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**B.A. Thesis**

***The Role of Family Background and Media in  
the Lives of Young Learners***

*Význam rodinného prostředí a médií v životě čtenářů  
mladšího školního věku*

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## **Prohlášení**

Prohlašuji, že bakalářskou práci s názvem *The Role of Family Background and Media in the Lives of Young Learners* jsem vypracovala samostatně. Použitou literaturu a podkladové materiály uvádím v příloženém seznamu literatury.

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## **Abstract**

The aim of this thesis is to depict the factors influencing children's reading literacy and compare them in the context of Czech and British cultural background. The thesis is focused on children aged 11-12 years. The key question is, to what extent does the media and the family background influence children's attitudes towards reading. The theoretical part investigates the nature of children's reading at the end of the young school age and the influences which shape it. Next part introduces general tendencies in the reading practice of children nowadays and compares reading habits of Czech and British 12-year-olds. The third part consists of a study divided into two sections. Both sections are based on a questionnaire which explores the reading habits of 12-year-olds.

## **Key words**

family background, gender gap, media, media literacy, peer culture, reader, reading, reading aloud, reading online, reading literacy, television viewing, young school age

## **Abstrakt**

Cílem této práce je popsat faktory ovlivňující dětskou čtenářskou gramotnost a srovnat je na pozadí českého a britského kulturního rámce. Práce se zaměřuje na děti ve věku 11-12 let. Klíčovou otázkou je, do jaké míry rodinné prostředí a média ovlivňují přístup dětí ke čtenářství. Teoretická část zkoumá povahu dětského čtenářství na konci mladšího školního věku a vlivy, které ho formují. Další část představuje obecné tendence, které se pojí ke čtenářské praxi dnešních dětí a srovnává čtenářské návyky českých a britských dvanáctiletých dětí. Třetí část se skládá z výzkumné práce, která je rozdělena na dvě části. Obě části jsou založeny na dotazníku, který zkoumá čtenářské návyky dvanáctiletých dětí.

## **Klíčová slova**

čtenář, čtenářská gramotnost, čtení, čtení online, média, mediální gramotnost, mladší školní věk, předčítání, rodinné prostředí, rozdíly mezi pohlavími, sledování televize, vrstevníci

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## Introduction

The basic impulse to write this thesis was the publication of the article “Mother, read to me” (“Mámo, čti mi”) in *Mladá fronta DNES* in January 2010. The author of this article refers to a British research published in *The Telegraph* which stated that three-quarters of British parents are too busy to read to their children. This leads her to think about the situation in the Czech Republic and she concludes that more and more parents do not have time to read to their children, which has a negative effect on their reading practice. We decided, therefore, to provide an in-depth examination of this topic with the aim of depicting various factors influencing children’s reading literacy and comparing them in the context of Czech and British cultural background.

The thesis is divided into three parts. In the theoretical part, the nature of children’s reading at the end of the young school age and the influences which shape it are investigated. We also try to discover the role of family background and parental involvement in developing the child’s reading habits. Finally, the relationship between reading and the media is analysed.

The second part is divided into two sections. Firstly, the differences in boy’s and girl’s reading habits are portrayed. Then the nature of reading online and parental involvement as well as the image of reading in the past and today are discussed. The following section moves from the general tendencies and compares reading habits of Czech and British 12-year-olds. The PISA 2009 results and the outcomes of a number of further studies conducted on this topic are outlined. This section serves as the basis for the third part of the thesis.

The third part consists of two sections based on a questionnaire. The first section relates to our hypotheses and tries to confirm or disprove them. 96 Czech learners serve here as a sample. The second section compares the factors influencing the reading habits of Czech and foreign grammar school learners. 52 learners represent its sample.

The conclusion is related to the six hypotheses which are the backbone of the whole thesis. These are as following:

**H1:** Reading aloud to children positively influences their attitude towards reading.

**H2:** Fathers are less involved in their child’s reading activities than mothers.

**H3:** The more reading materials the home environment provides, the better reading conditions children have and it is positively reflected in their attitude to reading.

**H4:** Young learners predominantly exceed the recommended length of time spent watching television and using a computer.

**H5:** The moderation of time spent watching television and using a computer has a good impact on child's reading practice.

**H6:** If a child has its own television and a computer, his or her reading activity is lower.

# **1. Theoretical Part**

## **1.1. Children's reading at the end of the young school age**

Reading plays an important role in the lives of children at the end of the young school age. According to Chaloupka at the age of ten or eleven children undergo important changes in their life. They abandon the certainties of the early childhood and become unsure in many ways. Their parents stop devoting so much of their free time to them and at school they have to make a transition from primary to senior level successfully. "It is a period of impaired emotionality and the time of seeking answers" (Chaloupka 13; translated by the author). Chaloupka adds that it is reading which very often provides children with these answers as well as poses them further questions. Moreover, reading quality literature usually supplies them with positive emotions.

On the other hand, some children of this age regard reading as useless. "Reading becomes an act of self-awareness and self-realisation just to the extent the child feels it necessary. The interest in literature is thus an individual feature of every personality" (Chaloupka 16; translated by the author). This assumption could be one of the reasons why girls are generally considered to be better and more devoted readers since emotionality is widely connected with women. From this point of view, it seems natural that some children search for emotions in literary works but at the same time there are some who either do not have the need to or rather prefer other and less demanding alternatives like TV series, cartoons, computer games etc.

## **1.2. Influences on children's reading**

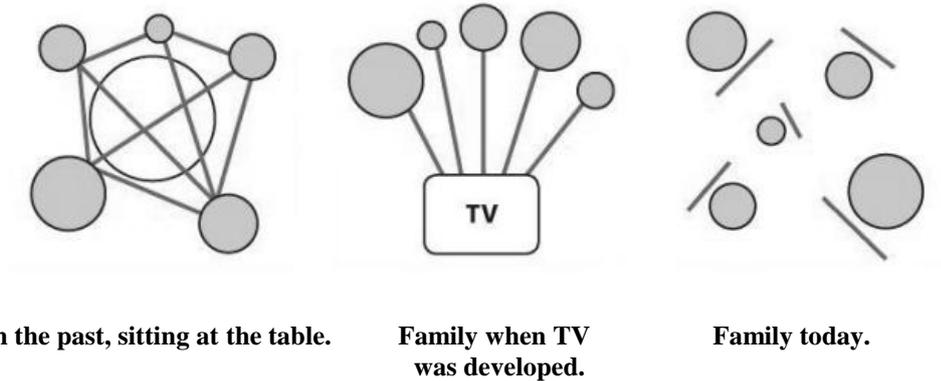
Not only are some children more captured by reading than the others, but also their taste for reading is indefinite. Chaloupka mentions "the attitudes and interests of early adolescents can be changed and influenced easily" (18; translated by the author).

### **1.2.1. The modern society**

Pennac says that "our children are sons and daughters of this time, whereas their parents were just children of their parents, they were not clients of the society" (21). In contrast, today's readers are confronted with much wider selection of reading materials as well as with a greater variety of accessible media. In addition to this, in the modern society

there is very little time left on sharing. Sometimes it is just a TV screen which connects the family members after a long day at school and work, sometimes not even that. The concept of family as a community is gradually being replaced by the concept of family as a sum of individualities. The shift in family traditions is described in Braun-Galkowska scheme.

### Braun-Galkowska Scheme <sup>1</sup>



#### 1.2.2. Peer culture

When they start to be affected by the peer culture, the family and the school culture lose their major position within the life of early adolescents. These cultures very often contradict one another. “There is a conflict between the cultural capital valued by school culture and that of peer culture. Peer culture puts the emphasis on the emotional fascinations of media content, involving very different forms of cultural capital than those valued in school” (Rydin 108). The media is a powerful force in that it provides a strong emotional content and it responds to the requirements of the society faster than books. Besides, reading is the activity which is generally promoted by school and teenagers want to act rather upstream.

Rydin comments on this by citing William Corsaro’s book *The Sociology of Childhood* (1997). “Children do not just passively internalize adult skills and knowledge. Rather they creatively appropriate information from the adult world to produce their own unique peer culture” (Rydin 18). This is one of the general tendencies in a society. Every new generation differs from the previous one. The parents of contemporary teenagers were

<sup>1</sup> Retrieved from <<http://www.celeceskoctedetem.cz/cz/menu/30/cele-cesko-cte-detem-sup-sup-/o-projektu/>> 14 February 2011.

already born into a ‘TV-friendly’ environment, although they were barely spoiled by computers and other relatively modern media. Nevertheless, their reading practice has already been affected by the media and they pass this practice on to their offspring. That is why we presuppose that the reading practice of today’s teenagers will show new trends and the media will play an important role in their lives.

