Incorporating Student Reading Interests into the Curriculum

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INCORPORATING STUDENT READING INTERESTS INTO THE CURRICULUM

A Thesis
Submitted to the Graduated Faculty of the Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education

in

The School of Education

by

Tia Denise Walker
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The purpose of this research was to examine the reading habits and interests of secondary school students in an urban community in order to discover ways to increase student reading interests. The researcher wanted to understand why adolescents choose to read or not to read certain texts and understand the reading behaviors of these students. The study focused on students’ intent to read certain texts such as traditional books and non-traditional texts. To gain knowledge on a larger population of students, a questionnaire based on student reading habits was distributed to all students enrolled in English 1 at the research cite. Then, three students who represented different extra-curricular choices at the school were selected to participate in one-on-one interviews, an interest related reading assignment, and a short-written response to measure higher-order thinking skills. A mixed-methods research approach was utilized to examine the reading habits of the students, determine if extra-curriculars had any bearing on students’ reading habits, and to determine if student interest in a text affect their ability to exercise their higher order thinking skills.
CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION
The more that you read, the more things you will know. The more that you learn, the more places you’ll go. —Dr. Seuss (1978)

Statement of the Problem

The opening quote by Dr. Seuss insinuates that reading helps one learn more, and in return, that knowledge helps one succeed. Knowing this, efforts to improve reading, such as reading across the curriculum, have greatly increased. However, assigned reading can sometimes feel like a chore and might decrease a student's desire to want to read. A quick conversation with or a quick glance over teenage social media, and you will see postings of all sorts of hobbies such as sports, vlogging, being creative, baking, etc. What you rarely see, are adolescents claiming to have the hobby of reading for pleasure. Most research, such as the Psychology of Media Culture’s surveys (2016) and observations by parents say this situation is because of adolescents’ increasing use of digital devices and social media. Adolescents also don’t read as a hobby because of heavy workloads, too much reading assigned, learning disabilities, and hectic social lives (Kaufman, 2016). However, most of this research fails to consider how much teens actually do read daily, even if it is not a traditional book or e-book. In fact, students read things such as long social media threads, game storylines, recipes and more all the time. The difference is in school reading does not meet the interest needs of students the way non-traditional out of school reading does. Teenagers read what they are interested in, and that is the factor that researchers, parents and educators seem to minimize the most.

The challenge many teachers face with teenagers and their reading habits, is that we do not know their interests in reading well enough. We know how they feel about our reading
assignments and a lot of us, teachers and parents, problematically transfer that disdain for
classwork reading to reading in general. This can make it difficult to teach reading to adolescents
if we feel that they just automatically don’t want to or enjoy reading. Discovering the topics that
interests our students can greatly improve our chances of finding reading material fit for their
needs. Once we are open to learning about the reading interests of our students, we can develop
flexible curriculums that allow for teachers to choose the reading selections based on our
students’ interests and needs.

**Curriculum’s Choices**

*A Lesson Before Dying, The Joy Luck Club,* and *Romeo and Juliet* are the anchor texts
dedicated to the 9th grade English Language Arts (ELA) *Guidebooks Curriculum* per the
Louisiana Department of Education’s (LDOE) Curriculum Hub (Louisiana Curriculum Hub, 2019). *Guidebooks* are the Louisiana Department of Education’s ELA scripted curriculum that
presents entire lesson plans, including all assignments and required texts to teachers. The
curriculum specifies what activities to do, when to do them, and even how to do them. Some
schools, who have low ratings with state test scores, are required to use the Guidebook
Curriculum in order to qualify for funding. In 2019, the *Guidebook Curriculum* was updated
from its older version to include more representation for diverse populations. While the chosen
novels are considered diverse, their content does not fit the needs and interests of all students,
including the BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) students these diverse books are
supposed to represent. Consider *A Lesson Before Dying* (Gaines, 1993) for example. This book
was chosen obviously for the Black students’ population’s representation and the presentation of
historic information such as Jim Crow era Louisiana. A Black man sentenced to death during Jim
Crow, while a black teacher is helping him become a man. Seems like all Black kids would find
this interesting right? The answer is probably not. As a matter of fact, the responses I got from my own students while reading the novel sounded like: *Why are all the books about Black people racists books? Nope, I didn’t read the chapters. This is boring!* In fact, the only good reaction I got from the novel was when it discussed food that the main character’s grandma cooked for him. Not because the students don’t appreciate “good literature” or they are too lazy, it is simply because my students’ interest in the continuous portrayal of Black people *only* during slavery and Jim Crow era is significantly low. Here, it is important to note that I believe having books filled with representation for students does make a difference, however, how and what they are represented as also matters. While I believe the book is very interesting and relevant to the type of students I teach, I don’t believe that the interest level in the book is significant enough to prompt students’ reading without excessive encouragement or force. In comparison, if *A Lesson Before Dying* is supposed to be the Black student representation, and *Joy Luck Club* the Chinese American student representation, does that make *Romeo and Juliet* the White student representation? Do Guidebooks developers believe that these books are the best choices to represent each of these different types of students? Or were they the easiest ones to develop a unit for? According to the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) materials chosen should connect to the educational objectives determined by the school and be relevant to student needs. Those needs include but are not limited to level of difficulty or readability, relatability, and age appropriateness (2014).

The Psychology of Media Culture’s (2016) study claims teenagers spend a lot of their time on their digital devices and social media. This is because teenagers have a significant amount of easy access to things that interest them. This is why including reading in the curriculum that is of interest to the students is important in their overall learning experience. We
want students to read, then be able to discuss, answer questions, and/or write about what they read. Most of the time, these tasks involved students thinking deeper than just remembering and understanding, it involves them using Higher-order Thinking Skills (HOTS). Some of the skills involved in HOTS are analysis, synthesis, conceptualization, information management, critical thinking, investigation, and metacognition. All of these skills can be used and transferred to any type of reading, so why do we govern our students reading with the type of books like those in the Guidebook Curriculum? Also, how do we expect our students to be able to critically think or reflect on readings that they have no interest in and furthermore probably avoided reading in the first place? In this study, I wanted to investigate the ways in which using novels and reading material that students have high interest in, will increase their reading and ability to develop their higher order thinking skills. By doing this, I hope curriculum developers consider broadening the reading choices for teachers (and students) when developing units for English Language Arts. I also hope to learn how to possibly increase my students’ desire to read print books or e-books.

