

Children and Reading

Literature Review

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Executive Summary

The purpose of this literature review is to summarise current knowledge on Australian children's leisure reading.

Children are defined as aged from 5 to 14 years of age and 'leisure reading' is understood as the reading children choose to engage in, as opposed to assigned school reading. In addition, reading is understood broadly to include digital and multimodal forms in addition to traditional paper based forms.

The literature review discusses current research into children's leisure reading. The review identifies gaps in existing knowledge and areas for possible further research.

Children's leisure reading habits

The majority of Australian children continue to enjoy leisure reading although there is some evidence that this has declined since 2003. Children have a variety of reasons for engaging in leisure reading, these include relaxation, to relieve boredom, to help them succeed at school, to escape and for fun. Research from both Australia and the US highlights the social importance of leisure reading, highlighting its role in maintaining social relations and in identity formation.

Both Australian and international research has identified a number of key factors that seem to be associated with both children's enjoyment of reading and the frequency with which children engage in leisure reading. These include the children's age, gender, and socioeconomic, family and cultural background. It is important to note that there is no simple causal relationship between any of these factors and children's leisure reading habits, rather they interact with each other in complex ways.

Research suggests the following associations:

- Reading for pleasure as an activity declines rapidly in frequency and intensity as children approach adolescence.
- Female children are more likely than male children to enjoy reading, to read for pleasure and to read every day.
- Children from high socioeconomic backgrounds are more likely to read for pleasure.
- Indigenous Australian children are less likely to read for pleasure than non-Indigenous children.
- Children with positive attitudes to reading tend to engage more frequently in leisure reading.
- Children who live in families with a substantial number of books are more likely to enjoy reading for leisure.
- Children who are encouraged to read by their families and who have parents who themselves engage in leisure reading are more likely to read for pleasure.
- Competing time demands are influencing children's ability to engage in leisure reading.
- Children with average or above average reading abilities are more likely to engage in leisure reading.

Children's leisure reading preferences

This literature review also found that there is little recent research on Australian children's leisure reading preferences and no research on Australian children's online and digital reading preferences. Recent US research has found that the number of children who had read an ebook had almost doubled since 2010 and that the growth in popularity of ebooks appeared to be having a positive impact on children's leisure reading. The literature review also found no recent research on when and where Australian children are reading. International research has suggested that reading at home after school and during school holidays were popular times for children's leisure reading.

There is also no recent Australian research identifying the sources of children's leisure reading. However, Australian and international research has found that children gain the majority of their advice about what to read from peers and family. Children's leisure reading preferences are also influenced by children's access to reading materials.

Libraries are a key source of leisure reading material. Around a quarter of Australia children get their reading material from bookstores.

Children's leisure activities

Australian research suggests that children's leisure activities have changed with greater access to computers and electronic information technology. Recent research shows a shift away from watching TV, videos and DVDs in favour of accessing the internet. There is some Australian research that suggests that children who watch TV and play computer games are less likely to read for pleasure.

1 Introduction

There is a vibrant culture of reading and writing in Australia. When surveyed in the *More than Bums on Seats: Australian participation in the Arts* research (2010)¹, 84% of Australian adults were actively engaged as readers and literature demonstrated the highest audience engagement of all art forms².

Libraries are a vital part of every Australian community and with over 70 writers festivals throughout Australia, there is clear evidence of the importance of literature to the fabric of Australian culture.

However, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) data suggest a statistically significant fall in children's reading for pleasure in the six year period from 2006 to 2012³.

The purpose of this literature review is to consolidate and evaluate current data and knowledge on Australian children's leisure reading.

2 Background

The Australia Council for the Arts identifies that the arts, including literature, are a vital part of Australia's culture and all Australians experience the arts through education and in their communities. The vision is that audiences are life long, and are engaged with art in new and inspiring ways.

The Literature section of the Council provides financial support to individuals and organisations involved in the creation, publication and promotion of Australian writing as well as in sustaining a vibrant literary culture in Australia. It also advocates for and responds to the growing opportunities, needs and challenges for the sector.

The Literature Sector Plan 2013-2014 describes the changing readership trends, in particular the impacts of digital technology and the rapid decrease in paper book retailers the increase ebook's market share. The sector plan acknowledges the need to ensure that all Australians to continue to have access to high quality Australian writing as they shift from paper based to digital technologies. This literature review into Australian children's leisure reading was commissioned to inform and provide accurate perspectives for future responses and the strategic investment of resources.

¹ Australia Council for the Arts, "More than Bums on Seats: Australian participation in the Arts" (2010)

² Excluding listening to recorded music

³ Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), "Children's Participation in Sport and Leisure Time Activities, 2003-2012," (2012).

3 Research Objectives

The main aim of this literature review is to review current knowledge about Australian children's leisure reading activities and to highlight any gaps in existing knowledge.

The specific objectives are to compile and summarise current research on:

- Australian children's reading habits.
- The role of reading within the broader context of Australian children's leisure activities.
- Barriers to and opportunities for Australian children to engage in reading.
- Key 'influencers' on Australian children's reading behaviour.
- The significance of technology for Australian children's reading behaviour.
- Emerging issues and trends in research on Australian children's reading.

3.1 Children

For the purpose of this literature review children are defined as aged 5 to 14 years of age, in line with the ABS definition of children in its report *Children's Participation in Cultural and Leisure Activities*⁴.

3.2 Leisure reading

For the purpose of this literature review, children's leisure reading is defined as the reading children choose to engage in, as opposed to reading that is assigned to them⁵. Leisure reading is characterised by personal choice and excludes the reading of school texts and other assigned school reading⁶. Leisure reading in the research literature is also referred to as 'voluntary reading', 'spare time reading', 'recreational reading', 'reading for fun', 'reading for pleasure', 'personal reading', 'reading outside of school' and 'self selected reading'⁷.

We recognise the need for a more comprehensive definition of 'reading' in this literature review, which takes into account the emergence of texts which combine different modes – including verbal text, sound, graphics and video⁸ (e.g. audio books). We also wish to avoid the limitations of understanding leisure reading as a singular concept which privileges a limited range of traditional paper based informational and fictional texts⁹ since, in the 21st century, reading for pleasure can include the reading of ebooks, graphic novels, audiobooks, websites and blogs¹⁰.

⁴ ABS, "Children's Participation in Sport and Leisure Time Activities, 2003-2012," (2012).

⁵ Mellon, "Leisure Reading Choices of Rural Teens," (1990); Hughes-Hassell and Rodge, "The Leisure Reading Habits of Urban Adolescents," (2007); Hughes-Hassell, "Urban Teenagers Talk About Leisure Reading," (2008).

⁶ Hughes-Hassell and Rodge, "The Leisure Reading Habits of Urban Adolescents," (2007).

⁷ Hughes-Hassell, "Urban Teenagers Talk About Leisure Reading," (2008); Hughes-Hassell and Rodge, "The Leisure Reading Habits of Urban Adolescents," (2007); Taylor, "Teenage Personal Reading: Habits, Attitudes and Beliefs " (2011).

⁸ Moyer, "What Does It Really Mean to 'Read' a Text?," (2011).

⁹ Love and Hamston, "Teenage Boys' Leisure Reading Dispositions: Juggling Male Youth Culture and Family Cultural Capital," (2003); Ryan, "Young People Choose: Adolescents' Text Pleasures," (2005).

¹⁰ Sly, "Curiouser and Curiouser: A Reading Wonderland " (2012).

4 How do Australian children feel about reading?

Key Points

- Research suggests that the majority of Australian children enjoy reading for leisure.
- Similar trends have been seen in international research.

Both Australian and international research suggests that children enjoy reading. The 2012 *Growing up in Australia: the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC)* report¹¹ found that the majority of the children in the study enjoyed reading – 87 per cent of children reported that they either enjoyed or ‘sometimes’ enjoyed reading at home. Similar results were obtained from the *Progress in International Literacy Study (PIRLS)* report¹², which found that 30% of Australian children ‘liked’ reading, 52% ‘somewhat liked’ reading and 19% ‘did not like’ reading¹³. The Australian percentages were similar to international averages.

Table 1: Feelings about reading among Australian and international children¹⁴

	Liked Reading %	Somewhat Liked Reading %	Did not Like Reading %
Australia	30	52	19
International average	28	57	15

Findings from the 2012 UK National Literacy Trust (NLT) Annual Survey¹⁵ of 35,000 British children suggest that children’s enjoyment of reading has remained fairly stable in the UK since 2005.

¹¹ "Growing up in Australia: The Longitudinal Study of Australian Children: 2010-2011 Annual Report," (2012). See appendix for further details on this study.

¹² Thomson et al., "Monitoring Australian Year 4 Students Achievement Internationally: TIMSS and PIRLS 2011," (2012). See appendix for further details on this study.

¹³ In the analysis and interpretation of the 2011 Australian Year 4 PIRLS data students’ attitudes to reading were assessed through a ‘Students Like Reading Scale’. The ‘Students Like Reading Scale’ combined responses to eight questions on students’ participation and enjoyment of reading, including two questions that explicitly relate to ‘outside of school reading’, If the percentages for ‘liked reading’ and ‘somewhat liked reading’ categories are combined, the results are quite similar to those reported using the LSAC data. The PIRLS student contextual questionnaires also collected additional information about students’ outside of school reading, including how much time each student spent reading on a typical day and the frequency with which the students engaged in different types of reading. Unfortunately, there does not appear to be any analysis or reporting of this data.

¹⁴ Thomson et al., "Monitoring Australian Year 4 Students Achievement Internationally: TIMSS and PIRLS 2011," (2012).

¹⁵ Clark, "Children's and Young People's Reading Today: Findings from the 2012 National Literacy Trust's Annual Survey," (2013). The children who participated in this study were aged 8 to 16 years.