### **1.3. The role of family background**

Family environment is the first and foremost socialization area for children and parents can be considered as the child’s first teachers. According to Trávníček “family is the essential environment for developing reading” (translated by the author). In fact, the process of acquiring reading habits starts already in the early childhood and parents help to guide their children through it. Reading to children is a critical step of this development.

#### **1.3.1. Reading aloud**

As Trelease explains, “listening comprehension feeds reading comprehension” (2) and he divides the process of child’s literacy acquisition into four stages: listening to vocabulary – speaking – reading – writing. The more children are read to in the early age, the more they are familiar with words and their meaning and the better conditions they have when starting to learn how to read and write. These children are also supposed to have positive attitude towards reading itself. Trelease adds “whenever an adult reads to a child, [...] a pleasure-connection is being made between child and book” (2).

Moreover, reading aloud to children nurtures the relationship with their parents and it has many other positive effects. Bonci enumerates these benefits: “language growth, reading achievement and writing, enhancement of children’s language comprehension and expressive language skills, listening and speaking skills, later enjoyment of books and reading, understanding narrative and story, and precocious reading in young children” (5).

#### **1.3.2. Father’s involvement**

When we consider father’s influence on children’s reading habits, the range of benefits will become much broader. Mothers are generally associated with the reading practice of their children. Nevertheless, father’s involvement seems to have a positive effect on children’s reading. Clark states that “children who grow up with actively

involved fathers benefit in numerous ways, including increased cognitive abilities; higher self-esteem; increased social competence; healthier relationships with peers both as pubescents and adults; access to greater financial resources, and better health outcomes” (5).

### **1.3.3. Parents as role models**

We must acknowledge here that there are differences among families. Bourdieu highlights that “surveys indicate that educational level and duration, as well as social origin, determine all cultural practices” (2). This assumption may be applied to the reading habits of various social strata as well. It indicates that learners from well-educated families are better readers. Such parents are likely to have more reading materials at home and their children can see them reading more often. It is extremely important for children to see their parents reading since parents impersonate child’s role models and children are apt to copy their practice in many ways.

### **1.3.4. School vs. family**

Although school gradually takes on the main role of educators, the family environment still has a notable function. Pennac says that when children learn how to decode signs into words, most of them become enthusiastic readers: they are able to syllabicate whatever they see. According to him, it is mostly up to the parents to encourage them in it (34-37). Moreover, as Trelease mentions “the child spends 900 hours a year in school and 7 800 hours outside school“ (1), thus the family environment is heavily influential and parental responsibility is high.

## **1.4. Reading vs. media**

### **1.4.1. Connection between reading and media**

Reading is an active process for “the reader must actively construct a meaning on the basis of a collection of signs that the text presents” (De Certeau 168-169). On the other hand, “industrialised culture”, as Chaloupka names it, is connected with a mere accepting of facts. By industrialised culture he means mainly the mainstream television production. He thinks that excessive exposing to this culture “may lead to passivity and suppression of the quest for meaning” (49; translated by the author).

However, we shall not limit ourselves to the criticism of television viewing, and the use of electronic media in general, at the expense of reading. Nowadays we may find quality products of the electronic media as well as various printed reading materials of poor quality. Livingstone even claims that “moderate amounts of TV viewing benefit young children’s reading” and that “children can develop a range of skills through watching television, including wider vocabularies, more expressive language, knowledge of storytelling and imagination” (4). That is why we should rather comprehend reading and the media use in interrelationship.

Hurrellmann explains the interconnection between reading and using media in the following way: “Since language and conceptual competencies, differentiation of perspectives, emotional interest and concentration on meaning comprehension are trained by means of reading, the reading competency is the major functional prerequisite for using other media. Reading is the key to media culture” (Garbe 9; translated by the author). It suggests that competent readers are more proficient media users. They are able to abstract the meaning easily and think about the subject matter. Saxer thinks that “as the most efficient media pedagogy we shall consider the effective teaching of reading, in which the complex media literacy should be rooted” (Garbe 9; translated by the author).

#### **1.4.2. Online reading**

Nevertheless, reading quality literature should not be overshadowed by the use of the media. It is natural that children use audiovisual and digital media in addition to reading ‘old’ printed media. However, printed media should not be *substituted* by screen media. One could argue that many digital media, especially the internet, involve the reading activity too. Yet online reading is different in nature and changes one’s reading habits. Naughton says that “users are not reading online in the traditional sense [...] new forms of “reading” are emerging as users “power browse” horizontally through titles, contents pages and abstracts, going for quick wins.” Rich adds “on paper, text has a predetermined beginning, middle and end. On the internet, readers skate through cyberspace at will and, in effect, compose their own beginnings, middles and ends. [...] What we are losing is the sustained, focused, linear attention developed by reading.” That is why school is here to help children learn how to handle the media functionally and parents are here to monitor the amount of time their child spends in front of the screen and the web pages he or she is searching through.

## **2. Presentation**

### **2.1. General tendencies**

#### **2.1.1. Boys vs. girls**

Multiple research studies have confirmed that there exists a gap between boys' and girls' attitude to reading. Therefore their scores in reading differ. According to the survey "Literacy Skills for the World of Tomorrow" developed by UNESCO and OECD in 2000, "girls had higher reading scores in every one of 43 countries surveyed" (TLC). They proved that girls are more engaged in reading and read more often. As a result boys are apt to read less fluently and they read for the purpose of getting information rather than for pleasure.

However, these numbers may not be absolutely accurate as the image of a reader may be interpreted differently by children. The authors of the survey conducted by National Literacy Trust mention that "young people who do not describe themselves as readers are still reading a variety of materials, even in the case of many of the boys; the big difference is simply that those who do not call themselves readers do not read fiction books" (Akerman and Clark 3). Some boys rather incline to reading comics or online texts. Nonetheless, it is disputable whether such reading materials contribute to the development of their reading competence. The research study made by PISA shows that "reading fiction for enjoyment appears to be positively associated with higher scores in the PISA 2009 reading assessment, while reading comic books is associated with little improvement in reading proficiency in some countries" (OECD 12). Policy makers are here suggested to search for more effective ways of increasing boys' interest in reading at school or at home.

#### **2.1.2. Reading online**

Interestingly, PISA 2009 results also demonstrate that "students who are extensively engaged in online reading activities [...] and searching for information online, are generally more proficient readers than students who do little online reading" (OECD 12). The Czech study conducted by GAC among ten- to fourteen-year-olds also acknowledges this assumption. They have found out that reading and computer use are two interrelated activities. It is assumed that children who often work with a computer are

usually good and enthusiastic readers. Moreover, the media literacy has mostly a positive effect on children's reading interest (Gabal and Václavíková 39; translated by the author). It indicates that reading online is already rooted in children's daily reading practice. Further, it seems that children used to reading printed texts have no problems with reading online and vice versa. The reason for this may be that reading online requires a critical approach to information. We can presuppose that the online readers are ready to apply this skill to critical reading of printed texts as well.

### **2.1.3. Parental involvement**

It has been analysed that the main factors influencing student's school achievement include: singleparent families, parents reading to young children every day, hours spent watching television and frequency of school absences (Barton and Coley 4). It means that there exists an evident link between parental engagement and children's educational achievement. It was proved that "involvement with reading activities at home has significant positive influences not only on reading achievement, language comprehension and expressive language skills, but also on pupils' interest in reading, attitudes towards reading and attentiveness in the classroom" (Clark 11). In addition, she also mentions that most of parental involvement is based on mother-child interactions (3). It is usually mother who encourages the child to read. Father's involvement is largely based on their socio-economic background: fathers with higher incomes are more likely to read to their children.

### **2.1.4. Reading in the past and today**

Children are generally considered to read less than they used to. However, it is a relative assumption. According to the survey "Young People, New Media," there is little evidence which would prove that children used to read more in the past. "In Britain, Himmelweit et al. found in 1956 that children read for between 1-2 hours per week. In our survey we also find a figure of 15 minutes reading books per day. This represents an average across readers (57%) and non-readers (43%). The readers spend around half an hour per day reading books" (Bovill and Livingstone 17).

