

**SURVEY FINDINGS**  
“Readers of the future” project  
with the support of Creative Europe Programme  
Macedonia  
December 2016 - January 2017

**Background: General situation with children’s literature in Macedonia and its history**

In Macedonia, the foundation of children’s literature lies in folklore - folk children’s songs and speech games (lullabies, tongue twisters, etc.), and also in folk stories (fairy tales and fables). The origin of children’s literature is related to the work of the first teachers and educators in the XIX century (to the didactic plays of Jordan Hadzhi Konstantinov-Dzhinot, who published the first primer in Macedonian - *Tablica pervaja*, and to the children's songs of Grigor Prlichev - *Vospitanie i dvanaeset pesni za deca*), and during the romanticism, which in Macedonia is mainly characterized by collecting folklore and publishing of folk songs and stories, the first publication of children's songs (children's folklore) appears, the Collection of folks songs by the Miladinov brothers.

According to Macedonian literature history, the rise of Macedonian children’s literature happens after the Second World War. In the first phase of the development of children’s literature, the first postwar generation of writers (who write in the period when the foundations of Macedonian language are being laid) are the key players, including the founders of children’s literature: Vancho Nikoleski, Boris Bojadzhiski, Vasil Kunoski, Slavko Janevski, Jordan Leov and Lazo Karovski. The second phase is marked by the writers: Gligor Popovski, Srbo Ivanovski, Cane Andreevski, Bistrica Mirkulovska, Genadi Bolinovski, Evgenija Shuplinova, Ivan Ivanovski, Jovan Strezovski, Miho Atanasovski, Vidoe Podgorec, Olivera Nikolova, Boshko Smakjoski, and writers of children's literature who according to their age belong in this generations, but became known later on - Vidoe Vidicheski, Risto Davchevski and Zhivko Chingo, whose books have become part of the obligatory books in schools. In the third phase, after 1959, a group of new children’s writers emerges, including: Kiro Donev, Dragan Janevski, Nenad Dzhambazov, Milutin Bebekovski, Vasil Pujovski, Gorjan Petrevski, Liljana Beleva, Hristo Petrevski, Svetlana Hristova Jocikj, Kata Misirkova Rumenova, Stojan Tarapuza, Dzvonko Stojanovikj, Vancho Polazarevski, etc. Jadranka Vladova, Aleksandar Prokopiev, Marija Emilija Kukubajska and others belong to the new generation of writers.

**Regarding the subjects and motifs** in Macedonian children’s books, one can conclude that they generally elaborate themes related to the world of children and are directly connected with children’s everyday life, school, friendship, children’s play and fun, social status, first love, traveling into real or fantasy worlds, and various exciting adventures (the books of older authors are filled with themes of the place of birth, or the hard life during the war, but both themes which today are "outdated" still appeal to young readers, who find a kind of "rural exoticism" in birthplace motifs, and a kind of "patriotic adventure" in war and revolution motifs). Teenagers, obviously, mostly like to read books about love, both poetry and prose, especially love novels, because they can relate to some of the

characters who have the same problems as they do. It can be inferred, however, that children mostly like to read novels that deal with current themes with a lot of action and events, that is, books with exciting stories, suggestive characters with sincere emotions, animated and lively dialogues, urban language and style that are very familiar to today's children.

Concerning the question about **the most popular children's books** for this generation of readers, the conducted surveys indicate that for the youngest readers those are the classics of Macedonian children's literature: "Zoki Poki" by Olivera Nikolova, "Kasni porasni" by Petre M. Andreevski, "The Sugar-coated Story" by Slavko Janevski, "Golem i mali" by Boshko Smakjoski, "Volshebnoto samarचे" and "Goce Delchev" by Vancho Nikoleski, "Beloto ciganche" by Vidoe Podgorec etc. Most popular titles among the teenagers are the novels by Gorjan Petrevski: "Spomenka", "Sama", "Isti ochi", and especially the novel printed in many editions, "Marta".

The experience shows that most popular authors from Macedonian children's literature are: Vancho Nikoleski, Vasil Kunoski, Slavko Janevski, Zhivko Chingo, Stojan Tarapuza, Petre M. Andreevski, Vidoe Podgorec, Olivera Nikolova, Boshko Smakjoski, Gorjan Petrevski, Kiro Donev, Jadranka Vladova; and most popular world authors are: La Fontaine, Ivan Krilov, Lewis Carroll, Carlo Collodi, Daniel Defoe, Jonathan Swift, Gianni Rodari, Jules Verne, Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, Astrid Lindgren, Johanna Spyri, J. K. Rowling, etc.

Children's literature, defined as "the body of written works and accompanying illustrations produced in order to entertain or instruct young people" is available to preschool and school children in Macedonia, both as translated and locally produced reading material. It encompasses a wide range of works, including translated classics of world literature, as well as currently popular bestsellers, picture books and easy-to-read stories written exclusively for children, fairy tales, lullabies, fables, folk songs, and other primarily orally transmitted materials, available in printed and electronic form.

In an absence of a previous, in-depth research, that would include relevant statistical data and analysis of the mentioned topic, this panorama of the genre's production, content and popularity is made based upon statements of authors, publishers, parents and non-governmental organizations, as well as media coverage and discussions on forums and social networks.

Children's literature in Macedonian, Albanian and other languages that are used in the Macedonian school system, written by local authors, is a part of the current primary school curricula. Since Macedonia's independence in 1991, a list of required books is established by the Bureau for Development of Education, an institution in the frames of the Ministry of Education, which is revisited periodically. The first revision made after 1991, led to an 'expulsion' of titles that referred to the previous, Yugoslav system, written by authors that were associated with it, replacing them with either international or domestic authors.

Besides the books listed by the Bureau, individual schools/teachers have the right to suggest other books to their students. This practically means that different schools in Macedonia could have different reading material in the frames of their language classes, with different ratio of locally authored versus translated books.

However, the prevailing impression is that, when it comes both to obligatory and to non-obligatory reading, there is a lack of young and fresh local authors that would write books that captivate the attention of children, the way that some of the translated literature does. The so called local 'stars' of children literature, whose books are mostly red because they are a part of the obligatory curriculum, are around 60 years of age. The same authors become published year after year for the last three decades, becoming a self-sufficient circle of writers, whose works are not up to date with current children's interests and way of life (although some, like "The Tales of Zoki Poki" by Olivera Nikolova, are praised as timeless classics). The Association of Writers, each year, dedicates one of its awards named after the late Vancho Nikoleski to the best children's book. However, the competition (if any) is very limited, and the award does not present a challenge for younger authors. One of the reasons could be that they are not interested to write for children, or – more realistically – that they cannot raise sufficient funds for publishing their works, thus leaving them outside the mainstream children's literature establishment.

An exception of this rule is made by the ones who are producing graphic novels, that are not exclusively written for children, but that can appeal to them by their visuals and the topics. One such young author, Matej Bogdanovski, has published his book "Patentalija and Tentelina" through a crowd-funded campaign, after his application for funds has been rejected by the Ministry of Culture. Another group of illustrators and writers have produced a new super-hero comic strip series, "Ajvar men" ('ajvar' being a traditional winter food in Macedonia), and are promoting their works online.

This touches another problem of the current market for children's books – the lack of proper promotion. The senior generation, as well as most of the publishers, seem to lack PR and marketing skills to promote the published works. To be part of the curriculum seems to be the only ambition of already established writers for children. This is understandable if one takes into account another element, the economic motivation. Namely, while most of the books in Macedonia are printed in a maximum circulation of 500 copies, the obligatory books are periodically printed in few thousand copies, which also means additional income for the authors of such books for each new edition.

The generational issue becomes even more apparent when one researches the current university level curricula (Pedagogical Faculties) that contain an undergraduate course on children's literature. One of them, for example, at the University Goce Delchev in Shtip (Eastern Macedonia), covers world, European, South-Slavic and Macedonian children's literature, but the 'newest' covered local authors are Kiro Donev, Velko Nedelkovski, Miho Atanasovski and Kata Misirkova Rumenova, who are all born before or shortly after WWII.

A rare book promotional activity organized by schools, besides collective visits to the Skopje book fair, are "Meet the author" events, that take the form of questions and answers sessions in the frames of language classes. An author talks about his or her creative process, motivations and inspirations and answers children's queries. However, these classes seem to be to 'dry' and do not include any other interactive feature that might encourage the reading of the discussed book. On the other hand, some non-governmental organizations try to research and promote reading habits. For example, "Step By Step" NGO, sponsored by USAID, conducts detailed surveys on mathematical and language literacy, the latter taking

into account elements such as education of parents, number of owned books at home etc. This organization has also published 20 new picture-books (in Macedonian and other school languages in Macedonia) that cover topics that are rarely dealt with in existing literature in Macedonia (such as birth of a new child in the family, divorce, death of a close one). All these titles have been developed in English by International Step by Step Association, and some of them are available for free online).

However, it seems that the best way to encourage children to read, especially locally produced reading material, is to connect a certain TV serial and/or theatre play with books. This was done by the mega-popular "5+" TV show, locally produced in Macedonian and Albanian language by a non-governmental organization OXO, who at the same time produced a series of picture-books that allow parent-teacher-child cooperation, on the topic of human rights. This is how children who identified with the characters of the show could identify with the ones in the books. However, this is a solitary example of such efforts that are more an exception than the rule.

A precise number of sponsored children's books by the Ministry of Culture of Macedonia, who has an annual publishing program, is not available. However, on the 15<sup>th</sup> of January 2017 an Anthology of Children's literature written by Macedonian authors was promoted by the Minister of Culture. It consists of works by 17 Macedonian writers (starting from the works of an early 20<sup>th</sup> century collector of folklore, Marko Cepenkov), 4 volumes of selected short stories by different authors, as well as a book of children's poetry.

On the other hand, a private foundation called Makedonika ([www.makedonika.mk](http://www.makedonika.mk)), has put an effort of digitalization of Macedonian language books and making them available for e-reading (mobile platforms and e-books). Among other genres, it includes a number of children's books, such as digitized classic editions that can be hardly found in their original print today, such as *Pupi Paf* by Slavko Janevski, *Mite sonuva* by Genadi Bolinovski or *Biljana* by Gligor Popovski. It also contains digital versions of the obligatory books according to the latest curricula. However, the utilization of this platform by children themselves remains questionable.

As per the suitability of the obligatory and/or recommended children's literature, public discussion was initiated on several occasions concerning the suitability of topics covered by some of the books written in local languages for primary school children. For example, in 2011 a University professor of literature, Venko Andonovski, has publicly (through a newspaper column in Nova Makedonija daily) questioned the choice of the tale "The Dead Konstantin" as a book for school children, having in mind that the main topic of the book is death. As a follow up, a journalistic investigation led to the conclusion that other books recommended as reading material by teachers contain graphic scenes of domestic violence.

A court case was also initiated for libel by a Macedonian author whose books are part of the school curricula, after two web-portals published a book review of one of the books recommended for school use for 7th grade pupils, that according to the review contains references to potential pedophilia. Although the case was won by both portals, it is not clear if the book was removed from the list of 'recommended' reading.

There are at least three children's periodical journals, two of them (Rosica and Drugarche) being distributed in schools for children who like to be subscribed to them, and one (Smeshka) distributed through local bookstores. These journals, unlike the book publishing, offer a bigger chance for young writers and designers to present their works on smaller scale.

### **Few words about the classics in Macedonian children's literature**

The classic "Zoki Poki" by Olivera Nikolova this year celebrates 50 years of its first publication, and after all these years, this character is still one of the favorite for today's children, who, as all other previous generations, can relate to Zoki Poki and his foolish behavior. Zoki Poki has the same significance for Macedonian literature as Oliver Twist for the English, and Tom Sawyer for the American. This book by Olivera Nikolova is a classic in Macedonian literature, every child has read this book and was growing with it. Literary critics are unanimous about the statement that this book has a potential to become international brand, and can be equally accepted in other regions of the world, if it is properly translated and marketed.

Another classic in Macedonian children's literature is "The Sugar-coated Story" by Slavko Janevski, which can be justly called the "Macedonian Pinocchio". In the tale about the "Sugary child" from "the biggest little town in the world, Negobilo (Neverland), the blend of fantasy and fantastic is what spurs children's fantasy and incites children's imagination. Through the adventures and experiences of the Sugary child (something like the adventures of the wooden child Pinocchio), in a fabulous fairytale-like atmosphere, the author Slavko Janevski balances the theme about the battle between good and evil, in which the good wins.

