

# Engaging Students in the “Joy of Reading” Programme in Finland

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**Abstract** The Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture funded the Lukuinto (Joy of Reading) literacy programme which aims to increase students’ desire to read and create a range of print and digital texts. Such an aim aligns directly with the Finnish core curriculum which places a strong emphasis on multiliteracies and new literacies. This study investigated effects of the programme on students’ literacy attitudes, activities in and out of school as well as differences between boys’ and girls’ attitudes. The data for the study were collected from students ( $N = 270$ ) from third to sixth grade using electronic questionnaires during the pilot phase of the programme. Our findings showed that the effect of the programme was small and that attitudes were strongly related to three activities during lessons: silent reading, self-selected reading material and recommending books to each other. Overall, girls’ attitudes were more positive than those held by the boys. There were differences between the activities that correlated with boys’ and girls’ attitudes. In addition, according to our study, it seemed that students yearn for more time to read for pleasure.

**Keywords** Joy of Reading programme · Literacy attitudes · Libraries and schools · Multiliteracies · New literacies

## 1 Introduction

Teachers, librarians and parents are challenged to keep children motivated to read. Access to both printed and electronic texts has increased rapidly in recent years, but many other activities are competing for children’s attention and time. According to Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) research (OECD, 2001, 2010), a declining trend in the time spent by students engaged in the act of reading has been noted over recent years.

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Finnish students have been among the top readers in international comparisons since the first PISA 2000 survey (OECD, 2001). Although Finland did not perform as highly on the most recent PISA, when compared to PISA 2000, Finnish students still perform at the top in comparison with OECD countries (OECD, 2010). A strange paradox seems to exist between students' high achievement in reading and low reading motivation as shown in international testing exercises, including PISA (OECD, 2010) and Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS). Furthermore, students' levels of reading engagement were lower than their reading motivation (Mullis, Martin, Foy, & Drucker, 2012).

Concerned about students' lack of reading motivation, the Ministry of Education and Culture funded the Joy of Reading (Lukuinto) literacy programme for students, aged 6–16 years, their teachers, parents and public libraries. The programme was designed to promote frequent and regular literacy activities in school and co-operation between students, teachers, librarians and students' parents. The purpose of this study was to examine the changes related to students' literacy attitudes. We report here the results of the first year of the ongoing programme.

## 2 Theoretical Background

### 2.1 Literacies

The understanding and definitions of literacy have changed over the past few decades. Traditionally, reading has been viewed as a passive decoding process without any interaction with the text (Clarke & Silberstein, 1977). Teaching decoding has been observed to be a dominating practice in the first-grade literacy instruction (Korkeamäki & Dreher, 2011; see the instructional materials, e.g. Backman, Kolu, Lassila, & Solastie, 2014). However, decoding alone is insufficient for meaning making, prompting literacy to be redefined and viewed as a set of social practices instead of individual cognitive process (Barton & Hamilton, 2000; Green & Dixon, 1994; Street, 1995). In addition to the social nature of literacy, current trends in literacy research have included not only print text but also images (Kress, 2003) and digital texts (Marsh, 2013) due to the influences derived from increased use of technology. As a result, the New London Group (1996) has redefined literacy as “multiliteracies”. Furthermore, Leu et al. (2004, 2011) defined literacy as “new literacies” due to the emergence of new technology in literacy practices.

Consequently, the Finnish Core Curriculum has renewed and adapted the concept of literacy on many occasions. In 2004, literacy was defined using a community-oriented view of language and a broad conception of text (National Board of Education, 2004). According to this conceptualisation, texts should be connected to students' lives and experiences using diversified multimodal literacy practices, including artistic subjects, drama, narrative and play, therefore supporting

each student’s personal learning and interaction. Digital environments are to be included in addition to printed ones. The most recent Curriculum Framework introduced the term “multiliteracy” to be included in the teaching of all subjects (National Board of Education, 2014).

The Joy of Reading programme shares the views of literacy as defined in the Finnish Core Curricula, but it also integrates views from the perspective of public libraries. The aim was to create operational models by incorporating the shared expertise of teachers and librarians. There was a need to enhance the understanding of new literacy practices held by teachers, librarians and parents in order to inspire communities of learners. The programme was designed to promote frequent and regular literacy activities in and out of school and co-operation between students, teachers, librarians and students’ parents along with a wide range of local partners. Students were encouraged to engage in reading activities at home that complemented the teaching in school.

The purpose of the current study was to examine the effects of the Joy of Reading programme on students’ literacy motivation by investigating the changes in their literacy attitudes and multimodal reading habits during the pilot phase of the programme. Our research questions were the following:

- (1) How did students’ literacy attitudes change during the nine months of the pilot phase of the Joy of Reading programme?
- (2) What were the reading activities in and out of school that were related to positive attitudes?
- (3) Were there any differences between boys’ and girls’ attitudes and literacy activities?

