

# CULTURAL PARTICULARITIES OF ADAPTIVE ABILITIES AND COMPETENCES OF ROMANY (GYPSY) CHILDREN

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**Abstract:** *The topic of this article covers cultural particularities of adaptive abilities and competences of Romany children of younger school age as the basis for elementary school education in Slovakia. The presented article consists of a theoretical and a research part. The main theoretical points of the thesis are based on the research key terms, which are used in the formulation of the surveyed problem. These are defined in details in particular chapters of the mentioned theoretical part of the dissertation thesis. The goal of the thesis research was to gain information – by qualitative and quantitative research methods – about cultural specific features of family education in Roma children, cultural particularities and attitudes of Roma parents to school attendance of children, about adaptive abilities and competences of a Roma child that are preferred in family and community, differences in the parents' demands on adaptive abilities and competences of a Roma child in relation to the child's gender and age, to the gender and educational level of the parent, to the Roma sub-group (Rumunger and Hungarian Roma), to the social and economical standard of the family and the type of community. We suppose that the gained data can be a relevant basis for educational processes in the field of elementary education of Romany pupils and an inspiration for those, who participate in any way, in designing educational materials for Romany pupils.*

**Key words:** *culture, adaptive abilities, adaptive competencies, Romany children, elementary school education.*

## INTRODUCTION

Despite many years efforts to improve the quality of elementary school education of Romany pupils in Slovakia, the results are still not as desired by the public. The topic of this article arose in the endeavour to focus - in the examined problem - on the possibilities of increasing the quality of elementary school education of Romany pupils, as well as the support of the Romany community in the field of education, based on the terms and ideas of the current elementary education curriculum. One possible alternative for increasing the quality of elementary school education and the successful progress of Romas in the process of school education seems to be the search and application of educational approaches that consider ethnic, cultural and social differences between Romany children and youth. When analyzing this suggested alternative deeper, we realize that we have insufficient knowledge in the field of cultural particularities, in regards to the family environment and home education of Romany children, of the parents' attitudes and opinions concerning their children's schooling, of the adaptive competences, abilities, tasks and activities, which the Romany family requires and which the parents consider particularly important and specific for Romany children. One of the possible solutions for to acquiring this knowledge was to carry out a long term – longitudinal field survey, aimed at increasing the quality of elementary school education of Romany pupils in Slovakia. The main theoretical basis of the article was formed as a result of work with literature and other information sources connected to the threaded topic of the article, oriented on the key terms of the research, which were used when defining the research problem. The research goal was to get information about cultural particularities of family education of Romany children, cultural particularities and attitudes and needs of Romany parents concerning their children's schooling, adaptive competences, abilities, tasks and activities of a Romany child that are preferred within the family and community, and different requirements of parents for adaptive abilities and competences of a Romany child. This was carried out by a qualitative and quantitative research paradigm.

## **RESEARCH PART**

It is often difficult to accept the individual as a bearer of his/her own culture, with a special way of self-reflection, thinking, philosophy of life, use of language and speech in the school environment with the mostly frontal education forms, which is based on perception of the pupils as a homogenous social group. It is therefore natural that the more distant from the culture represented by his/her school the child is, the lower are his/her chances to succeed. The school effect is in the opposite to the family effect which means a highly stressed situation the child alone cannot cope with. The child must socialize into the world of standards and values which are strange to his/her own culture. Upon the theoretical results we can say that the most important reason why the Romany (Gypsies) children are not successful in the school education is the difference between the traditional education in the Romany community and the official educational system which is sharply structured with the directive view on completing the school tasks. We should realize the differences between the Romany and the non-Romany children which should, however, point to the fact that the values and the standards set by the majority population need not comply with each ethnic minority. Therefore it is necessary that all who come into contact with the Romany minority try to understand their cultural particularities, values and standards. The elementary school education of the Romany children should be improved by the knowledge and acceptance of the cultural particularities as well as by their integration among other children upon respecting their cultural identity.

The following research part contains the research aimed at obtaining some information from the Romany children's parents about the cultural particularities of the Romany ethnic minority and about the family education in the Romany children, about the differences between the education of the Romany boys and girls with their parents and about the adaptive skills and competences of the Romany children preferred in the family and in the community. The obtained data should help us with the successful adaptation of the Romany children and improve the school education quality of these children.

