

**FM Olifant**

**Eunice Rautenbach**

and

**MP Cekiso**

**Tshwane University of Technology**

# READING HABITS AND ATTITUDES OF GRADES 8-10 ENGLISH SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNERS IN EERSTERUST, SOUTH AFRICA

## **Abstract**

The reading habits and attitudes of learners are continuously discussed by academics and reading enthusiasts on an international platform. The purpose of these dialogues is to search for methods that could cultivate a love for reading and improve reading skills among learners. Subsequently, this paper reports the results of a study conducted on the reading habits and attitudes of Grades 8-10 English Second Language (ESL) learners in Eersterust, South Africa. The study was both quantitative and qualitative in nature. A questionnaire was administered to 73 Grades 8-10 learners, who were purposefully selected from two schools. In addition, individual interviews were conducted with five ESL teachers and two learner focus groups, in which the

grades 8-10 learners from both schools were represented. The findings showed that the learners read English material, however, the majority of learners only read ESL materials in school, with the purpose of doing well academically. The results further showed that the learners were not reading for pleasure and had a negative attitude towards ESL printed material and preferred to spend their time on the Internet. Strategies to cultivate a culture of reading, in order improve the reading habits and attitudes of the ESL learners were suggested in the study.

**Keywords:** Reading, reading habit, attitude, reading skills, academic performance, reading preferences.

## 1. Introduction

Several studies have been conducted on the reading habits, interests and attitudes of learners (Majid & Tan, 2007; Rasana, 2009; Palani, 2012; Annamalai & Muniandy, 2013; Chettri & Rout, 2013; Owusu-Acheaw & Larson, 2014). Research on reading has shown that reading is essential to academic success and to intellectual growth (Bruguglia, 2005) and that the life-long habit of reading can best be inculcated and nurtured at an early age (Majid & Tan, 2007). Since reading affects learners' academic performance, it appears that developing a positive reading habit is likely to assist learners to succeed academically. However, research on reading habits and attitudes reveals that learners have lost interest in reading (Braguglia, 2005; Owusu-Acheaw & Larson, 2014).

Majid and Tan (2007) investigated learners' reading habits, reading attitudes and the motivations behind reading. They found that students could be motivated to read for academically-related reasons, such as to improve language skills and to obtain better grades in examinations. Owusu-Acheaw and Larson (2014) also conducted a study on the reading habits of students and confirmed that the reading habit of learners has an influence on their academic performance.

In a South African context, studies conducted on learners' reading habits and attitudes, include a study by Machet, Olen and Chamberlain (2001) on young people's reading preferences in the South African context. Nel, Dreyer and Klopper (2004) focused on the importance of teaching learners how to apply different reading strategies to improve reading ability. Rasana (2006) reported on Grade 11 learners' reading preferences and research conducted by Bharuthram (2012) focused on the teaching of reading across the curriculum.

When learners enter high school (Grades 8 to 12), it is assumed that they have already achieved a certain level of reading competency, because the development of reading is achieved in primary school (Grades R-7) (Gunning, 2007: 3). However, when the reading foundation in primary school is not properly cemented, a fragile reading ability will be carried over into high school grades, which will ultimately create some reading skills challenges as the learner progresses in school. At high school level, reading is viewed as a complex and cognitive development process whereby the learner needs to illustrate a certain level of text comprehension by means of understanding, interpreting and relating the meaning of the text. Grabe (1991: 380) further accentuates this view by declaring that learners in higher grades need to use higher order skills in processing the meaning of a text.

The researchers concluded that although literature about the reading practices of South African learners exists, it is limited in terms of learners' reading habits and attitudes. This is a cause for concern, especially if one takes into consideration the relationship between reading and academic success.

## 2. Purpose of the study

Globally, research indicates a growing concern for the poor reading abilities displayed by learners, which prohibit them from a successful academic career and a lifelong learning opportunity. Researchers such as Owusu-Acheaw and Larson, (2014) and Bruguglia (2005) have linked positive reading habits and attitudes to learners' academic achievement. According to Hugo, Le Roux, Muller and Nel (2005: 210), 40% of children in the United States of America (USA) experience challenges in becoming competent readers. A survey conducted By Temple, Ogle, Crawford and Freppen (2005: 4) recorded that 30% of grade 8 and 25% of grade 12 learners could not demonstrate basic reading ability. Abadzi (2008: 4) reports that most learners from Francophone Guinea fail to internalise the entire alphabet by the end of grade 2, and as a result the average learner could only read four of the twenty words presented to them in the study. The researcher reported a similar situation in Peru, where only 25% of grade 1 learners and 45 % of grade 2 learners demonstrated the ability to read letters of the alphabet and simple words. Research specifically focussed on reading habits and attitudes reveals that learners have lost interest in reading (Braguglia, 2005; Owusu-Acheaw & Larson, 2014).

Despite many initiatives by The Department of Education, various national and international literacy organisations and literacy bodies, private sector organisations and academic institutions, the South African population still exhibit a deficient reading habit. This situation is aggravated by schooling systems that produce learners who lag behind their international counterparts regarding the following: *“The South African learners are reading far below age appropriate expected levels.” (DOE, 2008 (A):2)*

Research by Pretorius (2002) and Matjila and Pretorius (2004) reflect a connection between academic achievement and literacy levels, which includes the skill of reading. In addition, Schmidt, Rozendal and Green (2002: 131) add that the skill to read is a crucial building block within the schooling programme and a poor reading ability by and large correlates with school failure. In contrast, we can thus conclude that if a learner demonstrates a good reading capability, it could correlate with successful academic achievements.

