

## READING ATTITUDES OF HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS: AN ANALYSIS FROM DIFFERENT VARIABLES

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### ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research is to determine the reading attitudes of high school ninth and twelfth grade students based on some variables. The researcher used 'general survey method' in the study. Totally 426 students from six public high schools, chosen according to random sampling method participated in the research. In order to answer the research questions in the study, "the Attitude Scale Towards Reading" was used. In accordance with the purpose of the study, percentage, mean, standard deviation, independent samples t-test, ANOVA and Tukey-HSD tests were employed in the study. For the statistical analyses SPSS 17.0 was used. According to findings of the study, it was seen that high school students had moderate level of reading attitudes. It was also understood in the study that high school students' reading attitudes differed significantly according to gender, grade level, school type, father's and mother's educational level and the financial income of the family variables.

**Key Words:** Reading, attitude, high school, gender, grade, education level, income.

### INTRODUCTION

Reading plays a very important role in our lives. It is so much a part of everyday living that one can hardly imagine a life without it. In the age of the Internet and information technologies, reading retains its importance as an essential skill for learners of any language (Alderson, 1984). Reading is amongst the most crucial determinants in developing an individual's vision that shapes his or her personality and that makes him or her become closer to other individuals. Reading makes individuals truly free and protects them from ignorance and false beliefs (Ünal, 2010). Also, skills in reading enable individuals to benefit from educational activities, and to participate fully in the social and economic activities in which they take part (N'Nambi, 2005).

Reading has been described in a variety of ways to explain the process of what happens when one reads and how one comprehends a text. However, a widely accepted explanation of reading is not found in the literature (Dubin, Eskey and Grabe, 1986). According to Allen and Bruton (1998), reading as a complex process of making meaning from a text, for variety of purposes and in a wide range of contexts. Grabe and Stoller (2002) define reading as the ability to draw meaning from the printed page and interpret the information appropriately. Reading is a psycholinguistic process in that it starts with a linguistic surface representation encoded by a writer and ends with meaning which the reader constructs (Goodman, 1995). The common characteristics of definitions relating to reading are that it is an activity that is realised through comprehension. Reading is not an activity that takes place individually but one that encompasses many events and situations (Ünal, 2010). A large number of reading specialists view reading as an interactive process (Barnett, 1988). This means that the

reader's mental processes occur at different levels and he or she engages themselves in an interaction with the print to create meaning (Carrell, Devine and Eskey, 2000).

Because reading is a complex and multifaceted activity (Demiröz, 2010) and it is a complicated skill since it requires the combination of attention, memory, perceptual processes, and comprehension processes (Kern, 1989). Thus, reading involves both comprehension and interpretation of a text by using questions formulated by the reader (Grabe, 1991) and various levels of cognitive processes are required for efficient reading process. Reading can not be regarded as a set of mechanical skills to be learned once and for all, but rather as a complex process of making meaning from a text, for variety of purposes and in a wide range of contexts (Allen and Bruton, 1998). In the reading process, readers use their background knowledge about the text's topic and structure along with their linguistic knowledge and reading strategies to achieve their purpose for reading (Peregoy and Boyle, 2001). As Goodman (1995) states reading is a psycholinguistic process in that it starts with a linguistic surface representation encoded by a writer and ends with meaning which the reader constructs; there is thus an essential interaction between language and thought in reading. In this sense, reading not only includes encoding the language or the written word, it also goes beyond the information in relation with the world (Freide and Macedo, 1998).

There is a direct correlation between reading habits of students and applications in the education system. It seems not possible to improve students' reading habits in an education system that leads students to memorise things that are taught to them. Students can improve their reading habits in a student-centred education system. In an education system like this, students not only develop their researching skills, but also they can approach events critically dealing both with himself/herself and their environment (Gömleksiz, 2004). On the other hand, reading habits are closely related with economical development as well as social development (Bircan and Tekin, 1989). Economical development as a natural process makes social change and development faster and the importance of reading can be felt very closely in developed societies (Yılmaz, 2008). Thus, in order to raise the production of information and follow up the innovations in a society, it is seen necessary to make students gain continuing reading habits (Özbay, Bağcı and Uyar, 2008). For this purpose, students should have positive attitudes towards reading in a society.