The presented research is a part of the long-life longitudinal research oriented towards the improvement of the elementary school education quality in the Romany children, towards seeking and applying the educational approaches which respect the ethnical, cultural and social differences in the Romany children and youth. The basic research problem has been specified after the theory had been elaborated.

- **The research problem**

The adaptive skills and competences in the Romany children of the younger school age (measurable variables) and their relation to the chosen natures (categorical variables) – the gender and age of the child, the gender and the educational level of the parent, the Romany subgroup, the socio – economic level of the family, the type of community?

- **The research goal**

This research is oriented toward obtaining the data from the Romany children's parents through the qualitative and quantitative research procedures:

- a) on the cultural particularities of the family education in the Romany children,
- b) on the differences between the education in the Romany boys and girls with their mother or father,
- c) on the adaptive skills and competences in the Romany children preferred in their family
- d) on the differences between the mother's and father's requirements for the adaptive skills and competences which should be achieved by the Romany boys and girls in the particular period of age,

in relation to the gender and age of the child, to the gender and the educational level of the parent, the Romany subgroup, the socio – economic level of the family and the type of community.

- **The research file**

We have tried to select the researched persons so that they represent the Romany population living in Slovakia as good as possible. The selected file contains the Romany parents whose children are between 6 and 11 years old. We have chosen 100 respondents, the parents of the Romany children of the younger school age from three regions - Banska Bystrica, Kosice and Presov. The group of the respondents was heterogeneous and contained more subgroups. Each subgroup was represented by 50 respondents: Rumunger - 50, Hungarian Romanies – 50.

- **The selection methods**

The selected file was subject to the calculated qualified selection (searching for the persons who were characterized by the specified attribute), as one of the selection methods. The selected persons had the relevant attributes of the basic file which were important for the respective research:

- the respondent was the father or mother of the 6- to 11-year-old Romany boy or girl,
- the respondent belonged to one of the Romany subgroups: the Rumunger, the Hungarian Romanies,
- the respondent lived in the segregated, separated or integrated type of the Romany community,
- the respondent was from the Banska Bystrica, Kosice or Presov region.

There were three socio-economic levels of the family: 1. lower, 2. medium, 3. higher. The lower socio-economic family level respondents lived in the frame houses where there was no drinking water distribution, no gas, no bathroom and they heated with logs of wood. The children did not have their own room and they lived together with their parents in one or two rooms. The medium socio-economic family level respondents lived in the tenement or in the house of a lower category with the kitchen and bathroom and the tenement/house was partially equipped with the basic electric appliances. All children lived together in their own room or some of them slept together with their parents in one room. The family owned the second-hand car. The higher socio-economic family level respondents lived above standard, they owned a flat or house with the kitchen, bathroom, living room, bedrooms. Each child in the family had his/her own room. The kitchen was equipped with the electric appliances above standard. The family had its own computer and car.

The field research was made in three types of the Romany community: segregated, separated, and integrated. The people in the segregated Romany community lived alone from the other population, with the minimal open relations. The people in the separated Romany community lived concentrated in a village or in a settlement near the village, often inhabited by the non-Romany population. The people in the integrated Romany community were integrated in the non-Romany population.

- **The research methods**

The qualitative research stage: unstructured interview, unstructured observation. The quantitative research stage: questionnaire interview.

- **The data processing**

The data obtained in the qualitative research stage helped us to specify the detailed list of the adaptive skills, competences and activities in the Romany children. This list was used to set up the questions in the questionnaire for the parents of the Romany children of the younger school age in the quantitative research stage. The particular adaptive skills, competences and activities in the Romany children of the younger school age were categorized into the basic categories and subcategories and analyzed, interpreted and assessed quantitatively and qualitatively individually in this stage in relation to the sex and age of the child, to the sex and the educational level of the parent, the Romany subgroup, the socio-economic level of the family and the type of community: 1. Work, the work competences: a) in the household, b) outside the house, c) on the field and in the garden, d) taking care of the animals; 2. The skills and competences in the health, in the daily life and in the taking care of the others: a) the taking care of oneself and of one's own health, b) the treatment of the others, c) the taking care of the others; 3. The social competences: a)

the family, b) the wider community; 4. The cognitive skills: a) the school, b) the community; 5. The musical, kinetic and motoric skills: a) the musical and kinetic skills, b) the physical and kinetic skills, c) the fine motoric skills; 6. The skills and competences in the survival and in the finances: a) the provision for the food and clothing, b) the ability to earn money; 7. The religion; 8. The socio-pathologic manifestations

The analysis and interpretation of the obtained research data was made through one of the statistical procedures – the descriptive statistics aimed at the description and processing of the data, at their graphic presentation and at the calculation of the basic statistic selection attributes. We used the correlation matrix to find the relation between the dependent and the independent variable. We calculated the correlation through the correlation index. We used ANOVA – the statistical method analysis of variance to test the hypotheses on the impact of the different levels of one or more monitored factors on the measurable variable.

