



The Impact of Family and School Cultural Capital on the Reading Literacy of Slovak Students

Simoneta Babiaková, Monika Brozmanová

¹Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica, Faculty of Education
Slovakia

²Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica, Faculty of Education
Slovakia

Abstract

The research study examines the influence of family cultural capital on students' reading literacy [1]; [2]. It presents findings from the VEGA research project no. 1/0720/22, Family Cultural Capital and Its Impact on Children's Academic Achievement, conducted at Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica, Slovakia. The study employs a quantitative sociological-pedagogical design using a questionnaire administered to 502 students aged 12 to 15. It focused on social dimensions of reading behavior concerning age, gender, and school location. Data were analyzed using contingency tables, Pearson's chi-square test, and the linear association test. Results show statistically significant differences between students from cultural centers and other localities regarding the number of books at home and the regularity of their mothers' reading. The likelihood of students discussing reading with their mothers decreases with age. A significant difference was also found between younger and older students in how often parents choose books for their children. Findings further reveal a low level of library use among students, with differences across grades, genders, and school locations. Reading motivation appears to be strongly shaped by external support, particularly from family and school [3]. Within families, crucial supportive factors include regular reading by family members, shared reading between parents and children, book availability at home, discussions about books, and family visits to libraries or bookstores. These findings emphasize the importance of family cultural capital in shaping reading literacy. The study contributes to understanding socio-cultural determinants of educational achievement and supports targeted interventions to foster reading engagement at home and in school settings.

Keywords: Cultural Capital, Reading Literacy

1. Introduction

The Slovak education system is currently undergoing a transformation process aimed at curricular reform. According to publication [4], this effort seeks to improve student learning outcomes, reduce the proportion of students performing at risk levels, diminish the impact of socio-economic status on basic literacy outcomes, and increase students' motivation to learn. Literacy is understood in a broader sense, encompassing all types of literacy, with reading and literary literacy holding a prominent position. An individual's ability to use and critically evaluate various texts for further learning, and to assess information in different life situations, depends on literacy. Reading comprehension and information processing are key competencies for lifelong learning and for the majority of professions. The quality of reading and various aspects of students' reading habits also influence language use. In this context, language can be seen as a medium that conveys knowledge and serves as a vehicle for the cultural memory of a segment of society. P. Bourdieu and J.C. Passeron [5] described language as an expression of an individual's social status, values, worldview, and the culture — referred to as linguistic capital.

Slovakia is a multicultural country in which, according to the most recent Population and Housing Census [6], at least 26 language groups were identified. Based on the Constitution of the Slovak Republic, these groups have the right to education in their mother tongue. Despite this, the primary language of instruction remains Slovak, which was the language of instruction for 89.7% of students in the 2024/2025 school year [7]. As a result, schools bring together a heterogeneous group of children who come from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. In some cases, students' home language and culture differ significantly from the language and culture of the school, which can lead to misunderstandings and failure in achieving reading literacy. In our research sample, this was particularly evident among students whose mother language is Romani and who are raised under the



influence of Romani culture. Marginalized Roma communities often live in social exclusion, which adversely affects not only children's access to education, but also their motivation and school attendance. Observations by the State School Inspectorate indicate that the language interactions of Roma children are limited, and therefore they do not benefit from the educational process to the same extent as their peers [8].

Students develop reading literacy through exposure to texts rich in linguistic and expressive features. Such texts are a key prerequisite not only for developing an understanding of literature, but also for developing spoken language. A deliberately guided reading experience supports the overall intellectualization of spoken language and contributes to language development across all its dimensions. Students' motivation to read and to develop a reading culture is supported by external mechanisms, primarily coming from their immediate social environment — namely, the family and the school [3]. A lack of interest and support from this environment often leads to a decline in students' interest in reading. Research confirms that more literate parents provide their children with a greater number of stimuli and opportunities that assist them in acquiring reading competencies [9]. Other studies show that children from families with more educated parents engage in communication more frequently and are encouraged to interact, which results, among other things, in a richer vocabulary [10].

