An independent study by Professor Keith Topping, Professor of Educational and Social Research, School of Education, University of Dundee
Welcome to this summary of the 2017 What Kids Are Reading report.

We’re delighted to be able to offer you the key findings of Professor Keith Topping’s latest study into the reading habits of almost 850,000 school children in the UK who together read well over 15 million books during the past academic year, using Renaissance’s web-based Accelerated Reader programme.

A much more extensive version of the report including all the data on reading preferences of boys and girls, regional variations, school snapshots, short reflections on reading by some of our readers’ favourite authors, the type of books read by good readers and much, much more can be found online at www.whatkidsarereading.co.uk. We hope you will find this of interest and we’d love to hear your thoughts on social media:

Twitter: @RenLearn_UK
Facebook.com/AccReader

Dirk Foch,
Managing Director,
Renaissance UK

Read the full report at:
whatkidsarereading.co.uk

About the Author

Keith Topping is Professor of Educational and Social Research at Dundee University. His published works exceed 300 (books, chapters, peer reviewed journal papers and distance learning packages), with translations into 12 languages. Prior to entering Higher Education he worked for a number of Local Education Authorities and for Social Services and Health. Keith’s own main research focus is Peer Learning (including peer tutoring, cooperative learning and peer assessment) and other forms of non-professional tutoring (e.g. by parents, assistants or volunteers) – in core skills (e.g. reading, spelling, writing, thinking skills, science, mathematics, information technology) and across subject boundaries, in all sectors and contexts of education and lifelong learning. He also has interests in computer aided assessment, peer assessment and formative assessment.
“What Kids Are Reading 2017” is a unique report. Whilst it offers a strong and important analysis of key literacy trends, it is, in essence, a celebration of children’s reading. The scale of the reading it documents is astounding – the billions of works read, the millions of books completed. The care of the children’s reading – as evidenced by their tests – is also extraordinary. The number of children, now nudging a million, who have taken part in the study is impressive. “What Kids Are Reading” paints a picture of a generation that is deeply engaged in reading, who are inspired by stories and books. For those of us who see literacy as the key skill, necessary for every child to fulfil their potential, this is a heartening. Books and stories continue to feed the imaginations of a new generation giving them skills and stories for the rest of their lives.

Of course there is an untold story underpinning this report, and that is the powerful contribution of the school libraries and school librarians who inspire children to read for pleasure. Finding the right book, for the right child, at the right time. This report is as much an evaluation of their impact as it is of the impact of Accelerated Reader. Too often they are marginalised. This report shows their power.

Occasionally the report sounds a warning bell, particularly in terms of the reading stretch offered to children in the first years of secondary education. This reinforces evidence published by the National Literacy Trust about the waning reading patterns and passions of children after transition to secondary school. We need to redouble our energy and creativity in inspiring young people in these years to read.

Chairing the National Literacy Trust and the Read On. Get On. Campaign has given me a keen understanding of the creative energy in the children's publishing sector. The report documents children’s reading in 2016 – Roald Dahl’s centenary year – and Dahl’s work figures strongly, but so do new titles, books generated by today’s writers for today’s children. The report is a testament to how writers and publishers are engaging children with reading by producing books which reflect their contemporary passions. It’s great to see Dan Freedman’s “Skills from Brazil” appearing in the favourites list in the year of the Rio World Cup. And the appearance of Zoella’s first novel is a reminder that the confident child reader of today moves between media not just genres.

So this report is a bright burst of energy and a significant statement of hope. Children are reading voraciously and intelligently, their imaginations fuelled by the classics and the best writers of today. I look forward to “What Kids Are Reading 2018”. Wouldn’t it be wonderful if the number of children taking part in it topped a million? What we’re seeing isn’t just the reading preferences of individuals but the reading culture of a new generation, riding a wave of strong literacy skills.

Dame Julia Cleverdon DCVO CBE is a passionate and practical campaigner who believes in the power of responsible businesses and has gained an international reputation for ‘connecting the unconnected’, inspiring individuals and organisations to work together for the common good.

