

School times and reading Tiempos escolares y lectura

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Received:
23/08/2016

Accepted:
02/10/2016

ISSN: 1885-446 X
ISSNe: 2254-9099

Keywords:
Reading Habits; Reading Motivation; Leisure Time; Recreational Activities; Academic Achievement; Secondary Education; Youth.

Palabras clave:
Hábito lector; motivación lectora; hábitos de ocio; tiempo libre; rendimiento académico; Educación Secundaria; jóvenes.

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Abstract

The aim of this work is to study the presence of reading as a leisure activity of young Spanish students, participating in Upper (not-compulsory) Secondary Education. The relationship between the frequency of leisure reading and the sociodemographic variables of the sample and its implications on academic context (performance, study time and experience classes) was analysed. One thousand seven hundred and sixty-four Spanish students participated through a questionnaire about school time and leisure time. Results indicated that reading as a leisure activity is not widespread among these youngsters. Reader profile: A girl who is studying at high school reads 1 or 2 times a week and spends 75 minutes each time. Students who spend more time reading have better grades, but do not spend more time studying. The frequency of leisure reading is linked to a more critical view of the educational system because students who read more, perceive that more time is spent on traditional methodologies and less on hands-on approaches that enhance their autonomy and initiative.

Resumen

El objetivo de este trabajo es estudiar la presencia de la lectura como actividad de ocio de la juventud española que cursa Educación Secundaria Postobligatoria (ESPO). Se analiza la relación existente entre la frecuencia de lectura durante el ocio y algunas de las variables sociodemográficas de la muestra, así como sus implicaciones en el contexto académico (rendimiento, tiempo de estudio y vivencia de las clases). Participaron 1.764 estudiantes españoles de ESPO a través de un cuestionario elaborado *ad hoc* sobre tiempos escolares y de ocio. Los resultados indican que la lectura como actividad de ocio no está extendida entre la juventud. El perfil lector es el de una chica que cursa estudios de Bachillerato, que lee una o dos veces por semana y que dedica 75 minutos cada vez. Los/las jóvenes que dedican más tiempo a la lectura tienen mejores calificaciones, aunque no dedican más tiempo a estudiar. La frecuencia de lectura durante el ocio se asocia con una visión más crítica del sistema educativo, ya que el alumnado que más lee percibe que se dedica más tiempo a metodologías tradicionales y menos a propuestas participativas que favorecen su autonomía e iniciativa.

Fraguela-Vale, R., Pose-Porto, H., & Varela-Garrote, L. (2016). School times and reading. *Ocnos*, 15 (2), 67-76. doi: 10.18239/ocnos_2016.15.2.1099

Introduction

Leisure activities have a significant impact on our life and on our context of life. Sowing the seeds for it in the early years and keeping it all through adolescence would be advisable, as this is when people's personal growth and development is taking shape. The relational level is also essential in the early ages: family and friends are vital references that set patterns, forms, customs and also convey values (Martín & Muñoz, 2009; Yubero & Larrañaga, 2010). These relationships are to appear in the next few years, when personal autonomy arises and the freedom to choose -for example- between the different offers that we can enjoy in our free time is exercised. In short, promoting the joy of reading is an essential activity that is far more than just instrumental or mechanical (Caride & Pose, 2015).

The acquisition of reading habits is the consequence of multiple factors, including the establishment of preferences and reading promotion processes. Different environments are responsible for this habit: teachers from all levels and areas of the educational system, families, public reading policies, libraries -public and school libraries-, playrooms, book stores, etc. The school, the family and the friends play an especially important role in taking up this habit. The school is important because children spend many hours there, but it also has a great potential to generate contexts (activities, spaces and times) that promote reading both directly and indirectly. The family is another habit-generating agent. On the basis of adult models, children and youngsters assimilate habits that tend to remain and shape their personality and life model (Moreno, 2001, 2002; Pereira, 2015; Travancas, 2014). Friends are another relevant socialisation axis during childhood and adolescence. In this last stage, the peer group appears to have a great impact on the taking-up and settling of lifestyles. As far as the reading habit is concerned, the peer group appears to have a major impact when choosing reading topics, because young readers project

their interests therein through conversations (Latorre, 2007; Merga, 2014).