5 How frequently do Australian children read for pleasure?

Key points

- The number of Australian children reading for pleasure has declined since 2003.
 - Around 30% of Australian children read daily, in line with UK research.
 - Around 15% of children report reading for more than an hour a day on average, similar to the OECD average.
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ABS data¹⁶ shows that the proportion of children reading for leisure has declined from 2003 (75%) to 2012 (71%). The 2011 Australian PISA¹⁷ research found a lower percentage of children who reported that they read for ‘enjoyment’, approximately two thirds (63%). This difference may be explained by the narrow age range in the PISA study¹⁸, or be a consequence of methodological differences between the two studies¹⁹.

International data collected through PISA shows that the percentage of students who reported that they read ‘for enjoyment’ has dropped around five percentage points in the majority of the OECD countries, including in Australia, between 2000 and 2009²⁰.

The 2012 LSAC²¹ report suggests that 30% of children read daily²², in line with UK research²³. However, the UK research does suggest a decline in the proportion of children who read daily for pleasure from 2005 (38%) to 2012 (28%).

The 2011 Australian PISA data²⁴ found that almost half (49%) of the children in the study indicated that they read for up to an hour per day and 15% indicated that they read for more than an hour per day²⁵. The Australian results were similar to the OECD averages.

Some care needs to be taken in concluding that Australian children’s leisure reading is in decline. The narrowness of the age range of children studied in the recent Australian context—10 to 11 years (LSAC) and 8 to 10 years (PIRLS), supplemented with data from PISA on 15 year olds—means that it is very difficult to draw conclusions about children’s

¹⁶ ABS, "Children's Participation in Sport and Leisure Time Activities, 2003-2012," (2012).

¹⁷ Thomson et al., "Challenges for Australian Education: Results from PISA 2009: The PISA 2009 Assessment of Students' Reading, Mathematical and Scientific Literacy," (2011). See appendix for details on this study.

¹⁸ There is consistent research evidence that children enjoy reading less as they get older, see Section 6.1 'Age'.

¹⁹ The ABS data on children’s participation in leisure activities is collected from an adult member of the household on behalf of the children in the household and so relies on adult recall and conceptualisation of what constitutes a child’s ‘leisure reading’. The PISA research relies on children’s own assessment of their reading practices and understanding of what constitutes ‘reading for enjoyment’.

²⁰ OECD, "PISA in Focus," (2011).

²¹ "Growing up in Australia: The Longitudinal Study of Australian Children: 2010-2011 Annual Report," (2012).

²² This percentage is based on the proportion of children who read on the day they completed the diary entry.

²³ Clark, "Children's and Young People's Reading Today: Findings from the 2012 National Literacy Trust's Annual Survey," (2013).

²⁴ Thomson et al., "Challenges for Australian Education: Results from PISA 2009: The PISA 2009 Assessment of Students' Reading, Mathematical and Scientific Literacy," (2011).

²⁵ It is important to note that the PISA results are not directly comparable to those obtained through LSAC since they are not a measure of the percentage of children in the study who read daily.

reading habits across the age range 5 to 14 years. This is particularly the case, given that research suggests that reading enjoyment, importance and frequency declines with age²⁶.

In addition, the ABS data on children's participation in leisure activities is collected from an adult member of the household on behalf of the children in the household and so depends on adult memory and what they think counts as children's leisure 'reading'. As various authors²⁷ have suggested, there is a danger in research that 'reading' may be conceptualised too narrowly as the reading of paper based literary texts²⁸.

Similarly, the conclusion drawn from the PISA results that there has been a decline in children's enjoyment of reading across OECD countries also must be examined in relation to this narrow idea of reading. Of the 11 statements used in the research to assess students' enjoyment of reading, five explicitly mention 'books' and one 'bookstores', which may result in the participants answering only in relation to the reading of printed books.

The only research that both defines children's reading broadly to include a range of digital media and reports a decline in children's reading is the 2012 British research conducted by NLT²⁹ which concludes that children's out of school reading has fallen across many formats since 2005³⁰. Additionally, the study also shows that the proportion of children who read daily has fallen from 2011 to 2012, from 31% to 28%.

The most recent Scholastic report³¹ from the United States, which includes questions about ebooks but not about other digital formats, found that the percentage of children who have read an ebook has doubled since 2010. This is supported by the UK NLT findings³².

Therefore, although Australian and international research suggests a general decline in children's leisure reading, it is possible that the decline has occurred more strongly or even exclusively, in the reading of traditional paper based literary texts. Research is only beginning to capture children's use of many of the newer forms of technology based reading formats and to consider alternate ways of conceptualising 'reading'.

²⁶ Scholastic, "2010 Kids & Family Reading Report: Turning the Page in the Digital Age," (2010); Clark, Osborne, and Akerman, "Young People's Self-Perceptions as Readers: An Investigation Including Family, Peer and School Influences" (2008); Clark and Douglas, "Young People's Reading and Writing an in-Depth Study Focusing on Enjoyment, Behaviour, Attitudes and Attainment," (2011); Scholastic, "Kids & Family Reading Report," (2013).

²⁷ e.g. Power, "Reading the Mismatch: Differing Perceptions of Boys' Reading Practices," (2001); Love and Hamston, "Teenage Boys' Leisure Reading Dispositions: Juggling Male Youth Culture and Family Cultural Capital," (2003); Smith and Day, "Keys to Reading among Middle School Children," (2013); Ryan, "Young People Choose: Adolescents' Text Pleasures," (2005).

²⁸ For example, research by Moje et al in the US that found that much students' reading was overlooked because they were not reading literary texts such as novels, short stories, and poetry, but rather were reading materials such as web sites, music lyrics, e-mails, letters, and magazines. Similarly, the 2010 *Kids & Family Reading Report: Turning the Page in the Digital Age* found that 39% of children and 47% of parents surveyed did not think looking for information online, looking at posts on social network sites or texting friends counted as reading. Australian research by Love and Hamston found in their study of teenage male children leisure reading that both the male children and their parents failed to recognise that the male children' use of electronic technologies for pleasure is a form of reading.

²⁹ Clark, "Children's and Young People's Reading Today: Findings from the 2012 National Literacy Trust's Annual Survey," (2013).

³⁰ The only exception was the percentage of children reading text messages which increased from 61% in 2005 to 68% in 2012.

³¹ Scholastic, "Kids & Family Reading Report," (2013).

³² Clark, "Children's and Young People's Reading Today: Findings from the 2012 National Literacy Trust's Annual Survey," (2013).

6 Who is reading?

Research has identified a number of important differences in children's reading habits, in relation to their age, gender, socioeconomic position and Indigenous identity.

All of these variables interact with each other and have varying degrees of influence.

6.1 Age

Key Points

- Children are less likely to read for pleasure as they get older.
- The peak reading age is between 9 and 11 years old.

There is consistent research evidence that children enjoy reading less as they become older³³. According to Johnsson-Smaragdi and Jönsson³⁴, the age between 9 and 12 is usually described as the 'book devouring age', after which interest in reading tends to decrease. ABS statistics have confirmed this trend in the Australian context with the highest percentage of children who read for pleasure coming from the 9 to 11 age group. A comparison of ABS statistics from 2003 to 2012 also show that there has been less decline in leisure reading in this age group, while the highest decline has occurred amongst the 12 to 14 year old age group.

Table 2: Percentage of Australian children who read for pleasure³⁵

Age	2003 %	2006 %	2009 %	2012 %
5–8	75	75	72	71
9–11	79	77	78	77
12–14	71	72	67	66

These findings are consistent with international research:

- The most recent US *Kids & Family Reading Report*³⁶ shows a steady decline in regular leisure reading from the youngest to the oldest children. Almost half of the children aged 6 to 8 years read books for fun most days of the week, compared to 39% of 9 to 11 year olds and 28% of children aged 12 to 14 years.

³³ Clark, Osborne, and Akerman, "Young People's Self-Perceptions as Readers: An Investigation Including Family, Peer and School Influences" (2008); Clark and Douglas, "Young People's Reading and Writing an in-Depth Study Focusing on Enjoyment, Behaviour, Attitudes and Attainment," (2011).

³⁴ Johnsson-Smaragdi and Jönsson, "Book Reading in Leisure Time: Long-Term Changes in Young Peoples' Book Reading Habits," (2006).

³⁵ ABS "4901.0 - Children's Participation in Cultural and Leisure Activities, Australia, Apr 2012" (2012)

³⁶ Scholastic, "Kids & Family Reading Report," (2013).

- The UK National Literacy Trust³⁷ found a similar trend with 64% of 8 to 11 year olds saying that they enjoy reading very much/quite a lot, compared to 46% of 11 to 14 year olds. In addition, the younger age group read more frequently, with 38% saying that they read daily outside of school, compared with 25% of 11 to 14 year olds.

6.2 Gender

Key Points

In general female Australian children are more likely than male children to:

- enjoy reading
- read for pleasure (although the gap has been growing smaller since 2003) and,
- read every day.

These findings are broadly consistent with international research.

Research across Australia, the USA and the UK has consistently found that males, particularly as they move into their teenage years, are less likely than females to engage in leisure reading³⁸.

Both ABS and LSAC data reveal these gender differences in children's leisure reading habits. The 2012 LSAC Report found that a greater proportion of female children (92%) than male children (83%) said that they enjoyed reading at home. ABS data collected from 2003 to 2012 has consistently shown that a greater percentage of female children read for pleasure than do male children³⁹. In addition, the ABS analysis of the LSAC time diary data found that in addition to enjoying reading more, females also read more often than males⁴⁰.

Table 3: Trends in reading for pleasure among 5-14 year olds by gender⁴¹

	2003 %	2006 %	2009 %	2012 %
Females	82	80	80	77
Males	68	69	65	65

In their analysis of the 2011 PIRLS data, Thomson and colleagues⁴² similarly found that more female students than male students indicated that they liked reading (36% compared

³⁷ Clark, "Children's and Young People's Reading Today: Findings from the 2012 National Literacy Trust's Annual Survey," (2013).

³⁸ Love and Hamston, "Teenage Boys' Leisure Reading Dispositions: Juggling Male Youth Culture and Family Cultural Capital," (2003).

