



DOI: 10.15804/tner.2022.69.3.07

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The Reader and Reading Culture from the Perspective of Student Teachers

Abstract

This study aimed at discovering the characteristics of non/traditional readers that can be used to formulate a typology and identify students' attitudes towards reading for pleasure. It also deals with the social context influencing students' reading culture. The questionnaire survey was conducted on 381 students at the Faculty of Education, University of Ostrava. The results showed that students who read for more than one hour a day prefer to read books in paper form, including textbooks, over reading electronic books, multimedia texts or playing on computers and consider themselves traditional readers. Non-traditional readers use critical thinking methods to understand texts and prefer a multimedia format for texts when reading for pleasure over playing computer games, reading e-books, and reading paper-based books. The study also points to the growing importance of the evolving multimedia reading culture in the era of the 4.0 Industrial Revolution.

Keywords: *non/traditional reader, reading attitudes, reading context, reading literacy, multimedia reading culture*

Introduction

Reading culture as a social phenomenon can be studied in various contexts: from a historical and socio-cultural perspective, educational reading bibliographies, and professional or personal identities about reading. Trávníček (2020, p. 19) defines

the culture of reading as a social reality that „can enjoy prestige and influence only if a sufficient number of participants/users participate in it”.

In the advanced societies of the 21st century, we are no longer dealing with the problem of the basal reading literacy of the population, which has been achieved for the majority. There is, however, a diverse range of internal and external factors influencing reading comprehension in different age categories. Social context affects the reading of students and adults in terms of quantity, quality and other attributes. Babiaková and Kasáčová (2021) pointed out different findings about reading context, e.g., the role of the teacher as a partner in reading. Vicherková (2020) described similarities and differences in changes in the reading contexts of Czech and Ukrainian 15-year-old pupils. Manifestations of (un)traditional reading are specifically updated due to digitisation. Kaur (2019, p. 121) pointed out the influence of information technologies in education to improve educational quality: „Information and communication technology in education has facilitated student understanding, students are perhaps the readiest and exposed to external education, but they are in the best situation to absorb what comes up in the classroom”.

Changes in the Reading Context and Reading Culture

In the 21st century, more significant dynamic technological changes are reflected in educational processes, such as working with text and its variations. Traditional paper texts have been enriched with various digital and multimedia texts, applications and resources. The procedural requirements for education in a hybrid form of teaching as a combination of full-time, online and distance forms of teaching are also changing. Reading culture is also changing and dynamic in more individualised, lifelong learning processes in the context of the Industrial Revolution 4.0.

Social demands accentuate needs related to diverse reading activities and expressions. Young people would instead read shorter texts. They like to read sci-fi, fantasy, detective stories, popular science texts, and short excerpts.

Developing reading strategies as transferable skills is essential to individuals' successful application in everyday life and the labour market. Moreover, educational processes necessarily reflect the demands of 21st-century society, increasing the pressure to educate teachers by anticipating their professional competencies needed in the future. „Educators are increasingly being asked to provide students with what are often called ‘21st-century skills’ – and it’s difficult to argue with the premise behind that initiative. Who wouldn’t want our students to have such

abilities – critical thinking, collaboration, communications, and especially, problem-solving skills” (Paterson, 2021).

Traditional and Non-Traditional Readership

As part of lifelong learning, we believe reading education is a lifelong need and a right. Although the importance of oral culture, writing culture, and data transfer through the reading process is not overlooked, it is necessary to address new dimensions of reading, such as multimedia texting and communication in everyday and educational environments, from the national to the global. We propose to name this phenomenon “cosmopolitan reading”. Another feature of reading that can be used for a possible typology of readers can be what Trávníček (2020, p. 18) has identified as reading trends leading to a blurring of the boundaries between so-called „high” and „low” literature. He has documented them, stating that the „spread of e-books among Americans is significantly larger than in Western Europe. Great Britain represents a particular border area between the two cultures”.

Readership as a Manifestation of Cultural and Social Variability

We understand the individual’s integration into society as their acquaintance with fundamental social values, relationships, cultural traditions and ideas. One needs to make contact with other people and communities. We think about life’s joys and sorrows, search for things, identify people or things, compare, analyse, anticipate, evaluate and set life goals through effective communication. Reading helps people fulfil their social roles. We create a fundamental identity associated with forming self-confidence in our lifelong maturation. Our accepted life and reading patterns do not have to be constant; they change as the individual herself or himself changes in interaction with the social and reading environment.

