

# *Impact of Family Factors on Individuals' Reading Habit in China*

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**Abstract:** Though it is nearly a common recognition that reading is beneficial to an individual's internal growth, the size of reading population seems to shrink so fast in modern society: people always use their lack of leisure time as well as the busyness of working and studying as their excuses. However, reading is not only a hobby, but also a long-term habit that may accompany an individual for the whole lifetime. We form all kind of habit since childhood time, does family attribute to our reading habits? This paper summarizes some previous literatures which investigate the influence of family factors on individuals' reading habit, but surprisingly notices that some of the findings do not align with today's phenomenon in China. To find out how the family factors such as family income and parents' attitudes toward reading influence one's reading habit, this paper conduct research using self-report questionnaire, analyzes some of the potential factors that may contribute more to today's changing reading trend, while debunking some findings that do not fit today's situation.

**Keywords:** Literature, Socioeconomic, Family, Reading Habits

## 1. Introduction

In the fast-develop modern society, reading seems to be a luxury activity in our lives, especially for high-school students and the office workers: many parents of high-school students have been opposed to reading extracurricular books, especially in China where the results of GaoKao nearly determined a child's career trajectory in one bout. Parents may believe that the only way of improving the student's ability is practicing papers repetitively and endless, which finally forms a 'conditioned reflex' when they meet the same type of questions next time. Some of them may also believe that someone who enjoyed reading academic literatures and scientific research paper should be considered as bookworms—those who spend plenty of time reading fiction and comic is just a waste of time. Office works are busy with heavy workloads, especially in the Asian society where working days and nights is regard as a badge of honor. Adults usually lack time and energy to read after high intensity working.

Another horrible shock on reading is the development of social media, among all type of which short videos such as Reels on Instagram, TikTok and even Youtube. People just need to move their fingers in order to switch to another video. Most short videos aim at providing visual shock on human and intrigued people to watch the next videos on after on. No matter teenagers or adults, their leisure activities have been transformed from reading and hanging out with friends to staying at home with their mobile phone and spending all day and night on social media.

Since 2007, when the company Amazon roll out their e-book reading device ‘Kindle’, the forms of reading has been changed tremendously [1]. People starts to buy digital book and subscribe electronic magazines online with kindles or their mobile phones. The reading atmosphere in the society seemed to be improved to a great extent due to the improving accessibility and convenience, as well as the lower price of e-books. However, in the last half decades the price of subscription on reading applications and digital book has been surged dramatically—downloading a book of legal edition even cost as much as the a physical book. The subscription price of WeChat Reading has been raised from 6 RMB per month to 19 RMB per month., which data has tripled. Reading seems to be a real luxury activity in modern society with the high financial cost and time cost; Reading seems to become the amusement of a small group of people who has plenty of money and free time. A research conducted in 2009 revealed in their data set those individuals from family with higher income, the more likely they will develop reading habits. [2]

This study was firstly inspired by the fact observed in the group of high school students in Shenzhen, one of the most prosperous cities in China. These students have been real bookworms since an early age, and they hope to remain the habit of reading. Nevertheless, when they jumped into high school, where most students need to distribute monthly expenses by themselves with the pocked money given by their parents. It is surprised to find that the paper copies of books have become unaffordable compared to students’ “income level”. Even if some of them may switch to reading applications, the time they could spend on reading has become more and more cherished. Randomly interviewed some of the students in an international high school in Shenzhen, it is noticeable that though most interviewees come from the high-income group in Chinese society, still not many of them still have the habit of reading, even if their conditions are most likely to match the ‘qualified reading lover’ (people that are both rich and free). Therefore, this study is initiated in order to find out that if there are truly some connections with income level and the formation of reading habit, and whether people in the modern society still enjoy reading or not.