Different studies on the reading habits of Spanish population analysing this reality from different approaches report heterogeneous and -sometimes- contradictory results. According to the Centre for Sociological Research (CIS, 2014), 35% of the Spanish population over 14 "hardly ever" or "never" reads, and the main reason given (42%) is that "they do not like it, they are not interested in it". 35.7% read "sometimes" (grouped into the categories "once or twice a week", "once a month" or "once every term") and the remaining 29.3% read "every day or almost every day". These low reading rates are in contrast with the data provided by the Spanish Federation of Publishers (2013), showing that the digital form has recently increased the percentage of frequent readers and that the reading habit is becoming more heterogeneous (e-books, webs, blogs, etc.). Being aware of the fact that society is changing quickly due to technological advances and that adolescents are one of the major mediators of such changes (Puksand, 2014), they have not been sufficiently asked about the format they use to read.

According to the latest research carried out by the National Institute of Statistics of Spain on cultural habits and practices in Spain (INE, 2015), reading is the most popular practice among Spanish people (62.2%), although, in this case, the reference criterion is undemanding, as it considers those people who have read one book at least in the last year as "readers". Within that category, the most active group is that between 15 and 25 years old. This report also underlines that the higher the level of education of respondents is, the more significantly the annual reading rate is increased. Such an heterogeneous reality requires appropriate contextualisation, identifying the sociodemographic variables that are more related to the reading habit:

- One of these variables is related to the family environment. Aspects such as the family's attitudes and habits towards

reading (Flores, 2009; Yubero & Larrañaga, 2010; Zadeh, Farnia & Ungerleider, 2010), its level of education, the household's cultural capital (Chiu & Chow, 2010) and the academic expectations parents have of their children (Castro *et al.*, 2015), have a direct, positive impact on the development of the reading habit. The household's economic status does not seem to be a determining factor, as "part of the positive impact of the social status is related to the educational practices performed by upper classes, who promote reading, but should lower classes also perform them, their children's performance is also improved" (Martinez & Córdoba, 2012, p.173).

- Other relevant variables are the reader's gender and age. The annual rates obtained in the research carried out by the National Institute of Statistics (INE, in its Spanish acronym) in people over 14 (INE, 2015) show that women read more (66.5%) than men (57.6%), as well as the age group between 15 and 24 compared to other age groups. This trend has also been identified in earlier stages, during Primary Education -between 6 and 12 years- (Yubero & Larrañaga, 2010), early adolescence -between 12 and 16 years- (Inglés, Díaz-Herrero, García-Fernández & Ruiz-Esteban, 2011; Muñoz & Hernández, 2011) and "A" Levels (Pindado, 2004). Little and adolescent girls have higher reading grades than their respective classmates in all educational stages.

The reading habit has certain implications, most of which are positive in terms of personal development. One of the most important lines of work analyses the link that exists between reading and academic performance. The positive link between reading (as a leisure activity, not as school work) and academic performance is especially noteworthy in Primary Education (Dezcallar, Clariana, Cladellas, Badia & Gotzens, 2014; Flores, 2009). The positive link between reading for leisure purposes and academic performance is widely documented in Compulsory Secondary

education, as well as other skills acquired by youngsters who associate this habit to greater social engagement and personal development (Flores, 2011; Gambrell, 2015; Howard, 2011; Hughes-Hassell & Rodge, 2007; Owusu-Acheaw & Larson, 2014; Wolters, Denton, York & Francis, 2014).

This study falls within this framework, materialised in the following objectives:

- Studying reading as a leisure activity of Spanish youngsters who are studying Post-compulsory Secondary Education (hereinafter, ESPO).
- Analysing the link that exists between reading frequency during leisure time and sociodemographic variables.
- Determining whether reading frequency is linked to the academic context (school performance, time devoted to study, the way youngsters live their school day, etc.).

Method

This study includes partial results from recent research on educational and social times of ESPO students. A methodological process of a quantitative nature has been followed within the framework of a network coordinated project, carried out by six research groups from different Spanish universities.