**Purpose**

The researcher has a vested interest and knowledge of their students’ interests and needs as it relates to reading. The purpose of this explanatory sequential mixed methods design study (Edmonds, Kennedy, 2017) was to examine the reading habits and interests of a select group of English 1 students enrolled in a Louisiana public secondary school in order to investigate ways to increase students’ reading interests. The study also measured students’ ability to develop HOTS while using reading material they are interested in, significant as the Louisiana Department of Education’s curriculum stresses the importance of student’s higher order thinking skills, it is important to show these skills can be developed with subjective interest material. The purpose of the current study was to also show that the same standards held for the texts selected
in curriculums such as Guidebooks can be applied to texts that represent, relate, and interest the students. I suspected the study’s findings would also point to the time and skills it will take for a teacher to change and develop assignments such as reading response to fit the diversity of student readings, and if the use of various multiple texts per unit are feasible. The research questions were as followed:

1. What are the reading habits of a select group of secondary students?
2. How do students’ involvement in extracurricular activities affect students’ reading habits?
3. How does a student’s connection or interests with a text affect their ability to answer higher order thinking questions?

**Study Description**

*Setting*

This explanatory sequential mixed methods design study was conducted at an urban, majority Black, Secondary Public School located in a school system and school designated as a low-socioeconomic setting in Louisiana. The researcher was the participants’ ELA teacher during the time of the study.

*Participants and Sampling Scheme*

The first part of the study consisted of distributing a questionnaire on student reading habits and interests to all of the students enrolled in English I at, what will be called, Ridge High School (RHS), a total of 67.

Then, from questionnaire responses, a select group of students were determined as a representative sample. According to Collins, Onwuegbuzie, and Jiao (2007), many possible purposive sampling schemes can be utilized for research studies. For this study two schemes –
criterion, and convenience – were deemed appropriate. Collins, Onwuegbuzie, and Jiao (2007) define criterion as “Choosing settings, groups, and/or individuals because they represent one or more criteria” (272). They also define convenience as, “Choosing settings groups and/or individuals that are conveniently available in willing to participate in the study” (272). Criterion is selected as students who agree to participate must be enrolled in an English I class at the selected site; convenience is also appropriate as target participants are students enrolled in a parish-wide (county) public school system’s only high school in proximity to the university setting. Both criterion and convenience sampling were employed as purposive sampling. Ideally, students represented the following types: a student who is an athlete, a student who is in a club that is not a sport, and a student who is not in any extracurricular activities. This criterion was selected to determine whether students’ involvement with extra-curricular activities had any influence on their reading habits.

Three students selected for further participation were given a text that closely relates to their interests and another reading that comes from the school’s curriculum. Each reading was selected as close to text complexity as possible in order to ensure accurate comparability to the school’s curriculum. They read each selection and then, they were asked an identical critical thinking question about the reading, in which they responded in writing. A rubric was then used to identify different levels of higher order thinking. This step allowed the researcher to understand if swapping out text material for texts that include students’ interests will improve higher order thinking.

Methods

In this study, I used qualitative and quantitative data collected in the form of a questionnaire, interviews, and student sample work that was assessed with a rubric designed by
the Louisianan Department of Education to assess writing samples. The students enrolled in English 1, completed a questionnaire on their current reading habits and what determines if they read a book or not. The questionnaire included free response and Likert Scale for frequency (Brown 2010) questions, that were coded into themes using the percentage of students for each category.

From the questionnaire, three students were chosen for further study. These students participated in one-on-one interviews that went into further detail on their reading habits and types of text, traditional or non-traditional, they read or don’t read. The three students represented the following: A student athlete, a student involved in non-athletic club, and a student who is not involved in any extra-curricular activities. This criterion was selected to represent the various types of students at school, and to determine if extra-curriculars, specifically different types of extra-curriculars, have any bearing on student reading habits.


In order to examine the reading habits of students, their behavior patterns and intentions need to be understood, therefore Ajzen’s (1991) Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) is the guide for this study. Ajzen’s socio-psychological theory is used to explain human behavior in many instances including that of reading (Van Schooten & De Glopper, 2002). Ajzen’s idea that at the very center of determining how someone will behave is their intention to perform the behavior (Ajzen, 1991, Figure 2.1) was the main focus of this study. The three main deciding factors of behavior intentions are: attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. The more positive the attitude and subjective norms surrounding the behavior, the more likely the intent to complete the behavior will increase. Because this study focused on ways to possibly improve student attitudes toward reading, their reading habits and behavior were explored. This study
examined reading habits and interests of students with different types of daily lives: students involved with athletics, students involved in non-athletic clubs, and students not involved in any extracurricular activities, all of which can increase or decrease a student’s intention to read. The criterion for students selected activities can affect the student’s availability to do things such as read for pleasure. Ajzen’s theory would suggest the students’ intent to read is determined by their current attitudes toward reading, if reading is a normal behavior for the environment or community of the students (considering factors such as peers and homelife), and how difficult the student feels completing the task of reading is. Overall, this study examined the intent to complete the behavior of reading and how to increase this behavior using student-interest texts, while still complying with set curriculum guidelines.
CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

In order to gain the guidance and knowledge needed for this study it was imperative to focus on research that included the reading habits of adolescents and also how the current curriculum, specifically in Louisiana, focuses on teaching reading. Utilizing the Louisiana State University’s Library Database, I researched key terms such as *adolescent reading habits* and *secondary school reading curriculum*, I found most of this research speaks on representation as the measurement for interests (Ark 2017; Ediger 1999) but rarely focuses on including specific student interests when selecting texts for reading. When specific student interests are mentioned, there is no indication on how teachers can effectively include these topics in their selections for reading, while still reaching the goals specified in the curriculum. Most research reviewed focuses more on how to increase reading in the curriculum and helping students who struggle with reading in general, ignoring students who simply lack the intention to read based on lack of interests, and research fails to provide a guide on including student interests into our text selections, therefore overlooking a potential roadblock in influencing positive student reading habits.