Nonetheless, it is the image of books which has changed. The same study states: "Overall the 'image' of books is poor. They are widely seen as boring, old-fashioned,

frustrating and as requiring altogether too much effort. Books aren't trendy - they are 'what your parents approve of'" (Bovill and Livingstone 19). They add that books are gradually replaced by IT as a source of information and television as a source of narrative. Though Garbe points out that this attitude differs within gender. "Many results of current media studies indicate that girls perceive audiovisual and digital media rather as *complementary* media to traditional printed materials. Boys, on the contrary, very often *substitute* the printed media with the screen media" (Garbe 13; translated by the author).

## **2.2. Great Britain vs. Czech Republic**

### **2.2.1. PISA 2009 outcomes**

Although the PISA research is focused on fifteen-year-olds, it would be interesting to introduce some results of the 2009 testing since this study was aimed at literacy. Moreover, these results should portray some general tendencies in the British and Czech society.

What is emphasized in the PISA literacy research is the functional nature of reading. In fact, it is a process in which a reader employs a variety of methods, skills and strategies in order to comprehend the text. Reading is perceived by PISA as a tool for reaching further objectives which are crucial in one's career and personal life.

"Within England there has been no significant change in performance compared with the results for 2006. In reading, there was a smaller gender gap than in most OECD countries" (Hewitt 1). Hewitt points out that England's students achieved a mean score of 495 in reading which was slightly above the OECD mean of 493. Czech students, on the other hand, were significantly worse – with a mean score of 478 in reading they were even below the OECD average. Besides, the Czech Republic ended up among the five OECD countries in which the results have remarkably worsened since 2000.

The study proved that Czech students struggle mostly with judging the form and content of the text. Some of them (23%) have insufficient reading competencies. In addition, it was found out that Czech teachers prefer reading aloud to silent reading in their lessons and reading-books to books for youth or computer learning materials, the internet or materials from other cross-curricular subjects. In the light of it, their strategies seem to be outdated. The research was conducted in 2009, that is why many of the students were

still taught under the old curriculum. It would be interesting to follow how the trends will develop in the next years under the auspices of the *Framework Education Programme*.

However, British educators were not satisfied with the PISA results either. From the 17<sup>th</sup> position in literacy in 2006 English students fell on 25<sup>th</sup> position in 2009. This was even one of the impulses to the general reform of the *National Curriculum* which is rooted in “The Schools White Paper 2010”. It is stated here that “the only way we can catch up, and have the world-class schools our children deserve, is by learning the lessons of other countries’ success” (3). It proposes less prescriptive *National Curriculum* and the introduction of teaching systematic synthetic phonics, as the best method for teaching reading. The importance of reading is acknowledged here as following. “Unless children have learned to read, the rest of the curriculum is a secret garden to which they will never enjoy access. As this is an area of such fundamental importance, we will go further than in any other area in actively supporting best practice” (43). This white paper shows that British officials regard reading as an extremely important competence in one’s life.

## **2.2.2. Research studies**

### **2.2.2.1. Children’s attitudes to reading**

There is no significant difference between Czech and British readers in terms of their liking for reading. In England and Wales more than half of young people (58%) enjoy reading either very much or quite a lot and associate reading with positive feelings (Clark et al. 6). According to Gabal and Václavíková 54% of Czech children stated that they enjoy reading and that they do not read only out of duty.

Considering the reading materials, Clark et al. show that magazines, websites and emails are read most frequently outside of school. More girls than boys read magazines, emails, blogs/networking websites and poetry, while more boys than girls read newspapers and comics/graphic novels (8). The authors comment that “the top reading materials outside school are not those the children believe their schools encourage, books and poetry, but rather magazines, websites and emails” (9). We can see here an upstream tendency which young people follow. The reading materials promoted by school are not attractive enough for them. They are rather inspired by their peers and choose the materials which are ‘trendy’. Nevertheless, as we could see they generally enjoy reading and it provides them with positive feelings.

### **2.2.2.2. Parents reading to their children**

Jama and Dugdale claim that one in five parents easily find the opportunity to read to their children, with the rest struggling to read to their children due to fatigue and busy lifestyles. They have found out that 67% of mothers read to their children compared to just 17% of fathers (5). *The Telegraph* mentions a study carried by CITV according to which “three quarters of Britain’s parents are too busy to read bedtime stories to their children” and that “only three per cent of fathers read to their children.” These are rather disappointing results. As already stated, reading aloud to children is a very important aspect of child’s development and father’s involvement with child’s reading activities would even more positively influence its reading habits. Gabal and Václavíková (1) point out that 70% of children who read daily are children who were regularly read to (22; translated by the author). Their study states that half of the Czech children involved said that their parents read to them regularly when they were younger and 41% of children observe that they were read to sometimes.

However, from the point of view of parents themselves the results will differ. Riebauerová mentions the Czech survey “Every Czech Reads to Kids“ (“Celé Česko čte dětem“): here 71.5% of parents said that they do not read to their children (18). These numbers indicate that reading aloud to children is a receding trend in both countries. But children do not profit from it. It also highlights the tendency for individualism in the modern society, which Braun-Galkowska portrayed in her scheme.

### **2.2.2.3. Television viewing and computer use**

Bovill and Livingstone proved that “television is the medium most often shared with family” and that “it is most often the medium which brings family members together” (24). Gabal and Václavíková (2) reached the same conclusion. They found out that 25% of family members watch television together every day for at least a few minutes (4). Both studies also agree on the fact that “parents who watch a lot of television tend to have children who do the same” (Bovill and Livingstone 29). Parental example works here better than parental rules. If a child sees his or her mother or father watching TV all the time, he or she has no motivation for reading. Furthermore, these parents have also presumably less reading materials at home since they do not need them. Thus the environment for child’s reading is not at all supportive. Gabal and Václavíková (1) say

“half of the children who read books daily can see their parents reading books regularly. On the contrary, three quarters of children who do not see their parents reading do not read as well” (23; translated by the author).

As both studies point out, it is heavily influential if a child has his or her own TV set or computer in his or her bedroom. Gabal and Václavíková (2) say that 30% of Czech students said that they have their own TV and can watch it as long as they want (4). 30% of students have also their own computer, 17% have their own games console and 25% have internet access in their bedroom (Opinion Window 8). One fifth of Czech parents leave the amount of time spent using the media entirely up to their children (Opinion Window 4).

The British statistics by Ofcom says that two-thirds of 8-11s (67%) have a TV in their bedroom, 12% have internet access in their bedroom and 71% have a games console in their bedroom (3-4). However, they add that “parental rules for TV, the internet and games are in place for between 80-90% of 5-11s, and at a lower level for 12-15s” (4).

Does it make a difference if a child has his or her own TV? “Kaiser found children with a TV in their bedrooms watched 90 minutes more daily and if a video game is in the bedroom, the child played 32 minutes more daily. The availability of a bedroom computer doubled the usage when compared with a child who does not have it in the room” (Trelease 2). These results seem to be logical since it is difficult to supervise the child’s activities in its bedroom thoroughly. This is very often a private domain of its owner with its own rules. In such cases it is difficult to regulate the child’s time spent in front of the screen. That is why these children are likely to read less.

We can see that Czech as well as British parents very often provide their children with their own television, computer or games consoles. Particularly the British parents are not indifferent to the amount of time their children spent in front of the screen. From the study conducted by Opinion Window we can learn that Czech parents seem to be less worried about their child’s exposure to the audiovisual products than parents in the West European countries. Only 5% of Czech parents express their worries about it and 30% of parents were worried a bit (9). However, such freedom of choice may have a negative effect on child’s reading habits and reading may be completely replaced by the use of audiovisual media.

## **3. Research Study**

### **3.1. Aims and purposes**

The aim of this study is to show the influence of the family background and the media on child's reading habits and compare the results in the context of Czech and British cultural background. The purpose of this study is to verify or disprove the hypotheses suggested in the introduction. The study is divided into two sections.

The objective of the first section (Section 1) is to offer an insight into the factors influencing the reading habits of Czech 12-year-olds. Gender is the distinguishing feature here. The purpose of this section is to depict the gender gap among Czech young readers in relation to the six hypotheses presented in the introduction.

The objective of the second section (Section 2) is to compare the factors influencing the reading habits of Czech and foreign grammar school learners. The cultural background and the school curriculum is the distinguishing feature here. Because of the fact that the research sample is small, this section should just outline some general tendencies in the reading practice of foreign learners.