## 2. Literature Review

Income has been identified as one of the most influential factors on individuals’ reading habits, since the impact of income does not limit on the monetary value only, but also the education level, accessibility to resources and community’s environment. Fernandez-Blanco, Prieto-Rodriguez, and Suarez-Pandiello also confirmed that one’s reading must within their budgetary constraint, which are factors such as income, time, book prices, household culture equipment and access to library. [3]

Low income to a great extent negatively impacted the quantity and quality of reading resources one can access. Buckingham, Beaman and Wheldall suggested that low-income families usually have lower accessibility to facilities, such as libraries and e-reader, children in which may also experience from lacking early literary education, as many of them may not have money and opportunities to attend preschool. [4] Jabbar, Mahmood and Warraich revealed that the students with parents of lower social economic status tend to purchase less book than those with parents of higher social economic status. [5] Demographically, researchers also noticed that dwellers in urban and suburban areas reported a larger population proportion of high-income family compared to dwellers in rural areas. The communities in urban and suburban areas generally have better reading resources such as bookstore and library of larger scales, as well as higher intent connectivity, which allows them to follow up the newest literature resources. [6]

The income level of a family, on the other hand, also reflected the educational attainment of parents and correspondingly their attitude toward education of their children. In demographic level, there are more college graduated in the relatively wealthier areas, urban and suburban area. [6] Hofslundsengen, Gustafsson, and Hagtvat established a notable correlation between the educational attainment of parents and the creation of an early literacy-rich environment for their children, directly impacting

the vocabulary and phonological skills of the offspring. [7] Another determinant closely related to adolescents' reading ability is the level of parental education, especially the structural dimension of parental cultural resources. Children of more educated parents spend more time reading recreationally. [8] Both global comparative analyses and national studies have shown that students with more educated parents have significantly higher reading literacy scores than students with less educated parents.[9] It is also said that less educated parents work in jobs with low background status tend to keep less money for their children's education, as they may not have the idea of investing children's study and reading. Compared to these families, parents with higher income and better education attainment can meet their children's needs more easily, for instance, buying books and other reading materials. [10]

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1. Design**

This study consists of one questionnaire with a total of 20 questions, aiming at analyzing the connection of reading and other factors such as age, gender, income level, education level, and etc., both qualitatively and quantitatively. Most questions are multiple choice questions with specific answers allowed. Each of the choices usually contains detailed and specific information, which can save the time of respondents and give them simple instructions on how to answer the questions. The questionnaire was designed on the website wjx.cn. Most of the participants responded the questionnaire according to self-reflection and perception of their family members, while a small group of participants who are aged below 12 give their responses with the help of their parents, which may base on parents' perceptions and the information of their family members is provided based on the parents' self-reflection.

#### **3.2. Participant**

There are 336 pieces of effective answers. The respondents are aged from 3 to 50. All of the participants are classified into several age groups: 2.08% of them aged below or equal to 12, 9.53% of them aged from 13-15, 55.65% of them aged from 16-20, 6.25% of them aged from 21-25 and 26-30 respectively, 20.24% of them are 30 years old or above. When classifying by gender, 63.39% of the participants are female; 34.82% of them are male; and 1.79% of them reported themselves as other genders.

#### **3.3. Procedures**

All surveys are conducted online with a link and a QR code attached to the questionnaires on the social media platform WeChat and Instagram. There is detailed instruction with purpose to guide on how to fill out the questionnaires. There is also a brief introduction on the questionnaires to ensure that participants understand what they are doing and what should they do. All the participants are volunteered to complete the survey after they have been introduced the content of the survey at the beginning of the questionnaire and the survey is completely anonymous and confidential. In a total of 3 days are used to collect all pieces of answers.

#### **3.4. Measures**

##### **3.4.1. Respondents' Reading Preference**

The RRP contains the following five items:

1. "Do you like reading? Rating from scale 0-5, where 0=Not like reading at all, 5= Extremely enjoy reading"
2. "How often do you read? Choosing from Never read, 1 book per year/per quarter/per month/ per half month/per week/ filled in the blank with other specific frequency."
3. "Which form(s) of literature do you prefer? Choosing from Fiction/ Non-Fiction/ Prose/ Poetry/ Fill in the blank with other specific form(s). This question can choose more than one answer."
4. "What kind(s) of book do you prefer? Choosing from Natural Science, Social Science, and the other six named categories as well as 'other' option which should be filled by the respondents themselves."
5. "When did you approximately start reading? Choosing from Kindergarten/ Primary School/ Lower secondary school/ Higher secondary school/ Undergraduate/ Graduate/ Doctor and above."