The following literature reviewed expresses the importance of teacher and curriculum working together to provide the best reading learning experience for students. The literature faces the challenges students are enduring while learning to become better readers, while also highlighting the roles teachers can take on in their classrooms to fill the reading gap. While the research is plentiful in providing what should be done by the schools, specifically the teachers, reviewed research lacks the inclusion of student-related interests into the selected text for classrooms (Applebee, 1996; Ark, 2017; Fisher & Frey, 2019; Horning, 2007). The first section
The literature review explores what a curriculum dedicated to improving reading should look like, while negating the current practice of teaching reading (Horning, 2007; Applebee, 1996; Fisher and Frey; Kirschner’s, 2004). The second section of the literature review focuses on the role of teachers in helping students become better readers (add citations). The last section of the literature review determines how adolescents choose what they read and when (add citations).

What Curriculum Should Look Like

Curriculum is the knowledge and skills students are required to learn during any given school year. Curriculum includes the learning standards and objectives students need to meet and the unit and lessons teachers must teach. In certain cases, curriculums can specify assignments and projects teachers must give to students throughout each unit (Ark 2017). Researchers have made plenty of calls to curriculum developers to include a more reading-friendly environment in schools (Horning 2007). The following literature reviews what researchers say is the best way to improve literacy for secondary students.

One approach to improving literacy skills is the concept of reading across the curriculum. Reading across the curriculum involves all subjects to incorporate reading into their lessons which in return will take students’ reading skills from simple comprehension to higher levels such as analysis, synthesis and evaluation of texts. Horning (2007) suggests that reading and developing heightened literary skills will prepare all students to become full participating citizens in the democracy. She suggests reading should be emphasized as a basis to obtain meaning from any text for analysis, synthesis and evaluation purposes. Horning emphasizes that all teachers in all disciplines need to know how to properly teach reading, thus highlighting reading across the curriculum. The article highlighted four strategies for reading across the
Horning’s concept that the curriculum should encourage all teachers to teach reading in every discipline in order to help develop students understanding further, supports Applebee’s contention that students who learn reading in context will be more likely to develop deeper understanding. Applebee (1996) provides the concept of “Curriculum as Conversation” being a different way for students to obtain knowledge in the classroom. Educators often present information to students without relevant circumstances and Applebee suggests we offer knowledge in context to allow students to easily grasp these concepts. With the current curriculum, students who seemingly know or understand the information are simply remembering facts rather than internalizing them. This problem shows lack of student understanding as a whole. Applebee’s concept of knowledge in action, knowledge that comes from student participation, allows students to conceptualize ideas, thereby obtaining actual understanding of the information or skills. Applebee also offers five structures of curriculum: catalog, collection, sequential, episodic, and integrated. With integrated being the most conversation inclusive. Having students conceptualize ideas while learning and reading provides them with background knowledge needed for understanding and increases curiosity on the subject, which in return can generate an interest in the topic.

While Applebee suggests conceptualized curriculum as ways to improve curriculum in general, Fisher and Frey (2019) suggests ways for the curriculum to improve adolescent literacy. Fisher and Frey provided teachers with nine components of effective reading instructions. These components included: phonemic awareness, the alphabetic code, fluent reading of texts, vocabulary, text comprehension, written expression, spelling and handwriting,
screening and assessment, and motivating children to read. To be successful, Fisher and Frey suggest this model to be adapted started when teaching children the alphabet all the way through their school careers. Likewise, The Learning Point Associates partnered with The Department of Education (2004) to provide the education field with the five components of effective reading instruction that must be present for a child to learn to read: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension (National Reading Panel, 2000). They also state that those who commit to teaching children to read must understand that it is ever-changing and needs to be in a continuous search for effective ways to help children read.

Like all the literature referenced, Kirschner focuses on the need for curriculum as whole to change. Who better to update a curriculum, than current teachers who are with the students daily and know their needs? Kirschner’s (2004) study follows teachers of English and reading programs at a low achieving middle school in Michigan who developed a curriculum that matches curriculum-based standards to improve student literacy. Teachers who participated, wanted to see increase scores in their students’ standardized testing and develop students more as readers. Writing a curriculum aligned with their state standards allowed them to increase scores on their Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP) by 10%, not as high as the teachers wanted, but having a more developed curriculum allowed teachers to help students become more interested in reading and turn a “culture of non-readers into a community of readers” (2).

The literature in this section, provides an ideal on what literacy-enhanced education could look like. All the authors agree that curriculum needs to be updated to improve our students’ literacy across disciplines. I especially appreciate Applebee’s idea that educators should provide context to students during teaching. It makes a huge difference, from experience, with students’
understanding of lessons and general plots when reading. Having a curriculum that focuses on exposure, especially when reading can help improve students’ overall literacy.

**Role of Teachers**

Teachers play the key role in making sure students are reaching the set goals of the school year. In this study, the teacher is tasked with understanding their students’ reading habits and interests to select texts that have positive impacts on both. The role of teachers in any educated-related study is vital to the success of students. As it relates to reading, teachers are one of the main sources of children learning to read and there are several studies (Ediger, 1999; Kirschner, 2004; Duffy 2009) focused on the development of teaching skills to better fit the needs of diverse readers. However, as a teacher, I can’t help but notice the lack of recognition (or the ignorance) on the lack of freedom a lot of teachers have. While it is vital to call on teachers to adjust their lessons to better fit the students, differentiation is of the same importance to make sure teachers are given the space and support needed to complete these tasks. The following literature discusses the ways teachers can aide in helping students become better readers. These authors also offer up ways and suggestions for ideal classroom reading practices.

