

RESEARCH OF THE SOCIAL RELATIONS OF ROMA AND NON-ROMA PUPILS WITH THE HELP OF SOCIO-METRICAL QUESTIONNAIRES

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The education of Roma children has been an acute, unsolved problem of the Hungarian education system as well as the Hungarian social system for decades. Despite the numerous researches carried out in connection with Roma people we still know few about the topic, especially about the present situation and about how the Roma and non-Roma children perceive each other. How their social relations are influenced by the local and global changes and finally what the teachers' opinions are about the situation and how efficiently they deal with the occurring problems. That is why we felt the importance of carrying out a comprehensive empirical research in which we could objectively cast light upon the relationships between Roma and non-Roma children in the Hungarian education system.

Keywords: Roma pupils, social relations, socio-metrical questionnaires, 'colour-matrix'

The aim of our research was to explore the interactions among Roma and non-Roma children and their thoughts, attitudes behind these interactions from several aspects.

In order to get an objective picture about the situation methodologically we based our research on four different methods: socio-metrical questionnaire, stimulated recall, interviews, and participating-observing method.

In this paper we would like to focus on the method and results of the socio-metrical questionnaire.

Circumstances of research

We have examined the everyday life of a Roma community for more than four years with the help of participating-observing method. In the meantime we could experience their everyday activities, their customs, their belief as well as the conflicts and the stressful relationship between them and the non-Roma people living in the same village.

At the same time we could experience that Roma and non-Roma children could play with each other without any conflict. Of course, the situation was not always idyllic, but we wanted to know what the secret of these children could be, how they could co-operate in and out of school.

In the meantime unexpected events occurred that gave a new aspect to our research. The local primary school attended by the children of the examined Roma community was closed. So they had to attend the primary school of the next village called Révfülöp.

We expected that the new situation would cause a lot of tension among children since they had to become acquainted with a lot of new things: travelling to school by bus, getting to know new children, new teachers in a much more modern school etc.

We started our research at the end of the school year 2006/2007 before the arrival of Roma children. Our aim was to grab the actual situation in the new school and the relationships among the children in the chosen classes.

In order to be able to follow the formation of social relations we chose another primary school having similar conditions as a control. In this school we wanted to examine what kind of relationships could be formed among Roma and non-Roma classmates. Therefore it was very important for us to choose a school with huge experiences on the scope of the education of Roma children.

We chose the primary school of Zalabér, which had quite similar conditions to the ones of the primary school of Révfülöp.

The two chosen schools are situated about 70 km far from each other in Central Transdanubia having 1000-1200 inhabitants.

The primary school of Révfülöp, the children of the examined Roma community started to attend, had got approximately 145 pupils at the beginning of our research, then after the arrival of the new (partly Roma) children from the closed school the number of pupils rose up to 168. This school had not been attended by numerous Roma children before so we expected that the sudden rising of the number of Roma children would cause significant conflicts.

The primary school of Zalabér has been attended by Roma children for a long time, the 30-40 per cent of the 125 pupils are Roma children.

In each school a senior section and a junior section class took part in the socio-metrical research, so altogether 4 classes.

The socio-metrical questionnaire

The socio-metrical questionnaire used in our research was made not too complicated in order to be able to be filled easily and quickly, since the same questionnaire-type was filled by the members of the junior and senior sections in both schools.

In the socio-metrical questionnaire the following questions were answered by the children taking part in the research.

- (a) Fill in some of your personal data (name, class, permanent address)
- (b) Who is your best friend in your class?
- (c) Who do you like the least in your class?
- (d) With whom do you play after school?
- (e) You are having a birthday party but your parents allow you to invite only three of your classmates since a lot of your relatives have been invited. Write three classmates who you would invite.
- (f) Your class is going for an excursion, but unfortunately the bus is too small, so you have to leave three of your classmates at home. Who would you leave at home? Write three names.

The second phase of our research was carried out at the beginning of school-year 2007/2008, after the arrival of the new pupils to the primary

school of Révfülöp. The aim of the research was to investigate the forming social relations among the new classmates especially between Roma and non-Roma children.

For the pupils of the primary school of Révfülöp another questionnaire was created containing special questions focusing on the new students. So the original questionnaire was completed with four questions.

- (a) Who do you like the best among your new classmates?
- (b) Have you known him/her before?
- (c) Who do you like the least among your new classmates?
- (d) Have you known him/her before?

