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## 6-8-Year-Old Children's Interest Towards Reading From The Aspects Of Their Textbook

**Dorottea Vass**, Eötvös Loránd University Barczi Gusztav Faculty of Special Needs Education, Institute of Special Needs Education Studies, Hungary, [vass.dorottea@gmail.com](mailto:vass.dorottea@gmail.com) ORCID:0000-0003-1147-4917

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**Abstract.** Reading topics also strongly influence interest in reading and the effectiveness of learning, interest in a certain topic motivates readers to engage with the text rather than regard it as a superficial structure, but to focus on the content and its underlying pillars. For this reason, a few years ago, we focused on developing an empirical research method that would allow us to examine the content of favorite stories of the target age group. In order to accurately examine the content, we created a triangulation study model based on the animated films, readings preferred by the pupils as well as the textual content of the alphabetical reading book. The current study aimed to reveal content correlations between reading book instructional content and students' interest. The results obtained with the developed measuring tool raise new aspects for rethinking the content of further alphabetical reading books and reading instruction texts.

**Keywords:** Alphabet reading book, motivation, interest, fairy tales, animation films

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### INTRODUCTIONS

Reading topics significantly contribute to the formation of the interest level and the connection of students to certain tasks (Hidi, 2001). Schraw et al. (Hidi, 2001) found that students who found the topic of the text that they were reading interesting they read more. A study by Schiefele and Krapp (1996) reported a similar result (Hidi, 2001). According to the authors, interest not only facilitates the amount of memorization of recalled textual information, but also strongly influences learning effectiveness. That is, interest in a certain topic motivated readers to go beyond the superficial structure of the text and focus on the main ideas and their basic features. Researchers have pointed out the variables that determine the state of a reader's commitment to a text (Hidi, 2001). These variables included textual characteristics such as novelty, intensity, and ease of comprehension. Additional variables included modification of different types of learning environment and individual self-regulatory activities. These variables can result in cognitive, affective, and behavioral variables following the reading session. Schraw et al. (1990) highlighted various text-based situational interest-inducing factors in relation to the development of interest in reading (Hidi, 2001). Examples include texts that are easy to understand, texts that rely on students' prior knowledge, and texts that are related to each other, thus encouraging reader engagement.

In order to arouse and maintain interest in students, Ainley - Hillmann - Hidi (2002) consider it important to understand students' individual and situational interest and the possibility of changing these two psychological states in solving practical questions. For example, the issue of situational interest may be important for educators who deal with students with no individual interest, as students with weak or no individual interest at all may only have situational interest (Ainley - Hillmann - Hidi, 2002). Considering that the four phases of interest proceed from situational interest to the development of individual interest (Hidi - Renninger, 2006), and to this we assign the two statements that (1) there are first-graders who have only situational interest, and (2) it is difficult to meet individual interests in school, in which case it is more advantageous to consider situational interests first (Hidi, 2001), then in order to develop interest in reading, it is primarily important to examine students' interest in general.

If we intend to address the interest in reading of the 6- to 8-year-old age group, the primary difficulty is that this age group does not yet have adequate reading and comprehension skills, so we can only and exclusively conduct an oral survey with them. An additional difficulty in the study may be that we tend to assume that the 6- to 8-year-olds have as yet undeveloped interests. However, authors Renninger and Wozniak have demonstrated (Hidi, 2001) that although special interests vary widely among children, they still have strong, stable, and relatively well-concentrated individual interests. In fact, we need to explore non-specific actors in arousing situational interest and educating the reader. In order to develop an interest in reading, it is worthwhile to find primarily those topics that, when first encountering the text, encourage students to engage with the text for more than just learning to read. To this end, it is worth focusing on those topics that have a decisive effect on arousing the reader's interest in reading through the effectiveness of an educational goal, and which, in addition to developing reading skills, have a developmental effect on students' personalities, they can indirectly understand their own place and role in society.

