



Department
for Education

Research evidence on reading for pleasure

Education standards research team

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Introduction

The first section of this briefing note highlights research evidence on reading for pleasure from domestic and international literature; exploring evidence on the trends and benefits of independent reading amongst both primary and secondary- aged children, as well as why children read. The second section of this briefing covers the evidence on what works in terms of promoting reading for pleasure.

Key findings

The evidence on reading for pleasure

Benefits of reading for pleasure:

- There is a growing body of evidence which illustrates the importance of reading for pleasure for both educational purposes as well as personal development (cited in Clark and Rumbold, 2006).
- Evidence suggests that there is a positive relationship between reading frequency, reading enjoyment and attainment (Clark 2011; Clark and Douglas 2011).
- Reading enjoyment has been reported as more important for children's educational success than their family's socio-economic status (OECD, 2002).
- There is a positive link between positive attitudes towards reading and scoring well on reading assessments (Twist et al, 2007).
- Regularly reading stories or novels outside of school is associated with higher scores in reading assessments (PIRLS, 2006; PISA, 2009).
- International evidence supports these findings; US research reports that independent reading is the best predictor of reading achievement (Anderson, Wilson and Fielding, 1988).
- Evidence suggests that reading for pleasure is an activity that has emotional and social consequences (Clark and Rumbold, 2006).
- Other benefits to reading for pleasure include: text comprehension and grammar, positive reading attitudes, pleasure in reading in later life, increased general knowledge (Clark and Rumbold, 2006).

Trends in reading for pleasure

- In general, the available evidence suggests that the majority of children say that they do enjoy reading (Clark and Rumbold, 2006).
- In 2010, 22% of children said they enjoyed reading very much; 27% said they enjoyed it quite a lot; 39% said they enjoyed it quite a bit, and 12% reported that they did not enjoy reading at all (Clark 2011).
- Comparing against international evidence, children in England report less frequent reading for pleasure outside of school than children in many other countries (Twist et al, 2007).
- There is consistent evidence that age affects attitudes to reading and reading behaviour; that children enjoy reading less as they get older (Topping, 2010; Clark and Osborne, 2008; Clark and Douglas 2011). However, some evidence suggests that while the frequency with which young people read declines with age, the length for which they read when they read increases with age (Clark 2011).
- A number of studies have shown that boys enjoy reading less than girls; and that children from lower socio-economic backgrounds read less for enjoyment than children from more privileged social classes (Clark and Rumbold, 2006; Clark and Douglas 2011).
- Some evidence has shown children from Asian background have more positive attitudes to reading and read more frequently than children from White, mixed or Black backgrounds (Clark and Douglas 2011).

Changes in numbers of children reading for pleasure over time

- Research is accumulating that suggests that a growing number of children do not read for pleasure (Clark and Rumbold, 2006).
- Between 2000 and 2009, on average across OECD countries the percentage of children who report reading for enjoyment daily dropped by five percentage points (OECD, 2010).
- This is supported by evidence from PIRLS 2006 (Twist et al, 2007) which found a decline in attitudes towards reading amongst children.

Children's perceptions of readers

- A greater percentage of primary than secondary aged children view themselves as 'a reader' (Clark and Osborne, 2008).
- A greater proportion of primary aged readers and non-readers (than secondary aged) believed that their friends saw readers as happy and people with a lot of friends (Clark and Osborne, 2008).

Types of reading

- Text messages, magazines, websites and emails have been found to be the most common reading choices for young people. Fiction is read outside the class by two-fifths of young people (Clark and Douglas 2011).
- Some evidence suggests that more young people from White backgrounds read magazines, text messages and messages on social networking sites and more young people from Black backgrounds read poems, eBooks and newspapers (Clark 2011).
- Twist et al (2007) report a slight increase in the proportion of children who claim to be reading comics/comic books and newspapers at least once or twice a week in England.
- There is mixed evidence on whether primary or secondary children read a greater variety of materials (Clark and Osborne, 2008; Clark and Foster, 2005).
- Young people who receive¹ free school meals (FSM) are less likely to read fiction outside of the classroom (Clark 2011).
- Most young people read between one and three books in a month (Clark and Poulton 2011b).

Reasons children read

- Reading for pleasure is not always cited as the key reason for children reading. Other reasons include skills-based reasons or reasons to do with learning and understanding (Nestle Family Monitor, 2003; Clark and Foster, 2005).
- Another popular reason given is emotional – relating to the way reading makes children feel (Dungworth et al, 2004).

¹ The surveys reported on pupils who received or did not receive free school meals (FSM) rather than pupils who were FSM eligible or not.

Gender differences in reading for pleasure

- A number of studies have shown that boys enjoy reading less than girls.
- Evidence has found that 58% of girls enjoy reading either very much or quite a lot in comparison to 43% of boys (Clark and Douglas 2011).
- In all countries, boys are not only less likely than girls to say that they read for enjoyment, they also have different reading habits when they do read for pleasure; with girls more likely to read fiction or magazines, and boys more likely to read newspapers or comics (OECD, 2010).
- Evidence from the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) has shown that boys are on average 39 points behind girls in reading, the equivalent of one years schooling.
- One study reports that boys are reading nearly as much as girls, but they tend to read easier books (Topping, 2010).

What works in promoting reading for pleasure?

Strategies to improve independent reading

- Having access to resources and having books of their own has an impact on children's attainment. There is a positive relationship between the estimated number of books in the home and attainment (Clark 2011). Children who have books of their own enjoy reading more and read more frequently (Clark and Poulton 2011).
- An important factor in developing reading for pleasure is choice; choice and interest are highly related (Schraw et al, 1998; Clark and Phythian-Sence, 2008)
- Literacy-targeted rewards, such as books or book vouchers have been found to be more effective in developing reading motivation than rewards that are unrelated to the activity (Clark and Rumbold, 2006).
- Parents and the home environment are essential to the early teaching of reading and fostering a love of reading; children are more likely to continue to be readers in homes where books and reading are valued (Clark and Rumbold, 2006).
- Reading for pleasure is strongly influenced by relationships between teachers and children, and children and families (Cremin et al, 2009).