Participants

A simple random sampling was carried out among a population of general regime ESPO students of "A" Levels, vocational training and Initial Professional Training Programmes (PCPI, in its Spanish acronym) from public and private schools in Spain to select the participants in this study. They were then proportionally distributed in strata depending on the region (Autonomous Community), type of study, type of school -public or private-, gender and year. A total of 1,764 students participated in this study (50.2% were girls and 49.8% were boys; 2.5% were under 16 years, 88.7% were between 16 and 20 years and 8.8% were over 20); distributed in "A" Levels (63.5%),

Vocational Training (27.9%) and PCPI (8.7%); from state (76.7%) and public (23.3%) schools. Concurrence was high, the representativeness of the sample was guaranteed with a margin of error of 2.3% and a confidence level of 95%.

Instrument

An *ad hoc* questionnaire on school and leisure times was prepared. The results of the following variables, belonging to the identification data blocks of the educational centre, description of the students, life at the educational centre and free time of the questionnaire, are shown:

- Personal information of the students: gender and age.
- Type of centre: state or public school.
- Type of studies: "A" Levels, Vocational Training and Initial Professional Training Programmes.
- Level of education of the parents: whether the parents have higher, secondary, primary education qualifications or none. The father's and the mother's information are supplied separately.
- Professional status of the parents: whether the students' parents are self-employed, employed, unemployed or have any other professional status. The father's and the mother's information are supplied separately.
- Importance of reading as a leisure activity: the students had to select the three most important activities from a list of 49 leisure activities. These activities were grouped into 9 categories: television and radio, digital leisure, sport and physical activity, tourism and hiking, cultural activities, parties/celebrations, games (video games not included), associativism and volunteering, and other activities. One of the options of the "cultural activities" category explicitly refers to reading: "reading books I like (tales, novels, etc.)", and is one of the major analysis references of this study. Should they not chose a cultural activity from those three, they were directly asked

to choose one important cultural activity in their leisure time.

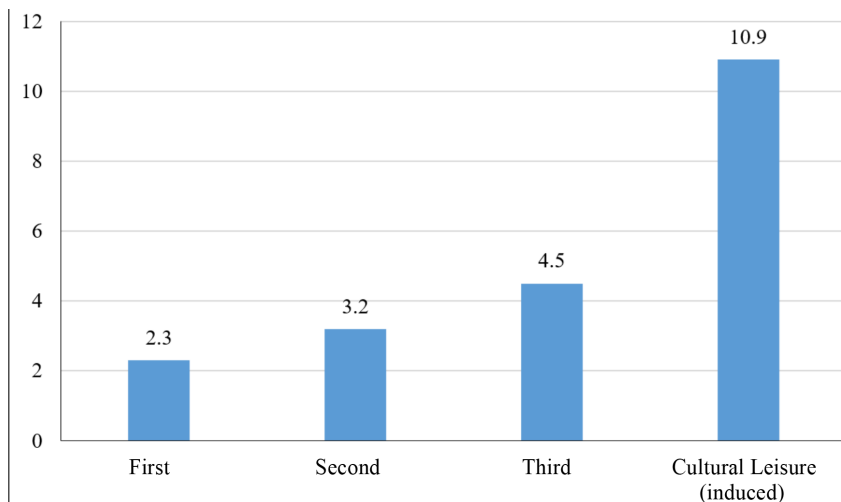
- How often reading is a leisure activity: a variable was created for those students who never chose reading as a leisure activity and were rated 0 (never read). Those students who chose "reading books I like (tales, novels, etc.)" had to state how often they read according to the following parameters: "only on holidays", "only 1-2 days a month", "reading days between Monday and Friday" and "in the weekends". The answers were grouped into the following categories: 0 (never read), 1 (occasional reading, a combination of the categories "only on holidays" and "only 1-2 days a month"), 2 (1-2 days a week), 3 (3-4 days a week), 4 (5-6 days a week) a 5 (7 days a week).
- Reading duration: the youngsters had to state the number of minutes devoted to reading every time they perform such activity.
- School performance: the youngsters reported the grade they get more frequently in their assessments of Post-compulsory Secondary Education (after leaving Compulsory Secondary Education), in a 0-10 scale.
- Perception of the classes: the students reported on their opportunities to perform different activities in their classes (working in groups, using other spaces, working at their normal speed, etc.) using a Likert scale from 1 (none) to 5 (many)

In order to guarantee the validity of the questionnaire's content, it was subject to a peer review process carried out by fourteen experts who collaborated. The instrument was adjusted through the results of a pilot application to 140 individuals distributed in eight autonomous communities.