- **The research results**

The obtained data show that the family education has its own cultural particularities in the Romany family and it is different in the sex of the Romany children and their parents. The mother takes care of her children and household and above all, she takes care of and educates her girls. The father helps take care of his children but he pays a great attention to the care and education of his boys.

In the past, the mother took care of the household and the father earned money. At present, the mother continues to take care of the household and takes the biggest responsibility for her children's behaviour while she educates them, but both parents provide money for their household, although in a different way. The mother, who does not work, provides the money she receives from the government, such as the social support, the children allowance or the other subsidies for her household. If her husband does not work, she tries to find the paid job near her home. Nowadays we talk about the utilities for the village or for the town/city. The father continues to be the householder, he takes care of the house and besides the money, and he provides the wood and coal for heating in the household as far as the Romany communities living in the isolated settlements are concerned. Some Romany people help the farmers on their fields in the country and so they get some food and money or some foodstuffs for their work.

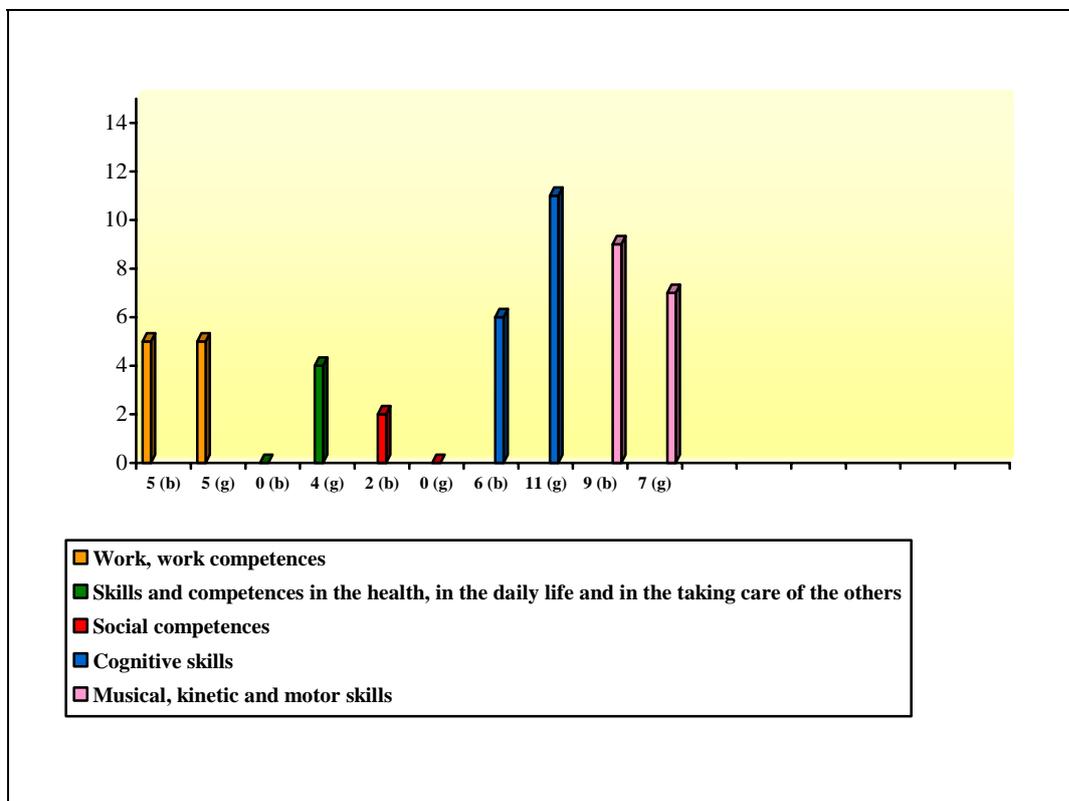
The adaptive skills and competences in the Romany children of the younger school age are different in the boys and girls. The Romany mother develops the competences mostly in the girls and prepares them for their role as a wife and mother. The father tries to develop the specific competences in the boys. The Romany children's competences are mostly the same as their parents' ones. Both the mother's and father's requirements, perhaps even the requirements made by the close family and community are closely related hereto.