Online reading habits

- There is little research that has been conducted specifically looking at online reading habits; the existing evidence has mixed results.
- Twist et al (2007) report finding a negative association between the amount of time spent reading stories and articles on the internet and reading achievement in most countries in PIRLS data.
- However, other research finds that those reading from the internet score well in reading assessments (Scottish analysis of PISA data, 2004), and PISA reports that young people who are extensively engaged in online reading activities are generally found to be more proficient readers (OECD, 2010).

Library use and reading for pleasure

- Research reports a link between library use and reading for pleasure; young people that use their public library are nearly twice as likely to be reading outside of class every day (Clark and Hawkins, 2011).

Definitions

As Clark and Rumbold (2006) note, the terms 'reading for pleasure', 'reading for enjoyment' and their derivatives are used interchangeably. Reading for pleasure is also frequently referred to, especially in the US, as independent reading (Cullinan, 2000), voluntary reading (Krashen, 2004), leisure reading (Greaney, 1980), recreational reading (Manzo and Manzo, 1995) or ludic reading (Nell, 1988, all cited in Clark and Rumbold, 2006).

Reading for pleasure has been defined by the National Literacy Trust as "reading that we do of our own free will, anticipating the satisfaction that we will get from the act of reading. It also refers to reading that having begun at someone else's request we continue because we are interested in it" (Clark and Rumbold, National Literacy Trust, 2006).

The process of reading for pleasure has also been described as a form of play that 'allows us to experience other worlds and roles in our imagination' (Nell, 1988 – cited in Clark and Rumbold, 2006), and a creative activity or active process (Holden, 2004; Pullman, 2004 – cited in Clark and Rumbold, 2006).

The evidence on reading for pleasure

Benefits of reading for pleasure

A growing number of studies show that promoting reading can have a major impact on children and adults and their future. Upon reviewing the research literature, Clark and Rumbold (2006) identify several main areas of the benefits to reading for pleasure:

- Reading attainment and writing ability;
- Text comprehension and grammar;
- Breadth of vocabulary;
- Positive reading attitudes;
- Greater self-confidence as a reader;
- Pleasure in reading in later life;
- General knowledge;
- A better understanding of other cultures;
- Community participation; and
- A greater insight into human nature and decision-making.

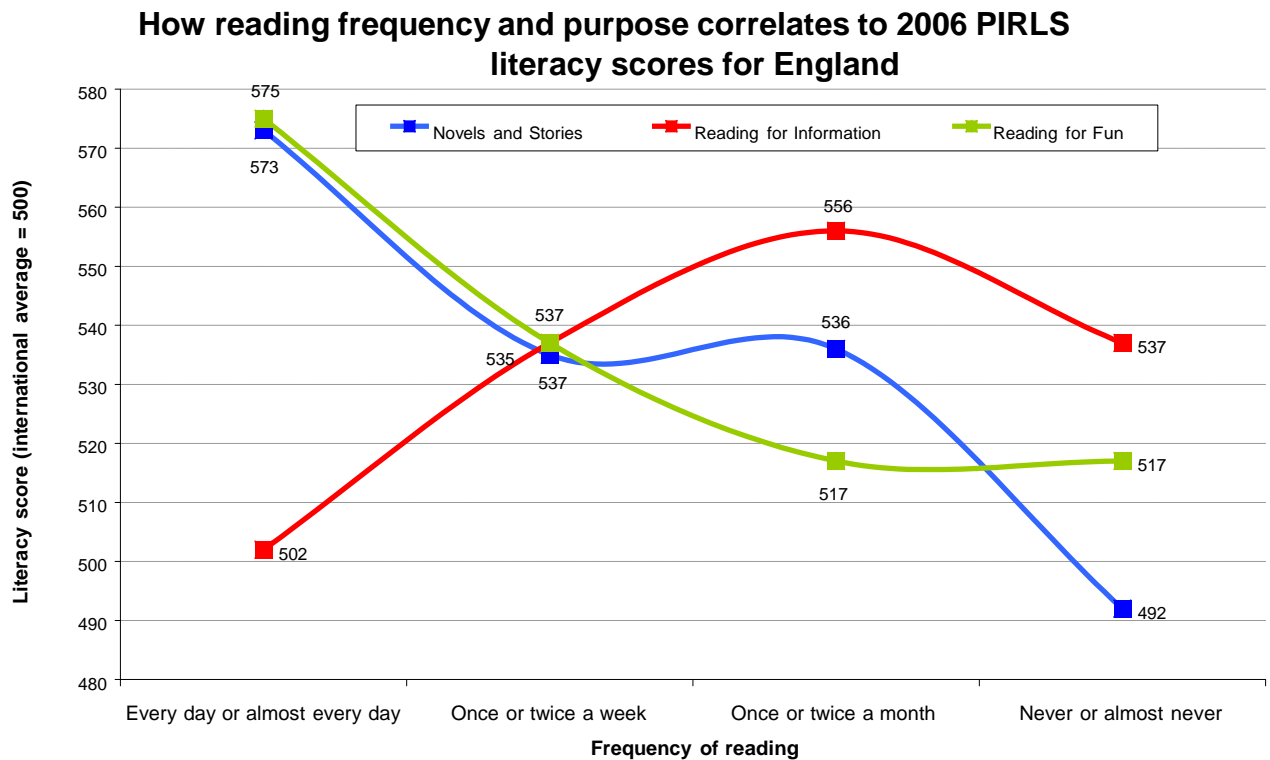
Evidence suggests that reading for pleasure leads to increased attainment. Clark and DeZoya (2011) found a significant positive relationship between enjoyment and attainment indicating that pupils who read more are also better readers. Although they made no inference about causality, therefore higher attainment may lead to more enjoyment of reading or greater enjoyment may lead to higher attainment. Similarly Clark (2011) in a large scale survey of over 18,000 young people found that those who reported enjoying reading very much were six times more likely than those who did not enjoy reading to read above the expected level for their age. Young people who reported not enjoying reading at all were 11 times more likely than those who enjoyed reading very much to read below the level expected for their age. Evidence from OECD (2002) found that reading enjoyment is more important for children's educational success than their family's socio-economic status. Clark and Rumbold (2006) argue that reading for pleasure could be one important way to help combat social exclusion and raise educational standards.

