

Gender differences in reading skill and attitudes to reading

A summary for teachers

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Background: There is a substantial literature highlighting differences between boys and girls in various aspects of reading (e.g., reading skill, attitudes towards reading). However, there is considerable variation in the reading skills and attitudes of boys and girls; therefore the actual size and extent of these gender differences is unclear. In addition, there is a lack of research examining gender differences in the relationship between reading skill and reading attitudes. The present study examined this.

Aim: 1) To examine gender differences in reading skill and the affective aspects of reading and explore gender differences in the relationship between these factors; 2) To use existing large datasets to examine the size of the gender difference in reading skill and the affective aspects of reading.

Participants: 232 children (50% male) aged 10 – 11 took part in the present study. All completed a questionnaire examining their attitudes to reading and school, competency beliefs in reading and school, reading frequency and an assessment of reading skill. Large scale databases were used for comparison.

Large scale dataset comparisons:

Study	Reading comprehension skill				Attitudes to academic reading			Attitudes to recreational reading		
	PIRLS 2003 Eng	PIRLS 2007 Eng	PIRLS 2003 Scot	PIRLS 2007 Scot	K&W Grade 1	K&W Grade 4	McKenna	K&W Grade 1	K&W Grade 4	McKenna
Cohen's d	.26	.25	.21	.29	.28	.07	.28	.43	.53	.58

For approximate sample sizes in these studies: PIRLS = PIRLS studies in England and Scotland (1,000's of pupils); K&W = Kush & Watkins (1996) study, n = 189 pupils; McKenna = McKenna et al., (1995) study, n = 18,185 pupils.

Cohen's d = size of the gender difference. To interpret Cohen's d value: .2 = small, .5 = medium, .8 = large effect size (i.e., gender difference). Therefore gender differences were wider in attitudes to recreational reading than in attitudes to academic reading and reading comprehension skill.



Results: Using data from the present study, on average, girls had better reading skill, read more frequently and had more positive attitudes to reading; however the gender differences were small and arguably not educationally significant. Examination of large international datasets illustrated that gender differences in the affective aspects of independent reading (i.e., attitudes towards recreational reading) are wider and more consistent than gender differences in reading skill. In the present study, boys' attitudes to reading were more closely associated with their reading skill.

Implications for education: Understanding variation in levels of reading skill and attitudes to reading is important to ensure that interventions are targeted most appropriately and effectively. Boys in particular may benefit from interventions aimed at increasing their attitudes towards recreational reading (as these are lower than girls) and may be more likely to confer additional benefits on their reading skill. However, group differences (i.e., on the basis of sex) should not overrule the importance of appreciating and understanding individual differences within the classroom.

Academic paper: Logan, S. & Johnston, R. (2009). Gender differences in reading ability and attitudes: examining where these differences lie. *Journal of Research in Reading*, 32, 199-214.