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***Can High Involvement of Roma Parents
Combat the Impact of Poverty? Resilience and Parental
Involvement in the Success of Roma Students at School
from the Students' Perspective***

***Czy duże zaangażowanie romskich rodziców może zwalczyć
skutki ubóstwa? Odporność i zaangażowanie rodziców
w sukcesy szkolne uczniów romskich z perspektywy uczniów***

ABSTRACT

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE: A recurring question in Romani studies is why it is difficult to achieve breakthrough successes in inclusion programs. These programs focus mainly on school subjects, although the role of parents is crucial to solving the problem. This study, therefore, concerns parents and their roles in school success.

THE RESEARCH PROBLEM AND METHODS: The purpose of this study is 1) to reveal how Roma and non-Roma pupils perceive their parents' involvement (PI) and 2) to come closer to explaining how PI affects students' school success under the control of other variables. The analysis sheds light on the views of children of Roma and non-Roma parents in Hungary. Cross-tabulation analysis and linear regression analysis were applied.

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THE PROCESS OF ARGUMENTATION: The database called Discovery of Hidden Value of Mentoring (DHVM) was analysed, which includes data from 13–14-year-old students (N = 206; 31.1% Roma, 68.9% non-Roma).

RESEARCH RESULTS: For all school-based and home-based PI indicators apart from one (parent–teacher conferences), Roma and non-Roma parents showed the same results. A student's disadvantaged financial situation most strongly determined their level of school success, overriding the compensatory effect of PI. The variance explained by the regression model was 30.4%, and the model was significant ($F(7) 5.18, p < 0.001$).

CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND APPLICABLE VALUE OF RESEARCH: Although financial disadvantage overrides the compensatory effect of PI on school careers and political entities need much action to improve people's financial situation, schools and families cannot look only to the outside for solutions. The most significant finding of the research is that there is a hidden resource to improve the school success of Roma pupils, namely PI. Based on the results, the schools are recommended to conduct the partner cooperation with parents, because together they can increase the children's future opportunities and resilience.

→ **KEYWORDS:** **ROMA PARENTS, PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT, RESILIENCE, MENTORING, SCHOOL SUCCESS**

STRESZCZENIE:

CEL NAUKOWY: Powtarzającym się pytaniem w literaturze dotyczącej studiów romskich jest to, dlaczego trudno jest osiągnąć przełomowe sukcesy w programach inkluzji. Programy te koncentrują się głównie na podmiotach szkolnych, chociaż rola rodziców jest kluczowa dla rozwiązania problemu. Dlatego też niniejsze badanie dotyczy rodziców i ich roli w sukcesie szkolnym.

PROBLEM I METODY BADAWCZE: Celem niniejszego badania jest 1) ujawnienie, w jaki sposób uczniowie pochodzenia romskiego i nieromskiego postrzegają PI swoich rodziców oraz 2) zbliżenie się do wyjaśnienia, w jaki sposób PI wpływa na sukces szkolny uczniów pod kontrolą innych zmiennych. Analiza rzuca światło na poglądy dzieci romskich i nieromskich rodziców na Węgrzech. Zastosowano analizę krzyżową i analizę regresji liniowej.

PROCES WYWODU: Przeanalizowano bazę danych o nazwie Discovery of Hidden Value of Mentoring (DHVM), która obejmuje dane uczniów w wieku 13–14 lat (N = 206) (Romowie: 31,1%, nie-Romowie: 68,9%).

WYNIKI ANALIZY NAUKOWEJ: Dla wszystkich szkolnych i domowych wskaźników PI z wyjątkiem jednego (zebranie rodziców), rodzice romscy i nieromscy wykazali takie same wyniki. Niekorzystna sytuacja finansowa ucznia najsilniej determinuje poziom jego sukcesów szkolnych, przeważając nad efektem kompensacyjnym PI. Wariancja wyjaśniona przez model regresji wynosi 30,4%, a model jest istotny ($F(7) 5,18, p < 0,001$).