Research has shown that children who read at or above the expected level for their age hold more positive attitudes towards reading than children who read below the level for their age Clark and DeZoya (2011). There is a link between positive attitudes towards reading and scoring well on reading assessments; for

example PIRLS² (Progress in International Reading Literacy Study) data (Twist et al, 2007) found that children with the most positive attitudes to reading were more likely to do well on the PIRLS reading assessments. There is also a relationship between reading frequency and attainment (Clark and Douglas 2011; Clark 2011) Clark and Douglas (2011) in their survey of 17,000 young people found that those who were at or above the expected reading level for their age read more frequently than young people who are below the expected level for their age. Clark (2011) found only one in 10 young people who read rarely or never read scored above the level expected for their age compared with one in three of young people who read every day. PIRLS also reports a positive relationship between frequency of reading for pleasure and scores on PIRLS literacy tests (Figure 1).

² PIRLS is an international study of reading and literacy, the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study.

Figure 1:



Source: DfE internal analysis based on PIRLS data (2006)

Figure 1 relates reading frequency and reading materials to PIRLS scores. The key finding is that frequent reading for pleasure is correlated to higher PIRLS literacy scores. However, reading for information is much less well correlated. The graph shows that³:

- Frequently reading novels and stories and reading for fun (regardless of whether this is through books, magazines or the internet) is strongly correlated to PIRLS literacy score.
- The proportion of children who reported that they seldom read stories or novels outside school has also increased significantly between 2001 and 2006 in England.
- However, reading for information (regardless of the source) is much less well correlated. Those who reported the most frequent reading of information texts,

³ 'Reading for fun' 'never or almost never' is amalgamated in to 'less than twice a month' in the source data but is shown separated here for visual simplicity. This graph is drawn from data in chapter 4 of the full international PIRLS 2006 report.

tended to have lower attainment; those who read for information only once or twice a month score highest and those who read for information every day score the lowest.

- Between 2001 and 2006, there was also a significant increase in the proportion of children in England who claimed to 'never' or 'almost never' read for information when not in school (Twist et al, 2007).

The PIRLS 2006 data of school children aged 9 to 10 shows that those who read stories or novels outside of school 'every day or almost every day' score significantly higher (with a standardised overall score of 573) compared to those that do so once or twice a week (535). Those who read once or twice a month scored 536 and those who read never or almost never scored on average 492. It must be noted that this is an association, but does not prove a casual one way link. It is likely that being a better reader will influence how frequently a child reads.

These findings are supported by evidence from PISA (The Programme for International Student Assessment); PISA results from 2009 show that in all countries, young people who enjoy reading the most perform significantly better in reading literacy assessments than who enjoy reading the least. There has been considerable debate as to what type of reading may be most effective in fostering reading skills and improving reading performance. The results from PISA suggest that, although young people who read fiction are more likely to achieve high scores, it is young people who read a wide variety of material who perform particularly well in reading (OECD, 2010).

Compared with not reading for enjoyment at all, reading fiction for enjoyment appears to be positively associated with higher scores in the PISA 2009 reading assessment, while reading comic books is associated with little improvement in reading proficiency in some countries, and with lower overall reading performance in other countries. Also, young people who are extensively engaged in online reading activities, such as reading e-mails, chatting on line, reading news on line, using an online dictionary or encyclopaedia, participating in online group discussions and searching for information on line, are generally more proficient readers than young people who do little online reading (OECD, 2010).

International evidence comes to the same conclusion. In the US, Anderson, Wilson, and Fielding (1988) investigated a broad array of activities and their relationship to reading achievement and growth in reading. They found that the amount of time children spent in independent reading was the best predictor of reading achievement and also the best predictor of the amount of gain in reading achievement made by children between second grade (aged 7 to 8) and fifth grade (aged 10 to 11).

In PIRLS data, the highest rates of children reporting reading for fun were found in the Russian Federation, where 58% of children reported reading for fun (which was also the highest achieving country). There was however no clear inter-country

relationship between attainment and the amount of reading outside of school. For example, children in Singapore reported less reading for pleasure outside of school but had considerably higher achievement in PIRLS.

That said, in England (and in most other countries) there was a positive association between the frequency of reading for pleasure and reading attainment. England had the greatest difference between the mean attainment of children who read for fun (outside of school) on a daily basis (mean scale score 575) and those who read on a weekly basis (mean scale score 537), a difference of 38 points (Twist et al, 2007).

Reading for pleasure is an activity that has real emotional and social consequences. There is a growing body of evidence which illustrates the importance of reading for pleasure for both educational purposes as well as personal development. The evidence strongly supports the argument that those who read more are better readers; and the amount of reading and reading achievement are thought to be reciprocally related to each other – as reading amount increases, reading achievement increases, which in turn increases reading amount (Cunningham and Stanovich, 1998 – cited in Clark and Rumbold, 2006). Children who read very little do not have the benefits that come with reading, and studies show that when struggling readers are not motivated to read, their opportunities to learn decrease significantly (Baker, Dreher and Guthrie, 2000 – cited in Clark and Rumbold, 2006).