Among the research on interest, Hidi and Renninger (2006) collected several methods of interest development, including the Model of Domain Learning (MDL) and the Person-object Theory (POI). The Model of Domain Learning (MDL) is a learning model of a field of activity or subject area that aims to parallel interest with development, processing, and knowledge acquisition. The model mostly focuses on situational interest and focuses on content-specific areas (e.g. the interaction between the individual and their environment). Person-object theory (POI) focuses on the individual interest that arises in the interaction between the individual and their environment, which attaches great importance to the relationship between the individual and the object, which triggers positive emotions. From a reading pedagogical perspective, both the Model of Domain Learning (MDL) and Person-object theory (POI) can contribute to the development of interest in reading. If we understand reading instruction and comprehension according to the Model of Domain Learning activity, we could help the interest in reading for the scope of the activity based on the theory of Person-object theory with an object that evokes positive emotions in primary school children. In this case, this subject could be the alphabetical reading book. If a positive relationship is established between the given subject (in this context the alphabetical reading book)

and the learner, it is assumed that pupils develop a certain level of situational interest (the learner likes the alphabetical reading book and the topics in it correspond to current events in the environment), so the given object arouses their interest). This primary situational interest (which is also part of MDL theory) induces motivators who will already be able to help the learner practice, in this case, reading texts. In this way, students also understand the text more easily, thus initiating a certain level of interest in the activity, which is assumed to generate a positive attitude towards reading.

Researchers dealing with children's fairy tales agree that children are the most interested in magic tales (Propp, (1999) calls them fairy tales) at the beginning of their sixth, seventh and eighth years of life, i.e. at the beginning of reading learning (Kádár, 2012; Mérei - Biné, 1978; Nyitrai, 2010; Szilágyiné, 2008; Tancz, 2009). In the context of the interest in reading among 6-8-year-olds, therefore, the elements of the tale and the elements, actions and heroes of the tales have come into focus for a reason. The research placed special emphasis on the developmental function and structural unity of the magic tale (Vass, 2016a, 2019), the actors of the tale and the powers of the actors in order to get an idea of the structural and functional units from which the tale is built, i.e. what are the factors that arouse the interest of the 6- to 8-year-olds.

### **The aspects of textbook examination**

The Model of Domain Learning (MDL) and Person-object theory (POI) models explained above may contribute to the development of raising interest in reading, within which the current study has focused on the alphabetical reading book, we consider it essential to highlight the analytical possibilities of textbooks.

One of the tasks of a textbook in the traditional sense is to encourage students to learn actively. In addition, the content of the unfamiliar and less interesting curriculum for students should be represented in the textbook in such a way that pupils find as many points of connection as possible with their interests and existing knowledge. These should be points of connection that intersect with pupils' vocabulary, personal experience, and, of course, their prior knowledge. These contents should influence pupils' interests (Chambliss and Calfee 1998; Kojanitz, 2007). In the case of an alphabetical reading book, in addition to the quality of words, sentences and texts, the content of the reading book has an important structural element. However, even though a textbook content needs to be related to everyday life (Kojanitz, 2005), this does not yet ensure that the textbook also maintains pupils' motivation. In addition to the definitions of content related to everyday life, it is important to treat the basic pillars of textbook research perspectives (Dárdai, 2002), especially the textbook as a pedagogical tool as a pedagogical-didactic scientific position (Table 1).

**Table 1.:** Analysis of Textbooks (Dárdai, 2002: 20)

The research dimensions of the textbook	Scientific positions of research
1. The textbook as an age document	Historical

2. The textbook as a medium of knowledge	Scientific
3. The textbook as a politics	Political/ideological
4. The textbook as a pedagogical tools	Pedagogical/didactics
5. The textbook as a medium	Communication theory, linguistic, reception theory
6. The textbook as a sociological factor	Sociological, psychological
7. The textbook as a product	Economic, educational economics, aesthetic

Based on Thonhauser's evaluation criteria system, the present study examines the textbook from a critical-analytical as well as a constructive-synthetic aspect. Within the model, emphasis was placed on the textbook's quality, content, form development and efficiency. Thonhauser's criteria system also placed great emphasis on the practical use of the textbook (Table 2).