³⁹ ABS "4901.0 - Children's Participation in Cultural and Leisure Activities, Australia, Apr 2012" (2012)

⁴⁰ This conclusion is based on whether the children reported that they had read on the diary day.

⁴¹ ABS, '4901.0 - Children's Participation in Cultural and Leisure Activities, Australia, Apr 2012' (2012).

to 23%), and more male students indicated that they did not like reading (25% of males, compared to 13% of females)⁴³.

The 2011 Australian PISA research⁴⁴ found more female Australian students reporting that they read for enjoyment every day⁴⁵ (73 %) compared to male students (53%). Across all OECD countries (except for Korea), there was a statistically significant gender difference reported, with more female than male students indicating that they read for enjoyment.

The most recent report from the UK National Literacy Trust⁴⁶ found that more female (27%) than male children (19%) say that they enjoy reading very much, and nearly twice as many male (16%) as female children (9%) say that they do not enjoy reading at all. Female children also reported reading more frequently, with 33% saying that they read outside of school every day, compared to 24% of male children.

The most recent US *Kids & Family Reading Report*⁴⁷ similarly shows that more female children say that they enjoy reading books than male children, 66% compared to 51%. It also found that female children read more frequently, 36% said that they read books 5 to 7 days per week, compared to 32% of male children. Both the UK and the US research have found that the gender gap narrowed over time. Australian research⁴⁸ has also shown a small reduction the gap from 2009 to 2012 (2 percentage points).

Smith and Day's⁴⁹ recent survey of middle school children⁵⁰ in rural North Carolina not only found that female children read more than male children and enjoyed reading more than male children, they also found that male children would read less than female children even if they had more time, that male children bought books less frequently than female children and that parents purchased books less often for male children than female children.

The 2006 Australian 'Boys, books, blokes and bytes' pilot project⁵¹, set up to explore whether it was possible to change male children's attitudes to reading, found that male children's engagement with reading decreased with age—year 9 students were more likely to find reading boring/more boring than fun (59%) than year 5/6 students (22%) and less likely to find reading fun (10%) compared to year 5/6 students (51%).

Hamston and Love⁵² studied 91 committed and 75 reluctant Australian male teenage readers from educated middle class families. Their research found that many male children, who said that they did not enjoy reading and rarely read for leisure, were actively involved

⁴² Thomson et al., "Monitoring Australian Year 4 Students Achievement Internationally: TIMSS and PIRLS 2011," (2012).

⁴³ If the percentages for 'liked reading' and 'somewhat liked reading' categories are combined, the PIRLS findings are similar to the LSAC results.

⁴⁴ Thomson et al., "Challenges for Australian Education: Results from PISA 2009: The PISA 2009 Assessment of Students' Reading, Mathematical and Scientific Literacy," (2011).

⁴⁵ The 2009 PISA survey asked students to indicate how much time they spent reading for pleasure by selecting one of five alternative responses: 1) I do not read for enjoyment; 2) 30 minutes or less a day; 3) Between 30 minutes and 60 minutes a day; 4) 1 to 2 hours a day; 5) More than 2 hours a day

The lowest amount of time reported for these students was 30 minutes or less a day.

⁴⁶ Clark, "Children's and Young People's Reading Today: Findings from the 2012 National Literacy Trust's Annual Survey," (2013).

⁴⁷ Scholastic, "Kids & Family Reading Report," (2013).

⁴⁸ ABS, 2012 '4901.0 - Children's Participation in Cultural and Leisure Activities, Australia, Apr 2012'

⁴⁹ Smith and Day, "Keys to Reading among Middle School Children," (2013).

⁵⁰ Children aged approximately 11 to 13 years of age.

⁵¹ Kelly, "Boys, Books, Blokes and Bytes," (2007).

⁵² Love and Hamston, "Teenage Boys' Leisure Reading Dispositions: Juggling Male Youth Culture and Family Cultural Capital," (2003); "Committed and Reluctant Male Teenage Readers: Beyond Bedtime Stories," (2004).

with electronic and print based leisure reading that satisfied their immediate pragmatic and social needs. For example, some read to gain information about their hobbies and interests which was shared with their peers and family. Hamston and Love concluded that these male children understood 'leisure' reading in its narrowest sense as engagement with paper based informational and fictional texts. Hamston and Love's conclusion highlights a potential problem with research which relies on children's self reporting of their enjoyment and involvement in leisure reading. Many children, particularly older male children who may have a preference for newspapers and magazines⁵³, may not consider their engagement with these materials as reading. Similarly, children who engage with electronic texts for information or entertainment may not consider this type of activity as 'reading'.

Love and Hamston⁵⁴ also note that care needs to be taken when drawing conclusions about gender differences, saying that research findings need to be situated in relation to factors such as the children's age, reading abilities, socioeconomic backgrounds and the institutional and cultural context of the research. Teese (2000) cited in Love and Hamston⁵⁵ says that gender disadvantage in relation to reading 'is experienced unequally in Australia according to socioeconomic status, with students from better educated households being least affected'. Ryan⁵⁶ makes a similar point, saying that in Australia, 'the reading achievement of many working class female children falls below that of many more affluent male children'.

6.3 Socioeconomic status

Key Points

- Australian research suggests high socioeconomic status is positively correlated with reading for pleasure amongst children.
 - Children with highly educated parents also tend to like reading more and read more often than other children.
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There is very little recent Australian research on the relation between socioeconomic status and children's leisure reading. The available research, both Australian and international, suggests that a child's socioeconomic status can affect both their enjoyment of reading and the extent to which they engage in reading for pleasure.

The LSAC⁵⁷ research found that children with high socioeconomic status were more likely to enjoy reading at home (just under 75%) compared to only 49% of children with low

⁵³ Love and Hamston, "Teenage Boys' Leisure Reading Dispositions: Juggling Male Youth Culture and Family Cultural Capital," (2003); "Committed and Reluctant Male Teenage Readers: Beyond Bedtime Stories," (2004).; Broughton and Manuel, "What Do Australian Boys Think About Reading?," (2007).

⁵⁴ Love and Hamston, "Teenage Boys' Leisure Reading Dispositions: Juggling Male Youth Culture and Family Cultural Capital," (2003).

⁵⁵ Love and Hamston, "Teenage Boys' Leisure Reading Dispositions: Juggling Male Youth Culture and Family Cultural Capital," (2003).

⁵⁶ Ryan, "Young People Choose: Adolescents' Text Pleasures," (2005).

⁵⁷ "Growing up in Australia: The Longitudinal Study of Australian Children: 2010-2011 Annual Report" (2012).

socioeconomic status. Only 6% of high socioeconomic status children reported that they did not enjoy reading at home, compared to 17% of low socioeconomic status children.

The PISA data⁵⁸ shows that students in the lowest socioeconomic quartile reported the most negative responses for reading enjoyment⁵⁹ and students in the highest quartile reported the most positive responses⁶⁰. A similar trend was found for the amount of time spent reading, with more children in lowest socioeconomic quartile reporting that they never read for pleasure (33%, compared to 17% of children in the highest quartile) and more students in the highest socioeconomic quartile, reporting the largest amount of time spent reading for pleasure (31%, compared to 21%).

Analysis of the LSAC data by the ABS⁶¹ confirmed that children with highly educated parents were more likely to enjoy reading (90%) and to read more often (41% read on the diary day) compared to children from low education households (85% reported enjoying reading and only 23% read on the diary day). Children from low education households were also twice as likely (14%) as children from high education families (7%) to indicate that they did not enjoy reading and that they had not read on the diary day.

Inequity of access to reading materials is one factor which explains why some children choose to read for pleasure and others do not. In earlier Australian research, Ryan⁶² interviewed 53 Australian students aged 14 to 16 years of age, finding that social class shaped the students' reading practices. Middle class children had more books available in their homes, were more likely to be encouraged to read and to have a parent who models the reading of academically sanctioned texts, such as novels, for pleasure. This finding is consistent with international research which examines the impact of socioeconomic factors on children's leisure reading⁶³. Australian and international research suggests that a child's socioeconomic status can affect their enjoyment of reading and the extent to which they engage in reading for pleasure.

McKool's⁶⁴ study also found that more students from middle/high income families were read to when they were young, than students from low income families. The NLT research⁶⁵ uses participation in the UK Free School Meals program as an indication of lower socioeconomic status. The study found that students who participated in the free meal program were less likely to enjoy reading – the gap narrowed between 2011 and 2012.

⁵⁸ Thomson et al., "Challenges for Australian Education: Results from PISA 2009: The PISA 2009 Assessment of Students' Reading, Mathematical and Scientific Literacy," (2011).

⁵⁹ For example, 52% of children in the lowest socioeconomic quartile reported that they read only if they were required to, compared to 29% of children in the highest quartile; 35% of children in the lowest quartile indicated that they considered reading to be a 'waste of time', compared to 16% of children in the highest quartile.

⁶⁰ For example, 45% of children in the highest socioeconomic quartile indicated that reading was a favourite hobby, compared to 27% of children in the lowest quartile; 51% of children in the highest quartile indicated that they liked to discuss books, compared to 28% of children in the lowest quartile.

⁶¹ ABS, "National Year of Reading. Reading: The Home and Family Context " in *2012 Year Book* (Canberra Australian Bureau of Statistics 2012).

⁶² Ryan, "Young People Choose: Adolescents' Text Pleasures," (2005).

⁶³ McKool, "Factors That Influence the Decision to Read: An Investigation of Fifth Grade Students' out-of-School Reading Habits," (2007).

⁶⁴ McKool, "Factors That Influence the Decision to Read: An Investigation of Fifth Grade Students' out-of-School Reading Habits," (2007).

⁶⁵ Clark, "Children's and Young People's Reading Today: Findings from the 2012 National Literacy Trust's Annual Survey," (2013).

