



JOURNAL: EDUCATION AND DEVELOPMENT, RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

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Education and Development, Research and Practice (EDRP)

Vol. 1, No. 1, (2014), October, pp. 1-7

On behalf of "The Education Sciences Faculty" U.SV.



A Study on Children's Interest towards Reading - a Questionnaire-Based Survey

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Abstract: In a society dominated by mass-media, which offers many temptations and seizes and reorients young people's interests, reading has lost ground. The importance given to reading has clearly diminished, as it is no longer favoured by our pupils. This represents a real problem, especially for the teachers from the pre-university education system, who sometimes feel powerless when facing the challenges of the contemporary world and who try by various methods to entice pupils to read and to get in contact with the magical world of reading. The purpose of this research is to investigate the way in which reading is viewed by pupils and to find the way to find the educational path that entice them to read. The study is based on a questionnaire survey conducted to determine the interested reading factors.

Keywords: interest towards reading, methods of enticing pupils to read

1. INTRODUCTION

The determining factors for human development are considered to be heredity, environment and education. Each of these factors plays its role in the human development, a balance of their contributions being necessary, though the leading part is given to education, as the essence of all activities dedicated to the human development (Cucoș, 2009).

Nevertheless, the interdependence of these three factors is obvious, as education does not have the power to compensate an entirely unbalanced environment or a profoundly affected heredity. The interaction of these factors leads to the psychological and sociological development of the individual, which takes place gradually, in stages, in accordance with the age particularities and the psychological phases through which the individual passes on the path of his or her evolution. When it's about reading, education is the main catalyst for discover the pleasure of traveling in the world of books. The most frequent situation in schools is that of children who have the ability to read but lack the reading motivation (Clary, 1991, Turner, 1992, Moser & Morison, 1998). Text comprehension and learning are also mediated by motivational factors. The interest is considered central in determining the ways to select information (Hidi, 1990). There are two types of interest in reading that are invoked in most studies: individual interest and situational interest. Individual interest is conceptualized as a relatively stable predisposition that develops over time associated with increased value, knowledge, and positive feelings (Krapp, 1999, 2000, Renninger, 2000). Situational interest represents a reaction to external stimuli (Harackiewicz et al.,

2000, Hidi, 2000). Individual interest is characterized by time persistence, enjoying more engagements, and using strategic text processing (Benton et al., 1998, Alexander et al., 1997, Schiefele, 1998). Despite its evident advantages, promoting individual interest in students reading may be a time-consuming task (Hidi & Anderson, 1992) due to many problems activated by the need to elaborate individualized programs for each child. So, the alternative of using situational interest seems to be a sufficiently productive way to enhance reading: "Stimulating situational interest may be one way for schools to motivate those who do not have pre-existing individual interests in academic activities, content areas or topics, and to help them make academic gains" (Hidi, 2001, p. 203).

A systematically and well-guided approach to reading helps the pupil enrich his/her knowledge and contributes to the development of thinking, language, and the personality of the pupil as a whole (Eftenie, 2008). The necessity to supervise reading can be traced back to the fundamental purpose of education – the comprehensive development of the human personality. Guiding school reading is even more necessary as the consequences of unsupervised reading can be disastrous.

A well-chosen and carefully supervised approach to reading can contribute a great deal to the delineation of the pupils' characters, as, at this age, they let themselves be greatly influenced by external role models. In this regard, an important role can be given to educational as well as therapeutic reading, which targets changes in the pupils' behavior and aims at well-delineated objectives, which are attained most of

the times (Parfene, 1999). The teaching reading actions are grouped in four methods: allowing time for silent reading, offering a choice of reading materials, sharing of literature read with and by children, and providing appropriate adult modeling of reading (Allington, 1977, Anderson et. Al., 1985, McCracken & McCracken, 1979, Routman, 1991, Trelease, 1989). The student's interest toward school in general and learning and reading tends to decrease with age (Fay, 1998, Hoffmann & Haussler, 1998). This is why in our research we focus on the different type of situational interest that may be used in classroom to increase student's motivation to read.