**Table 2.:** Evaluation criteria system based on textbook functions (Kojanitz, 2007: 117)

Functions	Quality components and criteria
Motivation	Illustration Curiosity Problems present Other solution for thinking
Knowledge	Understanding Viability Scientific accuracy
Systematization	Structure
Coordination	Alignment with other textbook
Differentiation	Leveled curriculum
Learning management Teaching learning strategy	Supporting classroom and learning Questions, tasks
Education for values	Emotional devices

Within the Thonhauser functional components, the study examined the functions of the alphabet reading book, such as functions influencing the method of reading instruction (Vass, 2017), and from this aspect we approach the function of the alphabetical reading book reading texts of the current study, with special emphasis on motivation, quality criterion, curiosity (Table 2.) (Kojanitz, 2007: 117).

## METHODS

In connection with the concept of curiosity as a qualitative component within the textbook functions of motivation, the question arose: what are the factors that make 6- to 8-year-olds feel

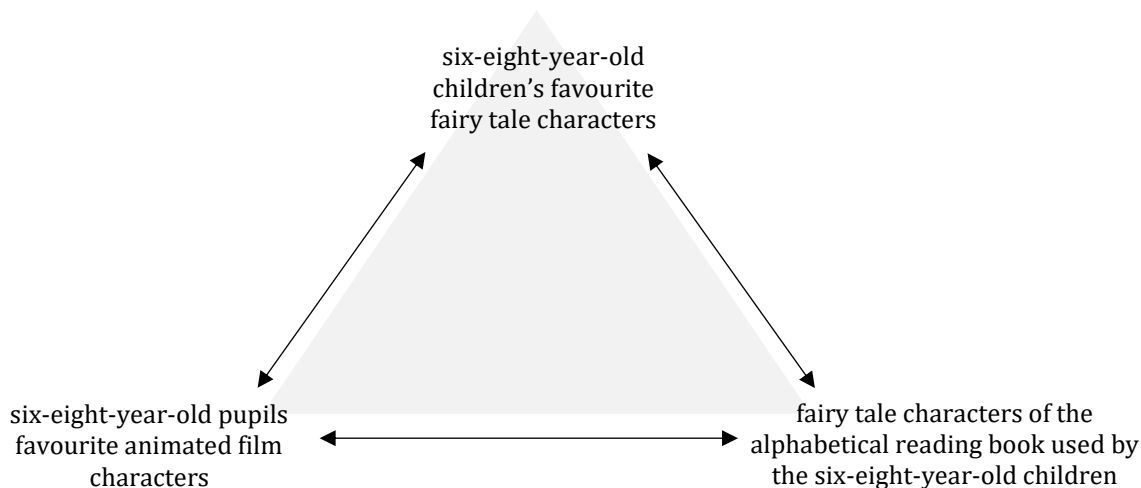
that a particular alphabetical reading book is interesting after reading a text? The survey examines the curiosity, textual content, and familiar content of the texts of the alphabetical reading book in order to develop reading motivation among the factors of textbook functions, reading skills, and interest; pupils' knowledge and comprehension skills, the text scheme of the book, and learning strategies as the subject of the study (Figure 1), of which the present study focused on two specific topics, to be specific on textbook functions and interest.

Based on the theory which claims that interest strongly influences the development of motivation towards reading, and that 6- to 8-year-old pupils are the most interested in fairy tales, fairy-tale and fictional heroes, and animated films; last but not least, that the functional role of the textbook includes motivation and raising the interest of the pupils, the research hypothesized the following hypotheses:

H1: The content of the texts in the reading textbook is not suited to the interests of 6- to 8-year-old children.

