The attitude of adolescents towards reading : the case of the Reali Hebrew School / Keren Buchbinder

Abstract

Over the past decades, there have been changes in leisure activities enjoyed by adults as well as by children and adolescents. First, there has been a general increase in leisure time and in the variety of cultural activities in which children and adolescents take part. Second, television and the internet have gradually replaced outdoor social interactions (Veisblai, 2011; Suan, 2011). It should be noted that the emergence of a new medium (Radio, Television and Internet) usually decreases the use of the prior, and consequently greatly affect the content of leisure time activities (Katz, 2000). Therefore, those changes in media consumption habits in leisure time also affected the wide subject of book reading executed by adolescents.

The basic assumption of the current research is that in the age of the internet and advanced technologies, the amount of 'book reading' done by adolescents, is going through major transformation. Therefore, it is important to find and analyze the current views of adolescents towards reading, and reading literature in particular. Accordingly, three main research goals were set: first, to present an up to date analysis of adolescents' (12-15 year olds) attitudes toward literature. Then, to examine the correlation between those attitudes and the actual scope of reading. Lastly, to map and analyze the factors which affect adolescents attitudes toward reading. Hence, the significance of this research can be found in the performance and current attitude of adolescence toward reading, as well as in identifying social and cultural needs of this age group and finding ways to encourage reading.

For achieving those research goals, six questions and hypotheses were set, related to the literature reading habits of adolescents: the connection between the scope of reading and the amount of books in one's home; the connection between self-concept and reading; the connection between adolescents self-concept as readers and their perception of friends and family members as readers; the attitudes towards literature; the perception of reading and suggested ways to encourage adolescents to read.

This research used both qualitative and quantitative methodology. The research tools were focus groups (2 phases, 44 students in total) and semi-structured interviews with 10 students, on their perceptions and attitudes toward reading. In addition, a questionnaire, which was based on several categories that were identified in the academic literature, and additional themes that emerged during the pilot focus groups that were conducted for the purposes of this research were also used. The questionnaire was filled out by 323 students all of whom attend one particular middle school in Israel – The Reali Hebrew School in Haifa. This school is an independent educational establishment situated in the north of Israel. Students attending this school are accepted through a screening process. The majority of students are from urban environments, from upper socio-economic statuses.

In relation to the students reading habits, the findings showed that besides the scope of reading, there are discrepancies between the specific research population and earlier findings in the academic literature about preferred reading time, preferred format, the variety of genres, and the main motives for reading. For example, it was found that adolescents preferred printed books (to digital), afternoon and evening reading, and were exposed to a large number of genres. This finding contrasts earlier findings that showed preference for digital formats, a limited number of genres read,

and reading during school hours. Those discrepancies were explained by several factors such as the socio-economic status and the specific age group which compiled the research population. It was also found that adolescent reading habits is greatly influenced by the physical and human environment, both in terms of exposure and availability of books in school and in the home. Furthermore, students' perception of their family members and friends also greatly influenced their reading habits. Those findings echoed the early academic findings.

Another aspect of the research showed ambivalent attitude toward literature on one hand, and the attitude toward teenagers who are 'readers' on the other. Those positive attitudes toward reading literature in contrast of the neutral, positive and negative attitude toward adolescents that are readers, indicates that students are aware of the benefits of reading (general knowledge, improvement of language, fun), but the viability of those benefits stands against social perceptions and peer group interaction.

In addition, the research shows that adolescents are divided about the possibility to encourage reading at that age. Several suggestions were raised, related to the school involvement, the recommendations of friends and family, and the integration of reading technology. However, there was no clear agreement, and two contradictive opinions were evident. This apparently occurred because of the unique perspective, the different reading habits and preferences of each student. Nonetheless, the qualitative analysis showed that adolescents understand the significance of creating a suitable reading culture and social environment, which can produce a legitimacy to read and a social reality that promotes reading.

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