Trends in reading for pleasure

In general, the available evidence suggests that the majority of children say that they do enjoy reading. Overall in their survey Clarke and Douglas (2011) found young people held positive attitudes towards reading. Most agreed that reading is important and that they enjoy it. They disagreed that reading is boring or hard and that they cannot find anything interesting to read. Most also disagreed that they only read in class or read only because they have to. Research suggests that girls tend to enjoy reading more than boys. However reading for pleasure is not only related to gender but also to age; it decreases in the teenage years and early adulthood but increases again later in life (Clark and Rumbold, 2006; Clark, Torsi and Strong, 2005; Nestle Family Monitor, 1999; Clark and Douglas 2011). Girls and younger pupils are more likely to consider that reading is important to succeed in life (Clark and Douglas 2011).

In terms of enjoyment of reading, research has shown that in 2010, 22% of children aged eight to sixteen said they enjoyed reading very much, 27% said they enjoyed it quite a lot, 39% said they liked it quite a bit and 12% reported that they did not enjoy reading at all (Clark et al, 2011). In terms of frequency Clark (2011) found that most young people read outside of class every day (29%) or two to three times a week (26%). Sixteen percent of pupils said they rarely read outside the classroom and 7% did not read outside of class. Girls read outside the classroom more frequently than

boys, with three in 10 in comparison to 2 in 10 boys reading everyday. Clark (2011) reported that 30 minutes was the most commonly cited length of time for young people report reading for.

Comparing against international evidence across OECD countries measured in 2009, on average 37% of children – and 45% or more in Austria, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg – report that they do not read for enjoyment at all. Children in England reported less frequent reading for pleasure outside of school than children in many other countries. Only a third of children reported reading for fun⁴ on a daily basis outside of school, in 2006, compared to the international average of 40% (Twist et al, 2007).

There is consistent evidence that age affects attitudes to reading and reading behaviour; that children enjoy reading less as they get older. Clark and Douglas (2011) found that KS2 pupils enjoyed reading significantly more than their older counterparts and that reading frequency declines with age. They reported that pupils in KS2 read more frequently than those in KS3 who in turn read more frequently than those in KS4. Pupils in KS2 were also more likely to rate themselves as better readers. This is supported by research involving 1,600 children. It found that a significantly greater proportion of primary than secondary children indicated that they enjoyed reading very much or quite a lot; 73% compared to 55% (Clark and Osborne, 2008). Clark (2011) however, reported that while the frequency with which young people read declines with age, the length for which they read when they read increases with age.

Topping (2010) found that both boys and girls tended to choose books that were easier to read once they reach age 11. Frequency of reading also appears to change with age. This finding is supported by another study which found that although 30% of children aged 5-8 were classified as high frequency readers (i.e. they read a book every day) only 17% of those aged 15-17 read every day (Scholastic, 2008 cited by Clark and Osborne, 2008).

There is some evidence to suggest that reading frequency and enjoyment is linked to socio-economic status. Clark and Douglas (2011) found that pupils who did not receive FSM had more positive attitudes to reading but the relationship is weak. They reported that around 4% more of children not on free school meals enjoy reading more than children on free school meals and pupils who receive FSM read less frequently. In terms of ethnicity Clark and Douglas (2011) found that young people from Asian backgrounds tended to hold more positive attitudes towards reading and read more frequently than young people from White, Mixed or Black backgrounds. Clark (2011) reported that young people from White backgrounds tend to enjoy reading the least.

⁴ The PIRLS questionnaires specifically asked pupils about whether they 'read for fun outside of school'.

Changes in numbers of children reading for pleasure over time

Research is accumulating that suggests that a growing number of children do not read for pleasure (Clark and Rumbold, 2006). Available evidence shows a decline in the numbers of children reading for pleasure over time. Between 2000 and 2009, on average across OECD countries the percentage of children who report reading for enjoyment daily dropped by five percentage points. Enjoyment of reading tends to have deteriorated, especially among boys, signalling the challenge for schools to engage young people in reading activities that 15-year-olds find relevant and interesting. On average across OECD countries, the percentage of children who said they read for enjoyment every day fell from 69% in 2000 to 64% in 2009 (OECD, 2010).

This finding is supported by evidence from PIRLS; Data from PIRLS indicates that attitudes to reading have declined slightly in England (in 2006 compared to 2001) (Twist et al, 2007). Children in England also had less positive attitudes to reading than children in most other countries. Girls were generally found to be more positive than boys in their attitudes to reading.

Children's perceptions of readers

When children were asked whether they saw themselves 'as a reader', a greater percentage of primary than secondary children reported that they saw themselves in this way; 84% compared to 68% (Clark and Osborne, 2008). This self-definition also appeared to have an impact on their attitudes and reading behaviour. When children were asked how often they read outside of school; the profiles of reading frequency were relatively similar for primary and secondary 'non-readers'. However, there were significant differences between primary and secondary 'readers'; with a greater percentage of primary than secondary readers reporting that they had read outside of school every day or almost every day (57% compared to 46%). In their large scale survey Clark and Douglas (2011) reported that most young people rated themselves to be either average at reading (45%) or very good at reading (50%) and found a strong relationship between self-reported reading ability and reading attainment.

Clark and Osborne (2008) asked children about their friends' perception of readers. A greater proportion of primary readers and non-readers (than secondary) believed that their friends saw readers as happy and people with a lot of friends. A significantly greater percentage of primary non-readers than secondary ones also believed that their friends views readers as someone who would do well. At secondary level the dominant perspective appears to change significantly, with a greater proportion of secondary children reporting that they felt that their friends perceived readers to be geeky/nerds. Non-readers at secondary were also more likely than their primary

counterparts to say that their friends believe that readers are boring (Clark and Osborne, 2008).