Research [11] has shown that the social context of reading strongly correlates with reading development in both younger and older elementary school students. The social context is understood as the fundamental mechanism of everyday social interaction in which the child reader is involved. This context is shaped by various elements of the social environment whose influence is not only functional but also intentional. These include individuals from the student's immediate surroundings — teachers, parents, grandparents, peers, siblings — as well as interactions and stimuli from social media and the internet, all of which influence students' reading habits in different ways and to varying degrees. The authors of the referenced study found that the proportion of enthusiastic child readers decreases sharply with age. Many students become non-readers, even though they have no difficulties with reading itself. While older students read more fluently, quickly, and expressively, they enjoy reading less and are particularly reluctant to read in public. Interest in the reading habits of older students declines rapidly with age. When students do not read, their reading literacy does not develop. In the most recent PISA assessment cycle, 35.4% of Slovak students were classified as being at risk in reading literacy, which represents more than one-third of the student population completing compulsory education [12].

In the VEGA research project No. 1/0720/22, *Family Cultural Capital and Its Impact on Children's Academic Achievement*, we examined, among other aspects, the influence of the family's and school's cultural capital on the reading habits of Slovak students, with respect to their age, gender, and school location.

2. Methodology

The data were collected and processed between 2023 and 2025. We used a questionnaire administered to students in the 6th and 9th grades of elementary schools, which was part of a comprehensive sociological and pedagogical study. The questionnaire consisted of 69 items, including closed, semi-closed, and open-ended questions. Of these, 24 questions related specifically to students' reading habits and literacy. From a social context perspective, we investigated how many books students have at home, how many of these are children's books, who in the household reads books, with whom and how often students discuss the books they have read, and how often they borrow books from the school or local library. Subsequently, we compared the data demographically, considering grade level, gender, and school location.

For data analysis, we used contingency tables and tested statistical independence using Pearson's chi-square test. Linear relationships between variables were examined using a test of linear association. As measures of association, we calculated Pearson's correlation coefficient.

A total of 502 students from the upper levels of primary schools in the Banská Bystrica region responded to the questions regarding reading and literacy. The sample was a convenience sample. We divided the research territory into a cultural center (the regional capital city) and other localities (Table 1). The respondents attended 10 different schools varying in location, size, organization, and number of students. The cultural center was represented by four schools located in the regional capital – university city, with 257 respondents. These are fully organized schools for students from grades 1 to 9; one of these schools includes a kindergarten, and one is a private primary school. The other localities were represented by six schools (250 respondents) from one town and five villages. These include one primary school in a district town, one primary school approximately 10 km from the

cultural center, and four primary schools in municipalities with populations ranging from 500 to 3 300 inhabitants.

Table 1. Research sample

Grade	N	%	Gender	N	%	School location	N	%
6th grade	285	56,8	Boys	256	51,0	Cultural centre	254	50,6
9th grade	217	43,2	Girls	246	49,0	Other localities	248	49,4
Together	502	100	Together	502	100,0	Together	502	100,0

The schools involved in the research are located in a Self-Governing Region, which has a population of 614,350. According to data, 77% of the population identify as Slovak, 11% as Hungarian, and 2.5% as Roma [13]. However, according to the Atlas of Roma Communities [14], the Roma population in this region may constitute up to 17.5%, with a quarter of them living in marginalized communities on the outskirts or outside of villages [15]. Many Roma students attend the four rural schools involved in the study.

3. Research results

We examined the social context of students' reading and readership in relation to their family and home background based on the following research questions:

1. How many books do the students have at home? (Do not count magazines, newspapers, or their school textbooks.)
2. How many of those are children's books?
3. Who in the students' households reads books? Who do students see reading books (including e-books) at least once a week at home?
4. How often does the mother talk with the students about what they have read and what they learned from the book?
5. How often does the father talk with the students about what they have read and what they learned from the book?
6. How often do students borrow books (including e-books) from the school or local library?

