



# The Influencing Factors of Nonfiction or Fiction Literature Preferences Determined by High School Students in Conejo Valley Schools

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## ABSTRACT

Understanding what causes high schoolers to choose a specific type of literary genre is crucial when attempting to encourage students to continue to read. Between nonfiction and fiction literature, recommendations from parents, teachers, and peers, attitudes towards literature, classroom and school influences, availability, involvement, and gender are all factors determining which genre the students are drawn to or prefer over the other. This study aims to identify which factors among those listed cause the participants to choose a particular genre. 194 subjects among Conejo Valley schools were given a survey on their opinions, and 17 subjects were interviewed with more in-depth questions. Results showed there are correlations between attitudes, classroom influences, involvement, and availability. Distinct correlations were not found among gender and recommendations from parents, teachers, and peers.

## INTRODUCTION

Many young adults choose to read so they can present their emotions through a form of communication, for pleasure, through edutainment for enhancing learning, for life and attitude to gain and construct new knowledge, during their downtime, and for emotional gratification. Pressures for educational purposes and busier schedules have averted high schoolers from continuing to read. Studies have shown that many young adults experience disinterest in reading as they grow older, beginning with indifference in ages as low as thirteen and fourteen (Creel, 2015). Many of these students neglect to understand that reading provides a stress-free environment, and it can present ways in which to deal with reality and social situations altogether (Bowen, 2010). The interest in reading flourishes through recommendations from the adolescents' teachers, media, family, and friends, as well as other factors such as gender, attitudes, classroom influences, availability, and involvement.

Fiction is encouraged throughout the classroom more often than nonfiction. Therefore, it is hypothesized that high school students, regardless of gender and age, will prefer fiction over nonfiction. This paper ultimately challenges the legitimacy of using an essentialist framework to generate knowledge about how to best encourage young adults to read. In addition, this study aims to answer the question: Is the consumption of nonfiction or fiction merely preferential or is there more purpose to the choices readers make among high school students within the Conejo Valley? If readers are influenced by events and interactions, what were those outside factors that affect literature content and consumption?

## METHODS AND MATERIALS

To test which type of genre will be preferred among 9th and 10th-grade high school students across Conejo Valley Schools, a survey was conducted with the help of professionals in the psychology, and English and Literature fields. Participants were made up of CP, Honors, and AP students between the ages of 13-17 at mid-sized suburban high schools (Newbury Park High School, Thousand Oaks High School, and Westlake High School).

The focus remained on Grades 9-10 because they are more likely to continue to be reading in comparison to Juniors and Seniors who generally have a busier schedule throughout their high school careers. Through Mixed Methods or Quantitative and Qualitative research: surveys and personal interviews (volunteers) data was gathered with personalized surveys to whether the subject is an avid reader or not. Surveys were conducted during class time, through various 9th and 10th-grade classes. Furthermore, the surveys only took up to 5-10 minutes so that not much class time was taken away from the students.

The interviews, if the students volunteered their time, took place at Thousand Oaks High School for those students, and the Thousand Oaks library for students from Newbury and Westlake High School. Before interviewing the students, the participants involved were required to give permission to be recorded at the beginning of the interview. Moreover, they also took another survey testing their author familiarity.

## RESULTS

### General Results

The sample consisted of 39.7% males and 56.2% females with a mean age of 14.8 (SD = 0.71, range 13-17). About 82.2% of participants prefer to go on their phones and check social media, watch television and movies, and play video games, or just generally be on a screen or some type of digital technology instead of reading, proving the issue of digital technology against literature. In addition, about 50.5% read some school books and some outside of those assigned in class, leaving half of the students to become more influenced through reading both inside and outside of the classroom. It was calculated that students that choose to read often read most because they enjoy the stories (74.8%).

Furthermore, 42.8% of students regarded nonfiction as informational and historical. On the other hand, fiction literature had 37.6% of the students stating that it was creative and imaginative writing, and 29.4% stated that it was an escape from reality as a type of fantasy.

### Author Familiarity

Before interviewing the student volunteers, the author familiarity list was provided to them to see if the students were well known to the students. Out of the 17 responses provided, all 17 students were familiar with J.K. Rowling and her infamous Harry Potter books, as well as 16 responses choosing Harper Lee, showing that the students spent time in class reading *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Only five out of the 17 responses knew at least seven of the 20 real authors provided; however, there were 11 out of the 17 students that knew at least 4 or more of the authors provided showing that the students were still invested in the authors and books that they were reading if they spent the time to remember the author's name.

