

*Lýdia Simanová*

Matej Bel University, Banská Bystrica, Slovakia

*Simoneta Babiaková*

Matej Bel University, Banská Bystrica, Slovakia

## The Socio-Cultural Context of Reading Interest of Younger Learners

### Abstract

This study examines the correlation between 9–10-year-old learners' reading interest and four types of socio-cultural environments that stimulate their interest (enthusiasm) in reading as a fundamental pillar of reading literacy development. The study aimed to map and analyse the socio-cultural context of four levels of intensity of reading interest of 1195 Slovak, Czech and Polish learners. A 46-item questionnaire was used to achieve the aim of the study. Statistical testing using Spearman's coefficient was used for analysis. The significant results of the research showed that the correlation between monitored younger learners' reading interest and family environment is very weak, and reading as a leisure activity in the virtual environment is not attractive.

**Keywords:** *reading enthusiasm, socio-cultural context, correlation, younger learners*

### Introduction

Child readers' reading skills are formed in various types of socio-cultural environment. Family and institutionalised environments especially contribute to their formation. An appropriate approach can kindle interest in reading, but a coercive and insensitive approach accompanied by pressure without appreciation can deform it. Reading interest is the fundamental pillar of reading literacy emphasised in the school setting mainly because of its international rating in 9-year-old learners (PIRLS testing), resulting in a learner's poor attitude towards reading (Levy,

2011). Reading interest of various intensities is associated with the emotional development of the child's personality. It is supported by receptive-experiential processes formed by actors in various socio-cultural environments associated with emotional experiences influencing child reading (Babiaková & Simanová, 2018). Research findings (Garbe, 2008) show that learners with good reading skills enter the phase of avid reading at the age of 8–9. On the other hand, the National Report on Child and Family Reading (2019) states that learners' interest in reading decreases by 15% to 20% around the age of 8–9 while declining by the same percentage until their teenage years. The learner's interest must be captured to make reading habitual (Renuga & Kanchana Mala, 2015). At younger school age, reading interest may achieve various levels of intensity classified as a neutral reading interest – 1<sup>st</sup> level; reading hobby – 2<sup>nd</sup> level; and reading enthusiasm – 3<sup>rd</sup> level. They reflect a child reader's relation to reading as something that he/she finds meaningful and valuable, something he/she does casually and that gives him/her satisfaction (Kováčová et al., 2020). Babiaková and Kasáčová (2019; 2021) differentiate the meaning of reading interest and reading enthusiasm:

- *Reading interest* is long-term in its focus, related to personal motives and orientation;
- *Reading enthusiasm* is reading for pleasure and active searching for stimuli and inspiration, resources as well as experience sharing, a state of emotional focus. Both are values added to reading literacy.

Following up on five principles of reading formulated by Anderson et al. (1985), Frankel et al. (2016) define reading literacy as follows: "Literacy is a constructive, integrative, and critical process situated in social practices. It involves complex, multimodal transactions between readers, texts, activities, and socio-cultural contexts". They emphasise that reading literacy is strategic and disciplinary. It indicates a significant influence of social factors in forming the relationship to reading. Applying different strategies and practical procedures facilitates readers to comprehend text, e.g., scaffolding (Reza & Dehqan, 2013). We see the basis for developing reading literacy and reading interest skills, which requires motivation and emotional-cognitive engagement. "It includes motivational factors such as self-efficacy, intrinsic motivation, and interest, as well as the mediating effects of engagement on reading. It requires attention to how relationships between readers and texts may change over time and in and through particular socioculturally situated contexts. Literacy is a continuously developing set of practices. It develops throughout a reader's lifetime in the context of authentic tasks with real-world purposes and motivations, and this holds true for the reading that happens within as well as beyond school" (Frankel et al., 2016).

Alhamdu (2016) talks about learners' situational interest, which is supported by conditions or environmental factors. It is a direct affective response to stimuli from the environment evoking experiences. According to Krapp (2002; 2005) and Hidi (2006), children who have good role models in reading tend to follow them. In our research VEGA No. 1/0455/18 *Research and Development of Reading Enthusiasm with Younger School-Age Learners*, the described aspects of child reading interest are the *socio-cultural context*.

A theoretical analysis by our research team identified the following factors: *reader characteristics* (personality characteristics), the ***socio-cultural context of reading*** (providing reading experience, experiencing, social sharing, perception of reading models, stimulation), and *reading preferences* (contents, genres and forms).

