

## BOOK BORROWING HABITS OF URBAN AND RURAL CHILDREN: A SURVEY

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### INTRODUCTION

Borrowing library books is a daily occurrence in elementary schools throughout the country. Such a common phenomenon is taken for granted as simply a ritual performed by children of many ages and for many reasons. With such a common activity, it is unsettling that no analysis or investigation has been done before this.

User studies have been done in numerous aspects of library services. Occasionally, user studies are even done in connection with school libraries. These studies seem to survey everything except the book borrowing habits of students. Since book borrowing and use of library materials hits at the core of library services, it is disturbing that more has not been written and studied about it.

Unless parents take pre-schoolers to a library, a child's first experiences with libraries come with their entrance into elementary school. Does a pattern emerge with students and their book borrowing habits the more they are exposed to libraries? Is the difference in those habits dependent on where students live? Does it matter whether students have access to a full-time certified librarian? Who helps them choose books and maintain an interest in reading? All of these questions deserve consideration when

evaluating the book borrowing habits of elementary school students.

This study takes a look at the ritual known as borrowing books. It will take a look at the book borrowing habits of two selected groups of elementary school students in two culturally different settings--rural and urban. The study attempts to determine differences in the book borrowing habits of rural and urban sixth graders and third graders in two schools of similar size. It also compares the habits of the same sixth and third graders in the same school setting. It is not an attempt to generalize for all urban and rural settings and students, but merely represents a study of the habits observed in two surveyor-selected public schools.

#### LITERATURE SEARCH

User studies are numerous. Evidence of that abounds in Library Literature and in ERIC. Standards established in library planning have been based on user studies. Libraries have, for years, based requests for funds on measurements of usage and user satisfaction. Some studies compare different libraries. Other deal with how the library performs for the patrons. User input can determine user patterns and bring the library staff into touch with the reality of service to clients<sup>1</sup>.

The search of Library Literature, back to 1970, revealed an appalling lack of research in the field of children's library services. Even less is being written about children's library services in rural areas<sup>2</sup>. There is a definite need to examine rural and urban children's library services. Since this will be a comparison of rural and urban book borrowing habits of school children, the library services surveyed will reflect a rural and an urban school settings rather than a community public library setting.

Although my literature search did not reveal a study of a comparison of children's book borrowing habits, one study of twenty-one rural schools of Northern California revealed an interesting pattern in student attitudes towards reading and libraries. In the study the purpose was to establish children's feelings towards themselves, school, reading, and math<sup>3</sup>. Students were asked thirty-six questions titled the "Yreka Student Attitude Assessment" in the Fall of 1973 and in the Spring of 1974. The study revealed that pupils in elementary and junior high schools liked to read and go to the school and public libraries. More students in lower grades bore more favorable attitudes towards libraries and reading. As children advanced in grades, favorable attitudes towards reading and libraries declined. One possible answer for this could be the noticeable increase in academic demands upon children and an increase in out of school activities. The results of the study also showed that students generally like school libraries better than public libraries.

In another study, community size and levels of education appear to have an effect on library usage<sup>4</sup>. The level of education that a person attains indicates the likelihood that he or she will read and use libraries. According to the respondents of the study, people in a medium sized community are generally the most educated and have the most reading interests. People in the large communities reported the least number of reading interests and people in small communities fell somewhere in between. People in small communities read materials most closely related to their life interests.

The Lucas user study could be examined by librarians in various communities when trying to forecast the demand for reading materials. Libraries must provide materials of interest to the traditional clientele as well as the younger, better educated people of the community.

Possibly the Lucas study could shed some light indirectly on the borrowing habits of children located in a small (rural) community and large (urban) community. Since it is difficult to measure exactly whether books are read or not, the measurement of reading interest in this study will be the number of books borrowed by students.

#### SOCIAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Much publicity has been given to the poor academic achievement of low to moderate income urban children. Use of school libraries is hopefully related, in part, to the academic areas of education. Are urban children any different than other children who come from the same socio-economic strata? This study wants to see if rural children and urban children are different in their book borrowing habits. It will also accept or reject the earlier Huang study in California which found a decrease of interest in libraries as students advance through the grades. The study will not try to answer why but will only report survey results.

#### PROBLEM STATEMENT

How frequently do students in selected third and sixth grades in a rural and in an urban public school borrow library books?