### **3.2. Methodology**

#### **3.2.1. The research sample**

Our study focuses on 12-year-olds, that is Year 7 students according to the British school grading system. This age group was chosen for several reasons. Firstly, after the tenth year of their life children usually stop struggling with the reading process and start to shape their attitudes to reading. Children of this age also undergo psychological as well as social changes and they are apt to adopt various influences. Moreover, children have to consolidate their gained knowledge and make use of their existing skills effectively in order to be able to develop new skills at the senior level of the primary school. Furthermore, some students switch their school after fulfilling the fifth form and start attending a grammar school, which is generally considered to be more demanding. All these conditions shape child's reading habits.

Section 1 involves 96 learners – 57 boys and 39 girls from Czech primary schools. This proportion is not optimal as there are more boys than girls. However, when analysing

the results we have found out that girls as well as boys gave relatively constant replies. That is why we believe that these results have a certain illustrative value.

There are 52 learners involved in Section 2 – 26 Czech and 26 foreign grammar school students. Fifteen boys and eleven girls represent each sample.

The original idea was to survey learners living in England. However, as there could be no cooperation established, we had to search for an alternative. The survey was finally conducted at the Prague British School in Kamýk. Although children attending this grammar school are not only of the British origin, English and Mathematics are taught here through the *English National Curriculum* following the *Framework for Literacy and Numeracy*. The rest of the subjects are taught through the *International Primary Curriculum*. Because of the different learning practice and teaching methods as well as children's diverse cultural background, we presuppose that our outcomes will differ from the Czech results and that they will confirm at least some of the tendencies mentioned in part 2 under 2.2.

### **3.2.2. Data collection technique**

A quantitative method in the form of a questionnaire was chosen for our purpose. Two equal versions were created – Czech and English<sup>2</sup>. Czech students were given the Czech version. The respondents were given oral instructions and the questionnaires were immediately collected after completion. Children had no problems with filling them out.

The questionnaire comprises 11 questions. Most of them are closed format questions, four of them may be regarded as open format questions. The questionnaires are anonymous. The respondents are classified according to their age and gender. The questionnaires were administered in Prague and Louny. The data were evaluated and charted into a number of graphs<sup>3</sup>.

### **3.2.3. Defining the terms**

In question one we adhere to the definition by Bovill and Livingstone, who say that “as a reader may be defined someone who spends around half an hour per day reading books” (17). When we consider TV viewing, Trelease mentions that the American

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<sup>2</sup> see the Appendix 1 and 2

<sup>3</sup> see the Appendix 3 and 4

Academy of Pediatrics calls for ten hours a week. That makes roughly 90 minutes a day of TV viewing. Such amount of time has “no detrimental effects on learning” (Trelease). It is reflected in question six. Question ten deals with the amount of time of computer use. It is proved that eight hours a week of computer use do not affect the child’s school achievement. That is approximately an hour a day of computer use.

### **3.3. Presentation and analysis of the results**

#### **3.3.1. Section 1**

Sample: 96 Czech learners; gender: 57 boys, 39 girls; age: 11-12 (sixth form)

*H1: Reading aloud to children positively influences their attitude towards reading.*

We have found out that child’s attitude to reading varies depending on gender. The majority of girls, 53.8%, said that they enjoy reading very much, followed by 23.1% of them who like it quite a lot. The majority of boys, 52.6%, said that they like reading a bit which is in opposition to 20.5% of girls. 17.5% of boys enjoy it quite a lot, 10.5% of them enjoy it very much. 5.3% of boys find it quite boring compared to 2.6% of girls. 14% of boys do not enjoy reading at all. None of the girls chose this option.

We can deduce from these results that girls usually enjoy reading – either very much or quite a lot. Boys commonly like it a bit. This is good news since it shows that despite living in a ‘media-friendly’ society, child’s attitude towards reading remains mostly positive.

According to our results girls were more often read to than boys. On the other hand, the proportion of children who were not read to at all is quite low: 21.1% of boys and 7.7% of girls. Both parents read to 48.7% of girls and 28.1% of boys. Mothers used to read to 28.2% of girls and 26.3% of boys. 7.7% of girls and 1.8% of boys stated that only their father read to them. 22.8% of boys and 7.7% of girls said that they cannot remember it.

Considering the time spent reading books, 51.3% of girls stated that they read more than half an hour a day compared to 15.8% of boys. 28.2% of girls and 38.6% of boys read round half an hour a day. The largest proportion of boys, 45.6%, said that they read less than half an hour a day. 20.5% of girls gave the same answer. These results show that girls

devote more time to reading than boys. Boys, on the other hand, do not have the need to spend more than half an hour a day reading books.

However, having thoroughly investigated the particular answers, we have found out that children who stated that they find reading boring or that they do not like it at all either generally replied that they were not read to or they cannot remember it. 67.6% of students who read less than half an hour a day also said that they were not read to or that they cannot remember it. On the contrary, only three learners who read more than half an hour a day stated that they were either not read to or they cannot remember it. This affirms our hypothesis that reading aloud to children has a positive effect on their attitude to reading. We have found out that those children who were read to read regularly and enjoy it.

*H2: Fathers are less involved in their child's reading activities than mothers.*

It is mostly both parents who encourage their children to read. 64.1% of girls and 36.8% of boys agreed on it. The second most common answer given by girls, 41%, was that their grandparents encourage them. Boys' second most common answer was that nobody encourages them to read (28.1%). 26.3% of boys and 15.4% of girls reported being encouraged by their mother. Fathers, siblings, friends and teachers alone were mentioned by a small percentage of respondents.

We can count up that reading aloud to their daughters is the case of 56.4% of fathers and 76.9% of mothers. 29.9% of fathers and 54.4% of mothers used to read to their sons. 69.2% of girls stated that their fathers encourage them to read compared to 38.6% of boys. Mothers encourage 79.5% of girls and 63.1% of boys.

These results indicate that not only are girls more often read to, but they are also more often encouraged to read. It seems that parents rather associate reading with their daughters than with their sons. These numbers also show that fathers are less involved in their child's reading activities than mothers, which confirms our hypothesis.

*H3: The more reading materials the home environment provides, the better reading conditions children have and it is positively reflected in their attitude to reading.*

94.9% of girls wrote that books and magazines can be found in their homes, followed by newspapers and encyclopedias (74.4%). 38.5% of girls mentioned comics and 2.6% of them dictionaries. Boys most commonly mentioned magazines (86%) and books

together with encyclopedias (73.7%), followed by newspapers (61.4%) and comics (42.1%). 1.8% mentioned dictionaries and one boy replied that they have none of these materials at home.

As we can see, the results are in balance. Interestingly, the percentage of boys and girls having comics at home is almost the same. We would expect a greater difference in this proportion since it is boys who may be readily associated with comic books. Nonetheless, we do not know if these girls just *see* comics at home or if they actually *read* them.

Another interesting fact is that children who find reading boring or do not like it at all have still acknowledged a great deal of reading materials they have at home. That is why it seems that the amount of accessible home reading materials do not influence their attitude to reading.

*H4: Young learners predominantly exceed the recommended length of time spent watching television and using a computer.*

None of the students said that he or she do not watch TV at all. The majority of boys, 66.7%, and 43.6% of girls watch TV more than half an hour a day. 46.2% of girls and 19.3% of boys watch it half an hour a day. 14% of boys and 10.3% of girls watch TV less than half an hour a day.

Considering the time spent using a computer, the results are clear. 53.3% of boys spend on average more than one hour a day using a computer compared to 9.1% of girls. The same proportion of girls spends one hour a day using it, which is in opposition to 33.3% of boys. Most of the girls, 54.5%, and 13.3% of boys spend using it less than an hour a day. 27.3% of girls said that they use a computer only occasionally. None of the boys chose this option.

More than half of the boys questioned spend more than an hour a day in front of the computer screen. 65.8% of boys who said that they spent more than 90 minutes a day watching TV spend daily more than an hour using a computer as well. Moreover, 17.5% of boys who exceed the recommended dosage of time watching TV and computer use stated that they read less than half an hour a day. It indicates that these boys have no time left on reading.

Yet our hypothesis is only partly true. Our outcomes show that most of the boys do exceed the recommended length of time watching television or using a computer but it does not apply to girls. The main reason for this may be that unlike boys, girls rather complement their reading activities with TV viewing or computer use than replace them completely.

*H5: The moderation of time spent watching television and using a computer has a good impact on child's reading practice.*

The majority of boys, 56.1%, said that they are allowed to watch TV as long as they want. 43.6% of girls gave the same reply followed by 41% of them whose time spent in front of the TV screen is regulated. 28.1% of boys cannot watch TV as long as they want. 14% of boys and 15.4% of girls can watch it without limits at the weekends or when they are ready with their homework.