I completed my teacher training at a local high school in Eersterust, which included English Second Language (ESL) teaching, to Grades 8-10 learners. Whilst teaching ESL to Grades 8-10, I observed that many ESL learners were experiencing a number of reading challenges. During ESL reading activities, I got the impression that learners appeared quite passive, disinterested, and displayed a lack of proficiency and anxiety. Greenwood (1998: 5) contextualises this quite interestingly when he observes that “reading is for many of them a passive, boring activity, performed constantly in isolation and perhaps associated with skills which they feel they do not possess”.

My observations include the following scenarios, to illustrate my concern:

- Learners performed poorly during in-class reading comprehension assessment activities.
- On numerous occasions, when I requested some learners to read out loud in class they refused by citing excuses, such as: “I am not feeling well today”; “Do I have to read?”; “I am not a good reader. Can I read to you in private?”; “I don’t like reading”; “The others are going to laugh at me”.
- Some of the learners that were willing to participate in reading out loud in class appeared very anxious and concerned about how their classmates reacted whilst they read.
- And some readers simply struggled to articulate words when reading.

Very little is known about the current reading habits and attitudes of grades 8 to 10 ESL learners in South Africa, especially in the Gauteng Province. Therefore, understanding learners’ reading habits and attitudes is important, to determine the obstacles that are hindering learners from reading. It is assumed this would help the teachers prepare relevant reading tasks, based on relevant reading resources that are informed by the needs and interests of the learners. It is for this reason that the current study sought to investigate and describe the reading habits and attitudes of Grades 8-10 in two high schools in the Eersterust area of Tshwane south district, with a view to offer suggestions for promoting learners’ reading habits and attitudes. In order to achieve this goal, the following research questions are addressed:

- What are the reading habits of Grades 8-10 learners in Eersterust in relation to reading English books?
- What are their attitudes toward reading English L2 material?
- What kind of ESL material do they read?

This study was informed by the Socio-cultural Theory of Literacy and the Attitude-Influence Model of Reading by G.C. Mathewson. Literacy as Social Practice Theory, according to Perry (2012: 53), is based on the multiple ways in which people use literacy, such as reading various types of text for various functions in their daily lives, which then form part of human behaviour. Street (2001: 430) proposes that “an understanding of literacy (which includes reading) requires a detailed, in-depth account of actual practices in different cultural settings,” because literacy is a social practice that exists between people, within groups and communities and the daily practices of society. Thus, the reading practices of learners in a classroom (a socio cultural context) can be influenced by our social practices and can be understood, in terms of motivation, beliefs, attitudes, intentions, conventions, and habits, that the learners exhibit when reading.

Another model of reading that this study tapped into is the attitude-influence model of reading, G.C. Mathewson's attitude-influence reading model, in Ruddel and Unrau (2004: 1431-1448) which explains the roles of affect and cognition in reading comprehension. According to the model a reader's whole attitude toward reading, such as prevailing feelings, and evaluative beliefs about reading, and action readiness for reading, will influence the intention to read, and, in turn, influence reading behaviour. This model supports understanding of the reading habits and attitudes of grades 8 to 10 learners toward reading in English.

The study was conducted and limited to two high schools in Eersterust and focussed only on Grades 8 to 10 learners that used Afrikaans as a first language and English as an L2. The aim of the study was not to generalise the findings but to achieve an in-depth explanation of the reading habits and attitudes of the learners at two high schools in Eersterust.

### **3. Reading habits**

Chettri and Rout (2013:13) declare that the activity of reading is a habit when it is carried out repeatedly. Various authors have defined reading habits differently. Annamalai and Muniandy (2013) define reading habits as behaviour that expresses the likeliness of reading and tastes of reading. Putting it simply, Shen (2006) in Annamalai and Muniandy (2013) define reading habit as how often, how much, and what the readers read. In addition, Wagner (2002) in Chettri and Rout (2013:13) states that "in measurable terms reading habits is often considered in terms of the amount of materials being read, the frequency of reading as well as the average time spent on reading". Researchers have devoted various efforts to examining learners' reading habits (Scales & Rhee, 2001; Chauhan & Lal, 2012; Majid & Tan, 2007; Karim & Husan, 2006; Akanda, Hoq, Hasan, 2013). According to Chettri and Rout (2013:14), "a good reading habit is necessary for a healthy intellectual growth and plays a very crucial role in enabling a person to achieve practical efficiency". Thus, developing learners' good reading habits facilitate their academic performance.

Majid and Tan (2007) are of the view that as pressure increases on children to perform well academically, it is not surprising that they often associate books and reading with learning, schoolwork, school projects, and passing examinations. Issa (2012) recommends that learners' enthusiasm, associated with the urge to engage in reading practices voluntarily, pleasurably and extensively, should be developed in order to cultivate good reading habits.

### **4. Reading attitudes**

Karim and Hasan (2006) define reading attitude as an individual's feeling about reading,

causing learners to approach or avoid a reading situation. On the other hand, Ajzen and Fishbein (1980) in Annamalai and Muniandy (2013) define reading attitude as a learned disposition on how to behave, either negative or positive. A positive reading attitude could lead to positive reading experiences that also leads to higher academic performance. Many studies have been conducted that focused on identifying factors that influence the development of positive reading attitudes towards reading. The study conducted by Walberg and Tshai (1985) identified the following factors as contributing to a positive attitude among adolescents: (a) Believing that reading is important; (b) enjoying reading; (c) having a high self-concept as a reader and (d) having a verbally stimulating home environment where verbal interaction takes place (Walberg & Tsai, 1985 in Karim & Hasan, 2006: 289).