## ***2.2 Motivation, Engagement and Reading Attitudes***

Numerous research studies have lent support to the importance of motivation in learning (e.g. Eccles & Wigfield, 1985; Gambrell, 1996; Guthrie & Humenick, 2004; Guthrie, Klauda, & Ho, 2013; Schwabe, McElvany, & Trendtel, 2014). Motivation is a complex phenomenon and can be defined from various angles. For example, Guthrie and Wigfield (2000) defined reading motivation as an individual’s goals and beliefs regarding reading. They also claimed that factors influencing reading motivation are different from those influencing motivation in other school subject areas. Sainsbury and Schagen (2004), however, found that the literature of research and theorisation tends to deal with reading motivation in the same way in all subject areas. Despite these contradictory views regarding conditions that affect motivation in reading and other subject areas, they were united in acknowledging the significant role of motivation to sustain engaged learning. Gambrell (1996) regarded motivation as an important factor in learning to read as it promotes deep student learning.

Wigfield and Guthrie (1997) documented that motivated children spent more time reading than those who were not motivated. While enjoyment of reading, as an essential form of reading motivation, does not always have a direct impact on reading performance, many researchers maintain that enjoyment is an important precondition for becoming a good reader. Children who read for pleasure show more positive reading behaviours (De Naeghel, Vankeer, Vansteenkiste, & Rosseel, 2012). Interested students may read more which seems to lead, especially at a young age, to becoming better readers than those who do not have interest in reading. Similarly, children who have developed more positive attitudes towards reading, including high levels of reading interest, are more motivated to read (Baker & Wigfield, 1999).

It seems that there are gender differences in reading interests. Most active readers are girls: girls tend to read more frequently, and they choose more diverse reading materials than boys (Brozo, Sulkunen, Shiel, Garbe, Pandian, & Valtin, 2014). According to Sulkunen (2013), girls are better and more active readers than boys and the difference between boys' and girls' reading achievement is the most notable concern in many countries. Furthermore, the gender gap in students' reading motivation and achievement has been widening further in some countries (OECD, 2001, 2010). It seems that the gap between boys' and girls' reading motivation and achievement is an enduring international challenge for educators (Durik, Vida, & Eccles, 2006; McKenna, Kear, & Ellsworth, 1995; Mullis, Martin, Foy, & Drucker, 2012).

This discussion brings our attention to the process of reading and the importance of interest and gender-based attitudes. According to Ajzen and Fishbein (2005), attitude is acquired, not inherited. It follows that adults working with children have a great opportunity to enhance students' reading motivation by developing children's interest and attitudes in reading, which is also the starting point in the Joy of Reading programme.

Reading motivation can be defined as the likelihood of engaging in reading (Gambrell, 2009, 2011). According to Baker & Wigfield, (1999), reading motivation signifies reading behaviours and attitudes. Motivated readers regularly read different kinds of print, have positive attitudes towards reading, consistently strong reading motivation and interest, read for different purposes and utilise their prior knowledge to generate new understandings. They also are willing to take part in meaningful social interaction around reading.

There are various natural opportunities for social interaction in classrooms which may support reading engagement such as listening to the teacher, discussing text with classmates or reading independently (Yair, 2000). These social occasions can enhance engagement and focus such that, as suggested by Csikszentmihalyi (1990), students gain the "flow" experience by way of total absorption in the reading process. Although the social context is decisive and can attract some reluctant readers to share their experiences, motivational, instructional and contextual supports are still required (Guthrie, Wigfield, & You 2012). The level of reading difficulty associated with a specific text is important and ideally allows readers to feel challenged but not frustrated. According to Stipek (1996), motivated students

are more likely to approach their reading tasks eagerly and to persist when they face a certain level of difficulty.

People tend to feel motivated to engage in authentic and personally relevant learning tasks. Consequently, personally meaningful activities promote engagement (cf. Deci & Ryan, 2000; Stipek, 1996). Students need connections to their prior experiences and knowledge in order to understand the purposes of the text and make it comprehensible. Meanings and new concepts are constructed based on prior knowledge (Anderson, 1994), which facilitates deep levels of reading comprehension (Pearson, Hansen, & Gordon, 1979) and has the potential to increase the amount of reading. What is more important, according to Becker (1992), is the meaningfulness in opportunities and activities, which suggests that autonomy to choose and pursue learning tasks that give value to one’s whole life may be essential, even to human health.

Indeed, choice seems to be a critical factor in the enhancement of reading motivation. Guthrie and Wigfield (2000) argued that when students are allowed to choose the books they read, their effort and understanding of the text increase. Several researchers have found that by allowing students to choose their reading material, a teacher can have an impact on students’ reading intention and motivation. In addition, teachers can promote students’ motivation by giving them personally meaningful and relevant tasks which are appropriately challenging to students and by allowing students control and autonomy over their reading activities and learning. According to self-determination theory, a classroom environment that fosters a sense of relatedness, competence, positive outcome expectancies and autonomy enhances students’ motivation (Carver & Scheier, 1998; Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Urdan and Turner, 2005). Furthermore, the role of choice was found to be an important factor in improving reading in Stewart, Paradis, Ross and Lewis’s (1996) study which investigated a literature-based developmental reading programme. Turner and Paris (1995) summarised motivational factors into six C’s—choice, challenge, control, collaboration, constructing meaning and consequences of the task. They also emphasised the power of students’ authentic choices and purposes of reading.