6.4 Indigenous children

Key Points

- There is very little Australian research on Australian Indigenous children's leisure reading habits
 - Indigenous children were less likely to enjoy reading for pleasure than non-Indigenous children
 - It is difficult to separate Indigenous identity from other social, economic, language and geographical factors which may impact on children's leisure reading habits
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There is limited research on Australian Indigenous children's leisure reading habits⁶⁶. The analysis of the PIRLS data found that the percentage of Indigenous students who liked reading was significantly lower (22%) than for non-Indigenous students (30%). However, there was no significant difference in the proportion of Indigenous and non-Indigenous students who did not like reading (20% and 19%).

The PISA data⁶⁷ also showed that Indigenous Australian students reported enjoying reading less than non-Indigenous students, and enjoy reading less than the OECD average. Just over 60% of Indigenous students indicated that they only read for information⁶⁸, 58% said that they read only if they had to and 43% reported that they find it hard to finish books.

More Indigenous students (52%) reported that they did not read for enjoyment, compared to non-Indigenous students (36%) and fewer Indigenous students reported reading for an hour or more per day (10%) than non-Indigenous students (15%).

Again, the research findings here raise the question of how 'reading' was understood by the students who participated in PIRLS and PISA projects. In addition, consideration needs to be given to the complex interaction of a whole range of socioeconomic, geographic, language and other factors with Indigenous identity.

⁶⁶ Recent research by Hale, Greene and Dries (2012), using oral interview data, provides a potentially useful addition to the large scale survey data produced by the PIRLS and PISA data. At the commencement of the project, baseline data was collected on Years 6-9 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' attitudes to reading and the type of out of school reading they engaged in. Unfortunately, the detailed results for this part of the study were not reported in their article.

⁶⁷ Thomson et al., "Challenges for Australian Education: Results from PISA 2009: The PISA 2009 Assessment of Students' Reading, Mathematical and Scientific Literacy," (2011).

⁶⁸ Although the PISA report describes the finding that 60% of Indigenous students read for information only as 'worrying', it may also indicate that many Indigenous children have a more pragmatic approach to reading than do many non-Indigenous children. See earlier discussion of research by Hamston and Love in relation to gender. It is also problematic to conclude that 'reading for information' is opposed to 'reading for enjoyment'.

7 What are Australian children reading?

Key Points

- There is little recent research on Australian children's reading preferences.
 - 54% of Australian students read newspapers for pleasure, 50% regularly read magazines, 38% regularly read fiction books and 20% regularly read non-fiction books.
 - There is no research on Australian children's online and digital reading preferences.
 - International research suggests that the diversity of children's reading preferences may be underestimated by limiting children's responses to print media.
-

There is very little recent Australian research on children's reading preferences. Recent international research is also scant and quickly outdated, given the pace of technological change⁶⁹.

The 2009 PISA data⁷⁰ show that 54% of Australian students read newspapers regularly (at least several times a month) for pleasure, 50% read magazines regularly, 38% read fiction books regularly and 20% read non-fiction books regularly. Comic books were the least frequently read (9%)⁷¹.

Further analysis of the PISA data indicated that Australian students showed less diversity overall in their reading choice than the OECD average. Female students had greater diversity in their reading preferences across all OECD countries except China.

The PISA study found significant gender difference in the reading preferences reported by Australian students. Female Australian students were more regular readers of magazines and fiction and non-fiction books than male students. Male students on the other hand, read newspapers and comic books more regularly than female students.

⁶⁹ The PIRLS student contextual questionnaires collected information about how frequently students read various types of text (including, stories, magazines, comic books) in print or online outside of school. Unfortunately, there does not appear to be any analysis or reporting of the Australian data.

⁷⁰ Thomson et al., "Challenges for Australian Education: Results from PISA 2009: The PISA 2009 Assessment of Students' Reading, Mathematical and Scientific Literacy," (2011).

⁷¹ The 2009 PISA project assessed the 'diversity' of the students' reading preferences by asking them to indicate how frequently they read five different print media for pleasure: magazines, comic books, fiction (novels, narratives, stories), non-fiction books and newspapers.

Table 4: Percentage of female and male children that regularly read each reading material⁷²

	Females %	Males %
Regularly read magazines	53	47
Regularly read comic books	7	12
Regularly read fiction books	48	28
Regularly read non-fiction books	21	19
Regularly read newspapers	50	58

The 2012 NLT survey⁷³ of British children similarly concluded that female children were more likely than male children to read a greater variety of materials using a greater range of media.

The PISA study⁷⁴ found that Indigenous Australian students showed less diversity in their reading preferences than non-Indigenous students. They read newspapers more frequently (60%) than non-indigenous students (54%). Fewer indigenous students (24%) reported that they read fiction books regularly, compared to non-indigenous students (39%). More Indigenous students also reported that they never or almost never read fiction books (25%, compared to 17%) or non-fiction books (33%, compared to 23%).

The PISA research⁷⁵ also found that children from high socioeconomic backgrounds had more diverse reading preferences than others and more so than the Australian average.

The restriction of the students' responses to print media in the PISA research may mask the true diversity of children's reading habits. An interesting comparison is the 2012 NLT's annual survey⁷⁶ in which 34,910 British children aged 8 to 16 participated. This survey found that the most common out of school reading was magazines (54%), websites (53%), lyrics (46%) and fiction (42%)⁷⁷.

The survey also found a number of differences between male children's and female children's out of school reading, concluding that female children were more likely than male children to read a greater variety materials using a greater range of media. More female children, for example, reported reading both technology based texts (text messages, social networking sites, emails and instant messages) and more 'traditional' texts such as fiction, poetry, magazines and song lyrics. Whereas, more male children than female children said that they read non-fiction, newspapers, comics and manuals. This echoes the Australia

⁷² Thomson et al., "Challenges for Australian Education: Results from PISA 2009: The PISA 2009 Assessment of Students' Reading, Mathematical and Scientific Literacy," (2011).

⁷³ Clark, "Children's and Young People's Reading Today: Findings from the 2012 National Literacy Trust's Annual Survey," (2013).

⁷⁴ Thomson et al., "Challenges for Australian Education: Results from PISA 2009: The PISA 2009 Assessment of Students' Reading, Mathematical and Scientific Literacy," (2011).

⁷⁵ Thomson et al., "Challenges for Australian Education: Results from PISA 2009: The PISA 2009 Assessment of Students' Reading, Mathematical and Scientific Literacy," (2011).

⁷⁶ Clark, "Children's and Young People's Reading Today: Findings from the 2012 National Literacy Trust's Annual Survey," (2013). Approximately 79% of the children were aged 8 to 14 years.

⁷⁷ The NLT study included text messages and messages on social networking sites in its measure of 'out of school reading' which are not covered in this literature review. The most common out of school reading was text messages (68%). Social networking sites also rated highly (51%).

PISA findings, which similarly found that female children had greater diversity in their reading preferences than male children.

Much Australian research conducted between 2003 and 2007 has focused on male children's reading as a result of concern about male children's literacy and academic achievement. Through interviews with 30 male Australian high school students, Broughton and Manuel⁷⁸ found that Year 7 male children preferred adventure, mystery, supernatural, fantasy novels, comics and comedy while the male children in Years 11 and 12 tended to prefer magazines about cars, sport, music, newspapers—for current affairs and sport, although some continued their interest in crime and detective stories. Male children of all ages liked biographies—especially of sports stars or individuals in fields of the post-school vocational interests of the male children—and there was a dislike of poetry across all age groups.

The 2006 *Boys, books, blokes and bytes* pilot project⁷⁹ found that there was even spread in the male children's reading preferences between novels, magazines and comics, with interest in novel reading declining with age.⁸⁰

In their study of the leisure reading of two groups of Australian teenage male children, aged 11 to 17, Love and Hamston⁸¹ found that it is necessary to contextualise studies of male children and reading, and to ask 'which male children' and 'which reading practices' are being referred to when research is appraised or designed. They found significant differences between the leisure reading preferences of committed readers and reluctant (but capable and academically successful) readers. More than 50% of committed readers indicated that paper based fiction was their preferred leisure reading, compared to 19% of reluctant readers. Reluctant readers had a higher preference for magazines (25%) compared to 8% of committed readers, and the internet (28%) compared to 4% of committed readers.

Table 5: Preferred leisure reading amongst 'committed' and 'reluctant' male children⁸²

	Print-based fiction %	Magazines %	Internet %
Committed	54	8	5
Reluctant	19	25	29

⁷⁸ Broughton and Manuel, "What Do Australian Boys Think About Reading?," (2007).

⁷⁹ Kelly, "Boys, Books, Blokes and Bytes," (2007).

⁸⁰ The *Boys, books, blokes and bytes* pilot project aimed to discover whether it was possible to improve or change boys' attitudes to reading through 'engagement', 'action' and 'relevance'. In the pre-program survey the boys were asked about their reading preferences.

⁸¹ Love and Hamston, "Teenage Boys' Leisure Reading Dispositions: Juggling Male Youth Culture and Family Cultural Capital," (2003); "Committed and Reluctant Male Teenage Readers: Beyond Bedtime Stories," (2004).

⁸² Love and Hamston, "Teenage Boys' Leisure Reading Dispositions: Juggling Male Youth Culture and Family Cultural Capital," (2003); "Committed and Reluctant Male Teenage Readers: Beyond Bedtime Stories," (2004).

8 How are Australian children reading?

Key Points

- No contemporary Australian research on children's leisure reading across different formats or media could be located.
 - UK and US research found a clear trend to reading screen based materials for pleasure.
 - Female children were more likely than male children to include paper based materials in their reading.
 - Ebooks were regarded by some children as an appealing medium in which to read for pleasure.
-

No Australian research could be located comparing Australian children's leisure reading across different formats or media, for example, comparing digital and paper based formats.

A survey of 1000 Australian adults found that although nearly 70% had downloaded at least one adult fiction ebook, only 31% had bought a children's ebook in 2012.⁸³

The main research comes from two major international studies, the 2011 UK NLT survey⁸⁴ and the US 2013 Scholastic *Kids & Family Reading Report*⁸⁵. These differ in terms of the activities they count as 'reading', with the US study having a much narrower definition of reading, asking the participants only if they had read a 'book' on digital device. The UK study, also considered email, social networking sites, instant messages and blogs as materials that could be 'read'.