The parents' requirements for the adaptive skills, competences and roles which should be achieved by the Romany boys and girls in the particular period of age are different. Nowadays we can see that the parents have the biggest requirements for the girls of the younger school age in the cognitive skills. The girls are supposed above all to dedicate themselves to school, to prepare for their lessons, to read, write, count and develop their communication skills in the Slovak language as well. This should help them in the social interaction with the Romany population, e.g. the shopping – they are able to put down what they need to buy, to read it, to understand and talk to the shop assistant, count how much they are going to pay for their shopping, how much they are going to get back etc. The other parents' requirements result from their cultural environment. Their daughter is of course taught to dance and sing and her kinetic skills are developed. Furthermore we observed that the older the Romany girls were, the more they helped in the household. The quantity and quality of the domestic works were directly proportional to their age. Their parents developed their daily life skills and when the girls were older, they were taught to take care of the other members in the family as well as of their health.

The parents' requirements for the adaptive skills, competences and roles in the Romany boys are different from those in the Romany girls. Compared to the Romany girls of the younger school age, they do sports much more. Their cognitive skills depend on their social interaction with the non-Romany population, just like with the Romany girls. The subsequent competences developed in the Romany boys in the family are the work competences. The Romany boys who live in the settlements help to provide the wood and coal for heating and help their father with his work. Their work competences develop when they work outside and their quantity and quality are directly proportional to their age.

Furthermore the parents' requirements for the competences in the Romany boys contain the development of the social competences we have not observed in the Romany girls of the younger school age. We suppose that in the Romany boys this is closely connected with the position of the man in the Romany family and community when the man/father/boy is expected to protect his younger siblings and if appropriate, he makes a stand for his father.

Comparing the adaptive skills and competences in the Romany boys and girls of the younger school age (Graph 1) we observed that the cognitive skills, the musical, kinetic and motor skills, the work competences and the adaptive skills and competences in the health, the daily life and the taking care of the others developed in the girls in the Romany family. We observed no development of the social, religious, survival or money skills and competences in them. The parents said that no socio-pathological manifestations could be observed in their daughters. We observed the development of the musical, kinetic and motor skills, the cognitive skills and the development of the work and social competences in the Romany boys. We observed neither the development of the skills and competences in the religion, the health, the daily life and the taking care of the others, nor the development of the survival and money competences in them. The parents said that no socio-pathological manifestations could be observed in the boys of the younger school age.



**GRAPF 1** The adaptive skills and competences in the Romany boys and girls of the younger school age

## **THE SUMMARY**

The research data obtained lead to the level of the anthropological points of origin as the assumptions for the knowledge of the Romany culture and population. The knowledge on how the Romany people lived in Slovakia in the past and how they live at present, the knowledge on their way of thinking, on their mutual relations, the relations between people, cultures, nations and societies. Furthermore the research data show that the cooperation between the family and school in the education of the children of the younger school age can be improved through respecting the Romany culture and family requirements. This may cause that the Romany children are more interested in the school education. They will be motivated (by the selection of the activities and roles based on their skills, competences, interest and partially on the Romany family and community requirements).

Besides respecting the cultural particularities of the Romany community we should bear in mind the individuality of the Romany child such as his/her gender and age. Another important aspect is the gender and education of his/her parent. The special aspect is the subgroup because the knowledge of the particular subgroups may help in the education of the Romany children. Furthermore we cannot forget the social aspects such as the socio-economic level of the Romany family and the type of the Romany community. We suppose that there are further important aspects which may affect the difference in the development of the adaptive skills and competences in the Romany children and the elementary school education: locality, the language the child and his/her parent speak, etc. Furthermore we recommend the further education in the Romany families and helping the parents to meet their parental duties. It is important to motivate those parents who meet their parental duties excellently and encourage those who lag behind. We recommend to complete the curricula for the pupils of the younger school age with tasks and activities to help them develop those competences they do not develop in the community, family, together with the development of the cultivation and education of the pupil as a personality. The Romany children should have good conditions for the development of their adaptive skills and competences. We realize however that the research of the Romany culture and cultural particularities is the long-life process which cannot be carried out without the active participation of these ethnic minority members.

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