As Vice President of Business in the Community, Vice Patron of Teach First, and previously Special Adviser to the Prince’s Charities, she now promotes collaboration among senior leaders from business, government, education and community organisations to transform education and opportunities for young people while building a more resilient civil society. As Chair of Teach First from 2006 to 2014, and now Vice Patron, Julia has pioneered efforts to address educational disadvantage by transforming exceptional graduates into effective, inspirational teachers in low-income communities across the UK.

Julia was appointed to chair the National Literacy Trust in 2013 and chairs Read On. Get On., the national campaign to ensure all children are reading well by the age of 11.

“Our librarian is a huge driving force in the success of Accelerated Reader because she creates themed displays and competitions each term and students are always keen to see what their library has turned into each half term! The library has always been a haven for our students but it has now become a place of imagination and excitement where students of all ages can curl up with a book and enjoy themselves.”

Read the full article at www.whatkidsarereading.co.uk
Summary of Key Findings

This summary of the What Kids Are Reading report considers the books read and quizzes taken by British primary and secondary age children between August 1, 2015 and July 31, 2016 in 3,897 schools.

Compared to the previous report, many more children participated in this research (848,219 compared to 725,369 – 17% more). Thus children participating in this study are nearing a million.

Slightly more boys than girls yielded data (371,374 cf. 353,754; 123,091 genders unknown – just as last year).

The total quizzes taken (= books read) was 15,087,017 as compared to 12,513,109 last year (20% more). Thus many more children were participating, but participating children were also quizzing on more books. Year 7 pupils took by far the largest number of quizzes overall (3,848,691) and Year 8 was also high on this factor (2,190,169).

In the first three years pupils steadily read more books each year, reaching a peak in Year 3 at 35.1 books. After this the number of books read per year steadily declined. This would be to a large extent expected as older pupils read longer and harder books. In Years 12 and 13 a larger number of books appear to be read, but the numbers of pupils contributing data at this age is quite small, and this probably represents a small group of very enthusiastic readers.

The average number of quizzes passed shows a similar trajectory. This year there is again strong evidence that the number of quizzes taken and passed is sustained into the first two years of secondary school (Year 7 and 8, except in Scotland). This suggests a continued growth in use of Accelerated Reader in secondary schools.

The average book difficulty rises as pupils get older, but not in proportion to the rate at which the pupils should be improving in reading. In previous years it peaked in year 6 then plateaued until year 11, after which it declined. This year however shows considerable improvement in this regard. Difficulty level peaks in Year 9. However, although the difficulty level rises sharply each year in primary school, it does not rise very much in the first years of secondary school (years 7-8). There is still considerable room for improvement here.

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### Table 1: Total and Average Quizzes taken and passed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Pupils</th>
<th>Total Quizzes Taken</th>
<th>Average Quizzes Taken</th>
<th>Total Quizzes Passed</th>
<th>Average Quizzes Passed</th>
<th>Total Words Read</th>
<th>Average Total Words Read</th>
<th>Average Book Level</th>
<th>Total Words Read</th>
<th>Average Percent Correct on Quizzes Taken</th>
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<td>1</td>
<td>9158</td>
<td>216924</td>
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<td>0.77</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>848,219</td>
<td>15,087,017</td>
<td>12,124,206</td>
<td>193,163,631,338</td>
<td>228,073</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Schools: 3,897**

The Average Percent Correct (APC) on quizzes taken was in every year lower than that recommended by the software manufacturers (0.70 – 0.78 cf. 0.85). Pupils in primary schools showed a higher APC than pupils in secondary schools. This shows a decline on the previous year after an increase in year before that. The effectiveness with which pupils are taking quizzes seems worrying: 15,087,017 were taken but only 12,124,206 passed (80%, exactly as last year).

The APC figure is depressed by the inclusion of quizzes which were not passed. If only those quizzes which were passed are considered, the APC holds up to the 85% level recommended.