### **Survey objectives**

Having in mind the previously described situation with children's literature in Macedonia, this survey aims to fill in, at least partially, the gap in our understanding of how things stand when it comes to the reading habits of children in Macedonia. In a broader sense, it is conducted in the frames of the overall project related to raising awareness on the importance of children's literature as a main tool for cultural development of young generations, and as a key for overcoming potential social, religious and ethnic barriers among them. An important focus is also put on the opinion of the parents regarding the quality of the obligatory or suggested reading material in schools, as well as the available literature outside school.

The main specific objectives of the survey were:

- Analysis of reading habits of children and youngsters in Macedonia, and

- Support of parents, teachers and publishers in the promotion of reading.

### Survey methodology

The survey was conducted using a questionnaire consisting of 11 multiple-choice questions, 5 of which allow an option for both children's and parent's answer, and one requiring parents' written comments on the suitability of recommended school reading.

Questionnaires were distributed in six primary schools in Macedonia:

- "Petar Pop Arsov" and "Panajot Ginovski" (Skopje)
- "Kole Kaninski" (Bitola)
- "Strasho Pindzur" (village of Karbinci, Shtip)
- "Ismail Qemali" (Gostivar)
- "Hristo Uzunov" (Ohrid)

The choice of primary schools was made based upon few important principles: geographic, social, multi-ethnic and gender. The survey thus covered schools in Central, West and East Macedonia, taking into consideration both urban and rural communities. Questionnaires were distributed in Macedonian-speaking and in Albanian-speaking classrooms, in the respective mother tongue. The covered classes were also gender balanced.

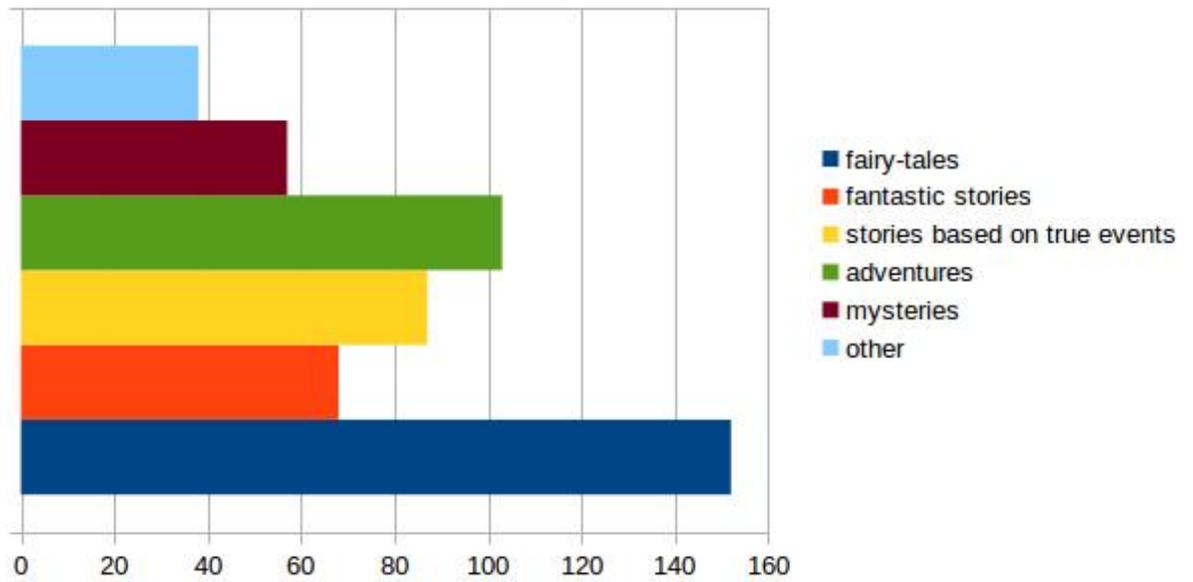
A total of 1000 questionnaires were distributed for primary school students, of which **355** were received in response from 2<sup>nd</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> grade classes and **575** from 5<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> grade (total of **930**). The results review follows the questions' order.

### Survey findings on questionnaires targeting 2<sup>nd</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> grade classes

The **first** question "Do you like to read?" was answered with "Yes" by 346 children, while only 9 of them answered "No". The same question, posed to their parents, yielded 295 "Yes" answers, and only 2 "No".

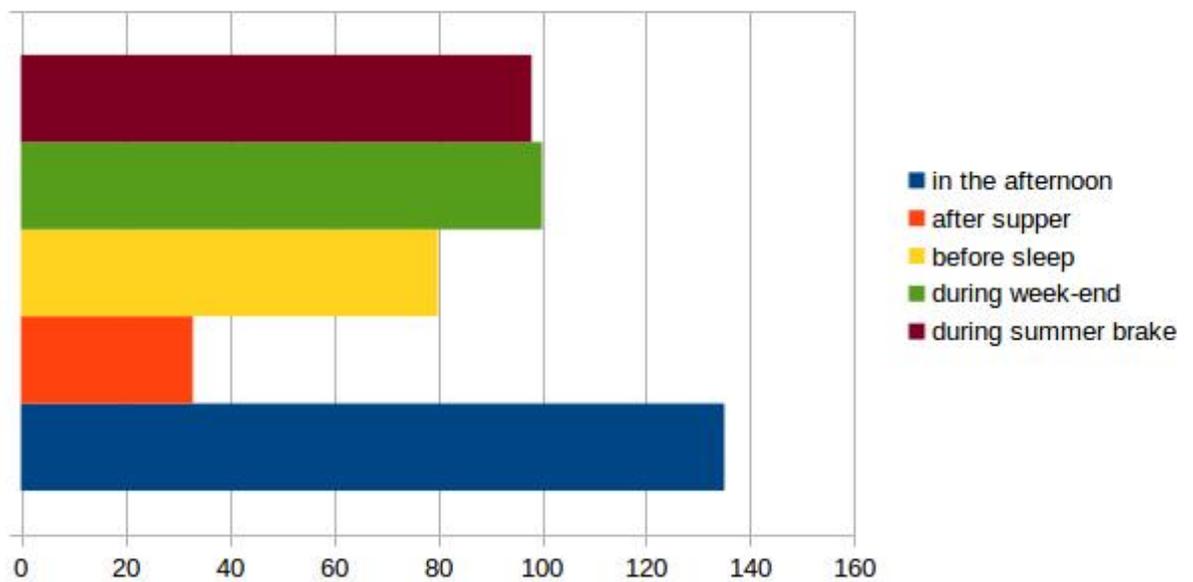
The **second** question, allowing a choice of more than one answer, "What is your favorite genre?", shows a priority for fairy-tales (152), followed by "Adventures" (103), "Stories based on true events" (87), "Fantastic stories" (68) and "Mysteries" (57). "Other" is chosen 38 times.

2 : What is your favorite genre ?



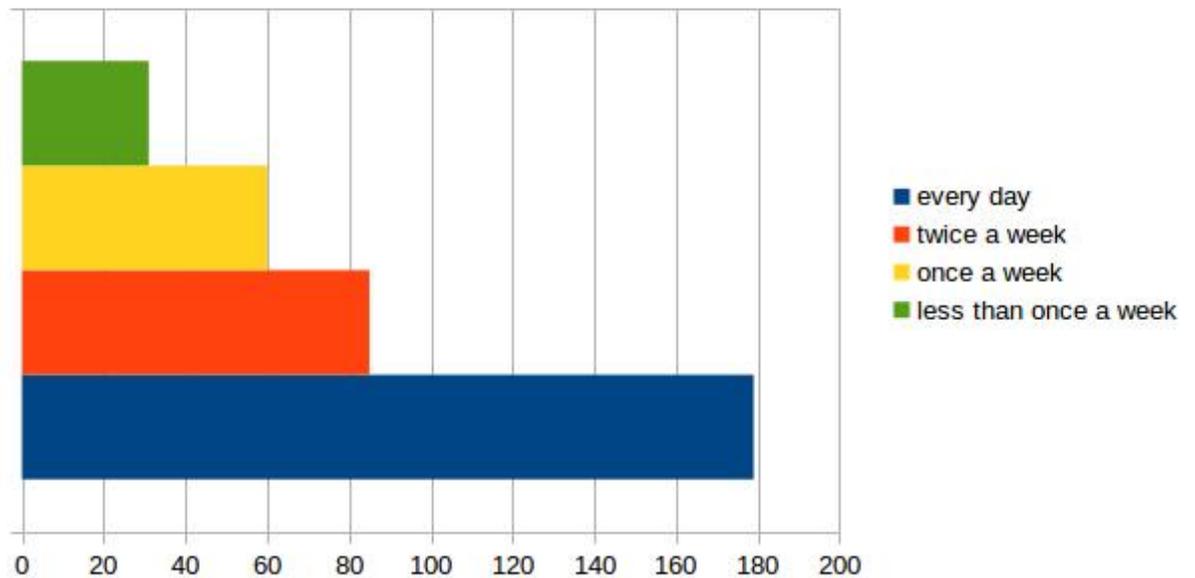
**Third** question is “When do you read at home?”, also allowing multiple answers. 135 children chose “in the afternoon”, 100 “during week-end”, 98 prefer to read during summer break, 80 before sleep, while 33 say that they read after supper.

3 : When do you read at home ?



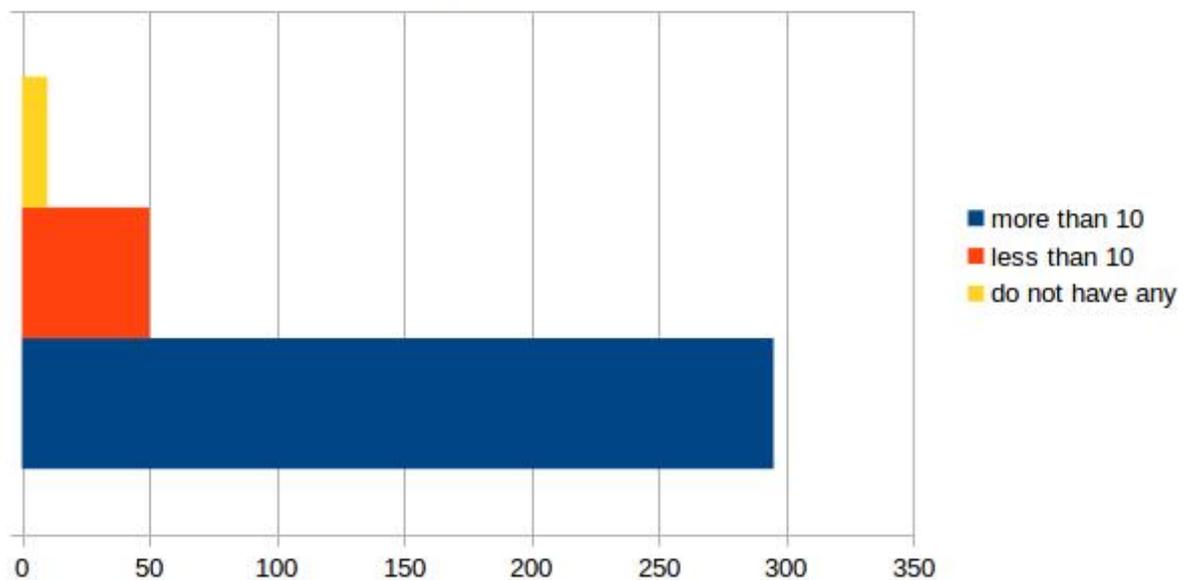
Regarding time spent per week reading, the **fourth** question, “How often do you read?”, yields the following results: Most of the participants, 179, say that they read every day. 85 of them read twice a week, 60 once a week, while 31 say that they read less than once a week.

4 : How often do you read ?