2. METHODOLOGY:

2.1. Objectives

- Investigating children's perception of reading;
- Identifying the factors which can contribute to stimulating the interest towards reading;
- Highlighting the attitude which can help remedy the lack of interest towards reading;
- Finding a correlation between the factors which determine a decline in the interest towards reading and those which can contribute to the growth of the interest towards this area;
- Finding solutions which can improve the educational techniques used in reading activities.

2.2. Hypotheses:

1. There are significant correlations between pupils' perception of the importance of reading in their lives and the children's age.
2. There is a significant association between the interest manifested by the family towards what the pupil reads and the children's interest towards reading.
3. There is a significant association between the teachers' attitude towards reading and the pupil's attitude towards this area.

2.3. Research methods:

The study was based on questionnaire-based survey methodology and a questionnaire with 15 items referring to descriptive aspects of reading was developed. The items refer to different characteristics of children's interest in reading as:

- the pupil's personal perception of reading;
- the habit of reading among pupils;
- the sharing of read content;
- the persons with whom they share the content of reading;
- the interest of the family towards pupils' reading;

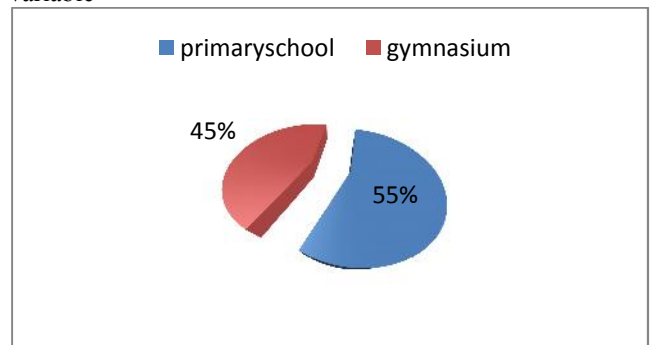
- the pupils' interest in school recommended reading;
- the reasons for which recommended reading did not present interest for them;
- favored activities instead of reading;
- factors which entice pupils to approach texts;
- the teachers' attitude towards pupils' reading;
- the amount of other read texts than recommended ones;
- the interest in acquiring books;
- the interest in assembling a personal library;
- the rhythm of library visits;
- the importance given to reading.

The questionnaires were administered in the classroom under personal supervision, the confidentiality of the answers was ensured and the pupils were rewarded for their involvement in the research.

2.4. The research group:

The research was carried out on a sample (N=163) of pupils from the Dumbrăveni No. 2 Primary School and from the Dumbrăveni School Group. The configuration of independent variables was as following: 90 pupils from primary school, aged between 9 and 11, from the 3rd grade (45 pupils) and the 4th grade (45 pupils) and 73 pupils from secondary school, aged between 13 and 15, from the 7th grade (35 pupils) and the 8th grade (38 pupils).

Figure 1: Sample's representation on type of school variable



The main criteria for differentiating the subjects were according to the *age variable* and the *type of school variable (primary or secondary)*.

3. RESULTS:

3.1. First hypothesis

Using Pearson correlation coefficient we have found the following significant correlations between the *age variable*, on the one hand, and the *habit of reading*, the *sharing of read content*, *recommended reading*, *other types of reading*, *purchase of books*, and

frequency of library visits variables, on the other hand, in the sense that older pupils tend to be less involved in reading:

Table 1: Correlations between reading interest and age variable (N = 150)

Interest variable	Age
Habit	-.428**
	.000
Sharing of read content	-.350**
	.000
Recommended reading	-.480**
	.000
Other types of reading	-.398**
	.000
Purchase of books	-.199**
	.006
Frequency of library visits	-.474**
	.000

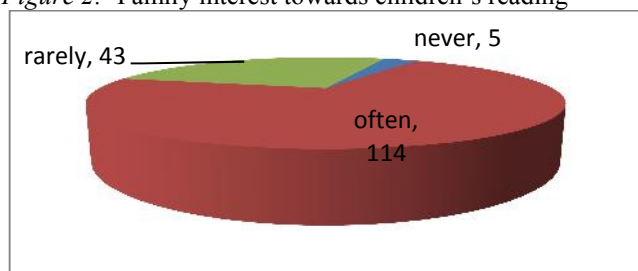
Note: *p < .05, **p < .01

From what is presented above, the following conclusion, regarding the influence of age on the pupils' interest towards reading, can be drawn: the pupils' interest towards reading varies inversely proportional with age, in the sense that the older the pupil gets, the lower his/her interest towards reading is. From the analysis and the correlation of items we can determine that there is a significant relation between the age of the pupils and their interest towards reading.