Allport (1967) defines attitude as emotional and mental readiness or a preliminary tendency based on experience, knowledge, emotion or motivation on any subject, social topic or event. An attitude is attributed to an individual and it is a tendency that arranges in an orderly manner that individual's thoughts, feelings, and behaviours in relation with a psychological object (Smith, 1968). Most of the researches show that the success in reading skills is closely correlated to the attitude towards reading (Guthrie and Wigfield, 2000; Wigfield and Asher, 2002; Morgan and Fuchs, 2007). In this regard, it has been concluded that students' attitudes towards reading are the leading factor that directly affects their reading performances (McKenna and Kear, 1990; Kush, Marley and Brookhart, 2005). While some researchers state that the positive attitudes towards reading make academic success increase, the others state that success in reading comprehension makes students develop positive attitudes towards reading (Kush and Watkins, 1996; Kush, Matley and Brookhart, 2005). However, it is known that the longer the time spent on reading the greater the probability that students' reading comprehension success is affected positively (Mazzoni, Gambrell and Korkeamaki, 1999). According to the researches (Altunay, 2000; Kılıç, 2004; Balcı, 2009) carried out in the literature, as the level in students' attitudes towards reading rises the marks they obtain from exams on reading comprehension also increase and the time devoted to reading increases as well.

Reading comprehension level of Turkish students was found to be under international standards in examinations carried out in international arenas such as the PIRLS (MEB, 2003). Because of this academic failure of Turkish students in international examinations, the Turkish Education System has been revised and the elementary and high school curricula have been renewed under the light of international educational progresses in order to develop students' academic skills such problem solving, critical thinking, effective

listening as well as reading comprehension. When the related literature is viewed in Turkey, it can be seen that there are some studies (Çakıcı, 2005; Yücel, 2005; Keleş, 2006; Kovacıoğlu, 2006; Ünal 2006; Topçu, 2007; Sallabaş, 2008; Balcı, 2009; Özbay and Uyar, 2009; İşeri, 2010; Ünal, 2010) for students' reading attitudes in elementary level of education, but it is seen that the number of studies on attitudes towards reading of students in high school level of education is very limited in the literature (Mitchell and Ley, 1996). Besides, developing positive attitudes towards reading is also crucial in terms of measuring and assessing the objectives of reading skills (Roettger, Szymczuk and Millard, 1979 as cited in Ünal, 2010). On the other hand, the determination of reading attitudes of high school students is believed to contribute to policymakers, curriculum developers and teachers in order to design better high school curriculum that will enable students to read more and get higher marks from examinations as such the university entrance examinations, known as YGS and LYS.

### **Purpose of the Research**

The purpose of this research is to determine the reading attitudes of high school ninth and twelfth grade students based on some variables. Hence, the problem statement of the research can be posed as, "What is the attitude level of high school ninth and twelfth grade students towards reading?" In order to answer this research question, the following sub-questions will be tried to be answered in the research.

1. Is there a significant difference between high school students according to gender?
2. Is there a significant difference between high school students according to grade level?
3. Is there a significant difference between high school students according to school type?
4. Is there a significant difference between high school students according to father's education level?
5. Is there a significant difference between high school students according to mother's education level?
6. Is there a significant difference between high school students according to financial income level of the family?

### **METHOD**

The researcher used 'general survey method' (Karasar, 2005), which is one of the most commonly-applied methods in the literature (McMillan and Schumacher, 2006). That method was also used to receive a variety of responses from a number of subjects participated in this study (Ekiz, 2003).

### **Participants**

The population of this study consisted of students in high schools during the 2011-2012 academic year within the borders of Nigde province. In order to detect the sampling of the study, from high schools in cosmos, 426 students from six public high schools were chosen according to random sampling method, volunteered to participate in the research (McMillan and Schumacher, 2006). Approximately 70 (%16,45) students were chosen from the schools. The subjects were assured for the anonymity and confidentiality for their responses in the study. Of the total, 237 (%55.64) of the students were female and 189 (%44.36) of the students were male and 226 (%53.06) students were in the ninth grade and 200 (%46.94) students were in the twelfth grade in the sampling group of the research.