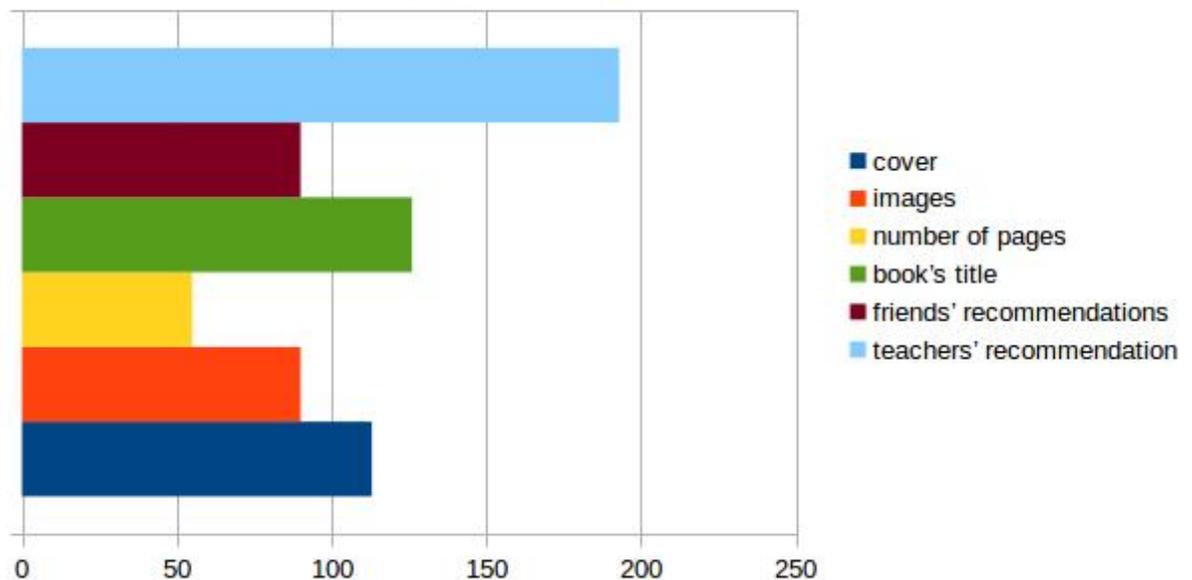
The **fifth** question, “How many books do you have at home?”, was answered by 295 participants with “More than 10”, 50 of them answered that they own less than 10 books, while only 10 do not have any books at home.

5 : How many books do you have at home ?



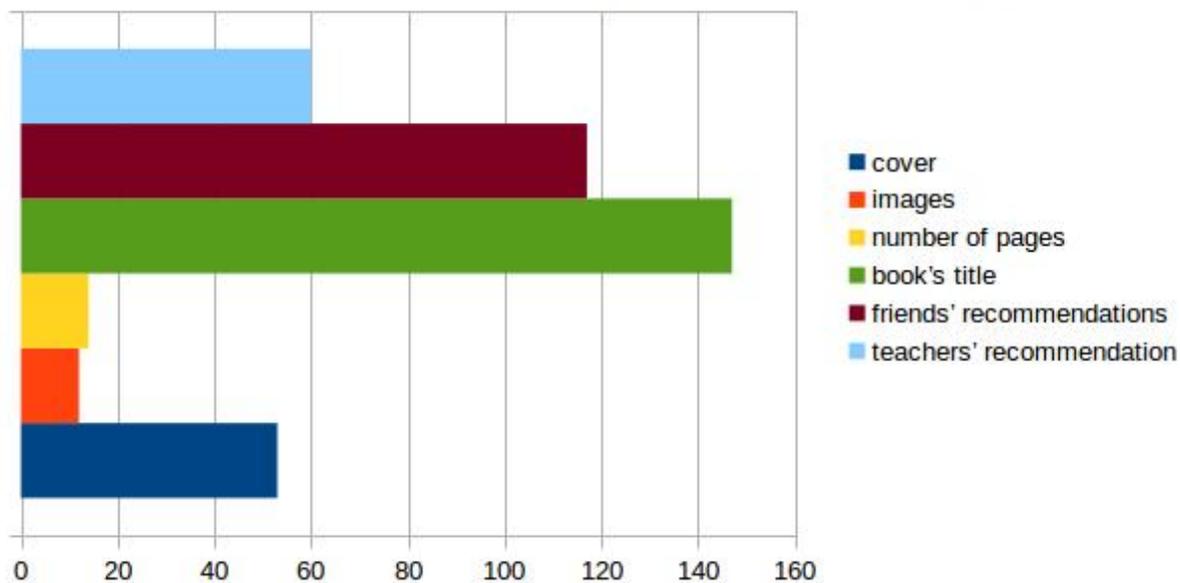
The **sixth** question “What is the most important for you when you select a book”, allowing more than one answer, was answered by both children and their parents. 193 children choose their books based upon the teachers’ recommendation, 126 according to the book’s title, 113 according to the book cover page, 90 according to images and the same number of children according to friends’ recommendations, while 55 prioritize the number of pages.

6 : What is the most important for you when select a book (children)



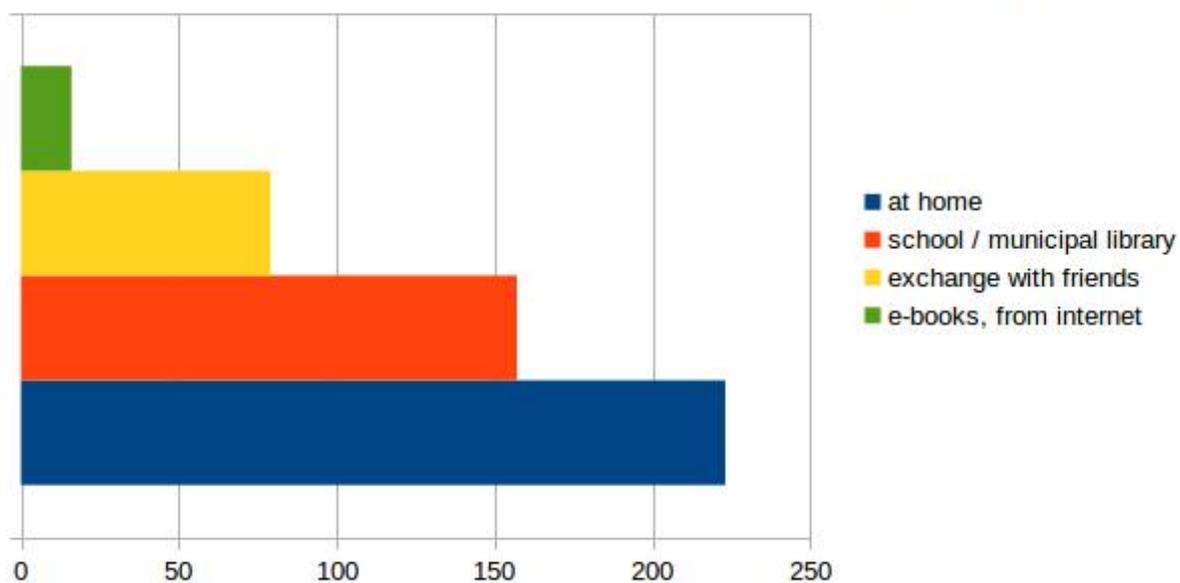
At the same time, 147 parents say that the most important for choosing a book for their child is the book’s title, 117 that they choose books according to their friends’ suggestions, 53 find that the book cover is the most important feature for their choice, 60 follow the teachers’ advices, 14 do it according to the number of pages, and 12 according to the images contained in the book.

6 : What is the most important for you when select a book (parents)



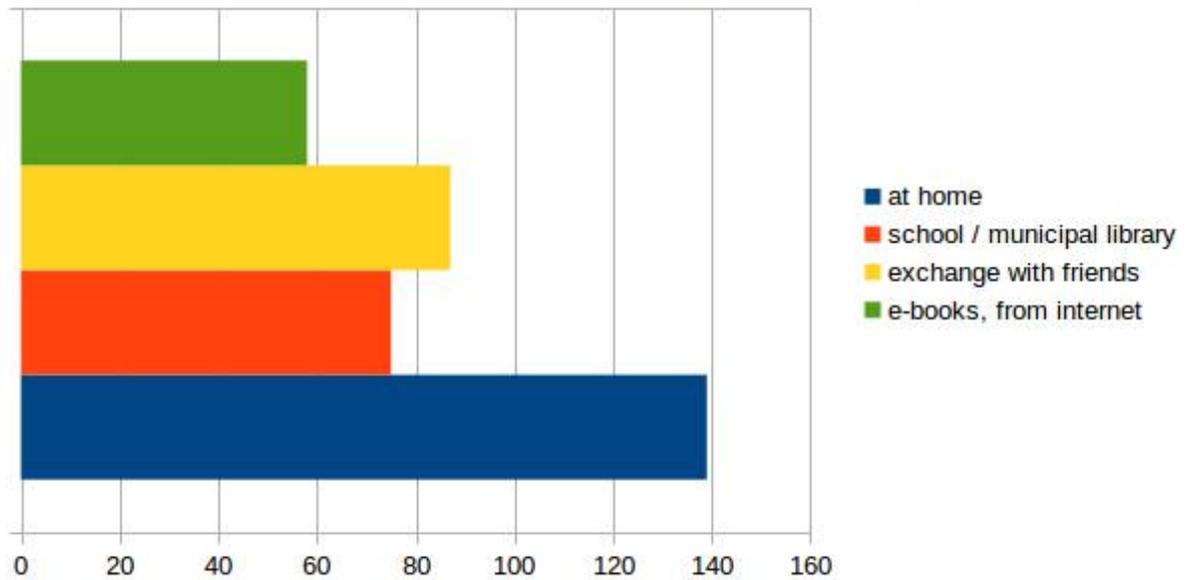
As an answer to question **number seven**, “Where do you get the books that you read”, allowing more than one answer, most of the children say that they get their books at home (223). 157 of them use the school or municipal library, 79 exchange them with their friends, while 16 use e-books and obtain their books from internet.

7 : Where do you get the books that you read ? (children)



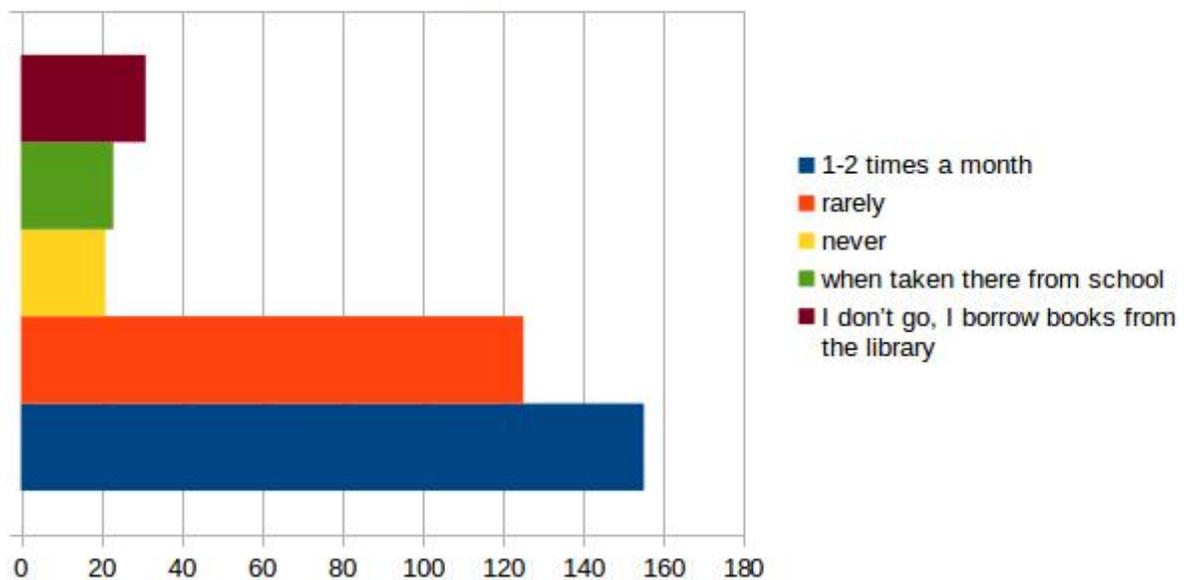
139 parents said that they also get books for their children from their home libraries. 87 of them exchange them with friends, 75 use the libraries, while 58 use the internet as a source for reading material.

