



# Reading habits of children with and without learning problems and parents' participation in this process according to the children's perception

Hábitos de leitura de crianças com e sem problemas de aprendizagem e participação dos pais neste processo de acordo com a percepção dos filhos

Hábitos de lectura de los niños con y sin problemas de aprendizaje y la participación de los padres en este proceso de acuerdo con la percepción de los hijos

*Mônica Taísa Assumpção Pessa\**

*Gabriela Rosito Alvarez Bernardez\**

*Tháís dos Santos Gonçalves\*\**

*Patrícia Abreu Pinheiro Crenitte\*\*\**

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*\*Speech Pathologist*

*\*\*Doctoral student in Oral Biology at the School Dentistry of Bauru (FOB-USP)- Brazil, Master in Speech Pathology and Audiology at the School Dentistry of Bauru - University of São Paulo (FOB-USP)-Brazil.)*

*\*\*\* Prof. Dr. at the School Dentistry of Bauru - University of São Paulo (FOB-USP)-Brazil. Post doctorate in Medical Sciences. Speech Pathologist..*

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**Correspondence address:** Tháís dos Santos Gonçalves, Rua Ponciano Ferreira de Menezes, 7-25, Apto 14. Jardim Panorama. Bauru-SP. Brasil. CEP: 17011-120

*E-mail address: thaiscarpediem@yahoo.com.br*

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## Abstract

**Introduction:** Reading plays an important role in the literacy process, and, consequently, for the good cognitive, academic and social performance of the individual. Aim: To investigate if the learning problem is a factor which influences the reading habits of the child and also the parents participation in the development of reading habits of their children, according to the children's perception. **Material and Method:** Participants were 100 students aged 9 to 12 years, of both genres, from 4th to 6th grade of elementary school. The sample was subdivided into two groups: with and without learning problems (50 children in each group). The participants individually responded to a questionnaire addressing the reading habits of each child as well as parental involvement in developing this habit. **Results and Conclusion:** The attitudes and reading habits of individuals with learning problems allow us to state that these children have less appreciation and involvement in reading activities, and also the parents of children in both groups demonstrated little participation in developing the reading habit of their children.

**Keywords:** reading; habits; learning disorders.

## Resumo

**Introdução:** A leitura desempenha importante papel no processo de alfabetização e consequentemente para o bom desempenho cognitivo, acadêmico e social do indivíduo. Objetivo: Investigar se o problema de aprendizagem é um fator que influencia no hábito de leitura da criança e também a participação dos pais no desenvolvimento do hábito de leitura dos filhos, de acordo com a percepção das crianças. **Material e método:** Participaram 100 escolares com idade entre 9 e 12 anos, de ambos os sexos, de 4º ao 6º ano do ensino fundamental. A amostra foi subdividida em dois grupos: com e sem problemas de aprendizagem (50 crianças em cada grupo). Os participantes responderam individualmente a um questionário que abordou os hábitos de leitura de cada criança, bem como a participação dos pais no desenvolvimento deste hábito. **Resultados e Conclusão:** As atitudes e os hábitos de leitura dos sujeitos com problemas de aprendizagem permitem afirmar que estas crianças apresentam menor apreço e envolvimento com atividades de leitura, e, ainda, os pais das crianças de ambos os grupos demonstraram pouca participação do desenvolvimento no hábito de leitura dos filhos.

**Palavras-chave:** Leitura; Hábitos; Transtornos de Aprendizagem.

## Resumen

**Introducción:** La lectura tiene una gran importancia en el proceso de alfabetización y en consecuencia para el buen desempeño cognitivo, académico y social del individuo. Objetivo: Investigar si el problema de aprendizaje es un factor que influye en los hábitos de lectura de los niños y también la participación de los padres en el desarrollo de hábitos de lectura de los hijos, según la percepción de los niños. **Material y Métodos:** Los participantes fueron 100 niños entre 9 e 12 años, de ambos sexos, de 4º a 6º grado de la escuela primaria. La muestra se dividió en dos grupos: con y sin problemas de aprendizaje (50 niños en cada grupo). Los participantes respondieron a un cuestionario de forma individual frente a los hábitos de lectura de cada niño, así como la participación de los padres en el desarrollo de este hábito. **Resultados y Conclusión:** Las actitudes y los hábitos de lectura de los niños con problemas de aprendizaje nos permiten afirmar que estos tienen menos estima y envolvimento en actividades de lectura, y también los padres de los niños de ambos grupos demostraron poca participación en el desarrollo del hábito de lectura de los niños.

