and the text should be studied not only from linguistic but also from public perspective. Now the curricula in BLL focus on practicing the type of text with an argument which focuses more on the discourse (on what is being said) and not on the person who becomes a reader if he/she can find and select such arguments from the text with which to support his/her thesis. The entire literary content can be structured according to the levels of PISA and ease the students' work with text to the highest degree. Adding the standard of the core: "Socio-cultural competence", which puts emphasis on the national and universal values, we should quickly move towards reconsidering the reading and turning it into critical reading through which students to move more easily from finding and extracting information to its interpretation, reflection and evaluation.

Overlaying of larger and larger volumes of text and the desire of teachers to quickly switch to their interpretation and evaluation leads to fewer and fewer reading of actual text. Students understand that they will get a higher mark if they reproduce the interpretation and evaluation of someone who has already analyzed the text (for example, a literary critic) and even cease to read the original text. In essence, they must also understand the text of the critic and extract information but it turn out to be harder because of the many terms and concepts which students have not mastered and so the movement in a vicious circle remains - students stop reading original texts, this leads to misunderstanding the interpretation of the text, to shock and denial of the reading process. Returning to the results shown in the levels of reading literacy in the test and II module of the external evaluation in VII grade shows that the test has proved passable for only 53% of the girls and 49.54% of the boys. This sharp decrease in the dynamics of the reading literacy - from over 80% to 52% can fairly be explained as follows:

1. Those 20% of the students who fail to cover the SME in fourth grade, with the existence of OCP in the middle stage of the basic school level, account for 10% of the dropouts and yet other 10% of those who earned a minimum number of points from the I module and never attempted to write on the second. Their initial literacy remained at the level of fourth grade. These students cannot read long texts, do not understand most of the words used in them, and have difficulty even finding basic information from the text, i. e. they do not understand the meaning of the text, do not give meaning to the questions on the text and this is why they cannot answer them.
2. Between V - VII grade 30% of the students (unstudies why and how) have ceased to develop their reading skills and on NEA in VII grade they have failed to reach the state educational minimum.
3. The system of education in BLL at this period suddenly throws reading away as an activity of the students. In the lesson units a lot of new concepts accumulate, work with the text shifts to memorizing literary analysis from critics and the adolescent loses interest in reading.

4. In this age the attitude of students towards learning strategies is changed. They believe that everyone who reads and learns separately is almost a "crammer" and should be isolated from the community.
5. The teacher in BLL ceases to assess the reading as a process and the skills of the students to work with the text.
6. Solving problems related to the text is also left behind and the attention of the teachers focuses on building skills to create written texts and build language skills.
7. The idea to study grammar, literature and speech development in the same general subjects without considering that reading literacy is not measured only with elementary skills, including reading and writing, but it should also be seen in a social context is mainly subject to rationalization. That is the only way to move to a new paradigm in teaching the students to communicate with text.
8. The process of building reading skills not only should not stop but it should deepen and be evaluated. Only if the student knows that he will continue to be tested whether and how he reads, understands the text and shows the dynamics in his reading skills, will he try to remain a reader.

The monitoring and evaluation should be crucial to stimulate the demand for self-fulfillment in life. For the existing system of inspection and assessment of knowledge to be credible, it must answer a few questions:

1. What is being checked?
2. How is it being checked?
3. In what form are the results of the inspection presented?

In all analyzes of the results of the NEA it is stressed that the test is significantly different from the methods of verification and assessment of the students during the school year. Different publications in which the question of the difference between assessments of the students at entry level, their level throughout the school year, and NEA appear.

Back in the eighties of the last century there were studies that seriously questioned the need of an objective assessment of student learning.

The main question that any educational system tries to answer when it comes to the examination and evaluation at school is what is checked and evaluated and how is this accomplished. The answer depends on the public needs and the dominant relationships typical of the society. When executive work prevails in labor and scientific knowledge is changed slowly the interest in school is aimed at students' knowledge and their skills to apply them in practice. Relationships in school are aligned in accordance with the typical of such lagging society relationships of domination and subordination. They are leading. This is why school examination and assessment of knowledge is based on surprise and fear. Skipping classes, lying, hypocrisy, the state of depression are widespread.

The most suitable system for the quantity of such knowledge is the quantitative evaluation. For many years it has been a key measurement of the students' performance. These grades are abstract; they do not disclose what exactly they represent. This leads to subjectivity in their use. They show the student and his relatives that he learns well, bad or somewhere between the two borders, but not the actual successes or the gaps in his training and development. Therefore, the attention of the students and the parents is aimed at achieving high success, sometimes without the knowledge why exactly it was received. With their alternativeness the quantitative assessments kill the self-esteem of some students, prevent them from catching up while making others noncritical to themselves, inciting envy, individualism and selfishness in the class. The actual grade emerges as the main motive for educational and cognitive activity. Today of Bulgaria gives optimism and hopes that the scientific progress and the new moral and material values will be a vital necessity. To work create in these new conditions requires knowledge. Not knowledge that reproduces already known truths but creative knowledge that is recreated in life.