Reading culture, as a testimony of an individual’s interest in reading and prosocial motivation as a reader, is historically anchored and, at the same time, reflects a modern social orientation. Appleyard (1990) emphasised the problem of gradual reader socialisation as an example of the acquisition, over the long term, of an ability to accept comic situations contained in literature.

During human development, readership fulfils several functions: educational, informational, diagnostic, emotional, relaxing, aesthetic, psychotherapeutic, psychological, communicative and, above all, socialising. The reader is understood as an individual reading a diverse text in a motivationally focused space-time.

PISA research defines reading literacy as the „ability to understand, think about, and use written text to achieve one’s own goals, to develop one’s own knowledge and potential, and to participate actively in society” (PISA, 2019, p. 34). Mo (2019, p. 2) characterises reading literacy as non-isolated comprehension of the text, i.e., he understands it somewhat more broadly as „understanding, using, evaluating, reflecting on and engaging with texts in order to achieve one’s goals, to develop one’s knowledge and potential, and to participate in society.” There is a further shift in the understanding of reading literacy as it is implemented by various reading concepts and viewed with regard to new aspects of diagnosis and evaluation.

New Trends in Attitudes Toward Reading and Ways of Reading

New features and influences characterise attitudes toward reading and ways of reading. Mo (2019) points to the issue of reading both printed and electronic texts, in which the reader should distinguish facts as objectively verifiable information from assumptions as subjective opinions. New online reading opportunities, approaches, and reading templates for reading assessment through new information technologies are emerging. The new challenges for reading are reader e-meetings, sharing, online comments and blogs. Digital space and navigation tools are changing, and a new manifestation of reading is developed in reading from the computer screen.

The educational practice aims to work with various sources, texts, (non)artistic, everyday, digital, and hybrid. The pressure to constantly assess information quality and analyse data from various sources, verify it, compare it, and evaluate its credibility increases the truthfulness of communications. Reading literacy is now very closely linked to the digital literacy of learners and working individuals, as was accentuated by the social and educational situation during the COVID-19 pandemic.

An unprecedented change in reading attitudes and roles can be observed in developing reading and learning strategies for individuals and different textual types and formats. Human attitudes to various communication problems play an important role in social adaptation, both in reading and distance learning, as well as in the more significant number of professional orientations in the home office environment and a connection with the absence of direct social contact during the pandemic. Hewston and Stroebe (2006, p. 285) that „attitudes help us to ‘estimate’ objects and events around us, while attitudes to the object save us energy, which we would reinvest in thinking about how to approach the object.”

Readers' attitudes reflect their experiences and knowledge as individuals, and their identification with both lived and fictional reality through the reading experience. The attitudes of individuals toward school and reading are influenced by many actors, such as teachers, family, extracurricular activities and friends. Positive attitudes to reading affect the lifelong reading. A new, multi-digital community of readers is emerging that is unrestricted by age, influenced by the digital revolution and the digital lifestyle, as well as the coexistence of traditional and electronic reading. Research by Barnet and Bedau (2002) dealing with reading attitudes and strategies has pointed to the effectiveness of argumentation in a text by separating real from fictional information, e.g., visualising flowcharts supporting information literacy. The problem of critical reading with comprehension in teaching, the relationship between reading methods and reading purposes, has been addressed by research (Sudrajat, 2018, p. 147) pointing to the educational need for knowledge about the theory of reading comprehension and the reading process.

Research Methodology

Objective, Method, and Sample

A questionnaire survey was undertaken at the Faculty of Education of the University of Ostrava from November 2020 to January 2021, aiming to identify the attributes of traditional and non-traditional readers based on self-assessments by the students of teaching themselves, considering their reading preferences and selected components of reading culture.

The research group consisted of 381 Bachelor's and Master's degree students in both forms of study who responded to the authors' call to participate in research focusing on reading culture and literacy. The selection of respondents can be considered random. The questionnaire contained 35 closed items. The items were formulated based on a previous analysis of related tools used in the international PISA and PIAAC surveys and based on long-term reflections on reading from the position of language and literature teachers. In this study, we present nine items. Their exact formulation is stated in the selected research outputs. P items were grouped into five categories labelled A Figure in a Work of Art, B Reading for Joy, C Reading for Knowledge, D Book, Film and Game, and E Reader Typology. The wording of the questions examining the categories of purpose, whether for pleasure or reading for cognition, corresponds to the formulations used in the above-mentioned educational outcomes surveys.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

The research problem, consisting of the absence of current attributes for the classification of younger readers into groups of traditional or non-traditional students, was deconstructed into the following research questions:

