

Understanding children's reading activities

A summary for teachers

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Background: Understanding the factors that predict children's choice of reading activities and engagement (i.e., time spent) with different text types is important, as research demonstrates that reading frequency contributes towards reading skill and development.

Aim: To examine the extent to which children's sex, age, socioeconomic status, reading motivation and reading skill predict their engagement in different reading activities (fiction books, factual books, school books, magazines, comics, short digital texts (e.g., SNS, text, emails) and web-browsing).

Participants: 791 children (aged 8-11) from 11 primary schools in England took part in the project. All completed questionnaires examining their reading habits, reading motivation and an assessment of their reading skill.

Reading habits questionnaire:

Children reported time spent reading: fiction books, factual books, school books, magazines, comics, short digital texts (e.g., Facebook, texts) and web-browsing.

Reading motivation questionnaire:

Children reported on their motivations for reading: Reading for curiosity, involvement challenge (all intrinsic) and recognition, grades, social, competition, compliance (all extrinsic).

Reading assessment:

Children competed the Group Reading Test II. This uses sentence completion to assess comprehension (e.g., the ___ was filled with hay. Options: play, idea, barn, horse, table)

Results: Sex predicted fiction book reading (more popular with girls) and factual books (more popular with boys). Age predicted time spent with digital texts (more popular with older children). Socioeconomic status predicted engagement with all texts (with exception of factual book reading). Reading skill predicted fiction book reading more than other text types (children with better reading skills read more fiction) and reading motivation predicted fiction and factual book reading more than other text types.

Results: Children's motivations to read (i.e., reasons for reading) predicted their reading habits. For example, children motivated of a curiosity to learn spent more time reading factual books and school text books. Children who read for a challenge spent more time reading fiction and factual books. Children who read to achieve good grades spent more time reading school textbooks and children who read for social reasons reported spending more time reading magazines and comics.



Discussion and educational implications: Research has shown that reading books, particularly fiction books, is effective at developing children's reading and language skills, therefore encouraging children to read more books is important. Nevertheless, teachers should consider the various factors which influence children's reading choices and ensure that children have access to texts which reflect their interests, bearing in mind the benefits of different literacy activities. Understanding the role of motivation on children's reading choices may help teachers find ways to encourage children to read more books, in addition to a greater variety of texts.

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