This study deals with the socio-cultural context of reading interests of Slovak, Czech, and Polish younger learners. The *research problem* is the relationship between reading interest and the environment.

The objectives of the research study were the following:

- Find out whether there is a correlation between younger learners' reading interests and socio-cultural environment types;
- If there is a correlation between younger learners' reading interests and environment, then find out its level.

## **Methodology**

Our questionnaire investigation involved 1195 learners aged 9–10 at Slovak, Czech, and Polish elementary schools.

**Table 1.** Characteristics of the Slovak, Czech and Polish samples

	A – Avid reader		I – Interested reader		G – Literate non-reader		N – Illiterate non-reader		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
SK	309	44.59	268	38.67	110	15.87	6	0.87	693	100
CZ	76	29.97	120	47.24	54	21.26	4	1.58	254	100
PL	46	18.55	114	45.97	82	33.06	6	2.42	248	100

Respondents answered a questionnaire of our own design built based on a theoretical construct. It was deduced from our qualitative research using focus interviews with groups of learners. The factors were determined: *reader characteristics* and the *socio-cultural context* of his/her reading and his/her *reading preferences*.

Questionnaire items were divided into three parts by the factors. Items were formulated as statements. The questionnaire contained 46 items. Items 1–4 were for demographic data; 5–8 for reader characteristics. They enabled identification and sorting into four groups of personality characteristics distinguishing intensity levels of reading interest: A, I, G, and N.

- *A – Avid Readers* – characterised by an interest in reading, actively seeking books, choosing literature consciously, and preferring reading in their leisure time.
- *I – Interested Readers* – can choose texts according to their own interests; cope with compulsory learning texts without difficulties. They need advice, help and motivation.
- *G – Literate Non-readers* – lax, indifferent, not “illiterate”; they can read, sometimes even very well, but they do not read of their own will or interest, only out of duty.
- *N – Illiterate Non-readers* – they have severe difficulties with reading literacy and find reading stressful and upsetting. When they do not have to, they do not read. When they have to, they suffer a lot.

The following 14 questionnaire items enabled the investigation of correlations between 4 environment types and reading interests of 1195 younger learners from three countries.

The socio-cultural context of learner reading was structured into four environment types:

1. Bookstore and library environment – a resource to choose from for leisure time reading;
2. Family environment – father, mother, grandparents, siblings – reading examples, advisors and inspirers;
3. School environment – teacher, classroom culture – personality and socially stimulating environment;
4. Virtual environment – multimedia alternative to reading.

Correlations between the four environment types and reading interests of younger learners were investigated in the following four formulated *research questions*:

- RQ1: Is there a relationship between younger learners’ reading interests and the bookstore and library environment?
- RQ2: Is there a relationship between younger learners’ reading interests and the family environment?
- RQ3: Is there a relationship between younger learners’ reading interests and the school environment?

RQ4: Is there a relationship between younger learners' reading interests and the virtual environment?

In order to analyse the correlations, the method of recording answers in the electronic form (the so-called CAPI method of data collection) was used, next transformed to MS Excel environment, where they were re-coded. The data were processed and analysed in the program IBM SPSS 28. Statistical significance was tested at the significance level of 0.05 by the Spearman correlation coefficient.

## Results

Each research question encompassed 3–4 questionnaire items enabling analysis of the level of correlation. Below are the research findings.

RQ1: Is there a relationship between younger learners' reading interests and the bookstore and library environment?

**Table 2.** Relationship between younger learners' reading interests and bookstore and library environments

	Reading interest					
	Slovakia		Czechia		Poland	
	$\rho$	n	$\rho$	n	$\rho$	n
I enjoy going to the library very much.	.466***	609	.471***	223	.377***	203
I enjoy going to the bookstore very much.	.446***	599	.548***	219	.392***	203
I want to have the books I like in my home library.	.367***	565	.447***	233	.405***	220

Legend:  $\rho$  – Spearman correlation coefficient; n = number; \*  $p \leq .05$ . \*\*  $p \leq .01$ . \*\*\*  $p \leq .001$

Slovak learners showed a positive medium correlation between the level of reading interest and the joy of going to the library ( $\rho = 0.466$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ), the joy of going to the bookstore ( $\rho = 0.446$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ), but also the desire to have the books they liked in their home library ( $\rho = 0.367$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ). The more the learners read avidly, the higher the desire to own books in their home library and the more they enjoyed visits to libraries. Czech learners showed a positive medium correlation between reading interest and visiting libraries ( $\rho = 0.471$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ) and enjoying bookstore visits ( $\rho = 0.548$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ). The correlation between reading interest and the desire

to own the books they liked in their home library was medium, 0.447. Polish learners manifested a positive medium correlation between the level of reading interest and the joy of going to the library ( $\rho = 0.377$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ), the joy of going to the bookstore ( $\rho = 0.392$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ), but also an equally strong correlation appeared in the desire to have the books in their home library ( $\rho = 0.405$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ).

