

## PRIMARY SCHOOL CHILDREN'S ATTITUDE TOWARD RECREATIONAL AND ACADEMIC READING

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**Abstract:** *This article aims to investigate primary school children's attitude toward reading using The Elementary Reading Attitude Survey (McKenna & Kear, 1990). A number of 106 Romanian students from 4th grade participated in this study. The results showed a rather positive attitude towards reading, both in recreational and academic reading. The data did not indicate differences in attitude toward reading between boys and girls. 12.26% of the students showed high negative attitudes on both subscales. Only a few students with atypical profiles (very high scores in one type of reading, and very low scores in the other) were identified.*

**Key words:** *recreational reading; academic reading; attitudes; primary school*

### 1. Introduction

In primary education reading is a fundamental acquisition for acquiring the competence of Communication in Romanian Language and a basic activity for learning and studying (Bocoş, 2016). Competencies are defined as structured assemblies of knowledge, skills and attitudes developed through learning, which allow solving specific or general problems in different contexts. A competence is not fully formed if the students do not show a positive attitude towards reading, both at school and in their free time. From a psychological point of view, the attitude is a construct representing "an ensemble of personal reactions to a particular object, which the subject himself perceives as part of his personality" (Silammy, 2000, p. 27). The attitudes have an affective component, and can be located at a positive or a negative pole. If students have a favorable attitude towards reading, then the time spent on reading activities is higher. However, studies in reading have focused mainly on fluency and understanding (knowledge and skills), and less on attitude. That is why the present study focuses on this non-cognitive component of reading.

A number of factors are associated with reading attitudes in primary classes, such as fluency and comprehension of written texts, age, gender, socio-economic status, personal interests or teaching methods. Worrell, Roth & Gabelko (2006) found, for example, that in 3rd Grade, girls have a more positive attitude towards reading compared to boys. Another goal of this research is to confirm that gender influences the attitude toward reading.

Although the literature has constantly emphasized the role of recreational reading on the general knowledge development, many students show a negative attitude towards reading, with the risk of remaining with significant gaps in the vocabulary. Moreover, studies have shown that attitudes affect reading performance (Martinez, Aricak, & Jewell, 2008) which emphasized the importance to evaluate the affective dimension of reading activities. Once these values and beliefs have been identified, targeted interventions can be structured to improve the attitude towards reading. Even if it seems more difficult to be activated, the affective side of reading is a key point in training high performing readers.

### 2. Research Questions

Through this study we aim to answer the following research questions:

- What is the attitude toward reading of 4th Grade children? Is there a difference between the level of recreational and academic reading attitude?
- Is there a difference in reading attitude between boys and girls?
- Are there students with high negative or positive attitudes on both subscales of reading attitudes or with large differences between recreational and academic reading?

### 3. Research Methods

#### 3.1. Participants

106 4rd grade students from the municipality of Arad, Romania participated in this study. Of these, 62 are male and 44 are female. The subjects come from two primary schools with normal education and study the Romanian language and literature according to the national curriculum.

#### 3.2. Instruments

The attitude toward reading was measured using a public-domain instrument, The Elementary Reading Attitude Survey (ERAS) whose authors are McKenna & Kear (1990). The tool contains 20 questions that measure two aspects of reading: recreational reading (10 items) and academic reading (10 items). Recreational reading includes items related to extracurricular reading activities and the pleasure of reading in leisure time. Academic reading refers to the attitude towards reading in the school environment. Each question is followed by four scenarios, in which of a cartoon character is: very happy, a little happy, a little upset, and very upset. Students can answer each question by circling the emotional expression that best suits them. In the present study, the cartoon character was replaced with emoticons that express the emotions described above. An example of a question and answer item is the following:

*How do you feel when you read a book on a rainy Saturday?*



The answers were rated on a Likert scale, with scores between 1 and 4, the higher score indicating a more positive attitude. Each student can have three scores. The overall individual score can vary between 20 and 80 and represents the general attitude towards reading. The scores on the two subscales, the recreational and academic reading can be situated between 10 and 40.