In the primary school of Zalabér the former questionnaire was filled again by the children since there were not significant changes in the classes.

All together 106 questionnaires were filled by four classes in two schools at the end of school-year 2006/2007 and at the beginning of school-year 2007/2008.

New procedure in the analysis of data

The way of data analysis used in literature was felt not adequate to our research therefore the demand of finding a new way in this field arose in us. Consequently for the analysis of data obtained from the socio-metrical questionnaires a chart based on Microsoft Excel was used that was named 'colour-matrix'. (*Table 1*)

In the first column and in the first row of the matrix the list of names of each class participating in the research can be read. The subjects' answers to each question were indicated with different colours. Red colour was used for the question 'Who is your best friend in your class?', pink for the 'invitation', black for the question 'Who do you like the least in your class?', blue for 'leave at home' question, light purple for the question 'With whom do you play after school?'.

In the second questionnaire-type created for the primary school of Révfülöp dark green indicated 'the best liked among new classmates, but has not been known before', light green indicated the 'the best liked among new classmates and has been known before'.

Dark brown colour indicated 'the least liked among new classmates, and has not been known before', and light brown indicated 'the least liked among new classmates, and has been known before'.

With the help of 'colour-matrix' the data obtained from the socio-metrical questionnaires can be arranged fast and easily and the analysis of them is much more unambiguous and easier than with other procedures known in literature.

The analysis of the socio-metrical questionnaire Primary school of Révfülöp - Junior section

At the beginning of the research two Roma children attended the chosen class of the junior section. It has been observed that both of them are accepted members of the class. 20 % of the class would invite them to their birthday party, though Dorottya was pointed by 20 % of the class as the least liked pupil. In the case of Márk this rate is only 5 %. Dorottya would be left at home from the excursion by 5 % of the class, Márk would be left at home by 10 % of class. (*Figure 1*)

In September 2007 three new classmates arrived, a Roma boy and two non-Roma girls. In the table red colour indicates the Roma children while the names of the new children are in italics. (*Figure 2*)

It can be stated obviously that a strong negative attitude was felt against the new Roma boy. K. Sándor was named by 45 % of the class as the least liked member of the class. 59 % of them would leave him at home in case of excursion, 89 % of them liked him the least among the newly arrived pupils, though 78 % of the class had not known him at all before! Only 1 pupil chose him as the best liked pupil among new classmates, but he had known him before. No one of the classmates would invite him to their birthday party!

From the stimulated recall interviews it turned out that the classmates have antipathy not because he is Roma, but because of his aggressive, bad conduct.

At the same time the newly arrived, curly fair-haired, blue-eyed girl, S. Rebeka was named by 14 % of the class as the best friend, 77 % of them liked her the best among the new classmates, though 70 % of the class had not known her at all before! 50 % of the class would invite her to their birthday party, and only 1 pupil liked her the least among the new classmates. No one of the classmates would leave her at home in case of excursion.

The third newly arrived pupil's status can be characterized as neutral, there are no unambiguous signs of antipathy or sympathy towards her. (*Figure 2, Figure 3*)

Primary school of Révfülöp - Senior section

In the first phase of the research there was only one Roma student in the class of whom various opinions were formed by his classmates. In the class nobody named him best friend, though 19 % of the class would invite him to their birthday party. At the same time 6 % of the class liked him the least and 19 % would leave him at home. To sum up the judgement of the Roma boy can not be evaluated either from negative or positive point of view. (*Figure 4*)

In the second phase of our research a very strange situation occurred in the class. It is obvious that the judgement of Roma pupil has developed a lot, since he was not given negative parameters, while the percentage of his positive parameters increased a lot. The reason behind this phenomenon we could get from the stimulated recall interviews: the newly arrived Roma pupils and the Roma boy became friends, so the Roma boy has got much more positive judgements than before.

All in all the judgement of the newly arrived non-Roma boy became the most favourable, since 53 % of the class like him the best among the new pupils, 26 % would invite him, and 5 % named him the best friend.

The judgement of the newly arrived Roma girl K. Mercédesz was quite contradictory since 11 % of the class titled her as the best friend, though only 5 % of her classmates would invite her to their birthday party. In other words some of those who considered her the best friend would not invite her. Even more, nobody named her answering to the question that who they like the best among the new classmates.

