

RESEARCH OF THE CHALLENGES OF READING IN THE DIGITAL ERA

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Abstract

In the 21st century, different digital generations have coexisted, and there is already talk about different types of literacy. Traditional literacy is not being displaced from its position as a mandatory for every educated person, but it necessarily goes hand in hand with other literacies – with digital, multimedia, information, etc. Digital literacy does not replace traditional forms of literacy; it builds upon the foundations of traditional forms of literacy.

The fourth industrial revolution, which is our near future as Klaus Schwab described, and its consequences in every area of our lives, will inevitably have an impact on reading and attitude towards the books. The major problem of this article is to identify the parents' role on forming reading habits of their children.

The actuality of the research problem is determined by the increasing level of illiteracy among Bulgarians, as well as by the need to constantly raise the topic of the book and its influence on the young generation.

The article presents the results of a survey among parents of primary school age children. The survey is a part of fundamental research, funded by the Bulgarian Science Fund – Digital Competencies and Media Education at Pre-school and Primary School Age (DN 05/8 14.12.2016) with coordinator Prof. Dr Romyana Papancheva from the University “Prof. Dr Asen Zlatarov”, Bourgas. The author is the leader of the Working Group “Research of the connection between Reading and Digital literacy” as part of the project. Based on preliminary done investigations and on an acquainting with literature about this problem in Bulgarian and English languages it has been developed a toolkit that is integrated in the questionnaires. In the first stage of the project there are made three types of surveys – for students (priority from fourth grade), for parents and for teachers.

The survey of parents' toolbox contains a questionnaire with 41 questions for parents. The design of the study is divided in three parts – section “Reading” (18 questions), section “Digital literacy” (13 questions – 5 of them open questions) and section that tries to analyse the parents' opinion about a connection between traditional literacy, reading habits and the formation of digital literacies of children up to 11 years old. There is also a demographic part.

The accent in this article is on the results of parents' survey – there are analysed parents' attitudes towards reading habits of their children.

In 2018 144 parents were interviewed from different Bulgarian cities and towns. The main idea is that the parents' manner of reading and attitude to reading books will shape child as a good reader. The survey describes children's reading habits towards their parents.

Keywords: reading, challenges, project, university, digital literacy, initiatives.

1 INTRODUCTION

In the 21st century, different digital generations have coexisted, and there is already talk about different types of literacy. Traditional literacy is not being displaced from its position as a mandatory for every educated person, but it necessarily goes hand in hand with other literacies – with digital, multimedia, information, etc. Digital literacy does not replace traditional forms of literacy; it builds upon the foundations of traditional forms of literacy.

The fourth industrial revolution, which is our near future as Klaus Schwab described, and its consequences in every area of our lives, will inevitably have an impact on reading and attitude towards the books. The major problem of this article is to identify the parents' role on forming reading habits of their children [1].

The actuality of the research problem is determined by the increasing level of illiteracy among Bulgarians, as well as by the need to constantly raise the topic of the book and its influence on the young generation.

2 METHODOLOGY

The article presents the results of a survey among parents of primary school age children (up to 11 years old). The survey is a part of fundamental research, funded by the Bulgarian Science Fund – Digital Competencies and Media Education at Pre-school and Primary School Age (DN 05/8 14.12.2016) with coordinator Prof. Dr Romyana Papancheva from the University “Prof. Dr Asen Zlatarov”, Bourgas. The author is the leader of the Working Group “Research of the connection between Reading and Digital literacy” as part of the project. Based on preliminary done investigations and on an acquainting with literature about this problem in Bulgarian and English languages it has been developed a toolkit that is integrated in the questionnaires. In the first stage of the project there are made three types of surveys – for students (priority from fourth grade), for parents and for teachers.

In 2018 144 parents were interviewed from different Bulgarian cities and towns. The main idea is that the parents' manner of reading and attitude to reading books will shape child as a good reader. The survey describes children's reading habits towards their parents.

The methods for collecting and registering sociological information are direct individual anonymous parents' poll, as well as a semi-standardised interview with parents of selected pupils in the next stage of the project. The stages of the survey include an organizational stage; recruitment and registration of sociological information; processing of the collected sociological information; and analysis of the results of the sociological survey.

The survey of parents' toolbox contains a questionnaire with 41 questions. The design of the study is divided in three parts – section “Reading” (18 questions), section “Digital literacy” (13 questions – 5 of them open questions) and section that tries to analyse the parents' opinions about a connection between reading literacy and reading habits and the formation of digital literacies of children up to 11 years old. There is also a demographic part.