Like Horning (2007), Ediger (1999) is an advocate for teaching across the curriculum and suggests for teachers to attend various amount of in-service training for skills to develop their teaching reading practices. Ediger calls for teachers to then practice these trainings in their classrooms and provide feedback on the outcomes of these skills learned. Ediger also suggests the way to make reading more enjoyable for students is to provide as much detailed background information the text as possible in order to help with overall understanding of the texts.
Like Ediger, Hoffman and Pearson believe teachers need more training. Hoffman and Pearson (2011) emphasize the need to teach teachers. These researchers suggest we know much on training teachers but know little about teaching teachers and we must teach educators before we train them. In their study, Hoffman and Pearson focused on the challenges teacher preparation will face in the next millennium. These challenges are primarily due to the ever-changing dynamic of reading as a discipline. Some of these changes mentioned include the nature of reading, the growing diversity of students, and changes in the occupational elements, how teachers are trained with professional development programs, of teaching.

While Ediger (1999) and Hoffman and Pearson (2011) suggest an abundance of trainings for teachers, Duffy (2009) provides a resource for teachers who are tasked with explaining reading to students who have a hard time learning. The book includes the major skills and strategies that help with vocabulary and comprehension development as well as word recognition. Each of the skills discussed also includes ways teachers can explain and illustrate them, while helping students move from teacher explanations to independency. Though, focusing on K-8 teachers, the book provides a much needed started for secondary teachers who find themselves struggling with readers of many different levels.

Similar to Duffy (2009) Hamre and Pianta aim to help at-risk students. Hamre and Pianta’s (2005) study focuses on ways teachers can support students at risk of school failure. The study found that students who are at risk of failure who has access to highly trained teachers skilled at support and curriculum implementation, were able to improve their school outcomes significantly more than those students who did not have this support. They found looking more closely into classroom structure will allow teachers to be more of help and support onto failing students.
Guthrie and McRae take a different approach than all the literature above and explain to teachers how what they do in the classroom can affect how their students feel about reading. Guthrie and McRae’s (2009) research focuses on how teacher practices can impact reading motivation either negatively or positively. According to the authors, teachers should focus more on making reading intrinsically motivating for students, providing them with relevant texts and affirming motivation. The relevancy of texts is what Guthrie and McRae mark as a vital reason why students avoid or do not avoid reading. Assuring the relevancy of a text to students will increase chances of avoidance. Guthrie and McRae also state that teachers should select texts that represent their students experiences and interests. Having too many texts that are irrelevant and disregards students’ experiences will lead students to view reading as “tedious chores” (5).

The researchers in this section agree that teachers need more training opportunities when it comes to teaching reading. Since student dynamics are ever changing, the professional development geared to teaching reading should continue to be available and updated for educators to have constant access to. As stated above, all the research in this section is geared toward helping students who struggle to read, however there is a lack of research for how to encourage students to read, who simply don’t choose to read.

**How Adolescents Choose What They Read**

Knowing what adolescents are interested in is a vital part of this study, especially as it relates to what they choose to read. As previously mentioned, many researchers are focused with helping struggling readers but very few acknowledge students who simply aren’t interested in the reading chosen for them. This study caters to those students and focuses on student interests and how it can be helpful to improving reading skills. The following literature studies provide insight into the texts students choose to read and not read.
Guthrie’s (2007) study focuses on providing teachers with clarity and solutions to the problem of adolescents being unmotivated to read. He offers reasons for this lack of motivation such as lack of relevancy and understanding of student’s comprehension level. Guthrie’s study provides interviews from students in fourth grade that relates their experiences with instructional practices to their motivations for reading. The relevance and chance of success were among the top practices that increased their dedication to reading. A student’s belief in self is a primary force on motivation and achievement in reading.

Like Guthrie, Schunk and Zimmerman relay that a student’s motivation to read comes from their belief in themselves. Schunk and Zimmerman (2006) show various experiments where students in fourth and fifth grade and seventh and eighth grade, grow in their self-efficacy and self-regulation in specific tasks. Self-efficacy is based on the perceived ability to complete certain tasks while self-regulation refers to self-generated thoughts, feelings, and actions designed systematically to affect one’s learning of knowledge and skill. Schunk and Zimmerman relate that self-efficacy influences behaviors; a student’s self-efficacy on reading texts affects their reading choices, efforts, and persistence. Also, students with high self-efficacy participate more, work harder, persist longer even faced with difficulties. and achieve at higher levels.

Similar to the self-efficacy discussed in Schunk and Zimmerman’s study (2006), Wilkinson’s (2020) study states that the decline of positive attitudes and frequency toward reading happens from childhood to adolescents. The study focused on understanding why adolescents choose to read or not read certain texts. Some of their responses for reading were reading to relax, learn more about the world, being able to contribute to conversations and finding exciting/thrilling reads. Some students’ reasons for reading directly affect their choice of
what to read. Students’ responses for not reading were lack of time to read for pleasure, loss of habit/enjoyment, too effortful, and not encouraged as much as in primary school.

Unlike the pervious discussed literature Becker, McElvany, and Kortenbruck focuses on students’ internal and external factors affecting their likelihood of reading. Becker, et al’s (2010) study examined the long-term effects of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation in students for reading literacy. Intrinsic motivation, being to do an activity for its satisfaction; while extrinsic motivation is completing an action because it leads to an outside outcome. They found that the relationship between intrinsic reading improved reading literacy if the reading amount was abundant. Becker, McElvany, and Kortenbruck also found that extrinsic reading motivation and reading literacy had a bidirectional relationship or flow, moving in opposite direction. Students who read more for personal pleasure in lower grade levels had improved reading literacy in higher grade levels, while students who read more for external reasons (for school grades) either had increased reading literacy but negative motivation, or both low reading literacy and negative motivation.

This next literature section addresses the why of the beneficial aspect for adolescents to read aside from their schoolwork. Howard’s (2011) study focused on the role of pleasure in reading for 12–15-year-old students. Howard found that pleasure reading fulfils functions such as enhanced academic performance, social engagement, and personal development. Her study also concludes that teens use reading to for information such as insights to mature relationships, personal values, cultural identity, aesthetic preferences, etc.