**Palabras clave:** Lectura; Hábitos; Trastornos del Aprendizaje.

## Introduction

Although most children learn to read without difficulty, there are many who are not able to learn, or who learn with great difficulty. There are many reasons why a child may have difficulty learning to read. These reasons can range from social barriers to biological impediments<sup>1</sup>.

Brazilian researches found discrepancies in reading among students of private and public schools, supported by the hypothesis of interference of sociocultural differences on learning<sup>2</sup>. In Brazil's reality, scholars who show any difficulty to learn or write, especially in the public education system, have a learning path without proper help, due to an innumerable series of factors linked from the parents' literacy condition until teacher's unpreparedness<sup>3</sup>.

Thereby, the term School Difficulties is used to designate problems arising from lack of stimulation, motivation and school inadaptation, problems that are not only in the student, but that interfere with their learning. In this case, school performance can be influenced both by emotional problems and by school-related problems. The student may be experiencing learning difficulties as a result of not being adapting to the methodology used, or difficulties in the relationship with the teacher and with colleagues<sup>4</sup>.

According to the National Center for Learning Disabilities – NCLD5, dyslexia is a disorder in language processing that can hinder reading, writing, spelling, and sometimes speech. Thus, it is set to a specific learning problem of reading skills. The difficulties that are not “specific” to a particular learning area, affecting more than one area in the development of academic skills (such as reading, math and writing) are also called Learning Disabilities. These definitions are necessary in order to facilitate the understanding of the differences of each case. This article refers to the School Difficulties, Dyslexia and Learning Disorders as learning problems.

Thus, all these learning problems interfere with individuals' reading skills.

Oliveira<sup>6</sup> reports that in the survey conducted by the Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development<sup>7</sup>, it was found that 55% of students in 7th and 8th grades of elementary school in Brazil have the most basic level of reading, i.e., words identification; therefore, neither they

necessarily present the understanding of what they read. In this regard, Nicholson<sup>8</sup> reports that reading and understanding develop metacognitive skills, since the reader enhances the ability to reflect on their own cognitive process, observing when they do not understand something (knowledge of understanding), regulating their own thinking while reading and creating analogies and critical reading (knowledge of how to comprehend).

Thereby, the act of reading goes beyond mere decoding of written symbols. It involves the ability to critically analyze and interpret what is read and use the information obtained to solve problems. In order to do this, the good readers should know why they are reading, be able to recognize whether they are achieving their goal in reading, and, otherwise, they should be able to implement strategies to minimize the difficulties of understanding. The conscious knowledge of what is expected to do, and strategies to do so, is the metacognitive knowledge – to know about the knowledge<sup>9</sup>.

According to Oliveira<sup>6</sup>, interactive storytelling for children in pre-school age plays an important role in language development.

Language is used to encode many of the schemes in non-verbal memory. It provides reflection, description, instruction and questioning, which in turn facilitate problem solving, developing rules to guide behavior and moral reasoning<sup>9</sup>. Language problems also result in reading comprehension problems, as readers may fail to monitor their understanding, consequently interfering with metacognitive skills.

Thereby, it can be said that the more contact you have with reading the more enhanced becomes the ability to understand due to the development and expansion of prior knowledge, as a basis for understanding new information<sup>10</sup>. Thus, the applicability of what you read is the biggest motivation among those who acquire the habit of reading<sup>11</sup>.

The literature indicates that it can be expected that individuals who are not well succeeded in reading activities do not feel pleasure on reading as leisure activity<sup>12</sup>. Furthermore, the lack of habit of some teachers to use books as a teaching and learning resource may cause in their students this rejection for reading as a recreational activity<sup>12</sup>.