The technique of reading and understanding of read text is formed when a student is in primary school. This is the period that has been forming reading literacy. The first section addresses to explore the family-generated learning conditions in book love and reading. The aim is to describe the students' family environment and to determine to what extent it influences their formation as readers. The behaviour of parents; the context that they have created for their children; their active or passive attitude to the researched object has formed the children's attitudes towards reading, books, digital devices – all of these create a context of children's reading habits. The parents carry the responsibility for the formation of a desire for reading in early childhood [2].

3 RESULTS

The accent in this article is on the results of parents' survey – there are analysed parents' attitudes towards reading habits of their children. Co-reading, upbringing in love for books creates a lasting positive attitude of children to language and written words. “A good foundation in communication and language is a prerequisite for further skills and literacy – such as writing and reading, for example” [3]. According to other researchers up to the age of 5, the child's vocabulary will impact on an educational success and on an income when this person gets 30 years old [4].

The formation of reading literacy of the young pupils is linked to the development of two basic groups of skills: decoding skills (reading technique); understanding of reading (reading awareness).

3.1 Reading perceptions and practices among parents with primary-school-age children

All data were collected between March and May 2018. 200 parents were asked to fill questionnaire survey. In total, 144 parents completed enough of the survey to provide usable data.

The respondents are from all over Bulgaria. The majority of participants of respondents were mothers (90%).

The respondents have a high level of education (70.8% are with Bachelor and Master Degrees; 3% people with Doctoral Degree). Some studies have approved the link between parental education and attitudes towards reading and books. Higher educated people have many interests as reading, listening to opera, going to concerts, visiting exhibitions, etc. [5].

3.1.1 Reading at home – family’s environment

The first part of the survey “Reading at home” contains questions about parents’ reading preferences, reading habits, a number of books in their own home-library, etc.; and questions related to the formation of reader literacy in their children. This section is addressed to parents to explore the family environment where the students live, play and learn. The family-created learning conditions help children become good readers.

90% of respondents answered that they like reading books. To the question “How often do you read books?” 9% responded ‘rarely’, 33% – 1-2 times a month; 34% – 1-2 times a week; 24% of parents read every day. Only one said ‘never’. The personal example given by parents – both in reading and in the use of digital technologies – is extremely important for the construction of children as readers and users of digital technologies.

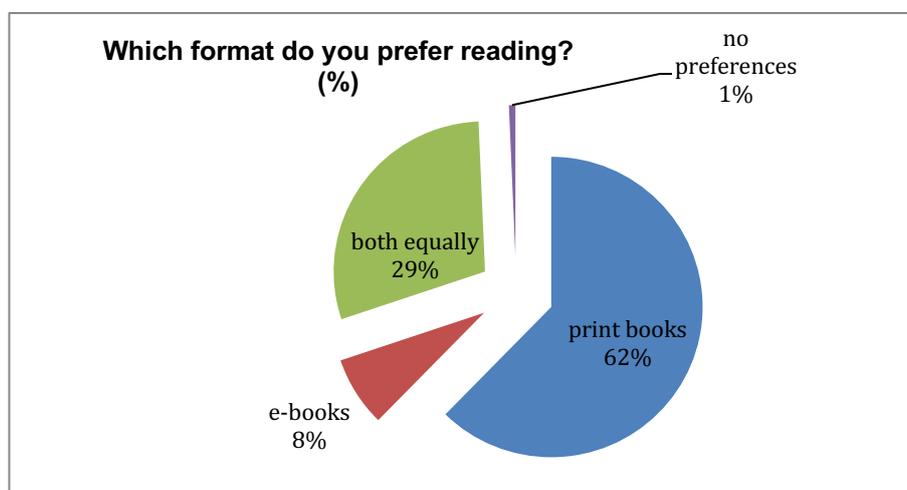


Figure 1. Parents’ Preferences about the format of books.

Table 1. Comparison between parents’, university students’ and children’s preferences about the format of books (%).

	Parents	Students	Children up to 11 years old
Print-books	62	74	73
E-books	8	16	26
both equally	29	6	1
No preference	1	4	-

Table 1 presents results of three investigations of the author – the first one is the current survey; the answers of children were collected by other survey also part of the project “Digital Competencies and Media Education at Pre-school and Primary School Age”. The university students from 1 to 3 courses were asked to complete a different survey with 12 questions connected with reading and favourite authors when they were at the seminars. In total, 101 students completed the questionnaire.