Even when all favourable circumstances prevail, it is likely that children’s motivation decreases when they grow older. Children often come to school with strong enthusiasm, intending to learn to read. Mazzoni, Gambrell, and Korkeamäki (1999) found that school beginners’ reading motivation increased from first grade to second grade which can be explained by learning to decode and enabling them to read instead of having mere practice activities. But in a later study, Gambrell and her colleagues (2013) showed a slight decline in reading motivation at the end of the second grade. Indeed, this sliding tendency is common as students get older (McKenna, Conradi, Lawrence, Jang, & Meyer, 2012). The declining trend is rather noticeable around the third or fourth grade (Chall & Jacobs, 2003; McKenna, Kear, & Ellsworth, 1995; Wigfield & Guthrie, 1997). Chall and Jacobs (2003) attributed this decline to the changes regarding the purpose of reading, with reading tasks becoming increasingly challenging and a tool for learning.

Individual reading opportunities are not as equally desirable and powerful for students as opportunities for shared reading experiences. Goodenow (1993) and Osterman (2000) have found that when students have a sense of belonging in the classroom, the likelihood that they would be motivated increases. Students who have been encouraged to collaborate with each other are motivated to read, and such social engagement enables them to read widely and frequently (Guthrie & Klauda, 2014; Schiefele, Schaffner, Möller, & Wigfield, 2012). However, it is likely that a favourable reading environment in school is insufficient to sustain reading in out-of-school settings. Family and community involvement can affect students' reading (Epstein, 2001; Hindin & Paratore, 2007; Merga, 2014; Turner, 1995) and may have the potential to change their attitudes towards reading (cf. Stevenson & Newman, 1986). Research has shown the positive effects that family involvement has, not only for students' learning, but also for their reading (Gonzalez-De Hass et al., 2005; Heath, 1983; Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988). This connection seems to apply also for multimodal reading (Brown et al., 2013). There is also evidence that children whose parents promote the view that reading is valuable, are motivated to read for pleasure (Baker & Scher, 2002).

It was obvious that school alone is an insufficient agent in the promotion of reading and reading motivation. Therefore, the Joy of Reading programme was designed to create learning communities for reading in which professionals from schools and public libraries work together with students' parents to promote reading motivation. The programme allowed each community to create their own practices instead of standard solutions. In the study we used the term "literacy" instead of reading, although the name of the programme refers only to reading. It is worth noting that the programme was named as Joy of Reading instead of Joy of Literacy because the Finnish language does not have a single term equivalent to the English "literacy" to include both reading and writing.

### ***2.3 The Joy of Reading Programme***

Comparison of the two PISA surveys focused on reading revealed that Finnish students were reading less for pleasure than they had been earlier (OECD, 2001, 2010). Finnish students were still performing at the top in comparison with OECD countries, but alarmingly their reading motivation and engagement rates were not at the same high level as their skills. Concerned about students' lack of reading motivation, the Ministry of Education and Culture funded the Joy of Reading (Lukuinto) literacy programme for students, aged 6–16 years, their teachers and parents as well as public libraries. As mentioned above, unfortunately the name of the programme does not quite capture its breadth of content and activities. The programme was based on the notion of multiliteracies, including the production and consumption of texts in the field of new literacies. It had its pilot phase in 2013–2014 followed by a theme year in 2014–2015. The programme recognised that schools and public libraries share the common goal of developing and sustaining children's

habit and enjoyment of literacies and learning. Consequently, combining societal resources and services should be natural and seamless to schools, libraries and parents. In addition, new forms of literacies are rapidly changing and multiplying, which demand schools and libraries to expand their vision to prepare students for the future. Schools and libraries not only have to react to changes, but also must act themselves as driving forces.

The programme was based on bottom-up planning, so the forms of promoting students’ desire to read varied from location to location. Every learning community included at least a school and a public library, and a wide range of other local partners may also be involved, including cinemas, literary art schools, local artists and basketball clubs. The libraries and other partners were expected to develop new ways to promote various school works and literacies. The communities were supported before and during the pilot phase by providing 17 in-service training sessions in which participants took part in pairs, including an envoy from both the school and the library. In these sessions, university staff members and other professionals from performing arts provided presentations, inspiration and ideas for developing practices. Guidance for pilot communities was provided by programme workers via the Internet and by community visits.

Some of the working models implemented in the Joy of Reading programme were small in scale, while others were large media projects involving a municipality as a whole, combining both traditional and new literacies. Many traditional activities were mainly concerned with written fiction, including focal points on reading diplomas, specific genre months and book worms that grew in accordance with the number of books that students have read. Some schools broadened their literacy horizons and utilised both digital and print literacies in their reading diplomas. To promote digital literacies, various activities were implemented, such as multimodal reading circles, literacy orienteering races with Quick Response Codes (QR codes) in the library and animation workshops. Some communities developed activities specifically directed at boys.

Implementation of the pilot phase of the Joy of Reading programme (January 2013–May 2014) included sampled activities listed in Table 1.