According to Martin and Navas<sup>13</sup>, the reading habit favors the improvement of academic performance and cognitive processes, and contributes to

a better integration in society, facilitating communication in general.

Considering the relevance performed by the reading habit in the literacy process and, consequently, for good academic performance, cognitive and social conditions, this study aimed to investigate whether the learning problem is a factor that influences the child's reading habits and also the participation of parents in the development of reading habits of children, according to the perception of children.

## Material and methods

### Ethical Aspects

This study was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the Dentistry School of Bauru, University of São Paulo, process protocol number 74/2004. Parents or guardians of all participants received the information about all study procedures and signed the Consent Form, in order to initiate the research procedures.

### Casuistry

A hundred children aged between 9 and 12 years old were interviewed, of both sexes, attending between the 4th and 6th grade of primary school, enrolled in a public school in a city in the interior of São Paulo.

The participants were divided into two groups according to the following criteria:

**Experimental Group (GI):** composed of 50 children (16 children in the 4th year, 17 in the 5th year and 17 in 6th year), who exhibited reading and writing alterations, in addition to school records with at least two grades below average each discipline, complaints about the academic performance presented by the school, and through interdisciplinary clinical evaluation (by speech pathologist and neuropsychologist) presented characteristics consistent with the condition of learning problems, covering up both specific learning disorders and academic difficulties.

**Control Group (GII):** composed of 50 children with no history of school failure and no history of disapproval (16 children in the 4th year, 17 in the 5th year and 17 in the 6th year), and, according to analysis of school records, had no impairment of reading and writing or developmental disorder,

physical, cognitive, sensory and/or behavioral order, which could affect their academic performance, which by specific clinical assessment showed no consistent characteristics with learning problems condition. Moreover, the school had no complaints regarding their school performance.

Were excluded from groups (GI and GII), children with hearing, visual and cognitive alterations, observed both by clinical assessment and by parental reports.

### Investigation of Reading Habits

This aspect was collected through a questionnaire consisting of 23 multiple choice closed questions. The questionnaire was prepared by Zorzi, Serapompa, Oliveira & Faria<sup>14</sup>, which underwent adaptation, with new questions prepared by the researchers, so that the proposed objective was achieved. Thus, the questions investigated the role of parents in the reading habits of children as well as the interests, feelings, attitudes and habits of children with and without learning disabilities for reading.

The questionnaire was applied individually and the child should describe or mark the response that she thought more appropriate. Children read the questions themselves, and if they needed help, the researcher read to them.

In the first part of the questionnaire, the children pointed out characteristics of their own parents in relation to the act of reading. In the second part they referred to themselves by answering questions regarding their habits and attitudes towards reading. In this study, was taken as a reference to children's own vision of themselves and their parents. The answers obtained allowed to describe a set of attitudes and reading habits of the subjects and their families. All the questions asked are described in the tables in the session of results.

Children of GI (experimental group) completed the questionnaire in Speech Pathology Clinic of School Dentistry of Bauru - USP, because these were patients of the clinic already, and were in the process of diagnosis or intervention in the institution. The children of the GII (control group) completed the questionnaire at school, after prior authorization of the directors.

### Analysis of results

The results were submitted to comparative quantitative statistical analysis, using non-parametric tests, according to the frequency distribution of results and the type of the variable. Therefore, it was applied the test Chi Square, Fisher and Mann-Whitney, and adopted the significance level of 5%..

## Results

Regarding the participation of parents in the reading habits of children, Table 1 shows that in

both groups, although explaining the importance of reading (statistically significant difference between the groups), most parents do not usually make frequent readings to their children. Yet, there have also been noticed statistically significant differences between the groups; it was observed that the minority of parents help their children with homework on request..