1. Is there a relationship between a student's self-esteem as a traditional reader and daily reading for pleasure for more than one hour?
2. Is there a relationship between the student's self-esteem as a traditional reader and the priority of working in class only with a traditional textbook?
3. Is there a relationship between the student's self-esteem as a traditional reader and the preference for reading a book for pleasure in paper text over reading a book in electronic form?
4. Is there a relationship between a student's self-esteem as a non-traditional reader and an understanding of information when reading for pleasure using critical thinking methods?
5. Is there a relationship between the student's self-esteem as a non-traditional reader and reading for knowledge favouring electronic texts?
6. Is there a relationship between a student's self-esteem as a non-traditional reader and the idea of a literary character in a book that is influenced by a character known from a computer game?
7. Is there a relationship between a student's self-esteem as a traditional reader and a preference for reading a book for pleasure over computer games?

Research hypotheses were formulated for the research questions, which we present with their verification results for economy and clarity.

Descriptive Results

The presentation of descriptive results for nine dichotomous questionnaire items is attractive with regard to the number of individuals in the sample who always belong to one of the two specified subgroups according to their subjectively-declared answers.

Only 27.82% of respondents answered yes to question B1, „Do you read more than one hour a day for pleasure?”

71.39% of respondents answered yes to Question E1, „Do you consider yourself a traditional reader?” Only 28.61% stated they did not consider themselves a traditional reader.

The result of the answer to question B4, „Do you want to work in teaching only with a traditional textbook in the paper text?” was expected today, yet quite

pronounced. Namely, only 12.60% of respondents stated that they wanted to work only with a traditional paper textbook and 87.40% of respondents stated that they did not want to work only with a traditional paper textbook.

Question E3, „Do you consider yourself a non-traditional reader (do you read differently than most readers)?” yielded the following results: 70% of respondents said „yes”, but most, 85.30% of respondents, did not consider themselves a non-traditional reader. The question aimed to express the subjective perception of the otherness of one’s reading and to stimulate reflection on the respondents’ reading activities concerning their choice of authors, genres, or forms of texting. Less than a quarter (22.57%) of respondents said critical thinking methods help them understand information when reading for pleasure. (B3).

Similarly, just a tiny proportion of students (21.52%) say a character from a computer game influenced them to create an idea of a literary character in a book they have read. (A4).

Most respondents (80.31%) prefer reading a paper textbook to electronic textbooks for pleasure. (D6)

However, when reading for knowledge, the number of respondents who prefer electronic texts doubles to 38.06%. (C4)

It was found that most respondents (71.39%) prefer reading a book for pleasure before playing a computer game. (D2)

Relational Results

Seven hypotheses were verified using Pearson’s chi-square (selected source data and the results of their statistical processing are shown in the following tables). All hypotheses were assessed at the standard significance level of 0.05.

H1 (Table 1) has been confirmed, stating that „Students who stated that they read for more than one hour a day for pleasure consider themselves traditional readers more frequently than students who stated in the questionnaire that they do not read for more than one hour a day for pleasure”.

Table 1. Observed and expected frequencies (H1)

Pearson’ chi-square = 4.435651 degree of freedom = 1 significance p= 0.035196			
Question B1	Question E1 (yes)	Question E1 (no)	Line totals
yes	84 (75.67)	22 (30.33)	106
no	188 (196.33)	87 (78.67)	275
Column totals	272	109	381

Hypothesis H2 (Table 2) has been confirmed, assuming that “Students who want to work only with a traditional paper textbook consider themselves traditional readers more frequently than students who do not want to work only with a traditional paper textbook”.

Traditional readers appreciate the personal interaction with the paper textbook.

Table 2. Observed and expected frequencies (H2)

Pearson's chi-square = 5.289551 degree of freedom = 1 significance p= 0.021454			
Question B4	Question E1 (yes)	Question E1 (no)	Line totals
yes	41 (34.27)	7 (13.73)	48
no	231 (237.73)	102 (95.27)	333
Column totals	272	109	381

Research hypothesis H3 has also been confirmed (Table 3), assuming that “Students who prefer to read a book for pleasure in paper text rather than reading a book in electronic form more likely consider themselves traditional readers than students who do not prefer to read a book for pleasure in the paper text before reading a book in electronic form”.

Table 3. Observed and expected frequencies (H3)

Pearson's chi-square = 86.083557 degree of freedom = 1 significance p= 1.72491E-20			
Question D6	Question E1 (yes)	Question E1 (no)	Line totals
yes	251 (218.46)	55 (87.54)	306
no	21 (53.54)	54 (21.46)	75
Column totals	272	109	381

H4, “Students who use critical thinking methods when reading do not consider themselves traditional readers more frequently than students who do not use critical thinking methods to comprehend information when reading for joy”, has not been confirmed (Table 4).