7 : Where do you get the books that you read ? (parents)

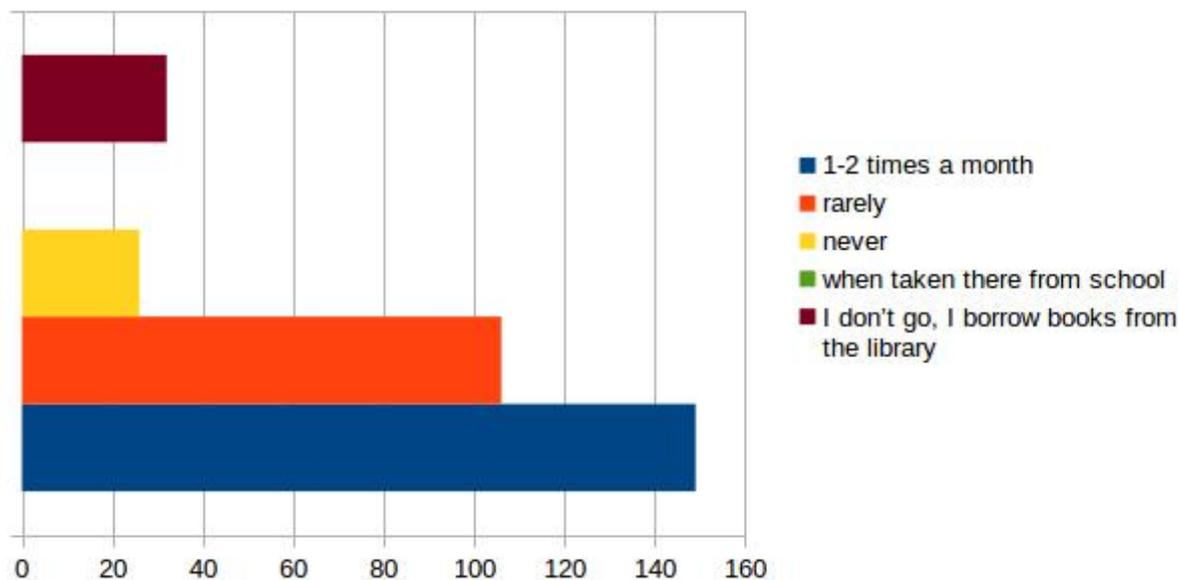


“How often do you visit a bookstore?” question **number eight**, was answered with “1-2 a month” by 115 children and 149 parents. “Rarely” was the answer of 125 children and 106 parents. “I don’t go to a bookstore, I borrow books from the library” was chosen by 31 children and 32 parents, while 23 children said they go to the bookstore only when taken there from school. 21 children and 26 parents said they “Never” go to the bookstore.

8 : How often do you visit a bookstore ? (children)

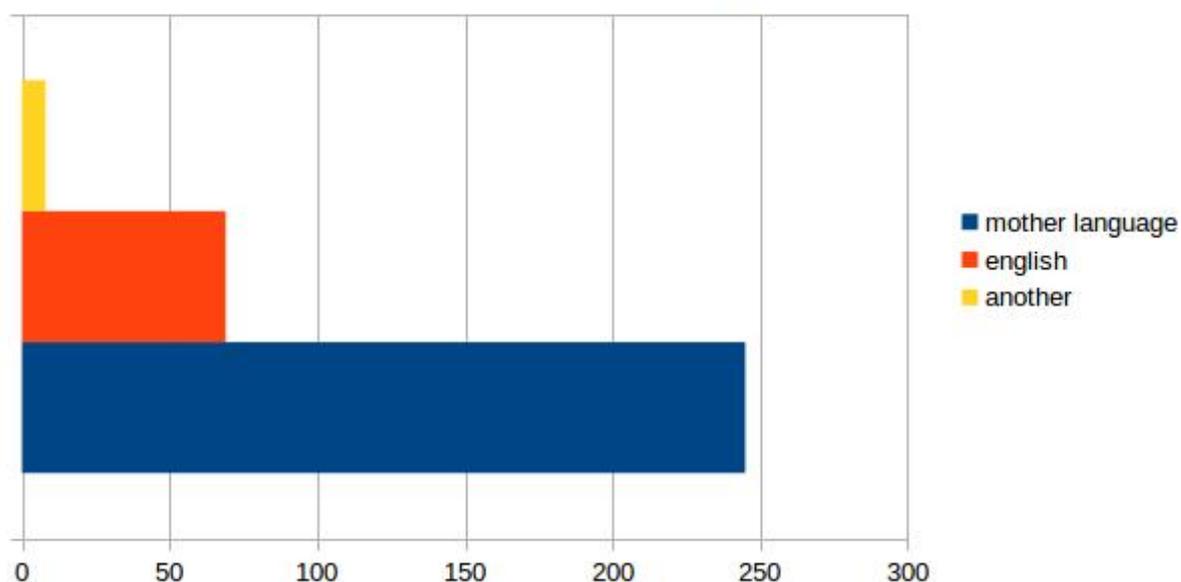


### 8 : How often do you visit a bookstore ? (parents)



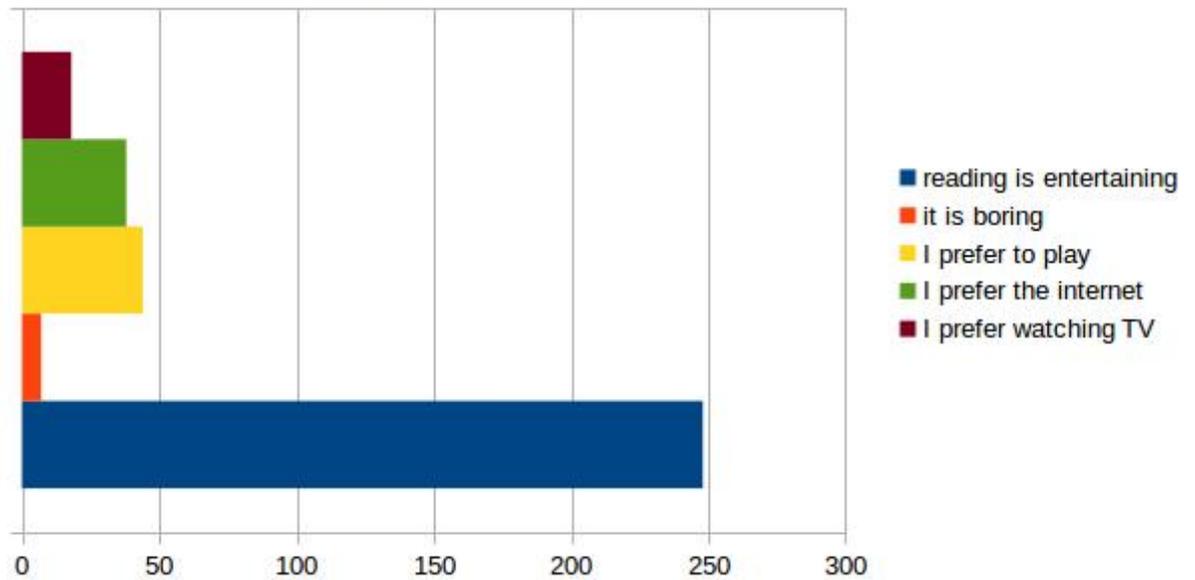
Answering question **number nine**, “What is your favorite language for reading?”, 245 children chose their mother tongue (Macedonian, i.e. Albanian), 69 prefer to read in English, while 8 in another language (naming German, Serbian, French and Spanish).

### 9 : What is your favorite language for reading ?



Asking about reasons for reading or not reading, question **number ten**, “Why do you like/do not like to read?” was answered as follows: 248 said that “A book is entertaining”, 44 that they like more to play, 38 that they prefer the internet, 18 that they prefer watching TV, while only 7 of them said that they find books boring.

## 10 : Why do you like / do not like to read ?

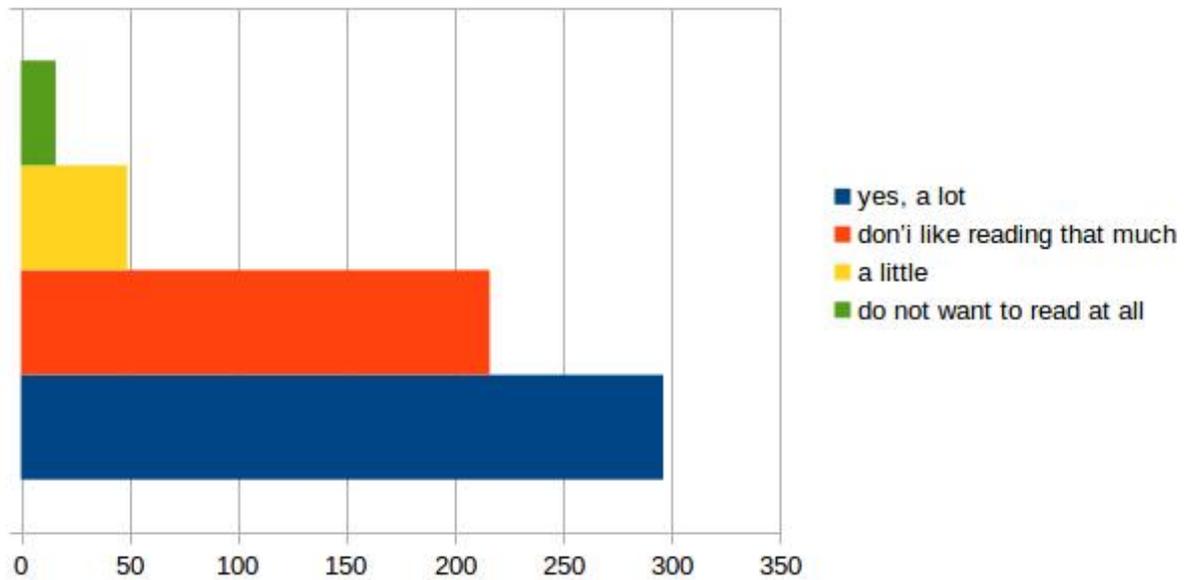


The 11<sup>th</sup> question asked the parents to comment if the books that are recommended for school are appropriate, and to give examples thereof. 102 parents said that the books are appropriate in terms of content and their children's age, naming titles such as "Alice in Wonderland", "Oliver Twist", "The Little Prince", "Clementine's Spider-web", "Stories over the Telephone", as well as books by Macedonian authors, such as "Itar Peyo", "The Sugar-coated Story" or "Goce Delchev". However, few of the comments relate to the unsuitability of some of the books in terms of their content, that they are not appropriate for the child's age, and/or that they are too old-fashioned for the new generations. Five parents also complained that the books (either in original or in translation) contain archaic language (dialects or archaisms) that they have to explain to their children at home, since there is no glossary at the end of the book.

### Survey findings on questionnaires targeting 5<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> grade classes

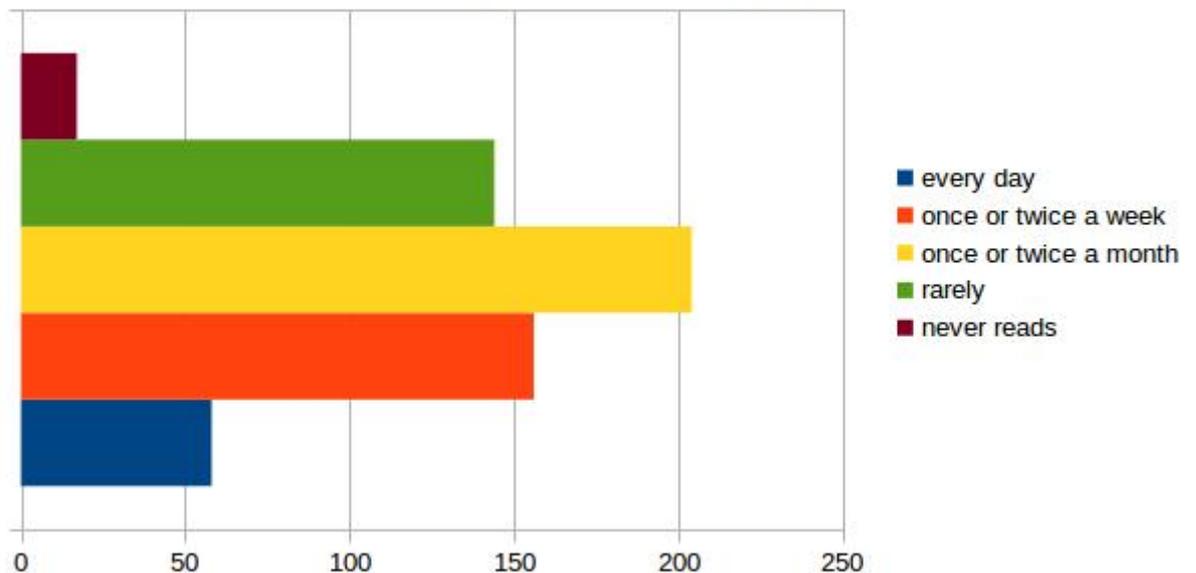
The **first** question "Do you like to read?" was answered with "Yes, a lot" by 296 children, 216 said that they "don't like reading that much", 49 like reading "a little", while only 16 said that they do not want to read at all.