**Table 1- Comparison of parental involvement in children reading habit among the groups with (gi) and without (gii) learning problems**

Questioned aspects	Answers	GI	GII	Statistical Test/ P value
Explain to the children the importance of knowing how to read r	Yes	88%	100%	Mann-Whitney/ 0,027*
	No	12%	-	
Usually read to the children	Everyday	8%	2%	Fisher/ 0,051
	Frequently	6%	24%	
	Rarely	40%	32%	
	No	46%	42%	
Help the children with their homework when requested	Yes	18%	6%	Mann-Whitney/ 0,036*
	Rarely	54%	44%	
	No	28%	50%	

\* statistically significant values. Adopted p value:  $\leq 0.05$

In relation to the interests and feelings of the participants about reading, Table 2 shows that children without learning problems demonstrated more positive feelings and interests, as 84% reported being very fond of reading, 100% reported that it's nice/interesting and 70% often ask for parents to buy books. On the other hand, 44% of children with

learning disabilities reported liking to read, 84% reported that it's nice/interesting, 14% reported that it is boring/tedious and only 34% often ask for parents to buy books, with statistical significant difference.

**Table 2- Comparison of interests and feelings of children in relation to reading between the groups with (gi) and without (gii) learning problems**

Questioned aspects	Answers	GI	GII	Statistical Test / P value
Like reading	A lot	44%	84%	Mann-Whitney/ 0,0002*
	More or less	30%	14%	
	A little	14%	2%	
	Nothing	12%	-	
The feeling when reading	That's fun/interesting	86%	100%	Fisher/ 0,012*
	That's stirring/boring	14%	-	
Ask parents to buy books	Yes	34%	70%	Mann-Whitney/0,001*
	Rarely	30%	24%	
	No	36%	6%	
Why is it important to know how to read (more than one alternative could be ticked)	To gain access to knowledge/information	58%	76%	Cui-square/ 0,055
	To have a good job	70%	68%	Cui-square/ 0,828
	Para ir bem na escola	68%	60%	Cui-square/ 0,404
	Para ter um lazer	20%	16%	Cui-square/ 0,602
	To do well in school	58%	44%	Cui-square/ 0,161
	To have leisure	4%	-	Cui-square/ 0,153
There is difficulty to understand when reading	Yes	86%	80%	Cui-square/ 0,424
	No	14%	20%	
What kind of text (reading) is difficult to understand (more than one alternative could be ticked)	Newspapers	62%	46%	Cui-square/ 0,005*
	Didactic books (school textbooks)	6%	14%	
	Non-Didactic books	2%	18%	
	Comics	10%	18%	
	Magazines	2%	2%	
	No answer	18%	2%	
Like when books, comic books or magazines are given	Yes	74%	88%	Mann-Whitney/0,074*
	Rarely	12%	10%	
	No	14%	2%	

\* statistically significant values. Adopted p value:  $\leq 0.05$

Table 3 shows that, with regard to the attitudes and reading habits, there was a statistically significant difference between the groups in relation to the frequent habit of reading outside of school, reading other content beyond what the teacher

suggests, frequent habit of reading as there is free time, and in their homes there are often materials that they like to read. It was observed in the group without learning problems the higher frequency of the mentioned aspects.

**Table 3- Comparison of attitudes and reading habits among the groups with (gi) and without (gii) learning problems**

Questioned aspects	Answers	GI	GII	Statistical Test / P value
Usually reads outside of school	Every Day	22%	72%	Mann-Whitney/ 0,000*
	Rarely	60%	24%	
	No	18%	4%	
Reads other things, in addition to what the school teacher orders	Yes	64%	90%	Mann-Whitney/0,007*
	Rarely	20%	10%	
	No	16%	-	
Prefers books	With pictures	90%	70%	Cui-square/0,012*
	Without pictures	10%	30%	
Why prefers books with or without figure	There are fewer texts to read	14%	2%	Cui-square/ 0,040*
	It is easier to imagine and understand what is being read	68%	62%	
	Because it has more text to read	8%	10%	
	Because you can imagine more freely what you are reading, without being influenced by pictures	10%	26%	
When there is free time, usually reads	Every time	28%	24%	Mann-Whitney/0,000*
	Frequently	10%	48%	
	Rarely	38%	26%	
	No	24%	2%	
What reads (more than one alternative could be ticked)	Only texts school orders	10%	-	Fisher/ 0,056
	Comics	80%	76%	Cui-square/0,629
	Magazines in general	28%	34%	Cui-square/ 0,516
	Newspapers	12%	28%	Cui-square/ 0,045*
	Books	52%	88%	Cui-square/ 0,000*
	Brochures, advertising posters, product packaging, instructions	48%	64%	Cui-square/ 0,107
Has difficulty concentrating when reading	Yes	64%	14%	Mann-Whitney/0,000*
	Rarely	10%	44%	
	No	26%	42%	
has library at school	Yes	100%	94%	Fisher/ 0,242
	No	-	6%	
Usually attends this library	Yes	42%	96%	Cui-square/ 0,000 *
	No	58%	4%	
Usually has some sort of material that likes to read at home	Yes	82%	96%	Cui-square/ 0,025 *
	No	18%	4%	