Table 2. Social contexts of students' reading

Variables	Test Pearson Chi-square	Test value	p-value
1. How many books do the students have at home?	Grade Gender School location	7,084 2,248 54,739	0,214 0,814 0,001
2. How many of those are children's books?	Grade Gender School location	5,788 3,320 31,224	0,216 0,506 0,000
3. Who in the students' households reads books?	Grade Gender School location	0,849 0,935 10,799	0,357 0,334 0,001
- mother			
- father	Grade Gender School location	0,003 9,800 13,440	0,959 0,002 0,000
- siblings	Grade Gender School location	0,158 0,071 0,590	0,691 0,790 0,442
- grandparents	Grade Gender School location	0,298 0,191 1,913	0,585 0,662 0,167
- someone else	Grade Gender School location	3,963 1,273 0,021	0,047 0,259 0,886
4. How often do the mother talk with the students about what they have read and what they learned from the book?	Grade Gender School location	0,198 5,740 6,733	0,000 0,125 0,081
5. How often do the father talk with the students about what they have read and what they learned from the book?	Grade Gender School location	25,391 3,197 9,673	0,000 0,362 0,022

6. How often do students borrow books (including e-books) from the school or public library?	Grade	38,273	0,000
	Gender	19,228	0,000
	School location	19,228	0,062

Socioeconomic background, household resources, as well as the family's attitude towards reading influence the number of books owned by the household. The physical availability of books to children and adolescents has a positive impact on their reading [16]. Therefore, we asked the students how many books they have at home.

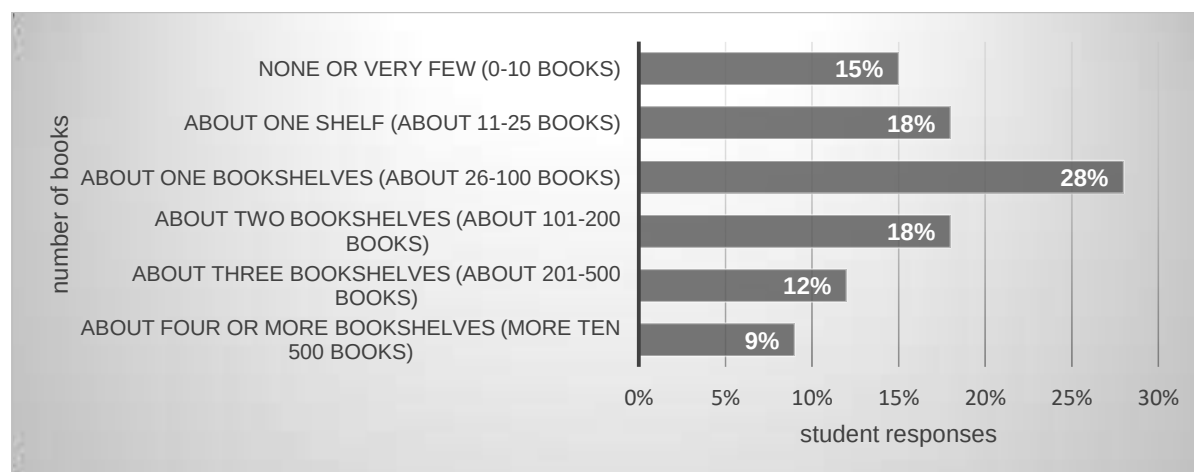


Figure 1. Number of books in the student's household

From Figure 1, we can see that nearly half of the respondents (46%) have between 26 and 200 books at home. The data suggest that ninth graders may have slightly more books in their households compared to sixth graders, although the difference is not very pronounced. No statistically significant relationship was found between grade level or gender and the number of books at home. The only minor deviation appears in the category of 500 books or more, where girls slightly outnumber boys. An interesting finding is that students living in the cultural center tend to have more books in their households, most likely due to better access to cultural institutions, education, libraries, and bookstores. This was confirmed by a statistically significant relationship between location and the number of books in the household."