**Table 1** Activities implemented in the pilot phase of the Joy of Reading programme

Pilot school	Location	Sampled activities
Aleksanteri Kena school	Sodankylä	Book talks, poetry and literary art workshops, reading with grandparents (virtual), author visits
Haapaniemi school	Viitasaari	Literacy markets, newspaper on the wall, communal writing competition organised by students, library orienteering
Muijala school	Lohja	Literacy ateliers, reading circles, library spooks, reading diploma to pre-schoolers, reading with prefects
Myllyoja school	Oulu	From games to game stories: writing stories about games, creating miniature worlds and animations
Puolala school	Turku	Media literacy workshops with the library, book and video talks, digital stories, multimodal reading circles, blogging, class photograph of personal poems

### 3 Method

In this study, we investigated the practices implemented by the schools and public libraries in their efforts to promote students' literacy motivation during the pilot phase. We collected data for the study on two occasions using electronic questionnaires. The first questionnaire was implemented at the beginning of the pilot phase in September 2013 and the second at the end of the school year in May 2014.

#### 3.1 *Participants*

For the pilot phase of the Joy of Reading programme, 30 pilot pairs, comprising of a school and a local library, were selected to participate in the programme. The pilot programme was implemented in two waves: the first half of pilot groups joined the programme in January 2013 and the second half started in August 2013. This study targeted the August pilot group, involving students in grades three to six who ranged in age from approximately nine to 13 years old.

The targeted groups for the surveys were students in the pilot schools. These participants were 270 third- to sixth-grade students from five Autumn pilot schools. Only those students who had completed all tasks in both the first and second questionnaires were included in this analysis. There were 135 boys (50%) and 135 girls (50%). Of these, there were 50 third graders, 91 four graders, 60 fifth graders and 69 sixth graders.

#### 3.2 *Data and Settings*

The questionnaires were based on PISA and PIRLS background questionnaires (OECD, 2009; IEA, 2011). Among other things, PISA and PIRLS questionnaires were designed to measure reading attitudes. To serve our research purposes, we added questions about multiliteracies and producing multimodal texts in these questionnaires. These included questions like "How often are you allowed to use your own electronic device during the lessons?" and "How often do you post to your own blog?" Our first questionnaire was designed to measure pre-existing literacy attitudes and habits before the pilot schools started to implement the Joy of Reading programme. The first questionnaire contained 42 questions, and the second questionnaire included 37 questions which were almost identical, with the exception of some questions concerning the Joy of Reading programme. Students' responses to the first questionnaire were compared with their responses to the second questionnaire at the end of the pilot phase.

Most of the items were scored on a four-point Likert-type scale with a score of one representing "strongly disagree", two representing "rather disagree",



three representing “rather agree” and four representing “strongly agree” (e.g. statements “I enjoy reading”, “I would like to have more time to read” and “I read only if I have to”). On an activity scale, a score of one represents “never or almost never”, two represents “once or twice a month”, three represents “once or twice a week” and four represents “every day or almost every day” (e.g. statements “I read for enjoyment”, “I read comics”, “I play board games”). The design of this scale means that the higher the score is, the better is the result. Some questions were negatively worded to check response reliability, and they were recoded to reflect the proper directions of response. In addition, the questionnaires consisted of a few forced choice open questions to gain more information about students’ multiliteracy habits including students’ choices about reading material.

### 3.3 Analysis

The descriptive statistics were computed for all data. To examine changes between the two data collection points and the strength and the direction of the relationships among variables, the responses of the first questionnaire and the second questionnaire were compared. Boys’ and girls’ responses were analysed separately. The statistical methods we used included factor analysis to group the activities, analyses of variance to find out the differences between genders and grades and Spearman’s correlation analysis to examine the relations between different variables.

We created scale scores according to the factor analysis for literacy attitudes (e.g. “I enjoy reading”, “I read only to get information that I need”), activities occurring during lessons (e.g. “the reading material is selected together”, “students read silent”) and diversity of both print and digital multimodal texts (e.g. fiction books, newspapers, board games, blogs) by summing the scores of the items and then computing the means.

We analysed the responses of the open questions by using the content analysis method for qualitative studies (Schreier, 2012; Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2013). We classified these responses into categories which emerged from the data. We present our descriptive data based on frequencies in the categories.

## 4 Results

We present the results pertaining to students’ literacy attitudes, differences in attitudes by grade and gender, correlations between literacy attitudes and different literacy activities and reported frequencies of literacy activities.

The data showed that the changes in literacy attitudes during the programme were small. There was a slight increase in girls’ scores on literacy attitudes. In contrast, a slight decrease in boys’ scores on literacy attitudes was detected. It seems that many school-based activities had little effect on students’ literacy

attitudes. Instead, frequencies of students' out-of-school literacies correlated with their attitudes. In addition, the result suggests that students yearned for more time for reading to promote their participation in literacy activities.

#### 4.1 Literacy Attitudes and Desire to Read

Descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) of literacy attitudes are presented in Table 2. The scale was reliable in both the first ( $\alpha = 0.82$ ) and the second questionnaires ( $\alpha = 0.83$ ).

The mean score of the literacy attitudes scale in the first questionnaire was 3.00 and in the second questionnaire 2.90. In this sample, these scores seem to be linearly associated with grade levels. The minimum value by grades was 3.14 in the first questionnaire by third graders, and the maximum value was 2.74 in the second questionnaire by sixth graders. In the both questionnaires, girls' scores on attitudes were better than boys'. The score of girls even slightly increased from 3.21 to 3.22. In contrast, the literacy attitudes of boys worsened; the mean score of the first questionnaire was 2.80 and the second questionnaire 2.57. However, the changes were rather small.