The NLT survey⁸⁶ is perhaps the most comprehensive⁸⁶ survey of children's leisure reading across different media. The research found that 73% of the children surveyed read paper based materials, 64% read using a computer, 56% read on their mobile phones⁸⁷, 20% read using an iPad and 21% read using other electronic devices. Only 9% of the children surveyed reported that they read using a Kindle. Technology based reading materials were read for leisure more often than paper based reading materials.

Most children surveyed (62%) said that they read paper based materials as well as at least one technology-based medium. Only 18% said that they only read paper based texts, while 20% said that they did not read any paper based texts at all.

As mentioned previously (Section 7), the research also found that female children showed more diversity both in their reading preferences and in the range of media they used. More

⁸³ Springen, "Are Teens Embracing E-Books?," (2012).

⁸⁴ Clark, "Children's and Young People's Reading Today: Findings from the 2011 National Literacy Trust's Annual Survey," (2012).

⁸⁵ Scholastic, "Kids & Family Reading Report," (2013).

⁸⁶ Clark, "Children's and Young People's Reading Today: Findings from the 2011 National Literacy Trust's Annual Survey," (2012).

⁸⁷ Given that the NLT study included the reading of text messages, email and messages on social networking sites in its measure of 'out of school reading', it is likely that mobile phones were primarily and computers were at least in part used for these types of reading activities. This needs to be borne in mind when assessing the percentages reported above.

female children than male children said that they read using paper based media as well as computers and mobile phones. Roughly the same number of male children and female children read using an iPad or Kindle but more male children than female children said they read using electronic devices such as Xbox, PS3 and iPods.

The *Kids & Family Reading Report*⁸⁸ surveyed just over 1,000 US children aged 6 to 17 years and their parents. It found that 46% of the children surveyed had read a book on a digital device such as a computer, iPad or other handheld digital device, almost double the figure in 2010. There was little variation by age or gender: 45% of 6 to 8 year olds had read a book on a digital device, 47% of 9 to 11 year olds, 48% of 12 to 14 year olds and 43% of 15-17 year olds. Slightly more female children (47%) than male children said that they had read an ebook (44%). Most reading occurred on a desktop or laptop computer (41%), 19% read using a device specifically designed for reading ebooks (such as a Kindle, Nook or Sony Reader), 21% read on some other type handheld digital device (mobile phone, Nintendo DS, etc) and 3% read on an iPad. Both children and parents in the study identified convenience—eg being able to purchase books easily, being able to carry all the books in one place, being able to easily look up words, being able to try books before buying them—as the main benefit of ebooks. Interactive features such as note taking, highlighting and commenting, the incorporation of games and video and read aloud options were also seen as important for both children and their parents.

The *Kids & Family Reading Report*⁸⁹ also found that the growth in popularity of ebooks appeared to be having a positive impact on children's leisure reading, with 21% of children who reported having read an ebook saying that they now read more books for pleasure – this was particular true of male children (25% compared to 19% of female children). Approximately half of the children surveyed said that they would read more books for fun if they had greater access to ebooks. Approximately half of children who had not read an ebook were interested in doing so.

Children who read ebooks still overwhelmingly (80%) indicated that they mostly read print books 'for fun' and 58% of children aged 9-17 years said that they would always want to read print books, even though ebooks were available. The advantages of print books were that they are easier to share with friends and preferred bedtime reading. Ebooks were seen to have an advantage when travelling or for out of home reading and when the children didn't want their friends to know what they were reading.

⁸⁸ Scholastic, "Kids & Family Reading Report," (2013).

⁸⁹ Scholastic, "Kids & Family Reading Report," (2013).

9 When are Australian children reading?

Key Points

- There is no recent Australian research which explores when children read for pleasure.
 - International research identifies 'at night', 'after school' and 'during summer' as popular times for leisure reading.
-

No recent Australian research about children's reading patterns could be located. The only recent overseas study which provided any findings about when children read was Smith and Day's⁹⁰ study of middle school children in rural North Carolina. Smith and Day found that most children read at night (47%) or after school (22%). Approximately 10% read on summer vacation, 9% reported that they on the bus and approximately 5% read when sick.

An earlier US study⁹¹ similarly found that children overwhelmingly preferred to read at home, during the evening (45-46%).

The 2003 *Nestle Family Monitor*⁹² research with US children aged 11-18 years found that the most common place to read is in bed (mentioned by around 70%). Children also liked to read 'on the move', with a quarter reading while travelling as a passenger in the car, and 14% reading while on public transport. The findings also suggest that children like to multitask, with nearly three in ten reading while they listen to music and one in eight reading in front of the television.

The 2013 *Scholastic Kids & Family Reading Report*⁹³ asked the children who participated in their survey a number of questions about their summer reading⁹⁴. The majority of children (86%) said that they had read one or more books over summer. The number of books children said that they had read over summer declined with age.

⁹⁰ Smith and Day "Keys to Reading among Middle School Children," (2013).

⁹¹ Moffitt and Wartella, "Youth and Reading: A Survey of Leisure Reading Pursuits of Female and Male Adolescents," (1991). This study was of 414 randomly selected US Mid-west high school students. Students were predominantly white and middle-class. Some of the participants in this study were older than the age specified in this literature review (5-14 years). This research has been included due to the lack of other information about where children like to read, however the age range should be noted.

⁹² Ipsos MORI, "Young People's Attitudes Towards Reading, vol. 17, Nestle Family Monitor" (2003). Note that some of the children in this study were older than the age frame specified in this literature review (5-14 years). This research has been included due to the lack of other information about where children like to read, however the age range should be noted.

⁹³ Scholastic, "Kids & Family Reading Report," (2013).

⁹⁴ US summer holidays generally last for two to three months.

10 Why are Australian children reading for pleasure?

Sociological and cultural research has shown that children's interest in books and the amount of time spent reading books are related to age, gender, socioeconomic status and family background⁹⁵. There is no simple causal relationship between any one of these factors and children's leisure reading habits, rather they interact in complex ways.

Psychological research, on the other hand, attempts to explain children's engagement in leisure reading in terms of concepts such as motivation, attitude, reading proficiency, reading self concept and personality.

10.1 Why do children engage in leisure reading?

Key Points

- Children have offered a variety of reasons for engaging in leisure reading, including for relaxation, to relieve boredom, for fun, for excitement, to escape and for motivation.
 - Research from both Australia and the US highlights the social importance of leisure reading, including its role in maintaining social relationships and in identity formation.
 - Psychological research has found children are more motivated to engage in leisure reading if they find reading inherently enjoyable.
 - Children's own belief in their reading abilities and personality has also been found to play a role in motivating them to read.
-

US research by Hughes-Hassell and Rodge⁹⁶ involving 750 middle school children, found that reasons the children gave for engaging in leisure reading were to relax, for escape and to relieve boredom. More recent research by Smith and Day⁹⁷ also examining the leisure reading habits of middle school children found that 46% children read for fun, 38% said that they read for relaxation, 34% for excitement and 12% for brain stimulation and motivation. Other reasons offered included liking the books, having nothing else to do and reading for interest.

The most recent Scholastic *Kids & Family Reading Report*⁹⁸ found that the top reasons children gave for reading for pleasure were entertainment (74%), to help them succeed at school (68%), to learn new information (67%) and to use their imagination (65%).

Love and Hamston⁹⁹ in Australia and Moje, Overby, Tysvaer and Morris¹⁰⁰ in the US highlight the important role of reading in maintaining social relations and identity formation.

⁹⁵ Johnsson-Smaragdi and Jönsson, "Book Reading in Leisure Time: Long-Term Changes in Young Peoples' Book Reading Habits," (2006).

⁹⁶ Hughes-Hassell and Rodge "The Leisure Reading Habits of Urban Adolescents," (2007).

⁹⁷ Smith and Day "Keys to Reading among Middle School Children," (2013).

⁹⁸ Scholastic, "Kids & Family Reading Report," (2013).

Love and Hamston, for example, provide examples of how the male children in their study read magazines and used various forms of electronic communication to satisfy their social needs (for friendship, acceptance, belonging, etc.). For example, many of the male children read to gain information about the sports and other recreational activities in which they regularly participated. They then used this knowledge in their interactions with peers and family.

Psychological research explains children's motivation for reading as being of two types: intrinsic (where the child finds reading to be inherently enjoyable or interesting) and extrinsic (where the child reads to gain a reward or to avoid a punishment)¹⁰¹. Greater engagement in and frequency of leisure reading has been found to be associated with higher intrinsic reading motivation¹⁰². Medford and McGeown¹⁰³ found that intrinsic reading motivation was strongly associated with both reading self-concept—an individual's own belief in their reading abilities—and personality. Children who believed they are to be competent readers were more motivated to read. In terms of personality, the quality of being open to new experiences was most closely associated with intrinsic reading motivation.

⁹⁹ Love and Hamston, "Teenage Boys' Leisure Reading Dispositions: Juggling Male Youth Culture and Family Cultural Capital," (2003).

¹⁰⁰ Moje et. al. "The Complex World of Adolescent Literacy: Myths, Motivations, and Mysteries," (2008).

¹⁰¹ Medford and McGeown, "The Influence of Personality Characteristics on Children's Intrinsic Reading Motivation," (2012).

¹⁰² De Naeghel et al., "The Relation between Elementary Students' Recreational and Academic Reading Motivation, Reading Frequency, Engagement, and Comprehension: A Self-Determination Theory Perspective," (2012).

¹⁰³ Medford and McGeown, "The Influence of Personality Characteristics on Children's Intrinsic Reading Motivation," (2012)

10.2 Attitudes to reading

Key Points

- Children with positive attitudes to reading tend to read more often.
 - Generally children have positive attitudes to reading, but there are some gender differences – female children tend to be more positive about reading and are less likely to find it boring and less likely to think it is a gendered activity.
 - Younger children tend to have a more positive attitude to reading.
 - Children from higher socioeconomic backgrounds tend to have a more positive attitude to reading.
 - Children with better reading abilities tend to have a more positive attitude to reading. There may be a link between children's ethnic backgrounds and their attitude to reading.
-

Research by the UK NLT¹⁰⁴ suggests that there is a strong positive relationship between attitudes to reading and reading behaviour. That is, children that have positive attitudes to reading also read more often.