#### HYPOTHESES

The hypotheses written in the null format are as follows:

1. There is no difference in the library book borrowing habits of sixth graders in a rural and urban school.
2. There is no difference in the library book borrowing habits of third and sixth graders in an urban school.
3. There is no difference in the library book borrowing habits of third and sixth graders in a rural school.

4. There is no difference in the library book borrowing habits of third and sixth graders if they have access to a full-time librarian or not.
5. There is no difference in the library book borrowing habits of third and sixth graders dependent on whether they have a scheduled library instruction period or not.

#### METHOD AND PROCEDURE

The case study design was used with a checklist/questionnaire distributed to all participants. Since the questionnaire was disseminated and collected during regular school days to participating classes, the return rate was 100%. A total of 178 students participated in the study, with the numerical breakdown as follows:

<u>Urban School</u>	<u>Rural School</u>
40 3rd graders (23%)	44 3rd graders (25%)
45 6th graders (25%)	49 6th graders (27%)
85 total (48%)	93 total (52%)

The children who served as subjects for the study were third graders and sixth graders in one urban and one rural school. In both schools, students come from low to moderate income level homes with parents mostly employed in blue-collar classification jobs. Both schools have enrollments of approximately 600 students.

Both schools have librarians servicing the buildings. The urban school has a full-time librarian with no paid aide. The rural school has a part-time librarian with a full-time paid aide. The book collections range from approximately 8500 volumes in the rural school, mostly funded through local sources, to approximately 11,000 volumes in the urban school, partially funded locally with a large amount of federal sources supplementing the local funding in the past. According to the survey, all of the urban students receive

library instruction while only one third grade class in the rural school reported receiving library instruction. The other third grade class and both sixth grade classes reported no library instruction with the librarian.

Student ethnic background in the urban school is predominantly white, with Protestant and Roman Catholic religious beliefs. There are some black and Oriental students. Student ethnic background in the rural school is white, Anglo-Saxon and Protestant in religious beliefs.

Both schools used in the study wish to remain anonymous. To protect the confidentiality, the schools will be referred to in this study as school U (urban) and school R (rural). School U is located in Southeastern Pennsylvania. School R is located in Central Pennsylvania.

Limitations of the Design: Several factors limited the design of the study. First, only two schools were used in this study. Second, both were public elementary schools, one urban and one rural. Third, only third and sixth graders were used instead of every student in each school.

Study delimitations: Certain delimitations may or may not have affected the answers on the checklist/questionnaire. The surveyor had little or no control over the following variables. First, there is no control over the personalities of the librarians. Second, the surveyor cannot test what the librarians teach or whether they teach with enthusiasm. Third, there is no control over the size of the library and book collections. Fourth, no test was given to ascertain the librarians' professional experiences.

Selection of questionnaire/checklist: Several criteria formed the basis for selecting questions on the questionnaire/checklist. The surveyor perused various research textbooks to find a questionnaire type which could be used. Since nothing was available, a set of questions was written and rewritten upon

advice from a library science professor at Villanova University. First, the questionnaire had to be very short. Second, the questions had to be easy enough for third graders and sixth graders to read and finish quickly. Third, the questions had to be worded so as to create as little bias as possible. Fourth, the questions had to be geared to answer all hypotheses of the study. Fifth, since the surveyor has taught in the same school district for a long time, she wanted to survey reader interest for both her interest and the interest of the library science professor at Villanova University. A sample copy of the questionnaire/checklist (see Appendix.)

Procedure: After obtaining permission from necessary administrators, the questionnaire/checklist was given to teachers selected by the building principals. The teachers then administered the questionnaires to their students. Upon completion, the forms were then returned to the surveyor for collation and analysis.

Data Analysis: The data analysis involved several procedures. The raw scores were collected and compiled for each sixth grade and third grade. Because the number of students differed in each of the four sections, the raw scores were then converted into percentages to equalize the results in order to make comparisons. The use of the Chi-Square was used in some instances to test for significance with the level of probability preset at .05. In some other instances, tables were used to check percentage comparisons in order to reject or accept the hypotheses. The surveyor did not use every question on the questionnaire/checklist, but instead, chose those questions which most closely answered or tested the hypotheses. (See Appendix)





Question: How many books or magazines do you check out each week?