Which way performs reading	Continuously, beginning middle and end	74%	100%	Cui-square/0,001 *
	Haltingly, skipping parts	22%	-	
	Read through the end	4%	-	
What is the importance of knowing how to read r	To learn new words	2%	4%	Cui-square/ 0,557
	To write better	12%	8%	Cui-square/ 0,504
	To learn	2%	10%	Cui-square/ 0,092
	To have good future	12%	10%	Cui-square/0,749
	To have a good job	30%	34%	Cui-square/ 0,668
	To do well in school	30%	34%	Cui-square/ 0,110
	To earn well	0%	2%	Cui-square/ 0,314
	To enter a college	6%	0%	Cui-square/ 0,078
	To speak well	40%	40%	Cui-square/ 1,000
	He did not know what to report	6%	0 %	Cui-square/ 0,786
Not classifiable	40%	34%	Cui-square/ 0,534	

\* statistically significant values. Adopted p value:  $\leq 0.05$

## Discussion

Regarding the parents' participation in the reading habits of their children, the results showed that parents have little effective participation in this process, in both groups. Studies show that the reading habit jointly with parents has great importance in the development of reading habit in children<sup>15</sup>.

Still, the study of Torppa et al.<sup>16</sup> showed that the shared reading experiences in preschool provided an important performance in all future academic tasks. The study also reports that children with reading problems had significantly less shared reading experiences with their parents before the reading learning in comparison to readers without problems. Such findings cannot be applied to the results of this research, because even in the group without learning problems, most parents do not have the habit of shared reading with their children.

The main characteristic of learning problem is the low performance in reading activity<sup>17</sup>. Relating this information to the participants' interests and feelings about reading, the lowest appreciation for reading observed among participants with learning problems is justified. In addition, the reading of children with learning problems is slow and syllabic, which may explain the fact that 14% of participants in the group with learning problems certify that the reading act is a boring/tiring activity.

There were also similarities between the groups regarding the interests and feelings about reading,

in which statistically significant differences were not observed. These similarities were noted in the following categories: importance of reading, presence of comprehension difficulties while reading and in what kinds of texts the difficulty occur in understanding, being elected the newspaper as the type of text in which children have more difficulty. Still, most of the group with learning disabilities, despite reporting they do not ask their parents to buy them books, enjoys when books, magazines and comics are given to them. The majority of the group without learning disabilities has also reported they enjoy being given such materials.

Given both groups report to be difficult to understand texts, literature presents that elementary students could improve even further their reading comprehension if intervention projects or improvement of this ability were actually developed. Thus, a better reading comprehension would have a positive impact on the expansion of other kinds of knowledge<sup>18</sup>.

Yet, regarding the attitudes and reading habits, as stated above, it is expected that individuals who are not successful in reading activities do not feel happy to do it as leisure<sup>12</sup>, which corroborates the findings.

In this study, only 10% of children with learning disabilities reported that they read only texts that the school offers, and no child without learning problem provided this report. Thus, most of the children reported that also reads non-didactic



texts. A study revealed that most of the children surveyed prefer reading for pleasure, not the academic texts, which caught the attention of researchers and this fact made them reflect if the reason for the lack of reading habit would be the reading obligation imposed by the school or the choice of not attractive themes made by teachers and clinical professionals<sup>19</sup>.