To answer this hypothesis, we focused primarily on developing an empirical research method that can assess the interest of the age group in question. We took into account that the reading skills of 6- to 8-year-old pupils were not yet developed enough to be able to participate in a questionnaire survey, so we chose the semi-structured interview as the main research methodology element. In addition, we also took into account that the age group in question is not yet able to classify their favorite reading by genre. Because of the latter, we told pupils about their favorite fairy tales and animated films, and with the help of illustrations of heroes in different fairy tale forms that we selected and drew, these pupils created a fairy tale. The research of two empirical studies, László Nógrády (1917) and Béla Tóth (1967), found during the research of the historical development of fairy tales and storytelling (Vass, 2016b) contributed to the development of this research methodology.

The triangulation of the current study takes into account the following content (Figure 1).



**Figure 1.:** The triangulation of the current study

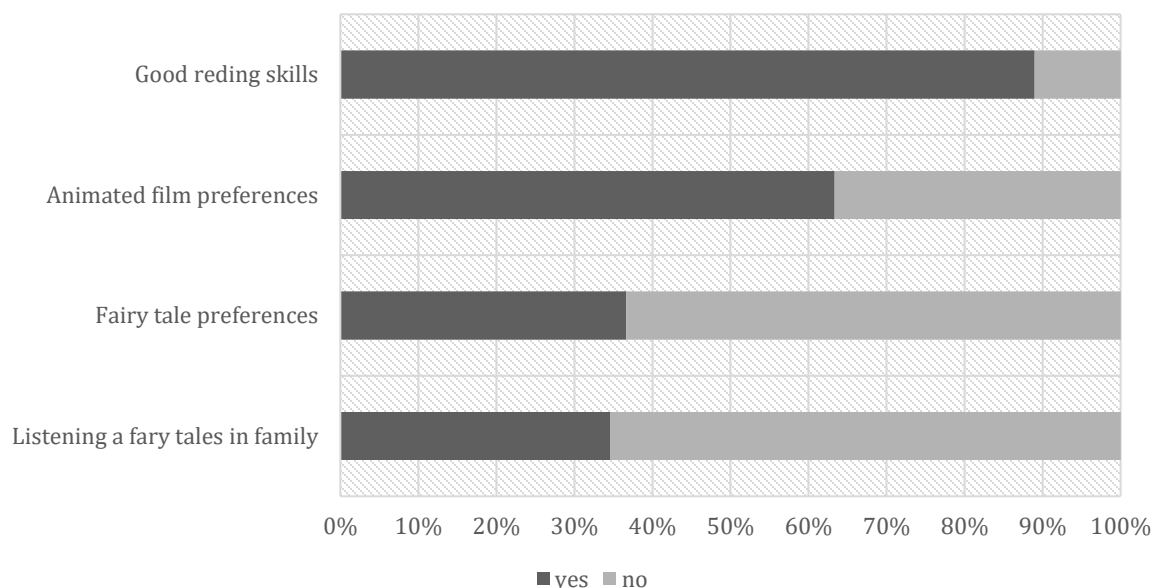
- 1) Examination of the types of fairy tales, types of fairy tale heroes and functions of the alphabetical reading book used by the 6- to 8-year-olds,
- 2) thematic, semi-structured interview responses with 6- to 8-year-old pupils about their favorite readings, fairy tale, and animated film,
- 3) a comparative analysis of the reading instruction texts, fairy tale types, types of fairy tale heroes and their function and the results of the thematic, semi-structured interview with 6- to 8-year-old pupils used by the Hungarian-language alphabet reading book.

Data collection was conducted with 267 first-graders from 15 institutions. The collected data were coded and analyzed using SPSS® 20.

## RESULTS

The interview was initiated by assessing pupils' reading skills. This was followed by mapping the family's fairy-tale experience and a general mapping of pupils' attitudes towards animated films and tales. The assessment of reading skills was carried out by evaluating the reading of an already known reading instruction text in the alphabetical reading book used by the pupils.