81.3% of boys who are not encouraged to read are those who can watch TV as long as they want. It shows that parents who leave the time spent watching TV up to their children are likely to be hostile to their reading activities.

53% of boys who can watch TV as long as they want read less than half an hour a day. It is the same with 23.5% of girls. Only 12.5% of boys who can watch TV as long as they want read more than half an hour a day compared to 83.3% of girls.

Our results prove that the moderation of time spent watching TV has a positive impact on child's reading practice. Yet, as we can see, this is particularly true for boys. Although some girls are allowed to watch TV as long as they want, it seems that it has not a big impact on their reading practice.

Considering the computer use, it is much more restricted than TV viewing. 54.4% of boys and 53.8% of girls are not allowed to use a computer as long as they want. 35.1% of boys and 25.6% of girls can use it as long as they want, compared to 10.5% of boys and 20.5% of girls who are restricted sometimes. These results tell that most of parents are alert to the amount of time their child spends using a computer.

80% of all boys and 90% of girls who stated that they can use a computer without limits can also watch TV as long as they want. This indicates that parents who do not moderate the time their child spends using a computer are likely to leave the amount of time spent watching TV up to them as well.

45% of boys and 30% of girls who can use a computer as long as they want read less than half an hour a day. 10% of boys and 70% of girls who can use a computer without restriction read more than half an hour a day. These data indicate that boys whose time is not restricted are likely to read less compared to girls who are usually keen readers regardless.

*H6: If a child has its own television and a computer, his or her reading activity is lower.*

The majority of children replied that they have their own television set in their room. It is the case of 78.9% of boys and 71.8% of girls. Most of the learners also have their own computer – 77.2% of boys and 69.2% of girls.

Children who have their own television are likely to have their own computer – in our study it is the case of 77.7% of boys and 78.6% of girls. 76.9% of boys and 50% of girls who read less than half an hour a day have their own TV set and a computer in their room. Moreover, 64.4% of boys and 57.1% of girls who have their own TV can watch it as long as they want. It is also true for 36.3% of boys and 29.6% of girls who have their own computer.

As we can see, a television and a computer are very often a part of child's room. We have proved that when children have their own TV, they can commonly watch it without limits. Children who have their own television are also very often provided with their own computer. Our results confirm that when a child has its own television and a computer, it is likely to read less. It is again especially true for boys.

### **3.3.2. Section 2**

Sample: 26 Czech and 26 foreign learners; gender: 30 boys, 22 girls; age: 11-12 (sixth form; Year 7 students); grammar school: The Prague British School (PBS) and Gymnázium Václava Hlavatého, Louny (GVH)

#### **3.3.2.1. Reading proficiency**

British students were quite successful in PISA 2009 testing, unlike Czech students. The outcomes of our research cannot prove if foreign students are better readers. Nonetheless, we can find out if they spend more time on reading books every day. Such children have good conditions to become better readers.

Our results show that 88.5% of foreign learners and 73.1% of Czech grammar school learners spend half an hour or more reading books every day. Only 11.5% of foreign learners compared to 26.9% of Czech ones stated that they read less than half an hour a day. The majority of boys and girls from the PBS read round half an hour a day. It is also true for boys and girls attending GVH.

These results suggest that both Czech and foreign grammar school learners are keen readers and that there is no significant difference between them in terms of their time spent reading books every day.

### **3.3.2.2. Attitudes to reading**

In chapter 2.2.3.1. we have found out that more than half of Czech and British young people enjoy reading either very much or quite a lot. 57.7% of GVH students and 84.6% of PBS students are of the same opinion. 30.8% of GVH students like it a bit compared to 15.4% of PBS students. 3.8% of Czech students like reading a bit and 7.7% of them do not like reading at all. None of the PBS students chose these two options.

We can confirm that half of Czech children surveyed like reading – either very much or quite a lot. This is also true for the absolute majority of foreign learners surveyed. It means that both groups of students generally have a positive attitude to reading. Moreover, it was very interesting to find out that none of the PBS students said that they find reading boring or do not like it at all. This may indicate that they regard reading as important and that there are people who have introduced reading to them in a positive light.

### **3.3.2.3. Reading materials**

Books can be found in 92.3% of Czech and 96.2% of foreign households. A large proportion of GVH learners reported to have magazines (96.2%) and encyclopedias (92.3%) at home. This contrasts with 50% and 42.3% of foreign students. 65.4% of GVH students and 34.5% of PBS students reported to have newspapers and 57.7% of foreign students and 46.2% of Czech students have comics at home. 30.8% of PBS students mentioned dictionaries as other reading materials.

It seems that magazines and encyclopedias are much less common reading materials in the homes of PBS students than in the homes of GVH students. It is quite surprising finding since teenagers are generally reported to be keen magazine readers. One

of the reasons may be that not many Czech stores provide their customers with foreign magazines. Or alternatively, these children do not have time for reading them or they rather prefer books or comics. As we can see, comics are more popular with foreign students than with the Czech.

#### **3.3.2.4. Parental involvement**

In chapter 2.2.3.2 we have signalled that approximately a half of Czech and British children were read to in their early years and that a very little proportion of British fathers read aloud to their children. The data in our survey were balanced and show that almost all children involved were read to.

38.5% of GVH parents and 46.2% of PBS parents read to their child. 23.1% of Czech mothers and 26.9% of foreign mothers compared to 11.5% of Czech fathers and 3.8% of foreign fathers read to their children. 15.4% of Czech as well as foreign students were not read to at all. 11.5% of Czech and 7.7% of foreign students cannot remember it.

Considering the father's involvement, the proportion is here equal. Half of the Czech fathers as well as half of the foreign fathers were reported to have read to their child. 53.8% of Czech fathers and 53.9% of foreign fathers encourage their children to read. These results show that many fathers were involved in their child's reading activities and that the results are not as hopeless as one would have expected.

#### **3.3.2.5. Television viewing and computer use**

All the GVH learners have confirmed that they watch TV. However, 7.7% of PBS students said that they do not watch TV at all. The majority of them, 80.8%, watch TV half an hour a day or less compared to 61.5% of GVH students. 38.5% of them and only 11.5% of foreign students exceed the recommended time spent watching TV. It indicates that TV viewing is more rooted in the daily practice of Czech children.

Considering the time spent using a computer, 50% of GVH students use it more than hour a day compared to 34.6% of PBS students. 23.1% to 23.1% of them use it an hour a day, 11.5% to 11.5% of them use it only occasionally. 15.4% of Czech students and 30.8% of foreign students use a computer less than an hour a day. These results show that half of Czech grammar school students are likely to exceed the recommended dosage of

time spent using a computer compared to 34.6% of foreigners. None of the respondents said that they do not use a computer at all.

Television in their room have 65.4% of GVH learners, however, there is no TV in the bedrooms of 65.4% of PBS learners. As we can see the results are reversed and indicate that foreign parents do not feel it necessary to provide their children with their own television. Moreover, almost all children at PBS, 96.1% precisely, cannot watch TV as long as they want compared to 77% of GVH learners. Out of these, 34.5% of PBS students can watch it as long as they want after doing their homework or at the weekends. This is true for 30.8% of Czech students. 23.1% of Czech students and 3.8% of foreign ones can. This points out to the fact that foreign parents very carefully control the time their child spends watching TV and to prevent the excessive TV viewing, they do not let them have their own TV in their bedroom. Czech grammar school students usually cannot watch TV without limits as well, however, the majority of them have their own TV set in their room, and thus we presume that they cannot be carefully observed.

80.8% of Czech students and 69.2% of foreign students have their own computer. The computer use of our participants is almost always moderated. 11.5% of GVH students and 15.4% of PBS students can use a computer without limits; the rest of them cannot or can only sometimes. PBS students frequently replied that their time spent using a computer depends on the number of tasks they have to do for school. It indicates that many of their assignments have to be done on computer. This is a good way how to train their media literacy. Our results also contradict one of the tendencies suggested in chapter 2.2.3.3.: Czech parents do not seem to be less worried about their child's exposure to the audiovisual products than parents in the West European countries. Our outcomes indicate that they are similarly engaged in moderating the time their children spend using the audiovisual media.

## **Conclusion**

The aim of this thesis was to depict the factors influencing children's reading literacy and compare them in the context of Czech and British cultural background. The thesis was focused on twelve-year-olds. Six hypotheses were related to our topic.