There are a number of factors which have been found to be associated with children's attitude to reading including age, gender, socioeconomic status, reading ability and even ethnic background.

Australian research¹⁰⁵ examining children's attitudes to reading for pleasure found that 62% described it as 'easy', 59% as 'a bit like school work', 44% as 'fun', 39% as 'a bit nerdy', 35% as 'boring' and 28% as 'something most of my friends do'. Gender differences were noted with female children tending to view reading more positively (easy, fun, something their friends do) compared to male children who were more likely to view reading as boring and a bit nerdy. The perception that reading was boring, nerdy, less fun and not something their friends were involved in was also found to increase with the age.

According to the UK NLT¹⁰⁶ female children tend to have more positive attitudes towards reading than male children, and they are less likely to see it as a gendered activity¹⁰⁷. Male children are less likely to view reading favourably, less likely to consider it 'cool' and more likely to consider it boring, compared to female children. Educational practitioners¹⁰⁸ also felt that male children's interests were not being catered for by publishers and schools and that many male children lacked male role models. Some educational practitioners also felt

¹⁰⁴ Clark and Douglas, "Young People's Reading and Writing an in-Depth Study Focusing on Enjoyment, Behaviour, Attitudes and Attainment," (2011).

¹⁰⁵ Australian Centre for Youth Literature "Young Australians Reading: From Keen to Reluctant Readers " (2001).

¹⁰⁶ Clark and Douglas, "Young People's Reading and Writing an in-Depth Study Focusing on Enjoyment, Behaviour, Attitudes and Attainment," (2011).

¹⁰⁷ Clark and Douglas, "Young People's Reading and Writing an in-Depth Study Focusing on Enjoyment, Behaviour, Attitudes and Attainment," (2011).

¹⁰⁸ Focusing on boys' literacy, the NLT *Boys' Reading Commission 2012* report identified a number of possible barriers to boys' reading based on a survey of educational practitioners from 226 UK schools.

that male children's learning styles, activity levels, ability to concentrate and maturity also acted as barriers to male children's reading.

Table 6: Attitudes to reading among male and female children¹⁰⁹

	Females % agree	Males % agree
Reading is more for girls than boys	9	16
Reading is boring	13	24
Reading is important	78	77
I cannot find anything to read that interest me	25	32
I like going to the library	45	35

Ryan¹¹⁰ noted that the children in her Australian study appeared to link engagement in reading to their gender identities and to the gender identities of their parents. She provides examples of female children explaining their love of reading in terms of their mother's love of reading and male children who seemed to view reading as a feminine activity.

Both Australian¹¹¹ and international research¹¹² has found that age affects children's attitudes to reading, that children enjoy reading less as they get older (see Section 6.1).

Children with higher socioeconomic status are also more likely to have a positive attitude to reading. NLT UK research¹¹³ found that students who participated in the free meal program¹¹⁴ more likely to see reading as a gendered activity, to be embarrassed if their friends saw them reading and to say that they preferred watching TV to reading.

NLT¹¹⁵ research also found children from Asian backgrounds tended to hold more positive attitudes to reading than children from non-Asian backgrounds. NLT also found that children who could read at or above the expected level for their age held more positive attitudes compared to children who read below the expected level for their age.

¹⁰⁹ Clark and Douglas, "Young People's Reading and Writing an in-Depth Study Focusing on Enjoyment, Behaviour, Attitudes and Attainment," (2011).

¹¹⁰ Ryan, "Young People Choose: Adolescents' Text Pleasures," (2005).

¹¹¹ Australian Centre for Youth Literature "Young Australians Reading: From Keen to Reluctant Readers " (2001).

¹¹² Clark, Osborne, and Akerman, "Young People's Self-Perceptions as Readers: An Investigation Including Family, Peer and School Influences " (2008).; Clark and Douglas, "Young People's Reading and Writing an in-Depth Study Focusing on Enjoyment, Behaviour, Attitudes and Attainment," (2011).

¹¹³ Clark, "Children's and Young People's Reading Today: Findings from the 2012 National Literacy Trust's Annual Survey," (2013).

¹¹⁴ The NLT research uses participation in the UK Free School Meals program as an indication of lower socioeconomic background.

¹¹⁵ Clark and Douglas, "Young People's Reading and Writing an in-Depth Study Focusing on Enjoyment, Behaviour, Attitudes and Attainment," (2011).

10.3 Family and home environment

Key Points

Australian research suggests that living in a household with a substantial number of books at age 5 is positively related with leisure reading activity at age 10-11. This is supported by US research.

- Australia data suggests that children in families where one parent is born overseas are more likely to read for pleasure than families where both parents are born in Australia.
 - International research suggests that children are more likely to enjoy reading if they live in a family with reading 'role-models' and are encouraged to read by their parents.
-

Research has shown that a child's family and home environment is important for children's leisure reading and that, to a large extent, the basis of children's reading habits is laid down during the pre-school and early school years.

The LSAC report¹¹⁶ identified various factors in the family context of young children (aged 4 to 5 years) that were associated with the frequency and enjoyment of leisure reading several years later (age 10 to 11 years). Young children who lived in households with more than 30 books were more likely to enjoy reading several years later compared to children who lived in households with fewer than 30 books. Additionally, the 2013 US Scholastic *Kids & Family Reading Report*¹¹⁷ found that having a large home book collection had a greater impact on children's reading frequency than household income.

LSAC¹¹⁸ also found that children who had visited a library (in the month prior to interview) at age 4 to 5 years were more likely to enjoy reading and to have read on the diary day.

Finally, children whose parents read to them when they were aged 4 to 5 were more likely to enjoy reading and to have read on the diary day than were children whose parents did not read to them¹¹⁹.

ABS data show that children of families with one parent born outside of Australia were more likely to read for pleasure (80% for children who had a parent born in a non-English speaking country and 77% for children with a parent born in an English speaking country other than Australia) than children where both parents were born in Australia (72%). There was less significance overall¹²⁰ as to whether an overseas born parent was from an English speaking country¹²¹.

¹¹⁶ "Growing up in Australia: The Longitudinal Study of Australian Children: 2010-2011 Annual Report," (2012).

¹¹⁷ Scholastic, "Kids & Family Reading Report," (2013).

¹¹⁸ "Growing up in Australia: The Longitudinal Study of Australian Children: 2010-2011 Annual Report," (2012).

¹¹⁹ ABS, "National Year of Reading. Reading: The Home and Family Context " (2012).

¹²⁰ When neither parent was born in Australia, the percentage was the same (73%), regardless of whether both parents were born in an English-speaking country or whether only one parent was born in an English-speaking country. The percentage was lower if both parents were born in a non-English speaking country (72%), the same as the percentage for children who had both parents born in Australia.

¹²¹ ABS, "4901.0 - Children's Participation in Cultural and Leisure Activities, Australia, Apr 2012" (2012)

NLT research from the UK¹²² has found that children who are strongly encouraged to read by their parents are more likely to enjoy reading and to read more frequently, compared to children who do not receive any encouragement.

McKool's¹²³ US study of out of school reading found that children who came from families with strong reading habits were more likely to value leisure reading. Recent findings from the *Kids & Family Reading Report*¹²⁴ support McKool's findings. The study found that having a 'reading role-model' parent had a greater impact on children's reading frequency than household income.

10.4 Time Demands

Key Points

- Australian research suggests that competing time demands are shaping children's inclination to read for pleasure.

This is supported by a 2008 US study.

The 2009 research, *Keeping Young Australians Reading*, conducted by the Centre for Youth Literature identifies competing time demands as the main barrier to children's reading for pleasure, especially for 'reluctant' or 'uncommitted' readers. US research by Moje, Oversby, Tysvaer, and Morris¹²⁵ similarly found that many of the students in their study said that they would read more if they had more time.

Manuel¹²⁶ says that the decrease in reading for pleasure that occurs for many Australian adolescents may be the result of increased time demands of secondary school 'slicing into the available time for reading for pleasure.'

10.5 Ability/literacy levels

Lower ability in children's reading skills (e.g. in reading comprehension and phonemic awareness), underperformance in reading at school and negative perceptions of themselves as readers have been shown to contribute to children's reluctance to engage in reading for pleasure¹²⁷.

¹²² Clark and Picton, "Family Matters: The Importance of Family Support for Young People's Reading Findings from the National Literacy Trust's 2011 Annual Literacy Survey," (2012).

¹²³ McKool, "Factors That Influence the Decision to Read: An Investigation of Fifth Grade Students' out-of-School Reading Habits," (2007).

¹²⁴ Scholastic, "Kids & Family Reading Report," (2013).

¹²⁵ Moje et al "The Complex World of Adolescent Literacy: Myths, Motivations, and Mysteries," (2008).

¹²⁶ Manuel, "Teenagers and Reading: Factors That Shape the Quality of Teenagers' Reading Lives," (2012).

¹²⁷ Love and Hamston, "Teenage Boys' Leisure Reading Dispositions: Juggling Male Youth Culture and Family Cultural Capital," (2003); Manuel, "Teenagers and Reading: Factors That Shape the Quality of Teenagers' Reading Lives," (2012).

11 If children are not reading, what are they doing?

Key Points

- Australian research (from 2002) suggests that children's leisure activities have changed since increased access to computers and electronic information technology. British research from 2012 supports this conclusion.
 - Recent Australian research suggests that the balance in leisure activity has shifted away from watching TV, DVDs and video in favour of accessing the internet.
-

The concept of displacement theory was coined to explain the shift in children's leisure activities as a result of television viewing, particularly in relation to children's leisure reading. The concept has since been expanded to include the impact of computers and other digital technologies on children's leisure reading. For example, Manuel and Robinson's (2002) survey of Australian 12-15 year olds¹²⁸ concluded that there were shifts in children's 'preferred leisure activities due to the impact of television and computer technologies'.