### 3.4.2. Family Members' Reading Preference

The FMRP contains the five questions that are similar to RRP:

1. "Does your parent(s) or guardian(s) like reading? Rating from scale 0-5, where 0=Not like reading at all, 5= Extremely enjoy reading"
2. "How often does your parent(s) or guardian(s) read? Choosing from Never read, 1 book per year/per quarter/per month/ per half month/per week/ filled in the blank with other specific frequency."
3. "Which form(s) of literature does he/she prefer? Choosing from Fiction/ Non-Fiction/ Prose/ Poetry/ Fill in the blank with other specific form(s). This question can choose more than one answer."
4. "What kind(s) of book does he/she prefer? Choosing from Natural Science, Social Science, and the other six named categories as well as 'other' option which should be filled by the respondents themselves. "
5. "Does your parent(s) or guardian(s) support you to read? Choosing from Yes/ No/ Not sure)."

### 3.4.3. Family Economic Background

The FEB contains measures the economic conditions of the respondents' family, aiming at summarizing the family's financial ability and the distribution of their income on reading, which intended to reveal the level of significance of reading in this particular family. The FEB includes the following questions:

1. "How much pocket money do you have per month (unit: RMB)? Choosing from 1000 and below/ 1000-2000/2001-3000/above 3000)"
2. "How much do you usually spend on reading? Choosing from 0/ 30 and below/ 31-50/51-100/101-200/201-300/above 300.)"
3. "How much monthly income does your parent(s) or guardian(s) earn in total? Choosing from 10,000 and below/ 10,001-20,000/20,001-30,000/40,0001-50,000/50,001-100,000/above 100,000, unit: RMB)"
4. "How much does your parent(s) or guardian(s) usually spend on reading? Choosing from 0/ 30 and below/ 31-50/51-100/101-200/201-300/Not sure.)"

#### 3.4.4. Education Level and Expectancy

The ELE measures the level of education one's parents or guardians have received, the level of education that the parents expect their children to reach, as well as the level of education that the respondents expect themselves to reach. The ELE includes the following questions:

1. "What is the educational level of your parent(s) or guardian(s)? Choosing from no education experience/ primary school level/ lower secondary level/ higher secondary level/ technical secondary school/ junior college/ undergraduate/ graduate/ doctor and above.)"
2. "What educational level does your parent(s) or guardian(s) expect you to reach? Choosing from not sure/ higher secondary level/ technical secondary school/ junior college/ undergraduate/ graduate/ doctor and above.)"
3. "What educational level do you expect you to reach? Choosing from not sure/ higher secondary level/ technical secondary school/ junior college/ undergraduate/ graduate/ doctor and above.)"

### 4. Results

#### 4.1. Respondents' Reading Preference

Among all of the participants surveyed, 30.95% of them present a neutral attitude toward reading, while approximately half of the participants show that they have a relatively great interest in reading. The percentage of people who report themselves reading a book per quarter and a book per month are both nearly 30%. The majority of people show a preference to fiction reading, which is reaching a high of 83.63%. The proportion of participants showing a favor to non-fiction reading is the second highest, which is 41.67%. The preference on categories of books is kind of diverse, with the books related to history, natural science, philosophy and detective having the top four popularity. Around 60% of the participants started reading at the level of kindergarten, while 30% of which began at primary school.

#### 4.2. Family Members' Reading Preference

The average grading for the question "does your parent or guardian like reading" is only 2.83, illustrating that the parent group of our participant does not show a great interest toward reading. Nearly one third of respondents report that they have no idea about the reading frequency of their parents or guardians. The most frequent reading frequencies are the same as the result from RRP, one book per quarter and one book per month. The parents also show a relatively greater interest in fiction and non-fiction, compared to other forms of literature such as prose and poetry. However, there is still almost 40% of respondents saying that they do not know exactly what their parents are reading. Nearly all the participants believe that their parents or guardians support them to read.

#### 4.3. Family Economic Background

Nearly half of the respondents suggest that their living expense is 3000RMB and above.

The percentage of participants who have pocket money of 1001-2000RMB and 2001-3000RMB are 20.54% and 26.49% respectively. Only 8.93% of the respondents reported 1000RMB and below. 17.86% respondents suggest that they spend 0RMB on reading per month, which means that they either borrow books to read or simply do not read any book. 24.11% of participants spend only 30RMB or less on reading while 10% of participants spend 200RMB or more. Around 40% of the respondents do not know about their parents total monthly salaries. Among the rest of them, the income distribution is diverse from approximately 10000 to 1000000RMB. Still about 35% of the



participants do not know how much their parents usually spend on reading monthly, among the rest of which most of them spend 30RMB or less while only a low of 5.65% of them spend over 3000RMB on reading.