### **Data Collection Instrument**

In order to answer the research questions in the study, "the Attitude Scale Towards Reading" (Gömlüksiz, 2004) was used in the study. The information for this scale is given below.

### **The Attitude Scale Towards Reading**

In this study, "the Attitude Scale Towards Reading", developed by Gömlüksiz (2004) was used in order to collect data to answer the research questions. The scale consists of 30 items. There are 21 positive, 9 negative attitude items in the scale. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the scale was calculated as .88. This result shows that the scale is reliable. KMO value of the scale was found as .83 and Bartlett's test result was determined as

2202.200. The higher the total score on the scale, the higher the level of attitudes towards reading of students. The conclusion reached in the scale was that the reliability level of the scale was high.

### Analysis of the Data

In accordance with the purpose of the study, percentage, mean, standard deviation, independent samples t-test, ANOVA (variance) and Tukey-HSD tests were employed in the study in order to examine the data obtained in terms of some variables (gender, grade level, school type, father's and mother's education level, and the financial income of the family). For the statistical analyses SPSS 17.0 was used.

### FINDINGS

The main question of the research was "What is the attitude level of high school ninth and twelfth grade students towards reading?" When the main points regarding the attitudes of students towards reading obtained in the research is analysed, the reading attitude levels of the students participated in the study were found as  $X = 3.09$ ;  $Std.Dev = 24.93$ . According to this finding obtained, the answers to the questions denote as "partially agree" level. In other words, the conclusion was found out is that the reading attitudes of high school students were in a moderate direction. The finding to the first sub-question of the research in relation to gender variable is given in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Reading attitudes of students in relation to gender

Gender	$\eta$	X	Std. Dev.	df	t	p
male	189	2.95	20.99			
female	237	3.22	27.66	424	-3.348	.001*

When Table 1 is analysed, it was found out that reading attitudes of high school ninth and twelfth grade students showed a significant difference [ $t_{(424)} = -3.348, p < .05$ ] according to gender variable in favour of female high school student. The finding obtained for the second sub-question of the research in relation to grade level variable is given in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Reading attitudes of students in relation to grade level

Grade	$\eta$	X	Std. Dev.	df	t	p
ninth grade	226	3.20	26.32			
twelfth grade	200	3.02	23.82	424	2.275	.023*

As looked at Table 2 above, one can see that there was a significant statistical difference [ $t_{(424)} = 2.275, p < .05$ ] between ninth and twelfth grade high school students in relation to grade level variable in favour of ninth grade students. The finding obtained for the third sub-question of the research in terms of school type variable is presented in Table 3 below.

Table 3: Reading attitudes of students in relation to school type

School Type	$\eta$	X	Std. Dev.	F	P
industrial/occupational high school	104	2.28	12.89		
anatolian high school	225	2.97	14.08	659.263	.000*
science high school	97	3.90	10.73		

When Table 3 given above is analysed, it can be seen that reading attitudes of high school students showed a significant difference [ $F_{(2-423)}= 659.263, p<.05$ ] according to school type variable amongst industrial/occupational, anatolian and science high school students. In order to determine the source of the difference amongst the groups, Tukey-HSD test was conducted. According to the result of this test conducted, a significant difference was found between industrial/occupational and anatolian and science high school students in favour of anatolian and science high school students. This result obtained in the research is for the disadvantage of industrial/occupational high school students. The finding obtained for the fourth sub-question of the research in relation to father's education level variable is shown in Table 4 below.

Table 4: Reading attitudes of students in relation to father's education level

Father's Educational Level	$\eta$	X	Std. Dev.	F	P
illiterate	-	-	-		
elementary school	84	2.03	3.86	1006.077	.000*
high school	235	3.08	11.59		
graduate school	107	4.13	9.11		

In analysing Table 4 given, it was found that reading attitudes of high school students differed statistically [ $F_{(2-423)}= 1006.077, p<.05$ ] in relation to father's educational level variable. In order to determine the source of the difference amongst the groups, Tukey-HSD test was conducted. According to the result of this test conducted, a significant difference was found amongst elementary, high school and graduate school levels in favour of graduate and high school levels of father's educational level variable in the research. This result obtained in the research is for the disadvantage of students whose father had elementary school level of education. The finding obtained for the fourth sub-question of the research in relation to mother's education level variable is shown in Table 5 below.