Overall, the pupils read a total of 193,163,631,338 words, considerably higher than the 161,322,910,054 words reported last year (20% more). This is indeed impressive, although the increase is not so large as last year. The average total words read also rose from 222,401 last year to 228,073 this year (3% increase). Both these figures suggest that pupils were tending to read longer books containing more words (but not necessarily harder books).

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**Reflections on Reading: Michael Rosen**

“It should be fairly obvious to state that one of the best ways to get children interested in reading and to carry on being interested in reading is to ensure that they are surrounded with books and printed matter that interests them.”

Read the full article at [www.whatkidsarereading.co.uk](http://www.whatkidsarereading.co.uk)
In addition to completing quizzes on books to assess their understanding, children also have the opportunity to vote for books in terms of whether they enjoyed the book or not. Of course, degree of understanding is not the same as personal preference, and the two measures should not be confused.

For the Years 1-6 children are reading favourite books at far above their chronological ability, but still maintaining a high rate of success in terms of high APC, albeit with occasional failure to meet required standards of accuracy. This is an increase over previous years, when this effect stopped at Year 5.

However, there is a marked difference in Year 7 (the year of secondary transfer). At this point favoured books are no longer a year above chronological age, but a year below it, and in ensuing years the difficulty of books plateaus or declines. This is the same picture as last year. It seems that transfer to secondary school has a striking effect even on highly motivated readers.

In the first years, children are reading very difficult books with a high degree of success – it is wonderful what reading motivating books does for children. J.K. Rowling is the most popular author (18 Books, a substantial increase over last year), with Rick Riordan second (14 books, a decline from last year). Cassandra Clare and Erin Hunter tied on 12 books, but this represents a considerable increase for Hunter (from five). Christopher Paolini had declined to four (from ten last year) and Michael Grant appeared with four. Jaqueline Wilson had three (eight last year) and Robin Stevens and Charlie Higson both had two. Daisy Meadows, Enid Blyton and Derek Landy had disappeared. Strikingly, Jeff Kinney hardly appears. Why are children reading books in the quiz lists they do not prefer? Possibly because they only know their favourites after the book has been read.

The voting system based on 4-star rating

- One of the best books I have ever read
- A very good book
- An a OK book
- Not a good book.

“It’s stories about real situations that interest me, things that are happening in the world today, (though events in history sometimes tug at my heartstrings too). And to find those stories, I have to go and look for them.”

Read the full article at www.whatkidsarereading.co.uk

“Accelerated Reader has helped our children develop into more mature and sophisticated readers. They’re much more involved in their reading and are more aware of what authors they like and what kinds of books they like to read, which they didn’t really know before.”

Read the full article at www.whatkidsarereading.co.uk
Popularity of Authors

**Jeff Kinney**
Books including: Diary of a Wimpy Kid

**David Walliams**
Books including: Gangsta Granny, Billionaire Boy

**Roald Dahl**
Books including: The Twits, The Magic Finger, Fantastic Mr Fox

**Roderick Hunt**
Books including: Village in the Snow, Castle Adventure

**Julia Donaldson**
Books including: The Gruffalo, The Gruffalo’s Child

**Francesca Simon**
Books including: Don’t Be Horrid, Henry!

**Zoe Sugg**
Books including: Girl Online, Girl Online: On Tour

“Once we have the skills that enable us to read an important sign, finish our homework, sign up for the football trials - we can have fun, indulging in glorious pleasure, just like eating our favourite meals.”

Read the full article at www.whatkidsarereading.co.uk
High-Achieving Kids

Jeff Kinney easily tops the high achieving list with 36 mentions, although again this is less than last year (38). J.K. Rowling rises back into second place with 32 mentions, as compared to 23 last year. David Walliams drops to third, with 24 mentions, just two fewer than last year. Fourth is Roald Dahl with 12 mentions (slightly down on last year). Suzanne Collins comes next with ten mentions — also slightly down on last year. James Dashner has seven mentions (one more than last year). John Green comes next with five mentions (as last year). Veronica Roth comes next with four mentions (down from six) and then Zoe Sugg with three mentions (new to this list this year).