Table 4. Observed and expected frequencies (H4)

Pearson's chi-square = 0.717378 degree of freedom = 1 significance p= 0.397005			
Question B3	Question E3 (yes)	Question E3 (no)	Line totals
yes	10 (12.42)	81 (78.58)	91
no	42 (39.58)	248 (250.42)	290
Column totals	52	329	381

Hypothesis H5 stating that students who prefer electronic texts for reading more often consider themselves non-traditional readers than students who do not prefer electronic texts (Table 5), has not been confirmed.

Table 5. Observed and expected frequencies (H5)

Pearson's chi-square = 2.499576 degree of freedom = 1 significance p= 0.113877			
Question C4	Question E3 (yes)	Question E1 (no)	Line totals
yes	14 (19.11)	126 (120.89)	140
no	38 (32.89)	203 (208.11)	241
Column totals	52	329	381

Hypothesis H6, stating that "Students are influenced by a computer game character when creating an idea of a literary character in a book read", has not been confirmed (Table 6).

Table 6. Observed and expected frequencies (H6)

Pearson's chi-square = 0.856828 degree of freedom = 1 significance p= 0.354628			
Question A4	Question E3 (yes)	Question E3 (no)	Line totals
yes	13 (10.51)	64 (66.49)	77
no	39 (41.49)	265 (262.51)	304
Column totals	52	329	381

Hypothesis H7 (Table 7), assuming that "Students who prefer to read a book for pleasure before playing computer games consider themselves traditional readers more frequently than students who do not prefer to read a book for pleasure before playing computer games", has been confirmed.

Table 7. Observed and expected frequencies (H7)

Pearson's chi-square = 45.24608 degree of freedom = 1 significance p= 1.73768E-11			
Question D2	Question E1 (yes)	Question E1 (no)	Line totals
yes	221 (194.18)	51 (77.82)	272
no	51 (77.82)	58 (31.18)	109
Column totals	272	109	381

Discussion

We have defined the factors influencing reading literacy and classifying an individual as a traditional or non-traditional reader. Studies by Stuart and Stainthorp (2015), Sandberg and Norling (2020), and Trávníček (2020), have confirmed our findings and have shown that reading attitudes, reading culture, the level of reading and digital strategies, i.e., the comprehensive quality of reading, are influenced by the synthesis and harmonisation of external and internal factors emerging in communication and actor-oriented behaviour from the cultural, economic, environmental, and social context. Therefore, the instruction in reading strategies should be part of literacy-oriented activities at all levels of schools and their study and professional orientations.

Muhid et al. (2020) examined the metacognitive strategy (MSQ) questionnaire and the study success test (RCT) of high school students' metacognitive abilities. The most-used strategy here was selective attention; the least-used strategy was self-reflection. They have shown that it is not enough to just read the text mechanically, but it is also necessary to think about the communicated information concerning known and unknown words, contexts, and meaning. Yildirim, Cetinkaya, et al. (2020) identified the KAPS model and developed factors contributing to reading comprehension, such as the use of deep reading.

The research group consisted of many respondents from just one country, so conducting the same survey in other countries seems another necessary step to verify the criteria for dividing readers into traditional and non-traditional. It could yield hitherto undefined attributes characterising traditional and non-traditional readership.

Conclusion

Statistical analyses show that students reading for more than one hour a day, preferring to read books on paper, including textbooks, before reading e-books, multimedia texts, or playing on computers, are considered traditional readers. Non-traditional readers use critical thinking methods to understand texts and prefer multimedia formulas of reading for pleasure over playing computer games, reading e-books and reading paper-based books when reading for pleasure. Characters from computer games do not yet influence today's "digital" generation of student teachers to create ideas about literary characters they have read about in book form.

This article's contribution to the educational area of reading literacy formation can be in finding and verifying several currently-functioning attributes for classifying young readers studying at university into two groups, between traditional and non-traditional readers. Most of the interviewed readers consider themselves to be traditional readers. In addition to them, however, non-traditional readers also coexist with ideas about new forms (e) of text sources and their usefulness, as well as their active processing in teaching situations and for pleasure. Therefore, teachers (not just) of language education cultivating today's youth reading culture should take note of the reader typology and respond to it by respecting both reader types' preferences for resources. They should also benefit from the use of positive, non-traditional readings resulting from technological advances in information and communication technologies for both reader types to the benefit of their successful participation in Society 4.0, with all its requirements for intellectual capital.

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