

THE READING ACTIVITY OF YOUNG LEARNERS IN THE MIDDLE SCHOOL IN KAZAKHSTAN

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This paper examines the reading activity of young learners in the middle school in Kazakhstan. Reading activity facilitates and encourages students' engagement towards the learning process, and it is crucial in the use of "real-world interaction" (Alvermann & Hagood, 2000; Zahorik, 1996). Reading activity has a great impact on the learner's general knowledge such as vocabulary, speaking, and communicative skills (Hayes, 2000; Schatz & Krashen, 2006). Researchers have confirmed that children in the middle school stop reading for pleasure, and start to learn for grades, test scores, or teachers' requirements, which may indicate the decrease of intrinsic motivation and the increase of the extrinsic one (Gottfried, 1985; Guthrie & Davis, 2003). This may become significantly noticeable when children move to secondary school, and start to learn for certain people or peers who may motivate them to learn and/or read (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

The participants were sixth (N=810) and eighth (N=695) graders in the middle school, they completed an online questionnaire on reading activity via the eDia online platform. The instruments were adapted from the original questionnaire of the National Literacy Trust (NLT), with some modifications in the items (cf. Clark & Foster, 2005). The questionnaire was in students' native language (i.e., Kazakh or Russian); the translation from English was made twice back and forth by five language experts who were proficient in both English and Kazakh, or English and Russian, respectively. Students in both grades responded to the same questions (23 items) about reading activity.

The items' reliability in the sixth grade was $\alpha=.77$, while in the eighth grade it was $\alpha=.76$. The results showed that reading activity outside of school dropped significantly from 70% to 60% in grade 8. Gender differences, in both grades, showed that girls spent more time with reading activities than boys did.

Factor analysis revealed that factors for reading activity were statistically significant. In the eighth grade, factor loading showed good fit to the data ($\chi^2=354.03$, CFI=.95, TLI=.93, df=149, RMSEA=.05, & SRMR=.04), whereas in the sixth grade the model was decent ($\chi^2=429.89$, CFI=.91, TLI=.89, df=155, RMSEA=.05, & SRMR=.05).

Path analysis indicated that habits and attitude for reading in both grades could be a significant predictor of such variables as reading discussion and self-concept as a reader. The model fitted well to the data in the eighth grade ($\chi^2=98.67$, CFI=.94, TLI=.91, df=41, RMSEA=.05, & SRMR=.03), and was decent in the sixth grade ($\chi^2=118.95$, CFI=.91, TLI=.87, df=36, RMSEA=.06, & SRMR=.04). The results indicated that as children became older, the attitude and habit started to play a crucial role in reading activity. To sum up, the study found that less time was dedicated to reading activity in and out of school, which may cause a serious problem for young learners' literacy development and their future career goals.