## DISCUSSION

### Interview Results and Discussion

After exploring descriptive analysis through surveys, face-to-face individual interviews were conducted with the volunteers who took the survey initially if they wished to provide more detail on their thoughts of reading's influence in their lives. About 17 interviews in total were conducted, as I also had the students take the previous survey regarding author familiarity as well to determine their ability to become involved in the book as a whole and understand the literature with the author in mind. Seven of the students interviewed were from Thousand Oaks High School, eight were from Newbury Park High School, and two were from Westlake High School. Of the students interviewed, seven were in the 9th grade, and ten were in the 10th grade. Those who responded that they had a dislike towards reading or don't make the time for it did not have the experience that others had with their parents reading to them and making it out to be an enjoyable activity.

Of the students interviewed, there were few who responded that they did not enjoy reading in general. However, those who did explained that it was because they didn't find the books interesting or enjoyable and that they simply did not have enough time in the day to read. In their eyes, reading takes too much of their focus, and can only be performed by itself. The students who responded that they enjoyed reading stated that they read about three hours throughout the week, also stating that their schedules sometimes get in the way of their assigned times for reading. When the students were asked what books their teachers generally assign in class, the students' overall answers were that they read fiction, with some nonfiction, and that they usually enjoy the fiction books assigned.

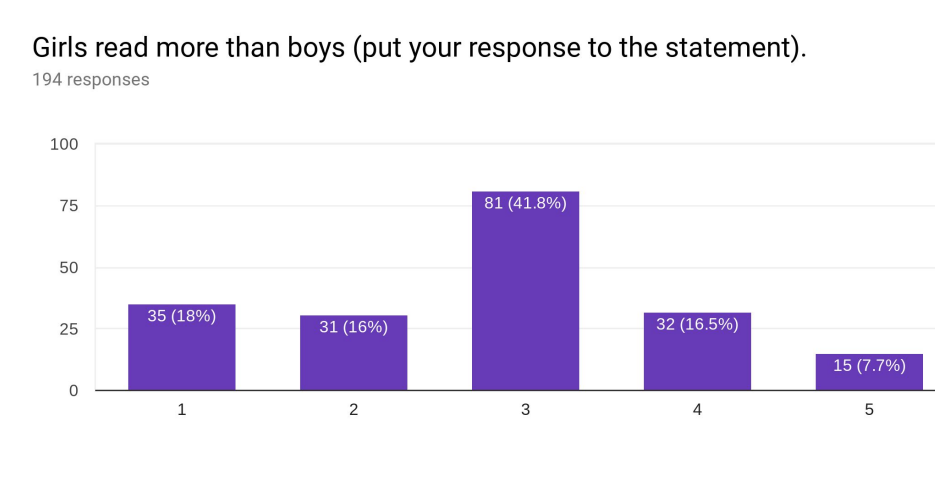
## CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study was to determine what factors influence students in high school to continue to read throughout their careers. It was proven that students will read as long as they are encouraged by their peers and in the classroom, availability in the home, and can enjoy it through involvement throughout the story. In addition, as the students expressed an interest in creating reading into a social component or environment, the status quo could be changed. By treating reading as a type of digital technology that can be talked about among friends or family, it will become socially acceptable to allow reading to be not just a solitary activity anymore, but one that everyone can appreciate.

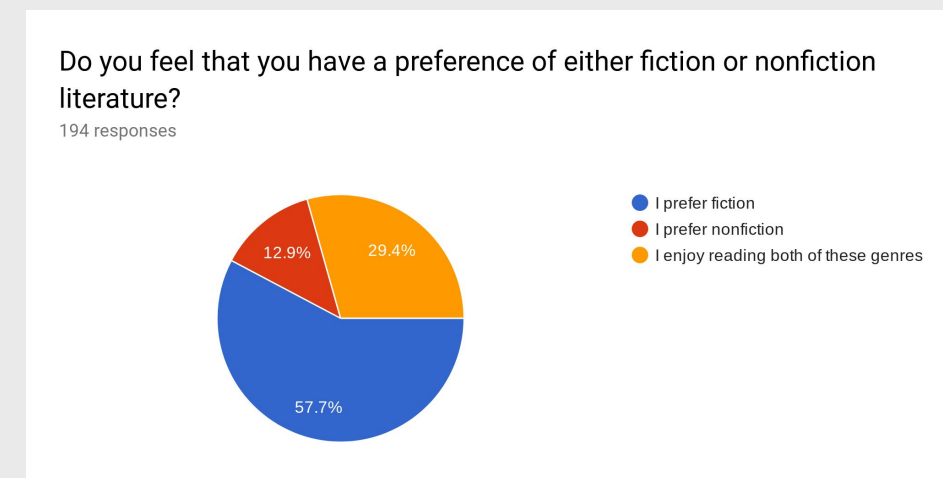
## REFERENCES

- Bowen, M. (2010). Judging a book by more than its cover examining the influences on the independent reading choices of middle school students. Fisher Digital Publications, 1-59.
- Creel, S. (2015). The impact of assigned reading on reading pleasure in young adults. Journal of Research on Libraries & Young Adults, 1-25.

### Gender



### Literature Preferences



### Involvement