The authors reported good psychometric qualities of the general attitude and of the two subscales, the coefficients of internal consistency ranging from .74 to .89 (McKenna & Kear, 1990). In the present study the alpha coefficients were as follows: .91 for the recreational attitude, .84 for the academic attitude and .92 for the general attitude toward reading.

The administration of the questionnaire was done in group. The experimenter gave the instructions, providing additional explanations if requested. The average time to administer the instrument was 15 minutes.

### 4. Findings

**Research question 1.** What is the attitude toward reading of 4th grade children? Is there a difference between recreational and academic attitude?

In order to determine the level of attitude towards reading, we calculated the average and standard deviation for the general scale and for the two subscales (attitude towards recreational reading and attitude towards academic reading). (Table 1).

**Table 1.** Average values of reading attitude

Variable	N	M	SD	LEVEL
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<b>General attitude</b>	106	55.84	12.61	Medium-between a little happy and a little upset
<b>Recreational reading</b>	106	27.39	7.77	Medium-between a little happy and a little upset
<b>Academic reading</b>	106	28.12	6.52	Medium-between a little happy and a little upset

The results indicate a middle-level general attitude, with a tendency towards the positive pole. The answers given by the children tend to approach *a little happy*, both in terms of the general attitude and the attitude on the two subscales. We noticed a higher average attitude towards academic reading ( $M = 28.12$ ), compared to recreational reading ( $M = 27.39$ ), but this difference was not statistically significant. Below we present the average values of each item of the scale.

**Table 2.** Average values for attitude toward Recreational reading

		M	SD
1.	How do you feel when you read a book on a rainy Saturday?	2.69	.96
2.	How do you feel when you read a book in school during free time?	2.56	1.05
3.	How do you feel about reading for fun at home?	3.03	.99
4.	How do you feel about getting a book for a present?	2.88	1.05
5.	How do you feel about spending free time reading a book?	2.75	1.13
6.	How do you feel about starting a new book?	3.19	.89
7.	How do you feel about reading during summer vacation?	2.47	1.20
8.	How do you feel about reading instead of playing?	2.00	.96
9.	How do you feel about going to a bookstore?	2.82	1.05
10.	How do you feel about reading different kinds of books?	2.95	1.04

The items with the highest average from Recreational reading subscale (Table 2), are item no. 6 ( $M = 3.19$ ) and item no. 3 ( $M = 3.03$ ) indicating a positive emotional state (a little happy) associated with starting a new book and reading at home, for pleasure. Items associated with a negative emotional state are item no. 8 ( $M = 2.00$ ) and item no. 7 ( $M = 2.47$ ), subjects declaring themselves a little upset when they must read instead of playing or when it comes to reading in the summer vacation.

**Table 3.** Average values for attitude toward Academic reading

		M	SD
11.	How do you feel when a teacher asks you questions about what you read?	2.84	1.03
12.	How do you feel about reading workbook pages and worksheets?	2.84	1.03
13.	How do you feel about reading in school?	2.85	1.06
14.	How do you feel about reading your school books?	2.64	.97
15.	How do you feel when it's time for reading in class?	3.00	.86
16.	How do you feel when you read out loud in class?	2.88	.99
17.	How do you feel about using a dictionary?	2.51	.98
18.	How do you feel about taking a reading test?	2.66	1.11
19.	How do you feel about learning from a book?	2.78	.98
20.	How do you feel about stories you read in reading class?	3.05	.94

Regarding the Academic reading (Table 3), the items with the highest average are item no. 20 ( $M = 3.05$ ) and item no. 15 ( $M = 3.00$ ), indicating a positive emotional state (a little happy) associated with reading stories from Romanian language and literature. Item no. 17 has the lowest score, ( $M = 2.51$ ), subjects declaring themselves between *a little happy and a little upset* when they have to use a dictionary.

**Research question 2:** Is there a difference in reading attitude between boys and girls?

To answer this research question we calculated the T test for two independent samples (male/ female) for both the general scale and the two subscales scores. The results did not indicate a significant difference in any of the situations, which means that in the present sample the attitude towards reading does not differ significantly between the girls and boys of the fourth class.

**Research question 3:** Are there students with high negative or positive attitudes on both subscales of reading attitudes or with large differences between recreational and academic reading?

