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Exploring the relationships among reading engagement, enjoyment, perceived competence, perceived difficulties and reading achievement

Abstract: This research sought to investigate the relationships among and impact of reading engagement, reading satisfaction, perceived reading difficulty, perceived reading competence and Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) reading achievement. The data were collected from the PISA 2018 assessment. A total of 5058 students (2457 females and 2601 males) in 224 schools participated, representing 25,739 15-year-old students in Kosovo. These students were in the eighth, ninth, tenth, eleventh and twelfth grades. The dependent variably used in this paper included the score achieved by Kosovar students in reading in PISA 2018 (353 points). The independent variables included items from the PISA 2018 student questionnaire: questions on the index of teacher stimulation of reading engagement, the index of enjoyment of reading, perceptions of reading competence and perceived difficulty in reading. The International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA), International Database (IDB) Analyzer was used in analysing the data. Correlation and regression analyses were performed to assess the correlations and interactions between the stimulation of reading engagement, reading satisfaction, the perception of reading competence, perceived reading difficulty and PISA reading achievement. While some factors exhibited a weaker influence, others, such as the enjoyment of reading and the perception of reading competence, were significantly associated with reading performance. The findings indicate that educators and policymakers play an important role in fostering a culture of reading and improving reading achievement among students in Kosovo.

Keywords: reading engagement, reading enjoyment, reading competence, reading difficulty, achievement

UDC: 37.011.251

Scientific article

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Introduction

Reading comprehension has always been a basis for performance in various areas of the education system as well as a prerequisite for successful participation in most areas of adult life (Capodieci et al., 2020). The ability to read has a significant impact on individuals' educational achievement and overall quality of life (Akyol & Boyaci-Altinay, 2019; Mulcahy et al., 2016). However, the factors that contribute to and influence reading achievement in assessments are multidimensional and complex. Stimulation of reading activity, reading enjoyment, perceived reading competence and perceived reading difficulty are all factors that are thought to play an important role in shaping a person's reading experience. According to Guthrie and Wigfield (2000), students who are actively engaged in reading have been shown to perform better in a range of academic subjects. Similarly, learners who enjoy reading also tend to perform better academically across a range of subjects (Whitten et al., 2018). According to Katzir et al. (2009) and Retelsdorf et al. (2011), students who perceive themselves as proficient readers also tend to take pride in their reading achievements, which can lead to positive emotional well-being. Conversely, a high perceived level of difficulty can reduce self-efficacy, which in turn can lead to less effort and perseverance in reading (Bandura, 1977).

Throughout our research, we encountered a number of studies examining the outcomes of the PISA test in Kosovo, each providing valuable insights into various aspects of educational attainment and performance. Qehaja and Aliu (2018) conducted an in-depth analysis of the 2015 PISA test results, focusing on the possible impacts of teacher quality and school resources on Kosovar students' reading proficiency. Osdautaj (2018) contributed significantly to the discourse on Kosovo's educational landscape by summarising analytical studies based on the results of the 2018 PISA test and providing a comprehensive overview of the status of education in Kosovo. Shala et al. (2018) addressed the worrying issue of poor academic performance among Kosovar students in the 2015 PISA assessment and highlighted areas requiring urgent attention and intervention. Meanwhile, Grajeveci and Shala (2021) emphasised the crucial impact of teacher characteristics on student

performance, underscoring the importance of effective pedagogical practices in improving educational outcomes. Building on this, Shala et al. (2021) examined the complex relationship between students' reading, math and science achievement and socioeconomic variables and established valuable connections between academic achievement and broader socioeconomic factors. In addition, Tahirsylaj (2021) performed a comparative analysis of teachers' teaching tasks and students' performance in the didactic-curricular context, providing valuable insights into the correspondence between teaching practices and student results, which was particularly evident in the context of the 2015 PISA assessment. These studies collectively contribute to our understanding of the complex dynamics shaping educational success in Kosovo and provide critical evidence to inform educational policies and practices aimed at improving student outcomes.