The negative opinion about one of the new non-Roma girls, P. Gertrúd, was also striking since 47 % of her classmates would leave her at home, 26 % of them liked her the least among the new pupils, and 5 % liked her the least considering the whole class. From the stimulated recall interviews it turned out that she had serious conflicts with the Roma girls though these

girls were her classmates in her former school, but at that time they had not had any problems with each other.

The position of the other non-Roma girl is quite special from that point of view that she had started her studies in this school, but one and a half year ago she left this school because of her conflicts with her classmates and attended the later closed school. After the closing of that school she came back to her former school. That is why her judgement was mainly negative since the previous conflicts with her classmates were revived. In spite of this her judgement can not be considered striking.

The opinion about K. Szabina, the Roma girl is similar to the one of K. Mercédesz, although her case can not be considered contradictory. (*Figure 5, Figure 6*)

The Primary School of Zalabér – Junior section

According to the analysis of socio-metrical questionnaires the best liked pupil in the class is Cs. N. Ádám who was named as best friend by 40 % of his classmates and would be invited to birthday party by 47 %. The least liked pupil is D.F. Giovanni (33 %) and he would be left at home by 53 % of his classmates.

53 % of the class would leave at home K. Dániel and Sz. Viktor as well. Among the Roma pupils B. Martina has got positive and negative judgement, too: 7 % of the class titled her as best friend, 20 % would invite but 27 % would leave her at home.

H. Dóra would be left at home by 13 % of her classmates, but she was not named in any other questions.

R. László also shares his classmates' opinions since 7 % of the class would leave him at home but at the same time 7 % would invite him. From *Figure 8* it is obvious that among the Roma pupils K. Dániel is the least liked, but two non-Roma pupils were judged in the same way.

From the analysis of the socio-metrical questionnaires we can state that the members of the class do not have any prejudice against Roma pupils since otherwise all of the Roma pupils of the class would be judged negatively.

To sum up it is presumable that there is no prejudice against Romas in the class, the negative judgement derives from the pupils' behaviour and personality. (*Figure 7, Figure 8, Figure 9*)

The Primary School of Zalabér – Senior section

The best liked pupils are B. Eszter, Cs.N. Raffael and D.F. Dániel who would be invited to the birthday party by 50-50 and 43 % of their classmates. In spite of this nobody would invite D. Attila, K. Zsanett and Sz. László and nobody considered them their best friends.

Among Roma pupils D. Nikoletta is titled as best friend by 7 % of the class and would be invited by 7 %.

K. Martin is considered the best friend by 21 % and would be invited by 29 % of the class.

7 % of the class chose L. Adrienn as the best friend and 14 % would invite her to their birthday party. (*Figure 10*)

All in all we can state that the judgement of Roma pupils is positive and unprejudiced.

The least liked member of the class is Sz. László (79%) and 86 % of the class would leave him at home in case of school-excursion.

D. Attila would be left at home as well by 79 %, but he was titled as the least liked pupil only by 7 % of his classmates.

7 % of the class like K. Zsanett the least, and 50 % of them would leave her at home. From *Figure 11* it is obvious that the positions of these three pupils are marginal since they are liked the least. (*Figure 11, Figure 12*)

Results of research

We based our research on four methods in order to get an objective picture about the present situation in the examined schools.

Data obtained from the interviews, stimulated recall, socio-metrical questionnaires and the participating-observing method confirmed each other, they elucidated the situation, while sometimes we could experience contradiction between the data obtained from one method and the ones obtained from another.

Therefore it is very difficult to present the results of our research without having presented the data obtained by the other methods. But of course in the framework of this paper we could not carry out the detailed presentation of the whole research, therefore we tried to concentrate only on the socio-metrical questionnaires and our achievements in this field. But we have to emphasize that our results and statements presented below are valid because of the simultaneous use of four methods. Data obtained only by the use of socio-metrical questionnaires could not have been considered the basis of our statements.

Considering all the data obtained during our research we can state that in junior section prejudice do not occur in the interactions of children, the conflicts derive from the personality of each pupil. Later in puberty in spite of the fact that sometimes we experienced serious conflicts among children, we can not state unambiguously that the conflicts would derive from prejudice.

But it is obvious that parental background has got significant influence on the social relations of children. Non-Roma parents have got much deeper prejudice against Roma children than their own children. And sometimes this prejudice influences the social relations of non-Roma and Roma children.

In our research we could prove that getting to a new school non-Roma children are accepted more easily by their classmates than their Roma fellows.