To answer this question, we set three levels of attitude towards reading: low level ( $M - SD$ ), medium level ( $M \pm SD$ ) and high level ( $M + SD$ ) for each subscale.

**Table 4.** Levels of attitude toward recreational and academic reading

	Low level	Medium level	High level
<b>Recreational reading</b>	N=22 (20.75%)	N=59 (55.66%)	N=25 (23.58%)
<b>Academic reading</b>	N=23 (21.69%)	N=65 (61.32%)	N=18 (16.98%)

The results showed that more than half of the subjects have a medium level attitude towards both recreational and academic reading (Table 4). 20.75% of the subjects are at a low level regarding recreational reading, while 23.58% have a high attitude. For academic reading, the results are different, a higher percentage of children showing a low attitude (21.69%), compared to 16.98% who show a high attitude.

In order to identify if there are children with distinct recreational and academic attitudinal profiles, we calculated the number of children with low/high levels on both subscales (Table 5).

**Table 5.** Number of children with low and high levels of attitude towards recreational and academic reading

	Low Academic reading attitude (-)	High Academic reading attitude (+)
<b>Low Recreational reading attitude (-)</b>	13 (12.26%)	2 (1.88%)
<b>High Recreational reading attitude (+)</b>	1 (0.94%)	10 (9.43%)

The results indicate that of the 20.75% of students with low Recreational reading, 12.26% also have a low attitude towards the Academic reading, while only 1.88% have a high attitude towards it. At the opposite side, of the 23.58% of children with high Recreational reading, only 0.94% have a low attitude towards the Academic reading, while 9.43% have a high Academic reading attitude.

## 5. Discussions and conclusions

The purpose of this study was to investigate the level of attitude towards reading in fourth-grade students and to identify the proportion of children who presents big differences between the levels of attitude toward recreational and academic reading. The results indicated an average, slightly positive attitude towards reading. These results are consistent with other studies that have identified a similar pattern.

Recreational reading has a slightly lower value, compared to the academic one, with children associating the reading during the summer vacation with a negative emotional state. On the other hand, reading a new book in leisure time is associated with positive emotions, which denotes that not recreational reading itself is rejected, but rather its mandatory aspect. The children showed themselves little upset when asked to replace the game with reading, which also indicates a non-assimilation of reading with a game. It is important that recreational activities are diversified, so that students do not associate reading at leisure with giving up other enjoyable activities.

Regarding the attitude towards the academic reading, it seems that an important aspect is represented by the stories from the Romanian language and literature towards which the subjects showed positive emotions, while the use of a dictionary was perceived to be a less pleasant activity. It seems that at this age, children prefer attractive, captivating texts, with accessible and easy-to-understand language, whose reading should not be interrupted by the use of the dictionary. However, most texts contain unfamiliar words, whose misunderstanding would lead to errors in extracting the meaning of the read message. A solution in this regard could be the use of online dictionaries, which are more attractive to children.

Another important result of the study is the one related to the levels of attitude towards reading. About 20% of the subjects have a low reading attitude. Of these, 12.26% have a low attitude towards both the academic and the recreational reading. It is important to identify these cases and to conduct a more thorough assessment of the factors associated with these unfavorable attitudes, and to create remedial programs based on the results obtained. In the high school cycle, most learning is based on written texts, and a negative attitude associated with reading would contribute to less effective learning.

It is interesting that only three children from the entire sample have low attitudes for one type of reading and high attitudes for the other. These cases need to be thoroughly analyzed, through alternative methods of investigation, to reveal the reasons behind these perceptions and beliefs, such as lack of school motivation, self-confidence or family problems.

Investigating the affective component of reading is an important step in designing reading improvement programs. Attitudes are formed over time as a result of experiences. In their study, Kazelskis et al. (2005) highlighted the fluctuating side of reading attitudes, especially for 4th and 5th grade students. For the younger students, immediate, positive or negative reading experiences produce rapid fluctuations in personal reactions. Teachers, family and multidisciplinary teams should take advantage of this attitudinal flexibility in order to facilitate the emergence of new, positive experiences that will lead to positive reading perceptions.

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