As shown in Table 1 all three groups prefer print-books. We can make a conclusion about the situation in Bulgaria regarding print-books vs. e-books that the majority of population chooses traditional format of books. There are the similar results of other international publications. The preference for paper books compared with digital ones is as follows – 70% for reading for pleasure vs. 30% – with an interactive book [6].

The question “Does your child read e-books?” is from the section “Digital literacy” and received answers as follows: 32% – never; 59% – No; 9% – Yes. This shows again that the e-books not popular among Bulgarian children.

The next question from the first part of the parents’ survey is about buying books. 4% said that they never buy books; 14% – rarely (once a year, for example), 47% – once per couple of months; 32% – every 2-3 weeks, only 3% – every week. The prices of print-books in Bulgaria are approximately 15 BGN. This is too expensive for many people in Bulgaria. According to Eurostat’s data Bulgaria cultural goods did not reach 2% of total household consumption expenditure [7].

There are two questions about the number of the books at home and about an attitude towards a library at home. When the families own over 100 titles of books at home there is an indicator of the suitable environment for forming a reading culture of the child. The most important results of these questions are that for 40% of parents keeping books at home has not only practical but spiritual value. “The mission of the book is to serve for the preservation and transmission of the knowledge, the experience and the artistic values of humanity. The act of communication with the book creates a field for sharing the spiritual experience” [8].

There are also open questions like “Why do you read /do not read to your child books?” The parents were expected to present their arguments there.

3.1.2 The child and reading

The second section “The Child and Reading” from the first panel explores the formation of reading habits in the family, questions about the child’s attitudes towards books, their reading habits.

Since the target audience is fourth grade students, they were expected to read on their own. That is why some of the questions relate to the years when they were younger and their parents read to them stories. Co-reading is extremely valuable as the child can communicate with their parents and creates a common field of understanding and interaction.

80% of parents answered that their children like when their parents read them books. Only one parent said that nobody read to their children when they were little. The extra information is given with the explanation why the parents read to their children aloud when the kids were little. The most popular answers are that reading develops the imagination; speech and thinking; reading books to young children helps them to get to know the world. There is also a response that it would bring them up to love books from their early ages.

The next question of this part of the survey is about the frequency of reading aloud to little children. 41% replied “often” (several times a week), 46% of respondents claimed that they read to their children every day. Only 2% said “rarely” (once a month).

The question “When you were reading books to your child, which of the mentioned situations was happening most often?” allowed more than one response. The parents had used reading to explain the most important things concerning life, behaviour, conclusions, etc. The active listening of children is very important to parents, as the study shows.

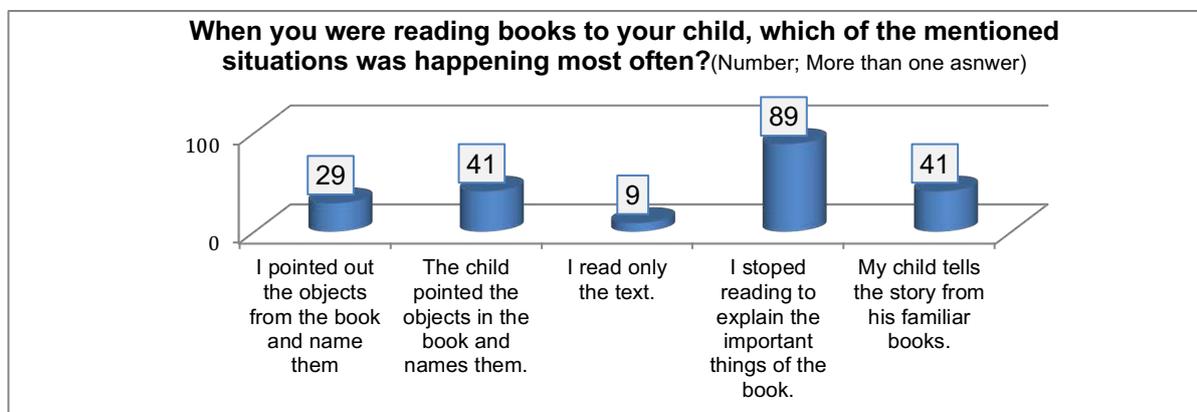


Figure 2. Parents’ manner of reading stories to their children.

The Fig. 3 is a graphical explanation of the child’s manner of the listening stories.