3.2. Second hypothesis

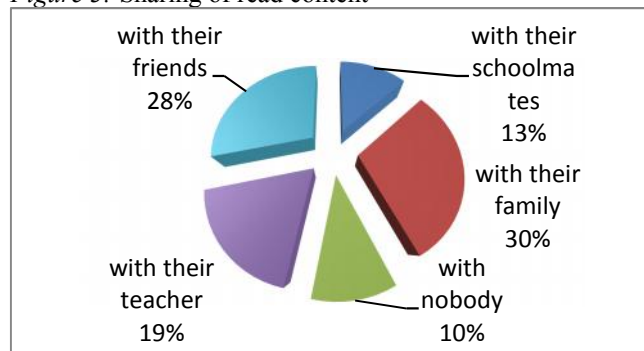
The interest manifested by the family: summarizing the data obtained at item 5 concerning the interest manifested by the family towards what the pupil reads, from the 163 tested subjects, 114 answered that their family manifests interest often, 43 answered rarely and only 5 subjects answered never (Figure 2). From the obtained data we can determine that the family manifests an interest towards what the pupil reads, a particular interest being manifested regarding primary school pupils, in which case 74 pupils answered often, 16 rarely, and none never.

Figure 2: Family interest towards children's reading



The predominance of the family in sharing of read content: from the analysis of the results obtained at the item regarding the persons with whom the pupils share the content of reading, 48 subjects answered that they share it with their family, 46 subjects with their friends, 30 with their teacher, 21 with their classmates and 17 do not share the content of their readings (Figure 3). From this data summary it is notable that the family plays an important role in the act of reading.

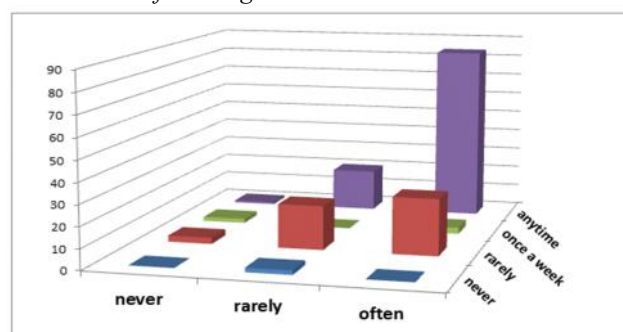
Figure 3: Sharing of read content



As the involvement of the family in the pupils' reading is statistically noticeable, we will analyze this involvement correlated with the influence of the family on the habit of reading, on recommended reading, on types of reading other than the recommended ones, on purchase of books and on interest towards library.

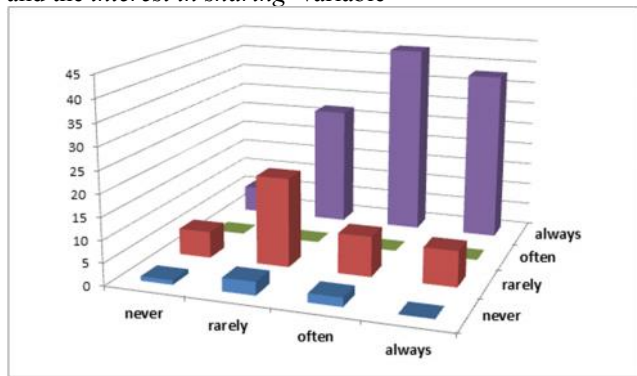
As the crosstabs method revealed and the chart below (Figure 4) shows, the influence of the family on the habit of reading indicates the following: the more interested is the family in what the child reads, the stronger is the habit of reading. The significant character of this relation between variables is sustained by determining the chi square ($\chi^2 = 37.683^a$, $p < .01$), which shows the fact that there is a significant difference between the observed frequencies and the expected frequencies concerning the influence of the family.