RQ2: Is there a relationship between younger learners' reading interests and family environment?

**Table 3.** Relationship between younger learners' reading interests and family environment

	Reading interest					
	Slovakia		Czechia		Poland	
	$\rho$	n	$\rho$	n	$\rho$	n
My parents enjoy my reading at home.	.237***	616	0.122	225	.204***	213
I enjoy listening to others' reading.	0.016	591	0.011	223	.173***	222
I enjoy reading to somebody.	.381***	585	.411***	209	.232***	197
When choosing what to read, I get the best advice from my father.	.036	693	.146*	254	.074	248
When choosing what to read, I get the best advice from my grandparents.	.065	693	.098	254	0.147	248

Legend:  $\rho$  – Spearman correlation coefficient; n = number; \*  $p \leq .05$ . \*\*  $p \leq .01$ . \*\*\*  $p \leq .001$

Slovak learners manifested a low correlation between their reading interests and parents enjoying them reading at home ( $\rho = 0.237$ ) at the significance level  $p \leq 0.001$  ( $p=0.000$ ). There was a positive medium relationship between learners' reading interests and enjoying their own activity of reading to somebody else ( $\rho = 0.381$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ). No relationship between the family member advising on choosing what books to read and learners' reading interests showed either in the mother, siblings, or grandparents. In Czech learners, no correlation appeared between learners' reading interests and parents enjoying their reading at home. A positive medium correlation was registered for enjoying the activity of reading to somebody else ( $\rho = 0.411$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ). However, only Czech learners showed at least a positive weak correlation between the father as one of the family members advising on choosing what to read and learners' reading interests ( $\rho = 0.146$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ). No such relationship

appeared for other family members. Polish learners showed a weak positive correlation between learners' reading interests and parents enjoying them reading at home ( $\rho = 0.204$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ), as well as learners enjoying reading to somebody else ( $\rho = 0.232$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ). The relationship between learners' reading interests and advising on choosing what to read appeared in a weak positive correlation in grandparents ( $\rho = 0.147$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ). However, no correlation showed in other family members.

RQ3: Is there a relationship between younger learners' reading interests and the school environment?

**Table 4.** Relationship between younger learners' reading interests and school environment

	Reading interest					
	Slovakia		Czechia		Poland	
	$\rho$	n	$\rho$	n	$\rho$	n
The teacher allows us to bring our own books to school.	.218***	654	.343***	237	0.084	205
We talk with teachers about what we are reading in our leisure time.	.197***	589	.340***	214	.073	180
I only read what I need /must for school.	-.424***	646	-.408***	234	-.493***	228
I enjoy reading in my leisure time.	-.429***	577	-.437***	233	-0.085	194

Legend:  $\rho$  – Spearman correlation coefficient; n = number; \* $p \leq .05$ . \*\* $p \leq .01$ . \*\*\* $p \leq .001$

Slovak learners manifested a weak positive correlation between their reading interests and the teacher allowing them to bring their own books to school or read their own books of their free choice in the school environment ( $\rho = 0.218$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ). A similar weak positive correlation was shown between learners discussing with teachers about what they were reading and the level of reading interest ( $\rho = 0.197$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ). A negative medium correlation between reading interest and reading literature needed for school showed in Slovak learners ( $\rho = -0.424$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ). The higher reading interest manifested in learners, the lower consenting opinion on only reading literature needed for school instruction. A negative medium correlation also appeared between their enjoying extracurricular reading and reading interests ( $\rho = -0.429$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ). Czech learners manifested a positive medium correlation between

the option to bring their own books to school and their reading interests ( $\rho = -0.343$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ) or discussing with teachers what they were reading in their leisure time ( $\rho = -0.340$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ). Czech learners also manifested a negative medium correlation between their reading interests and their consent to that they read only what they needed for school instruction ( $\rho = -0.408$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ). The correlation between enjoying extracurricular reading and reading interest turned out to be negative medium ( $\rho = -0.437$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ). Polish learners showed no relationship between the teacher allowing bringing own books to school or the teacher discussing with them works they were reading in their leisure time and their reading interests. A negative medium correlation appeared between reading interest and reading only literature needed for school instruction ( $\rho = -0.493$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ). No relationship showed between enjoying extracurricular reading and reading interest.