We could also cast light upon the fact that Roma teenagers are getting out of the Hungarian educational system since family events and tasks have got priority over education. It means that Roma children very often do not finish their studies even in the primary school. In the examined Roma community this phenomenon could be experienced as well.

We consider one of the main achievements of our research the development of 'colour-matrix', which makes the data processing of the socio-metrical questionnaire easier creating a logical system, consequently its use is advantageous and applicable in other researches based on socio-metrical questionnaires (*see the example of colour-matrix in appendix, Table 1*).

Conclusion

The aim of our research was to explore the interactions among Roma and non-Roma children and their thoughts, attitudes behind these interactions from several aspects.

In this paper we endeavoured to present a segment of our comprehensive empirical research on social relations of Roma and non-Roma children. We have focused on the results of socio-metrical questionnaires and the newly developed procedure of the analysis of these questionnaires, called 'colour-matrix'.

At the same time we would like to emphasise that our results are valid only in the examined Roma community, since it is well-known that Romas do not form a homogeneous group so we have to treat data cautiously. But we believe that our research can serve as a basis of an extended research on social relations of Roma and non-Roma children.

Appendix

Figures of survey results that were highlighted in the paper have been appended below.

Figure 1: The position of Roma children in the junior section in the primary school of Révfülöp

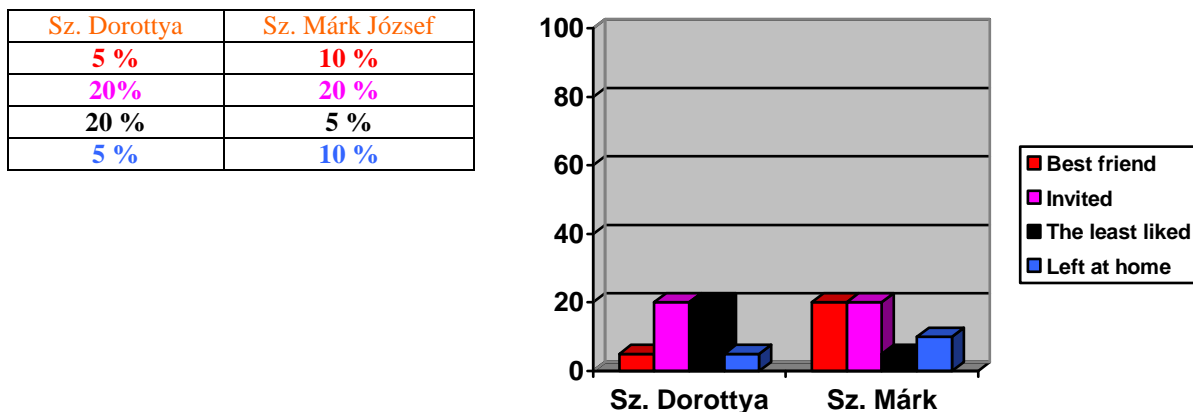


Figure 2: The position of Roma children and newly arrived pupils in the junior section according to positive parameters in the primary school of Révfülöp

