

Krisztina STUMMER

The Image of Women's Upper Commercial Schools in Hungarian Pedagogy in the First Half of the 20th Century

Introduction Educational opportunities for women – overview

Women in Hungary could enter state-regulated institutional education due to a long process of progress. In the 19th and 20th centuries, several social, economic, and educational policy changes took place, influencing women's educational opportunities and the labor market.

Traditionally, education for girls was mainly provided within the family. They learned the necessary skills from their mother. The first institution of lower education was the "handicraft school", established in 1828 in Buda with the support of the Buda Women's Association on the initiative of Teréz Brunszvik (Nemes-Németh & Sanda, 2021). In higher social classes, however, families employed private teachers to ensure a proper education for their daughters (Rébay, 2006).

At the state level, Article 38 of the Law of 1868 established the right to education for all, regardless of gender, religion, or social background (Article 38 of Law of 1868). Thus, at the elementary level, girls were also entitled to education benefits: from 6 to 12, they were obliged to attend elementary school and then, if they no longer studied, to repeat school.

Those who chose to continue their education could enroll in upper elementary or state civil schools. At this level, schools for girls and boys differed in length of education and curriculum; the male curriculum offered a broader range of subjects. In addition, each girls' school offered classes in domestic science, needlework, and child-rearing.

From the very beginning, the Hungarian National Association for Women's Education (in Hungarian: "Országos Nőképző Egyesület") supported the cause of girls' education, and it was the first to initiate the opening of an institution where they could access an advanced level of education. As a result of their initiative, the first higher girls' school in Hungary was founded in 1869. It aimed to provide an education of a similar quality to the boys' schools but failed to achieve this long-term (Sanda, 2016).

The Hungarian National Association for Women's Education founded the first girls' secondary school. It was opened in 1896, and its first class graduated in 1900. After that, however, the number of girls' secondary schools grew slowly, with only four operating by 1912 (Rébay, 2009).

In 1926, women's education was first regulated by law. The law differentiated girls' secondary schools, offering a humanistic education, girls' lyceums, emphasizing modern languages, and girls' boarding schools, teaching housewife duties (Rébay, 2009).

Bálint Hóman, in the spirit of standardization, abolished the previous types of schools in 1934 and stated that "the name of the Hungarian secondary school is gymnasium." (Article 11 of Law of 1934). However, since this measure failed to bring the expected results in the long run, he reintroduced the girls' lyceum from 1938, which was identical to the previous one but independent of it (Rébay, 2009).

Research objective and questions

The present study examines how the Hungarian Pedagogy journal authors between 1909 and 1938 formulated their opinions on women's upper commercial schools.

The starting date of 1909 is related to the opening of the first women's upper commercial school, while 1938 marks the school type's raising to secondary school status.

The research seeks to answer the following questions:

- Does the journal address women's upper commercial schools?
- Do the authors of the publications take credit?
- What is the author's connection to commercial education?
- What is the gender distribution of the authors?
- What views does the author convey about the school?
- How do the publications fit into the portrayal of women of the era?

Formation of women's upper commercial schools in Hungary

In the second half of the 19th century, women's demand for professional (commercial) education increased significantly. Initially, this demand was met by the creation of commercial courses. In 1888, the first independent commercial course for women was established, with a duration of six months. Two years later, the course duration was extended to eight months. However, the content and quality of these courses did not meet professional and social needs. The city of Bratislava was the first to submit a petition to the Minister of Religion and Public Education. Later that year, in 1909, the city received permission to open the first women's upper commercial school. In its organization and curriculum, the women's school was modelled entirely on the boys' school, according to Decree No. 44.001 of 1895 (Nagy, 2014). In our case, the identical curriculum is critical because, in the first half of the 20th century, all types of schools, without exception, took care of subjects suitable for the female mind, thus including domestic science and needlework in their lessons. In contrast, these subjects were absent from the upper commercial schools.

Despite the lack of traditional female content, the number of new institutes and students has increased yearly. One of the reasons for its popularity was that after three years of study, students could take a commercial school leaving exam and, with the certificate, could continue their studies at commercial colleges (Schack & Vincze, 1930).