Types of reading

Clark and Douglas (2011) found that text messages, magazines, websites and emails were the most common reading choices of young people and fiction is read outside of class by over two-fifths of young people. Twist et al (2007) report a very slight increase from 2001 in the proportion of children in England who claim to be reading comics/comic books and newspapers at least once or twice a week.

There is mixed evidence on whether primary or secondary children read a greater variety of materials. One survey found that the range of books read was greater at primary level (Clark and Foster, 2005) but others have found that this was the case at secondary (Clark and Osborne, 2008). The earlier study (Clark and Foster, 2005) had a much larger sample size of around 8,000 pupils.

Secondary 'readers' indicated that they read a greater range of materials than primary 'readers' (including magazines, books, websites, emails, blogs/networking websites, newspapers and manuals), while more primary than secondary 'readers' reported reading poetry outside of school. Technology-based reading materials were more popular with KS4 pupils, while materials such as comics, fiction, poems and plays decreased in popularity with age (Clark and Douglas 2011).

Clark (2011) found that pupils who receive FSM were less likely to read fiction. Five in 10 young people who did not receive FSM read fiction outside of class at least once a month, compared with 4 in 10 young people who receive free meals. More non-FSM pupils also read technology-based materials outside of class, while young people who receive FSM were more likely to read poems than young people who do not receive FSM. Regarding differences in types of reading by ethnicity she reported that more young people from White backgrounds read magazines, text messages and messages on social networking sites, while more young people from Black ethnic backgrounds read poems, eBooks and newspapers.

Clark and Douglas (2011) report that young people who read below the expected level for their age were the least likely to read a variety of materials outside of class and found young people who read above the expected level for their age read more of the traditional forms of reading, such as fiction, non-fiction, poems and plays. Evidence suggests that many children who describe themselves as 'non readers' are still reading a variety of materials (although at secondary level, they did not tend to read fiction books) (Clark and Osborne 2008). Other research has found that differences in reading self concepts between competent and less competent readers appeared within the first two months of schooling (Chapman et al, 2000 cited in Clark and Osborne, 2008).

Other research has also asked children how frequently they read story books or fiction (Maynard et al, 2007). This study found that a much lower proportion of children (43%) aged 7-11 indicated that they read these texts often or very often, than in PIRLS. Sixty-three percent of children in PIRLS reported that they read stories/novels at least weekly outside of school. This disparity is likely to be due to the different scales used in each of the surveys. Clark and Poulton (2011b) investigated how many books children read in a month. They found that most young people 49% said they read between one and three books. Thirteen percent of young people said they had not read any books in a month.

Reasons children read

Evidence suggests that reading for pleasure is not always cited as the key reason for children reading. There are a few studies that have explored the issue of why children read, which have revealed comparable results. The majority of children surveyed seem to respond with skills-based reasons, reasons to do with learning and understanding, or emotional reasons.

The Nestle Family Monitor (2003 – cited in Clark and Rumbold, 2006) found that upon asking 11 to 18 year olds why they read; 55% stated that books help them understand different people/cultures, 40% wanted to learn more about new subjects, and 33% stated that books encouraged them to try new hobbies. When asked how they would they would describe reading, half of the respondents described it as relaxing; a third of respondents described it as fun.

A survey conducted by the National Literacy Trust (NLT) as part of Reading Connects (Clark and Foster, 2005) found that the majority of children emphasised skills-related reasons for reading. Half the children said they read because it is a skill for life and because it will help them find what they need or want to know. Reading as a fun activity was the third most frequently chosen reason. More boys than girls reported that they read because it will help them get a job or because they have to. Girls indicated reading because it is fun, it teaches them how other people live and because it gives them a break.

Dungworth et al (2004 – cited in Clark and Rumbold, 2006) found that the most popular reason for reading was emotional, and related to the way reading made them feel. Children also stated that they read for enjoyment and because it was relaxing. Results from this study point more strongly towards reading for pleasure being a reason for children reading.

Reading motivation has been described as 'the individual's personal goals, values and beliefs with regard to the topics, processes, and outcomes of reading' (Guthrie and Wigfield, 2000 – cited in Clark and Rumbold, 2006). Clark and Rumbold (2006) cite research showing that motivation to read decreases with age, especially if children's attitudes towards reading become less positive; if children do not enjoy

reading when they are young, then they are unlikely to do so when they get older (McKenna, Ellsworth and Kear, 1995). The authors conclude that in order to reap the benefits that reading for pleasure can bring, schools need to implement a reading promotion programme that will make reading an experience that is actively sought out by children.

Gender differences in reading for pleasure

A number of studies have shown that boys enjoy reading less than girls; and that children from lower socio-economic backgrounds read less for enjoyment than children from more privileged social classes.

Clark and Douglas (2011) found that boys enjoy reading less with 43% of boys and 58% of girls enjoying reading either very much or quite a lot. Between 2005 and 2009 there has been an increase in the gap between boy and girls who enjoy reading. In 2005 11% more girls than boys enjoyed reading; by 2009 this has widened to a 15% gap. Nearly twice as many boys than girls agreed with the statement that reading is boring and that reading is hard and were more likely to say that they did not read outside the classroom and could not find anything that interests them. Boys are also less likely to say that they have access to a computer, magazines, newspapers, blogs or books compared with girls. Sixty-seven percent of boys say they have books of their own at home as opposed to 79% of girls. Girls were also more likely to rate themselves as better readers (Clark and Douglas 2011). Clark (2011) also found that boys were more likely to have negative attitudes towards reading. She found that more boys than girls agreed with the statements that they prefer watching TV to reading, that they did not read as well as other pupils in their class, that they only read when they had to, and that they would be embarrassed if their friends saw them read outside of class.