According to the survey sample, 100% of the pupils in Vojvodina watch some kind of animated film at home. (2.6% of the respondents could not answer these questions.) Most of these pupils also watch cartoons frequently (74.1%), and only 25.9% rarely watch them. 94.4% of the pupils frequently watch cartoons during the academic year as well, and 5.6% have only watched it in the past. The activity is most often done alone (49.1%), meaning that 87.7% of these pupils do not watch animation with their parents (Figure 2).



**Figure 2.:** Children’s reading skills and the frequency of watching animated films and listening to fairy tales

Table 3 contains the data for pupils’ favourite readings and animation films as well as the various types of textbook content.

**Table 3.:** Children’s favourite reading content and animation film content, and the percentage distribution of the frequency of reading content in the textbook

Favourite text content	Favourite content %	reading Favourite film %	animation Textbook content
Fairy tales	26.3	15.0	4.32
Animal tales	36.3	18.0	33.65
Warrior and adventure stories	5.3	36.3	0.48
Children’s life	10.3	21.7	18.75
Poem	7.6	-	21.63*
Encyclopedia	8.0	3.0	0.48
Other	6.1	5.2	20.67*

Pupils proved to be the most interested in magic tales (26.3%) and animal tales (36.3%). The next category of popularity was warrior and adventure stories (10.3%) as well as handling encyclopedias (8%). Stories about children were the least interesting among first graders (5.3%), while more interest was stated towards poems (7.6%) and other texts (6.1%). Considering animation movies, pupils mentioned examples with warrior and adventure contents, as well as

stories that could be categorized as stories about children’s lives. Since pupils preferred animation movies to reading texts (see Table 2.), it can be concluded that pupils prefer warrior, adventure stories as well as stories about children’s lives. However, pupils report on reading animal tales and stories more preferably in their reading instruction books, while all the other categories of literary texts that appear in their reading instruction books differ from their interests. Nevertheless, the research results assembled in Table 4 contradict the above stated results regarding the topics of readings.

**Table 4.:** Frequency of Children’s general favourite contents, animated film contents and textbook contents

Contents	In texts %	In animation films %	Textbook content %
Fairy tales and fairy tale figures	41.9	62.9	5.54
People of different ages and occupation	7.9	14.6	12.72
Animals	34.5	15.4	17.27
Real stories	7.5	3.0	0.00
Mixed theme	5.6	3.4	65.45

Table 4 shows that pupils prefer either readings or animation movies which contain fairy tale characters (41.9 and 62.9%), or animals (34.5% and 15.4%). Since reading instruction textbooks contain diverse topics and only a minimal amount of readings cover fairy tale characters (5.54%) and animals (17.27%), the content of textbooks is not in line with pupils’ expectations.

It is important to pay attention to the data presented in Figure 2 and Table 3. Namely, as pupils show more preference towards animation movies to reading tales and are not familiar with a lot of readings, however their favorite readings are fairy tales, animal tales, warrior stories and stories about children’s lives in which tale characters and animals are present. Thus, it can be concluded that pupils show interest towards stories that contain magical elements (during fight scenes or adventurous stories) as well as their characters are animals or fictitious creatures. For the reason that reading instruction books contain characters in 65.45% that do not belong to the above mentioned groups of characters, i.e. their content differs from pupils’ field of interest also for the fact that since pupils do not read other texts but those in their reading instruction book. This statement has also been confirmed by the motive and reason of liking (Table 5.), to be specific the actions of the characters in animation movies is a rather important influencing factor in the formation and establishment of liking (63.7%), or respectively, the appearance of their favourite characters play a crucial role in deciding the fanciness of a reading. In addition, pupils tend to identify themselves with characters that are of their gender and age. Good manners and pedagogical



virtue count only when dislike is in question or in case pupils do not like a certain character that dispose of some kind of bad-mannered behavior (Table 5.).