Figure 4: The relation between the family interest variable and the habit of reading variable



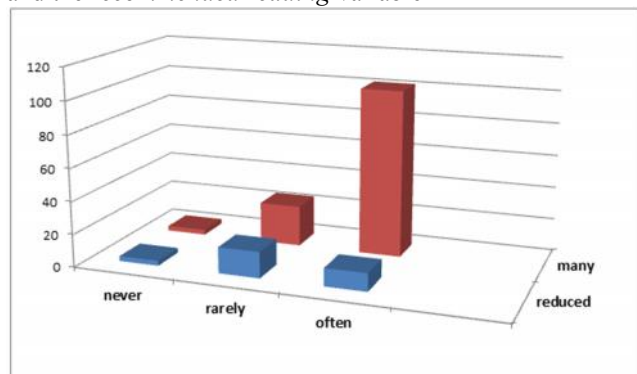
As the chart below (Figure 5) shows, the *family influence* on the *sharing of read content* variable indicates the following: the more interested is the family in what the child reads, the more interested is the child to share what he/she reads. The significant character of this relation between variables is sustained by determining the square chi ($\chi^2 = 16.424^a$, $p < .05$), which shows the fact that there is a significant difference between the observed frequencies and the expected frequencies concerning the influence of the family.

Figure 5: The relation between the *family interest* variable and the *interest in sharing* variable



As the chart below (Figure 6) shows, by confronting the variables *family interest* and *recommended reading* we notice the following: the more interested is the family in what the child reads, the more interested is the child to read the recommended books. The significant character of this relation between variables is sustained by determining the square chi ($\chi^2 = 20.938^a$, $p < .01$), which shows the fact that there is a significant difference between the observed frequencies and the expected frequencies concerning the influence of the family.

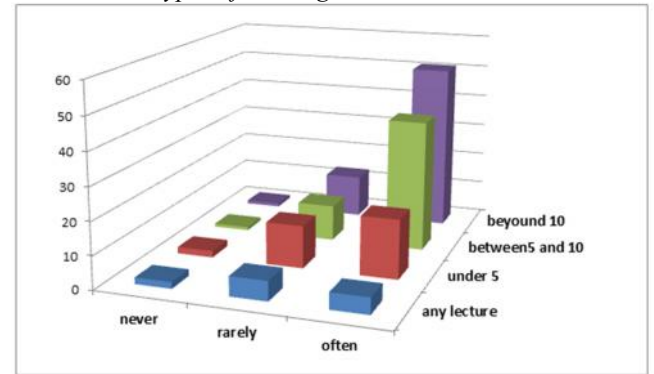
Figure 6: The relation between the *family interest* variable and the *recommended reading* variable



Concerning the variable *family interest* and the variable *other types of reading*, as the chart from Figure 7 shows, the following can be noticed: the more interested is the family in what the child reads, the more interested is the child to read books, others

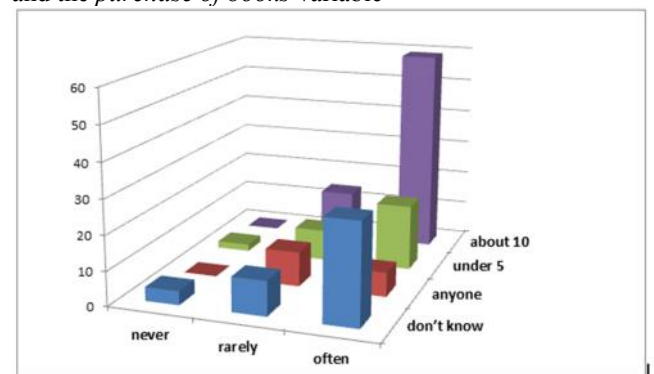
than those recommended at school. The significant character of this relation between variables is sustained by determining the square chi ($\chi^2 = 16.177^a$, $p < .05$), which shows the fact that there is a significant difference between the observed frequencies and the expected frequencies concerning the influence of the family.