Table A: R=rural U=urban N=number of students

Bks. taken out	R-6 (N=49)	U-6 (N=45)
0	6%	18%
1	41%	64%
2	41%	13%
3	8%	0%
4 or more	4%	5%

Table B:

Bks. taken out	U-3 (N=40)	U-6 (N=45)
0	8%	18%
1	78%	64%
2	5%	13%
3	10%	0%
4 or more	0%	5%

Table C:

Bks. taken out	R-3 (N=44)	R-6 (N=49)
0	5%	6%
1	77%	41%
2	16%	41%
3	2%	8%
4 or more	0%	4%

Question: How often do you go to the school library?

Table D:

	R-6	U-6
Less than 1 time	2%	10%
1 time/week	35%	75%
2-3 times/week	59%	13%
4 or more times/wk.	4%	2%

Table E:

	U-3	U-6
Less than 1 time	8%	10%
1 time/week	72%	75%
2-3 times/week	20%	13%
4 or more times/wk.	0%	2%

Table F:

	R-3	R-3
Less than 1 time	10%	2%
1 time/wk.	79%	35%
2-3 times/week	11%	59%
4 or more times/wk.	0%	4%

Question: Do you like to borrow a book after the librarian or teacher reads it to you?

Table G:

	R-3	R-6	U-3	U-6
yes	55%	12%	70%	29%
no	18%	57%	22%	67%
don't know	27%	31%	8%	4%

Question: If you didn't go to the library for lessons or class, would you go on your own?

Table H:

	R-3	R-6	U-3	U-6
yes	36%	49%	50%	42%
no	18%	16%	8%	25%
don't know	46%	34%	42%	33%

Question: Who helps you choose your books?

Table I:

	R-3	R-6	U-3	U-6
nobody	36%	82%	50%	82%
librarian	44%	6%	25%	11%
teacher	0%	0%	0%	0%
friend	9%	12%	22.5%	7%
parents	2%	0%	2.5%	0%
library aide	9%	0%	0%	0%

READER INTEREST SURVEY RESULTS\*

	R-3	R-6	U-3	U-6
Biography	6	2	0	2
Jokes/Riddles	24	13	25	12
Folk/Fairy Tales	6	0	4	4
Indians/Cowboys	5	2	3	0
Funny Stories	8	10	8	10
Spooky Stories	12	10	12	18
Science	3	4	0	5
Monsters/Ghosts	2	2	9	10
Cooking	3	0	6	4
Animals	10	13	6	11
History	1	6	4	3
Cars/Planes	2	4	5	3
Poems	3	1	3	1
Animal Stories	7	4	1	4
Science Fiction	7	2	3	7
Adventure	3	18	7	7
Math/Computers	1	2	2	1
Mysteries	0	2	2	2
Sports	7	15	5	7
God	7	4	7	3
Wars	1	9	2	6
Dinosaurs	6	0	4	3
Kids w/problems	1	3	2	2
Languages	3	3	1	0
Fantasy	1	6	5	5

	R-3	R-6	U-3	U-6
Sewing	1	0	0	0
Dolls	1	0	0	0
Romance	0	5	0	1
Crafts/Drawing	0	0	1	3
Greek Myths	0	0	1	0
Dancing	0	0	1	0
Twistaplots	0	1	0	0
Motorcycles/Cycles	0	2	0	0

\*Students were asked to choose the three subjects that they like to read about the most. The figures reflect those choices.

## RESULTS

Hypothesis #1 is rejected based on the results of three questions. There is definitely a difference in the borrowing habits of sixth graders in the rural and urban schools. According to the percentages in Table A, 18% of the urban sixth graders borrow two or more books per week. Rural sixth graders borrowed two or more books per week at a rate of 53%. According to Table D, 85% of all urban sixth graders surveyed use the library one time or less per week and 37% of rural sixth graders surveyed use it one time or less per week.

There was a difference in percentages between what students actually take out and what they would take out if they were given the freedom to take out whatever they wanted. Although the actual book borrowing is very different, the percentages here were much closer. Eight-two percent of the urban sixth graders surveyed, and 86% of rural sixth graders said they would take out two or more books per week if they could.

Hypothesis #2 is accepted. After use of Chi-Square calculations, the results were confirmed. Of the third graders and sixth graders surveyed, Table B shows 82% and 86%, in that exact order, borrowed one book or less per week. In Table E, 92% of the sixth graders and 90% of the third graders go to the library at least once a week. The actual results accept the hypothesis, but, if they were given freedom to choose as many books per week as they wished, 82% of the sixth graders and 65% of the third graders said that they would borrow at least two or more books each week.