It has been verified that child's attitude to reading is very much determined by gender. Girls usually enjoy reading very much or quite a lot, boys commonly like it a bit. Girls rather regard TV viewing and computer use as a complementary activity to reading and spend on average half an hour or more reading books every day. Moreover, parents seem to associate reading primarily with girls since it has been found out that girls were more often read to than boys and they are more often encouraged to read.

The findings of this thesis confirm that reading aloud to children positively influences their attitude towards reading. Children who were not read to are likely to read less and find reading boring or do not like it at all. However, it has been proved that the majority of parents used to read to their child and it may contribute to the fact that children's attitudes to reading were discovered to be generally positive.

Although many fathers were reported to be involved with their child's reading activities, mothers are ordinarily those who read to their children and encourage them to read. It was also proved that parents who are not much involved with their child's reading activities are usually those who do not regulate his or her time spent watching TV.

It was indicated that the amount of accessible home reading materials does not influence child's attitude to reading. On the other hand, many children are provided with their own TV set and with a computer. These children are likely to read less. When a child has his or her own TV, his or her time spent watching it is usually unlimited. However, it was proved that the moderation of time spent watching TV has a positive impact on child's reading practice. It is mostly true for boys since girls are usually prolific readers regardless.

Most of boys usually exceed the recommended length of time watching TV or using a computer, though most of parents are alert to the amount of time their child spends using it. Those parents who do not moderate the time their child spends using a computer are likely to leave the amount of time spent watching TV up to them as well.

When comparing Czech and foreign grammar school learners, it has been found out that most of them spend round half an hour a day reading books and they generally have a positive attitude to reading. Especially foreign learners seem to value reading highly. TV viewing, on the contrary, seems to be more rooted in the daily practice of Czech children, although most of the grammar school students cannot watch it unlimitedly. Much less of the foreign learners compared to the Czech have their own TV. Moreover, Czech learners are more likely to exceed the recommended dosage of time spent using a computer than their foreign colleagues. However, most of the parents of grammar school students moderate their time spent using a computer.

As for reading materials, magazines and encyclopedias were not as commonly mentioned with the foreign students as with the Czech. Comics, on the other hand, were more popular with the foreigners.

Parents used to read to almost all of the grammar school learners. Half of the Czech fathers as well as half of the foreign fathers were reported to have read to their child and half of them also encourage them to read.

As we can see, the different cultural background determines the child's reading practice to some extent and the reading habits of grammar school learners slightly differed. The findings show that parental involvement with child's reading activities is an extremely important factor shaping their reading habits. The media, in our thesis represented by TV viewing and computer use, proved to be an inseparable part of life of children nowadays. It can undoubtedly enrich them in many ways. However, it is especially school and parents who are here to teach children how to utilise the media reasonably, so that it complements the child's reading practice, not replaces it completely. As we could see, especially some boys struggle with this and further strategies and programmes which would enhance their interest in reading would be beneficial not only for them, but also for the whole society.

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# Appendices

## Appendix 1: Reading literacy questionnaire – Czech version

### Dotazník pro děti mladšího školního věku – Čtenářská gramotnost

Ahoj, jmenuji se Lucie Slavíková a jsem studentkou Pedagogické fakulty Univerzity Karlovy v Praze. Momentálně píšu svou bakalářskou práci, která je zaměřena na význam rodiny a médií v životě čtenářů vašeho věku. Vyplněním tohoto dotazníku mi pomůžete v mém výzkumu a já vám za to předem mnohokrát děkuji!

Tento dotazník je **anonymní**. Žádná z odpovědí není správná nebo špatná. Zaškrtněte vždy **JEDNU** odpověď (pokud není uvedeno jinak) nebo odpověď doplňte. Důležité je, abyste odpovídali **pravdivě**.

**Datum:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Pohlaví:** chlapec                      dívka

**Věk:** \_\_\_\_\_

#### 1. Kolik času průměrně trávíš čtením knih?

méně než půl hodiny denně

zhruba půl hodiny denně

víc než půl hodiny denně

#### 2. Četli ti rodiče pohádky před spaním?

ANO, oba mi je četli.

ANO, maminka mi je četla.

ANO, tatínek mi je četl.

NE.

Nevím.

#### 3. Povzbuzuje tě někdo doma ve čtení? Můžeš zaškrtnout i více odpovědí.

ANO, oba mí rodiče.

ANO, moje maminka.

ANO, můj tatínek.

ANO, moje babička / dědeček.

ANO, můj bratr / sestra.

ANO, ale povzbuzuje mě někdo jiný: \_\_\_\_\_

NE.

**4. Jaké typy tiskovin máte doma? Můžeš zaškrtnout i více odpovědí.**

knihy

časopisy

noviny

komiksy

encyklopedie

žádné

jiné: \_\_\_\_\_

**5. Baví tě čtení knížek?**

ANO, hodně.

ANO, docela dost.

Trochu.

Případá mi nudné.

NE, vůbec mě nebaví.

**6. Jak dlouho průměrně koukáš na televizi (to zahrnuje televizní programy, video, DVD / Blu-ray disky, internetovou televizi)?**

na televizi nekoukám

méně než hodinu a půl denně

hodinu a půl denně

víc než hodinu a půl denně

**7. Máš v pokoji vlastní televizi?**

ANO

NE

**8. Můžeš koukat na televizi jak dlouho chceš?**

ANO

NE

Občas – Co to znamená? \_\_\_\_\_

**9. Máš vlastní počítač?**

ANO

NE

**10. Kolik času trávíš u počítače?**

počítač nepoužívám

počítač používám jen příležitostně

méně než hodinu denně

hodinu denně

víc než hodinu denně

**11. Můžeš trávit u počítače kolik času chceš?**

ANO

NE

Občas – Co to znamená? \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix 2: Reading literacy questionnaire – English version

### READING LITERACY QUESTIONNAIRE

Hello, my name is Lucie Slavikova and I am from the Czech Republic. I am studying at Charles University Prague, the Faculty of Education. Now, I am writing my bachelor's thesis which is about the role of family and the media in the lives of readers of your age. I would be very grateful if you could spend a few minutes answering the following questions and thus help me with my research. Thank you very much for your help!

**NOTE:** There is no right or wrong answer. Just tick **ONE** box or complete the answer. Please give answers which are true about **YOU**.

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Gender:**    boy                      girl

**Age:**                      \_\_\_\_\_

#### 1. How much time on average do you spend reading books?

less than half an hour a day

round half an hour a day

more than half an hour a day

#### 2. Did your parents read to you bedtime stories or fairy tales when you were a child?

YES, both of them read to me.

YES, my mother read to me.

YES, my father read to me.

NO

I don't know.

**3. Does anybody in your family encourage you to read? You can tick more than one box.**

YES, both my parents do.

YES, my mother does.

YES, my father does.

YES, my grandmother / grandfather does.

YES, my brother / sister does.

YES, but the one who encourages me is my \_\_\_\_\_.

Nobody.

**4. Which types of reading materials do you have at home? You can tick more than one box.**

books

magazines

newspapers

comics

encyclopedias

none of the above

other reading materials: \_\_\_\_\_

**5. Do you enjoy reading books?**

YES, I enjoy it very much.

YES, I enjoy it quite a lot.

I like it a bit.

I find it quite boring.

NO, I don't enjoy it at all.

**6. How much time on average do you spend watching TV (that is TV programmes, videos, DVDs / Blu-ray discs, Internet television)?**

I don't watch TV.

less than 90 minutes (1.5 hours) a day

90 minutes (1.5 hours) a day

more than 90 minutes (1.5 hours) a day

**7. Do you have your own television set in your room?**

YES

NO

**8. Are you allowed to watch TV as long as you want?**

YES

NO

Sometimes – Can you specify it? \_\_\_\_\_

**9. Do you have your own computer?**

YES

NO

**10. How much time on average do you spend using a computer?**

I don't use a computer.