Figure 7: The relation between the *family interest* variable and the *other types of reading* variable



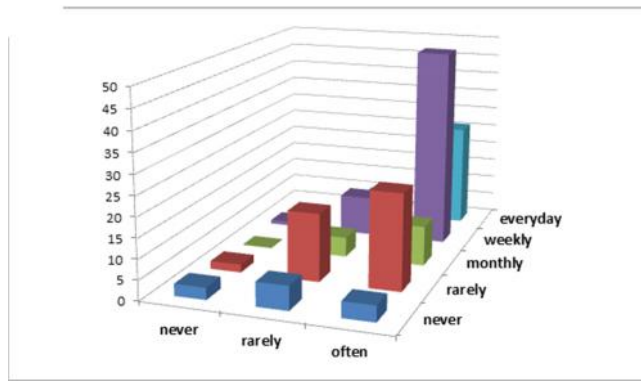
From the analysis of data concerning the variables *family interest* and *purchase of books* the following can be noticed: the more interested is the family in what the child reads, the more interested is the child to buy books, as shown in Figure 8. The significant character of this relation between variables is sustained by determining the square chi ($\chi^2 = 19.730^a$, $p < .01$), which shows the fact that there is a significant difference between the observed frequencies and the expected frequencies concerning the influence of the family.

Figure 8: The relation between the *family interest* variable and the *purchase of books* variable



By analyzing the relation between the *interest manifested by the family towards what the child reads* and the influence on *the frequency of library visits*, the following can be noticed: the more interested is the family in what the child reads, the more frequent are the child's library visits, results presented in Figure 9.

Figure 9: The relation between the *family interest* variable and the *frequency of library visits* variable



The significant character of this relation between variables is sustained by determining the square chi ($\chi^2 = 30.567^a$, $p < .01$), which shows the fact that there is a significant difference between the observed frequencies and the expected frequencies concerning the influence of the family.

Using correlations (by the Kendall tau method) we find that there is a statistically significant relation between the *family interest* variable, on the one hand, and the *habit of reading*, the *sharing of read content*, *recommended reading*, *other types of reading*, *purchase of books*, and *frequency of library visits* variables, on the other hand, in the sense that *the pupils whose parents are more interested in what the children read are more involved in the act of reading*. This conclusion is sustained by determining the non-parametric coefficients (the Kendall tau method), as the Table 2 below shows:

Table 2: Correlations between reading interest and family involvement variable (N = 150)

	Family involvement
<i>Habit</i>	.297 .000**
<i>Sharing of read content</i>	.264 .000**
<i>Recommended reading</i>	.356 .000**
<i>Other types of reading</i>	.231 .001**
<i>Purchase of books</i>	.176 .014*
<i>Frequency of library visits</i>	.308 .000**

Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

From what is presented above, the following conclusion, regarding the influence of the interest manifested by the family on the pupils' interest towards reading, can be drawn: the more interested is the family in what the child reads, the more involved is the child in the act of reading, manifesting a high

interest towards reading. The pupil's interest towards reading grows directly proportional with the interest manifested by the family in this area.

From the performed analysis and the correlation of items we can determine that there is a significant relation between the interest of the family towards reading and the interest of the pupil towards reading.

3.3. Third hypothesis

As the table below shows, there is not a statistically significant relation between the *teachers' interest* variable, on the one hand, and the *sharing of read content*, *recommended reading*, *other types of reading* and *purchase of books* variables, on the other hand, because, as it can be observed in the table below, these correlations are not sustained when determining the χ^2 criterion.

Table 3: Correlations between reading interest and teachers' interest variable (N = 150)

	Teachers' interest
<i>Habit</i>	.236 .006**
<i>Sharing of read content</i>	.055 .498
<i>Recommended reading</i>	.117 .189
<i>Other types of reading</i>	.105 .199
<i>Purchase of books</i>	-.021 .796
<i>Frequency of library visits</i>	.308 .000**

Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

From what is presented above, the following conclusion, regarding the influence of the interest manifested by the family on the pupils' interest towards reading, can be drawn: the more interested is the family in what the child reads, the more involved is the child in the act of reading, manifesting a high interest towards reading. The pupil's interest towards reading grows directly proportional with the interest manifested by the family in this area. From the performed analysis and the correlation of items we can determine that there is a significant relation between the interest of the family towards reading and the interest of the pupil towards reading.

