

Leisure Reading (But Not Any Kind) and Reading Comprehension Support Each Other – A Longitudinal Study Across Grades 1 and 9

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This study examines associations between leisure reading and reading skills in data of 2,525 students followed from age 7 to 16. In grades 1-3 poorer comprehension and fluency predicted less leisure reading. In later grades more frequent leisure reading, particularly of books, predicted better reading comprehension.

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to 16. In grades 1-3 poorer comprehension and fluency predicted less leisure reading. In later grades more frequent leisure reading, particularly of books, predicted better reading comprehension. Negative associations were found between digital reading and reading skills.

- There is a common belief that in addition to school-related reading activities, reading for pleasure promotes reading development.
- Those who read a lot are better readers than those who read less.
- Parents and teachers would be well advised to encourage children to become habitual readers.

What underlies the correlation between reading skills and leisure reading?

- Frequent leisure reading can support the learning of important prerequisites (such as orthographic knowledge and vocabulary) of fluency and reading comprehension.
- Frequent leisure reading can emerge as a result of developing good skills.
- The association between the amount of leisure reading and reading skills may be reciprocal.

Do genres of leisure reading produce different results?

- Fiction reading seems more strongly correlated with comprehension skills than other leisure reading genres.
- Time spent reading fragmented digital information has been found to correlate negatively with the comprehension of print reading.



The study

This study contributes to the previous literature on the role of leisure reading in reading development by applying a long-term longitudinal design, comprehensive assessment of the key measures, and a sophisticated analysis method for developmental data.

Research questions:

- *Are the development of reading skills and the amount of leisure reading of different genres associated at the between-person level? That is, do better readers also read more?*
- *Are reading skills and leisure reading of different genres mutually predictive at the within-person level? That is, does an increase in leisure reading predict increased reading fluency or better comprehension at the subsequent time point and vice versa?*

Participants were 2,525 students born in 2000 who were studied from kindergarten to grade 9.



Findings

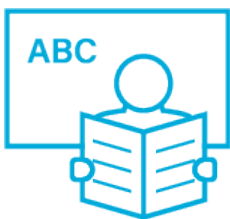
Reading fluency

- Reading fluency correlated with leisure reading, especially reading books.

- In grades 1 and 3, reading fluency positively predicted subsequent changes in leisure reading.
- In grade 7, book reading was a significant positive predictor of grade 9 changes in reading fluency, whereas grade 6 digital text reading was a significant negative predictor of grade 7 changes in reading fluency.
- Grade 6 reading fluency positively predicted magazine reading change in grade 7.
- Path estimates were quite low; therefore, results can be summarised such that in grades 6–9, fluency no longer played a major role in reading fluency development and reading activities.

Reading comprehension

- Reading comprehension correlated with leisure reading, especially reading books.
- There were reciprocal associations between reading for leisure and reading comprehension in grades 1–4.
- Reading comprehension and book reading were also reciprocally linked in grades 6–9.
- There were significantly negative predictive paths from grade 6 digital texts to grade 7 reading comprehension, as well as from reading comprehension in grade 4 to digital texts in grade 6.
- Increased leisure reading was a stronger predictor of increases in reading comprehension than the converse.



Summary

- Overall, the results suggest positive associations

between leisure reading and reading competence.

- It was shown that these associations vary as a function of time, leisure reading genre, and reading competence measure.
- There was a positive association between reading comprehension and voluntary book reading.
- Digital reading demonstrated a negative association; however, it is important to note that the questions included only short texts such as social media and messaging.
- Associations between leisure reading and reading fluency were weak.
- Slow readers and poor comprehenders read all types of leisure reading genres less than fluent readers and good comprehenders.
- The strongest positive effects were found for book reading.
- During the early grades, the predictive cross-lagged paths ran from reading fluency and comprehension to leisure reading, but not from leisure reading to reading competence.
- In the later grades, active book reading in particular was reciprocally associated with reading comprehension, but not with reading fluency.
- It therefore appears that leisure reading does not promote reading fluency; however, reading fluency can act as a constraint on leisure reading during the early school years.
- Skilled reading comprehension promoted leisure reading in grades 1–9. In later grades, an association was found to be reciprocal and the effects of leisure reading on reading comprehension were stronger than the converse.
- These findings underline the importance of leisure reading for reading comprehension development and suggest that we should pay close attention to the development of reading interest from early grades onwards.