While Howard (2011) explains to readers the benefits from pleasure reading, Wilhelm, Smith, and Fransen explains what adolescent readers are willing to read. Wilhelm, et al (2013) publication focuses on an in-depth study of what adolescent readers like to read and why and
what that means for the texts read in school. The authors focus on what we can learn from the interests of adolescents’ pleasure reading and offer insights on how to incorporate these interests into the classroom. The authors also offer up explanations of the top read genres and gives suggestions on books that could be included in certain curriculums for reading.

**Conclusion**

The literature reviewed offered many insights on improving literacy in our schools. It provided tools and guidance needed for teachers who want to help struggling students, while also offering up suggestions for a better reading curriculum. The literature also provides educators with an idea of the type of genres that usually interests adolescents in hopes of encouraging teachers to include these types of materials in their classrooms. While of these things are essential in developing the reading skills of our students, they do not necessarily aid in developing our students’ reading habits. There is a significant lack of research dedicated to understanding why the decrease of habits and enjoyment of reading in adolescents is so great, especially in secondary school levels. Future research could focus more on including ways to present reading to students as a means of enrichment and enjoyment rather than a chore to be done for school. Overall, the literature reviewed provides excellent sources for teachers to help struggling readers succeed and get a start on understanding the reading interests of our students.
CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this explanatory sequential design study was to examine the reading habits and interests of English 1 students enrolled in a Louisiana public secondary school in order to investigate ways to increase students’ reading interests. I conducted a qualitative and quantitative (mixed methods) research study, specifically, an explanatory sequential design (Edmonds, Kennedy, 2017). Wisdom and Creswell’s (2013) approach to mixed-methods research best fit my study: “Use qualitative data to explore quantitative findings.

This explanatory sequential design typically involves two phases: (1) an initial quantitative instrument phase, followed by (2) a qualitative data collection phase, in which the qualitative phase builds directly on the results from the quantitative phase. In this way, the quantitative results are explained in more detail through the qualitative data” (p. 2). The questionnaire given to the students generated the percentage of students who fit into each category, while the student interviews helped further explore those numbers.

The study was conducted during the A Lesson Before Dying Guidebook unit (Louisiana Curriculum Hub, 2019). In this study, I examined my students’ behaviors and attitudes as it relates to reading. This included surveying the entire English 1 student body at (pseudonym) Ridge High School on their reading habits and interests. Then, I conducted interviews and small reading activities with three students to closely review their personal interests or disinterests in reading. This study was framed by Ajzen’s Theory of Planned Behavior (1991) which helps to identify students’ intent to read. The questionnaire given to students required direct answers to their intent to read based on their reading behavior patterns. The questionnaire provided the
researcher with the information needed to select texts based on student interest and evaluate student ability to answer higher order thinking questions with texts of relevant interests to the students and text already specified in the LDOE Guidebook’s Curriculum. A mixed-methods research design best fit this study’s interview and questionnaire analyses and evaluation of student sample assignments. The research questions used were based on understanding what and why students choose to read or don’t, their specific interests and how we can include those interests into the curriculum. The research questions are as follows:

1. What are the reading habits of my students?
2. How do students’ involvement in extracurricular activities affect students’ reading habits?
3. How does a student’s connection or interests with a text affect their ability to answer higher order thinking questions?

Each of these questions help to determine and utilize students’ interest and habits within reading.

**Setting/Context**

This study took place in the English Language Arts classroom for English 1 at a public secondary school in Louisiana. This school will be called Ridge High School (RHS). Ridge is a public 9th-12th grade school whose population is predominantly African American students with a small amount of Hispanic and White students. The high school had a total of 429 students enrolled ranging from 98-131 students per grade level. The 9th grade class at RHS consisted of 98 students and the 10th grade class consisted of 101 students, 83 of those students are enrolled in English 1. The demographics of RHS were: 91.6% Black 3.7% Hispanic, 3.5% White, 0.7% Asian, 0.2% Native, and 0.2% Hawaiian/ Pacific Islander (District Website, 2021) Each class
period was 55 minutes long with each class meeting daily. The school has three learning tracks for students to follow: college track, technical school track, and career track. These tracks were determined by their middle school testing scores and can be changed by a meeting with the students’ counselors, teachers and parents. The school was considered a re-design school where their English and Math curriculum are set and guided by the LDOE’s Guidebooks Curriculum, a highly scripted curriculum developed by Louisiana teachers and administrators and must be strictly followed in order to receive certain funding.

The classroom’s physical appearance consisted of an independent reading area that has a chair separate from standard classroom desks in between two bookshelves stocked with class sets of required reading material and personally selected and provided reading material from the teacher. The Guidebooks Curriculum leave little to no time for any independent reading, however, the books from this collection were most used during testing when students cannot use any electronics. All desks were spaced apart as much as possible in rows in compliance with school guidance to help slow the spread of COVID-19.

**Participants**

The participants included in this study were 67 of the students enrolled in English 1 at RHS. All 83 students enrolled in English 1 were invited to complete the questionnaire with a letter of consent sent home to parents, however, the missing students include: students considered a no-show, students whose parents did not sign the consent forms, and students who simply just did not complete the questionnaire. The 67 students consisted of 23 tenth grade students and 44 ninth grade students whose demographics are 65 Black, 1 Hispanic and 1 White. The students also consisted of 24 females and 43 males. In Table 1 students’ grade level, specific demographic information are presented.
Table 1. Questionnaire Participants Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student participants</th>
<th>Gender identification</th>
<th>Racial identification</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grade 10</td>
<td>6 females</td>
<td>17 males</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender identification</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racial identification</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 9</td>
<td>18 females</td>
<td>26 males</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender identification</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racial identification</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Only three students were chosen to collect data (sample assignments and individual interviews) as a representative sample. These three students were chosen to represent the following types: a student who is an athlete, a student who is in a non-athletic club, and a student who is not involved in any extra-curricular activities. This decision was to ensure all student types and possible interests were included in the study, while also determining whether a student being involved in extra-curriculars affects reading habits more or less than those of whom are not. Students received text selections to complete assignments based on interest as stated in their questionnaire and text complexity as compared to texts specified in LDOE’s Guidebook’s Curriculum. Table 2 contains interview participants demographics.