Procedure

The participants were informed of the purposes of the research and they participated voluntarily.

Figure 1 Most important leisure activity: reading books I like (%)



The fieldwork was carried out in the last quarter of 2014 and the first quarter of 2015. The questionnaire was implemented in educational centres during school hours.

Data analysis

Descriptive and inferential statistical analyses were performed. Given the nominal and ordinal category of most of the variables analysed, non-parametric tests were used to compare two independent samples (U of Mann-Whitney) among k independent tests (Kruskal Wallis) and Spearman bivariate correlations. A comparison of the averages through the Anova test with a scale variable was occasionally used too. The computer software used was SPSS 20.0.

Results and discussion

The main results of the study are shown below, grouped in topics defined by the objectives thereof.

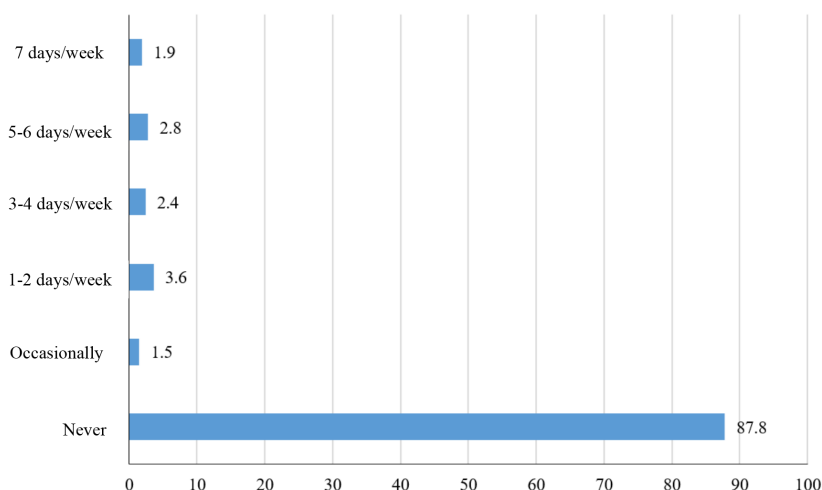
Reading as a leisure activity for youngsters

According to figure 1, the portion of youngsters who chose reading as a leisure activity is small. Only 2.3% picks it as their

first choice (ranking 14 out of the 49 activities proposed) and this trend continues as far as their second and third leisure activity is concerned. The percentage increases to 10.9% only when they are forced to pick one cultural leisure activity, and reading ranks third out of the eight leisure activities categorised as cultural.

As far as reading frequency is concerned, figure 2 shows that a very high percentage of youngsters never read. In addition, there are few people who read every week. This data reinforce the contributions of other studies (Federación de Gremio de Editores de España, 2013; Martín & Muñoz, 2009) that report on this reality in Spain. The reasons for this reading deficit among youngsters are various, but some authors (Ballester e Ibarra, 2013) revise nowadays' approaches of Literature Didactics critically regarding the training of readers, questioning different platitudes, practices and strategies that exist in the attachment to this subject. According to Sanjuán (2011), the promotion of literature among children and adolescents has marginalised an essential aspect: the emotional component and the individual experience of reading. Similarly, other studies cite the

Figure 2 Reading frequencies of Spanish youngsters studying ESPO (%)



presence of electronic leisure in the lives of adolescents as an increasingly important reason when it comes to modifying or minimizing reading habits (Pindado, 2004).

As might be expected, the importance given by students to reading as a leisure activity is associated to the reading frequency (Spearman coefficient: $\rho = .16, p < .05$). The more importance they give, the more days they devote to reading. The same applies to the reading duration, every time they perform this activity. Table 2 shows the results of the Anova test.