In all countries, boys are not only less likely than girls to say that they read for enjoyment, they also have different reading habits when they do read for pleasure. Girls are more likely than boys to be frequent readers of fiction, and are also more likely than boys to read magazines. However, over 65% of boys regularly read newspapers for enjoyment and only 59% of girls do so (OECD 2010). Supporting these findings Clark and Douglas (2011) found that the gap between boys and girls reading fiction increased between 2005 and 2009, nearly tripling from a 3% point difference to an 12% point difference. Similarly, the gender gap in magazine reading has widened, increasing from a 12% point difference in 2005 to a 17% point difference in 2009. Although relatively few children say that they read comic books regularly, on average across OECD countries, 27% of boys read comic books several times a month or several times a week, while only 18% of girls do so (OECD, 2010).

PISA reveals that in OECD countries, boys are on average 39 points behind girls in reading, the equivalent of one year of schooling. PISA suggests that differences in

how boys and girls approach learning and how engaged they are in reading account for most of the gap in reading performance between boys and girls, so much so that this gap could be predicted to shrink by 14 points if boys approached learning as positively as girls, and by over 20 points if they were as engaged in reading as girls. OECD explain that most of the gender gap can be explained by boys being less engaged, and as less engaged children show lower performance, the OECD argue that policymakers should look for more effective ways of increasing boys' interest in reading at school or at home (OECD, 2010).

PISA also reports that, although girls have higher mean reading performance, enjoy reading more and are more aware of effective strategies to summarise information than boys, the differences within genders are far greater than those between the genders. Moreover, the size of the gender gap varies considerably across countries, suggesting that boys and girls do not have inherently different interests and academic strengths, but that these are mostly acquired and socially induced. The large gender gap in reading is not a mystery: it can be attributed to differences that have been identified in the attitudes and behaviours of boys and girls (OECD, 2010).

OECD (2010) conclude that while factors such as predisposition, temperament, peer pressure and socialisation may contribute to boys having less interest in reading than girls, boys could be encouraged to enjoy reading more and to read more for enjoyment. PISA results suggest that boys would be predicted to catch up with girls in reading performance if they had higher levels of motivation to read and used effective learning strategies. One example includes developing effective ways of summarising complex information in their reading.

The poor reading proficiency seen among socio-economically disadvantaged boys is cited as a particular concern by OECD 2010. This is because, without the ability to read well enough to participate fully in society, these children and their future families will have fewer opportunities to escape a cycle of poverty and deprivation. On average in the OECD area, socio-economically disadvantaged boys would be predicted to perform 28 points higher in reading if they had the same level of awareness of effective summarising strategies as socio-economically advantaged girls and 35 points higher if they enjoyed reading as much as socio-economically advantaged girls (OECD, 2010).

A more recent study has examined the reading habits of over 100,000 children aged 5 to 16 in the UK in 664 schools (Topping, 2010). The data from the study was captured using web-based software which aims to manage book reading for teachers and encourage children to read more for pleasure. The study found that boys were reading nearly as much as girls, however they tended to read easier books than girls; girls consistently read books of a more difficult level than boys in the same year.

A survey of school children conducted for World Book Day in 2002, found that 15 to 16 year old boys spent 2.3 hours a week reading for pleasure, compared to 9 hours a

week playing computer games, or 11 hours watching television. However, when boys were reading they did so because they enjoyed it (cited by Clark and Rumbold, 2006).

What works in promoting reading for pleasure?

Strategies for improving independent reading

The OECD recognise that changing children's attitudes and behaviours may be inherently more difficult than providing equal access to high quality teachers and schools, two of the factors that explain the low performance of socio-economically disadvantaged children– an area where PISA shows that over the past decade, some countries have achieved significant progress (OECD, 2010).

Clark and Foster (2005 – cited in Clark and Rumbold, 2006) explored what activities could be set up in the classroom to promote reading for pleasure; designing websites/magazines, meeting authors/celebrities and reading games were the most frequently chosen reading promotion activities from a list of 12 possible choices.

Choice

An important factor in developing reading for pleasure is choice. Schraw et al, 1998 (cited in Clark and Rumbold, 2006) found that there was a positive relationship between choice and affective aspects of reading, such as motivation. Also, Gambrell, 1996 (cited in Clark and Rumbold, 2006) found that when children were asked which book they had enjoyed most, 80% of them said that the one they had enjoyed most was the one they had chosen themselves.

Clark and Phythian-Sence (2008) conclude that choice and interest are highly related and often conflated: children are more likely to choose books that look interesting to them. But to affect reading behaviour, children have to go beyond simply choosing a book, and must subsequently choose to read that book, over any other available activity.

Incentives and rewards

The evidence on whether rewards help to bring about reading enjoyment is mixed. Clark and Rumbold (2006) cite several studies which show that incentives do not significantly affect motivation to read. For example, Edmunds and Tancock (2003), who found no significant differences in reading motivation and reading amount between children who received incentives and those who did not.

However, Clark and Rumbold (2006) cite other research which finds that a reward linked to a desired behaviour can increase motivation to carry out that behaviour. Therefore, Clark and Rumbold (2006) conclude that literacy-targeted rewards, such as books or book vouchers, are more effective in developing reading motivation than rewards that are unrelated to the activity.

'Booked Up' is one example of a reading promotion programme involving choice for the children involved. 'Booked Up' is a national programme encouraging Year 7 children to read for pleasure; giving all Year 7 children the chance to choose a free book from a list of 12 selected titles. An evaluation of this programme found that at the time of completing the online questionnaire, most children (71%) had read or started to read the book they had chosen. And amongst those who said they never read, 68% claimed to have read at least some of their book. Nearly half of parents/carers (47%) reported seeing evidence of their child wanting to read more as a result of being involved in Booked Up and receiving the free book (Hope-Stone associates, 2008).