#### 4.4. Education Level and Expectancy

Approximately half of the participants reported that their parents have attained an undergraduate level of education. There are also some of them only achieve higher secondary level or even lower. About 20% of the parents and guardians reach a high of graduate degree or even doctor degree. About three quarters of the parents expect their children to reach a higher educational level of graduate and even doctor, while the same proportion of participants expect themselves to reach such educational levels as well.

### 5. Findings and Discussions

The group who reported that their living expense is 1000RMB or less, which is the lowest among all groups, reported the highest likeness toward reading, compared to other price groups. This is actually different from the previous literature. The pocket money can be considered as the only income of students to some extent. As most of the participants are high school and college students, it is surprised to notice that those who earn higher pocket money do not show a great interest toward reading, though they seem to have the highest accessibility to reading resources. According to the survey, the higher the pocket money, the fewer people who report themselves as quite enjoy reading or extremely love reading. The amount of money people spent on reading related resources, according to the data collected, have a linear correlation with neither total amount of pocket money nor the liking degree towards reading. Most of the participants just spent 30 RMB or less on reading every month. This is kind of self-explanatory, as the reading frequency reported are usually one book per quarter or per month. If the individuals have not finished reading one book, it may not have a spending on other book resources until they completed.

In order to find out the influence of family factors on reading habits, the data from Respondents' Reading Preference and Family Members' Reading Preference are compared. The enthusiasm towards reading of respondents and their parents seems to be aligned with each other. For those who have reported that their parents extremely love reading, most of the respondents suggest that they exceptionally enjoy reading as well. Through this finding, it is capable to assume that the reading habit of parents or guardians positively affected the individual's reading habits. However, since this study is only testing the correlation, the causal relationship is still not certain. Those whose parents spent a relatively greater amount on purchasing books usually have an either very low budget (30 RMB or less) or a rather high budget (300RMB or above). Both of them are not surprising results: if there is already plenty of book resources in the households, it seems that there is no need to purchase excessive resources. However, if the parents and the individuals themselves have different reading favor, there may be a greater demand for reading resources in this household.

Nevertheless, all the data collected by this questionnaire may not accurately measure the individuals' reading habits, as the diversification between books are quite large. For instance, when asking about the Respondents' reading preferences, it may be hard for ones to judge how frequent they read, as day-to-day routines can be varied—if there are other important events take place, the individuals may reduce their reading time or quantity, even though they really enjoy reading. It is also hard to measure the frequency simply according to the number of books someone read, due to the content of different length and the difficulties of comprehending different reading materials,

Besides, it is also noticeable that the questions about Family Members' Reading Preferences, considering about the easiness of data collection, are completed by the respondents. Many

respondents even do not have a basic understanding about their family members and the family economic status. It is reasonable to remain doubtful to the truthfulness of the reported responses other than "I don't know". Additionally, as all the data have been grouped in different options for easy data collection, it may be hard for an individual to find its place in those given choices. There may also be potential demand characteristics, as the participants may want to pretend, they really love reading or they extremely hate reading, the self-reported results may be the information and personal image they want to present, rather than their true thoughts.

## 6. Conclusion

Upon thorough examination of the data collected, it becomes apparent that the participants under scrutiny did not align with the outcomes observed in prior research. Contrary to established notions suggesting a positive correlation between individuals hailing from affluent backgrounds and the cultivation of reading habits, findings of this study unveiled a divergent trajectory. Rather than exhibiting a proclivity for reading, individuals from wealthier families demonstrated a discernible inclination towards alternative leisure pursuits. This unexpected trend raises intriguing questions about the evolving dynamics within contemporary society and prompts future studies to explore additional factors influencing the reading behaviors of the affluent. It is plausible that shifting societal norms and changing preferences among the privileged class have steered them away from traditional reading practices. The allure of alternative entertainment activities could be a significant contributing factor. This paradigm shift in recreational choices among the affluent suggests a nuanced interplay of factors shaping their behaviors, warranting further exploration.

Moreover, this study inadvertently sheds light on a broader societal concern--the apparent lack of familial awareness among today's teenagers. The revelation that a substantial portion of the participants consistently responded with "I don't know" when queried about their family situations and members underscores a growing disconnect. This concerning trend suggests a diminishing sense of familial engagement among contemporary youth, prompting a deeper examination of the factors contributing to this disconnect.

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