RQ4: Is there a relationship between younger learners' reading interests and the virtual environment?

**Table 5.** Relationship between younger learners' reading interests and virtual environment

	Reading interest					
	Slovakia		Czechia		Poland	
	$\rho$	n	$\rho$	n	$\rho$	n
I prefer reading on the Internet over a print book.	-.319***	576	-.384***	223	-.247***	189
I prefer listening to an audio-book over reading.	-.343***	568	-.358***	214	-.418***	197
I prefer reading books over watching films.	.453***	530	.448***	212	.330***	197

Legend:  $\rho$  – Spearman correlation coefficient; n = number; \* $p \leq .05$ . \*\* $p \leq .01$ . \*\*\* $p \leq .001$

Slovak learners manifested a negative medium correlation between their reading interests and preference for reading on the Internet ( $\rho = -0.319$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ), as well as preference for listening to an audiobook over reading it in the print form ( $\rho = -0.343$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ). A positive medium correlation appeared in preference for reading print books and watching films ( $\rho = 0.453$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ). The higher the learner's avid reading (reading interest achieving a higher level), the lower preference for reading on the Internet, listening to audiobooks and watching films. Czech learners manifested a negative medium correlation between their reading interests and preference for



reading on the Internet ( $\rho = -0.384$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ). There was also a negative medium relationship between their reading interests (interest) and preference for listening to an audiobook ( $\rho = -0.358$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ). The correlation between their preference for reading a print book and watching films was medium, 0.448. Polish learners manifested a weak negative correlation between reading interests and reading on the Internet ( $\rho = -0.247$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ). A negative medium correlation also appeared in their preference for listening to an audiobook and reading interests ( $\rho = -0.418$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ). A positive medium correlation was also between their preference for reading print books and watching films ( $\rho = -0.330$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ).

## **Discussion**

The research findings in the socio-cultural context of younger learners' reading interest development led to the following ideas. Child readers of the research sample aged 9 to 10 enjoyed visiting bookstores and libraries, they would have liked to own the books they had read and liked in their home libraries. Reading enthusiasm manifested more intensely in relation to time or space in that socio-cultural environment for voluntary reading. That environment stimulated intrinsic motivation to read even beyond school duties. The more enthusiastically the learners read, the higher the desire to own their favourite books and visit libraries more often. In this regard, historically strongly anchored traditionalism of the studied socio-cultural environment can be stated according to older research findings of Marhounova (1987).

The research showed that younger learners' reading enthusiasm was slightly related to parents enjoying their children reading at home in their leisure time. The level of learners' reading interests in the sample stabilised throughout primary education. That implies that family reading models do not play the most important role in early childhood. Pre-reading literacy positively motivates reading interests in children's pre-primary education (Babiaková, 2016). The findings showed that learners needed less or no help or guidance from their family members in choosing books for reading for joy in their leisure time. The family environment lost its priority position in giving advice. Father, as reading support for choosing book titles, partly held that position in Czech readers.

The school environment turned out to be less stimulating. The teacher was neither a desired nor a sought-after partner for discussions about voluntary reading. Findings (Lederbuchová, 2006) confirmed that learners preferred to share their impressions and opinions on what they had read with their friends. Family or school

environment appeared less stimulating or required if reading interest at this age achieved higher levels.

Virtual environment represented by reading on the Internet, listening to audiobooks or watching films was almost completely unrelated to the development of reading enthusiasm in this age group. Multimedia reading showed no potential to restrict or eliminate reading print books in the current digital age. The higher learners' reading interests, the less attracted they were to read on the Internet, listen to audiobooks, or watch films. That confirmed research findings of more than 15 years ago (Lederbuchová, 2006), where the preference for book reading prevailed over film watching in younger learners by more than 50%.

Limitations of our research were identified in the following: the respective national samples were not of the same sizes, the distribution of learners' reading interest levels in the national groups differed, and the research tool was nominal, restricting the selection of procedures for statistical processing of the data. The research's strength is authenticity since the research tool was designed by the initial qualitative strategy using interviews with children in focus groups and enabled identifying the characteristics of learners' reading interest levels and the relationship to the types of socio-cultural environment.