I use it only occasionally.

less than 1 hour a day

1 hour a day

more than 1 hour a day

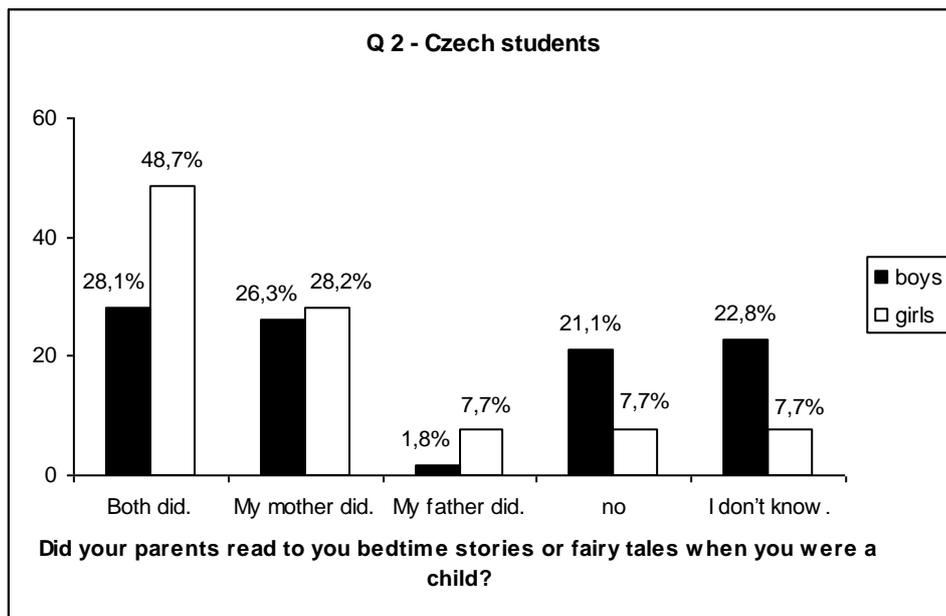
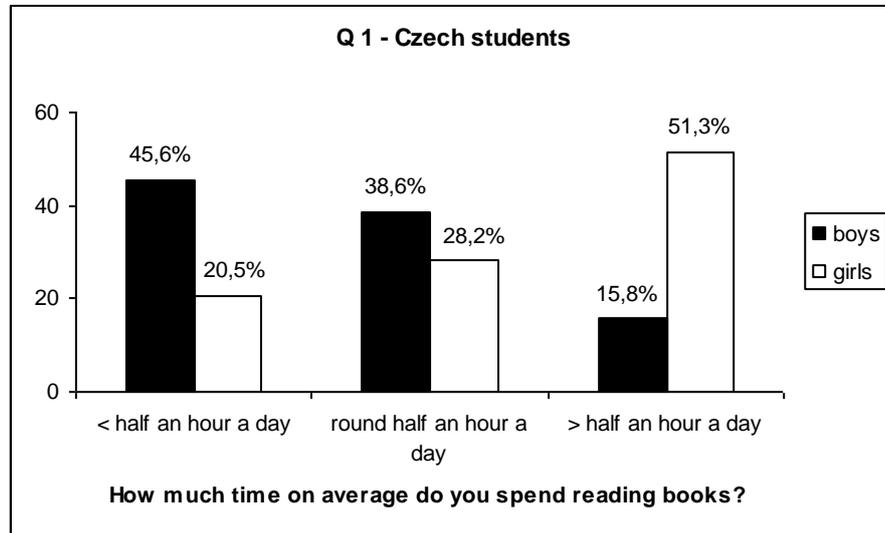
**11. Are you allowed to use a computer as long as you want?**

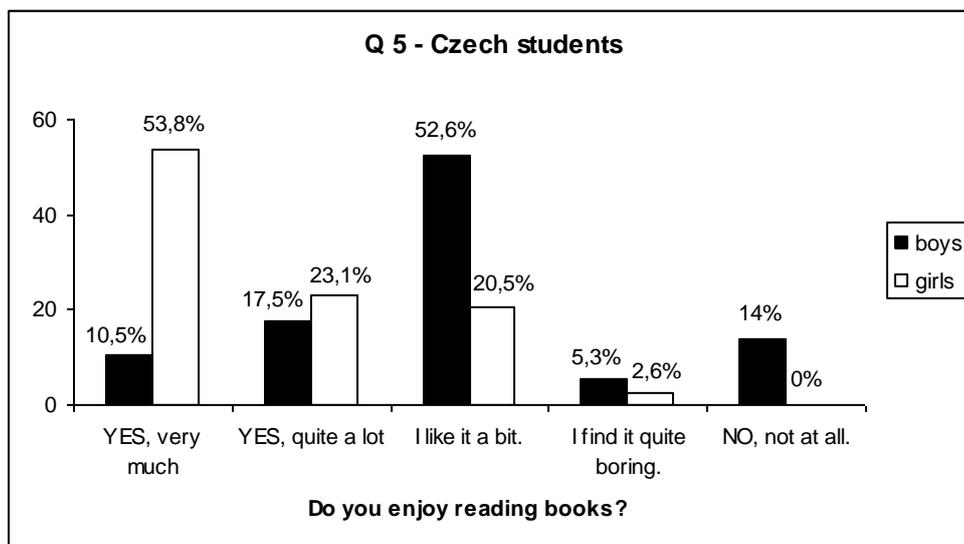
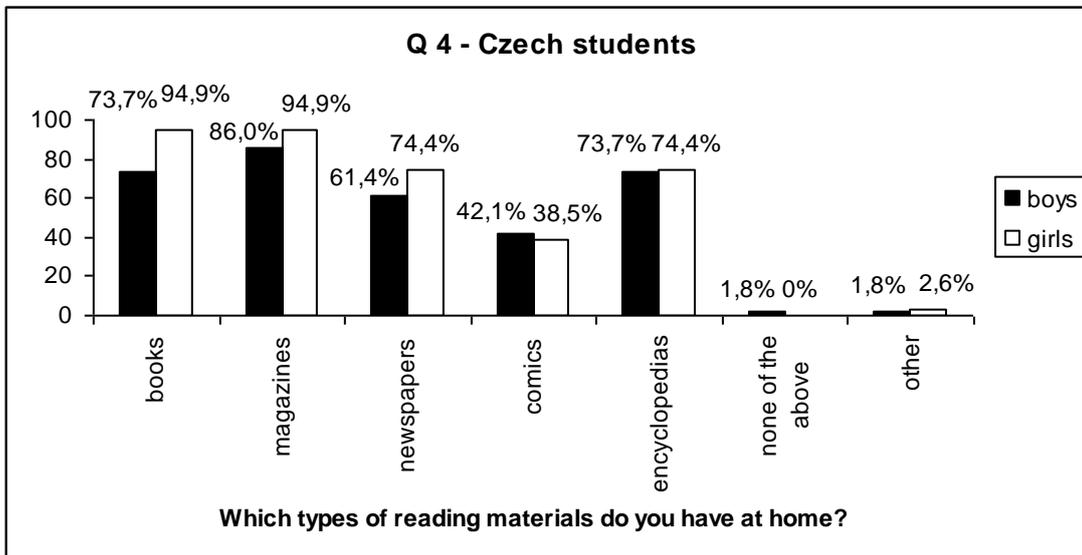
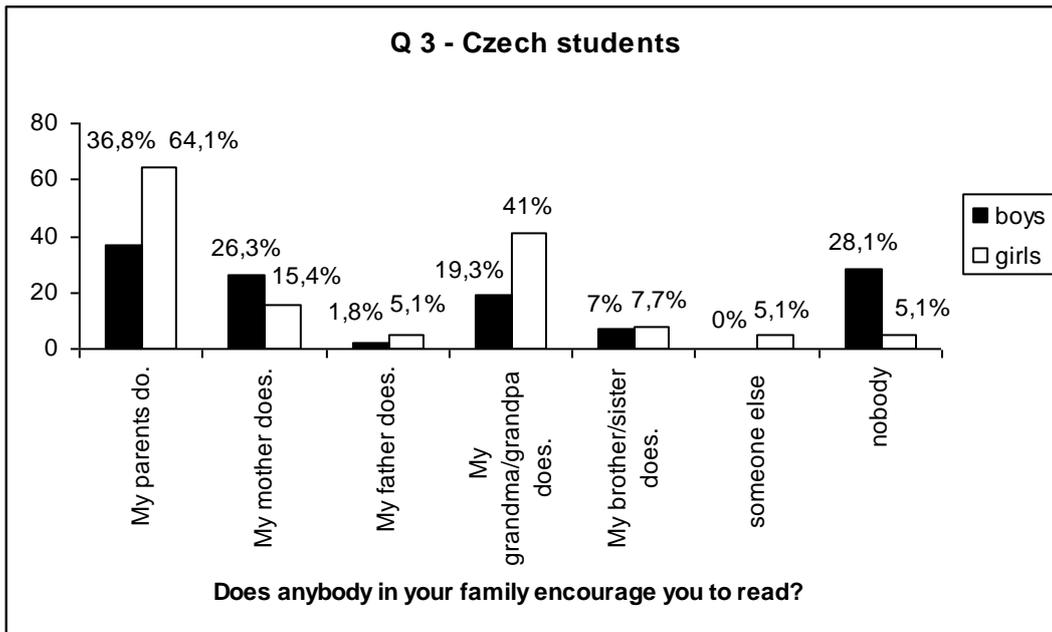
YES