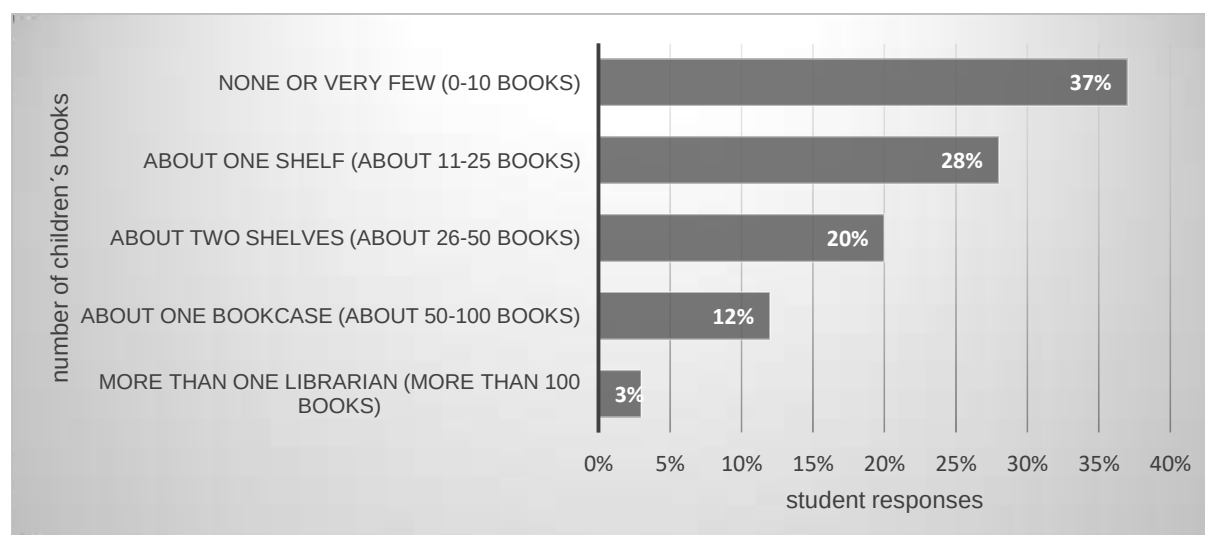


Figure 2. Number of children's books in students' households

More than half (64%) of the students reported having between 0 and 25 children's books in their household. The largest proportion of students (37%) indicated that they have 0 to 10 children's books at home. No statistically significant relationship was found between grade level or gender and the number of children's books in the household. This suggests that the distribution of children's books is very similar across younger and older students, as well as between boys and girls. A statistically

significant difference, however, was observed between students from the cultural center and those from other locations. Students from the cultural center reported having significantly more children's books at home.

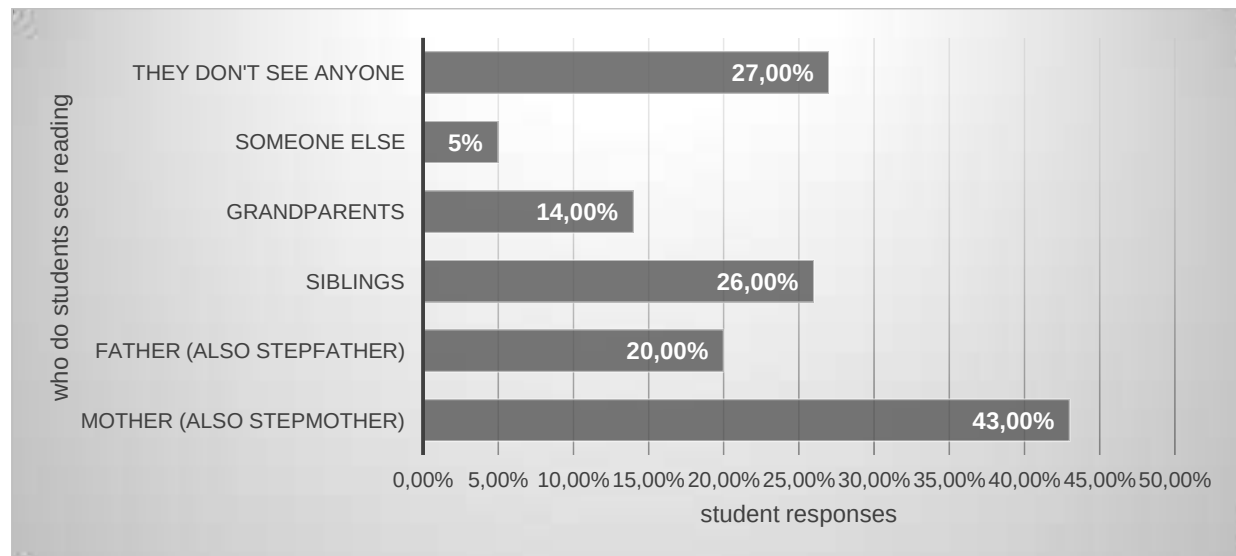


Figure 3. A person in the student's household who reads books regularly at least once a week

The most frequently reported person who regularly reads books was the mother (43%), which points to her dominant role in supporting reading. In contrast, only 20% of students mentioned the father, which is less than half compared to the mother. The father was identified in only one out of five cases, highlighting a marked imbalance compared to mothers. Other family members mentioned were siblings (26%) and grandparents (14%). More than a quarter of students (27%) reported that they do not see anyone at home reading books. Only 5% of children indicated that 'someone else' reads, suggesting that reading is largely confined to the close family circle.