To meet the new requirements the school should reorganize its activities and let the need for new selected information forms which should develop the skills, abilities and needs of the students permanently. It should find such a way of teaching the information that the student keeps for a lifetime his/her desire to enrich, improve knowledge, to align his/her training and development in accordance with the requirements of the scientific and technical progress in the modern world. Can the public school of today give such a guarantee? Definitely not. Bulgarian school still has not become a place for creative expression of the personality of the adolescents. The atmosphere of rigidity which conceals under all sorts of reforms with the same (or worse) quality score still prevails.

And if the curricula can take a break from reforms and transformations, the system of examination and assessment of knowledge needs to change immediately so as to stop the damage it causes not only on the directly involved participants in the learning process but on society as a whole. New times require new system for monitoring and assessment at school (and not only at school). A system that does not inhibit does not to interfere but promote the increasing quality and efficient achieving of the harmonious development of the personality.

It is no longer enough to find out what students know. It should be known how they use their knowledge in public appearances creatively, in creating social values according to their training and development. Social realization in its diversity is the best criterion for shaping the personality, its growth, its equality to the needs and requirements of the public environment, its training and development. That is why the social realization with its results should become a major subject of school test and evaluation.

Especially in classes in Bulgarian language and literature the teacher should examine and evaluate the ability of students to communicate as a way of social expression. There are no other classes in which to build habits for proper speech along with the subject knowledge. After all, from here on starts the imminent use in life not only of different types of style but also the culture of the speech which is inseparable from the culture of the individual and the society. Therefore, the speech-communicative principle will continue to be essential in the teaching course.

It is necessary to ensure that in the assessment process the intervention of the examiner with his/her personality and preferences is minimized. It is necessary to find a way to such a communication between the teacher and the student that the process of verification does not become difficult but unleash the creative energy of the student. It is necessary to minimize the fear of examination and assessment of the knowledge, and hence to lighten the mood in Bulgarian school and save the prestige of the Bulgarian teacher. It is necessary to offer the students and their parents a realistic assessment of the knowledge so that they know that whoever examine them in any village of the country (from the elite high schools of Sofia to the last mountain village) he/she will confirm the already set diagnosis of the acquired skills and habits; united state general education criteria are needed.

Other socio-ideological factors explaining the decline in reading literacy right in the period from IV to VII grade can be searched for. The fact, however, is present. Half of the Bulgarian students have ceased to develop their reading literacy in this period. They not only estranged from the knowledge but are also on the edge of their inability to get into the secondary education system. What can be done? - First, to restore national external assessment at the end of each grade. This will quickly diagnose the gaps in the students' knowledge and it will be possible to identify the measures to overcome them.

This assessment may not be in all studied subjects, but it is obligatory in BLL. It is also urgent to synchronize the criteria for state educational minimum with the criteria of PISA. It is proven that they can objectively measure the levels of reading literacy. It is also urgent to provide more hours to develop skills of working with a text and in this way preparing students to solve more complex learning tasks with complex scientific texts because the lack of reading literacy inevitably leads to weaker results in other school disciplines. In the academic year 2012/13 the students observed of us are already in IX grade. In order to check their level of reading literacy the PISA survey from 2009 was used. Mainly books with tests related to reading literacy are used without presenting the students the other books aimed at studying of mathematical literacy, reading motivation and social-pedagogical factors.

The survey was conducted in the autumn of 2012/13 year and it has been complied with the overall procedure of PISA. The decline in the achievements of the surveyed students in IV, VII and IX grade persists. After VII grade till the research at the beginning of IX grade according to the PISA criteria it turned out that 9% of the girls and 11.3% of the boys did not cover the critical levels of reading literacy. This decline is visible among students who went to professional high schools after VIII grade. What conclusions should be made:

1. It turns out that after VIII grade nobody checks the dynamics of the knowledge in BLL and particularly reading literacy of the students. And right after VIII grade they received a diploma of primary education.
2. The summary clearly shows that the positive dynamics in the development of their reading literacy continue to develop students enrolled in professional and specialized (language) high schools after VII grade. A possible reason for this is the natural competition between them, the intensive teaching of at least two foreign languages and the requirements of the teachers in all subjects. The reading literacy of these students compensates for the delay of others and so their average results are closer to the research results of PISA conducted nationwide in 2009.

The unfortunate conclusion is that over these past four years nothing has changed in the dynamics of reading literacy of the students, despite the constant claims of the public that the education of the Bulgarian students is a priority! This continues until these graduates reached the state matriculation exams in the 2015/16 school year. As we already noted at SME- BLL in the first examination session in Burgas district appeared 3006 students i.e. 59.2% of the students who appeared to external evaluation in fourth grade and 64.7 % of the same students who appeared on the external evaluation in seventh grade.