WNIOSKI, REKOMENDACJE I APLIKACYJNE ZNACZENIE WPLYWU BADAŃ: Chociaż niekorzystna sytuacja finansowa przeważa nad kompensacyjnym wpływem PI na karierę szkolną, a podmioty polityczne potrzebują wielu działań, aby poprawić sytuację finansową, szkoły i rodziny nie mogą szukać rozwiązań tylko na zewnątrz. Najważniejszym wnioskiem z badań jest to, że istnieje ukryty zasób, który może poprawić sukces szkolny uczniów romskich, a mianowicie PI. Na podstawie wyników można zalecić szkołom partnerską współpracę z rodzicami, ponieważ wspólnie mogą zwiększyć przyszłe możliwości i odporność dzieci.

→ **SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: RODZICE ROMSCY, ZAANGAŻOWANIE RODZICÓW, REZYLIENCJA, MENTORING, SUKCES SZKOLNY**

Introduction

Parental Involvement in Roma Students' School Success

Why do international and national programs aiming to support Roma pupils' success in school have difficulty achieving breakthroughs? This is one of the leading questions in the literature on the topic, from the world of policy, school realities and research on resilient individuals' life trajectories (Brüggemann & Friedman, 2017; Rutigliano, 2020; Wilkin et al., 2009; Husz, 2023). The factors underlying the successes and failures of these programs are complex, and the question of what factors and regularities drive the broader social context in which these small-scale programs are supposed to achieve change is still unanswered (Fejes, 2013; Ferge, 2015; Gzásó, 2019; Pusztai, 2015; Schleicher, 2023). A full understanding of this broader social context is almost unattainable for a school, but there is one important actor with whom it can be in daily contact and through whom the success of Roma students can be facilitated more effectively. These are the parents of Roma children, who are often perceived as outsiders not only by schools but also by programs designed to help their children (Rutigliano, 2020; Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003; Khalfaoui et al., 2020). Our study therefore shifts the focus from the role of the school to Roma parents and their parental involvement (PI).

In the international literature, PI is broadly understood to include all activities of parents that promote the students' success in school. In a narrower sense, it refers to the parents' activities, attitudes, beliefs and expectations that specifically support a child's academic progress at school or at home. Following the international literature, the term refers to both school-based and home-based forms of PI. The former includes the parents' presence at school, whilst the latter entails the parents' activities at home which help the child to complete school tasks, taking into account the child's individual needs and paying attention to the child's school-related activities. Within school-based PI, we can distinguish between formal and informal forms. The formal subgroup includes activities such as participating in parent–teacher conferences or other official events. The informal forms of school-based PI include activities such as attending casual events or

talking to teachers (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003; Jeynes, 2011; Imre, 2017; Marton, 2019; Epstein, 2009; Koltói et al., 2019).

Epstein highlights the importance of active communication between parents and the school, shared responsibility and community involvement in supporting a child's education (2009). But how does this play out for Roma pupils and their parents? Often, Roma parents feel alienated from educational institutions, as if their walls are symbolically and effectively closed to them (Flecha, 2014; Hafičova et al., 2020; Lukács et al., 2023; Merchán-Ríos et al., 2023; Rutigliano, 2020; Wilkin et al., 2009). It is common for schools to understand education in terms of a two-part (teacher/student) system, in which the parent is forgotten or ignored. However, research has shown that all parties (students, teachers, parents, the wider local community and society as a whole) benefit from moving away from this narrow view, building closer cooperation between the family and the teachers and coordinating the educational goals (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003; Jeynes, 2011; Coleman, 1988; Killus & Paseka, 2020; Ritók, 2009). One of the prerequisites for this to occur is ample opportunities for interaction between parents and teachers, often in the form of extra-curricular activities (Epstein, 2009).