Difficulty of books does not show much change, apart from an increase in upper primary (Years 5 and 6). Younger children read well above their chronological age but older children (even those with high reading ability) read well below it. APC in general was adequate — although this is perhaps not surprising when the difficulty of books is so low and declining, as was the case in the upper years.

Struggling Readers

In Year 5 pupils were reading at the level of difficulty expected (two years behind their chronological age) but not very accurately. By year 6 they were reading two and a half years behind, but with the same level of inaccuracy.

In Year 7 (the first secondary year), there were again signs of pupils reading more books familiar to younger pupils with higher reading ability. This was associated with a substantial rise in difficulty for the second year in a row. Let us hope this trend continues. However, this was accompanied with a degree of declining accuracy, although these Year 7 pupils were still reading as far below their chronological age as Year 6 pupils were. It may take some time before first year secondary pupils become used to reading harder books at the required level of accuracy.

In Year 8 there were increases in the difficulty of books, and these left pupils again only two years behind their chronological age, which is what would be expected. Year 9 pupils read at virtually the same level of difficulty as Year 8 pupils, so inevitably they fall further behind in terms of expectations. Additionally, the relationship between book difficulty and APC is not a straightforward one.

Non-Fiction Titles

In Years 3 to 5, difficulty was above or at the chronological age of the pupils, holding up similar to that for average fiction books. However, once beyond Year 5 it began to decline, just as with average fiction books. The drift to sports books in Year 5 halted this year, and Year 5 pupils read a more mixed collection of books. However, beyond this and especially on entry to secondary school it was much the same, with many male sports-oriented books dominating the choices. Thus there was no evidence that pupils read harder non-fiction books than fiction. The number of books not read to the criterion of 85% was unacceptably high — it seemed that the non-fiction books were not read or understood as carefully as the fiction books. These results were similar to the five previous years.
The book difficulty level is determined by the ATOS formula. This is marked on the book, so pupils can make sure that they are choosing books that are not too easy or too hard – challenging without causing frustration. ATOS uses four factors to determine readability: average sentence length, average word length, word difficulty level and the total number of words in the book. The entire book is scanned and the formula applied to the whole book - not a small sample of text as with other formulae. ATOS can be applied to all publications. In order to relate the ATOS levels to the British system, ‘1’ would have to be added to bring the difficulty level up to English, Welsh and Northern Irish Years and ‘2’ added to bring it up to Scottish P years. The interpretation takes this into account.

To illustrate this point, ATOS was applied to about 30 text samples from some common UK publications. Interestingly these common periodicals were not as different in terms of their average readability as might have been expected, but the range of readability of items within each one was considerable. An exception was Hello magazine, which had many text samples within a narrow range of readability, as if its policy was to constrain readability deliberately. The Economist had consistently high readability text. The differences in size of text sample were also interesting - the Sun had some shorter but also some longer pieces while Hello texts were even more varied.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Publication</th>
<th>Reading Age</th>
<th>Range Based on Word Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Economist</td>
<td>13.6</td>
<td>12.0 - 15.2, 500 - 2,000 words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Times</td>
<td>12.7</td>
<td>11.0 - 15.1, 500 - 800 words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Daily Mail</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>9.1 - 14.2, 450 - 700 words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Sun</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>9.7 - 13.3, 350 - 1,000 words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hello Magazine</td>
<td>11.4</td>
<td>9.5 - 13.3, 250 - 2,000 words</td>
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</table>

"Imagination is the key not only to storytelling but to creativity and intellectual development in all walks of life. Being inventive or having an idea can help a person overcome a problem, find a solution to an argument or maybe even write a..."

Read the full article at www.whatkidsarereading.co.uk
Regional variation between the different parts of the UK (England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland) was investigated.

