

Reading Literacy of Roma Pupils

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Abstract

This work is a contribution to Roma pupils' literacy research. The importance of literacy for an individual today is absolutely crucial; applied research suggests that people with advanced literacy skills are more likely to have a higher self-esteem, improved health, more satisfying jobs and higher income compared to those with low literacy skills. Persons who are at greater risk of reduced literacy level are those from different cultural backgrounds, unemployed and unskilled people, those with very low level of education and people living in social exclusion. Roma pupils (very often) belong to such groups of people, therefore it is necessary to set up measures to eliminate these risks. The need to develop language competence of Roma pupils in the Czech language, including reading comprehension ability, is also included in the Roma Integration Strategy by 2020.

This thesis examines whether and how the reading literacy test results of Roma and non-Roma pupils differ, and describes factors of home and school environment that influence the Roma pupils' literacy development. Based on these research questions hypotheses were set.

Our research of Roma pupils' literacy was conducted in 4th and 5th grades of primary schools in socially excluded localities in the Czech Republic, research tools were questionnaires for pupils and teachers and a literacy test. The research is a replication of the International reading literacy research PIRLS. The survey involved a total of 596 respondents from 36 elementary school classes, data analysis was conducted using quantitative research methods. Hypotheses were tested using the Mann-Whitney *U* test for independent samples.

Results of the literacy test among a group of Roma and non-Roma pupils are significantly different, while Roma pupils reaching one-third lower score on average than non-Roma pupils. Materials that pupils usually read are mainly books, pupils from both groups also read quite often information from the Internet. Non-Roma children use the Internet more often

for school tasks, on the other hand Roma children prefer social networks and they use the Internet mainly as a source of entertainment, not for their own development.

Roma pupils read books that are listed in the canon of school literary education (Honzíkova cesta, Staré řecké báje a pověsti, Dášeňka čili Život štěněte) and books connected with popular films or series (Harry Potter, Monster High). Non-Roma pupils demonstrate greater autonomy in the selection of books they read.

As a significant predictor of outcome in the literacy test we confirm home literacy environment, the number and availability of books, family reading habits, attitude towards reading, family reading activities and the total number of books read. The most difficult text understanding processes for Roma pupils is drawing conclusions, which means understanding the causal relationship between different events, inferring main ideas, and identifying persons or things (in the text). The other difficult area is the interpretation, thus recognizing the overall message of the text and comparing different information from the text.

The results show a strong need for Roma students to support them in reading and understanding texts, as disadvantages caused by the non-stimulating environment may be so consequential, that without compensatory measures Roma pupils are at high risk of reduced level of reading literacy. At the educational policy level, this shows the need for greater emphasis on the development of reading literacy among disadvantaged students and promote teacher training in this area.