Another study showed that working with the reading of texts facilitated the motivation to read and write, and resulted in the improvement of textual progression and cohesion, besides the adequacy of the formal aspects of writing as spelling and punctuation, and was as well motivator for other reading and writing practices in the studied group<sup>20</sup>.

Furthermore, in contrast to the results of this study, which showed that the group without learning disabilities has more frequent reading habits, it was reported in the study by Vieira et al.<sup>19</sup> that read a lot may not be sufficient to have a good spell domain. It would be necessary: reading, comprehension, creativity, spelling rules and memory so the child can analyze and reflect on written language. The authors observed that in the group of low active readers, only 10% presented low spelling domain. The researchers concluded that just reading would not be the determining factor to make fewer spelling errors, and other studies reported that it would be necessary to master the writing rules and not have major impairments in learning. Still, for the authors, reading affects the increase of vocabulary, showing different forms of texts, bringing knowledge, making room for imagination and transmitting information about people and the world they belong to<sup>19</sup>.

This study showed that the group with learning disabilities prefers reading books with pictures by the fact that there is less text to read and turn it easier to imagine and understand what is being read, and this was statistically significant. The preference for books with pictures can be justified by the reading problems, whereas studies show that children with learning problems have slow reading, with limited understanding and decoding of difficulties<sup>21</sup>.

The difficulty in reading significantly undermines the accuracy, speed and/or reading comprehension. Students who have reading problems, or read but do not demonstrate understanding,

will certainly have difficulties in learning different school subjects<sup>22</sup>.

Children with learning problems reported greater difficulty in concentrating when reading, with a statistically significant difference between groups. There was also a statistically significant difference between the groups in relation to the way of the reading is performed, whereas the group with learning disabilities usually hold halting reading, skipping parts or first read the end, while the group without problems runs the reading continuously, following the sequence beginning, middle and end. The finding that 26% of children with learning problems read skipping parts or first read the final issues, reveals the difficulty in reading and the urge to finish as quickly as possible such activity, and demonstrates the negative influence of learning problems in the reading habit.

Following this reasoning, it is important to consider the affective conditions, interest and motivation in relation to reading act, so the enjoyment and the fondness of reading in day-to-day life can be ensured<sup>23</sup>.

In the group with learning problems, most of children reported that despite the schools have libraries, they do not have the habit of attend them, and these difference was statistically significant when compared to the group without problems. Thus, the positive attitude of the teacher facing the reading can be an important factor in learning and reading habit development<sup>24</sup>.

For Barros and Gomes<sup>23</sup>, teachers often are unaware of the importance of reading and children's literature in the classroom to support the pleasure of reading.

In this study, it was observed that there was still similar behavior between groups, with no statistical significant difference between groups in relation to the type of reading (except reading books, in which statistically the group without learning disabilities had a higher frequency of reading) and about the importance of reading, whereas both groups recognize the benefits of reading, despite the group with learning disabilities do not have the common habit of doing it. And, as already mentioned, the applicability of what is read is the biggest motivation among those who acquire the reading habit<sup>11</sup>.

## Conclusion

Attitudes and reading habits of individuals with learning disabilities have revealed that: children with learning disabilities have less appreciation and involvement in reading activities; judge read activity as boring/tedious; read less or do not read when they have free time; have difficulty concentrating when they are reading; have a preference for books with pictures, on the grounds that the pictures help in understanding what one is reading, reduce the writing and have less habit of frequenting the library of their schools.

Parents of children with and without learning disabilities, despite relating to children the importance of reading, demonstrate little interest in developing the reading habit, according to the perception of the children themselves. Although they are aware of the importance of reading in their academic and social lives, children with learning disabilities have unfavorable attitudes to the development of reading habits, highlighting the need to encourage reading by teachers and speech therapists, so that these children enjoy the benefits of reading to their cognitive-linguistic development and oral and written communication.

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