Descriptive statistics, frequencies and percentages of responses of the pilot school students to the Likert-style question, *My desire to read has increased this year*, are presented in Table 3. At the end of the pilot phase, 67.4% of the students agreed with the statement that their desire to read had increased, which indicates that the pilot programme might have positive effects on literacy attitudes and, consequently, on students' reading behaviours. Unfortunately, there was a pronounced difference between boys' and girls' responses to this statement. More girls (74.9%) than boys (60.0%) agreed that their desire to read increased. The gender difference was more pronounced in relation to the "strongly agree" response. Far more girls (30.4%) than boys (17.8%) selected this response.

**Table 2** Means and standard deviations of the literacy attitude scale score

	N	M (first questionnaire)	SD (first questionnaire)	M (second questionnaire)	SD (second questionnaire)
Total	270	3.00	0.62	2.90	0.72
Third grade	50	3.14	0.53	3.11	0.68
Fourth grade	91	3.06	0.59	2.87	0.77
Fifth grade	60	3.06	0.57	2.93	0.600
Sixth grade	69	2.77	0.71	2.74	0.73
Girls	135	3.21	0.55	3.22	0.58
Boys	135	2.80	0.63	2.57	0.70

**Table 3** Frequency and percentage of question of desire to read

My desire to read has increased this year	Total N = 270	Percentage	Boys N = 135	Percentage	Girls N = 135	Percentage
Strongly agree	82	30.4	24	17.8	58	43.0
Rather agree	100	37.0	57	42.2	43	31.9
Rather disagree	54	20.0	31	23.0	23	17.0
Strongly disagree	34	12.6	23	17.0	11	8.1

**Table 4** Correlations of the literacy attitude scale score with frequency of activities occurring during lessons

Activity occurring during lessons	Literacy attitudes (first questionnaire)	Literacy attitudes (second questionnaire)
The reading material is selected together	0.22**	0.12*
Students read silent	0.34**	0.37**
Students read self-selected material	0.33**	0.47**
The teacher uses a computer	0.16*	0.14*
Students recommend to each other books to read	0.10	0.16*
A scale score of all the activities	0.10	0.12*

\* $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.001$

## 4.2 Activities During Lessons and Choosing Material for Reading

Descriptive statistics of “*frequency of activities occurring during lessons*” are presented in Appendix A. The scale was reliable for both the first ( $\alpha = 0.78$ ) and second questionnaires ( $\alpha = 0.81$ ).

Correlations of the literacy attitude scale score with student’s reports of activity frequency of activities during the school lessons are presented in Table 4. Only four of the correlations in the first questionnaire were statistically significant. These activities were *students read silent* ( $r = 0.34$ ), *students read self-selected material* ( $r = 0.33$ ), *the reading material is selected together* ( $r = 0.22$ ), and *teachers use a computer* ( $r = 0.16$ ). In addition, students’ literacy attitudes were correlated positively with a scale score for all the literacy activities, though the magnitude was relatively weak ( $r = 0.10$ ).

In the second questionnaire, five correlations were statistically significant. The activities that correlated most strongly with students’ literacy attitudes were *students read self-selected material* ( $r = 0.47$ ), *student read silent* ( $r = 0.37$ ) and *students recommend to each other books to read* ( $r = 0.16$ ). The scale score for all the literacy activities was again positively related to students’ literacy attitudes ( $r = 0.12$ ).

As *students read self-selected material* had the strongest correlation with literacy attitudes, we examined students' responses to a forced choice open question that required students to explain how and why they selected their reading materials in order to explore further what types of self-selected materials appealed to the students. The examples below indicated consistently the importance of autonomy in choices:

- (1) If the book interests me.
- (2) It should be funny and exciting.
- (3) A good story including exciting happenings.
- (4) If the book has a good plot.
- (5) I choose by the cover and the name.
- (6) Usually I flip the book awhile and ponder whether I would read it.
- (7) I read the back cover.
- (8) Based on pictures.
- (9) Non-fiction and history books.
- (10) I choose books about horses.
- (11) Genre.
- (12) I do not necessarily like books that contain only 100 pages.
- (13) My friends usually recommend me the books they are reading.
- (14) My mum is a heavy reader, and her book likings are like my likings. So she recommends me various books to read.
- (15) My favourite book series or a familiar author.
- (16) If I already know something about the book.
- (17) I wish that the book could escape me from this world.

According to these students, the reading materials should be personally interesting, exciting and funny (1, 2). The story, the plot and the content were also repeatedly mentioned as reasons for their choices of reading (3, 4). Many students made choices for their reading based on the text on the back cover, the pictures or by skimming the text (5, 6, 7, 8). Some responses suggest that students had certain specific reading preferences such as a favourite genre (9, 10, 11) and book length (12). Additional reasons for reading were recommendations from a friend or a family member (13, 14) and familiarity with the book or the author (15, 16). There were also some individual responses implicating that reading is a good way to relax or even escape from unpleasant experiences (17).

