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SOFIA UNIVERSITY –
MARKING MOMENTUM
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National Recovery and Resilience Plan

OF THE REPUBLIC OF BULGARIA

RESEARCH GROUP
MODERN TECHNOLOGIES

RESEARCH AREA
SOCIAL SCIENCES (POLITICAL SCIENCES, LAW, EDUCATIONAL SCIENCES)

The Reading Practices of Bulgarian Students
/in Bulgaria and abroad/

INTRODUCTION

The project is motivated by the need to find out the real situation of the reading practices of Bulgarian students - those who live and study in Bulgaria and those who live and study abroad but attend Bulgarian school on weekends. The essential questions are how much, what and how contemporary Bulgarian students read, in what language and on what medium they read; why they read or do not read, what place in their reading practices is occupied by compulsory school literature and readings in social networks, literature they choose to read themselves and publications in traditional media; do the quantity and quality of their reading depend on the cultural and educational environment and the type of medium (paper or screen).

The aim of the project is to create tools that neither oppose nor ignore the reading interests, preferences, attitudes of students, but to develop them in optimal directions for personal development and public interest. Models of learning and teaching language and literature can be developed that are relevant to students' needs, interests, and motivation to read, while developing established reading skills and the expansion of digital technologies into all spheres of life. The big question is how, alongside the preservation of good educational traditions and the cultivation of functional literacy in reading, to cultivate in Bulgarian students a sophisticated aesthetic taste and deep reading comprehension skills that would enable them to experience the pleasure of reading.

METHODOLOGY

A survey was conducted among students of grades 5 to 12. Over 11 140 respondents participated, 177 of them from Bulgarian Sunday schools abroad, another 10 970 from schools in Bulgaria.

The survey aims to establish: (1) which texts are the subject of student reading interest; (2) what is the essence and what are the functions and differential signs of the concept of reading skill; (3) to what extent is the institutionalized learning environment a comfortable place for students to read; (4) whether the development of reading skills is amenable to systematic, planned and targeted educational influences; (5) which are the preferred reading venues of Bulgarian students; (6) what are the attitudes of students towards literature studied at school; (7) what are the attitudes of students in Bulgaria and abroad towards the study of literature in school settings.

An additional study was also conducted to investigate the listening attitudes of school and university students towards audiobooks. The study included 59 participants, including 27 students from language schools in Sofia and 32 students from the Bulgarian Philology and Russian Philology specializations at 'St. Kliment Ohridski' University. The task of the study was to find out under what conditions the participants would prefer to use audiobooks; what motivates the participants to choose a particular audiobook, and to what extent the choice reflects their reading preferences; to what extent the participants recognize their experience of reading on paper as the same or different from listening to audiobooks; what texts are preferred for listening when working with audiobooks. An additional purpose of the study was to determine if there was a difference between students' and nonstudents' attitudes about using audiobooks.

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RESULTS

1. When the student pays attention to the title of the text, the more he/she skims the text to get a general idea of the content, the more he/she reviews the text looking for specific information.

2. When the student pays attention to the title of the text, the more he rereads the text several times, the more he returns to the beginning.

3. When the student pays attention to the title of the text, the more he rereads the text several times, the more he makes sense of the text, drawing conclusions about the meaning of the information in its different parts.

4. When students pay attention to the title of the text, the more they ask questions about different aspects of the text and answer the questions, the more they make sense of the text, drawing inferences about the meaning of the information in its different parts.

5. When students pay attention to the title of the text, the more they ask questions about different aspects of the text and answer the questions, the more they highlight/highlight parts of the text that contain key information.

6. When students pay attention to the title of the text, the more they make sense of the text, drawing straightforward conclusions about the meaning of the information in its different parts, the more they highlight/mark parts of the text that contain key information.

7. When students start reading, 33.9% of them usually take between 15 and 30 minutes before they stop reading the text. For another 32.3% of students, stopping reading occurs between 30 and 60 minutes after starting.

8. On average, 57.56% of students manage to read one to three books per month. Only 2.3% of students manage to read more than seven books.

9. Students do not read in their free time because they prefer to "do other things" (48.8%). A particular /unpredicted/ proportion of 11.9% (in the 'other' category of the survey) is characterized by a request for insufficient time - due to other commitments not related to reading. For 1.93% of the students surveyed, "feeling" like reading was associated with social isolation and/or loneliness [because I don't want to be alone].

10. When a student starts reading {with little motivation to read}, the less time that typically passes before stopping [less than 15 minutes] , the fewer [or none] books he or she manages to read per month on average. Students most often read texts in the genres of adventure novels, short stories and fantasy (with commensurate shares: over 40%). Least of the so-called game-novel genre (lowest share: less than 30%).

11. Students declared that when they recalled the last work they studied in school, to the greatest extent (35.2%) they understood it well, and to a lesser extent (7.5%) they found it difficult to read and understand.

12. A weak tendency for coherence is observed only for the condition is easy to read with respect to adventure novels, historical novels, science fiction, game novels, short stories and poetry. The same applies to the condition is uninteresting - with respect to adventure novels, historical novels, short stories and poetry.

13. However, a tendency for relatedness of motivation to read is observed in the condition "The requirement that I have read the work", i.e., the motivation to read is stronger the more conformist the students' perception of the teacher as the authority setting the requirements. The condition 'Requirement that I have read the work' has the lowest 'rating' among students - only 52% approve of 'forced' reading.

14. When comparing the components of question 28 /the so-called "internal" coherence/, it is registered that: the requirement to reflect independently on things like plot, characters, metaphors, etc. is related to the students' ability to express their own opinions on the issues discussed in the work, as well as the requirement to independently discover plot elements, metaphors, etc. The opportunity for students to express their own opinions about the issues addressed in the work is greater the more discussion there is about the issues and the meaning of the work.

15. With regard to the additional study, the conclusions are as follows: Listening to audiobooks is combined with performing daily routine activities under time deficit.; Listening to audiobooks to prepare for exams is becoming an increasingly common practice for students; Students and faculty stated that the experiences of reading paper and listening to audiobooks differed from one another; The choice of an audiobook for students and for students is motivated more by the topic of the book, while additional stimuli (e.g., the voice of the narrator) are ignored.

CONCLUSION

Similarly to the findings of the projects of our and foreign programs, which investigate the reading skills and attitudes of young people, the summarized conclusions of the survey of the reading practices of Bulgarian students at home and abroad could serve for rethinking the goals and objectives of Bulgarian language and literature education in secondary school. The systematic and purposeful implementation of methodological activities in Bulgarian language and literature classes that provoke students' interest and motivation in reading and help them to acquire effective learning strategies would lead to better educational achievements, because reading and learning skills determine students' success in all subjects.

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