



Executive summary

**Children's and young people's reading
habits and preferences:
The who, what, why, where and when**

National Literacy Trust

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This report, based on a recent survey of over 8,000 primary and secondary pupils in England, explores why some pupils choose to read and others do not. The research literature shows that reading for pleasure benefits children in numerous ways. Yet, research also shows that young people's reading enjoyment may be declining. Given current political concerns about reading and the clear benefits that reading for pleasure can bring, it is vital that more emphasis is placed on reading enjoyment both at school and at home. The National Literacy Trust therefore conducted a survey for Reading Connects in 2005 to collect evidence about children's and young people's reading preferences and reading behaviours with the aim of supporting parents, teachers and other literacy professionals in promoting wider reading.

Key findings

- Half the sample of pupils said they enjoy reading either very much or quite a lot and rated themselves as proficient readers.
- The majority of pupils read every day or once/twice a week.
- Almost half the sample believed that they were reading enough. A fifth of pupils stated that not only were they not reading enough, but they also would not want to read more.
- Pupils generally held positive attitudes towards reading - agreeing with statements that reading is important and disagreeing with statements that reading is boring, hard, or for girls rather than boys.
- Pupils indicated reading a diverse range of materials outside class, which included texts other than books. When asked specifically about fiction preferences, adventure, comedy and horror/ghost stories were the most frequently chosen types.
- Most pupils read in the bedroom, followed by the classroom and the living room.
- When asked why they were reading, most pupils indicated that they read because it is a skill for life, it helps them find out what they want/need to know and because it is fun. Only a fifth of pupils read because they have to.
- Pupils said that they would read more if they had more time, if they enjoyed it more, if books were cheaper and if books were about subjects they were interested in.
- When asked what activities would encourage them to read more, half the sample stated that designing websites/magazines, meeting authors/celebrity readers and reading games would motivate them. Rating books and writing book reviews were only motivating for a fifth of pupils.
- Over 80% of pupils reported that it was their mother who had taught them to read, followed by their teacher and their father.

- Almost half the pupils never or almost never talked with their family about what they were reading. Their mother, father and friend were the top three people with whom pupils discussed their reading. Their mother, teacher and father were also the most frequently cited reading partners.
- Pupils also believed that their mother spends more time reading than their father.
- A quarter of pupils reported that their father never spent any time reading.
- Pupils stated that their mother encourages them to read more frequently than their father.
- Finally, when asked who should teach them to read and who should encourage them to enjoy reading, the majority of pupils stated that these should be done by both the home and the school.

The data was also analysed in detail in terms of demographic differences, namely gender, age and uptake of free school meals.

The key findings by gender are:

- In line with previous studies, girls reported greater enjoyment of reading than boys and were likely to do so more frequently. Boys tended to hold more negative attitudes towards reading than girls. Both boys and girls rated themselves to be equally proficient readers.
- Girls and boys preferred reading different types of materials and different types of fiction; findings which confirm those of earlier research.
- More boys than girls reported that they read because it will help them get a job or because they have to, while more girls than boys indicated reading because it is fun, it teaches them how other people live and because it gives them a break.
- Girls were more likely than boys to state that they would read more if they had more time or friends who read, while boys would read more if they enjoyed it more and if they found reading easier. More girls than boys were enthusiastic about a variety of reading promotion activities.
- More boys than girls said they never talk about reading with their family. Indeed, more girls than boys not only read with their mother, sibling, friend, teacher and teaching assistant, but they also talk about reading with them.
- Both boys and girls believed that both the home and the school should not only teach them to read but should also encourage them to enjoy it, but a greater percentage of girls than boys believed this.

Key findings by age:

- In line with previous research, reading enjoyment declined with age, with primary pupils enjoying reading significantly more than secondary ones. More primary than secondary pupils said they read outside school every day and held more positive attitudes towards reading.
- Interestingly, primary pupils rated themselves to be more proficient readers than secondary ones.
- Primary and secondary pupils preferred different reading materials, which partly reflect their age differences and access to resources, such as computers.
- Primary pupils reported reading for a greater number of reasons than secondary ones. They also stated that they would read more if they had more time, if books were cheaper and if it was about subjects they were interested in. Secondary pupils also reported that they would read more if they enjoyed it more.
- More primary than secondary pupils were enthusiastic about reading promotion activities, including reading games, helping younger children read and meeting authors/celebrity readers. Over half of secondary pupils believed that designing websites/magazines would encourage them to read more.
- Parents and others are more likely to read with younger children. Indeed, more primary than secondary pupils reported reading with and talking about reading with a variety of people. More primary than secondary pupils not only reported being encouraged to read by their mother and father but they also reported that their mother and father spend a lot of time reading.
- Finally, although both primary and secondary pupils believe that it should be both the home and the school that teach them to read and to enjoy reading, a greater proportion of primary than secondary pupils believe this.