### 1 : Do you like to read ?



The **second** question, “How often do you read the obligatory books?”, was answered by 58 children with “every day”, 156 said that they read once or twice a week, 204 that they read 1-2 a month, 144 that they do it rarely, while 17 admitted that they never read the obligatory books.

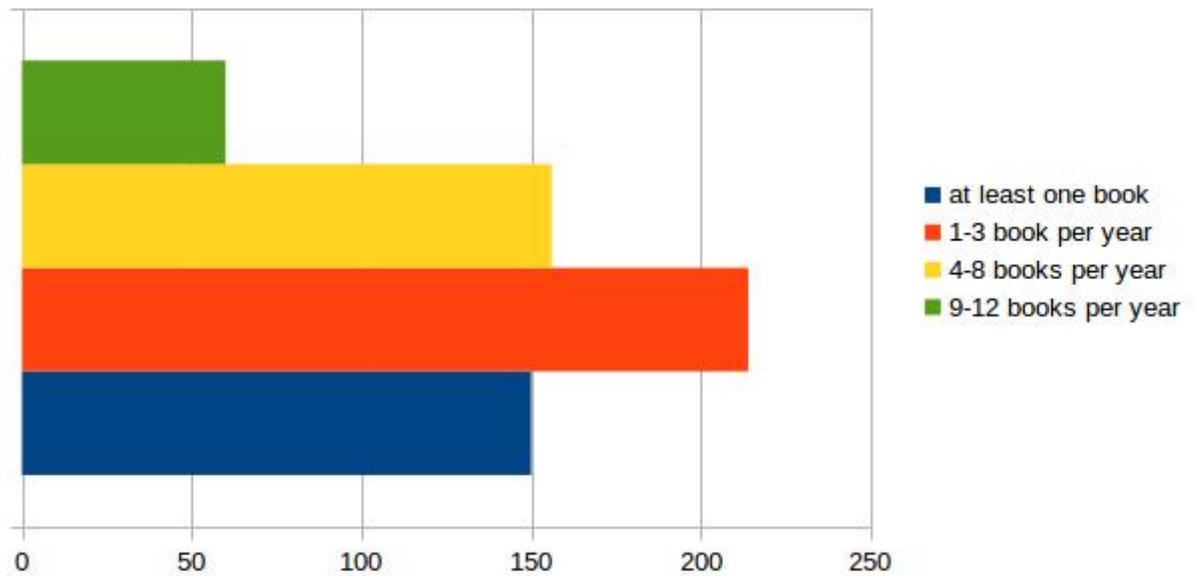
### 2 : How often do you read the obligatory books ?



“How many books (besides the obligatory ones) do you read per year?”, the **third question**, was answered as follows: 150 pupils said that they read at least one book a year besides the required school material, 214 that they read 1-3 books per year, 156 that they

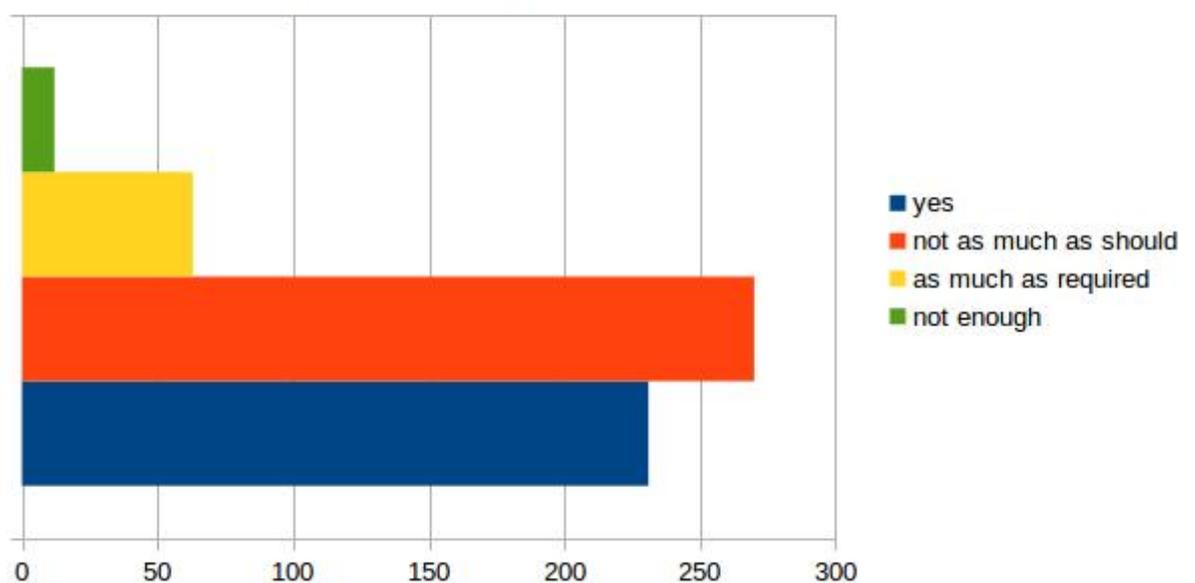
read 4-8 books, and only 60 surveyed pupils say that they read 9-12 extra-curriculum books during the year.

3 : How many books (besides the obligatory ones) do you read per year ?

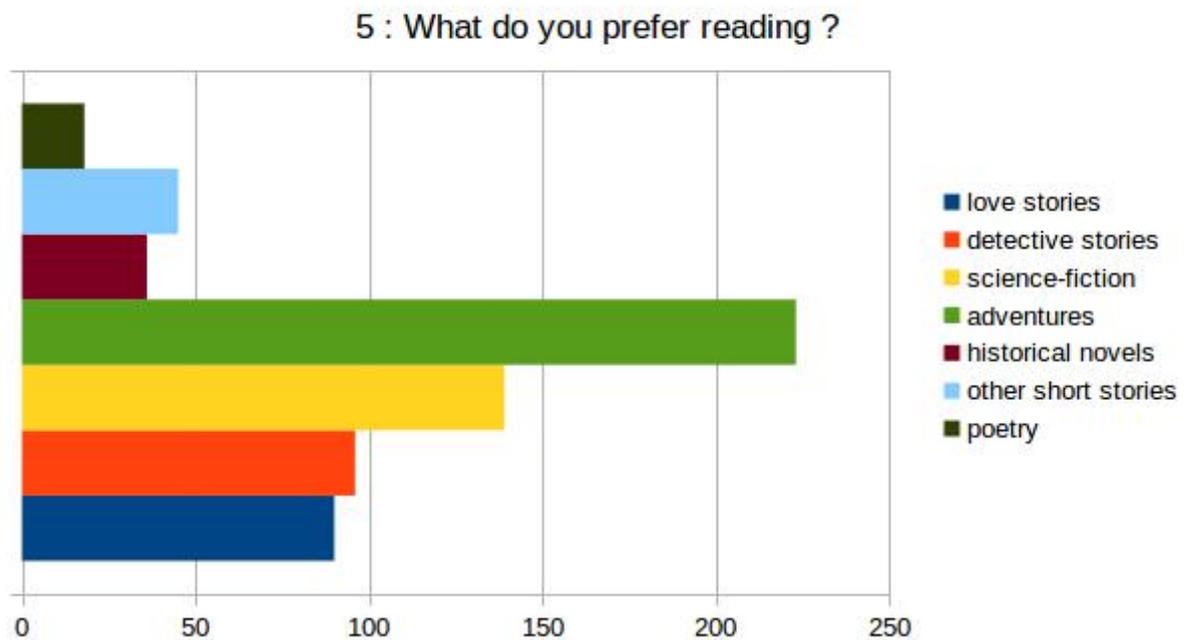


The **fourth question**, “Do you think that you read as much as you should?”, was answered with “yes” by 231 pupils, while 270 said that they do not think they read as much as they should, and that they should read more. 63 said that they read as much as they are required at school, while 12 admitted that they do not read enough, since they do not like to read at all.

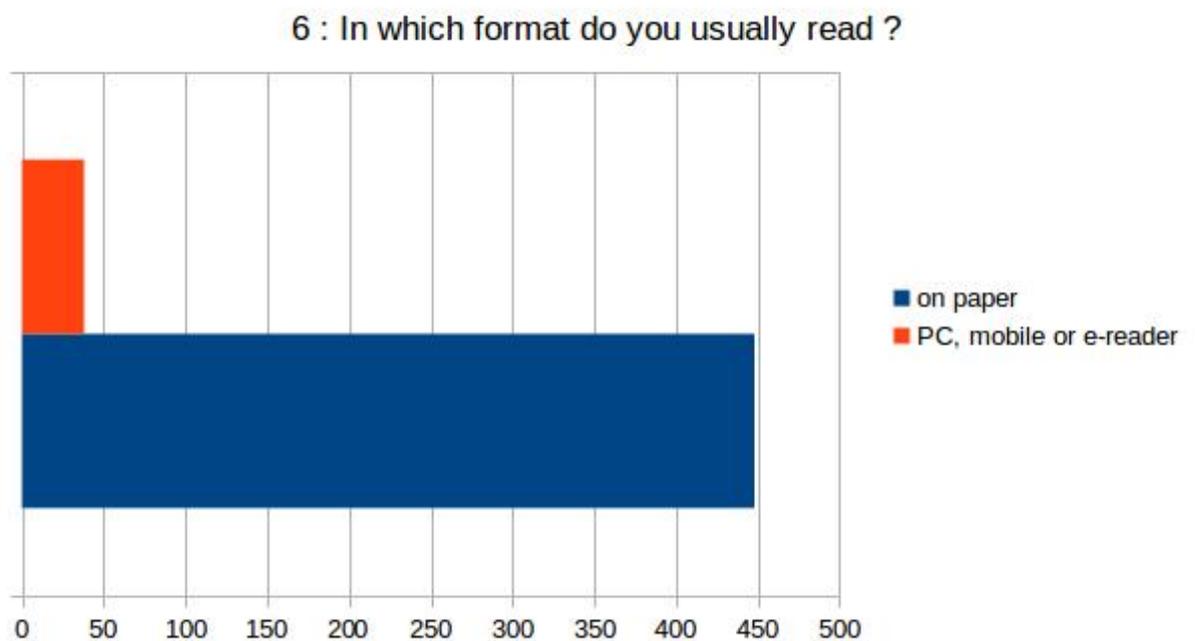
4 : Do you think that you read as much as you should ?



Question **number five**, “What do you prefer reading?”, was answered with “adventures” (223), “science-fiction” (139), detective stories (96), love stories (90), while 36 prefer historical novels. Also, 45 like other stories, and 18 poetry.

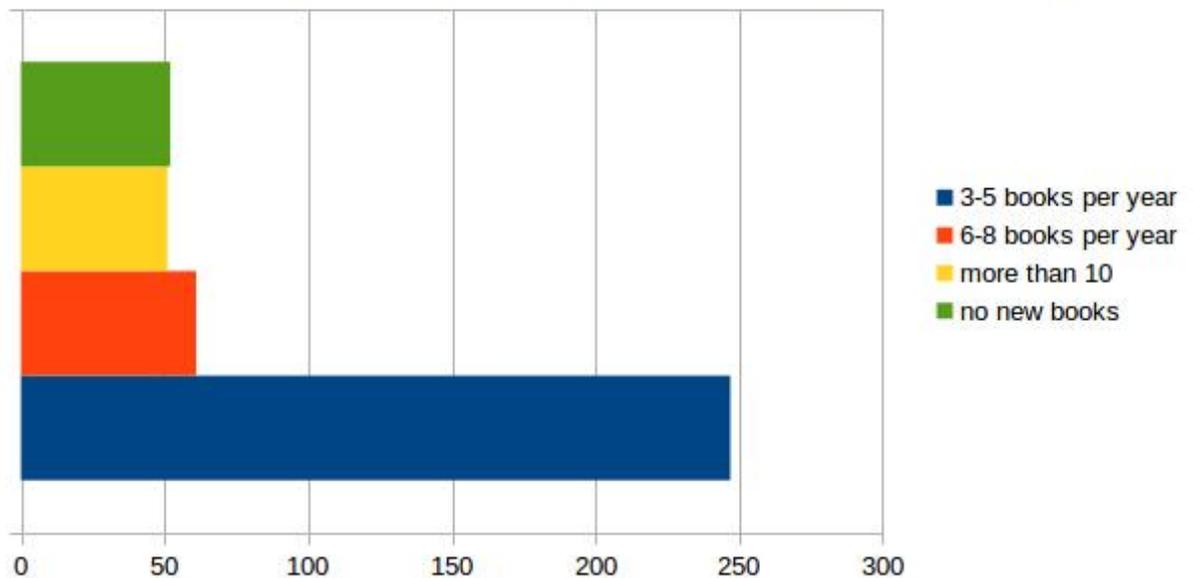


The **sixth question**, “In which format do you usually read?” was answered by 448 pupils with “on paper”, while 38 said that they read on a computer, mobile or e-reader.