## **5. Problem statement**

The essence of schooling is to teach literacy, such as writing, speaking, listening, and reading. As a result, reading is a key component in a learner's literacy journey. For many learners, English is a second, third, or fourth language; yet, it remains the medium through which the learners access literacy, making learning in all subjects more difficult.

Learners with good reading habits achieve better in their studies than learners who possess bad reading habits (Chettri & Rout, 2013; Karim & Husan, 2006; Issa, 2012). However, research on reading habits and attitudes reveals that at present, partly due to electronic media such as the Internet, video games and portable digital devices, people do not show much interest in reading books, magazines and journals (Annamalai & Muniandy, 2013; Palani, 2012). Thus, the amount of time the people spend reading is declining.

Furthermore, failure in reading, according to Rowling in Lerner and Johns (2009: 382) becomes a strong factor in determining what happens in the classroom. As such, understanding learners' reading habits, attitudes, and motivation toward reading is fundamental to language development, and learners' reluctance to read requires further investigation. Therefore, there is an urgent need to develop the reading habits and attitudes of learners, to improve their academic performance.

## **6. Research methodology**

The study followed a case study approach with a triangulation design, employing a mixed method of quantitative and qualitative perspectives. For the quantitative research element, the learners were required to complete a questionnaire. The study used a survey design. McMillan and Schumacher (2001:602) define a survey design as "the assessment of the status, opinions, perceptions, plans and beliefs". This design was deemed suitable, as the aim of the study was to get the learners' opinions about their

reading habits and attitudes. The sample for the study was drawn from Grade 8-10 ESL learners at two high schools in Eersterust. The sample selected for the questionnaire survey consisted of 50 learners per school, from grades 8-10, totalling 100 learners accumulatively from the two high schools. However, not all the learners' parents provided consent, nor were all the learners willing to participate and only 73 learners (across the three grades from both schools) eventually completed the questionnaire.

The qualitative stage of the study comprised of semi-structured individual interviews with ESL teachers and focus group interviews with learners. As Leedy and Ormrod (2001:159) point out, interviews in qualitative research are seldom structured and prepared and Maree (2005: 87) adds that the purpose of qualitative interviews is to observe the world (or the topic under investigation) through the eyes and views of participants. The purposive selected sample for the semi -structured interviews consisted of 5 grades 8 -10 ESL teachers from both high schools. The sample for the 2 focus group interviews (1 focus group per school), consisted of 6 grades 8 – 10 learners (1 male and 1 female learner per grade).

## **7. Instrumentation**

The researchers used the survey questionnaire (quantitative method) and semi-structured interviews (qualitative method) conducted with English L2 teachers, as well as focus group interviews with the selected learner participants, to investigate, describe and analyse the reading habits and attitudes of Grades 8 -10 ESL learners in Eersterust.

The questionnaire consisted of opinion statements and intensity scales that were rated on a Likert scale and attempted to facilitate some understanding of the reading practices and attitudes of learners, such as reasons for reading, when they read, their choice or avoidance of reading activities and their opinions of print text. The first part of the questionnaire was based on the demographics and personal information of the sample. The second part was structured to determine the reading habits of the learners by using closed question statements. The habit determining statements were compiled according to literature on ESL reading materials; ESL proficiency of learners, and other topic-related documented information. This process was in concurrence with research done by Elley (1991) and Pretorius (2002), who indicate that access to reading material and the regular practice of reading improves reading ability, vocabulary skills, as well as academic performance. The third part of the survey established learners' attitudes towards reading. In this regard, the learners were provided with the options to self-assess and rate their own behaviour towards reading.

The school principals guided the researchers to identify 5 ESL teachers, 2 from school A and 3 from school B, to participate in the study by means of semi-structured interviews. The researchers also conducted one semi-structured focus group interview session, consisting of 6 learners (3 males and 3 females from the Grades 8 to 10), per school. The learners that participated in the focus group discussion were identified by the

ESL teachers. The participants were not constrained, and were free to express their experiences, which added value, reliability, and richness to the collected data.

## **8. Data analysis**

For the second and third part of the questionnaire, the learners responded to each closed question statement, which were encoded by the allocation of numbers and then computerised. The data was analysed statically and then summarised using frequencies and percentage scores. The researchers analysed the quantitative data, by exploring the data and calculating the data distribution, as explained by Creswell and Plano Clark (2007: 130 -131). Furthermore, White (2005: 98) asserts that descriptive research is non-experimental, with the purpose of analysing and providing accurate descriptions of variables that affect the topic under investigation, with regard to practices, beliefs, relationships, effects, as well as developing trends.

Creswell & Plano Clark (2007: 132) explain that the most important element in qualitative data analysis is the coding process, which groups evidence and label ideas, units or themes, with the aim to reflect increasing broader perspectives. The researchers amalgamated both quantitative and qualitative data which provided the detailed analysis of the reading habits and attitudes of the cohort of Grades 8-10 learners towards English second language.

With regard to acting in accordance with certain moral responsibilities the researchers obtained the necessary written authorisation from the Gauteng Department of Education, as well as the Department of Education, Tshwane District. The researchers also obtained the permission of the school principals of the schools selected for the study, obtained a parental consent form from the parents/guardians of the learners and an informed consent form of participation from all research participants. The researchers assured the research participants of anonymity and confidentiality, in order to protect their identities. The study did not pose a physical treat.

## **9. Findings**

### **9.1. Qualitative data**

#### ***Research question 1: Reading habits***

This part of the questionnaire aimed to investigate the reading habits of the learners in the sample group.