Ongoing communication between parents and teachers, as well as reaching out to each other, not only helps to foster a trusting relationship in which information about the child's behaviour, development and education can be shared, but also provides a space for discussing uncomfortable and difficult topics. Ultimately, this creates an opportunity for educational actors to move away from problem-oriented communication towards partnership-based solutions and for eliminating mutual prejudices (Killus & Paseka, 2020; Bempechat & Shernoff, 2012). An important cornerstone of all this is that both parties in their respective roles feel jointly responsible for the child's development and realise that together they are serving the best interest of the student (Bacskai, 2020; Blumenthal et al., 2020; Horváth et al., 2023; Wood & Mayo-Wilson, 2012; Koltói et al., 2019).

It is difficult to distinguish which aspects of PI can best maximise student outcomes, and the often hidden nature of PI at home makes it difficult for educators to learn about the "blind spot" that is PI. Therefore, in the present study, we focus on students who are authentic mediators of their parents' PI with the school and their sense of support at home in school-related activities. We shed light on the issue from the perspective of Roma and non-Roma students aged 13–14. The purpose of the study is 1) to reveal how Roma and non-Roma pupils perceive their parents' PI and 2) to come closer to explaining how PI affects students' individual-level school success under the control of other variables.

Roma Students in Hungary

The Roma are the most populous ethnic minority, not only in Hungary but also in Europe as a whole (FRA, 2014; Polónyi, 2016; Ćurčić et al., 2014; Rutigliano, 2020; Eurofound, 2017), with a rapidly growing population currently estimated at 700,000–900,000 people

nationwide¹ (Pénzes et al., 2018; Pásztor et al., 2016; Polónyi, 2016). After the turn of the millennium, European studies unanimously noted significant differences between Roma and non-Roma students at all levels of education (Bocsi & Ceglédi, 2021; FRA, 2014; Polónyi, 2016; Ćurčić et al., 2014; Brüggemann & Friedman, 2017; Kárpáti et al., 2014). Programs that were intended to create bridges for the Roma populations reported sparse progress in many European countries (Brüggemann & Friedman, 2017; Ćurčić et al., 2014). The school success of Roma students is below that of non-Roma students in Hungary as well (Polónyi, 2016; Széll & Nagy, 2018; Hajdu et al., 2015). A slight increase can be seen in the educational attainment of the population aged 15 years or higher who identify themselves as Roma in the microcensuses and censuses of recent years, but their school success compared to the overall population is still significantly lower (Table 1).

Table 1. Highest Educational Level of the Population Aged 15 and Above in Hungary (Self-Reported, in per cent)

		Less than eight classes	Eight classes	Secondary vocational education without school-leaving exam	School-leaving certificate	Higher educational degree
2022 Census	Whole population	2.3	21.2	21.1	33.1	22.3
	Gypsy (Roma)	13.2	54.1	19	10.7	2.9
2016 Microcensus	Whole population	3.2	23.2	20.9	32.2	20.5
	Gypsy (Roma)	17.3	60.3	14.2	6.9	1.3
2011 Census	Whole population	4.9	26.8	21.3	30.1	17
	Gypsy/Roma	23.1	57.6	13.1	5	1.2

Note: Gypsy (Roma) – “The respondent belonged to the given nationality if he/she indicated the given nationality in at least one of the questions concerning nationality, mother tongue, or language used in the family or among friends” (KSH, 2018, p. 7). In 2022, the proportion of people identifying themselves as Roma decreased compared to the previous census (244,834 in 2011; 209,909 in 2022).

Source: KSH, 2014a, 2014b, 2018, 2022.

To summarise the above, we argue that it is important to understand the issue in a much broader context than the school, and we have focused on one factor of particular importance: PI. 1) The first research question is: Do children of Roma versus non-Roma

¹ The most recent complete research recorded a population of 876,000. The future Roma population in Hungary is estimated at 961,000 in 2030 and approximately 1.1 million in 2100 (Pénzes et al., 2018; Polónyi, 2016).

parents differ in perceiving PI, and if so, in what ways? 2) How does PI affect school success, controlling for other variables? The analysis sheds light on the views of pupils aged 13–14 of Roma and non-Roma parents in Hungary.