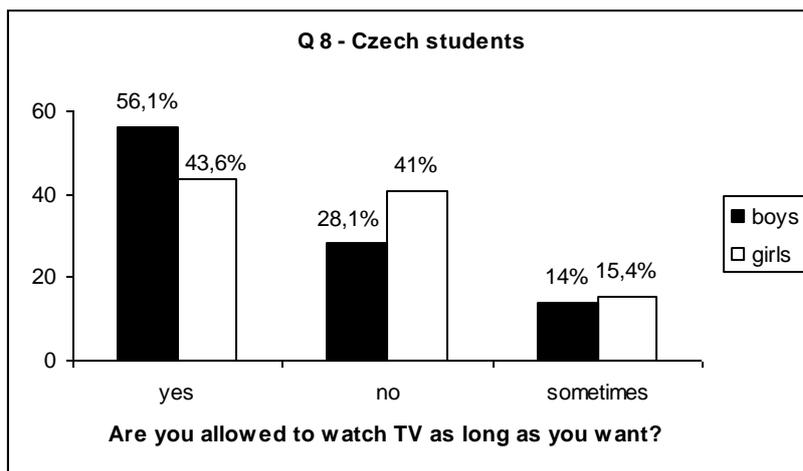
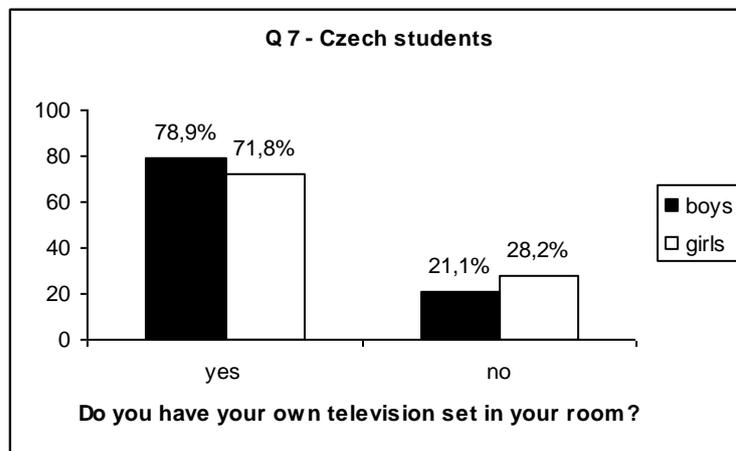
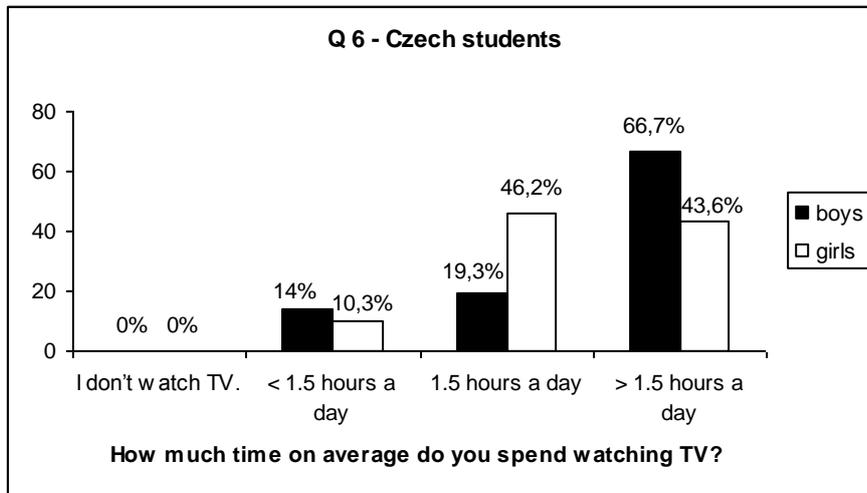
NO

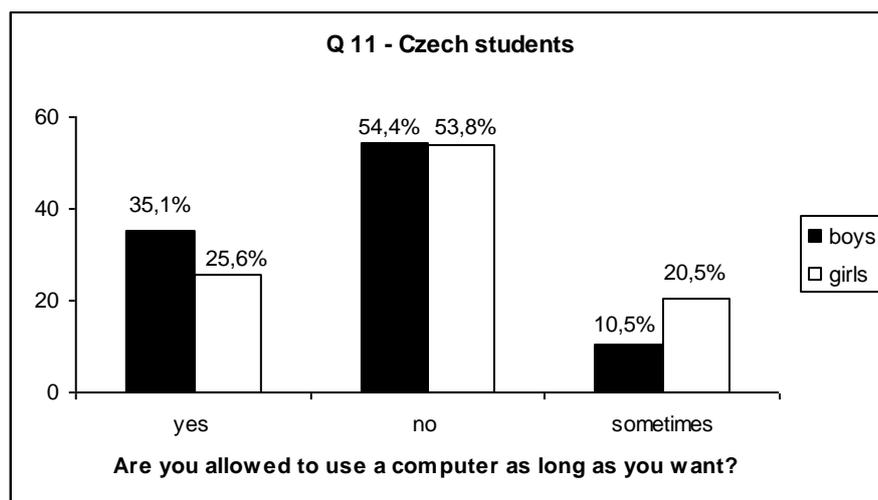
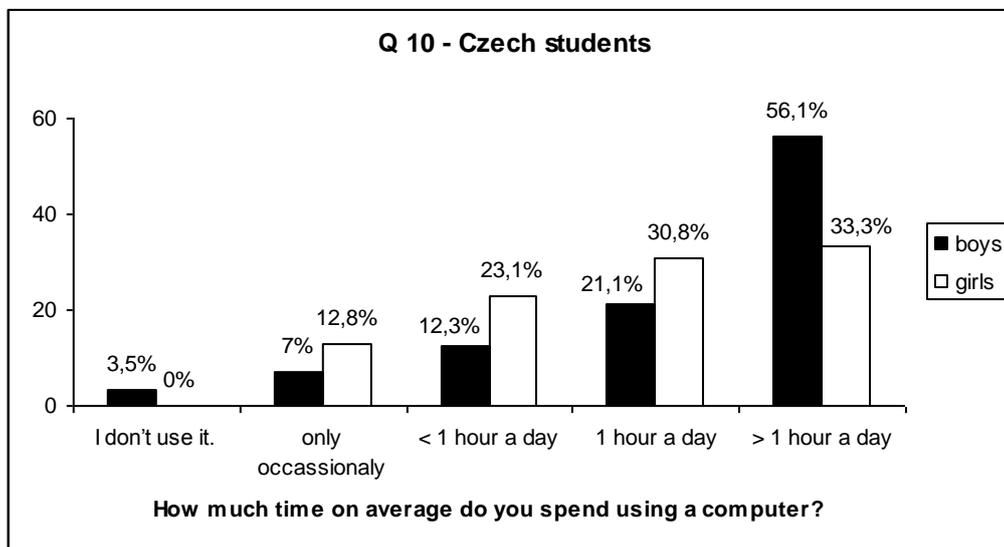
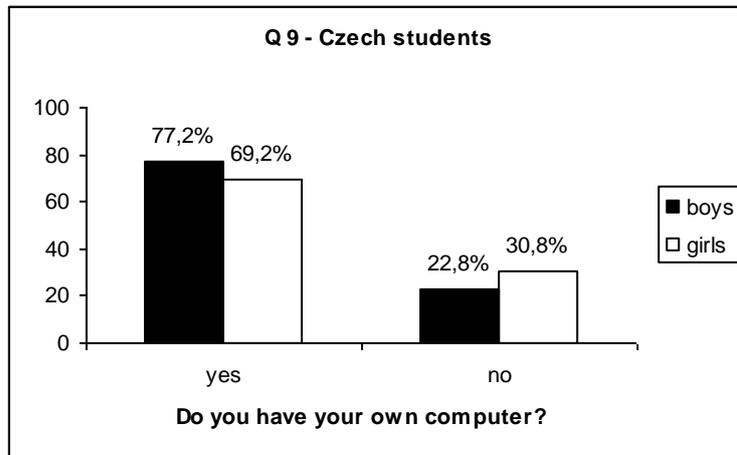
Sometimes – Can you specify it? \_\_\_\_\_

### Appendix 3: Research Study – Section 1 outcomes









## Appendix 4: Research study – Section 2 outcomes