Student overload and the ratio between general and vocational classes have generated ongoing debate. From 1919, the length of the study was increased to four years because "it is absolutely impossible to complete the curriculum of a commercial school in three years honestly" (Trautmann, 1898; quotes by: Nagy, 2014:97). In addition, training continued at two different stages: the first two years of study became a commercial course, where students were introduced to the Hungarian commercial life. The last two years focused on the specifics of international economics. Despite the extended study duration, the women's schools continued to attract many students, reaching 18 by the end of the 1920s (Schack & Vincze, 1930).

The upper commercial schools were granted the status of secondary schools in 1938, marking the first legislation of this type of institution. After this date, the institution functioned as a secondary school, and general education was given a more significant role than before.

Opinions in Hungarian Pedagogy

Hungarian Pedagogy is the journal of the Educational Committee of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. Since its foundation in 1892, it has been one of the most renowned journals of Hungarian educational science. The organization aims to "unite all those committed to the development of our education" (Csengeri, 1982:1). Regarding its choice of topics, Hungarian Pedagogy is very diverse: besides theoretical and practical issues, it also includes articles on the history of education, current school textbooks, and the different types of schools. (Mészáros, 1992).

Relevant publications related to the topic were selected and processed through document analysis. Only those publications were considered relevant, which expressed an opinion on the type of school; thus, recruitment or job advertisements were not considered relevant. Between 1909 and 1938, only four relevant papers were written by two authors.

Our first author, Vilmos Szuppán, was involved in women's and commercial education. During his wide-ranging activities, he published numerous studies, compiled several school textbooks, worked as a headmaster of girls' schools and was director of the Academy of Commerce (Nagy, 1979).

Szuppán's name often appears in connection with commercial schools, as he regularly criticizes their functioning. In this case, he describes his thoughts on a congressional debate. The question was raised at the meeting whether the commercial education of the two genders could be the same. A lively debate emerged on this matter. The argument was made that human progress and economic conditions require equal education between the genders. Girls should also be given a place in the labor market because of the growing demand and to provide a livelihood for the unmarried. Vilmos Szuppán, on the other hand, argues that equal education should indeed be provided, but not by introducing an identical curriculum. "The physiological and psychological constitution and special skills of women, which differ from those of men, ... and the differences in the educational background of the two genders, stand in the way." (Szuppán, 1914:61) Szuppán often refers to the biological differences between the two genders, which he believes determine the jobs that can be filled. Girls are suitable for commercial work or correspondence in foreign languages, but they would not be suitable for higher positions. This difference alone justifies different studies. In addition, he also argues that "at no time in a girl's training for any profession should her preparation for the duties of motherhood and housewifery be forgotten, and thus alienating her from her natural vocation." (Szuppán, 1914:61) A woman's natural vocation is to become a good mother, housewife, and wife (Kéri, 2015; Pukánszky, 2006). At this period, this idea is not unique. There is a widely held traditional view of women's primary activity being family life and the duties associated with it. He uses similar arguments in his publication of 1931. He rejects the notion that girls' schools should be "the same as boys' schools" (Suppan, 1931:207). Again, he mentions the psychological and physical differences and stresses job opportunities. He highlights the many problems in the curriculum and operation of boys' commercial schools and adds that women's schools are also plagued by the fact that "they have the same curriculum as boys' schools. Therefore, it suffers twice as much: it has all the problems of a boys' school and, despite its feminine name, it is not a girls' school." (Suppan, 1931:207)

The second author, Alajos Loczka, is a chemistry teacher. During his career, he was head of the Department of Vocational Education of the Ministry of Religion and Public Education, where he opened several vocational schools (Kenyeres, é.n.).

Given the economic conditions, Loczka understands the parents' desire to send their daughters to schools providing a breadwinning possibility. However, he also believes that modern general education is desirable. He criticizes that "the women's upper commercial school ... prepares them for clerk careers, but has no regard for the needs of future mothers" (Loczka, 1931:91). He lacks the necessary skills for motherhood and housewifery, such as domestic science or child-rearing. A "Hungarian grand lady" needs to be able to socialize, run a household and raise her children with the proper awareness. He is not against women's schools providing qualifications, "but qualifications should not be for a career as a clerk, but for a career as a housekeeper, which is more suited to women's nature" (Loczka, 1931:92).