### ***4.3 Literacy Activities Outside of School***

Descriptive statistics of "*frequency of literacy activities outside of school*" are presented in Appendix B. In the present sample, the scale was reliable for both the first ( $\alpha = 0.89$ ) and the second questionnaires ( $\alpha = 0.86$ ). The average frequencies

of all the print-based literacy activities have decreased during the pilot period. Instead, the mean frequencies of watching and taking pictures, watching and making videos, chatting, using social media and using online encyclopaedias have increased. The activity that increased most was chatting (an increase of 17.6%). The activity that decreased most was writing fiction (a decrease of 8.3%). It seems that students’ digital literacies are multiplying at the expense of print-based literacies. It is notable that these digital literacies include not only pictorial literacies but also electronic print literacies. However, the changes in the average frequencies were rather small.

Correlations between students’ literacy attitudes and the frequency of literacy activities outside of school are presented in Table 5. In the first questionnaire, the activity that correlated most strongly with students’ literacy attitudes was reading fiction ( $r = 0.64$ ). In general, the activities related to use of technology correlated negatively with the literacy attitudes. Interestingly, playing computer or console games was the activity that correlated most negatively with students’ literacy attitudes ( $r = -0.31$ ).

**Table 5** Correlations of the literacy attitude scale score with frequency of literacy activity

Activity outside of school	Literacy attitudes (first questionnaire)	Literacy attitudes (second questionnaire)
Reading fiction	0.64**	0.75**
Reading non-fiction	0.19**	0.17**
Reading magazines	0.18**	0.33**
Reading comics	0.17**	0.24**
Writing fiction	0.28**	0.34**
Writing non-fiction	0.14*	0.15*
Watching pictures	0.07	0.11
Watching videos	-0.28**	-0.34**
Listening to audiobooks	0.21**	0.19**
Playing computer or console games	-0.31**	-0.35**
Playing internet games	-0.13*	-0.21**
Playing board games	0.28**	0.31**
Chatting	-0.26**	-0.05
Using social media	-0.29**	-0.32**
Using email	-0.22**	-0.23**
Scale score: diversity of reading print	0.37**	0.45**
Diversity of reading digital texts	-0.25**	-0.19**
Diversity of reading print and digital texts	-0.11	-0.06

\* $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.001$

**Table 6** Correlations of the literacy attitude scale score with frequency of literacy activity by boys and girls

Activity outside of school	Boys' literacy attitudes (first questionnaire)	Boys' literacy attitudes (second questionnaire)	Girls' literacy attitudes (first questionnaire)	Girls' literacy attitudes (second questionnaire)
Reading fiction	0.58**	0.69**	0.59**	0.68**
Reading non-fiction	0.23**	0.34**	0.23**	0.07
Reading magazines	0.20*	0.34**	0.18*	0.26**
Reading comics	0.36**	0.38**	0.17*	0.27**
Writing fiction	0.20*	0.25**	0.32**	0.38**
Writing non-fiction	0.15	0.29**	0.12	0.06
Watching pictures	0.07	0.24**	-0.02	-0.11
Watching videos	-0.28**	-0.16	-0.13	-0.35**
Listening to audiobooks	0.18*	0.22**	0.22**	0.15
Playing computer or console games	-0.20*	-0.17	-0.15	-0.15
Playing internet games	-0.19*	-0.17	-0.01	-0.02
Playing board games	0.31**	0.43**	0.17	0.17
Chatting	-0.17	-0.13	-0.23**	-0.02
Using social media	-0.21*	-0.33**	-0.26**	-0.24**
Using email	-0.28**	-0.24**	-0.08	-0.14
Scale score: diversity of reading print	0.40**	0.52**	0.36**	0.34**
Diversity of reading digital texts	-0.18*	-0.05	-0.15	-0.13
Diversity of reading print and digital texts	-0.03	0.04	-0.14	-0.023

\* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.001$

In the second questionnaire, the activity that correlated most strongly with students' literacy attitude was reading fiction ( $r = 0.75$ ). Once again, online activities correlated negatively with the literacy attitudes. One involved watching videos ( $r = -0.34$ ), and the others included playing computer or console games ( $r = -0.35$ ) and playing internet games ( $r = -0.21$ ). However, playing board games correlated positively with literacy attitudes ( $r = 0.31$ ).

We also investigated correlations of boys' and girls' reported frequency of literacy activities outside of school with their literacy attitudes. Table 6 presents the results.

There were differences in correlations between students' literacy attitudes and their literacy activities by gender. The activity that correlated most strongly with the literacy attitudes in the first and the second questionnaires across both gender was reading fiction (boys'  $r = 0.69$ , girls'  $r = 0.68$ ). Also reading magazines, reading comics and writing fiction correlated positively with both boys' and girls' literacy

attitudes. Reading non-fiction correlated positively with both boys’ and girls’ literacy attitudes in the first questionnaire. In the second questionnaire, girls’ literacy attitudes no longer correlated with reading non-fiction, while boys’ literacy attitudes remained strongly related to the reading of non-fiction. Interestingly, there was no longer negative correlation between literacy attitudes and playing computer or console games when boys’ and girls’ responses were analysed separately. In addition, using email correlated negatively and playing board games and watching pictures correlated positively with literacy attitudes for boys but not for girls.

#### 4.4 Reasons to Read More

In the first questionnaire, there was a multiple choice question *What would make you read more?* Students ( $N = 270$ ) were able to choose multiple alternatives. Students’ responses to the question are presented in Table 7.