Table 2. Selected Participants Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Demographics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student A</td>
<td>Grade 10, Black, Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student B</td>
<td>Grade 9, Black, Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student C</td>
<td>Grade 9, Black, Female</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Research Phases

Phase 1: The Questionnaire

The first phase of research was to conduct an English 1 wide student reading interest questionnaire. The questionnaire included questions related to students’ interests, their enjoyment of school readings so far, and how often or not they read. It also provided the researcher with a generalized look into the reading habits of secondary English 1 level students.

The questions included in the questionnaire were:

1. Please indicate whether you are a student-athlete, a student involved in a non-athletic club, or a student not involved in any extracurricular activities.

2. Do you consider yourself to be someone who enjoys reading? Yes or No.

3. On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being never and 5 being always, how often do you read required text for school?

4. On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being never and 5 being always, how often do you read traditional books or eBooks for personal enjoyment?

5. On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being never and 5 being always, how often do you read non-traditional texts (magazines, blog posts, social media posts, etc.)?

6. Free Response: What determines if you read a text (whether traditional or non-traditional) or not? (Meaning why did you choose to read something or why not).

7. Free Response: If you could choose what type of topics or genres school reading consisted of what would you choose?

Each of the questions were selected to provide insight into the English 1 students’ reading habits and interests. All students, parents, and the school’s principal were informed via consent forms and phone calls that the questionnaire had no bearing on student’s grades or
resulted in any penalty based on answers or completion of the questionnaire. The study was also approved to proceed by the Louisiana State University’s Institutional Review Board.

**Phase 2: Selecting Representative Students**

The second phase of research was to select the three students who would serve as the representation for the entire student body. The purpose of selecting these students were to gain a closer look into how different types of students and their involvement with extra-curricular activities may or may not affect their reading habits and interests. The students selected were to represent the following: a student athlete, a student involved in a non-athletic club, and a student not involved in any extra-curricular activities. I ultimately selected the three students based on their attendance of class regularly, the ability to receive consistent correspondence from parents, and their willingness to participate. These students filled out separate consent forms due to being interviewed one on one by the researcher. The first student, Student A is a 10th grade male football player. The second, Student B is a 9th grade male student in a club that is for students who show exemplary success in RHS, for the purpose of this study, we will call the club Ridge Scholars. Lastly, Student C is a 9th grade female student who is not involved in any extracurricular activity.

Each of the selected students participated in a one-on-one interview that expanded responses and provided more detail on their habits of reading and ability to write or answer questions about the texts selected for the school’s reading curriculum. Two of the three students interviewed were conducted in person with student responses transcribed word for word by interviewer, while the third was conducted via Zoom and recorded due to COVID-19 restrictions. The interview questions were as followed:

2. What motivates you to read something? What determines if you read a certain text or not? This can include traditional books, magazines, blog posts, text messages, anything that is something you can read.

3. Do you read traditional books or e-books for personal pleasure outside of school? Why or why not?

4. What are some things you enjoy reading? This can include magazines, blog/social media posts, cookbooks etc.

5. Name any books you have read for school purposes that you enjoyed. (If students name books ask them what they enjoyed about them)

6. Do you find it easy to write or answer questions about things you have read in school? Why or why not?

7. If you could choose to read about any topic or genre of books in your English class, which topic or genre would you choose?

8. Do you think you would find it easier to write or answer questions about the above topic than books that you currently read in school?

9. How does what you have to read for class/in school affect how you feel about reading or does it?

Each question was selected to point out specific student interests in order to help select texts for the assignment portion of the research. Questions also helped to determine if students felt the required reading for school was a detrimental factor in their ability to answer questions about readings and desire to read at all.

**Phase 3: The assignment**

The third phase of research was to provide the three students with an interest related text selection based on their interviews and comparability in text complexity to another reading
provided by the school’s curriculum. The students read each selection and responded to identical critical thinking questions specified and provided by LDOE’s Guidebook’s Curriculum. While conducting this study, the students enrolled in English 1 at RHS were currently in the Guidebook unit of *A Lesson Before Dying*, therefore the selected text provided by the school’s curriculum comes from that unit. The assignment was:

*Directions: In a short response, explain how the main character of the text shows a certain level of Maslow’s hierarchy of needs? Include textual evidence in your response.*

Maslow’s hierarchy of needs (1943) was a supporting text for the entire unit of *A Lesson Before Dying*, and every other supporting text and novel for the unit referred back to Maslow’s hierarchy of needs. Due to the need to utilize two texts and their meanings, while providing textual evidence to support responses, this question qualifies as a higher order thinking question. This question was used to assess students’ knowledge of the curriculum required text as well as the student interests selected text. The curriculum required text used for this assignment was chapter 16 and 17 of *A Lesson Before Dying* by Ernest Gaines.

Student A received the novel *IXI Rise of the King* by Bryan and Paul Johnson and instructed to read the first two chapters for the purpose of the assignment. Student A’s interview pointed to music and suspense being the topic interests of the student. The novel selected consisted of both of these topics.

Student B received a biography written by Jake Brown about Lil Wayne titled, *Lil Wayne- An Unauthorized Biography* and was instructed to read the first three chapters.
Student B’s interview revealed student enjoyed reading about celebrities he likes whether in books, magazines, or social media.

Lastly Student C received *Witch Dreams* by Vivian Vande Velde and instructed to read the first two chapters. This student’s interview indicated that she enjoyed books about mystery, fantasy and witches and also books that were easy reads.

Students had already completed and turned in their answer to assignment for the chapters in *A Lesson Before Dying* prior to completing their personal readings. After each student finished the chapters, they were instructed to read, they then completed the exact same assignment for their interests related reading. I used a rubric provided on LDOE’s website to evaluate written responses.