Research Tools (Methods)

Instrument

The Discovery of Hidden Value of Mentoring (DHVM) study was carried out by a research team of students studying the impact of the Let's Teach for Hungary (LTH) mentor program and researchers of the MTA-DE-Parent-Teacher Cooperation Research Group.² The instrument contains a total of 247 items, based on newly created and adapted questions (NABC, 2021; Bacskai, 2020; Pusztai & Engler, 2020).³

Data Collection

The data collection was carried out in person in the second (spring) semester of the 2021/22 academic year. The technical background was provided by the Evasys survey creation and evaluation system. The instructor-supported online and in-person surveys were administered by members of our research team, who work as mentors in schools.⁴

Sampling Procedure and Sample Presentation

The participants of the survey were a total of 206 7th- and 8th-grade students who are attending primary schools in Hajdú-Bihar County, Hungary, where the LTH mentoring program is run. The sampling was designed to control for the effect of subject variables that were significantly related to the variables we investigated (e.g. classes with mentored students or not, schools' settlement type and institutional context measured by the students' social background).

² Emese Alter, PhD student; Tímea Ceglédi PhD, Katalin Godó, PhD student, Irén Godó, PhD student; Hunor Papp, MA student; Annamária Horváth, MA student; and Emese Tóth, MA student took part in developing the measurement tool and collecting the data.

³ Based on the study Value-Creating Education in 2020 (Maria Kopp Institute for Demography and Families). The research was led by Prof. Dr Gabriella Pusztai.

⁴ As our participants were 13–14-year-old students, their parents were informed about the details of the research via an informed consent form, and their permission was obtained before data collection took place.

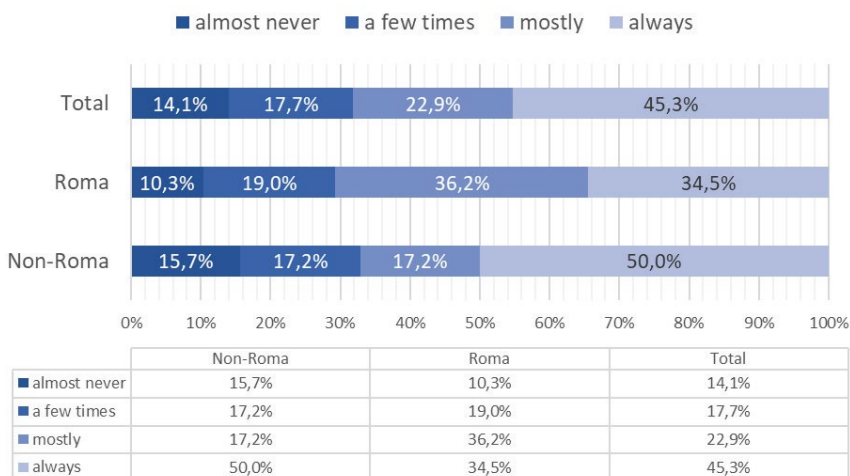
Results

Characteristics of Roma Parents' PI

As mentioned above, to answer the research questions we analysed the database of 13–14-year-old students, including Roma and non-Roma respondents. The questionnaire was based on the students' perception; therefore, all the results can only shed light on their point of view.

First, we investigated students' perceptions of their parents' formal school-based PI. Attendance at parent–teacher conferences was considered a key indicator of formal school-based PI. In Figure 1 it can be seen that non-Roma students' parents had the highest attendance at parent–teacher conferences (always attended), whilst among Roma students the second option (my parents mostly attended) was the most frequent answer.

Figure 1. Responses to the Question “How Often do Your Parents Attend Parent–Teacher Conferences?” Among Roma and non-Roma Students, in per cent



Note: N = 206; p = 0.024

Source: DHVM, 2022.

However, attending parent–teacher conferences was the only PI indicator in which we found a difference. For all other PI indicators, the children of Roma and non-Roma parents gave similar answers. Roma parents help their children with homework and studying as much as non-Roma parents. The same was true for discussing future goals with their children and being involved in school activities. Values and attitudes according to

PI are equally important for Roma and non-Roma students, and both groups equally felt that their parents and teachers share the same opinions about the world (Table 2).

