



PREACT

ATTENDANCE

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Evidence in Action

A K20 Center Research Brief

Exploring the Effects of Book Clubs on the Reading Attitudes of Students

Whittingham, J. L. & Huffman, S.

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Introduction

Research has consistently shown that students' interest, motivation, and confidence in reading decline during the middle grades, often leading adolescents to see reading as a chore rather than a meaningful activity. The authors situate this study within a body of research suggesting that choice, social interaction, and voluntary reading experiences can positively influence adolescent literacy development.

While classroom-based literature circles have been well documented, less research has examined independent book clubs offered outside of class time, particularly their effect on students who are resistant to reading. This study addresses that gap by examining whether participation in a voluntary, student-centered book club could improve students' attitudes toward reading, including motivation, self-perception, and lifelong reading interest.

Methodology

Research Design:

The study used a pre-post quantitative design. Researchers measured students' reading attitudes before and after their participation in an independent book club over the course of one semester.

Sample:

- Participants: 60 middle school students
- Grade Level: Middle school (specific grades not reported)
- Student Characteristics: Volunteers; included students with both positive and negative initial reading attitudes
- Setting: Two local middle schools
- Additional Participants: Middle-level university interns served as adult participants and discussion models within book clubs

**Intervention Descriptions:**

The intervention was an independent, voluntary book club offered outside the regular instructional day.

What students and adults did:

- Students voluntarily attended weekly book club meetings.
- Students selected and read self-chosen books rather than a shared class text.
- Students discussed books they were currently reading.
- Adult facilitators shared their own reading experiences and their enthusiasm for reading.

Focus:

- Reading attitudes, motivation, self-perception, and engagement (not academic achievement)

Delivery format:

- Small-group discussions in an informal, social setting
- Emphasis on discussion, book talks, and peer-to-peer sharing

Who implemented the intervention:

- Middle-level university interns enrolled in a professional education internship
- Interns served as facilitators and reading role models, not formal instructors

Dosage:

The study provides sufficient information to calculate dosage.

- Frequency: 1 session per week
- Length of Sessions: Approximately 25 minutes
- Duration: One semester
- Based on a typical semester length of 15 weeks, the total time of engagement will be 6.25 hours

Data Analysis:

Students completed a 10-item Likert-scale reading attitude survey at the beginning and end of the semester. Researchers:

- Compared pre- and post-survey scores
- Tracked total participation time
- Conducted correlational analyses to examine relationships between:
 - Initial attitudes and change over time
 - Participation time and attitude shifts



Results

- Overall improvement in reading attitudes, particularly among students who initially had negative views of reading
- Students with the lowest starting attitudes showed the greatest positive change
- Even limited participation had a measurable positive effect for reluctant readers
- Improvements were noted in:
 - Feelings about reading
 - Self-perception as a reader
 - Interest in lifelong reading

Students who had already enjoyed reading tended to participate more, but showed smaller attitude changes.

Practical implication:

Short, low-stakes exposure to socially supported reading experiences can substantially benefit reluctant readers.

Application into Practice

Independent book clubs can be implemented as a low-cost, flexible strategy to improve reading attitudes, especially for students resistant to traditional literacy instruction.

Action Steps for Schools:

- Establish a voluntary book club outside of instructional time
- Prioritize student choice in reading materials
- Organize students into small discussion groups
- Include adult reading role models who actively share their own reading experiences
- Focus meetings on discussion and enjoyment, not assessment
- Schedule approximately 25 minutes per week across a semester
- Ensure access to a wide range of reading materials
- Use the club as a support, not a replacement, for classroom instruction
- Schools should adapt implementation based on staffing and scheduling capacity

Work Cited

Whittingham, J. L., & Huffman, S. (2009). The effects of book clubs on the reading attitudes of middle school students. *Reading Improvement*, 46 (3), 130-136.