**Table 1: Reading habits of grades 8-10 ESL learners**

	Item	Never	Hardly ever	Sometimes	Often	Very often
		%	%	%	%	%
1	I read English books every day.	9.6	1.4	71.2	13.7	2.7
2	I only read English books at school.	4.1	13.7	38.4	27.4	13.7
3	I read English books at home.	24.7	11.0	43.8	16.4	2.7
4	I only read books in my first language in my leisure time.	16.4	12.3	37.0	13.7	16.4
5	I read English books during my leisure time.	19.2	15.1	38.4	16.4	4.1
6	I would be bored without a book.	49.3	16.4	21.9	4.1	4.1
7	Do you read outside of class?	45.2	6.8	32.9	5.5	2.7
8	I read with friends.	39.7	15.1	26.0	8.2	4.1
9	I read with my family.	43.8	8.2	27.4	5.5	8.2
10	I read social media platforms on my cell phone	13.7	6.8	20.5	23.3	32.9

**Keys:** N = 73 learners

% = percentages score

Table 1 shows that the majority of learners indicated that they *sometimes* read English every day, with 38.4% of learners specifying that they *sometimes* read English only at school. The highest percentage of the learners reflected that they *sometimes* read English at home, while 24.7% evinced that they never read English at home. This could be because there is a lack of reading material at home, or the environment at home is as such that it does not encourage the practice of reading. Table 1 further reveals that only 2.7% of the learners showed that they *very often* read English texts at home. In addition, the statistics reflected an analogous pattern between leisure time reading, being bored without a book and reading with friends on *very often* frequency, by respectively indicating an identical percentage score of 4.1%.

Table 1 also shows that 37.0% marked that they *only* read books in their first language in their leisure time. This result revealed that although the learners studied ESL at school,

there could be learners that were more comfortable in engaging in leisure reading by using their First/home Language. Furthermore, the result could have been an indication that learners were not very proficient in ESL reading, which validated the option to read only books in their First Language. The highest percentage of learners indicated that they *sometimes* read English during their leisure time. With regard to the statement “I would be bored without a book”, 49.3% of learners pointed out that they would *never* be bored without a book, whilst only 4.1% percent of the learners marked that they *often to very often would* be bored without a book. This result could be attributed to the fact that learners rather participated in other activities that they enjoyed, more willingly than in the act of reading.

To further establish the reading habits of learners as reflected in Table 1, data depicted by Item 7 flagged the fact that 2%-4% signaled that they *often to very often* read outside of class, paradoxically to 45.2% of the learners who marked that they *never* read outside of class. The results confirmed that there are only a few learners who prefer to participate in the practice of reading as a habit.

The data in Table 1 further revealed that the percentage of learners that pointed out that they *never* read with their friends was 39.7%. Forty-three-point eight percent of the learners indicated that they *never* participated in reading with their families. These results could be ascribed to the fact that neither the parents, nor the friends of a learner modeled reading, and therefore the prospect for that learner to practise reading as a habit would be extremely small. Table 1 also shows that most learners, indicated that they *often to very often* utilised their cell phones for reading. This shows that the learners did not rely only on books, but also used other reading sources.

### ***Research question 2: Attitudes towards reading***

This section of the questionnaire sought to establish the participants' own expressions on their attitudes toward ESL reading.

**Table: 2 Reading Attitudes of grades 8-10 ESL learners**

	Item	1	2	3	4	5
		%	%	%	%	%
1	I enjoy reading English books	5.5	6.8	15.1	34.2	38.4
2	I like reading school text books	8.2	17.8	23.3	32.9	16.4
3	I like spending time in a library	28.8	20.5	15.1	17.8	13.7
4	My friends like reading	19.2	15.1	27.4	13.7	21.9
5	My parents like reading	9.6	12.3	17.8	19.2	39.7
6	Listening to music is more fun than reading	15.1	9.6	17.8	17.8	37.0
7	I would rather do something else than do English reading	21.9	12.3	28.8	16.4	19.2
8	I like watching English movies than reading	5.5	2.7	2.7	11.0	76.7
9	I like watching English television programmes than reading	8.2	2.7	2.7	12.3	74.0

Frequency keys: 1: Strongly disagree 2: Disagree 3: Not Sure 4: Agree 5: Strongly Agree

**Keys:** N = 73 learners % = percentages score

Table 2 revealed that 34.2% of learners *agreed* that they enjoyed reading English books and 38.4% *strongly agreed* that they enjoyed reading English books. The results therefore displayed a high level of English reading enjoyment. Even though 72.6 % of learners indicated that they *agreed to strongly agree* that they enjoyed reading English books, a percentage of 49.3% of learners expressed that they enjoyed reading school textbooks.

Furthermore, more than a quarter of the total number of learners, *agreed* and 13.7 % *strongly agreed* that they liked spending time in a library. On the other hand, 28.8% indicated that they *strongly disagreed* to spending time in the library. In order to cultivate a positive reading attitude, learners needed to be encouraged to frequent reading institutions such as libraries as they provide room to practise reading, as well as promote acts and habits of reading.

Table 2 further showed that 27.4 % of the learners conveyed that their friends *sometimes* liked to spend time reading and 21.9 % strongly agreed that their friends liked to read, whereas 19.2% of the learners *strongly disagreed* to their friends liking the act of reading.

Concerning parents liking to read, 39.7 % of the sampled learners indicated that they *strongly agreed* that their parents liked reading, which was in direct contrast with the 9.6% who indicated that they *strongly disagreed* that their parents liked to read.