No statistically significant differences were found between sixth and ninth graders. However, a significant difference emerged between students from the cultural center and those from other locations regarding the mother's regular reading. In the cultural center, students reported the mother as a reading person considerably more often (50%) than students from other locations (only 36%). Twice as many students in the cultural center (26%) reported the father as a reader compared to students from other locations (13%). Boys indicated the father as a reader more frequently (25%) than girls (14%). This asymmetry was further confirmed by a statistically significant difference between boys' and girls' responses. It may be assumed that fathers read more often in households with boys than in households with girls, or that boys are more attentive to their fathers' reading. With regard to siblings or grandparents as readers, no statistically significant differences were observed in relation to grade level, gender, or location.

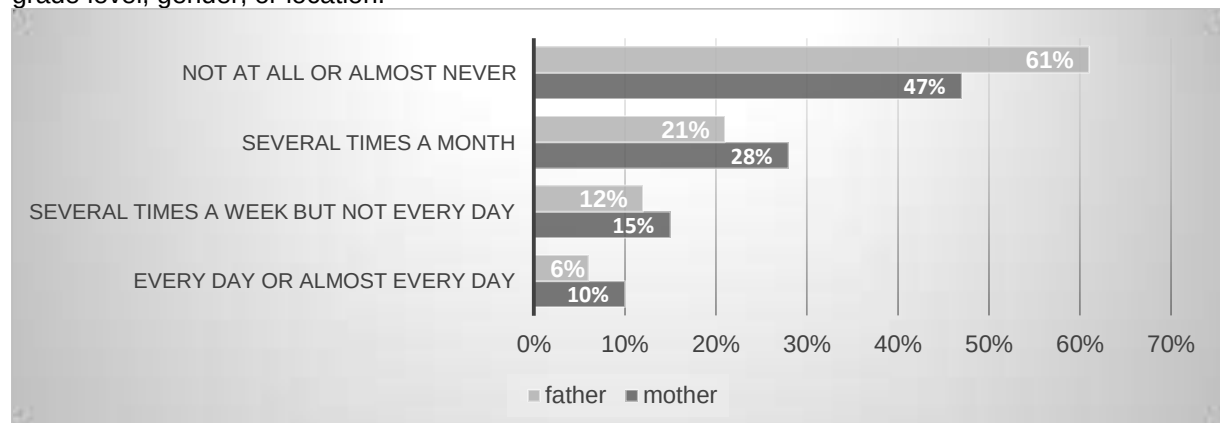


Figure 4. How often do the mother and the father talk with the students about what they have read

Daily dialogues about reading are rare. Only 1 in 10 students reported talking daily about reading with their mother, and only about 1 in 16 with their father. A total of 61% of respondents stated that they do

not talk, or hardly ever talk, with their father about reading, while 47% reported the same regarding their mother.

A statistically significant difference was found between younger and older students in how often their mother and father talk with them about what they have read. With increasing age, the likelihood of children talking with their parents about reading decreases markedly. This decline may reflect not only children's growing independence but also a decreasing parental interest in the reading lives of older children.

Although no statistically significant difference was observed between boys and girls in conversations with the mother, mothers tend to discuss reading more often with daughters than with sons. More than half of boys (52%) and 43% of girls reported that they hardly ever talk with their mother about reading. Fathers, however, were reported to talk significantly more often about reading with students from the cultural center compared to those from other locations.