H. Dóra	K. Sándor	S. Rebeka	Sz. Dorottya	Sz. Márk József
5 %		14 %		18 %
9 %		50 %	5 %	18 %
5 %	5 %	77 %		

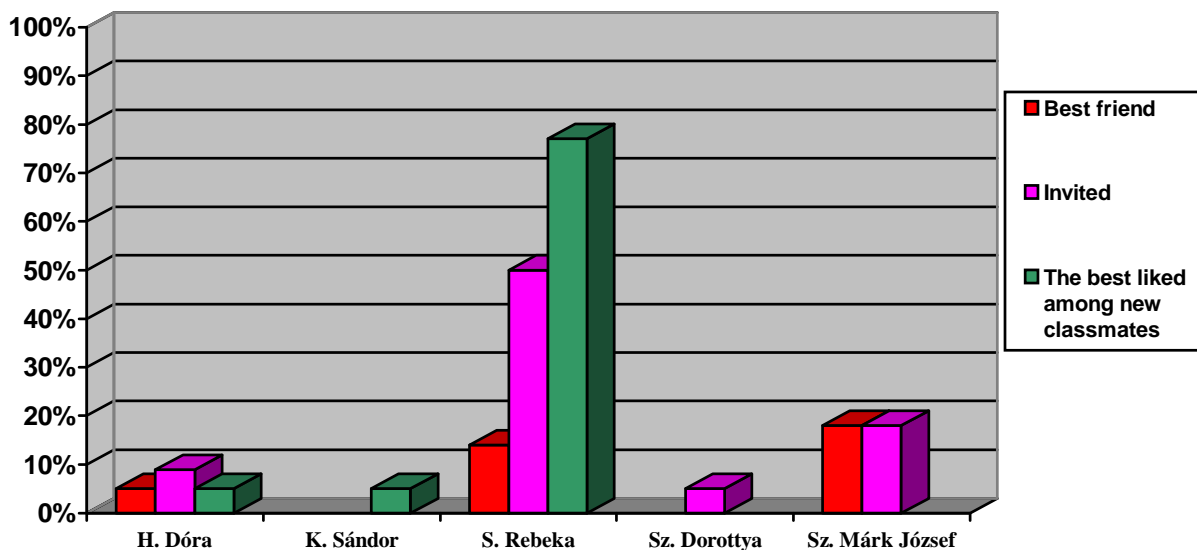


Figure 3: The position of Roma children and newly arrived pupils in the junior section according to negative parameters in the primary school of Révfülöp

H. Dóra	K. Sándor	S. Rebeka	Sz. Dorottya	Sz. Márk József
	45 %		5 %	5 %
14 %	59 %		14 %	18 %
	82 %	5 %		

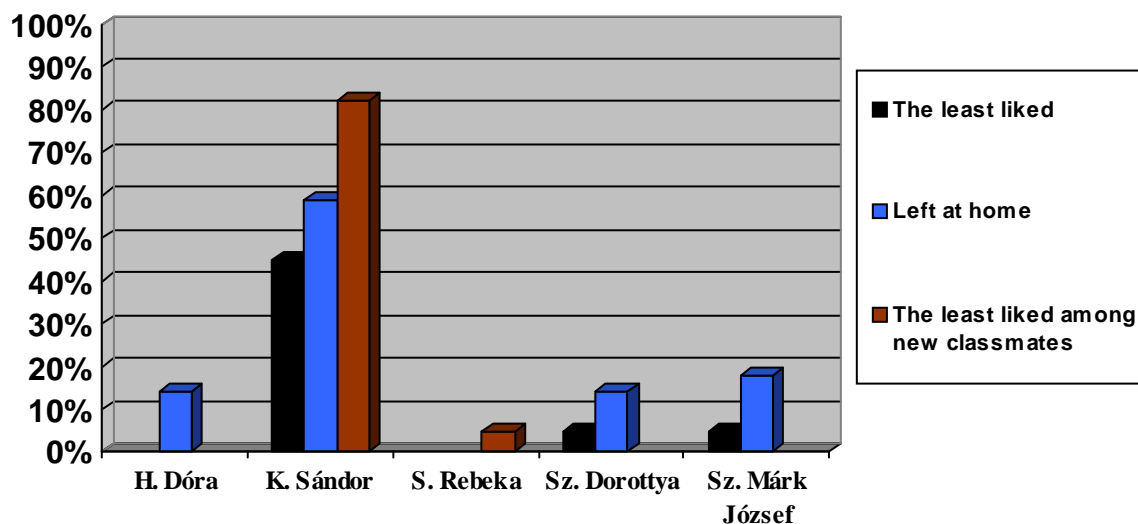


Figure 4: The position of Roma children in the senior section in the primary school of Révfülöp

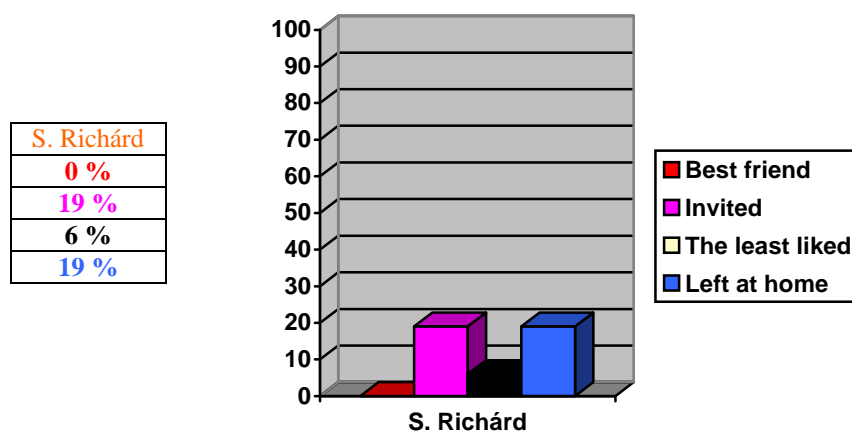


Figure 5: The position of Roma children and newly arrived pupils in the senior section according to positive parameters in the primary school of Révfülöp