Table 2. Summary of Further Analysis About Differences Between Roma and non-Roma Students' Perceptions About Their Parents' PI

Home-based PI	School-based PI	Values and attitudes
Help with studying and homework (NS) Talking about plans and further education, discussing what happened at school (NS) Packing the school bag, checking homework and learning (NS)	Formal: Attending parent–teacher conferences (non-Roma parents slightly more often) Participating in other official school events (school celebrations, opening and closing ceremonies of the year) (NS) Informal: Contacting teachers (NS) Participating in other school events (paper collection, school fair, family day) (NS)	PI is equally important for students. (NS) They equally feel that their parents and teachers have the same opinion about the world. (NS)

Note: NS – non-significant differences. N = 206, two-sample t-tests and crosstabs.

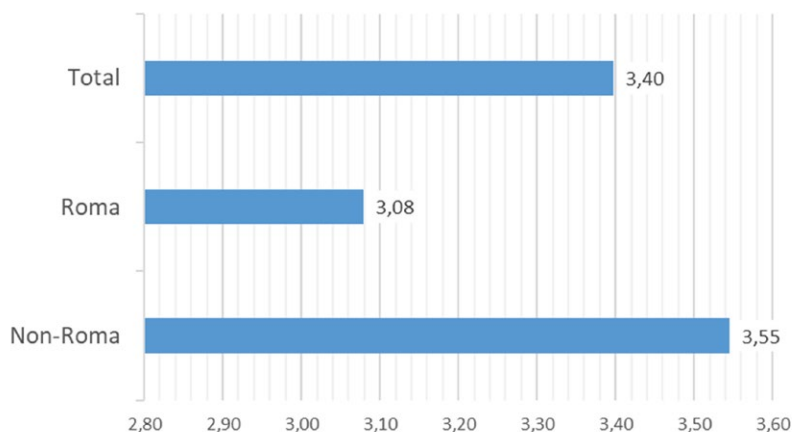
Source: DHVM, 2022.

Predictors of School Success

The second research question focuses on how perceived PI affects the school success of students (when controlling for other variables). The analysis looked at whether the above-seen active PI of Roma parents is reflected in students' school success. This time, the school success was measured by grade point average (GPA).

When looking at the raw data, the results show that Roma students had a lower GPA than their non-Roma peers. In this education system, students are graded from 1 to 5, where 5 represents the best grade. The difference between the two study groups was almost half a grade (0.47) in favour of non-Roma students, a difference that has a particularly large impact on the chances of further education in secondary school, which is relevant in this age group (Boudon, 1998; Bourdieu, 1977; Ceglédi, 2018; Mohammed & Engler, 2021; Fényes, 2000; Tódor, 2022; Papp, 2022).

Figure 3. GPA of Roma and non-Roma Students (Averages on a Scale of Grades 1–5, Where 5 is the Best Grade) (Literature, Mother Tongue, History, Mathematics and Science)



Note: Independent-sample t-test: $t(1) = 11.044$, $p = 0.001$; $N = 167$.

Source: DHVM, 2022.

We were curious to find out what deeper factors were behind the lower grades. Thus, we examined the effect of social status indicators on the variance in student GPA: mother's and father's education (0 – below high school graduation; 1 – at least high school graduation), objective financial capital (measured by an index based on the family owning/ having access to a laptop, a washing machine, a refrigerator, running water, a computer, a smartphone, stable internet connection, an e-book reader, mobile data, the children having their own room and a place where they can study without being disturbed), being Roma (0 – yes; 1 – no), financial situation measured as “ever having received child protection assistance”⁵ (0 – yes; 1 – no). The model explains 28.5% of the variance and is significant ($F(5) = 6.59$, $p < 0.001$). As shown in Table 3, in this model receiving child protection assistance (which indicates a very low family income) has significant explanatory power, and those whose families who have never received such assistance had a higher student GPA than those who did. Objective financial capital and Roma ethnicity did not have any explanatory power for student GPA.

⁵ Child protection assistance is a state subsidy for families who have an extremely low income.