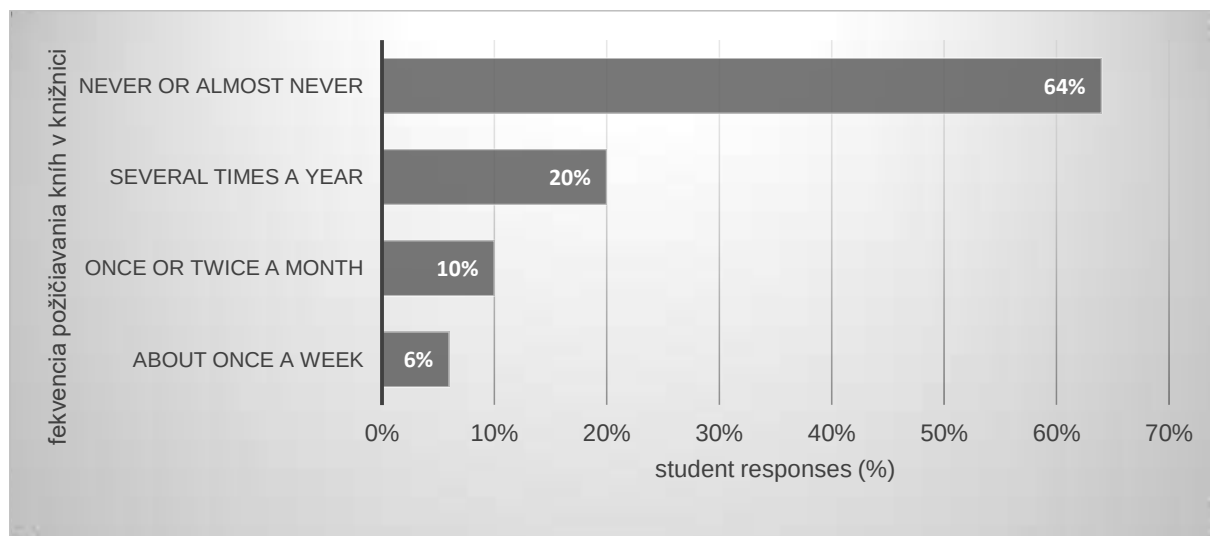


Figure 5. Frequency of borrowing books from a school or public library

Most respondents (64%) said they never or rarely borrow books or e-books from the library, while 20% said they borrow them only a few times a year. Only a small proportion of students visit the library regularly – 6% once a week and 10% once or twice a month. The data indicate a low level of library use among this group of students.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The Research findings confirmed that the largest proportion of the pupils surveyed had only 0–10 children's books at home. This finding suggests that some families may simply prefer other forms of education or entertainment for their children, such as games, sports, and television, and therefore do not place emphasis on collecting children's books. However, it may also mean that they do not have sufficient financial means to purchase children's books, which are currently expensive. If we take into account the location of the elementary schools from which our respondents came, we can clearly assume that the socioeconomic background of some students from the cultural center and other locations is different. This is also confirmed by our research findings. In other locations, it is more common for pupils to have fewer books at home than in the cultural center. A statistically significant relationship between location and the number of books in the home has been confirmed. This may be related to various socio-economic factors:

Parental education – In rural areas or economically less developed regions, the proportion of parents with higher education may be lower, which can be associated with a reduced emphasis on reading at home and a smaller number of books in the household.

Students' native language and parents' language – The mother tongue of some of our respondents in rural schools is Romani. Many of these students' parents speak only Romani at home. There is a shortage of books in the Romani language. In 2020, *The Good Romani Fairy* – Kesaj Foundation, with financial support from the Fund for the Support of the Culture of National Minorities in Slovakia, published only two interesting and useful titles, while a third remains in manuscript form [17].

Household financial situation – Books can represent a costly investment, especially if a family has a limited budget and must prioritize other expenses.



Access to culture and educational institutions – Libraries, bookstores, and cultural events are more common in cultural centers, which motivates households to own books.

Historical and regional factors – Localities with a richer history of education (e.g., university towns) may have more households with larger numbers of books.

Differences in the number of books at home are often influenced by a combination of parents' education and language, economic situation, availability of libraries, cultural customs, and regional factors. There is also a statistically significant relationship in favor of students from the cultural center between location and the number of children's books in the household. The result may be influenced by the responses of our respondents from marginalized Roma communities.