Table 5: Reading attitudes of students in relation to mother's education level

Mother's Educational Level	$\eta$	X	Std. Dev.	F	P
illiterate	35	1.98	3.52	562.868	.000*
elementary school	168	2.94	14.61		
high school	144	3.78	6.96		
graduate school	79	4.16	8.12		

When Table 5 given is analysed, it can be seen that reading attitudes of high school students showed a significant difference [ $F_{(2-423)}= 562.868, p<.05$ ] according to mother's education level variable. In order to determine the source of the difference amongst the groups, Tukey-HSD test was conducted. According to the result of this test conducted, a significant difference was found amongst illiterates, elementary school, high school and graduate school levels in favour of graduate and high school levels of mother's educational level variable in the research. This result obtained in the research is for the disadvantage of students whose mothers were illiterates and had elementary school level of education. The finding obtained for the last sub-question of the research in relation to family's financial income level variable is shown in Table 6 below.

Table 6: Reading attitudes of students in relation to family's financial income level

Financial Income Level	$\eta$	X	Std. Dev.	F	P
100-500 TL	-	-	-		
501-100 TL	84	2.00	4.32		
1001-1500 TL	163	3.04	12.86	542.777	.000*
1501-2000	124	3.74	11.16		
2001 + TL	55	4.15	8.20		

In analysing Table 6 given above, it was found that reading attitudes of high school students differed statistically [ $F_{(2,423)} = 542.777, p < .05$ ] in relation to family's financial income level variable. In order to determine the source of the difference amongst the groups, Tukey-HSD test was conducted. According to the result of this test conducted, a significant difference was found amongst 501-100 TL (Turkish Liras), 1001-1500 TL, 1501-2000 TL and 2001 and above TL income of family's financial income level variable in the research in favour of 2001 and above and 1501-2000 TL financial income level. This result obtained in the research is for the disadvantage of students whose family's financial income level is under 1000 TL a month.

#### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

According to the results of the research, the attitude levels of high school students towards reading were found out to be in a moderate direction. Keleş (2006), Ünal (2006) and Arıcı (2005) found out similar findings to the related finding of this research. On the other hand, reading attitudes of high school students showed a significant difference according to gender variable in favour of female students. In studies carried out by Kush and Atkins (1996), Küçük (1998), Güngördü (2006), Sallabaş (2008), Anastasiadou (2009), Balcı (2009), İşeri (2010) and Ünal (2010), it was found out that female students showed more positive attitudes towards reading than male students in the research. So, it can be said that in the light of these findings, the finding in relation to gender variable of this research is paralleled to the studies in the literature. It is considered possible that female students compared to male students showed higher responsibility for studying their lessons, thus they spend more time on reading (Sidekli and Buluç, 2006; Balcı, 2009; Ünal, 2010). Besides, it can be rooted from the cultural point of view of the society since female students are made stay at home and study their lessons, whereas male students are mostly allowed to go out and meet their friends outside, thus they read less compared to female students. However, Akyol (2005) and Suna (2006) found out no significant difference between female and male students in terms of attitudes towards reading. Although there are opposite findings on reading attitudes of students in relation to gender, it is stated a common belief that gender is not a significant determinant factor in reading attitude in the related literature.