Recent Australian statistics on children's participation in sport and leisure activities has shown a decline in children's viewing of TV, videos and DVDs (from 98% in 2003 to 96% in 2012). The average number of hours children spent watching TV, videos or DVDs has decreased from 22 hours in 2003 to 15 hours in 2012. The proportion of children who had accessed the internet, either during school hours or outside of school hours, had increased from 64% in 2003 to 90% in 2012¹²⁹.

The analysis of the LSAC data by the ABS¹³⁰ found that children who watch TV and play computer are less likely to read for leisure. In contrast, children who play board games and do homework are more likely to read for leisure. The research also found that male children who engaged in organised sports were less likely to read for leisure¹³¹.

As previously mentioned (see Section 5), the UK NLT's *Children's and Young People's Reading Today* report¹³² found that in the UK between 2005 and 2011 the number of children reading daily for pleasure had fallen across most media. In the Australian context, although children's reading has declined, there has been an increase in children's participation in a whole range of leisure activities since 2003, including playing sport, participating in dancing, bike riding, playing a musical instrument, singing and drama¹³³, suggesting that like the UK, reading is in competition with a range of other leisure activities. This suggests that while children may be reading less, they are engaging in other cultural activities.

¹²⁸ Cited in Broughton and Manuel, "What Do Australian Boys Think About Reading?," (2007)

¹²⁹ ABS, "Children's Participation in Sport and Leisure Time Activities, 2003-2012," (2012).

¹³⁰ ABS, "National Year of Reading. Reading: The Home and Family Context " (2012).

¹³¹ It should be noted that because these findings were based on children's activities on the diary day, and not a longer study of children's leisure activities, they are unable to provide evidence of 'displacement' of one activity by another.

¹³² Clark, "Children's and Young People's Reading Today: Findings from the 2012 National Literacy Trust's Annual Survey," (2013).

¹³³ ABS, "Children's Participation in Sport and Leisure Time Activities, 2003-2012," (2012).

12 Where are Australian children getting their reading material? Key sources and influences on reading behaviour

Key Points

- There is no recent Australian research identifying the sources of leisure reading material for children.
 - The last research (2001) found that the school library, followed by the local library were the main sources.
-

No recent Australian research on where children are getting their reading material or on the key influences on their reading choices could be located. Recent international research is also limited.

The Young Australians Reading: From Keen to Reluctant Readers research¹³⁴ investigated the reading habits of young Australians aged 10 to 18. Although dated, the research provides one of the few available sources of Australian data about how children source the books they read for leisure. The research found the school library was the main source mentioned by children who read for pleasure at least once a month (28%). The percentage was higher among high school students (42%) and private school students (37%). Bookshops were mentioned by 25% of the respondents but less frequently by primary school aged children (17%). The local library was third (22%) followed by family (16%) and friends (8%).

The most recent US *Kids & Family Reading Report*¹³⁵ found that most of the children¹³⁶ in its study relied on the library¹³⁷ as the main way of sourcing the books that they read for pleasure (74%), followed by school book fairs (59%) and bookstores (35%). The library was used more by younger (60% of children aged 9 to 11) than older children (54% of children aged 12 to 14). There was very little difference in the proportion of children by age who sourced their books through bookshops.

In their study of leisure reading among US urban middle and high school students, Hughes-Hassell and colleagues¹³⁸ found that the middle school students (aged 11 to 13 years) in their study obtained their reading material from three main sources – the school library (65%), the public library (53%) and the classroom (48%). High school students (aged 14 to 18 years) obtained most of their reading material from bookstores (54%). The school library was a source of reading material for 36% of high school students and the public library for 39%. While the ages of the children in the US study are similar to the recent Scholastic study and the earlier Australian study, Hughes-Hassell and colleagues research asks more broadly about ‘reading materials’ rather than simply ‘books’. However, as

¹³⁴ Australian Centre for Youth Literature "Young Australians Reading: From Keen to Reluctant Readers " (2001).

¹³⁵ Scholastic, "Kids & Family Reading Report," (2013).

¹³⁶ Children were aged 9 to 17 years.

¹³⁷ The study did not specify the type of library.

¹³⁸ Hughes-Hassell, "Urban Teenagers Talk About Leisure Reading," (2008); Hughes-Hassell and Rodge, "The Leisure Reading Habits of Urban Adolescents," (2007); Hughes-Hassell and Lutz, "What Do You Want to Tell Us About Reading?: A Survey of the Habits and Attitudes of Urban Middle School Students Towards Leisure Reading," (2006).

discussed earlier, this in itself does not guarantee that the children in the study will answer in relation to a broader range of reading material.

An interesting point of comparison between the Australian research and the research by Hughes-Hassell and her colleagues is the much higher use of the school library by the US students. Library use remains high in the 2013 Scholastic findings. A second point of comparison is the very different trends in use of the school library among the two cohorts of high school students. A greater proportion of Australian high school students used the school library as a source of books for leisure reading than did primary aged students, whereas among the US students, a lower percentage of high school students compared to middle school students used the school library for this purpose.

Similarly, the results from the Scholastic study show a decline in library use with age. Since the groups are not directly comparable, it is difficult to assess whether the decline in use of the school library by US high school students is a US phenomenon, a contemporary trend or simply a result of the division of the students engaged in the research into middle school and high school cohorts rather than high school and primary school cohorts. The higher proportion of US high school students in both US studies sourcing their leisure reading through bookstores compared to Australian students was another interesting point of comparison which perhaps can be explained by the lower price of US books compared to Australian books. Unfortunately no recent Australian figures are available to see whether there has been a similar trend.

12.1 Social networks, families, schools and libraries

Key points

- Research suggests that Australian children gain the majority of their advice about which books to read from their peers.
 - Similar findings emerged in at least one US study.
-

Ryan¹³⁹ found in her interviews of 53 Australian students, aged 14 to 16 years, that children's leisure reading preferences were highly individual and emerged from their interests and relationships with their families and friends, rather than coming out of school experiences. She provides examples of children reading around their interests, receiving books as gifts and borrowing books from family and friends. This broadly confirms earlier findings in *The Young Australians Reading* research¹⁴⁰ where 35% of children nominated their friends as the main source of advice about which books to read, 24% nominated a family member, 16% the school librarian and 9% their English teacher.

Similar findings emerged in the research by Moje, Overby, Tysvaer and Morris¹⁴¹ conducted in a large US Midwestern city. The participants in this study were 79 children aged 10 to 17

¹³⁹ Ryan, "Young People Choose: Adolescents' Text Pleasures," (2005).

¹⁴⁰ Australian Centre for Youth Literature "Young Australians Reading: From Keen to Reluctant Readers " (2001).

¹⁴¹ Moje et al "The Complex World of Adolescent Literacy: Myths, Motivations, and Mysteries," (2008).

years of age. The study found that the majority of children's leisure reading material was provided by their peers either directly or through recommendations. Several children belonged to formal or informal book clubs that organised book selections or to affinity groups or clubs, where magazines or other texts were shared or borrowed. In some cases parents also made recommendations and shared their own books. This research deals with a more comprehensive view of 'reading' and 'reading materials', compared to many of the other studies.

The US *Kids & Family Reading Report*¹⁴² specifically asks about the books that children read rather than taking a broader perspective on reading. The research again identifies families, friends and teachers/librarians as key sources of ideas for what children read. This research ranks these very differently compared to the earlier research mentioned. The majority of children nominated parents (73%) as the main source of recommendations, followed by teachers/librarians (57%) and friends (55%). Even the older cohorts of children participating in this research ranked parents slightly higher than friends. For children aged 12 to 14 years 68% nominated parents, while 66% nominated friends, for children aged 15 to 17 years, 61% nominated parents and 60% nominated friends. This research, unlike the 2001 Australian research, allowed participants to nominate *all* of the sources who gave them ideas about which books to read rather than simply the *main* source. Without any current Australian research it is impossible to assess whether this more recent US research indicates a trend or change but it does agree that the influence of friends on children's reading preferences increases with age.

Research by Hughes-Hassell and Rodge¹⁴³ on the leisure reading habits of 1,340 US urban middle school children also found that parents (70%) were nominated as having the most influence on the children's leisure reading. This research appears to have framed the question differently asking instead about who most *encouraged* the students' leisure reading. The research found that 63% of the students selected teachers, 40% nominated librarians, while only 15% chose their friends.

British research by Hopper¹⁴⁴, which examined the reading habits of 707 British school students aged between 11 and 15, found family members, particularly female family members, were the main influence on the children's reading choice followed by recommendations by peers. Hopper found that teachers' influence was relatively small and that the media also influenced the students' reading choices, specifically she found in her research, the film versions of *Harry Potter* and *Lord of the Rings*.

¹⁴² Scholastic, "*Kids & Family Reading Report*," (2013).

¹⁴³ Hughes-Hassell and Rodge "The Leisure Reading Habits of Urban Adolescents," (2007).

¹⁴⁴ Hopper, "What Are Teenagers Reading? Adolescent Fiction Reading Habits and Reading Choices," (2005).

12.2 Socioeconomic factors

Key Points

- Research indicates that children from middle to high income families have greater access to reading materials from a larger variety of sources.
-

McKool's¹⁴⁵ US study of out of school reading of 159 students highlights the impact of socioeconomic factors on children's access to reading materials. Children from middle and high income families had greater access to reading materials than children from low income families. Middle class children reported that they had access to three different sources of reading materials with the majority of their reading material coming from home libraries and bookshops. Children from lower income families indicated that they obtained their reading material from one or two sources only. The majority of their reading material came from school libraries, however most did not access public libraries. McKool also found that many low income reluctant readers reported that they did not have access to reading materials that they were interested in reading.