The researchers expected that the outright majority of the learners would indicate that they *strongly agreed* that listening to music was more fun than reading. However, this was not the case. Even though 54.0% revealed that, they *agreed to strongly agreed* that listening to music was more fun than reading, 24% reflected that they *strongly disagreed* with this impression. 17.8% of the learners noted that they were not sure whether to listen to music was more fun than to read. The results could support listening to music rather than reading because many young learners were involved in making music as a channel to express their emotions and tell of their life experiences, which resonated with the greater adolescent population. In relation to the item which states: I would rather do something else than read in English, 16.4% of learners revealed that they *agreed* and 19.2% signaled that they *strongly agreed* that they would rather do something else than listen to music. Interestingly, 21.9% of the sample population indicated that they *strongly disagreed* that they would rather do something else than English reading.

Table 2 also showed that 76.7% and 74.0% of learners, respectively, had a more positive attitude towards watching English movies and watching English television programmes than reading. This could be attributed to the fact that it requires no effort to watch television, or that the visual images were more entertaining than books. It could also be because it was an activity that was modeled to learners by family and friends, hence everybody could partake in it at the same time. Additionally, most households have a television, but not every house has books to read. Furthermore, the majority of the South African youth idolizes international music and television stars, and the results could also be an indication that learners found English television more interesting, because it showcases these celebrities.

### **Research question 3: Type of ESL materials learners read**

**Table: 3 Reading materials of Grades 8-10 ESL learners**

<b>I like reading this English material:</b>	<b>Never</b>	<b>Hardly ever</b>	<b>Sometimes</b>	<b>Often</b>	<b>Very often</b>
<b>Item</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
Schoolbooks	4.1	11.0	47.9	20.5	15.1
Magazines	13.7	9.6	41.1	23.3	9.6
Newspapers	20.5	13.7	38.5	13.7	11.0
Novels	26.0	13.7	31.5	21.9	1.4
Internet	5.5	11.0	30.1	19.2	30.1

**Keys:** N = 73 learners % = percentages score

Table 3 illustrates the distribution of six types of reading materials, i.e. schoolbooks, magazines, newspapers, novels and Internet. In this table, the learners were requested to indicate their likes for the various types of reading materials already mentioned. The results pointed to a high rate of Internet use (30.1%) in terms of *very often* frequency use, followed by school books (15.1%) and newspapers (11.0%). 15.1% of the learners indicated that they liked to read their schoolbooks *very often*, compared to the 4.1% of learners who marked that they *never* liked to read their school books. It was interesting to note that the highest percentage of learners signified that they *sometimes* liked to read schoolbooks, however, *sometimes*, is not a clear determinant of their attitude towards the reading of schoolbooks. This result might be attributed to the fact that learners spent a considerable amount of time on reading to progress in school and achieve their academic goals.

Table 3 further shows that 23.3% of learners *often* participated in reading magazines, and again, the majority of learners (41.1%) marked that they *sometimes* read magazines, with 13.7% signifying that they *never* liked reading magazines. Apart from the pictures used in magazines that might have evoked the learners' curiosity to read, the reading content in magazines many times entailed real life stories which learners might have been able to relate to and as a result, 23.3% disclosed that they *often* participated in reading a magazine.

With newspapers informing and recording real time daily happenings, it was interesting to note that 20.5% recorded that they *never* liked to read newspapers, and 38.5% noted that they *sometimes* liked to read the newspaper.

With regard to novels, 26.0 % said that they *never* liked to read novels, 31.5% marked that they *sometimes* liked to read novels, with 21.9 % signifying that they *often* liked to read novels.

Interestingly, the data revealed that only 30.1% indicated that they *very often* like to read on the Internet, with 30.1 % and 19.2% respectively indicating that they *sometimes* and *often* liked to read on the Internet. With the growth rate of technology in South Africa, it was expected that more learners would lean towards preferring to read on the Internet.

## 9.2. Qualitative data

### ***Interview with teachers***

During all the interviews with ESL teachers, a strong notion of agreement came through that most learners did not participate in after-school reading practices. Teachers were of the opinion that most learners only read per instruction in the class and for assessment purposes.

All the teachers agreed that reading influences presented by technology included positive and negative effects. They asserted that technology had the potential to improve the habit of reading by creating a platform for learners to engage more in the practice of reading. However, teachers were of the opinion that technology affected the writing of learners utilising short message service codes in academic writing. One of the teachers claimed that learners are out-phasing books by making more use of the Internet.

Collectively, the teachers mentioned that there were a number of factors that influenced the reading habits and attitudes of the learners. Influencing factors identified by TEACHER 11 were poverty, reading material, the environment at home, lack of exposure, lack of libraries facilities and demotivated emotional state of learners. TEACHER 12 referred to the disadvantaged area in which the school was situated, socio-economic factors such as unemployment and social background such as single parenting. TEACHER 13 added access to reading material and social influences to the list. TEACHER 14 included the influence of the first language ability on the second language reading. TEACHER 15 claimed that the attitude of the learners and the effect of study groups were some of the influences that affected the reading habits and attitudes of the learners.

**Some verbatim extracts from the interviews conducted with the teachers support the above information:**

*R: It starts at home. If there's... poverty at home the chances that the parents will have money to buy books and things are very slim, because they have to make a decision... what is priority for them to spend the money on. But I think schools should do more in terms of libraries, reading material and... newspapers. (TEACHER 11)*

*R: ....most of the learners ... at this school are from, disadvantaged areas so that makes it difficult for them, to cope with the language especially (TEACHER 12): ... there's a lot ... socio-economic factors, first of all, social background, single parenting, unemployment... (TEACHER 12)*

*R: Factors would be basically socio-economic ...Then, apparently our school doesn't have a library. So, it's, the access to [!: To books.], ... to reading material is, a little bit restricted to them. ... then you have the influence of, your social influence out there, where people see reading as a waste of time and reading properly as a waste of time. And it is mainly displayed by their peers, friends outside, and sometimes it's been influenced in the habits of their elders, their parents at home. ... we can see that the role models they follow is not academically inclined, they have other ideas of life. And that influences them negatively towards reading, and actually working ... in school in general. (TEACHER 13)*

*R: The reading habits are influenced negatively by peer pressure, by the social networks, and, maybe just the attitude of the learners.... study group, and learners forgot about study groups. (TEACHER 15)*

## ***Focus group interviews***

Learners attested to preferring the Internet as a reading platform to print reading material. They motivated their preference of reading material by saying that it afforded them with more choices, as well as explaining the reading content better. In addition, learners confirmed that using the Internet infiltrated the quality of their writing through the use of short message service codes without them even being aware thereof. One learner confirmed that s/he preferred reading books, because Internet facilities were expensive. This coincided with the claim made by a teacher, who alleged that some learners did not have access to digital media.