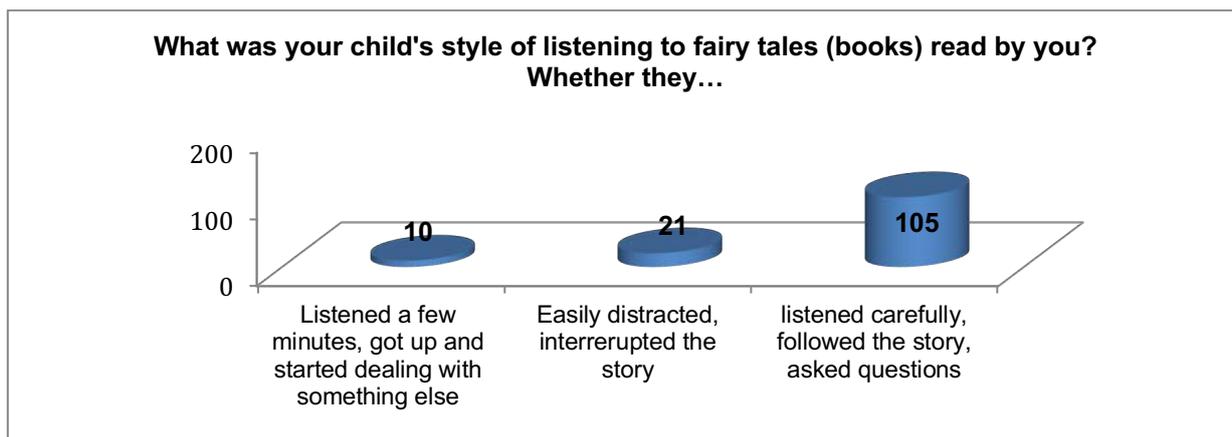


Figure 3. Parents' explanation about the children's manner of the listening stories.

As we can see the majority of children are good listeners and we can predict that they have become good readers.

"Does your child like reading books?" is the question that received many different answers. Only 1% (2 people) said "my child doesn't like books at all"; 13% of parents thought that their children rather not like reading; 16% – neither likes nor dislikes; 34% of respondents said that their children "rather like books" and 36% – like a lot (the Likert scale was used in this question).

At this age (up to 11 years old) children still have good reading manners and read often. The reasons are different – because their parents push them to read; because there is compulsory school literature for reading; for pleasure; because the children love reading books, etc.

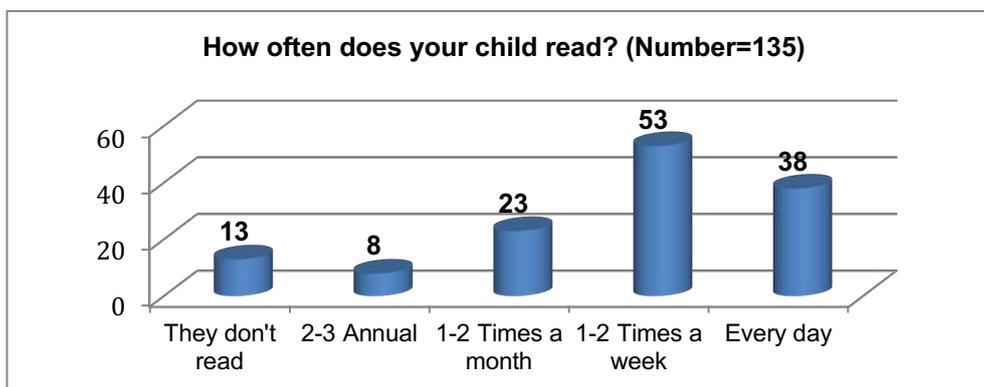


Figure 4. Parents' explanation about the children's manner of the listening stories.

The research question is why if there are many readers why there is so much illiteracy? The results of PISA about Bulgarian 15-years old students are not optimistic. 40% of Bulgarian pupils are functionally illiterate said PISA in 2015 [9]. Nearly every second student in Bulgaria has problems with reading and with the comprehension a text in their mother language [10].

There isn't an explanation of this paradox.

3.1.3 Connection between reading literacy (traditional) and forming of digital one

"How does your child usually read?" is connected with the manner of children's reading. The answers (n=126) vary as follows: reads the whole book carefully – 45%; they skip the descriptions and reflections of the author – 10%; reads the preface and the end of the book – under 1%; they only read what they're interested in – 28%; reads several books at once – 12%; and 5% said 'other'.

New technologies create a new culture of reading – screening, skimming, lateral, consumer reading, mobile reading, etc. [11, 12]. The results of the survey demonstrate classical manner of reading – the students up to 11 years old read the whole book carefully and consequently.