The attitudes towards reading of ninth and twelfth grade students indicated significant difference according to grade level in favour of ninth graders. McCoy et al. (1991), Hayes (2000), İşeri (2006), Keleş (2006) and Suna (2006) found out in their studies that as the years of educational experience of students at school rise, attitudes of students towards reading follow down. Hence, it can be said that the finding in relation to grade level variable in this research is paralleled to studies in the related literature. Twelfth grade students, in other words the final graders of high school level of education, take the university entrance examinations, known as YGS and LYS in the same year. Most of the students spend their time not on reading books but on solving problems in tests in order to better practise for these examinations in their last year. Besides, most of these students spend their time in order to better study for the exams in private test preparatory courses both after school and at the weekends. Thus, the related finding in regard of grade level obtained in the research can be said to be significant from this perspective. On the other hand, it was also found out in the research that attitudes of students towards reading differed significantly in terms of school type variable in favour of

students who were being educated at anatolian and science high schools. In studies carried out by İşeri (2006), Keleş (2006), Anastasiadou (2009) and Ünal (2010), it was found out that school type and the settlement place of the school differed significantly in terms of attitudes of students towards reading. Hence, it can be said that the finding in relation to school type variable in this research is paralleled to the studies in the related literature. Both anatolian and science high schools accept their students after some examinations at elementary level of education. However, high schools such as industrial and occupational high schools do not accept their students with examinations, so whoever wants to study in these schools can enter without taking any exam. Besides, the students studying at anatolian high schools, especially the students in science high schools enter in these schools with high examination marks. Thus, they have to study and read more in order to enter in these high schools and it can be perceived possible the students studying in these schools have positive attitudes towards reading. Also, the expectations of families on students studying in these schools and their socio-economic indicators can have a positive effect on the reading attitudes of the students. On the other hand, Yavuz (2009) concluded in his study that education is assumed to be a means of achieving social evolution, common exams can be an especially important barrier to vertical social evolution for students whose parents are poorly educated.

According to results obtained in the research, it was found that attitudes of high school students towards reading differed significantly in relation to father's and mother's educational level in favour of students whose fathers and mother had high school and/or graduate level of education in the study. These results obtained in the research were for the disadvantage of students whose father and mothers were illiterates and/or had elementary school level of education. Devrimci (1993), Küçük (1998), Keleş (2006), Anastasiadou (2009), Campbell, Voelkl and Donahue (2000) and Guthrie (2001) found out in their studies that reading attitudes of students differed significantly in terms of father's and mother's educational level. However, Suna (2006) found out a significant difference between reading attitudes of students and their mother's educational level, but not their father's educational level. So, it can be said that in the light of these findings, the findings in relation to father's and mother's educational level variable of this research are paralleled to the studies in the literature. These findings can be explained from two perspectives. The first reason can be explained by Bandura's (1977) social learning theory since students observe their parents. When students have parents who are poorly educated, they will not have enough academic, emotional and social support from their parents as well as they will not see their parents while reading. The second reason can be explained with financial income level since parents who are poorly educated do jobs for low socio-economic status and they reserve less money for their children's education. However, Ünal (2010) found no significant difference between students' reading attitudes and their parents' occupations. Thus, the result obtained by Ünal (2010) does not correspond to the related finding obtained in this research.

According to the last finding of the research, the attitudes towards reading of high school students indicated significant difference according to the financial income level of family variable in favour of 2001 and above and 1501-2000 TL financial income level. This result obtained in the research is for the disadvantage of students whose family's financial income level is under 1000 TL a month. According to Coşkun (2003), one of the factors which determine one's socio-economic status is the financial income level. In this regard, as Tosunoğlu (2002) states, there is a strong correlation between reading books and the financial income level. While parents whose financial income level is high can meet their children's needs, whereas parents whose financial income level is low cannot meet their children's needs. So, this issue can cause parents not to make their children have reading habits. In researches carried out by Devrimci (1993), Keleş (2006), Campbell, Voelkl and Donahue (2000) and Guthrie (2001), it was found out that financial income level of families differed significantly in terms of attitudes of students towards reading. Hence, it can be said that the finding in relation to family's financial income level variable in this research is paralleled to the studies in the related literature. Hence, there exists a considerable body of results showing that monthly income level of the family affects students' reading attitudes levels positively in the related literature. Other research has shown the relationship between family's

income level and academic achievement while there are other results that show that this relationship is low or non-existent (Yavuz, 2009).

In conclusion, it can be recommended that future studies should be carried out in order to better understand the reasons of reading attitudes of high school students. Also, experimental studies can be carried out in order to understand whether the time spent on reading affects reading attitudes of students. A similar study can also be carried out in elementary level in comparison with high school level.

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