Considering the research conducted thus far, this study aimed to contribute to the existing literature by examining the relationships between factors like the stimulation of reading engagement, reading enjoyment, perceived reading competence, perceived reading difficulty and PISA reading achievement within the specific context of Kosovo. Through this focus on the Kosovar context, this research provides valuable insights into the factors influencing reading achievement among Kosovar students and contribute to efforts aimed at enhancing educational outcomes in the region.

Literature review

Teachers' stimulation of reading engagement – The concept of reading engagement entails various elements, such as behavioural engagement, which encompasses reading time, frequency and attentive participation (Guthrie et al., 2012); cognitive engagement, which is defined as the reader's motivation to read and their capacity to apply metacognitive strategies during the reading process (Lee et al., 2021); social engagement, which is related to the exchange of ideas between students and teachers as well as between students and peers (Lutz et al., 2006); and affective engagement, which is associated with reading-related feelings, perceptions and attitudes (Kucirkova & Cremin, 2020). Teachers play a primary role in stimulating students' engagement in reading. Stimulation by teachers to support students' engagement in reading is important, as it promotes improved literacy skills, including reading comprehension, vocabulary development and critical thinking (Connor et al., 2009; McQuillan, 2019; Merga, 2014; Naeghel et al., 2012). Teachers who encourage reading engagement help students develop a lifelong love for reading, which fosters continuous personal and academic growth (Lee et al., 2021).

Reading enjoyment – Reading enjoyment is a key element of reading engagement that helps students hone their reading skills. According to PISA results, students who love reading the most outperform those who love reading the least across all nations (OECD, 2011). Reading enjoyment is crucial for students, as it has positive effects on their academic achievement, cognitive development and

overall well-being (Whitten et al., 2016). When students enjoy reading, they are more likely to read voluntarily and more frequently, which contributes to improved reading skills, general knowledge, vocabulary and self-assurance in reading (Clark & Rumbold, 2006; Dadandi & Dadandi, 2022). Consequently, regular, active reading engagement aids in the development of the many cognitive processes necessary for in-depth reading comprehension (Barber & Klauda, 2020). According to research, students' enjoyment of and engagement with reading not only predicts their literacy skills but may also play a protective role, supporting their development of resilience as learners (OECD, 2021).

Perception of reading competence – Perceived reading competence is a critical factor in a student's overall reading development and academic success. Students who have high reading self-efficacy beliefs tend to develop emotional and mental habits that promote reading for both recreational and educational purposes, making them 'lifelong readers' (Guthrie et al., 2009). Additionally, reading more challenging texts and reading for pleasure are linked to self-efficacy. Consequently, people with higher levels of self-efficacy outperform those with lower levels of motivation on reading tests (Mucherah & Yoder, 2008). Moreover, students' perceptions of their reading ability are strongly linked to their motivation, future academic achievement and even career choices (Usher & Pajares, 2008). Students with more positive views of their reading abilities read more frequently, are likely have a long history of reading engagement and they are more likely to participate in pleasant textual interactions, indicating a positive relationship with written texts (Henk & Melnick, 1995).

Perception of difficulty in the reading process – refers to students' subjective assessment of how challenging they find a text. This perception can significantly impact reading comprehension, as students may approach difficult texts with anxiety or reluctance, affecting their ability to understand and analyse the material (Cain & Oakhill, 2007). Poor self-perceptions about one's ability to read are especially harmful because they can cause students to stop reading due to a fear that their perceived shortcomings will be exposed. This can lead to a vicious cycle in which students miss out on opportunities to interact with texts that could boost their confidence and enhance the very skills they believe they lack (Hall, 2009). Studies have shown that students with low comprehension profiles have less success engaging in reading activities, suggesting that metacognitive processes, that is, the processes of fostering understanding through self-reflection and self-esteem development, are the causes of low reading comprehension (Horton et al., 2015; Stranovska & Gadusova, 2020).