**Challenges Encountered**

Finding specific novels or text that both fit the interests of students and matched the text complexity of the unit reading was an anticipated challenge. For this reason, only three students were selected for further study, however, the challenge was still a time consuming one. I had to review each book myself to ensure they fit the needs of the students as well as research their levels of complexity compared to the unit reading. This process was made easier by using each book’s Lexile scale (Doman, 2020). A Lexile measure on a text represents its difficulty level. Every book was within 100 points below or 50 points above the unit text’s Lexile scale. This is the same range specified by the developers of the Lexile scale that determines the comfortability students will have reading above and below their own Lexile range.

**Analysis**

Using Ajzen’s TPB, the results of the questionnaire were coded by motivation for students to read. Student’s social norms were portrayed to be the number one reason student’s
read or don’t read. Specifically, students’ teachers and parents are their biggest motivations when deciding whether students will read a text. Students’ motivations for reading were compared to (below in Figures 1 – 5) how often students read each type of text (traditional and non-traditional) and then, the common genres students were interested in were differentiated by popularity amongst students. The separate student interviews were transcribed, and responses were compared to questionnaire codes to determine the accuracy of the student representation. Ultimately, the three interviewed students’ responses, specifically motivations to read and types of reading completed correlates with the results taken from the questionnaire. Student B was the only student in both the questionnaire, and student interviews to note the difficulty of a text (perceived behavior control) as a reason to read or not read.

**Ethics**

It was important to allow students to provide their honest and personal opinions on the topic of reading as well as the text selections for school. Students had to relay their own experiences without my intervention. Also, to not deprive students who were not chosen for this study the chance of credit or extra credit from this assignment, the students who participated were thanked with a snack during their interview instead of grades. Students did not know of this incentive before their agreement to participate. Students also seen the *A Lesson Before Dying* assignment a week prior to completing their interests level text’s assignment. Given that students already had experience with the question for the assignment, witnessing the question twice may have had some bearing on their increased performance.
Positionality

As the English Language Arts (ELA) teacher to my participants, I already had a vested interest in their reading habits. Due to ELA being a highly discussion and writing based class, I am in the position to know my students very well and already had an idea prior to conducting this study on each of their interests. I know that my students enjoy class with me and as their teacher, I realize their relationship with me may have some effect on their participation in the study. However, I also know these students ultimately had to complete extra assignments in order to complete this study, therefore I believe the results to be accurate and of the student’s best ability and effort. I also already had knowledge on how much these students read their required material for class. I was not fully aware of their reading for pleasure practices, however, again I did know my students’ interests enough to have assumptions on their responses for reading. Being a person who loves to read and obtained not only joy and peace, but so much knowledge from reading, learning my students reading habits could help me better understand their attitudes toward reading and possibly be able to positively affect their viewpoints on reading.
CHAPTER 4. FINDINGS

Restatement of the Purpose

The purpose of my study was to examine the reading habits and interests of students in order to investigate ways to increase students’ reading interests. The students examined were urban secondary public-school students in a majority African American school population. The research questions were as follows:

1. What are the reading habits of my students?
2. How do students’ involvement in extracurricular activities effect students’ reading habits?
3. How does a student’s connection or interests with a text affect their ability to answer higher order thinking questions?

Findings

I used three methods to collect data to examine the reading habits of secondary school students. I conducted a qualitative and quantitative (mixed methods) explanatory sequential design (Edmonds, Kennedy, 2017) research study. Qualitative and quantitative data was collected in the form of a class-wide questionnaire on reading habits and interests which were coded into percentages, transcribed student interviews on in-depth reading habits and interests, and analysis of assigned student-work based on given interest related topic readings.

The class-wide questionnaire allowed for a larger scale of responses and include free-response questions and questions using the Likert scale for frequency (Brown 2010). The student interviews were personal and one on one, either on zoom or in person, with a variety of open-ended questions that were transcribed. The student-work assignment was given after the students
completed their assigned reading based on their interests and was the exact same question given in a lesson in LDOE’s *Guidebook Curriculum*. The questionnaire and student interviews were coded and themed to show commonalities amongst students, specifically students who have common schedules such as being student athletes. The components associated with Ajzen’s theory of planned behavior (TPB); attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavior control to shape intentions (Ajzen 1991), were used to code the students’ responses to the questionnaire and interviews. Table 3 displays the actual *a priori* codes used to code responses.

Table 3. Codes used for Charts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ajzen’s TPB Code</th>
<th>Frequency in questionnaire</th>
<th>Frequency in Student Interviews</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attitude</td>
<td>92% of students in the questionnaire stated they do not enjoy reading</td>
<td>2/3 students stated they do not enjoy reading. 1 stated they enjoy reading only if interested in the topic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subjective Norm</td>
<td>All 67 participants mentioned a subjective norm as motive for reading</td>
<td>3/3 mentioned a subjective norm as motive for reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived Behavior Control</td>
<td>0/67 students mentioned PBC as a motive for reading</td>
<td>1/3 students mentioned PBC as a motive for reading</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Questionnaire

While coding the questionnaire, I discovered the frequency of how much students read school related texts, traditional books or e-books for pleasure, and non-traditional texts to be very consistent among most participants. These findings are represented in the pie charts below.

Figure 1. How Often Adolescents Read for School
Figure 2. How Often Adolescents Read for Pleasure

Figure 3. How Often Adolescents Read Non-Traditional Texts
As shown in Figure 1, most students read required texts for school. 54 of the 67 student participants reported they always read what is required of them for school. While only 5 reported reading required texts less than “very often.” This was not surprising that most students reported reading more than ‘sometimes’ as in many reviewed studies (Shunk and Zimmerman, 1997 and Wilhelm, Smith, and Fransen, 2013) the extrinsic factor of grades often motivates students to read their texts for school. Ajzen’s TPB states if a person’s attitude toward a behavior leads them to believe the outcome will be favorable, they are more likely to complete the behavior. In this case, students know reading a required text for school will help them receive positive grades, therefore their likeliness to perform the behavior is increased. The surprising factor was that students reported ‘always’ instead of ‘very often’ for reading required texts. This could be because extrinsic motivations are a greater factor in behavior than I realized or students wanted to relay to a teacher, even though told responses are anonymous, that assigned reading is always completed.