Another example is 'Rooted in reading' which is a reading promotion project offering primary and secondary school students a suite of 12 reading 'passports' to encourage reading for pleasure. It covers a whole range of ages from children leaning to read through to sixth form students. After reading a book, children complete an entry that takes the form of a short review in their passport. The student, teacher, school or public librarian can then stamp their passport with the project's tree logo to endorse their reading. A small-scale evaluation in 46 schools in Lincolnshire found that both teachers and pupils reported the amount of time the children spent reading, and their enjoyment of reading had increased since the reading passports had been in use. The most positive responses came from students in an urban primary school on a deprived estate whose attainment level was below both national and local authority means (Willshaw 2012).

Role of parents/carers and the home environment

Evidence suggests that parents and the home environment are essential to the early teaching of reading and fostering a love of reading. Key findings from the evidence include:

- Parental involvement in a child's literacy has been reported as a more powerful force than other family background variables, such as social class, family size and level of parental education (Flouri and Buchanan, 2004 – cited in Clark and Rumbold, 2006);
- Children whose home experiences promote the view that reading is a source of entertainment are likely to become intrinsically motivated to read (Baker, Serpell and Sonnenschein, 1995 – cited in Clark and Rumbold, 2006); and,
- Children are more likely to continue to be readers in homes where books and reading are valued (Baker and Scher, 2002 – cited in Clark and Rumbold, 2006).

Findings from PISA support this. OECD (2010) report that parents' engagement with their children's reading life has a positive impact on their children's reading

performance. Children whose parents reported that they had read a book with their child “every day or almost every day” or “once or twice a week” during the first year of primary school performed higher in PISA 2009 than children whose parents reported that they had done this “never or almost never” or “once or twice a month”. On average across the 14 countries that had collected information on this question, the difference is 25 score points, but it ranges from 4 score points in the partner country Lithuania to 63 score points in New Zealand.

The importance of resources

Evidence suggests having access to resources and having books of their own impacts on young peoples reading attainment. In a survey of over 18,000 young people aged 8 -17, Clark and Poulton (2011) found that seven in 10 young people have books of their own. Girls were more likely than boys to have books of their own, as were non FSM pupils in comparison to pupils who receive FSM and pupils from white and mixed ethnic background compared to black ethnic backgrounds. They found that pupils who had books of their own were more likely to enjoy reading and read more frequently. Young people who had books of their own were twice as likely to read daily. Those without books of their own were five times more likely to say they never read. Clark and Douglas (2011) found that 58% of children who read below the expected level had books of their own compared with 80% of children who read above the expected level for their age had books of their own. This was much stronger than the relationship between access to electronic media and literacy attainment.

Clark (2011) reported that three percent of children do not have any books in the home. Boys, FSM pupils and Asian pupils were twice as likely to say they did not have books at home. Clark (2011) found a relationship between estimated number of books in the home and reading attainment. Of the young people who said there were no books at home over a third read below their expected level, half at the expected level and seven percent were reading at above the expected level while of those who estimated they had more than 500 books at home 10% read below the expected level, half read at the expected level and two fifths were reading at above the expected level. Clark (2011) reported that even a small number of books could make a difference. Of those who report having up to 10 books in the home, a fifth read below the level expected for their age, while nearly three-quarters read at the expected level and 8% read above the expected level. Similarly Clark, Woodley and Lewis (2011) found that 19% of young people had never received a book as present and these young people were more likely to read below the expected level.

Evidence from the US reinforces the UK findings on the relationship between book ownership and attainment. Lindsay (2010) in a meta-analysis of 108 studies found that having access to print material improves children’s performance and encourages young people to read more and for longer. A longitudinal study by Evans et al. (2010) found that having books in the home has as big an impact on a child’s attainment as

parental education level. They found that having as few as 20 books in the home could have a benefit for children in helping them achieve a higher level of education. Similarly a German study by Schubert and Becker, (2010) found that the home print environment was a strong predictor of reading achievement, even when income, parental education, aspects of schooling, language used at home, and other aspects of the home environment were controlled for (cited in Clark and Poulton 2011).

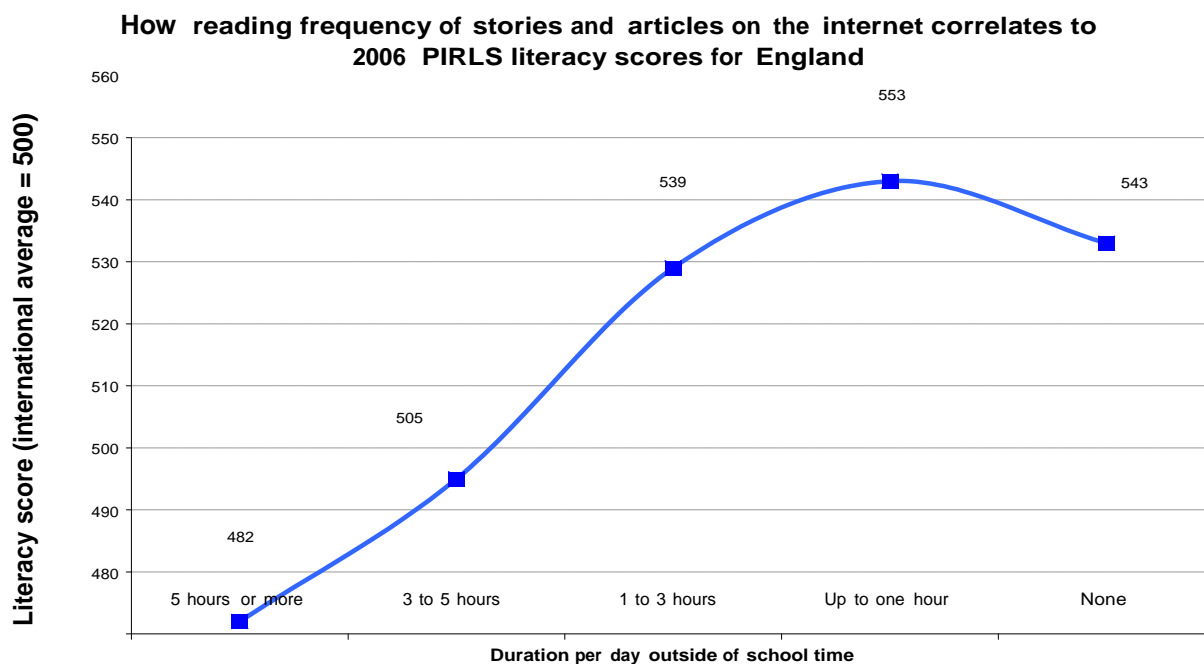
Promoting reading for pleasure in schools