Table 1. Importance of reading as a leisure activity and minutes devoted to it

	N	Average (min)	DT	If	F
First	35	95.57	53.25		
Second	52	87.62	53.94		
Third	64	75.31	41.82	3	4,401**
"Induced" Cultural Leisure	73	63.84	46.58		

** $p < .01$

Equally expected is the result showing that the groups that give more importance to reading devote more time to reading every time they do it. Tuckey's *post hoc* analysis shows that there are only significant differences among those who pick reading as their first leisure activity and those who pick it as their fourth leisure activity, with more than half an hour of difference.

Reading frequencies and sociodemographic variables

As far as the gender of those youngsters who read frequently is concerned, the results of the U test of Mann-Whitney show that there is a quite significant difference between boys and girls in this variable ($Z = -3.26, p < .001$): girls read more often than boys. As shown in figure 3, girls have a lower score in the category "never read in his/her leisure time"

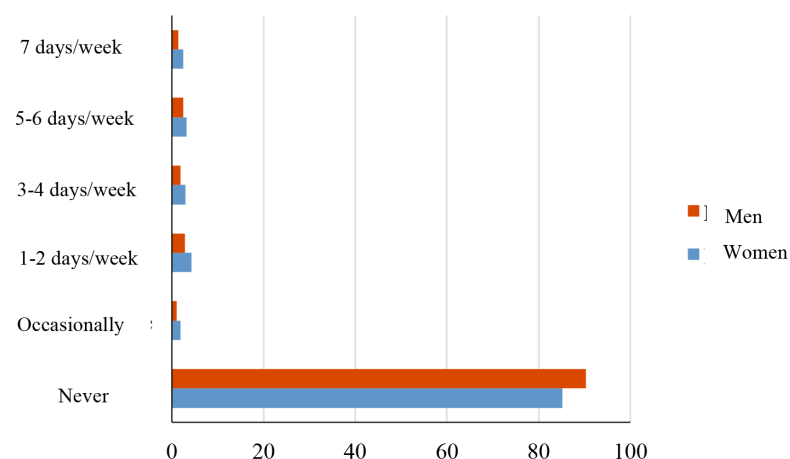
(85.2% women and 90.3% of men) and have higher scores in the other categories. This fact confirms the trend identified in the bibliography, whereby women have a higher reading rate (Yubero & Larrañaga, 2010).

No significant correlation between the age of the youngsters and their reading frequency is detected (Spearman coefficient: $\rho = -.03, p > .05$).

As far as the level of education of parents is concerned, our data show that only the level of education of the fathers -not that of the mothers- is linked to the youngsters' reading frequency. The correlation between these variables is studied using the Spearman coefficient. The results show that the higher the level of education of the fathers is, the more their children read in their leisure time ($\rho = .06, p < .05$); but, in our study, this correlation does not exist regarding the level of the mothers ($\rho = .04, p > .05$).

The influence of the parents' level of education in their children's reading habits is well documented both in Primary Education (Martín & Muñoz, 2009) and in Compulsory Secondary Education (Cheung & Andersen, 2003; Ferreira, Pose & De Valenzuela 2015), whether through mimesis or conscious educational induction by the adults living with their children. This is not accidental. Nevertheless, in ESPO, it would seem that this

Figure 3 Time devoted to reading. Comparison between boys and girls (%)



relation becomes weaker and there are other factors that are more relevant to settle (or maintain) reading habits during leisure time. For example, those friends with similar interests and a positive influence seem to be a key aspect to taking up reading (Mansor, Rasul, Rauf & Koh, 2013).

Reading frequency during leisure time and academic context

This heading analyses the existence of relations between reading during leisure time and the type of educational centre, the studies pursued by the youngsters, their academic performance, their study time and the valuation of the activities performed in the classroom by the youngsters under study. As stated by Caride and Pose (2015, p. 66), “if any educational practice implies the conception of man and the world, reading is deeply engaged in its achievements”. It is undeniable that promotion activities performed at school and educational centres as a whole play an essential role in reading as a source of education and mainly pleasure (Goikoetxea & Martínez, 2015). This fact finally emerges in higher educational levels (Caride & Pose, 2015). Regarding Secondary Education, Yubero and Larrañaga rightly state that “it is essential not to focus only on the interest of students in reading from an instrumental point of view. The institutions also have to promote voluntary reading behaviours, which mainly generate reading habits” (2015, p. 719).