<i>B. Attila</i>	<i>K. Dóra</i>	<i>K. Mercédesz</i>	<i>K. Szabina</i>	<i>P. Gertrúd</i>	<i>S. Richárd</i>
5 %	5 %	11 %	0 %	5 %	16 %
26 %	11 %	5 %	5 %	5 %	26 %
53 %	5 %	0 %	5 %	0 %	---

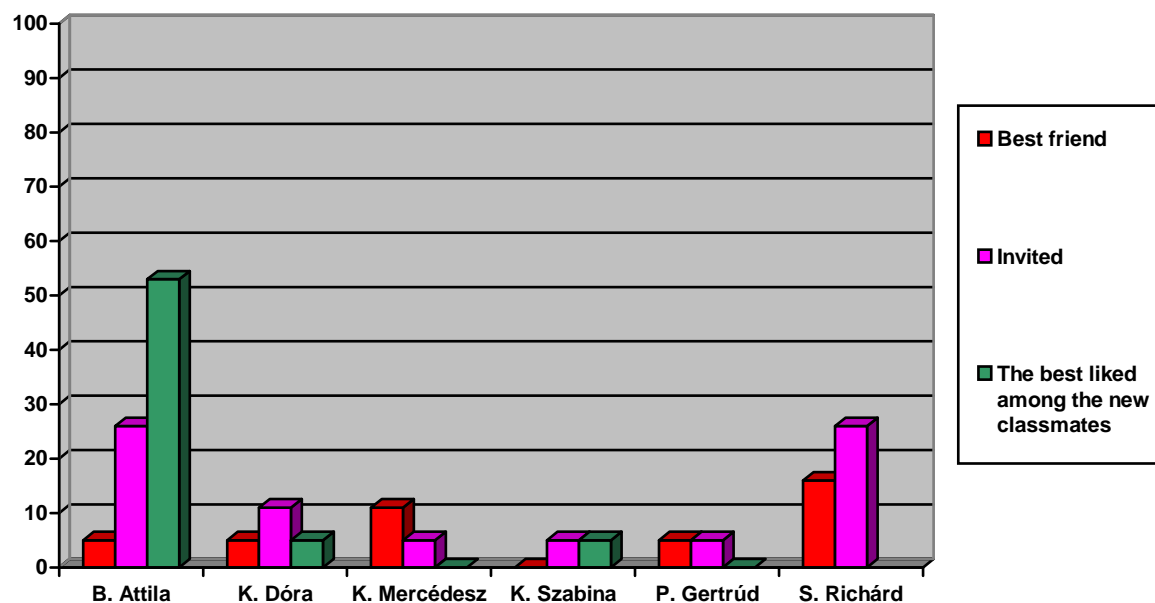


Figure 6: The position of Roma children and newly arrived pupils in the senior section according to negative parameters in the primary school of Révfülöp

B. Attila	K. Dóra	K. Mercédesz	K. Szabina	P. Gertrúd	S. Richárd
0 %	11 %	0 %	0 %	5 %	0 %
0 %	21 %	21 %	26 %	47 %	0 %
0 %	5 %	5 %	11 %	26 %	--