In our research, we found several studies that examined PISA test results in various nations. Gu and Lau (2023) conducted a comprehensive investigation of the potential differences in the relationship between reading instruction, engagement and achievement in three different regions in China. Their study illuminates the nuanced dynamics that shape reading outcomes in different educational contexts. Similarly, Cheema (2018) examined the effects of reading enjoyment on adolescent reading achievement in a sample of 65 countries. By exploring this relationship on a global scale, Cheema's work provides valuable insight into the uni-

versal importance of reading engagement for academic success. Brozo et al. (2008) conducted a comparative analysis of reading engagement in five countries, including the United States, New Zealand, Australia, the United Kingdom and Ireland. Their cross-national study provides valuable comparative data on the factors that influence reading engagement and highlights the importance of cultural and contextual differences in shaping reading practices and outcomes. Umek et al. (2012) examined the influence of preschool education on the reading skills of 15-year-old youths in Slovenia, contributing to our understanding of the lasting effects of early interventions on literacy development. Lafontaine et al. (2021) investigated the factorial structure of newly introduced reading self-concept and self-efficacy scales in PISA 2018. Their study highlights the complex interplay between students' perceptions of their reading skills and their actual reading performance, providing valuable insights for designing educational assessment and intervention strategies. Bernardo (2023) examined the relationship between a growth mindset and reading proficiency among Filipino students learning English. By examining the role of mindsets in shaping reading outcomes, Bernardo's research offers important implications for cultivating positive attitudes towards learning and improving literacy skills among diverse student populations. Using Turkish data from PISA 2018, Dadandi and Dadandi (2022) studied the impact of students' perceptions of their Turkish teachers' behaviour on the students' reading engagement, enjoyment, self-efficacy and success. Their study provides insights into the numerous factors that influence reading achievement and highlights the importance of teacher–student dynamics in fostering a supportive reading environment.

PISA Kosovo Context

Since 1997, the governments of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries have worked together to monitor educational outcomes in terms of student achievement on a regular basis and within an internationally agreed-upon common framework (OECD, 2004). As a partner of the OECD, Kosovo took part in PISA for the first time in 2015 and for the second time in 2018. Approximately 600,000 students from 37 OECD member countries and 42 partner countries participated in the PISA 2018 assessment (OECD, 2019). Recognising the importance of reading literacy, the focus of PISA 2018 was on reading (as the primary area of assessment). Based on an analysis of PISA 2015 performance results, Kosovo achieved an overall average of 347 points in reading, compared to the general OECD average of 493 points, making it one of the third lowest-performing countries. Based on these results, the pre-university system in Kosovo is underdeveloped. Specifically, 15-year-old students in Kosovo demonstrated low achievement in science, reading and mathematics (OECD, 2016; Muja, 2018; Grajevci & Shala, 2021). Kosovo took part in PISA for the second time in 2018. In reading (the primary assessment area), Kosovo achieved an average of 353 points. Average reading performance was similar to 2015. Girls scored higher (365 points) than boys (340 points), while students in the eleventh grade (368

points) exhibited higher reading success than their peers in tenth grade (358 points), ninth grade (337 points) and eighth grade (305 points). The PISA 2018 results were not enough to close the gap with the PISA 2015 results. Compared to PISA 2015, there was an overall average increase of 8 points in the reading skills area. However, Kosovo was once again of the three lowest-performing countries (OECD, 2019-b).