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	Teachers' interest
Habit	.236 .006**
Sharing of read content	.055 .498
Recommended reading	.117 .189
Other types of reading	.105 .199
Purchase of books	-.021 .796
Frequency of library visits	.308 ,000**

Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

It can thus be observed that the interest manifested by teachers towards reading influences the pupils only in regard to the habit of reading, in the sense that it can determine them to read more than they usually do, and in regard to the frequency of library visits, in the sense that the pupils visit the library more frequently if they are persistently advised to read by their teachers.

From what is presented above it can be argued that the teachers' influence on pupils' reading is limited, manifesting itself only in certain areas. From the conclusions that were drawn it can be argued that there is not a significant and permanent relation between the teachers' attitude towards reading and the pupils' interest in this area.

The results obtained by these analyses can generate a *future research direction: ways through which teachers can constantly or permanently influence pupils' reading.*

4. CONCLUSIONS

This research aimed to investigate pupils' perception of reading and to identify the factors which can contribute to stimulating the interest towards reading, an activity considered extremely important for the educational and social success of the pupil, as it can be found in all areas of activity and it is necessary throughout all the school years, as well as after graduation.

Although the majority of the tested pupils see reading as an important activity, a result obtained by summarizing the answers to item 15 of the questionnaire and shown in the chart below (Figure 10), this activity does not represent a passion for many

of the pupils, but just a way of enriching their knowledge (Figure 11), and, instead of this activity, pupils favour others, considered to be more attractive and more interesting, as shown by the chart in Figure 12.

Figure 10: Reading importance

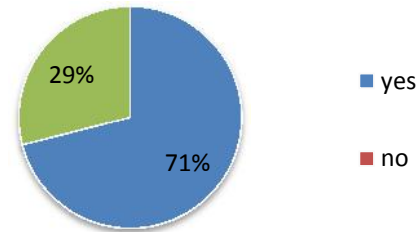


Figure 11: Meanings of reading

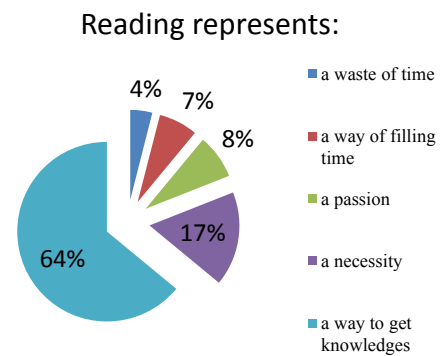
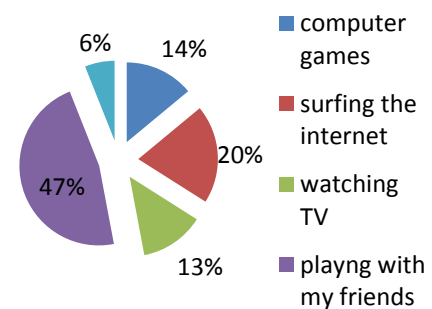


Figure 12: Activities favored instead of reading



This situation becomes even more worrying as it manifests itself more prominently in older pupils. As the results obtained at hypothesis 1 show, the older the pupil gets, the lower his/her interest towards reading is. A larger number of the tested pupils from secondary school favor other activities instead of reading, compared with the tested pupils from primary school, in spite of the fact that there should be a more prominent interest towards reading among older pupils, because they are expected to read more than younger pupils.

The factor which has a strong influence on the pupil's reading is the family, as shown by the conclusions from working hypothesis 2: the more interested is the family in what the child reads, the more involved is the child in the act of reading, manifesting a high interest towards reading. The pupil's interest towards reading grows directly proportional with the interest manifested by the family in this regard.

Even though the teachers manifest a high interest towards reading, a situation presented in the analysis of frequencies from hypothesis 3, they do not have a full influence on the pupil's reading, but only a limited influence; there is not a significant and permanent relation between the teachers' attitude towards reading and the pupils' interest in this area.

From the obtained results we can draw the conclusion that a close cooperation school – family is needed, and the parent should be persuaded to become an vital part of the educational process, even more so as the pupil spends more time with his/her family than at school. If the parent manifests a positive attitude towards reading, if he/she sees the book as a valuable item, if he/she talks with the children or relations about books, the child's interest towards reading follows an upward path. It is recommended to pursue a good communication between teachers and parents during various encounters and a close cooperation school – family, which will benefit both the pupil and the teacher.

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