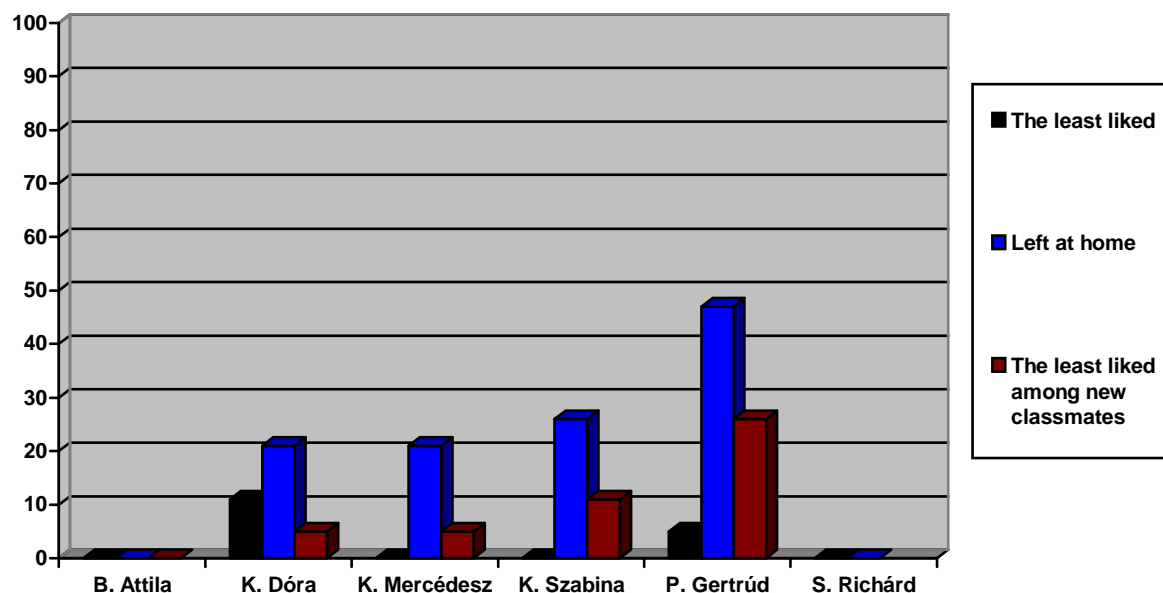


Figure 7: The position of pupils in the junior section according to positive parameters in the primary school of Zalabér

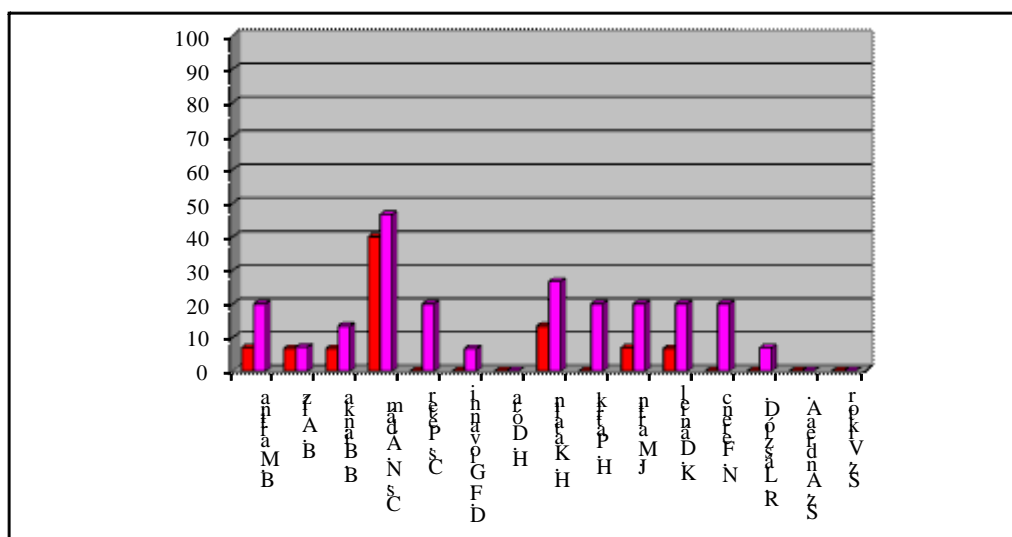


Figure 8: The position of pupils in the junior section according to negative parameters in the primary school of Zalabér