It is assumed that these 40.8% - 2071 students who have not reached the first state exams are arranged in reading literacy somewhere around level IB because these were the indications in the conducted tests in the fourth, seventh and ninth grade. In this area are also the graduates who received a bad score, i.e. 10.3% more - 315 students. The reports of the Regional Inspectorates of Education reported only the percentage of graduates attending compared to twelfth grade for the graduates in Burgas region - 97.75 percent of the admitted. So the students that do not meet state educational standards are only 10.3%. And do the rest 2071 of the students that are left behind possess sufficient reading literacy for realization? - Obviously, the answer is negative.

Within the scope of the students who got between 23 and 41.5 points, or ratings between 3.00 and 3.49, fall 989 graduates making them closer to the level IA. Seniors with results close to 59 points cover level II - 1036 more graduates. 347 graduates received up to 76.5 points remain. They moved to the border of the very good ratings.

The fact that a minimum of 77 points is already sufficient for an excellent 5.50 grade suggests that even two sentences written grammatically correct on the 41 question already makes the graduate with excellent grade in the state matriculation exam in BLL. In Burgas district 313 graduates 10.1% are in this range. Only 7 of them with the highest score - 6.00 which means that only they - 0,23%, were able to collect between 95 and 100 points.

The ability to "write argumentative text" up to four pages on the topic as well as the ability to defer the genre by themselves - interpretive essay or essay is already a serious problem for the students. It should not be difficult for the graduates if we refer to the Ordinance. But... More than 85% of graduates in the Burgas district have not even tried to work on the task. This automatically leads to the conclusion that their reading literacy has no chance to move to fourth level of reading literacy and the two more after it. Even if we accept that those who received 95 to 100 points are able to do well they are a very small percentage of all the graduates. So - the dynamics in the level of the reading literacy of students in the same class in the Burgas district, traced and analyzed in eight years, clearly shows that:

1. Starting at primary school over 12% from the students in Burgas district remain primarily illiterate, i.e. the two branches of the initial literacy - reading and writing in sync are unmastered.
2. In the middle stage of the primary school the link between training in literacy to fourth grade and the beginning of the actual training in Bulgarian language and literature from the fifth grade is severed. Up until seventh grade the majority of students / to Burgas district 422 students / drop out of school. And their reading literacy ceases to develop. So at the end of seventh grade the reading levels of only 52.27% of the students raises.
3. With the PISA is found out that more students do not reach the levels of reading literacy. Moreover, secondary literacy is realized and the survey shows that 40% of students in ninth grade, who are 15 years old, are practically illiterate when it comes to reading.
4. The Ministry of Education has never presented a detailed analysis of the reasons for the failure of the Bulgarian graduates at the state exam in Bulgarian language and literature. So beyond the simple accounts of the number of highest and lowest grade, the findings of the ministry does not actually show anything - neither what exactly is being measured with the exams, nor what is behind the scores of students, nor what is the purpose of the results of the final examinations at the end. This study not only confirmed the findings of the MES that this is the class with the lowest results of the matriculation exam in Bulgarian language since the mandatory matriculation exam of 2009. It also confirmed the results of the study of PISA - over 40% of the graduates in the Burgas district do not meet the criteria of the PISA reading literacy. Given that this is a base for permanent acquired functional competence, the study objectively showed that the educational system of the Burgas district this year has a class of graduates with over 40% readable and functionally illiterate youth.
5. Even if an accordance with the state educational standards for the possessed competencies that are valued by the state matriculation exam in Bulgarian language and literature is looked for, the results of the research show that more than 40% of the graduates in the Burgas district are not able to:

- Perceive meanings from texts with a variety of meaningful, functional, linguistic differences and to process the received information according to the task;
- Build a complete and finalized text which meets the requirements for legal correctness and communicative appropriate;
- Select and combine language resources, taking into account the subject of communication and the specific communicative task;
- Select and combine language resources with style feature preferred in communication in different functional areas.

The same cannot master and do not know how to apply:

- The lexical norm of the modern Bulgarian literary language;
- The grammatical norm of the modern Bulgarian literary language;
- The orthographic norm of the modern Bulgarian literary language;
- The punctuation norm of the modern Bulgarian literary language.

They do not have enough knowledge to:

- Understand the conditional nature of the fiction;
- Know the depicted authors and works and the processes in the Bulgarian literary history that are related to them;
- Explain and interpret the construction and operation of a literature work of art;
- Interpret the artistic sense of a particular literary text.

It is about time to consider whether this external assessment gives a real picture of the knowledge of the graduates and their level of reading literacy since each year the formula for equalization of the obtained points in the assessments is announced after the verification of the examination works

Diagram №1