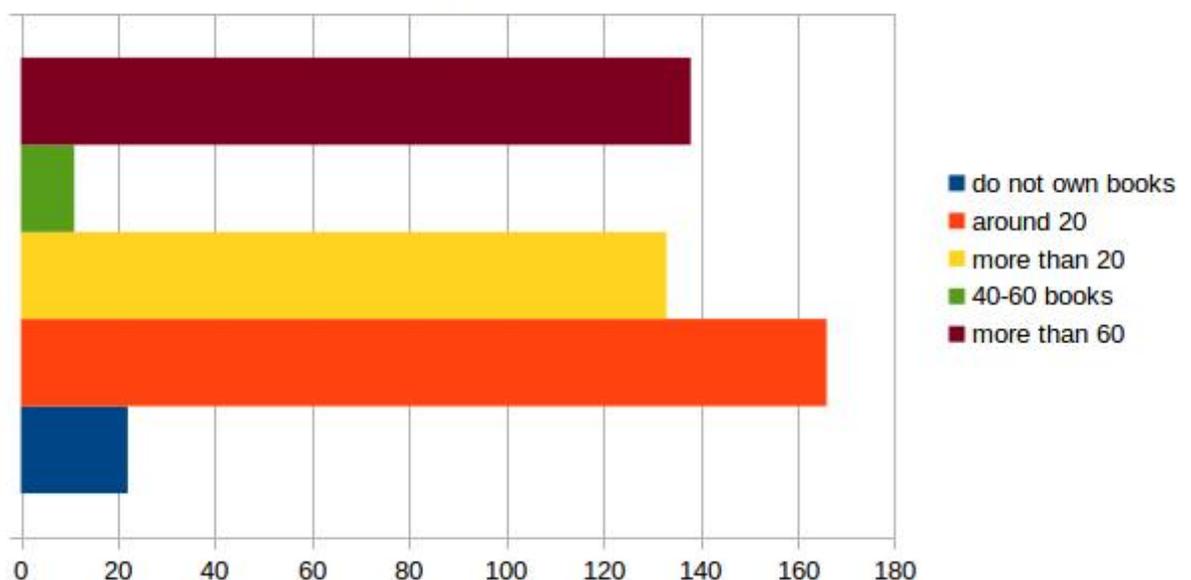
“How many books do you buy or you get as a present annually?”, question **number seven**, majority of the surveyed (247) said that they buy or get 3-5 books per year, 61 that they get 6-8 books, while 51 said that they annually refresh their libraries with more than 10 books. However, 52 pupils say that during the year they do not buy or get any new book.

7 : How many books do you buy or you get as a present annually ?

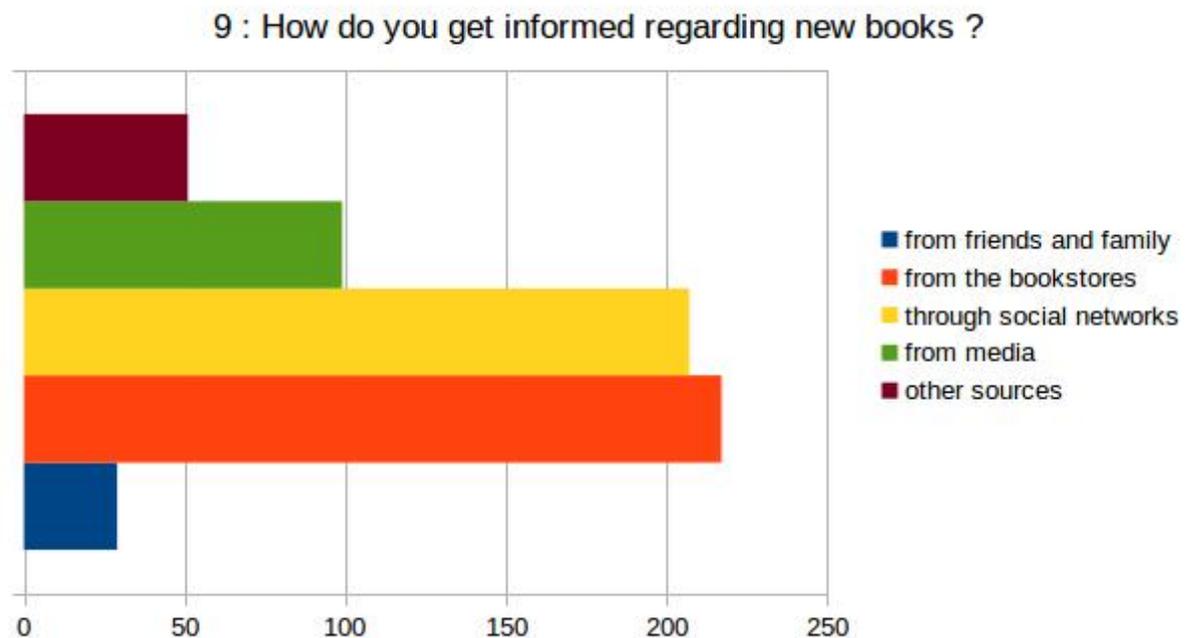


**Eight question**, how many books do children have at home, 22 pupils said that they do not own any book, 166 that they have around 20 books, and more than 20 are owned by 133. From 40-60 books is the answer of 11 pupils, while 138 said that they have a larger number of books at home.

8 : How many books do you have at home ?

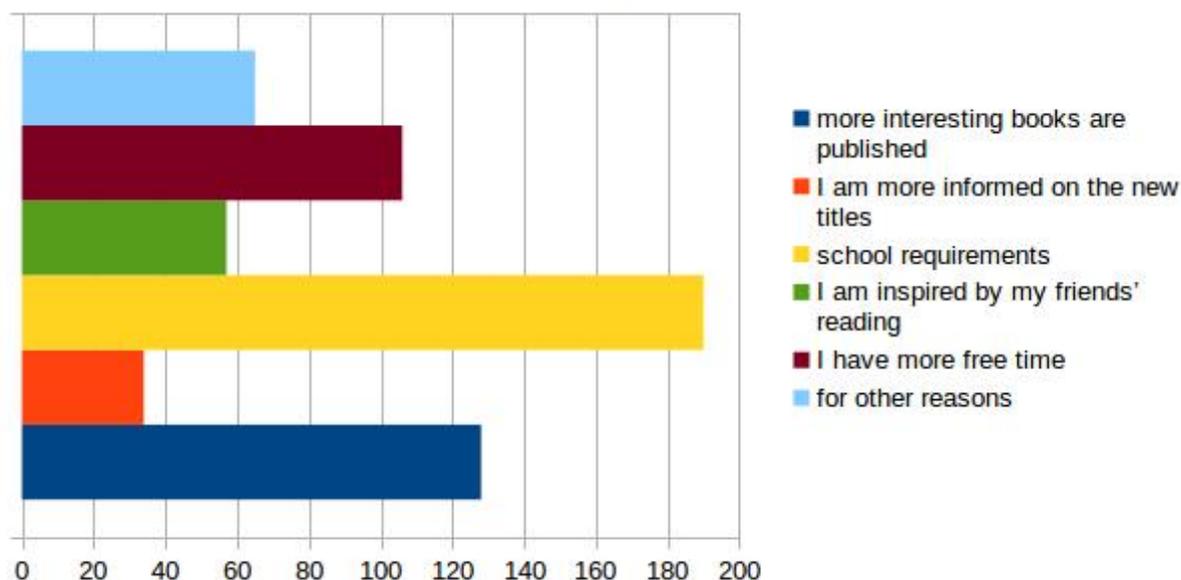


29 answered the **ninth question**, “How do you get informed regarding new books?” said that they learn that from their friends and family, 217 that they get the information from the bookstores, 207 follow these information through social networks, 99 from the media, while 51 said that they get informed from other sources.



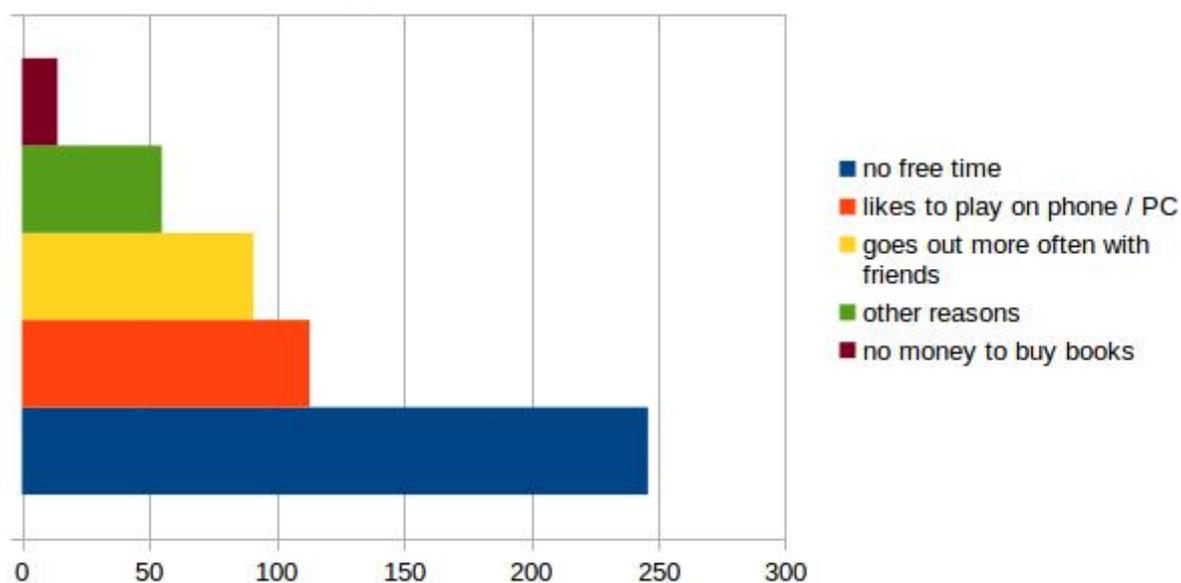
“In comparison to last two years, I read more or almost the same amount of books because...”, question **number ten**, 128 pupils found the reason for their greater interest in the fact that lately there are more interesting books published (128), 34 said that the reason is that they are more informed on the new titles. 190 said that they read more since the school requires them, while 57 that they are inspired to read by their friends’ reading habits. 106 read more because they have more free time, while 65 of them named ‘other’ reasons for this.

### 10 : In comparison to two last years i read more because ...



Compared to the last two years (**question number 11**), pupils said that they read less (or not at all), since they do not have free time (246), or since they like to play on their mobile phones or the computer (113). 91 go more often out with their friends, while 55 named other reasons. 14 pupils said that they do not read lately since they do not have money to buy books, or that they do not have information about the new titles.