**Table 5.:** Variables of liking and dislike among pupils regarding their favorite reading and animation movies

Motive of liking	Favourite reading text %	Favourite animation film %
Animate creature and their actions	27.0	63.7
Sense and sensibility	18.7	2.2
Features of characters	7.9	13.1
Aesthetics	40.4	18.4
Motive of liking	Favourite reading text %	Favourite animation film %
Age, gender, appearance, financial status	40.1	40.8
Intellectual, moral qualities	21.0	24.3
Good-manners	12.7	7.5
Other	20.2	25.5
Motive of dislike	Favourite reading text %	Favourite animation film %
Age, gender, appearance, financial status t	28.51	28.1
Disability	22.55	22.1
Bad-manners	47.23	44.6

Pupils show more interest towards text content and animation movies that make them laugh and are exciting. So, they prefer warrior or adventurous stories that contain tale characters or animals tales or stories about children’s lives, as well as stories with fictitious and magical elements since pupils consider a story a good one if they it makes them laugh (58.8% and 54.5%), and the story is also exciting. Pupils show less interest towards stories that are sad or scary (Table 6.).

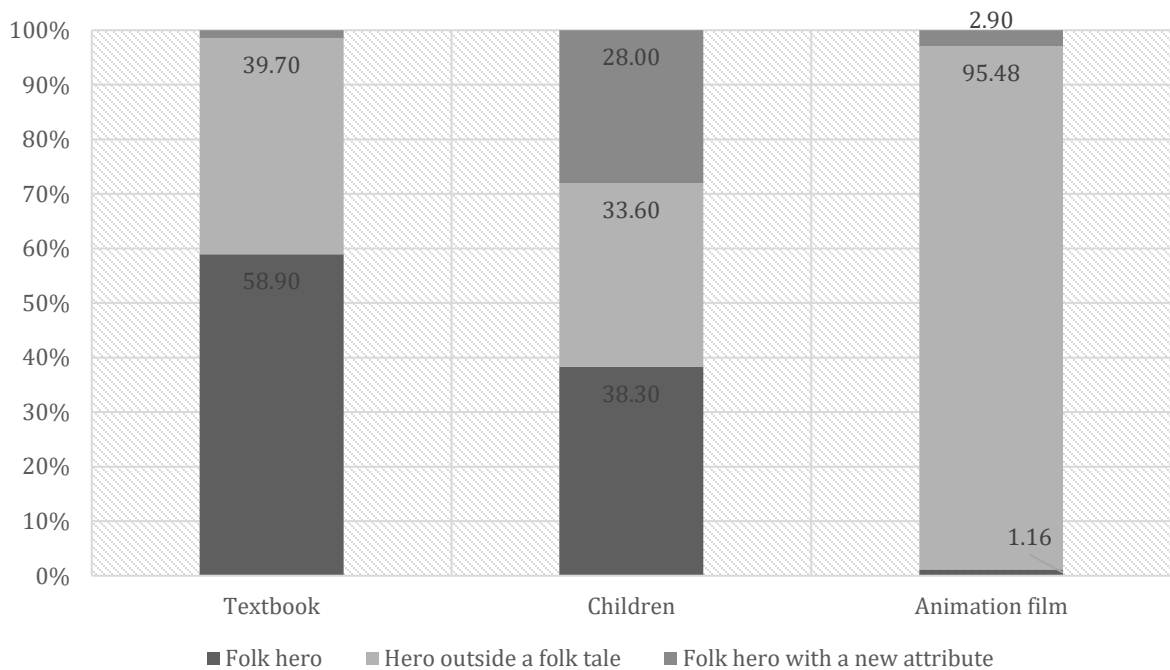
**Table 6.:** What kind of feelings are preferred by children in their favourite animated film and text content?