## **Conclusion**

Individual countries' educational conceptions are considerably related to the socio-cultural context of reading enthusiasm at the younger school age. Teachers should be professional support in forming readers' reading habits and self-reflection (Renuga & Kanchana Mala, 2015). We recommend taking the research results into account in the upcoming changes to the curriculum of the educational area of Language and Communication, concentrating on comprehending, and experiencing the read literary text. Systematically and simultaneously link children's reading at school, in family, and out-of-school institutions. Create space and time at school for peers to discuss leisure time reading and extracurricular selection of books with regular book and reading workshops for younger learners and invite family members and other actors of leisure time reading. Not resign on reading print books in the contemporary accelerated development in the use of virtual space.

## Acknowledgements

This study was created under Project VEGA No. 1/0455/18 *Research and Development of Reading Enthusiasm with Younger School-Age Learners*.

## References

- Alhamdu, A. (2016). Interest and reading motivation. *Psikis: Jurnal Psikologi Islami*, 1(1), 1–10. DOI: 10.19109/psikis.v1i1.552
- Anderson, R. C., Hiebert, E. H., Scott, J. A., & Wilkinson, I. A. G. (1984). *Becoming a nation of readers*. The National Institute of Education, U.S Department of Mucatoon Wmimigion. <https://doi.org/10.1177/002205741619600302>
- Babiaková, S. & Kasáčová, B. (2019). Reading preferences' analysis of Slovak younger learners. *ICERI 2019: 12<sup>th</sup> international conference of education, research and innovation* (pp. 1356–1363). IATED.
- Babiaková, S., & Kasáčová, B. (2019b). Research into the phenomena of the child's world. New trends, old challenges. *Eunomia – Sustainable development*, 96, 131–143.
- Babiaková, S., & Kasáčová, B. (2021). International Comparison of the Social Context of Younger Pupils' Reading. *The New Educational Review*, 63(1), 99–110. DOI: 10.15804/tner.2021.63.1.08
- Frankel, K., Becker, B., Pearson, P. D., & Rowe, M. (2016). „What is reading?“ to What is literacy. *Journal of Education*, 196(3). DOI: 10.1177/002205741619600303
- Garbe, Ch. (2008). *German-Czech study*. <https://www.skipcr.cz/dokumenty/ctenarstvi.pdf>
- Hidi, S. (2006). Interest: a unique motivational variable. *Educational Research Review*, 1, 69–82. DOI: 10.1016/j.edurev.2006.09.001
- Kids and family reading report. (2019). Scholastic. [https://www.scholastic.com/content/dam/KFRR/Downloads/KFRRReport\\_Finding%20Their%20Story.pdf](https://www.scholastic.com/content/dam/KFRR/Downloads/KFRRReport_Finding%20Their%20Story.pdf)
- Krapp, A. (2002). Structural and dynamic aspects of interest development: theoretical considerations from an ontogenetic perspective. *Learning and Instruction*, 12, 383–409. DOI: 10.1016/S0959-4752(01)00011-1
- Krapp, A. (2005). Basic needs and the development of interest and intrinsic motivational orientations. *Learning and Instruction*, 15, 381–395. DOI: 10.1016/S0959-4752(01)00011-1
- Levy, R. (2011). *Young children reading at home and at school*. SAGE Publications.
- Marhounová, J. (1987). *Čtenářem se člověk stává. [One becomes a reader]*. SNTL.
- Renuga, M., & Kanchana Mala, B. (2015). Students' Perceptions of Themselves as Readers and the Concept of Reading. *The New Educational Review*, 41(3), 86–97. DOI: 10.15804/tner.2015.41.3.07
- Reza, G. S., & Dehqan, M. (2013). Social-cultural theory and reading comprehension: the scaffolding of readers in an EFL context. *International Journal of Research Studies in Language Learning*, 2(3), 67–80. DOI: 10.5861/ijrsll.2012.183

**AUTHORS****LÝDIA SIMANOVÁ**

PhD, university teacher, Matej Bel University, Faculty of Education  
Ružová 13, Banská Bystrica, Slovakia.  
e-mail: [lydia.simanova@umb.sk](mailto:lydia.simanova@umb.sk)  
Website: <https://www.pdf.umb.sk/lsimanova/>  
ORCID: 0000-0002-9374-8581

**SIMONETA BABIAKOVÁ**

Doc., university teacher, Matej Bel University, Faculty of Education  
Ružová 13, Banská Bystrica, Slovakia.  
e-mail: [simoneta.babiakova@umb.sk](mailto:simoneta.babiakova@umb.sk)  
Website: <https://www.pdf.umb.sk/sbabiakova/>  
ORCID: 0000-0002-4038-7006