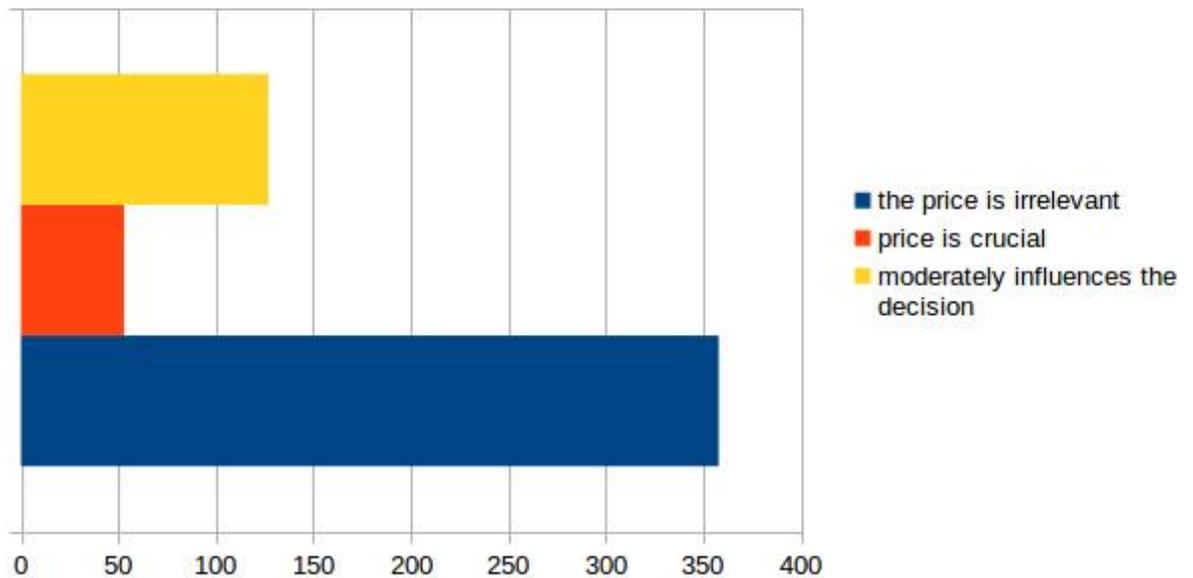
### 11 : Why do you read less, compared to the last two years ?



“How much does the price of the book influence your decision to buy it?” (**question number 12**), majority of pupils (358) said that the price of the book is irrelevant, since if

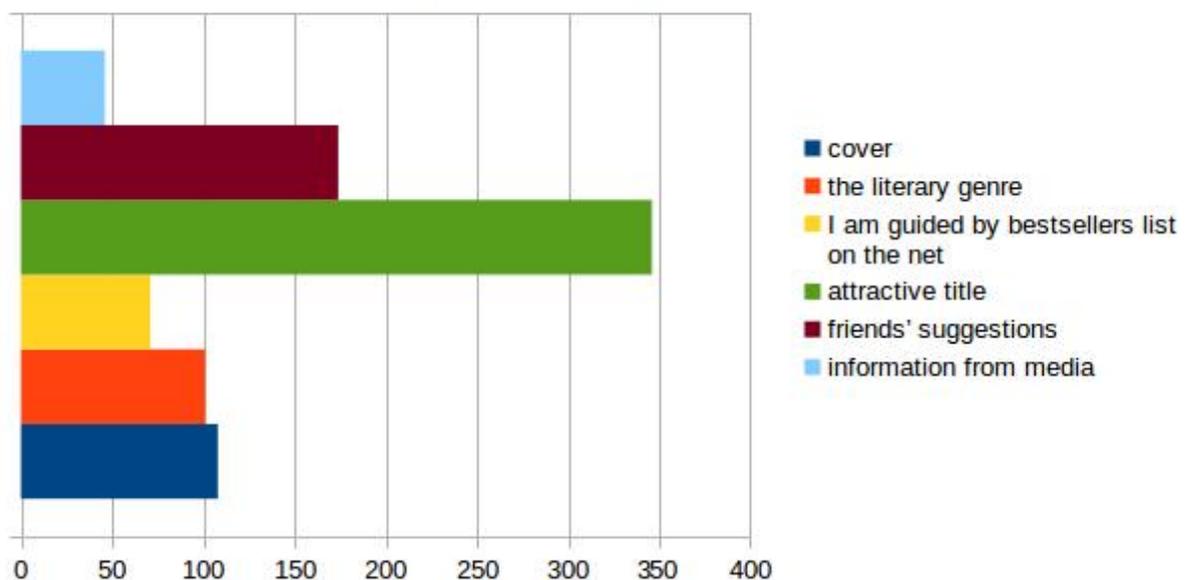
they like the book they buy it anyway, only 3 said that the price is crucial, no matter if they like the book if the price is too high they do not buy it. 127 said that the price moderately influences their decision, while 37 chose 'other' as option.

12 : How much does the price of the book influence your decision to buy it ?

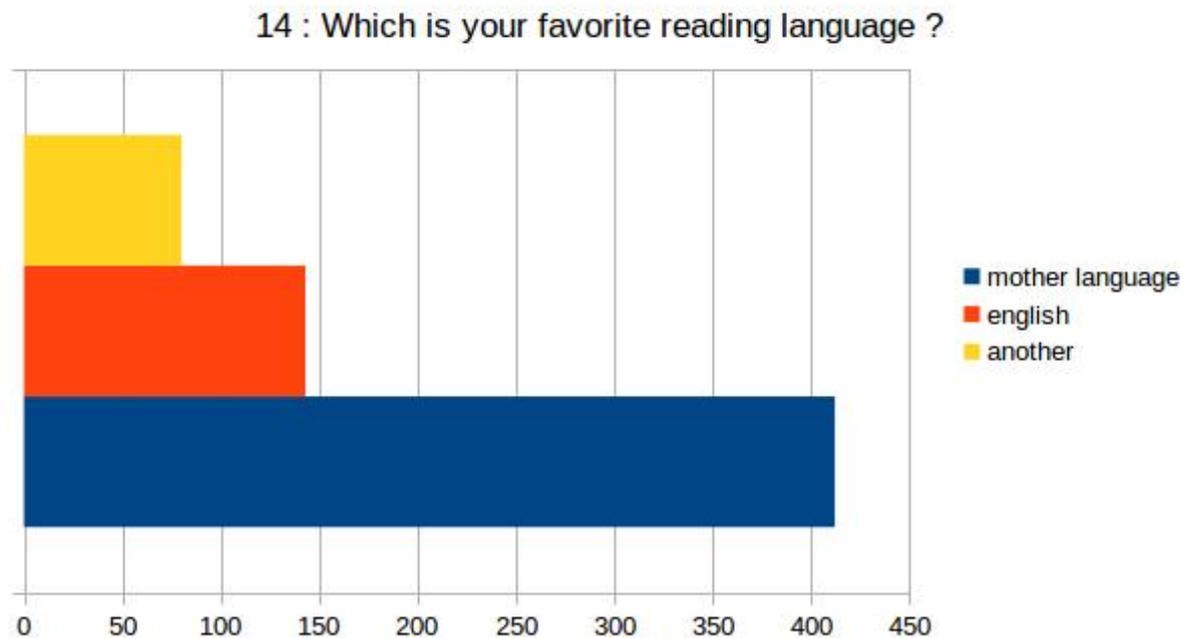


**Question number 13** – “What inspires you the most to pick up a book and read it?”, most of the pupils (346) said that that is the attractive title, 108 that that is the cover, while 101 choose the book according to the literary genre. 174 pupils said that they get inspired by their friends’ suggestions, 71 choose the title being guided by bestsellers lists on internet, while 46 by information from the media.

13 : What inspires you the most to pick up a book and read it ?



The last, **question number 14**, “Which is your favorite reading language?”, most pupils (412) said that they prefer their mother tongues, 143 that they like to read in English, while 80 that they like to read in other foreign languages (Turkish, Bosnian, Serbian, Greek, Bulgarian, German, French, Italian, Russian, Arabic, Japanese, Portuguese)



### **Analysis of the survey results**

The presented data show that there is an overwhelming number of children who say that they like to read, which in the first sample (2<sup>nd</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> grade) coincides with the answers of their parents, confirming the veracity of this claim. Their genres of preference (fairy-tales, adventures) are expected for the age of 7-9 in this sample, although the adventure genre is also dominant in the second sample. Most of them read after classes, every day, not only during week-ends or summer holidays. Children say that they like reading because it is "entertaining" (an option for it being 'educational' might not be so popular), and the majority says it prefers it even over every-day play, the internet and watching TV. Only a very small number of children admit that for them it is generally boring.

All of this shows a tendency towards cultivating a reading habit in the frames of the family and the home, as primary reading points, especially for children from 7-9 years of age. This becomes even more evident if one takes into account the dominant number of children who say that there are more than 10 books on their home shelves, and that this is the place where they get their books, as well as where they read the most during their free time. Schools and libraries are second on the list of potential places to obtain a book, followed by exchange with friends, which shows the existence of such practice.

However, the utilization of e-books and internet as virtual library is quite low in both samples. Considering the high internet connectivity in Macedonia (60% of households and the same number of population according to data from 2015), this does not necessarily imply lack of access to digital books, but simply non-existing habit to use the world wide web for obtaining and reading books. While internet might be used for other children's activities (gaming, watching videos) it does not come even close to being a primary source of reading material neither for the children, nor for their parents. A creation of content and promotional boost of children's literature in Macedonian and/or Albanian in e-format might change things in the future, but for the moment it seems that paper wins over pixels.

A visit to a bookstore is presented as one of the ways of obtaining books. However, a bookstore is also a place to buy school accessories, toys etc., so going to a bookstore once or twice a month (a dominant chosen option) does not necessarily imply that the visits resulted with buying a book. The frequency of visits at least implies that children and their parents are well aware of the location of the bookstores in their town, and that they are regular patrons. Bookstores and libraries seem to be two separate entities, and being a member of a library does not exclude frequent visits to the bookstores (the number of children and parents who do not buy books because they can borrow them in their local libraries is considerably low).

Favorite reading language is predominantly the native tongue (Macedonian or Albanian). However, on the list of foreign languages, English leads the way, leaving other non-European, European and even neighboring languages quite far behind. This is understandable having in mind the age of the surveyed children, who in the first set have just recently become literate, while others are at the start of the development of their reader preferences and tastes.

As per the profile of the desired book, for children the most important element for the ones from 2<sup>nd</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> grade is that it has been suggested by the teacher, while older students rely on their friends' suggestion. For the first sample the importance of the book being suggested by the teacher might be a result of the fact that these books are in fact obligatory, which does not leave much space for 'skipping' them. However, this might also point to another direction, that the teacher is understood as an authority figure when books are in question, someone whose choice is trusted. Thus, the responsibility of the teaching staff to recommend high quality books (no matter if they are obligatory according to the curriculum or not), and to help children understand what they read. The parents on the other side find the title more important than the suggestions of the teachers, pointing to a possible doubt in the choice of the required reading by the educational authorities.

One of the most important feed-back of the survey seems to be the final parent's comments on the quality of the books recommended for school use in the first questionnaire. Their critical remarks, although not high in number, can be a valuable source for future action. Attractive graphic design, creative layout, glossaries for less known terms and phrases, lighter topics (not 'depressive' as one parent points out) and fresh titles that are popular with the children outside school (Harry Potter series named as example in two of the questionnaires) are considered a step forward in making reading even more attractive for younger generations. Books should be thoroughly proof red, thus contributing further

towards children's literacy. Both Macedonian and Albanian speaking parents point towards the need for books that speak about "national culture", written by domestic authors. There is no mention about the need of nourishing gender equality, ethnic cohabitation and getting to know the culture of others. On the contrary, it is considered a problem if the characters (in the example in a school book on mathematics) have names typical of the 'other' ethnic group.

### **General conclusions from the survey:**

- Regarding the question of how often young people today read, and do they like to read at all or they read just if it is mandatory for school, it can be inferred that young students in primary schools (2nd to 9th grade) generally read just obligatory books or extra books suggested by the teachers, and aside from that "reading-obligation" (reading seen as obligation and duty), significantly small number of students claimed that for them reading is a fun and interesting way to spend free time (now, serious activities should be undertaken to bring young people closer to the esthetic and fun function of books, and to replace "reading-obligation" with "reading-pleasure" and "reading-fun"). For that purpose, books should be chosen from the literature for children and young adults which would not be just "pure didactics", but aside from accomplishing pedagogic and didactic goals, they should give children and young adults a primarily esthetic experience (esthetic pleasure!) and esthetic communication with the book as word art. With this distancing of children's literature from the pedagogic aspect, young readers will get access to books whose primary function will be to encourage the esthetic development of students in primary and secondary schools.