Almost half (49.6%) reported that they would read more if they had more spare time. The second most supported reason was *If somebody told me about good books* (43.0%), and the third *If libraries were located nearer to my house* (38.5%). Almost as often mentioned (35.2%) was *If I knew what I like to read*. According to the students, parents (14.8%) and teachers (12.6%) would have a greater impact on students’ reading than their friends (9.3%). Almost one in five (18.9%) insisted that *Nothing* could make them read more.

In addition to reasons predefined for them in the questionnaire, 14.4% of the students mentioned several other reasons. A representative selection of their responses is presented below. Many were associated with the reasons *If somebody told me about good books* and *If I knew what I like to read*, implying that students would like to know something about their text or books in advance (responses 18, 19, 20). Some students yearned for more books of certain genre or from a specific book series (21, 22, 23). Some responses indicated that students’ hobbies take all of their spare time or interest (24, 25, 26, 27), leaving limited time for reading.

**Table 7** Students’ reasons to read more

What would make you read more?	Percentage
If I had more spare time	49.6
If books were cheaper	26.7
If libraries were located nearer to my house	38.5
If somebody told me about good books	43.0
If my friends read more	9.3
If I knew what I like to read	35.2
If the libraries had better repertories	32.6
If the teacher encouraged to read more	12.6
If my parents encouraged to read more	14.8
Some other reason, what?	14.4
Nothing	18.9

A few responses concerned about extrinsic reasons for reading (28, 29), availability of reading materials (30, 31) and a facilitative reading environment (32, 33). Some responses implied that it was not possible to read more than they already read (34, 35).

- (18) If I knew about the plot in advance.
- (19) If I knew that the book is exciting and if I knew what kind of a story it tells.
- (20) I don't know good books.
- (21) More Harry Potters.
- (22) If there were more baking books.
- (23) If more books were published in a book series that I read.
- (24) I have workouts every day so reading is not any common entertainment for me.
- (25) If there were more days in a week. My hobbies take about 5 days a week.
- (26) If had more time after my hobbies.
- (27) If I did not have a computer.
- (28) I would like my parents to tell me what is desirable to read.
- (29) If I got an award of 100 read books.
- (30) If we visited in the library more often.
- (31) If we had more books in my house.
- (32) If my brother stopped annoying me!
- (33) Silence.
- (34) Since I was a small child I have always loved reading♥♥♥♥♥♥♥♥
- (35) I already read the maximum amount.

According to students' responses, a lack of time for reading is an increasing problem not only for adults, but also for children. Many kinds of activities and hobbies besides school work are competing for students' attention and time. In addition, a large number of students hoped to know about texts and books before reading to get into written worlds. Also physical environments may make them read either more or less, depending on facilities. Nevertheless, the reasons for reading are various and, in general, they suggest that students hold positive attitudes for reading. There is still potential to assist students to read more despite the competitive time demands of varying school and non-school engagements.

#### ***4.5 Visiting the Library***

We were also interested in the role of libraries in enhancing students' literacy motivation. Table 8 shows the correlations between students' literacy attitudes and their reported frequencies of library visits. In the first questionnaire, a strong correlation was found between literacy attitudes and visiting the library with parents ( $r = 0.34$ ). Interestingly, there was no correlation between the literacy attitudes and visiting the library with the class.



**Table 8** Frequency of visiting the library

With whom do you visit the library?	First questionnaire			Second questionnaire		
	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls
With my parents	0.34**	0.33**	0.23**	0.32**	0.37**	0.17*
Alone	0.15*	0.10	0.09	0.24**	0.14	0.13
With my friends	0.17**	0.04	0.13	0.23**	0.03	0.12
With my class	0.08	0.08	0.13	0.06	0.14	0.06
With a relative or another familiar adult	0.26**	0.20**	0.15	0.25**	0.35**	0.10

\* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.001$

In the second questionnaire, the correlations were quite similar. Again, the correlation between literacy attitudes and visiting the library with parents remained strong ( $r = 0.32$ ). Visiting the library with other adults was strongly related to boys' literacy attitudes, while no significant correlation was found with girls'. In addition, correlations between students' literacy attitudes and visiting the library alone and with friends strengthened during the pilot phase. This suggests that independence may be an important area of research for understanding children's reading behaviours outside of school.

## 5 Discussion

A shared goal in the Joy of Reading programme for teachers, librarians and parents was to increase students' motivation to engage in reading and to increase students' enjoyment of various literacy activities. The purpose of this study was to examine the effect of reading activities during the pilot phase of the programme. We were interested in changes in students' literacy attitudes and what activities in and out of school were related to positive literacy attitudes. Furthermore, we investigated whether there were any differences between boys and girls relating to their literacy attitudes and the type of reading activities they engaged in during the pilot programme.

Our main finding from this exploratory investigation is that while students' literacy attitudes remained fairly stable during the pilot phase of the programme, students' desire to read also remained strong; almost 70% of all the respondents indicated that their desire to read has increased during the pilot phase. It is worth noting that students answered the second questionnaire when the programme was just past its midpoint. Therefore, the results can be considered as suggestive because changes take time and further time in the programme may have further extended the positive outcomes recorded.