Feelings	Altogether %		Girls %		Boys %	
	Film	Reading	Film	Reading	Film	Reading
To be excited	22.5	19.2	24.0	18.5	20.7	20.0

To cry	1.5	2.3	2.1	2.7	0.8	1.7
Laugh	58.8	54.5	58.2	53.4	59.5	55.8
To think	7.5	17.3	6.2	16.4	9.1	18.3
To be afraid	5.2	1.9	6.8	0.7	3.3	3.3
Other	3.7	3.0	2.1	4.8	5.8	0.8

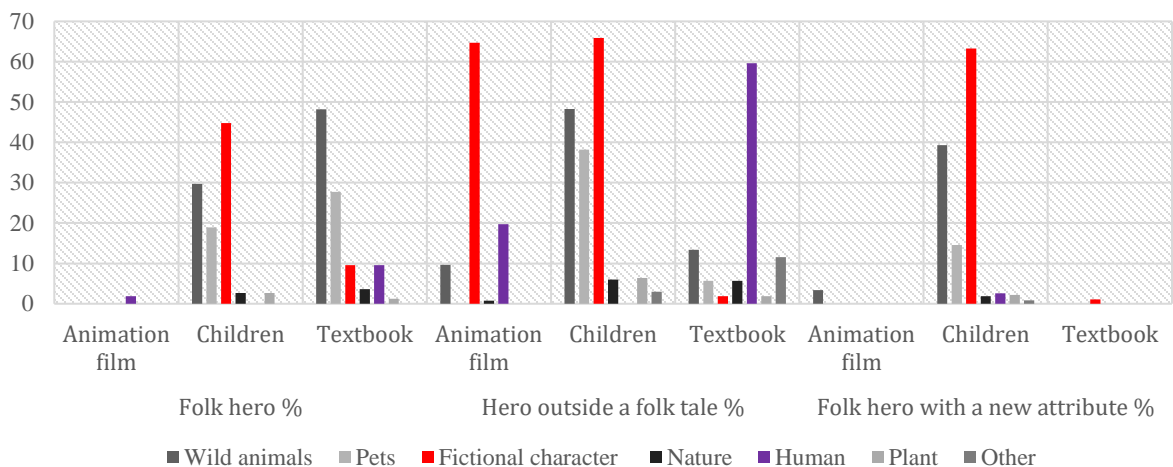
These stories in case of reading instruction texts are magic and animal tales, while in case of animation films they are warrior and adventurous stories or stories about children’s lives. Since out of the two activities, the 63.3% of pupils show higher preference towards animation films pupils consider warrior and adventurous stories as well as stories about children’s lives more interesting and exciting that contain tale characters and heroes.

In addition to the research results elaborated upon, the structured interviews provided an opportunity to analyze the characters in stories made up by pupils. Based on the chosen character, their functions and features, three categories have been established: (1) folktale hero, (2) hero outside a folk tale and (3) folktale hero with new attributes. Folktale heroes were those characters that are explicitly present in traditional folktales, such as the beautiful princess, evil witch; heroes outside a folk tale were the ones who are not to be found in any traditional folktales, such as robots, pupils, mutants); while folktale heroes with new attributes are the ones that dispose of features and appearances that of traditional folk heroes, however the feature they dispose of are non-traditional, for instance golden fish with illuminative eyes, hysterical princess, tamed dragon). The categories have been established based on pupils’ responses, for the purpose of analyzing animation movies as well as reading instruction text content along these (hero) categories (Figure 3).



**Figure 3.:** Children’s favourite types of fairy tales and their frequency in the text book and animated films

Based on the research results, children show no specific preference towards any types of tale heroes, to be specific there is no significant difference among the categories of folk heroes, heroes outside a folk tale or folk heroes with a new attribute. A difference in frequency rate can be detected in the analysis of animation movies, i.e. heroes outside a folk tale are the most popular among children (95.48%). Disproportion can be found in children’s responses regarding textbook content. Namely, in 58.9% folktale heroes dominate their preference. In this case pupils consider textbook content rather interesting, which contradicts with previous findings. For the sake of precise data management, the heroes made up by pupils in their own stories (told during the interview) have been further divided into subcategories and further analyzed in greater depth (Figure 4.).