Previous studies (Grajcevcic and Shala, 2021; Osdautaj, 2018; Qehaja & Aliu 2018; Shala et al., 2018; Shala et al., 2021; Tahirsylaj, 2021) have examined various factors related to PISA performance in Kosovo, including teacher quality, school resources and socio-economic variables. However, a notable research gap remains regarding the effects of promoting reading engagement, reading enjoyment, perceived reading proficiency and perceived reading difficulty on students' reading performance. Despite their recognised importance in the literature, these variables have not been thoroughly studied in the Kosovo context, particularly the complex dynamics between them and their interaction with PISA results. This lack of information hinders the development of tailored interventions and educational policies aimed at improving the reading performance of Kosovar students, highlighting the urgent need for further research in this area. Therefore, this study aimed to fill this gap by addressing the relationships between these key variables related to reading experience and reading achievement, seeking to provide valuable insights for educational practitioners and policymakers to better support the literacy development of students in Kosovo. Specifically, the study focused on the following research questions:

- Is there a significant correlation between teachers' stimulation of reading engagement, students' reading enjoyment, students' perception of reading competence and students' perceived difficulty in reading and reading achievement?
- To what extent do teachers' stimulation of reading engagement, students' reading enjoyment, students' perception of reading competence and students' perceived difficulty in reading impact reading achievement?

Methodology

The International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA), International Database (IDB) Analyzer was used in the data analysis. Correlation analysis was used to assess the correlations between the stimulation of reading engagement, reading satisfaction, perceived reading competence, perceived reading difficulty and reading achievement according to PISA. Regression analysis was used to examine the impact of the stimulation of reading engagement on students' reading satisfaction, perceived reading competence, perceived reading difficulty and PISA reading achievement. By understanding these relationships, policymakers and educators can identify areas for intervention and develop targeted strategies to improve literacy levels and overall educational outcomes in Kosovo.

Sample

In total, 5058 students (2457 females and 2601 males) in 224 schools completed the PISA 2018 assessment, representing 25,739 15-year-old students in Kosovo, including those in the eighth, ninth, tenth, eleventh and twelfth grade classes.

Measures

In PISA 2018, various concepts related to reading engagement, reading enjoyment, perceived competence and perceived difficulty were measured through carefully designed questionnaires given to participating students. Four items assessed teachers' stimulation of reading engagement: 'The teacher encourages students to express their opinion about a text'; 'The teacher helps students relate the stories they read to their lives'; 'The teacher shows students how the information in texts builds on what they already know'; and 'The teacher poses questions that motivate students to participate actively'. Students responded on a four-point Likert scale, selecting from the options 'never or hardly never', 'in some lessons', 'in most lessons' and 'in all lessons'. The variables were grouped into a single category named 'teachers' stimulation of reading engagement' (OECD, 2019-b). The Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient for this scale was .793.

Five items were used to assess students' reading enjoyment: 'I read only if I have to'; 'Reading is one of my favorite hobbies'; 'I like talking about books with other people'; 'For me, reading is a waste of time'; and 'I read only to get information that I need'. Students responded on a four-point Likert scale, selecting from the options 'strongly disagree', 'disagree', 'agree', 'strongly agree'. The variables were grouped into a single category, named 'enjoyment of reading'. Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient for this scale was .639.

Six items were used to assess students' perception of their reading competence and whether they encountered difficulties in learning how to read. Specifically, perception of competence in reading was assessed with three items: 'I am a good reader'; 'I am able to understand difficult texts'; and 'I read fluently'. Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient for this scale was .760. Perceived difficulty in reading was also assessed by three items: 'I have always had difficulty with reading'; 'I have to read a text several times before completely understanding it'; and 'I find it difficult to answer questions about a text'. Students responded on a four-point Likert scale, selecting from the options 'Strongly disagree', 'disagree', 'agree' and 'strongly agree' (OECD, 2019-a). Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient for this scale was .727.

Each of these concepts was quantified using Likert-type scale responses, allowing the categorisation and analysis of students' attitudes and experiences related to reading within the PISA framework.