Our second finding was that the literacy attitudes were strongly related to three activities during lessons: silent reading, self-selected reading material and recommending books to each other. The finding is aligned with theories and studies which highlight the importance of students' choice and collaboration to students'

motivation and engagement (e.g. Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000; Ivey & Johnston, 2013; Turner and Paris, 1995). Students who are allowed to choose their reading materials are more motivated to read. With choices, students have authority over decisions concerning their own reading. In this way, reading becomes more personally meaningful. In addition, the reading activities that support students' cognitive engagement are likely to be motivating (Yair, 2000).

In addition, our findings confirm earlier research by Hutchison, Woodward & Colwell (2016) that students have many kinds of literacies that they engage in out-of-school settings. It is likely that these literacies within informal learning environments may affect students' literacy attitudes more than those experienced in the school context. Building on existing out-of-school literacies can be a meaningful way for teachers and parents to enhance students' positive reading identities.

With the help of our third question, we aimed to find out whether there were any differences between the girls' and boys' literacy attitudes. Our findings show that the girls' attitudes were more positive than boys', which has been a perpetual finding in literacy research (e.g. Brozo et al., 2014; Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000). Consistent with the finding by Lau (2014), girls' literacy attitudes were fairly stable during the pilot programme, whereas boys' literacy attitudes decreased slightly. In addition, there were several measurable differences in the consumption and production frequencies between boys and girls, such as reading non-fiction, which was positively correlated with boys' literacy attitudes but not girls'. Another notable gender difference was that, contrary to girls', boys' literacy attitudes correlated with the frequency of visiting library with parents and other familiar adults. This may imply that boys need more interaction to get motivated to read.

Interestingly, the frequency of playing digital games was negatively correlated with students' literacy attitudes. However, there was no significant correlation when boys' and girls' responses were analysed separately. Likewise, playing board games was not correlated with girls' literacy attitudes. Instead, there was a rather strong correlation between boys' attitudes and playing board games. Hence, it seems that although boys' attitudes were not as positive as girls', liking digital games does not prevent boys liking reading.

These findings suggest that children's personal interest is important and may be gender-dependent. The importance of personal interest was demonstrated again in students' responses to the question of how they choose reading materials. These responses also exposed something about students' concepts about literacies: the concepts were still very narrow, counting in mainly alphabetic print literacy, read in fiction books.

While this study shows possible relations between students' literacy attitudes and frequencies of some in-school and out-of-school literacy activities, its limitations include an unstandardised programme of short duration conducted with a rather small sample group. Van Steensel, McElvany, Kurvers, & Herppich, (2011) implemented a meta-analysis of family literacy programmes and found that the overall effects of the programmes are small. Accordingly, the effects of this programme seem to be rather small but did offer some initial insights into how reading

motivation can be promoted. It should be noted that the programme was ongoing and our results were based on the programme’s first year of activities only.

A strength of this programme was its bottom-up approach, which allowed the practices and attempts to promote students’ literacy attitudes and engagement to be initiated by schools and their local community partners. In this sense, the practices and focal interest on literacy motivation varied from school to school. In addition, the nature of motivation and literacy attitudes are multidimensional, and our findings might have been different if we had examined the attitudes using different dimensions such as challenge, curiosity, involvement and importance (see Wigfield, 1997). Also, the lengthy nature of the questionnaires may have affected respondents’ capacity to maintain concentration, especially for the younger students.

A follow-up study is necessary to examine the stability of the changes reported here. In fact, such a study has already commenced. Furthermore, teachers’ and librarians’ views need to be configured into the story that the data have to tell. While the current study was descriptive and exploratory in nature, the findings provided an empirical foundation for developing and testing research hypotheses about reading motivation and activities that promote its development using additional qualitative and quantitative data that we are currently collecting from the programme.

## 6 Conclusions

It seems that the more students are allowed to read silently in their lessons, the better their literacy attitudes. Many students responded that they would like to have more time to read during the schooldays. Fundamentally, dealing with time management is dealing with management of values. It is about how much we appreciate certain factors or activities in our lives and what content areas teachers choose to emphasise in school.

The lack of time does not only affect the amount of reading but also the quality of choices related to the reading materials. Students reported that even if they have time for independent reading they would rather choose easy and short texts to read as this would enable them to stop whenever needed for other classroom activities of higher importance. In response, teachers should explain why literacies are important for school work and generally for future life. More importantly, teacher should create facilitative conditions, including time set aside for reading, enabling students to become completely immersed in reading, hence striving for the ultimate state of flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990), which, in turn, may promote real attitudinal changes towards reading for enjoyment.

Students need to share their literacy experiences and recommend texts and other materials to each other, which help students who find it difficult to make a choice about what to read. Teachers view shared literacy experiences as beneficial as they provide opportunities for students to share relevant background knowledge in order

to engage in reading. Even the act of selecting a text is a preparatory stage towards such engagement.

In order to encourage students to read more, we need to show them entry points to reading materials, for example through recommendations, book talks, sharing and other social literacy activities. These are important ways that schools and public libraries share and utilise each other's expertise to promote reading and reading engagement; the public and school librarians have knowledge about materials, and the teachers are acquainted with many kinds of pedagogical methods. Indeed, librarians and teachers should collaborate to enable students make full use of these professionals' potential in opening up the world of fact and fiction.

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