Key findings by uptake of free school meals

- Uptake of free school meals (FSMs) had a negative relationship with reading enjoyment and self-reported reading proficiency.
- Uptake of FSMs also impacted on the frequency with which pupils read outside class, with a greater percentage of pupils not receiving FSMs reporting that they read outside school every day.
- Consistent with previous studies, a greater proportion of pupils not receiving FSMs estimated having more books at home than pupils receiving FSMs. They also reported having greater access to a number of resources at home, including a computer and a desk of their own.
- Both groups of pupils believed that reading is important. However, pupils receiving FSMs were more likely to agree that reading is boring and hard,

- that reading is more for girls than for boys, and that they cannot find books that interest them.
- More pupils receiving FSMs stated that they read because it would help them get a job, while more pupils not receiving FSMs reported that they read because it is fun and because it gives them a break.
 - Whether or not pupils received FSMs also had an impact on their reading choices, which may be partly due to differences in access to certain resources, such as computers and mobile phones.
 - Both groups indicated that they would read more if they had more time and if they enjoyed it more. A greater proportion of pupils receiving FSMs stated that they would read more if books had more pictures, if someone read aloud to them, if libraries were closer and if their family encouraged them more.
 - Both groups also stated that designing websites/magazines would motivate them to read more. More pupils receiving FSMs also said that they would be encouraged to read more by reading games and by helping younger children to read.
 - A greater percentage of pupils not receiving FSMs reported that their mother, father and teacher had taught them to read, while pupils receiving FSMs reported that a sibling or friend had been their reading teacher.
 - A greater percentage of pupils receiving FSMs reported that their father did not encourage them to read.
 - More pupils not receiving FSMs reported talking about reading with their mother and father, while their FSM-receiving counterparts stated that they talk about reading with their teacher and teaching assistant.
 - The extent to which pupils reported that their parents chose to read also differed according to whether or not they received FSMs. A greater percentage of pupils receiving FSMs reported that their mother or father do not spend any time reading.

Finally, the data was also explored with respect to differences between reluctant and enthusiastic readers. The key findings were:

- Enthusiastic readers rated themselves as more proficient readers and reported reading outside school more frequently than reluctant readers.
- Enthusiastic readers held more positive attitudes towards reading.
- More enthusiastic readers than reluctant ones stated that they read because it is a skill for life, it teaches them how other people live and feel, it helps them understand the world better, it is fun, it helps them find what they want/need to know, it gives them a break and it helps them understand themselves better.

- Whether or not pupils enjoyed reading had an impact on their preferred reading materials and their choice of fiction types.
- Enthusiastic readers said they spend time reading in a greater variety of places, including the living room, bedroom, classroom, playground and café.
- A greater proportion of enthusiastic readers believed that time constraints, cheaper books and better library facilities would make them read more.
- Both groups of readers said that designing websites/magazines would prompt them to read more. More enthusiastic readers than reluctant ones stated that meeting authors/celebrity readers and helping younger children read were activities that would help them and others read more.
- Enthusiastic readers were more likely to talk with their family about reading every day or once/twice a week. In particular, they were more likely to read with their mother, father, grandparent, sibling, friend, teacher and teaching assistant. More enthusiastic than reluctant readers also talked about reading with these people.
- Enthusiastic readers also reported being encouraged to read a lot by their mother and father. More enthusiastic than reluctant readers also reported that their mother and father themselves spend a lot of time reading.

Based on these findings, this report suggests some approaches that might help schools to promote reading for pleasure, such as:

- **Create a culture in which all pupils are encouraged to be enthusiastic readers.** To support this goal, schools with effective approaches consult with students to learn of their interests and to ensure that the range of reading materials available in school reflects those interests. They recognise that a diverse range of reading materials will encourage students to read, for example websites, comics and magazines. They engage children in the planning and delivery of reading and library activities, offering them the opportunity to select and purchase reading materials for their use.
- **Consider how to engage boys with reading.** In addition to the encouragement of boys reading around their personal interests, particular attention needs to be given to the involvement of male staff, community role models and fathers. The National Reading Campaign initiative Reading Champions supports schools with this aim by sharing practices that involve boys in creating a reading culture.
- **Consider how they can support parents in encouraging reading in the home.** The role of the home is important for all children. Home-school practices that successfully involve all parents in ways they value for strengthening involvement in their children's home and school reading,

need to be shared between schools. Both Reading Connects and Reading Champions can support this work.

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