Results

Dimension		Never or hardly never	In some lessons	In most lessons	In all lessons
Teachers' stimulation of reading engagement	N	481	1336	1741	1245
	%	10.03	27.96	36.13	25.89
	SE	.43	.67	.77	.75
	M	338.81	353.31	360.79	356.65
		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
Enjoyment of reading	N	1084	1330	1755	620
	%	22.84	27.81	36.47	12.98
	SE	.594	.712	.76	.506
	M	353.88	361.37	339.08	342.26
Perception of competence in reading	N	123	373	2655	1600
	%	2.37	7.74	55.99	33.90
	SE	.23	.39	.73	.69
	M	298.54	334.25	353.09	369.82
Perceived difficulty in reading	N	1566	1794	1055	295
	%	33.36	38.67	21.89	6.16
	SE	.73	.76	.61	.38
	M	373.14	360.95	326.21	316.48

Table 1: Descriptive statistics of dimensions

Notes: N – Number of cases, % – Percent, SE – Standard Error, M – Reading achievement

Table 1 presents the results of the descriptive analysis of dimensions. The number of cases for each answer option, along with the percentages, standard errors and scores on the PISA test are presented in order.

Based on the results, for the dimension *Teachers' stimulation of reading engagement*, the most commonly selected option was 'In most lessons' (N=1741, 36.13%), with an average score of 360.79 points on the PISA test, while the option 'Never or hardly never' was selected least (N=481, 10.03%), with an average score of 338.81 points. For the second dimension, *Enjoyment of reading*, the most commonly selected option was 'Agree' (N=1755, 36.13%), with an average score of 339.08 points on the PISA test, while the option 'Strongly agree' was selected least (N=619, 12.98%), with an average score of 342.26 points. For the third dimension, *Perception of competence in reading*, the largest number of students (N=2655, 55.99%) chose the option 'In most lessons'. In terms of the total average, the most commonly selected option was 'Agree' (N=2655, 55.99%), with an average score of 353.09 points on the PISA test, while 'Strongly agree' was selected least (N=123, 2.37%), with an average of 298.54 points. For the last dimension, *Perceived difficulty in reading*, the most commonly selected option was 'Disagree'

($N=1794$, 38.67%), with an average score of 360.95 points on the PISA test, while the option ‘Strongly disagree’ was selected least ($N=295$, 6.16%), with an average score of 316.48 points.

Variable	N	M	SD	R	r (SE)	Cohen d
Stimulation of reading engagement	4912	2.77	.74	.10	.02	.20
Reading achievement	4912	354.52	68.19			
Enjoyment of reading	4923	2.85	.42	.20	.02	.41
Reading achievement	4923	354.17	68.24			
Perception of competence in reading	4881	3.20	.57	.25	.02	.52
Reading achievement	4881	354.79	68.01			
Perceived difficulty in reading	4793	2.02	.68	-.34	.01	.72
Reading achievement	4793	356.11	67.37			

Table 2: Correlation analysis results

Notes: N – Number of cases, M – Mean, SD – Standard Deviation, r – Correlation, r (SE) – Correlation Standard Error, Cohen d

Table 2 shows the correlation analysis between the variables: *Stimulation of reading engagement*, *Enjoyment of reading*, *Perception of competence in reading*, *Perceived difficulty in reading* and *Reading achievement*. Based on the correlation coefficient, there was a moderate positive relationship between the *perception of reading competence* and *reading achievement* ($r = 0.25$). This means that as students’ perception of their reading competence increases, their reading scores tend to increase to a moderate extent. There was a weak positive relationship between *reading enjoyment* and *reading achievement* ($r = 0.20$). This indicates that as reading enjoyment increases, reading scores tend to increase somewhat, but the relationship is not very strong. A weak positive correlation was also found between *stimulation of reading engagement* and *reading achievement* ($r = 0.10$). This indicates that as the stimulation of reading engagement increases, reading scores tend to increase slightly, but the relationship is not very strong. Meanwhile, there was a moderate negative relationship between *perceived difficulty in reading* and *reading achievement* ($r = -0.35$). Thus, as students perceive reading to be more difficult, their reading results tend to decrease to a moderate extent.