As far as the type of educational centres is concerned, there are no significant differences in terms of reading frequency of youngsters, regardless of whether they attend public or state schools (U of Mann-Whitney: $Z = -1.60$, $p > .05$). Nevertheless, there are differences depending on the type of studies (Kruskal-Wallis: $\chi^2 = 17.95$, $p < .001$). Reading is not a leisure activity to 85.7% of “A” Levels students, 91.8% and 95% in the case Vocational Training and PCPI students, respectively.

There is a very significant positive correlation between reading frequency during leisure

time and the most recurrent grade in ESPO ($\rho = .068$, $p < .01$). The more young people read, the better grades they get in their studies; this fact is evidenced by other similar studies (Molina, 2006). Nevertheless, this relation is not maintained regarding the amount of time devoted to studying ($\rho = .042$, $p > .05$). When the youngsters completed the surveys, they were informed that “extracurricular” activities and the amount of time devoted to studying or performing academic activities were excluded from item block “Free Time”. It is therefore understandable that reading frequency during leisure time is not correlated to study time, although it involves reading. Young people differentiate both activities without difficulties.

The relation between reading frequency and academic grades seems to have a component that is more cultural than utilitarian, because those youngsters who read more in their leisure time do not devote more time to studying than those who do. Nevertheless, it would seem that, in any case, enjoying reading as a leisure activity is a powerful indicator of academic performance, both individually and nationwide (Lee, 2014; Smith & Say, 2013).

Regarding the valuation of the activities performed in class, a list with the items under study is shown in table 3. As can be seen, there is a significant, direct correlation between reading frequency and the perception that teachers devote more time to explain things in class. The more students read, the less they perceive that they can reflect and discuss on the syllabus in class, organise autonomously, enhance their creativity or comment on future training and/or professional guidance.

No correlation is found between reading frequency and collaborative work, using spaces and resources of the school, respecting the individual working speed, shifting the activities’ intensity, reflecting and discussing on topical issues and problems that affect young people.

Table 2. Reading time and how I live my school day

How often can I perform the following activities in class	ρ
Working in groups and collaboratively	.00
Using other spaces and resources of the school	.04
Working at my normal speed	-.01
Alternating activities of different intensity	-.00
Listening to the teacher's explanations	.07**
Reflecting on and discussing the syllabus	-.04*
Reflecting on and discussing topical issues	-.04
Organising myself	-.06**
Discussing issues that affect us	-.04
Enhancing creativity	-.07**
Commenting on training and/or educational guidance	-.05*

*p < .05; **p < .01

The results obtained do not allow establishing causal relations between the amount of time devoted to reading and to the other variables analysed. We do not intend to contend that reading has a direct impact on the other variables, because interactions are multiple and can even be bidirectional in some cases.

Conclusions

As in the case of the preceding heading, conclusions are clustered around the three objectives of this study.

Reading as a leisure activity is not widespread among young people pursuing Post-compulsory Secondary Education studies in Spain. Barely 10% select it among their three main leisure activities. The overall profile of the reader from this group is a girl studying "A" Levels, who reads once or twice a week and devotes an average of 75.31 minutes every time she does so.

As far as demographic variables are concerned, gender is a relevant factor when choosing reading as a leisure activity, since girls read more often than boys. The level of education of the fathers -not that of the mothers- is positively related to the amount of time their children devote to reading. Age does not seem to be a relevant factor in this group, although it should be noted that the sample is determined in a limited age interval, reducing the

opportunities to find differences in terms of this variable.

In last place, concerning the relation between leisure time and academic contexts, those youngsters who devote more time to reading get better grades. The relation between reading frequency and academic grades seems to have a component that is more cultural than utilitarian, because those youngsters who read more in their leisure time do not devote more time to studying than those who do. In general terms, reading frequency during leisure time may be linked to a more critical view of the educational systems, because those students who read more believe that they devote more time to traditional methods (listening to the teachers' explanations) and less time to more participative approaches that promote their autonomy and initiative.

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