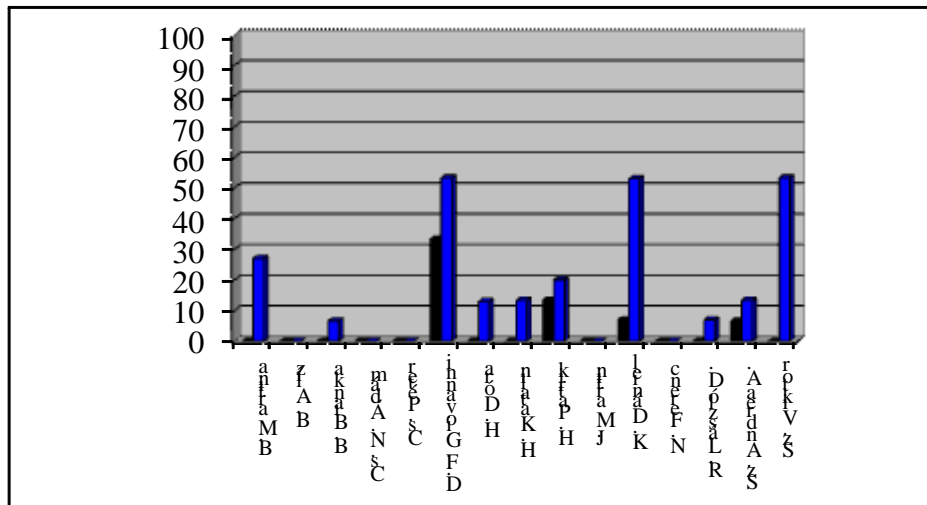


Figure 9: The position of pupils in the junior section in the primary school of Zalabér

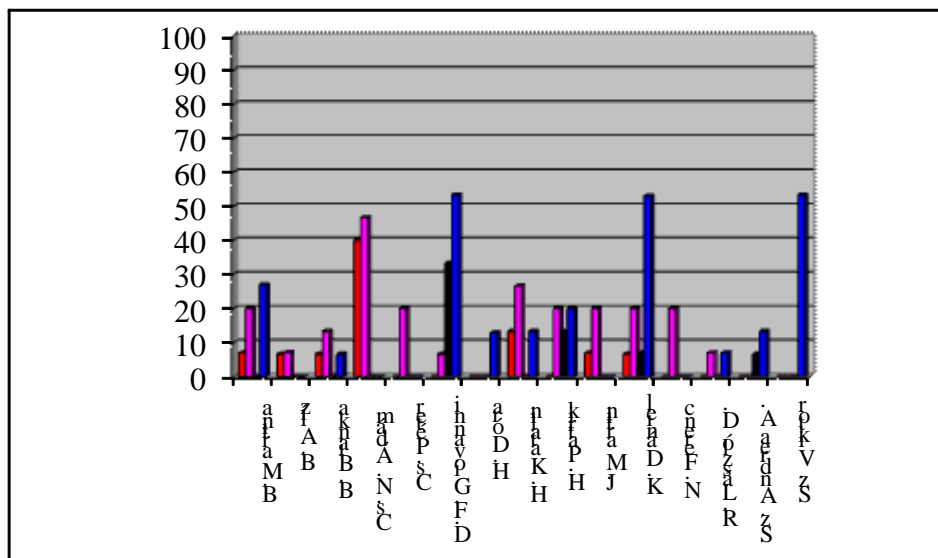


Figure 10: The position of pupils in the senior section according to positive parameters in the primary school of Zalabér

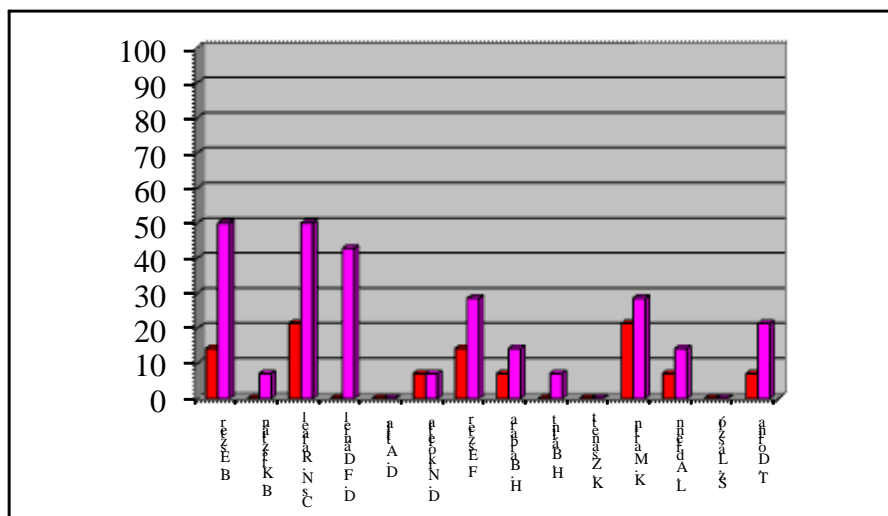


Figure 11: The position of pupils in the senior section according to negative parameters in the primary school of Zalabér