	N	Mean	SD	B	B (SE)	t	β
(CONSTANT)				300.34	10.59	.	.
Stimulation of reading engagement	4719	2.77	.73	.84	1.82	.46	.01
Enjoyment of reading	4719	2.85	.55	16.17	2.47	6.66	.13
Perception of competence in reading	4719	3.20	.56	18.59	2.27	8.10	.15
Perceived difficulty in reading	4719	2.02	.68	-26.06	1.52	-16.25	-.26
Reading achievement	4719	357.01	67.15				
R-Square	R2			R2 (SE)			
	.16			.01			

Table 3: Regression analysis results

Notes: N – Number of cases, M – Mean, SD – Standard Deviation, β – Regression, β (SE) – Regression Standard Error, t – t-value, β – Standardised coefficient, R² – R-Square, R² (SE) – R-Square Standard Error

The regression analysis results indicated a significant negative relationship between *perceived difficulty in reading* and *reading achievement* ($\beta = -.26$, $t = -16.25$). This suggests that as students' perceptions of reading difficulty increase, their reading achievement tends to decrease. A significant positive relationship between *perception of competence in reading* and *reading achievement* ($\beta = .15$, $t = 8.10$) has also been encountered. This indicates that as students' perceptions of their reading competence increase, their reading achievement tends to increase as well. There was also a significant positive relationship between *enjoyment of reading* and *reading achievement* ($\beta = .13$, $t = 6.66$), which suggests that as students' enjoyment of reading increases, their reading achievement tends to increase as well. All three variables contributed significantly to the model. However, *teacher stimulation of reading engagement* ($\beta = .01$, $t = .46$) did not contribute to the model in any way (very low predictive capability, non-significant).

Discussion

This study focused on assessing the correlation between and impact of teachers' stimulation on students' engagement in reading, reading satisfaction, perception of reading competence and perceived difficulty in reading as well as their success on the PISA test. The results showed a relatively weak positive correlation between stimulation of reading engagement and reading achievement. Teachers generally encourage students to express their ideas about a text and help them make connections between the stories and their lives. In most lessons, they show students how the information in the text is constructed, resulting in students achieving higher scores. In addition, teachers ask questions that motivate the students to participate actively in lessons. The positive values on this scale indicate that the students perceived their teacher as providing greater stimulation

compared to average students across OECD countries (OECD, 2019-b). However, stimulating reading engagement did not contribute significantly to the model in the regression analysis. Despite a positive beta coefficient, the low t-value indicated a weak and insignificant relationship. This suggests that while teacher stimulation of reading engagement may have some influence on students' reading achievement, its predictive power is limited compared to other factors examined in this study. There is research showing a strong relationship between reading engagement and reading achievement (Brozko et al., 2007; Chiu & McBride-Chang, 2006). Indeed, reading engagement is a multidimensional construct influenced by various factors, such as the quality of the reading material, personal interest and motivation. This complexity may contribute to the relatively weak relationship observed in this study. Similarly, reading achievement can be influenced by many factors, including prior reading ability, teaching methods and socioeconomic status, which can dilute the strength of the correlation. Despite the weak relationship found, the promotion of reading engagement remains important in education. In general, researchers agree that motivation and engagement play a crucial role in students' reading development and success (Guthrie & Cox, 2001; Leea et al., 2021). Engagement is particularly important because the level of engagement over time significantly affects student outcomes (Afflerbach & Harrison, 2017; Irvin et al., 2007). Although the results revealed a weak relationship between stimulating reading engagement and reading outcomes, there are still valuable educational and personal benefits of promoting reading engagement. Further research and consideration of other relevant factors are needed to gain a more complete understanding of these complex relationships.