None of the focus group participants from group one or group two confirmed that they enjoyed reading. All learners agreed that they never bought books, motivating their answer by saying that there were more important things, such as food, that they needed to spend their money on. This response was a bit controversial because learners said that they read more on the Internet than what they read print material and to roam the Internet or social media sites, data was needed, which also had to be purchased.

## **10. Discussion of findings**

The aim of the study was to investigate the reading habits and reading attitudes of Grades 8–10 learners towards the ESL materials. It emerged from this study that the learners read English material. The majority of learners primarily engaged in the act of reading with the sole purpose to progress at school. Books Aid International (2003) in Chettri and Rout (2013:15) conducted an international survey in the UK on students and the results revealed that while UK students read for relaxation, the majority of the children from twelve developing countries revealed that they read for passing examinations.

The findings further revealed that the learners did not read outside the classroom context. This confirms that the learners did not read for pleasure to improve their reading habits. Diem and Atmanegara (2015) are of the view that reading becomes a habit if they always spend their time reading routinely. Therefore, it is clear that these learners did not possess good reading habits that would allow them to read at their own accord despite the fact that, according to Owusu-Acheaw and Larson (2014:2) good reading habits help learners to obtain meaningful and desirable knowledge. The findings also disclosed that the majority of learners indicated that they preferred to roam the Internet or log onto social media on their cell phones rather than to read books. Chettri and Kout (2013), who declared that Sri Lankan secondary school children preferred to chat and listen to the radio or viewing television rather than reading, support this finding.

In relation to the learners' attitudes toward ESL reading material, the majority of them revealed that they did not spend their time reading in the library and they rather do something else than do English reading. It could be deduced from the findings that the Grades 8-10 learners in the study had negative attitudes towards reading ESL materials.

This is an unfortunate situation since positive reading attitudes, according to Karim and Hasan (2006) lead to positive reading experiences, which also lead to higher academic performance.

The results from this study further showed that learners had preferred reading material. Data collected for this study reflected that the majority of learners preferred reading on the Internet. Johnson-Smaragdi and Johnson (2006: 521) argue that books are not the only reading material, and therefore, digital multimedia presents the reader with the alternative of plenty print text, such as e-books, online magazines and newspapers and computer based media. In addition, schools increasingly offer prescribed school text books in electronic form, called e-learning, and teachers now incorporate technology in their teaching methods. It is for this reason that Hall and Coles (2002) advise that the use of the computer, and the supportive function it can have in the promotion of reading, should be accepted and embraced as bringing a new dimension to education.

Pretorius (2002: 190) alleges that most teachers realise that reading is important, however Hugo (1999: 93) alleges that the teacher's training programmes in South Africa are not adequately developed to enable and equip the trainee teachers to use principles of language acquisition. Therefore language teaching is hampered, and ultimately the language learning process, which includes the act of reading, is compromised.

In order to improve the status of reading in South Africa, it is important that we change our thinking and attitude about reading. Learners need the interaction with as well as the motivation and support of parents, teachers, caregivers, librarians, peers and community role models to adapt a habit of reading and thus develop a positive reading attitude to interact with various types of print text.

The findings of this study established that most learners indicated that they mostly read for the purpose of academic progression. Regardless of the fact that they preferred technology-based reading platforms, compared to traditional print material, it was encouraging to note that learners still read in order to gain knowledge. The fact that learners indicated that they read, was a good starting point for them to be introduced to programmes to improve their reading habits and attitudes toward ESL reading.

## **11. Conclusions**

This study was conducted in an attempt to enhance understanding about reading habits, attitudes and preferred reading materials, with the ultimate goal to cultivate a love for reading and improve reading skills among ESL learners. It was also confirmed that the majority of learners had a negative attitude towards reading printed material. This is a cause for concern since a positive attitude toward reading is one of the strongest correlates of reading achievement. This statement is supported by Mullis,



Martin, Kennedy and Foy (2007; 139-142) who claims that learners who obtained the highest reading scores, are those learners who express positive attitudes toward reading, as well as consider themselves to be proficient readers. Based on the findings of the study, it is thus important that learners are motivated to read for pleasure since it furthers the development of reading as life-long habit.

## **12. Implications for improving learners' reading habits and attitudes towards reading**

There are a number of practical implications regarding the above findings and discussion. It is evident that urgent measures should be considered to motivate and support high school learners to improve their current reading habits and attitudes. The findings of this study showed that learners put much effort into reading for tests and examinations at the expense of reading for pleasure. Neglecting reading for pleasure might have serious negative results towards developing a good habit and having a positive attitude towards reading. This idea is supported by Davis (1995) who is of the view that the issue of tests and examinations runs contrary to the objective of creating stress-free conditions for pleasure reading.