The UK *Family Matters: the Importance of Family Support for Young People's Reading* research¹⁴⁶ found that 12% of the children surveyed had never received a book as a present and 14% indicated that they had never been to a bookshop.

12.3 Other factors

Research by Hopper¹⁴⁷ identified the following factors as additional key influences on children's leisure reading choices— prior knowledge of the book or author, the appearance of the book and genre. Taylor¹⁴⁸ found in his study of a small group of New Zealand senior students that students said that they often read a string of books written by an author or belonging to a genre they had enjoyed previously.

¹⁴⁵ McKool, "Factors That Influence the Decision to Read: An Investigation of Fifth Grade Students' out-of-School Reading Habits," (2007).

¹⁴⁶ Clark and Picton, "Family Matters: The Importance of Family Support for Young People's Reading Findings from the National Literacy Trust's 2011 Annual Literacy Survey," (2012).

¹⁴⁷ Hopper, "What Are Teenagers Reading? Adolescent Fiction Reading Habits and Reading Choices," (2005).

¹⁴⁸ Taylor, "Teenage Personal Reading: Habits, Attitudes and Beliefs " (2011).

13 Emerging issues or trends in research on children's leisure reading

This literature review has identified the following issues raised for further research and consideration.

1. The difficulties and challenges of defining children's leisure 'reading' in the 21st century.
 - The blurring of distinctions between reading and other activities in children's lives, such as gaming and various forms of online communication.
 - The relationship between more literary forms of reading and more popular forms of reading and the impact this has on what both adults and children consider to be 'real' reading.
2. Children's use of online and digital technologies.
 - The uptake by children of various forms of ebooks.
 - Research about what children are reading online.
 - The impact of ebooks and other digital technologies on children's enjoyment and frequency of their leisure reading, for example, the impact of ebooks on male children's self-perception of themselves as readers.
 - How and when children use different media in their leisure reading.
3. Gender differences in children's leisure reading.
 - Whether the lessening of the gender gap between male and female children's leisure reading is the start of a trend or a one-off occurrence.
 - Gender differences in children's use and enjoyment of ebooks and digital technologies for reading.
4. The role of children's leisure reading in their everyday life.
 - The role of reading in children's relationships with peers and families.
 - The role of reading in constituting children's identities.

14 Gaps in the research

This literature review identifies a number of gaps in the existing understanding of children's reading for pleasure. These concern both the research focus – what is 'reading for pleasure' at a time when much that children wish to read is in digital form – and the detailed age based data on children's reading habits that would permit inferences on reading trends as children age. More generally, there is a need for regular, national scale, methodologically consistent research into reading for pleasure in Australia.

The following specific gaps have been identified:

Gaps in detailed Australian research on children's leisure reading:

1. Unlike in the US and UK, there is no Australian nationwide annual or biannual survey of children's reading to identify trends in children's leisure reading habits over time.
2. Very little Australian research has been undertaken on children's leisure reading in the last three years.
3. The recent Australian research that is available on Australian children's leisure reading focuses on a narrow age range, 8 to 11 years of age plus the PISA data on 15 year olds. This makes it impossible to discuss children's leisure reading across the entire age range 5 to 14 years or to make comparisons across the age range.
4. Most of the recent Australian research is focused on children's reading performance and the data on leisure reading are peripheral and sometimes not reported.
5. There is no recent Australian research on when children are reading for leisure and very little relevant international research.
6. There is no recent Australian research and very little recent international research on where children are obtaining their leisure reading material.
7. There is no recent Australian research which examines the key influences on Australian children's leisure reading.
8. There is a need for research on the relationship between screen based activity and reading for pleasure and the impact of ebooks on Australian children's reading choices.
9. There is no recent Australian research which examines children's reasons for engaging in leisure reading.

Gaps in research which addresses the issue of what constitutes Australian children's 'leisure reading':

1. Much of the Australian research either defines leisure 'reading' narrowly as book or print reading or fails to consider the diversity of what might constitute reading in the 21st century.
2. Much research, both Australian and international, fails to deal with the question of how children are understanding 'reading' when they are responding to questions about their reading habits. This means that it is difficult to compare research studies and it calls some conclusions into question.
3. There is no recent Australian research on what or how Australian children are reading that includes the diversity of contemporary digital media.
4. Many of the barriers to children's reading such as gender, socioeconomic status etc. have been fairly uncritically reaffirmed in study after study. It would be more advantageous to consider whether the same barriers to children's leisure reading operate in relation to a more broadly conceptualised notion of reading.

Appendix

Research Methodology

Recent scholarly research produced since 2010 on Australian children's leisure reading habits was identified by searching the Australian and International databases below. Particular attention was paid to the aims and objectives of the project and the definition of reading.

- Google scholar accessed through eresources at UWS
- TROVE – National Library of Australia
- Proquest
- J-Stor
- Scopus
- Educational Research Complete (EBSCOhost, EBSCO)
- ERIC (Proquest)
- AustLIT: The Australian Literature Resource
- SAGE Research Methods
- Informit datatbases (RMIT)

The search terms 'children'/'child'/'teenager'/'boy'/'girl'/'adolescent' were combined with:

- Reading habits
- Recreational reading
- Leisure reading
- Children's/tee
- Voluntary reading
- Spare time reading
- Silent reading
- Independent reading
- Outside of school reading
- Self-selected reading
- Personal choice reading
- iPad habits and reading
- Ebooks and reading
- Kindle and reading
- Nook and reading

- Use of ereaders
- Ereaders and leisure
- Online reading
- Multi modal

Initial results indicated little recent Australian research on children's reading for pleasure so the research scope was broadened to capture international and Australian research produced in the last 5 to 10 years.

To capture unpublished research, personal contact was made with the Centre for Youth Literature, children's literature researchers in Australian universities, Australian children's book publishers, the Children's Book Council of Australia, Lesley Reece from The Literature Centre, Judith Ridge from Westwords and various state run children's reading competitions.

Finally, a comprehensive search of Internet sources was carried out.

Research on Australian Children's leisure reading habits

Summary of key sources

- *Growing up in Australia: the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children* (LSAC)
- *Progress in International Literacy Study* (PIRLS)

Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA)

In Australia the three most significant recent sources of data on Australian children's leisure reading habits are provided in *Growing up in Australia: the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children 2010-2011 Annual Report*¹⁴⁹, the ABS, *2012 Yearbook* which provides a more comprehensive analysis of the 2010 LSAC data, and the 2012 report on the Australian Year 4 data collected as part of the Progress in International Literacy Study (PIRLS).

Growing up in Australia: the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC) is a nationwide study of Australian children which commenced in 2004 with a representative sample of 10,000 families, including two cohorts of children, an infant group aged 3 to 19 months and a child cohort, aged 4 to 5 years, their parents, carers and teachers. Data is collected every two years, allowing the children's development and wellbeing to be investigated over time. The ABS *2012 Yearbook* article '*Reading: the Home and Family Context*', provides a more comprehensive analysis of the 2010 LSAC data in relation to the older cohort of children (10-11 years of age in 2010), combining information in LSAC about whether or not children enjoy reading with information about children's leisure reading sourced from the children's time diaries. The article also examines the relationship between the children's reading habits and their family reading context.

¹⁴⁹ "Growing up in Australia: The Longitudinal Study of Australian Children: 2010-2011 Annual Report," (2012).

The *Progress in International Literacy Study* (PIRLS) is an international reading assessment project directed by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA), an independent international cooperative of national research institutions and government agencies. The aim of PIRLS is to provide internationally comparative data to enable participating countries to make informed decisions about reading education. In Australia, PIRLS is implemented by the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER). PIRLS has been conducted on Year 4 students (8-10 year olds) in 5 year cycles, beginning in 2001. In 2011 over 6,000 Australian students from 280 schools were randomly selected to participate in the project. This was the first time Australia children had participated in the PIRLS.

PIRLS contextual questionnaires include questions about the participants' 'outside of school' reading, their attitudes and reasons for reading, and the number of books in the home. In addition, the parent/primary caregiver questionnaire asked about the children's early reading experiences and collected background information about the parents'/caregivers' reading, attitudes to reading, number of books in the home.

Another useful source of data is the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) report *Challenges for Australian Education: Results from PISA 2009* which, like the PIRLS research, despite being educational in focus contains a chapter on the research participants' reading habits. The chapter contains information about Australian students' enjoyment of reading, the time they spend reading for enjoyment and the materials they are reading. The chapter also provides useful comparisons with other OECD countries. Although the students who took place in this study were aged 15 years, information is included in this literature review to supplement the scant Australian research on children aged 5 to 14 years.

In addition to these large national studies, there are a limited number of smaller, generally older Australian studies which will be used to supplement the more recent research.

Various authors¹⁵⁰ have observed that very little is known about children's leisure reading habits compared to their involvement in other leisure activities and this is still the case, particularly in relation to the recent Australian context. The majority of research on children's reading, even children's leisure reading, is strongly motivated by concerns about children's literacy, language development and academic achievement. This is true of the major international research such as that conducted by Christina Clark and her colleagues from the National Literacy Trust in the UK; international comparative data on leisure reading collected as part of the *Progress in International Literacy Study* (PIRLS) and the *Programme for International Student Assessment* (PISA); and US research conducted by the National Endowment for the Arts (*Reading at Risk 2004* and *To Read or Not to Read 2007*) and by Scholastic, published as the *Kids and Family Reading Reports*¹⁵¹.

¹⁵⁰ e.g. Nippold, Duthie, and Larsen, "Literacy as a Leisure Activity: Free-Time Preferences of Older Children and Young Adolescents," (2005); Cremin, "Revisiting Reading for Pleasure: Delight, Desire and Diversity " (2007).

¹⁵¹ "Kids and Family Reading Report," (Scholastic Inc, 2006); "2008 Kids & Family Reading Report: Reading in the 21st Century: Turning the Page with Technology," (Scholastic Inc, 2008); "2010 Kids & Family Reading Report: Turning the Page in the Digital Age," (Scholastic Inc, 2010); "Kids & Family Reading Report," (2013).

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