A weak positive relationship was found between reading enjoyment and reading achievement. Students who read only when they are asked (forced) to read exhibited lower scores than students who read even when they are not asked. Students for whom reading is a hobby had higher scores compared to students for whom it is not. Students who like to talk about books also had higher scores compared to students who do not like to talk about books. Students who consider reading a waste of time as well as students who read just enough to get the necessary information had lower scores than students who do not consider reading a waste of time and those who read regularly. Positive values on this scale mean that the student enjoys reading more than the average student across OECD countries (OECD, 2019-b). Meanwhile, the regression analysis revealed a positive relationship between reading enjoyment and reading achievement, and the positive beta coefficient and high t-value indicated the association was significant. This suggests that as students derive more enjoyment from reading, their reading achievement tends to increase. This finding emphasises the importance of fostering a positive reading culture and providing students with access to engaging and relevant reading materials that cater to their interests and preferences. Several studies have reported a strong positive relationship between reading enjoyment and reading outcomes, with students who read for pleasure performing better on reading tests than their peers who do not enjoy reading (AOE, 2022; Clark & Zoysa, 2011; Cullinan, 2000; Smith et al., 2012; Wingard et al., 2020). Reading

enjoyment is a complex and individualised experience that can be influenced by numerous factors, including personal interests, the specific reading materials and the reading environment (Casey & Byford, 2010; Clark & Phythian-Sence, 2008). Moreover, prior reading ability, teaching methods, socio-economic background, access to resources as well as the number of books at home can have an impact on reading enjoyment (Caygill & Chamberlain, 2004; Clark & Poulton, 2011; Nash, 2002; THRA, 2015). These factors may contribute to the relationship between reading enjoyment and reading achievement. Thus, further research is needed to gain a more complete understanding of all relevant factors.

The results indicated a moderate positive relationship between the perception of reading competence and reading results. As students' perception of their reading competence increases, their reading scores tend to increase to a moderate extent. Students who are good readers demonstrated higher success compared to students who are not good readers. Students who are able to understand different types of texts, especially difficult texts, had higher scores than students who are not able to understand difficult texts. In addition, students who read fluently had higher scores than students who do not read fluently. The observed positive correlation between the perception of reading competence and reading results suggests that students who believe in their reading abilities are more likely to perform well. This is consistent with Bandura's (1977) self-efficacy theory, which holds that individuals who have confidence in their abilities are more motivated and more persistent in tasks related to those abilities. Studies have shown that other factors, such as actual reading skills, quality of teaching, motivation and external support, also play an important role in determining students' reading performance (Gambrell, 2011). In other words, students' perceptions are shaped not only by themselves but also by their environment and the motivational support they receive, which can influence the growth of their understanding.

The regression analysis revealed a significant positive relationship between the perception of reading competence and reading achievement, with a positive beta coefficient and high *t*-value. This suggests that as students perceive themselves to be more competent in reading, their reading achievement tends to increase. This highlights the importance of nurturing students' confidence in their reading abilities and providing opportunities for them to develop and apply their reading skills. When students perceive themselves as competent readers, they are more likely to believe in their ability to successfully complete reading tasks. In turn, this confidence can lead to increased effort and persistence in challenging texts, which are closely related to both reading performance and reading success (Tegmark et al., 2022). Indeed, students who feel competent in reading are often more motivated and engaged in reading activities, which can contribute to greater reading achievement over time (Guthrie & Klauda, 2015).

In contrast, a moderate negative relationship was found between perceived reading difficulty and reading achievement. Students who have reading difficulties had significantly lower scores compared to students without reading difficulties. Additionally, students who need to read several times to understand a text had lower scores compared to students who do not have this problem. Students