The parents were also asked about their care in forming children's reading literacy. 96% of them said that they're interested in forming reading literacy of their children. 94% claimed that the place of books in their lives (of parents and children) is extremely important – “without books we cannot develop ourselves”. 33% of parents responded that digital technology, Internet, television displace reading books.

The comparison between ages of starting using digital technologies and starting Reading (number) shows that the children start using digital technologies before they start read alone.

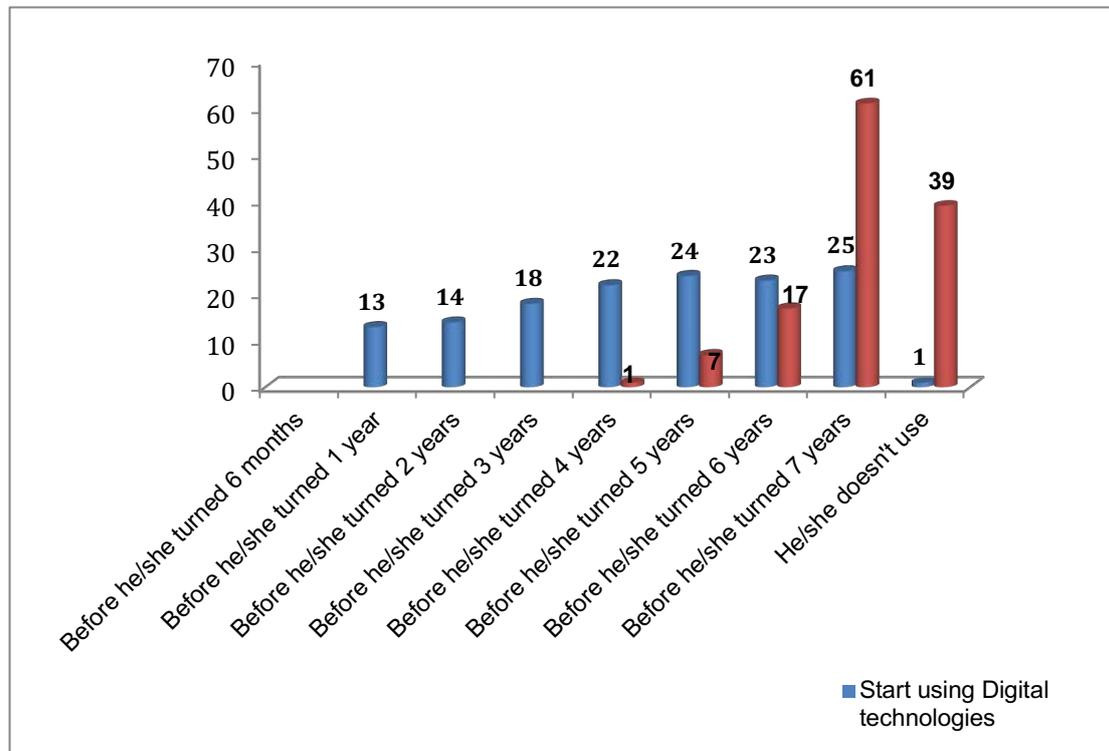


Figure 5. Parents' answers about starting using digital technologies and reading.

Although the children are engaged with digital technologies they are also read print books. There are no tensions between traditional and electronic media. Here are some parents' conclusions: "Reading creates a peculiar connection. There has been broader access to human culture lately". "I prefer my child to read on digital media, because sometimes it is a way to fight off the fear of thick books". "Touching the book is very important but digital technologies are part of our lives". "It is important to read, no matter the paper or digital media".

4 CONCLUSIONS

As one of the oldest communication tools, and as transmitter of knowledge and ideas, books continue to play an important role in the education and cultural enrichment of European citizens. [7]. As Mark Warshauer discovers reading and writing skills and cultural literacy will help students make full use of the Internet, find information, create meaningful multimodal content [13].

One of the approaches to stimulating reading is "combines both the educational element and the popularization of cultural heritage" [14].

"The modern educational system entering the Bulgarian schools requires a change in the traditional educational environment, change towards dialogue, meaningful communication between the participants, cooperation and general solving of the tasks in the educational process." [15].

In the early ages the most important role is the parents'. After the most important are the educational system and the society, the cultural environment and friends of children. There is a need to coordinate all actors connected with reading and with maintain the authority of the book in the life of modern children.

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