The findings of this study suggest that teachers should emphasise extensive reading in their classrooms. Extensive reading involves learners' reading texts for enjoyment and developing general reading skills. If teachers engage learners in extensive reading, reading becomes faster; learners increase their vocabulary and motivation to read. In order to enhance a culture of reading, the study suggests that teachers should begin the extensive reading process by advising learners to read books of their own choice, start reading in their free time and take note of how much they are reading.

Teachers are advised to monitor the process of reading by asking learners to share feedback on what they have read. This could be done by requesting learners to write a summary of what they are reading. According to Bell (1998), writing a summary allows learners to assert full control, both of the grammar and vocabulary used. Learners could also be called upon to make a presentation based on what they are reading. This activity is likely to assist learners to have knowledge of the right preparation, self-independence and autonomy. These are all required traits to cultivate a lifetime reading habit.

The findings of this study also suggest that teachers should make use of multimedia sources to promote books. These include video, audio, CD ROM, film and many others. Since electronic books have gained wide-spread use as an educational tool, teachers are advised to take advantage of developments in technology and encourage learners to read on the Internet. In the above-suggested ways, it is envisaged that teachers can encourage learner motivation to read and secure their full engagement in the enjoyment the reading process provides.

## REFERENCES

- Abadzi, H. 2006. *Efficient Learning for the Poor: Insights from the Frontier of Cognitive Neuroscience*. Washington, D.C.: World Bank.
- Annamalai, S. & Muniandy, B. 2013. Reading habit and attitude among Malaysian Polytechnic students, *International Online Journal of Educational Sciences*, 5 (1): 32- 41.
- Babbie, E. 2005. *The basics of social research*. Belmont, CA: Thomson/Wadsworth
- Bharuthram, S. 2012. Making a case for the teaching of reading strategies across the curriculum in higher education. *South African Journal of Education* 32:205-214.
- Bell, T. 1998. Extensive reading: why? and how? *The Internet TESL Journal* 1V (12): Accessed on 4 April, 2017.
- Braguglia, K.H. 2005. Reading habits of business students. *Journal of College Teaching & Learning* 2 (3): 67- 72.
- Chauhan, P. & Lal, P. 2012. Impact of information technology on reading habits of college students. *International Journal of Research Review in Engineering Science and Technology* 1 (1): 101- 106.
- Chettri, K & Rout, 2013. Reading habits- An overview. *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science* 14 (6): 13- 17.
- Creswell, J.W & Plano Clark, V.L. 2007. *Designing and Conducting Mixed Method Research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage publications.
- Davis, C. 1995. Extensive reading: An expensive extravagance? *ELT Journal* 49 (4): 329- 336.
- Department of Education (DOE) 2008a Foundations for Learning Campaign: 2008-201. Government Gazette, Vol. 513, no.30880. Pretoria: South Africa.
- Diem, C.D. & Atmanegara. Y. 2015. Cultivating children's reading habit: Literacy learning enhancement in the digitization era. *International Journal of Innovative Social & Science Education Research* 3 (1 & 2): 1- 11.
- Eamin Ali Akanda, A.K.M., Gausul Hoq, K.M. & Hasan, N. 2013. Reading habits of students in Social Sciences and Arts: A case study of Rajshahi University. *Chinese Librarianship: An International Electronic Journal* 35: 60- 71.

- Elley, W.B. 1991. Acquiring literacy in a second language: the effect of book-based programmes. *Languauge Learning* 41: 375-411.
- Grabe, W. 1991. 'Current development in second language reading research', *TESOL Quarterly* 25(3) 375-406. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/3586977>
- Greenwood, J.1998. *Class readers*. Hong Kong: Oxford University Press.
- Hall, C & Coles, M. 2002. *Gendered reading: Learning from children's reading choices*. *Journal of Research in Reading* 25(1): 96-108.
- Hugo, A, J. 1999. Enhancing the study reading skills of distance education students' strategies for designing course material. Unpublished doctoral thesis, University of South Africa.
- Hugo, A.J., Le Roux, S.G., Muller, H. & Nel, N.M. 2005. *Phonological awareness and the minimising of reading problems: A South African perspective*. *Journal for language teaching*. 39 (2): 210-225.
- Johnsson –Smaragdi, U. & Jonsson, A. 2006. Book reading in leisure Time: Long term changes in young peoples' book reading habits. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research* 50(5); 519-540
- Karim, N.S. & Hassan, A. 2006. Reading habits and attitude in the Digital age: Analysis of gender and academic program differences in Malaysia. *The Electronic Library* 25 (3): 288 – 297.
- Karim, N.S.A. & Muniandy, B. 2013. Reading habit and attitudes among Malaysian Polytechnic students. *International Online Journal of Educational Sciences* 5 (3): 32- 41.
- Lerner, J. & Johns, B. 2009. *Learning disabilities and related mild disabilities: Characteristics, Teaching Strategies and New Directions*. 11<sup>th</sup> ed. Wadsworth, Cengage Learning.
- Machet, M.P.,Olen, S.I.I. & Chamberlain, A. 2001. Young people's reading in South Africa: A pilot project. Pretoria: Children's Literature Research Unit.
- Majid, S. & Tan, V. 2007. Understanding the reading habits of children in Singapore. *Journal of Educational Media and Library Sciences* 45 (2): 187- 198.
- Maree, K. 2007. First steps in research. Pretoria: Van Schaik Publishers.
- Matjila, D.S. & Pretorius, E.J. 2004. Bilingual and Biliterate? An exploratory study of Grade 8 reading skills in Setswana and English. *Per Linguam* 20: 1-21.