who have difficulty finding answers to the questions related to the text also had low scores. Positive values in these indices mean that students perceive greater difficulty than the OECD average (OECD, 2019-a). Juel (1988) found that students' perceived reading difficulty can affect their reading achievement over time, especially in the early grades. Similarly, Guthrie and Davis (2003) explored how students' motivation and perceived reading difficulty can affect their reading achievement, emphasising the importance of engagement. Students who have reading difficulties may face challenges in understanding learning materials and performing reading-related tasks, which may affect their self-esteem and motivation, leading to disengagement from the learning process and reduced academic achievement (Sazan & Rabillas, 2022; Ueda et al., 2021). Notably, the regression analysis revealed a negative association between perceived reading difficulty and reading performance, with the significantly negative beta coefficient and high t-value indicating a robust and statistically significant relationship. This suggests that as students perceive reading tasks to be more challenging, their reading performance tends to decline. This finding highlights the importance of addressing students' perceptions of reading difficulties and providing appropriate support to help them overcome challenges related to their reading comprehension and literacy. According to Schunk (2003), when students believe that reading tasks are too difficult to overcome, they are less inclined to make an effort or attempt new and challenging tasks. Furthermore, students who find reading tasks challenging may experience stress and anxiety. A particular type of anxiety related to reading is called reading anxiety (Zbornik & Wallbrown, 1991). Research conducted on this topic has found a negative relationship between reading achievement and reading anxiety, with higher levels of reading anxiety being associated with lower reading scores (Ramirez et al., 2019). The moderate negative relationship found between perceived reading difficulty and reading achievement in this study provides insight into the complex relationship between these two factors. It is important to recognise that this relationship is not determined by a single factor but rather is influenced by various cognitive, motivational and contextual elements. Further research and longitudinal studies are needed to gain a deeper understanding of this relationship.

Conclusion

In summary, the results highlight the complex factors that affect reading performance, including teacher stimulation, reading enjoyment, perceptions of reading proficiency and perceived difficulty in reading. While some factors may have a weaker influence, others, such as the enjoyment of reading and the perception of reading competence, are significantly associated with reading performance. Thus, promoting a positive reading environment, increasing students' confidence in their reading skills and addressing perceived reading difficulties are essential strategies for improving students' reading achievement and promoting literacy development. Further research and longitudinal studies are needed to deepen our understanding of these complex relationships and support the design of effective interventions in educational settings.

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RAZISKOVANJE ODNOSOV MED BRALNO ANGAŽIRANOSTJO, UŽITKOM, ZAZNANO KOMPETENCO, ZAZNANO TEŽAVO IN BRALNIMI DOSEŽKI

Povzetek: Raziskava proučuje povezanost med zavzetostjo za branje, uživanjem v branju, zaznavanjem lastne kompetentnosti pri branju, zahtevnostjo preizkusa in bralnimi dosežki na preizkusu PISA. Podatki so bili zbrani iz ocene PISA 2018. Skupno je sodelovalo 5.058 učencev (2.457 učenk in 2.601 učencev) z 224 šol, ki so »zastopali« 25.739 15-letnih učencev na Kosovu. Ti učenci so obiskovali 8., 9., 10., 11. ali 12. razred. Odvisne spremenljivke, uporabljene v članku, vključujejo rezultat, ki so ga kosovski učenci dosegli pri branju v preizkusu PISA 2018 (353 točk). Neodvisne spremenljivke, vključene v analizo, zajemajo sklop vprašanj v vprašalnikih za učence s preizkusa PISA 2018: vprašanja o indeksu spodbujanja učiteljev za angažiranost pri branju, zadovoljstvu pri branju, zaznani težavnosti branja in zaznani kompetentnosti pri branju. Za analizo podatkov smo uporabili analizator mednarodne baze podatkov (IDB) Mednarodne zveze za vrednotenje izobraževalnih dosežkov (IEA). Za preučitev povezav in vpliva med zavzetostjo za branje, uživanjem v branju, zaznavanjem lastne kompetentnosti pri branju, zahtevnostjo preizkusa in bralnimi dosežki na preizkusu PISA smo uporabili korelacijsko in regresijsko analizo. Medtem ko imajo nekateri dejavniki šibkejši vpliv, imajo drugi pomembno povezavo s šolskim uspehom pri branju – to sta zadovoljstvo in zaznana kompetentnost pri branju. Izobraževalci in šolska politika lahko na tej podlagi prispevajo k spodbujanju kulture branja in izboljšanju šolskega uspeha pri branju med učenci na Kosovu.

Ključne besede: angažiranost pri branju, zadovoljstvo pri branju, zaznana kompetentnost pri branju, zaznana težavnost branja, dosežki branja

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