**Figure 4.:** The favourite type of folk tales of pupils and their frequency in the textbook

Animals and fictitious creatures formed one of the subcategories. Considering data from these two aspects, the most frequently preferred folktale hero is the subcategory of fictitious creatures (44.8%), followed by that of wild animals (29.7%). Significant difference (< 0.01) was found among female pupils within the subcategories of fictitious creatures (80.8%), domestic animals (53.4%). Additionally, both genders showed preference towards wild animals (boys in 50.4% of the cases, while girls in 46.6% of the cases). Within the category of heroes outside a folk tale, pupils preferred fictitious creatures (65.9%), followed by wild animals (48.3%). Significant differences between genders (< 0.01) were found within this category, as well. Namely, boys showed higher preference towards fictitious animals in comparison to girls. While female respondents opted for fictitious creatures in 55.5% of cases, boys did so in 88.4% of the cases. Within the category of folk heroes with a new attribute, pupils chose fictitious creatures the most frequently (63.3%), and just as in the previous categories, significant difference (< 0.02) was also

detected between boys' and girls' responses. Male respondents chose fictitious creatures in 56.2% of the cases, while girls did so in 69.2% of the cases. The second most frequently chosen hero was wild animals (39.3%).

The textbook contains folktale heroes in 58.9%, and heroes outside a folk tale in 39.7%, while folk heroes with a new attribute occur only in very rare cases. Based on the research results, the most outstanding difference in children's interest area and the actual textbook content proves to appear in case of heroes with a new attribute, there is no significant difference regarding children's interest area and heroes outside folk tales, folk heroes. Thus, textbooks only partially satisfy the needs, i.e. the interest area of children and various hero types. The 44.8% of pupils like magic creature in folktales the most, while textbooks contain wild animals in this rate, and magic creature only in 9.6%, i.e. there is a significant difference in the textbook content of magic creatures and pupils' interest towards them. Pupils like folktale heroes with a new attribute in 55.55%, while textbooks contain them in only 1.11%, but wild animals in 28.9%. So, textbooks fail to satisfy children's needs from this aspect, as well. Pupils have shown preference towards heroes outside a folk tale in 68.13%, however the textbook contains human characters in 59.62%. In this case, the relative frequency of animals outside a folk tale is also low (13.46%). Significant difference was detected in case of folktale heroes as well as human characters, which means that the textbook failed to satisfy the interest area of children in these cases, too.

Research results show that the reading categories, topics and hero types present in the textbook do not correspond with the interest areas of pupils. Based on the summarized data, the favourite reading of 12 pupils is found in the textbook (12.12%), these pupils also had considerable reading activities at home. 31 pupils (18.45%) also reported that their favourite reading was present in the textbook, however they did not have any reading activities at home. Furthermore, in 87.87%, pupils reported their favourite reading was not found in their textbook, but had considerable reading activities at home. While 81.54% of pupils did not have any reading activities at home and their favourite reading was not present in the textbook. There is no significant difference between at-home reading activities and interest towards textbook readings. Regardless whether pupils participated in reading activities at home or not, the favourite readings of pupils was not found neither in the textbook, nor in the reading-book.

## **CONCLUSION**

Based on the results, we got an answer to our hypothesis: The 6-8-year-old Children favourite reading text and animated film category, reading and film theme is significantly different from the text book's content and characters.

The results of the research call for the rethinking and redesigning of reading instruction texts for first-grade alphabet books and reading books. An alphabet reading book has a much more complex pedagogical mission. In addition to teaching one how to read, it maintains or increases pupils' interest in reading. When designing and editing an alphabet reading book, it can have a much greater positive impact on the readers' development if we keep in mind the interests of pupils

when carefully selecting a reading method, reading texts, aesthetics, and competency-enhancing illustrations.

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