A few years later, Loczka continues his argument along the same reasoning. He realizes parents are worried about their daughter's fate, as they cannot all marry, leaving their fate uncertain. Therefore, although they need to be prepared for self-sufficiency, it is wrong for our school system to put women "in competition with men" (Loczka, 1938:84).

Reflecting on the curriculum of the two genders, he says: "Since 1909, commercial vocational education has been extended to include schools for women, with the same curriculum and teaching materials as for boys. Separate schools for women have also been created within the framework of vocational training in industry, but these are, of course, very different from boys' schools because they are adapted to the female vocation." (Loczka, 1938:80). He cites the example of industrial education, where women's studies are "naturally very different" from those of boys.

Both authors sharply criticize the curriculum of women's upper commercial schools. The main arguments cited are the biological, physical, and psychological differences between the two genders and women's traditional roles within the family (Stummer, 2022).

Women's portrayal in Hungary in the first half of the 20th century

In the first half of the 20th century, two portrayals of women can be outlined in parallel: the traditional and the modern image of women.

The traditional image of women is primarily based on the "triple role" of girls. In other words, they should become good wives, housewives, and mothers (Kéri, 2008, 2015). They should be taught all the skills they can use later in the family environment.

Another frequently mentioned argument (as we have already seen) is the two genders' different physical and mental constitutions. On this basis, they discouraged the pursuit of an advanced level of education for girls and the same school curriculum as for boys (Kéri, 2015).

Nevertheless, the traditional image of women cannot be seen as unilaterally negative. On the contrary, motherhood was seen as a vital vocation. The prevailing view during this era was that "a woman's place is not in the factory, but in the family. The most important of women's duties is to tend the family hearth, to ensure the dignity and happiness of family life" (Altenburger, 1916:67). In a constantly evolving world, the modern woman's duty remains to be her husband's companion and stand her ground as a housewife (N.N, 1908).

Employment still needs to be supported because working women remove the possibility of supporting the family from men. "Every woman who manages to get a job displaces a man, so the increase in women breadwinners means more unemployed men" (N.N., 1904:6). It also takes time away from family and children.

The modern image of women refutes traditional views on many points. Motherhood and married life remain central but are complemented by the idea of an advanced level of education and employment. The demand emerges that "at least in our institutions providing general, non-vocational education, boys and girls, men and women, should receive an equal education" (N.N, 1906:125).

Economic and social conditions justify the presence of women in the labor market, leading to greater acceptance in some circles. "The good old Hungarian society has changed; the middle class is impoverished. Little women also need to look for a breadwinning career. Switchboards, post offices, telegraph, schools, wherever they can be placed, no longer seem to be sufficient. The higher career paths must be opened to them" (N.N., 1908:181).

As a result of the world wars, women could prove their worth in specific jobs. It is conceivable that, without the world wars, they would not have had this opportunity until much later (Stummer, 2021).

After a brief review of the two representations of women, it is clear that the writings published in the Hungarian Pedagogy can be placed within the context of women's traditional image.

Summary

In conclusion, there were only four publications on women's commercial education in the period under review. Given the novelty of this type of school, this figure is relatively low. Furthermore, the four selected papers were written by two authors, both men, who expressed their views under their names. Vilmos Szuppán and Alajos Loczka share sharp criticisms and make very similar arguments. Their main counter-argument is that the school ignores girls' physical and psychological features, failing to prepare them for their vocation as women.