Respondents most frequently reported seeing their mother read at home. However, more than one quarter of students indicated that they do not see anyone reading books in their household. This may signal a lack of reading role models in the students' home environment. In the cultural center, students significantly more often identified the mother as a reading person. Although the father was mentioned substantially less frequently than the mother, students' responses differed significantly with respect to the school's location. In the cultural center, the father was identified twice as often as in other locations. These results suggest that students in the cultural center are exposed to more reading stimuli and role models in the form of both a reading mother and father.

More than half of the students do not talk with their father about what they have read, and half do not discuss it with their mother. With increasing student age, conversations with parents about reading become even less frequent. This may be due to the growing independence of older students and their preference for discussing reading with peers. It may also be related to parents' lack of knowledge about how to communicate effectively with their adolescent children about reading and books [18].

Statistical results confirmed that sixth-grade students and girls borrow books from libraries significantly more often than ninth-grade students and boys. The majority of respondents do not borrow books from either school or public libraries at all. Access to school library materials was negatively affected by school closures and limited access during the COVID-19 pandemic [19]. Another contributing factor may be the number and condition of school libraries in Slovakia. In 2022, financial expenditures for the acquisition of library collections decreased by 37.6% compared to 2021 [20]. This decline meant that school libraries were unable to purchase new book titles, leaving some library collections outdated. The research findings indicate that the social context of students' reading practices is not favorable.

Interest in reading books and the development of readership are beneficial for the personal growth of individuals, as they foster imagination, empathy, critical thinking, vocabulary, and language competencies. The book as a medium facilitates the understanding of broader contexts, stimulates creativity, and supports the development of emotional intelligence, while shared reading with parents strengthens mutual bonds. For this reason, it is recommended that parents serve as role models in reading, engage in reading as a shared family activity, maintain discussions about books that have been read, and encourage curiosity and interest in reading.

It is essential to allocate financial resources for the operation and activities of school libraries and to create conditions for the education of school librarians, enabling them to implement innovations, organize, coordinate, and provide support for the development of reading literacy, readership, and reading culture among students through various educational and creative approaches. Furthermore, they should be equipped to design, manage, and implement discussions, reading competitions, and activities linked to projects that promote students' reading.

The publication of this article was supported by a grant from the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Youth of the Slovak Republic within the VEGA project No. 1/0720/22, Family Cultural Capital and Its Impact on Children's Academic Achievement.

REFERENCES

- [1] Nunes, A. Ch., De Andrade, J. M. The impact of cultural capital on school performance. In *Frontiers in Education*. Volume 9 - 2024 DOI: 10.3389/feduc.2024.1389574 <https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/education/articles/10.3389/feduc.2024.1389574/full>
- [2] Yu, S., Liu, Y. & Guo, R. How does my family affect me?" The family cultural capital impact on Chinese junior high school students' academic achievement. In *Elsevier. Thinking Skills and Creativity*. Volume 46 – 2022. 101146 DOI: /10.1016/j.tsc.2022.101146 <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S1871187122001481?via%3Dihub>
- [3] Liu, Y. Exploring the impact of family capital on family reading culture of primary and secondary school students. In *Frontiers in Educational Research*. Vol. 6, Issue 28:, 2023. 1-