- MacMillan, J.H. & Schumacher, S. 2006. *Research in education. A conceptual introduction* (5<sup>th</sup> ed.). New York.
- Macmillan, J.H. & Schumacher, S. 2014. *Research in education. Evidence-Based Inquiry*. 7<sup>th</sup> ed. Essex: Pearson Education Limited.
- Mullis, I.V.S., Martin, M.O., Kennedy, A.M. & Foy, P. 2007. *PIRLS 2006 International Report: IEA's Progress in International Reading Literacy Study in primary schools in 40 countries*. Chestnut Hill, MA: TIMMS & PIRLS International Study Centre, Lunch School of Education, Boston College.
- Nel, C., Dreyer, C & Klopper, M. 2004. An analysis of the reading profiles of first-year students at Potchefstroom University: a cross-sectional study and a case study. *South African Journal for Education* 24:95-103.
- Nippold, M. A., Duthie, J.K. & Larsen, J. (2005). Literacy as a Leisure activity: Free time preferences of older children and Young adolescents. *Language, Speech & Hearing Services in Schools*. ProQuest Psychology Journal 36(2): 93-103.
- Owusu-Acheaw, M. & Larson, A. G. 2003. Reading habits among students and its effect on academic performance: A study of students of Koforidua Polytechnic. *Library Philosophy and Practice (e-journals) Paper 1130*. Available- <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/libphilprac/1130>
- Palani, K.K. 2012. Promoting reading habits and creating literate society. *Journal of Arts, Science & Commerce* 2 (1).
- Jarab, H. & Al-Sadi, A. 2015. An empirical study of reading habits and interests of Saudi University EFL learners. *International Journal of Linguistics* 7 (2): 1- 17.
- Perry, K.H. 2012. *What is literacy? A critical overview of Socio-cultural perspectives*. *Journal of Language and Literacy Education* [Online], 8(1), 50-71. Available at [http://jolle.coe.uga.edu/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/What-is-Literacy\\_KPerry.pdf](http://jolle.coe.uga.edu/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/What-is-Literacy_KPerry.pdf)
- Pretorius, E.J. 2002. *Reading ability and academic performance in South Africa. Are we fiddling while Rome is burning?* *Language Matters*, 33:169-196.
- Rasana, N.H. 2006. The reading preferences of Grade 11 ESL learners in the Eastern Cape. *Southern African Linguistic and Applied Language Studies* 24 (2): 175- 190.
- Ruddel, R.B. & Unrau, N.J. 2004. *Theoretical models and processes of reading*. 5<sup>th</sup> ed. Los Angeles: International reading association.

- Scales, A.M. & Rhee, O. 2001. Adult reading habits and patterns. *Reading Psychology* 22 (3): 175- 203.
- Schmidt, R.J., Rozendal, M. & Greenman, G. 2002. Reading instruction in the inclusion classroom: research-based practices. *Remedial and special education* 23 (3): 130-140.
- Street, B.V. 2001. *The new literacy studies*. In E. Cushman, G.R. Kintgen, B.M. Kroll, & M. Rose (Eds.), *Literacy: a critical sourcebook* (pp. 430-442). Boston: St. Martin's Press.
- Temple, O., Ogle, D., Crawford, A. & Freppon, P.2005. 2nd Ed. *All Children Read: Teaching for literacy in today's diverse classrooms*. New York: Pearson.
- Walberg, H.J. & Tsai, S.L. 1985. Correlates of Reading Achievement and Attitude: A National Assessment Study. *The Journal of Educational Research* 78(3).
- White, C. J. 2005. *Research: A practical guide*. Pretoria: Ithuthuko Investments (Publishing).
-

---

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

### FM Olifant

Tshwane University of Technology, Department of Applied Languages, Building 30 Room 30-314, Pretoria.

OlifantFM@tut.ac.za

**Mrs Tilla Olifant** is a doctoral student who has an interest in the field of the reading behaviour and attitudes of South African learners at secondary school level. She received the Gwen Knowles-Williams award for 2017 from the English Academy of Southern Africa, based on the work she submitted for her master's study. With this award she was recognised as a teacher of English, whose academic merit is worthy of note. Mrs Olifant is currently doing research on the critical reading practices of English Second Language secondary school learners. She is a lecturer at the Tshwane University of Technology, in the Department of Applied Languages. Mrs Olifant teaches English for Academic Purposes and English for Occupational Purposes to students enrolled in the Faculty of Engineering and the Built Environment.

### E Rautenbach

Tshwane University of Technology,  
Department of Applied Languages, Building 30 Room 30-334, Pretoria.

RautenbachE@tut.ac.za

**Dr Eunice Rautenbach** is a lecturer in the Department of Applied Languages at the Tshwane University of Technology. She specialises in the teaching of English for Occupational Purposes across disciplines at the University and is involved in the development of the curricula for these courses. Her fields of interest include English for Specific Purposes, Work Integrated Learning, recognition of prior learning at South Institutes of Higher Education and reading skills and behaviour of learners in South Africa. Dr Rautenbach supervises both master's and doctoral students. She has published articles in accredited academic journals and presented papers at both international and national conferences.

## **MP Cekiso**

Tshwane University of Technology, Department of Applied Languages,  
Sosh South: Building 14, Room 14-G33,  
2 College Road Block L Soshanguve, Pretoria.

CekisoMP@tut.ac.za

**Professor Mzwamadoda Cekiso** is an Associate Professor in the Department of Applied Languages at the Tshwane University of Technology. He holds a PhD in English from the University of North West. Professor Cekiso is the author of various articles in accredited academic journals and has successfully supervised both master's and doctoral students. He has presented papers at international and national conferences. His fields of interest include critical reading literacy, learners' English reading comprehension, evaluating reading strategies instruction and students' learning styles in the English classroom.