Evidence from international studies indicates that young people in England continue to read less independently and find less pleasure in reading than many of their peers in other countries (Cremin et al, 2009). Research for the UKLA (United Kingdom Literacy Association) examined how teachers could enhance children's reading for pleasure. The activities included: marked improvements in reading environments, read aloud programmes, book talk and book recommendations and the provision of quality time for independent reading. The teachers involved in the project came to appreciate the significance of the wider range of reading which young people experience in their homes and communities. Shared understandings were established between teachers, and families about the changing nature of reading and everyday reading practices which supported children's reading for pleasure. Reading for pleasure was also found to be strongly influenced by relationships: between teachers; between teachers and children; between children and families; between children, teachers, families and communities (Cremin et al, 2009). Research has shown that events focussing on reading for pleasure can also promote or enhance social skills in young people (e.g. Allan et al, 2005 cited by Clark and Rumbold, 2006).

Online reading habits

There is little research that has been conducted specifically looking at online reading habits, and the existing evidence has mixed results. Based on the existing evidence, it seems to depend on what activities are being conducted online, and what young people are reading. In PIRLS 2006, on average across countries, reported spending more time in a typical day reading stories and articles in books or magazines than on the Internet (1.4 hours vs. 1.0 hours).

Figure 2:



(Data source; p53 of PIRLS England⁵ report)

Twist et al (2007) report finding a negative association between the amount of time spent reading stories and articles on the internet and reading achievement in most countries in PIRLS data. Those who read for long periods of time online have been found to score less well than those who read stories and articles online. This suggests that the medium is important, and suggests that online reading offers fewer benefits than more traditional mediums (PIRLS, Twist et al, 2007).

However, in contrast, the Scottish analysis of PISA data (2004) found that although those young people reading a large amount of fiction tended to score highest on reading tests, young people reading non-fiction or reading from the internet also tended to perform well above average.

Also, PISA reports that young people who are extensively engaged in online reading activities, such as reading e-mails, chatting on line, reading news on line, using an online dictionary or encyclopaedia, participating in online group discussions and searching for information on line, were found to be generally more proficient readers than young people who do little online reading (OECD, 2010).

⁵ <http://www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/other-publications/downloadable-reports/pirls-2006.cfm>

The role of librarians in reading for pleasure

The UK national survey of school libraries was conducted between December 2009 and April 2010 (Streatfield et al. 2010). Part of the survey captured the activity of school librarians in middle and secondary schools⁶. The survey reported that school librarians encouraged children to enjoy reading in a variety of ways including supporting teachers, giving one to one support to pupils and providing access to resources. Most librarians took an active role in promoting reading for pleasure with individuals and groups of pupils. Activities that they were involved in included arranging reading clubs and author visits, providing exhibitions and displays and getting children involved in competitive reading schemes (Streatfield et al. 2010).

Library use and reading for pleasure

One recent study (Clark and Hawkins, 2011) was conducted online with 17,089 children aged 8 to 16 from 112 schools to explore library use. The survey found that the vast majority of children, whether or not they use the library, agreed that reading is important to succeed in life.

Other key findings from the survey include:

- Nearly half (48%) of children said that they do not use public libraries at all;
- Children from White backgrounds use public libraries the least (48%);
- Public library use declines drastically and significantly with age, with 63 % of KS2 (Key Stage 2);
- 42% of KS3 (Key Stage 3) and only 24% of KS4 (Key Stage 4) children saying that they use their public library;
- Public libraries do not disproportionately attract children from more or less affluent backgrounds (48% of FSM) children using one compared with an equivalent 46% of non-FSM children); and
- Of the 44% of children who do use the library, the most common reason, cited by over half of all children, was that the library had interesting reading materials.

⁶ 1,044 respondents whom 463 (44.3%) were qualified librarians, 59 (5.7%) held dual qualifications in education and librarianship, 27 (2.6%) were teachers who have been assigned additional responsibility for day to day management/operation of the library, 96 (9.2%) had an HE qualification in another subject discipline (i.e. not librarianship or education; these people are identified as 'Graduates' below) and 326 (31.2%) were neither qualified librarians nor graduates.

Non-library users were found to be more than three times more likely to only read when in class, and more than three times more likely to state that they cannot find anything to read that interests them, and almost three times as likely to rate themselves as not very good readers compared to library users.

Over 40% of non-library users stated that one reason for them not going was that their friends do not go and nearly as many gave as one reason that the public libraries did not have any interesting materials for them.

The research found a link between library use and reading for pleasure; young people that use their public library are nearly twice as likely to be reading outside of class every day. Public library users are nearly twice as likely to say that they enjoy reading either very much or quite a lot.

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