Table 3. Variables Predicting GPA (1st Model)

	B	Std Error	Beta	t	Sig.
Constant	2.802	.264		10.61	<.001
Objective financial capital	.054	.036	.178	1.497	.139
Never received child protection assistance (indicating a very low income)	.682	.203	.403	3.360	.001***
Non-Roma ethnicity	-.113	.225	-.058	-.502	.618
Father's education	-.253	.207	-.142	-1.223	.226
Mother's education	.399	.214	.232	1.867	.066*

Note: The model explains 28.5% of the variance in school success, and is significant ($F(5) = 6.59$, $p < 0.001$; $N = 206$). Linear regression, beta coefficients; dependent variable: GPA.

Source: DHVM, 2022.

After this, we used another linear regression model to examine how the explanatory power of each variable for GPA varies when PI is also considered as a predictor. In this model, we included resilience (measured by the Connor–Davidson Scale), to see whether the parents' effort or the students' characteristics are enough to overcome the significant effect of requiring child protection assistance. The variance explained by the new model is 30.4%, and the model is significant ($F(7) 5.18$, $p < 0.001$). As can be seen from the coefficients (Table 4), the disadvantage of children receiving child protection assistance remained significant. Proactive involvement of the parent does not have significant explanatory power, but the child's resilience is a significant positive predictor of school success; therefore, unlike involvement, it may be an important protective factor against failure, even in financially disadvantaged families (Kovács et al., 2022; Varga, 2018).

Table 4. Variables Predicting GPA (2nd Model)

	B	Std Error	Beta	t	Sig.
Constant	2.193	.403		5.436	.000
Objective financial capital	.023	.037	.077	.632	.530
Never received support from child protection assistance	.711	.202	.423	3.520	.001***
Non-Roma ethnicity	-.170	.228	-.087	-.742	.461
Father's education	-.234	.211	-.132	-1.113	.27
Mother's education	.386	.219	.223	1.761	.083*
Proactive involvement of the parent	-.032	.178	-.019	-.181	.857
Student resilience	.243	.100	.263	2.443	.018*

Note: The model explains 30.4% of the variance in school success, and is significant ($F(7) = 5.18$, $p < 0.001$; $N = 206$). Linear regression; beta coefficients; dependent variable: GPA.

Source: DHVM, 2022.

Conclusions

The aim of the study was to answer the essential question of what is needed to improve the school success of Roma pupils. In the theoretical part, we argued that the issue should be understood in a much broader context than the school, and we focused on PI as a particularly important factor. The analysis is based on the responses of 13–14-year-old Hungarian children of Roma and non-Roma parents.

For all school-based and home-based PI indicators apart from one (parent–teacher conferences), Roma and non-Roma parents showed the same results. Although the non-Roma students had a better GPA than the Roma students, the linear logistic regression model showed that self-identifying as Roma alone does not explain the difference in school success. However, when we included the indicator of receiving child protection assistance (which indicates a very low family income) in the regression model, the explanatory power of being Roma disappeared. After these results, we deepened the question even further: Could PI be the solution? Unfortunately, the active PI of Roma parents is not enough to improve school success (if it is measured only by GPA), but the resilience of students had a significant impact. The result can be cause for hope that the learning of their children is important to Roma parents and that they devote a lot of time and energy to supporting them.

An important limitation of the research is that, due to the small sample size, the results are less generalizable. Nevertheless, it should be stressed that the research could be a conducive basis for further studies of Roma pupils in a larger sample and could contribute to a deeper understanding of the topic. Furthermore, it is important to highlight that we have seen only the children's self-reported perceptions about their parents' PI.

Although financial disadvantage overrides the compensatory effect of PI on school careers and much action is needed by policy actors to improve families' financial situation, schools and families cannot look only to the outside for solutions. Parents can be seen as partners within reach of the school. The most significant finding of our study for schools is that there is a hidden resource to improve the school success of Roma pupils, namely PI. Based on the results, it can be recommended that schools collaborate with parents as partners, because together they can increase the children's future opportunities and resilience. Good practices for collaboration are well-known in the international literature.

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