Hypothesis #3 is rejected. Table C clearly shows that rural sixth graders borrow more books than rural third graders among the students surveyed. According to the table, 82% of the third graders and 47% of the sixth graders borrow one book or less per week. In Table F, 11% of the third

was not scheduled.

However, if this hypothesis were based on the results of the percentages in Table G, the hypothesis would be rejected. In the urban school where students receive library instruction, 70% of third graders and 29% of sixth graders surveyed said that they would take out books that are read to them by the librarian or teacher. In the rural school where the library instruction is not consistent, 36% of the third graders and 12% of the sixth graders surveyed said they would take out a book if it were read to them.

#### CONCLUSIONS

There are differences in the book borrowing habits of rural and urban third and sixth graders in the chosen schools. Rural students take out more books than their urban counterparts. Rural sixth graders take out more books and visit the library more times per week than rural third graders. Urban third graders and sixth graders surveyed are more consistent in the borrowing and library visitation habits.

The additional reader interest survey also showed definite differences in reading subjects between urban and rural students. Favored subjects also differ from third grade to sixth grade within the same social setting.

When comparing the results of this survey with the relevant part of the Huang study, the results of the two also differ. Huang stated that as students progress through the grades, their interest in libraries decreases. The Huang study also included several junior high school grade levels and perhaps if this study had extended to junior high school, the results would be altered. However, if this study trend would continue as is, the urban students would maintain the same interest throughout elementary school while the rural students would increase their book borrowing habits and library

visits from primary to the intermediate grades. Perhaps this should be a consideration for future study.

#### APPLICATIONS

Suggestions for Practice: Given the results of this study, librarians administrators, and supervisors should examine the contents for use in the following ways:

First, while it is true that the rural students borrowed more books than the urban students, it is the urban students who remained most consistent in the borrowing habits from third to sixth grade. One suggestion for this might be the presence of the full-time librarian and consistent library instruction from kindergarten to sixth grade.

Second, the study results show that 82% of all sixth graders in both schools do not rely on anyone to help them select books. No students in the sixth or third grades said that their teachers help them choose books. Perhaps some thought should be given to providing more assistance when choosing reading materials. An area of concern to teachers, librarians and administrators should be what the students read or whether they read library books at all.

Third, rural children take out more books than urban students. Urban students have more outside distractions, both cultural and other, than their rural counterparts. Knowing this, perhaps thought could be given to enhancing a public relations program for a library to try to make reading and libraries as interesting as the other activities.

Fourth, although a reader interest survey was not in the original plans for the study, it is nevertheless as valid as the rest of the questionnaire.

Perhaps librarians in rural or urban areas could use the results when ordering materials for their libraries.

Suggestions for further research: The results of this study have led the surveyor to think of several possibilities for further research in the field of user studies in school libraries. In some cases the study would take a considerable amount of time. Some of the suggestions are also related to the educational media field as well as traditional print oriented facilities.

1. Public versus private school students borrowing habits.
2. Socio-economic levels versus borrowing habits.
3. Boys versus girls and borrowing habits.
4. Broken homes versus intact families and borrowing habits.
5. Reading levels versus borrowing habits.
6. Attendance versus borrowing habits.
7. Grade achievement versus borrowing habits.
8. I.Q.'s and borrowing habits.
9. Effects of elementary library exposure on high school library usage.
10. What is taught and how it affects library usage.
11. In-depth reader interest study.
12. The effects of various types of media usage on learning.
13. Effects of the Reading is Fundamental (RIF) program on reading and library usage.
14. The effects of parent and student aides on the borrowing habits and use of library facilities.
15. The effects of teacher borrowing habits on students.
16. Attitude study of students exposed to libraries before starting school versus students who had no exposure until elementary school.



FOOTNOTES

1. Lowell Martin. "User Studies and Library Planning," Library Trends.
2. Becky Sheller. "Kids are the Issue: Rural Libraries and Children's Services," Rural Libraries.
3. G.W. Huang. "Student Attributes Toward Learning and Libraries," California School Libraries.
4. Linda Lucas. "Reading Interests, Life Interests, and Life Styles," Public Library Quarterly.

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