References

- A modern leány. *Vasárnapi Ujság* 55. évf. 3.sz. 1908. 49. https://adtplus.arcanum.hu/hu/view/VasarnapiUjsag_1908/?query=modern%20n%C5%91&pg=56&layout=s (2022.10.13.)
- Adolf, Altenburger (1916): Orel Géza: Műhelyi nevelés Páris iskoláiban. *Magyar Pedagógia*. 25. évf. 63–65.
- Józsefné, Attila Ambrus & Katalin Kéri (2015): *Leánynevelés és női művelődés az újkori Magyarországon* (nemzetközi kitekintéssel és nőtörténeti alapozással) (Akadémiai doktori értekezés). Pécs. http://real-d.mtak.hu/837/7/dc_1067_15_doktori_mu.pdf (2022.10.23.)
- János, Csengeri (1892): Olvasóinkhoz. *Magyar Paedagógia*. 1892/1, 1-2. sz. 1-2.
- Ágnes, Kenyeres (szerk., é.n.): Loczka Alajos. In: *Magyar életrajzi lexikon* <https://www.arcanum.com/hu/online-kiadvanyok/Lexikonok-magyar-eletrajzi-lexikon-7428D/> (2022.11.12.)
- Katalin, Kéri (2008): *Hölgyek napernyővel*. Nők a dualizmus kori Magyarországon 1867-1914. Pro Pannonia, Pécs.
- István, Mészáros (1992): Magyar Paedagógia – Magyar Pedagógia 1892-1992. *Magyar Pedagógia* 1992/92, 1. szám. 5-24.
- Adrienn, Nagy (2014): *A felső kereskedelmi iskolák fejlődéstörténete Magyarországon (1867-1945)*. Doktori (PhD) értekezés. Kézirat. Pécs.
- Sándor, Nagy (szerk. 1979): *Pedagógiai Lexikon*. Budapest, Akadémiai kiadó
- Nagy-gyűlés 1900 január 20-án. *Magyar Paedagógia* 15. évf. 1.sz. 1906. pp. 125.
- Nóra, Nemes-Németh & Dániel, István Sanda (2021): Die Anfänge Weiblicher Erziehung und Bildung in Ungarn. In: A. Somogyi. (ed.): *13th International Conference of J. Selye University. Theological Section*. Conference Proceedings. 105-111. 7 p. ISBN: 978-80-8122-410-2 <http://uk.ujs.sk/dl/4102/NNS.html> (2022.11.24.)
- N.N (1908): Fizikus leányok. *Vasárnapi Ujság*. 55. évf. 10. sz. 1908. 181. https://adtplus.arcanum.hu/hu/view/VasarnapiUjsag_1908/?query=modern%20n%C5%91&pg=188&layout=s (2022.10.13.)
- Béla, Pukánszky (2006): *A nőnevelés évezredei*. Gondolat, Budapest.
- Béla, Schack & Frigyes, Vincze (1930): *A kereskedelmi oktatásügy fejlődése és mai állapota Magyarországon*. Franklin-Társulat, Budapest.
- Dániel, István Sanda (2016): *Bevezetés a szakképzéstörténetbe*. Typotop Kft. Budapest. ISBN: 978-61-5804-9344
- Krisztina, Stummer (2021): A nőkről alkotott kép hazánkban a 20. század első felében sajtótermékek tükrében. *Képzés és Gyakorlat*. 19. 1-2.sz. 39-48.
- Krisztina, Stummer (2022): Sajtótermékek a női felső kereskedelmi iskoláról a 20. század első felében. In: Pusztafalvi Henriette-Takács Zsuzsanna Mária (szerk): *Útitársak*. Tanulmánykötet Kéri Katalin tiszteletére. Magyar Tudományos Akadémia Pécsi Területi Bizottsága, Pécs. 302-317.
- Vilmos, Suppan (1931): Még néhány szó a felső kereskedelmi iskola problémájáról. *Kereskedelmi Szakoktatás* 38. 10. sz. 409-421.
- Vilmos, Szuppán (1914): A X. kereskedelmi oktatásügyi nemzetközi kongresszus. *Magyar Paedagógia* 1914/23. 57-62.
- *Az 1868. évi XXXVIII. tc: A népiskolai közoktatás tárgyában.* <https://net.jogtar.hu/ezer-ev-torveny?docid=86800038.TV&searchUrl=/ezer-ev-torvenyei%3Fextraparams%3D%7B%2522ID%2522%3A%2522FullTextSearch%2522%2C%2522Year%2522%3A%25221868%2522%2C%2522Kibocsato%2522%3A%2522TV0%2522%7D> (2022.11.10)
- *Az 1934. évi XI. tc: A középiskoláról.* <https://net.jogtar.hu/ezer-ev-torveny?docid=93400011.TV&searchUrl=/ezer-ev-torvenyei%3Fextraparams%3D%7B%2522ID%2522%3A%2522FullTextSearch%2522%2C%2522Year%2522%3A%25221934%2522%2C%2522Kibocsato%2522%3A%2522TV0%2522%7D> (2022.11.10).