Some of these regions are rather small and numbers of readers not large in every case. It was thus not sensible to make comparisons between boys and girls across the regions for all Years (especially for Wales). We start our comparisons with Year 3. In Wales we only report on the secondary level of education.

Two main features stand out from the foregoing. Firstly, the striking slump in difficulty at transfer to secondary school is very marked in all regions. Book difficulty plateaus after secondary transfer. The fact that pupils in Scotland are still in primary school does not protect them from this slump. In Year 6 pupils are reading at their chronological age.

In Year 7 pupils are suddenly a year behind their chronological age, in Year 8 two years behind, and in Years 9-11 at least three years behind.

Secondly, there is variation among the regions in Years 3 and 4, but the numbers are small and may not be reliable. In Years 5 and 6 with more reliable numbers all regions do more or less as well, except Scotland is up on difficulty in Year 6. At secondary level again all regions do equally well (or poorly), except in Scotland difficulty is down in Year 8. For Wales we only have the secondary results, but here again they are not much different from the other regions.
Recommendations

Recommendations for the future seem clear. Pupils should be encouraged to: pass all quizzes; sustain a higher level of challenge in their reading, especially on transfer to secondary school; and sustain Average Percent Correct at or above the 85% level on every book. Teachers should be aware of the very different pupil preferences for reading over time and the marked differences in preferences in secondary between boys and girls (although not necessarily encouraging them!). Even high-achieving readers need encouragement to sustain high challenge in their reading, especially in the later years. Boys might profess more interest in non-fiction but need encouragement to read it carefully. Books popular with children should guide school purchasing decisions in the future, but even on these books difficulty eventually declines.

The take-home messages of this report are thus:

The good news:

- Many more pupils are quizzing with Accelerated Reader.
- Difficulty of books bounces about a little, but in general shows a slight upward trend.
- The accuracy with which books are read is rising slightly, although less so in the upper years.
- The accuracy of reading by low ability readers is rising slightly.
- On average, boys are performing at lower levels of difficulty to girls.
- Children read highly motivating books at a far higher level of difficulty, with accuracy.

The less good news:

- There is a marked downturn in difficulty of books at secondary transfer. Although there are some signs that schools are addressing these issues, more needs to be done. Secondary teachers and librarians need to get better at encouraging children appropriately.
- The difficulty even of highly motivating books declines in secondary school.
- Struggling readers are seriously under-challenged, but their level of accuracy is low as well.
- High-ability readers are seriously under-challenged in the secondary school.
- Non-fiction readers are seriously under-challenged, especially in secondary school where they choose male-dominated books.
- Year 7 pupils in Scotland who are still in primary school show a marked decline in difficulty. This raises the prospect that maturational factors rather than change in type of school are causative.

School Spotlight

Ormiston Primary School

“Accelerated Reader has had a huge impact on reading at the school. It’s made reading more transparent, it’s easier to see how well children have understood concepts in the book, it’s easier for parents to support their children with reading, and it’s easier for children to link reading done outside school with reading done in the classroom.”

Read the full article at www.whatkidsarereading.co.uk
Celebrating 30 years of reading success

From the humble beginnings of a central Wisconsin basement to becoming the world’s most widely used reading management software, Renaissance Accelerated Reader has been encouraging children of all ages and abilities to read for pleasure for more than 30 years.

At its heart, Accelerated Reader is simple; a child reads a book, takes an online quiz, and both they and their teacher receive instant feedback on how well they’ve done. When those quizzes are on ‘suitably challenging’ books, and the school timetable allows for daily reading time – then reading ability improves, and a love of reading develops.

However, Accelerated Reader wouldn’t have the impact without the support, dedication and commitment of the countless teachers and librarians who have been driving its success in schools across the world over the last 30 years – and to them, we say a very big ‘Thank You’, and here’s to the next 30 years!

Independent studies by the National Literacy Trust (NLT) and Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) show the positive effect that Accelerated Reader has on both attitudes towards books and reading, and reading ability – even among the most struggling and reluctant readers.

Learn more at www.renlearn.co.uk/reading