- The fact that students read because they are forced to read, and not for pleasure, suggests that the list of obligatory school books needs to be modified. Not only parents, but teachers also, think that a fundamental change should be done in the list of obligatory books (teachers underline that verses which are hard to remember, or don't have appropriate rhythm, create repulsion towards poetry, and uninteresting books simply "kill" student's desire to read). Teachers emphasize that children should have a say, that they should suggest the reading material, and they urge the authors to write about modern-day themes. Experts in the field also underline the need of revision of the obligatory books, which should be preceded by a serious analysis to see if the books read by previous generations are still as interesting for the new internet-generations. For that purpose, the Bureau for Development of Education in Macedonia has already took the initiative to revise the obligatory books and to form a working group that will inspect the need to add new titles in the list of obligatory books.

- When doing this, the genre preferences of the reading population who is between 8 and 14/15 years should not be forgotten, and the difference between "the little reader" and "the young adult reader" should be respected, by choosing titles inclined toward literary fantasy, which has an important role in the development of imagination and creativity in young people. However, research has shown that besides the affinity towards adventures and fantasy, young people like to read more realistic books in which "realism"

for them is represented by the things that can be experienced, and is related to the things that happen to them in real world. Given that both teachers and psychologists agree that children's development should not be directed only towards socialization and education, but above all towards individualization of the person, the literature offered to young readers should also correspond to the inside world of the child.

- Regarding the question of what it is that makes the book appealing and interesting for the children, it can be seen that the answer depends on the age of the child for which the book is intended. In picture-books as the first reading material for children even before they learn the letters and learn to read, the most important thing are the illustrations, and in books intended for teenagers, the most important thing is the theme that corresponds with their needs and desires.

- For books intended for younger readers (2<sup>nd</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> grade), it can be seen that the most important thing is still the visual perception, and visual stimuli are what primarily incite these readers to continue exploring the book. Unfortunately, the obligatory books for this age group, even when they are content-appropriate, completely lack this visual part ("colored stimuli"). The fact that sensory perception is crucial for this age cannot be omitted, and everybody should bear in mind that this "visual equipment" is the key feature required to establish the required link to the children's soul and to recruit future readers.

- Although it should be accepted that the internet and the modern technology have made the book a secondary preoccupation for young people, and the attention of today's children is completely directed towards television and computer games, efforts should be made to impose good literature over the dominant electronic media, literature that can still compete with the visual media. Experts say that if children start reading picture-books as early as possible, the static illustrations (versus the quick visual effects of electronic media) allow the children to slowly grasp the beauty of the text and the illustration. On the contrary, children's books don't have to be seen only as something opposed to electronic media, but they can also become part of them, by creating appropriate electronic children's books (e-books).

- Regardless of the current world trend of decreased reading of printed books due to the surge of electronic media and internet content, in Macedonia the dominant way of reading is the standard reading of printed books, and e-books are less frequently read, and mainly by student in higher classes (it should be noted that these habits are not as usual for younger children, as they are for older students in primary school and high school, who spend most of the day outside and use mobile electronic devices). Given the fact that most young people said that they don't read because they don't have time, maybe they should be offered more ways to electronically read books, so as to sustain and develop the reading habits.

- Although, generally, the preferred language of reading is the mother tongue, the younger generations already show aptitude toward reading books in the original language, mostly English, while the desire to read books in other languages is generally based on personal relations to that countries (Serbian, Bosnian, Turkish, Greek, Bulgarian) or by the interest in discovering the more exotic "destinations" (Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Arabic, etc.)

- Although, on the question about the influence of the price when buying a book, the majority of the students said that the price of the book doesn't influence their decision to buy the book they like, research has shown that students (and their parents) each year buy less and less books, and that must be due to economic crisis and the fact that, because of the difficult economic situation in which Macedonian families spend their money mainly on food and other essential needs, buying books is regarded as luxury.

- Given the fact that the choice of book is mainly influenced by the popularity of the book on internet, or by friends' suggestions on social networks, or by the adaptation of a book into a film or animated series, it would be good if the new titles in children's literature are promoted on social networks.

- Initiatives should be taken to connect the literary works for children with other media, and to adapt them into: movies, animated movies, plays, radio-plays, comic-books, picture-books. Literature placed in this type of multimedia context would become attractive to the new generations.

### **Survey conclusions and recommendations:**

Based upon the presented findings, we conclude and recommend the following:

➤ **Cooperation with educational authorities, teachers and parents** is a key pillar to sustaining and further developing the existing, high interest of children in reading. Due to the home as the focal point of children's reading space, as well as the awareness of parents on the importance of their children's reading habits, promotion and creation of books in accordance to their mutual preferences and comments is desirable. This means maintaining and promoting high standards of translation, proof reading, design, as well as supporting new local authors that might bring freshness to the existing required reading list.

➤ **Creating special, interactive editions of the curriculum reading**, that include parent/child/teacher activities is strongly encouraged, as well as sections that inspire discussion, questions and answers to the topics presented in the book (evaluation of characters, moral issues, unknown words and phrases etc.), with a separate guide for the parents and/or teachers. These additional features could be created both as a hard copy and digital.

➤ According to the survey, reading is felt as something in relation to visual (graphic) perceptions, and the visual stimulæ are the ones that inspire young readers to explore books. Thus, an additional effort should be made by **publishers to engage creative and high-quality designers and artists**, who would make children's books not only readable but also stimulating and pleasing for the eye. The current situation in this sense with the books required by the curriculum is that they either do not include any visualization at all (besides the cover), or this is done quite seldom.

- The interest in reading in **foreign languages should be further supported**. However, at the same time high quality editions and **translations** in Macedonian/Albanian should be provided, since poor translations, as well as works by local authors that are not interesting or that are irrelevant for the new generations, could, in prospect, lead to losing interest in reading in one's mother tongue
- When **projecting the price of the books** publishers and bookstores should bear in mind that although for most of the pupils in the survey the price of the book seems irrelevant, for an important number of them this might be the reason why they do not own many books, and why they do not buy and read them.
- Organizing **festivals of children's books**, where children and their parents could meet the authors, publishers and designers and vice versa, engage in discussions and buy books at reduced prices. This may be also an alternative to an ordinary going to a bookstore or the Skopje book fair, that children usually visit organized by their schools, but without any special program to attend.
- Encouraging relevant **literary criticism** as a necessary tool for literature's development, especially when it comes to children's literature. For the moment book reviews are seldom written, since newspapers and journals do not find this to be a lucrative journalistic genre. The reviews that do get published are usually very short, supportive ones, that are mostly copied from the back-covers or afterwords of the publications, produced in order to boost the book's promotion and sale. Independent literary criticism is almost a non-existent field.
- For any other issues that have not been covered by this survey, a **more detailed and in-depth research** should be conducted, that would also reveal correlations between different analyzed elements (for example, what is the correlation, if any, between preferable reading in English and utilization of internet as a reading source, or what is the link between gender of pupils and their preferences for certain literature genre).

#### **Possible ways for stimulating new titles:**

- Awards for writers of children's literature, which can be pecuniary for further stimulation of the writers of all generations. At the moment, the only established award for children's literature is given by the Association of Writers of Macedonia (see p. 3).
- Organization of literary competitions with rewards for poetry and prose works of primary school pupils, organization of literary meetings with authors, literary readings and promotions. Organization of "caravans", in which Macedonian authors of literature for children and young adults can visit multiple primary schools across the country, and can directly convey their creative experiences to the children, and tell them the reasons which motivated them to write, the places where they find inspiration for new books, or tell them about the books which they already know (when the author personally speaks about the

idea for the book and the theme of the book, how it was created and what inspired him to write it, that will incite interest and the children will want to read it).

### **Possibilities and realities: an imagined future**

One of the most important features of children's literature, in general, as well as reflected by this survey, is the creative tension resulting from a constantly shifting balance between two forces: that of the rigid schoolroom, and that of children's imagination. While the didactic and the imaginative are thought of as oppositional, they need not always be contradictory to each other. Future efforts should bear this co-existence of the creative and the educational in mind, however not pushing too hard towards the limits of this pursuit. Reading of the pure pleasure of doing so should be equally promoted by teachers and parents, as the one for passing one's test or obtaining a good mark.

As pointed out by experts in the field, certain criteria are suggested as helpful in making a gross estimate of the degree of that development of children's literature within any given country, which at the same time could serve for shaping its future. Some of these criteria are artistic. Others link with social progress, wealth, technological level, or the political structure. In what seems their order of importance, these criteria are<sup>1</sup>:

1. Degree of awareness of the child's identity and needs
2. Progress made beyond passive dependence on oral tradition, folklore, and legend.
3. Rise of a class of professional writers, as distinct from moral reformers, schoolteachers, clerics, or versatile journalists—all those who, for pedagogical, doctrinal, or pecuniary reasons turn themselves into writers for children.
4. Degree of independence from authoritarian controls: church, state, school system, monopoly of certain 'privileged' authors etc.
5. Number of locally produced "classics", the influence of which transcends national boundaries.
6. Invention of new forms or genres and the exploitation of a variety of traditional ones.
7. Measure of dependence on translations.
8. Quantity of primary literature: that is, annual production of children's books and, more to the point, of good children's books.
9. Quantity of secondary literature: richness and scope of a body of scholarship, criticism, reviewing.

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<sup>1</sup> Source: <https://www.britannica.com/art/childrens-literature>

#### 10. Level of institutional development: libraries, publishing houses, associations, etc.

The possibilities that stem from these criteria seem endless. However, besides the proclaimed high awareness of the children's identity and needs, it seems that there is a gap between the politics and the praxis in the field of children's literature, at least in the Macedonian case. The identity of a child is as fluid and as changeable as the identities of an adult, and it depends on historical, economic and other circumstances. Although there are some basic, pertinent needs (for shelter, protection etc.), today's children might not have the same specific interests and desires as the ones from decades ago. A faster pace of adjustment of the publishers and authors to the modern times and technologies might create a closer and fruitful partnership between them and their potential readers. Critical re-evaluation of the existing required readings should be done solely based upon aesthetic and pedagogical criteria, promoting European values that include multiculturalism, gender equality and peace. Learning from different contexts with longer tradition how to achieve this, at the same time cherishing one's own local, traditional culture, should help in fulfilling this long-term goal.

#### **Conclusions and recommendations:**

- The general conclusion is that there is an authorship crisis in literature for children and young adults, and also a discontinuity in the creation of such literature. (Research shows that in the last decade, the situation in Macedonia is very alarming - because on average only 5-10 new titles are being published every year, and the youngest author of children's literature is already in the middle generation of writers). In conditions where there are fewer and fewer high quality titles and writers, the attention should focus on the reasons for the lack of interest of the writers of children's literature. It can be assumed that new generations of writers are not sufficiently stimulated to write children's book, because of the inability of achieving high circulation, which is due to the limited market. For this purpose, they need to be stimulated by involving them in international cultural and educational networks which allow for mobility and circulation of writers of children's literature and their works. That will open possibilities for publication of translations, which is extremely important, because Macedonian children's literature is not properly presented to other countries, even though its quality can match that of European and world literature.

Concerning the question if there is an appropriate body of translations of world children's literature on our languages, it can be said that aside from "children's classics", there are a lot of modern bestsellers for children that are not translated on Macedonian and are practically inaccessible to young Macedonians, which are aware of the publications on the original language, but they don't have the possibility to read them on their mother tongue.

- Sometimes, the parents and the students are not the only ones to blame for the lack of interest in reading, but often the problem lies in the unattractive programs of

publishing houses, or in the low quality translations offered to young readers. Given that sometimes the choice of authors offered to young readers can be wrong, by insisting on author who are outdated for the new generations, different methods for stimulating young authors should be used, so as to widen the choice in children's literature, and that is the responsibility of certain institutions - the Ministry of Culture, The Ministry of Education, the publishing house - and they all need to develop joint strategy for this problem. Newer children's books should be added to school curricula, literary associations should promote new awards for young authors, publishing houses should give greater possibilities to young writers to promote their books, and media should make them popular among young readers.

- In the world, children's literature is highly commercial because it is connected with the film industry or the toy industry, so the same can be done here in Macedonia with some successful books, that can be turned into children literary brands.

- Parents, schools, cultural and educational institutions, publishing houses and all others involved, joined in a continued campaign regarding the importance of books, should all try to develop the interest in reading and the love towards books as early as possible in children, keeping in mind that children and young people are the potential new readers that will continue to nurture the written word tradition.

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