- 16, DOI: 10.25236/FER.2023.062801 <https://francispress.com/uploads/papers/7F2tbHBdXmFWtYaXUHMDATdeHvkhQe35gcqglX9k.pdf>
- [4] Hapalová, M. et. al. Vzdelávanie pre 21. storočie. Východiská zmien v kurikule základného vzdelávania. [Education for the 21st Century: Foundations for Changes in the Elementary Education Curriculum]. Bratislava: Štátny pedagogický ústav, 2022. <https://vzdelavanie21.sk/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Vychodiska-zmien-v-kurikule-zakladneho-vzdelavania.pdf>
- [5] Bourdieu, P. & Passeron, J. C. *Language and Relationship to Language in the Teaching*. 1994.
- [6] Štatistický úrad SR. [Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic]. DataCube – Demografia a sociálne štatistiky, [Demography and Social Statistics]. 2024. <http://datacube.statistics.sk/>
- [7] Centrum vedecko-technických informácií SR. [Slovak Centre of Scientific and Technical Information]. Štatistická ročenka – základné školy 2024/2025 [Dátový set]. [Statistical Yearbook – Primary Schools 2024/2025 Data set]. CVTI SR, 2024.
- [8] Švidraň Basarabová, B. *Identification of Communication Barriers of Roma Children in the Educational Process*. EDULEARN25 Proceedings, 2025. pp. 6598-6605.
- [9] Stanovich, K. E. *Progress in understanding reading: Scientific foundations and new frontiers*. New York: Guilford Press, 2000. ISBN 9781572305656
- [10] Hoff, E. Causes and consequences of SES-related differences in parent-to-child speech. In: Bornstein, M. H., Bradley, R. H. (Eds.), *Socioeconomic status, parenting, and child development*, s. 147 – 160. Mahwah, NJ, US: Lawrence Erlba Associates Publishers, 2003.
- [11] Babiaková, S., Kasáčová, B. & Cabanová, M. Čítanie a čitateľstvo slovenských detí : výskum detského čitateľstva a medzinárodné komparácie. [Reading and Readership of Slovak Children: Research on Children's Reading and International Comparisons]. Banská Bystrica: Belianum. Vydavateľstvo Univerzity Mateja Bela, 2020. ISBN 978-80-557-1758-6
- [12] Miklovičová, J., Galádová, A. Správa o realizácii medzinárodnej štúdie PISA 2022 a prvé výsledky za SR. [Report on the Implementation of the PISA 2022 International Study and Initial Results for the Slovak Republic]. Online. Národný inštitút vzdelávania a mládeže [National Institute for Education and Youth], 2023. https://www2.nucem.sk/dl/5676/PISA_2022_Kratka_sprava_SVK.pdf
- [13] Štatistický úrad Slovenskej republiky. Banskobystrický kraj - charakteristika regiónu. [Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic. Banská Bystrica Region – Regional Profile]. <https://slovak.statistics.sk/wps/portal/ext/themes/regional/bansko%20bystricky%20kraj/about!ut/p/z1/>
- [14] Atlas rómskych komún. [Atlas of Roma Communities]. 2025. <https://www.romovia.vlada.gov.sk/atlas-romskych-komunit/sociograficke-mapovanie-romskych-komunit-2025/?csrt=16133598628408798726>
- [15] Program hospodárskeho a sociálneho rozvoja BBSK na roky 2022–2030. Banskobystrický samosprávny kraj. [Banská Bystrica Self-Governing Region. (2022–2030). Economic and Social Development Program of the Banská Bystrica Self-Governing Region]. <https://www.bbsk.sk/storage/app/media/dokumenty/phsr/phsr-bbsk-2022-2030-uvod-a-analiticka-cast.pdf>
- [16] Šebová, M., Marcinová, V. Ako pomôcť deťom, aby rady čítali. Reflexie medzinárodného výskumu a politik na podporu čitateľskej gramotnosti. [How to Help Children Enjoy Reading: Reflections on International Research and Policies Supporting Reading Literacy]. Online. Košice: Technická univerzita, 2020. ISBN 978-80-553-3533-9. file:///C:/Users/docPaedDrBabiakovaSi/Downloads/Policy_Paper_Literacy-1.pdf
- [17] Knižné novinky, ktoré vyšli v rómskom jazyku. Maget. [New Books Published in the Roma Language]. <https://maget.sk/predstavujeme-publikacie-nadacie-dobra-romska-vila-kesaj/>
- [18] Wang, B. Afri, E. A Case Study of Parent-Child Interaction In Their Reading Activity. *International Journal of English and Applied Linguistics*. 3 (2) 2023. E-ISSN: 2787-9482 DOI: doi.org/10.31237/2372 <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/e457/1d9169bd5edf4b9a5fb38d8db286097031b8.pdf>
- [19] Soulen, R., Tedrow, L. Students' frequency of access to school library materials in transformative times. *Journal of Librarianship and Information Science*. 54(1), 2021:096100062110377 DOI: 10.1177/09610006211037721 https://www.researchgate.net/publication/353805404_Students%27_frequency_of_access_to_school_library_materials_in_transformative_times
- [20] Cenigová, R. Analýza stavu školských knižníc za rok 2022. [Analysis of the State of School Libraries for 2022. (2022). [Data set/report].



https://casopiskniznica.snk.sk/fileadmin/user_upload/Rocnik_2023/2023_10_20_Mgr_Rozalia_Cenigova.pdf