In Figure 2, the responses for how often students read traditional books for personal pleasure is almost a complete reverse in numbers. 59 of the 67 students responded they rarely read books for pleasure in contrasts to the 54 students who said they always read required text for school. Four students responded they never read for pleasure while only one student indicated they read for pleasure very often. Again, these results did not come as a shock to me because the extrinsic motivation is not as high in pleasure reading as it is in school required readings, thereby decreasing the intent to complete the behavior.

The results in Figure 3 represent how often students engage in non-traditional text reading. These readings include magazines, blog posts, and all other social media posts. 60 of the 67 students responded they always read non-traditional texts. Five students indicated they read
non-traditional texts very often while only 2 responded with sometimes reading these types of texts. I mostly expected all of the students to choose always on their questionnaire because social media is such a big part of society and the results support this. In relation to Ajzen’s TPB, Figure 3’s results are comparable to subjective norms, behaviors expected by peers, family, and society for an individual to complete (Ajzen 1991). Social Media and other non-traditional texts are a societal norm therefore increasing the student’s intent to read them. The explanation for these results is better understood by the free responses to the questionnaire.

The free response questions were coded motivation and by student extracurricular activity status. This was because I anticipated students to use time as one of their reasons for reading or not and wanted to determine if students being involved in extra-curricular activities had any bearing on these results. As shown in Figure 4, the common themes indicated by the responses were time, being required by teachers or parents, if the topic was of interest to the student, or if the text was something a lot of other people were reading (trending).

Figure 4. Why Students Read or don’t Read
Per the results, there were 19 student athletes, 27 students involved in a non-athletic club, and 21 students not involved in any extracurricular activity who completed the questionnaire. Each students’ responses to the question on why they choose to read or don’t read a certain text fit into the themes related in Figure 4. I was intrigued at how many students indicated their teachers and parents to be great influences on reading even though subjective norms are a factor in intent to complete a behavior. Again, Ajzen’s Theory of Planned Behavior (1991) states behavioral intention is determined by an individual’s attitude toward the behavior, the subjective norm surrounding the behavior, and the perceived behavioral control. To put the theory into context Figure 1 shows most students indicated they read required texts for school. This means, their attitude toward the outcome of reading required texts (the behavior) is positive, there is a high individual societal norm surrounding the students to read required texts, and the students’ self-efficacy or feeling their ability to successful complete reading required texts for school is positive (perceived behavioral control). In comparison, Figure 4’s theme results of teacher and parents being a influence on whether or not the student’s read a text is the only one that all 67 students indicated as a factor in whether or not they read a text.

The Theory of Planned Behavior’s results are completely opposite in Figure 2 than in Figure 1. Figure 2’s results would indicate that the student’s attitude toward the outcome of reading traditional texts for personal pleasure is negative. There is a low societal norm to read traditional text for personal pleasure and the perceived behavioral control of reading traditional texts for pleasure is negative. All of these factors explain the low intention to read traditional books for pleasure. Figure 3’s results are similar to Figure 1, because the attitude and perceived behavioral control is positive and there is a high societal norm to read non-traditional texts, the intent to read non-traditional texts is high and the behavior will likely be completed.
Also, as anticipated all student athletes mentioned time being a factor in choosing to read; however, I did expect more non-athletic club students to use time and less non-extracurricular activity students to mention this theme. Mainly because I forgot to factor in possible other time-consuming activities these students can have after school. Not surprisingly, 82 percent of students mentioned things related to their interests and peers being a factor on whether or not they read a text. Adolescents want to read thing they are interested in and also, things that seem to be trending with their peers and other social related groups. Subjective norms seem to be the most influential factor on reading for the students.

Overall, the questionnaire was able to help me identify common codes with reading for students. I was able to determine what factors have the biggest influence on students and get a general idea of students’ attitudes toward reading. I was also able to receive an overview on topics that students are interested in and would like to be included into texts for school. These results were also coded into common themes and illustrated in Figure 5 below.

![Student Common Themed Genres](image)

Figure 5. Student Common Themes
The Selected Student Interviews

As priorly stated the students selected represented the following: a student athlete (Student A), a student involved in a non-athletic club (Student B), and a student not involved in any extra-curricular activities (Student C), just as indicated in the larger-scale questionnaire. I ultimately selected the three students based on their attendance of class regularly, the ability to receive consistent correspondence from parents, and their willingness to participate. I transcribed each student’s interview and coded them in themes to compare them to the larger scale questionnaire. The interview questions were:

2. What motivates you to read something? What determines if you read a certain text or not? This can include traditional books, magazines, blog posts, text messages, anything that is something you can read.
3. Do you read traditional books or e-books for personal pleasure outside of school? Why or why not?
4. What are some things you enjoy reading? This can include magazines, blog/social media posts, cookbooks etc.
5. Name any books you have read for school purposes that you enjoyed. (If students name books ask them what they enjoyed about them)
6. Do you find it easy to write or answer questions about things you have read in school? Why or why not?
7. If you could choose to read about any topic or genre of books in your English class, which topic or genre would you choose?
8. Do you think you would find it easier to write or answer questions about the above topic than books that you currently read in school?

9. How does what you have to read for class/in school affect how you feel about reading or does it?

Student A.

Student A is a 10th grade student athlete. At RHS, students who did not do well on their 8th grade Louisiana Educational Assessment Program (LEAP) testing, making an unsatisfactory, are placed in T9 classes. These classes are meant to help students who are behind reach high school level. Student A was placed in a T9 class for ELA his ninth-grade year, therefore had to take English 1 in tenth grade. Student A, like majority of the questionnaire participants said he always reads his classwork. He was one of the 6% of students who said he never reads traditional books for pleasure. He also said he always reads non-traditional texts.

Student B

Student B is a 9th grade male student in a club that is for students who show exemplary success in RHS, for the purpose of this study, we will call the club Ridge Scholars. On the questionnaire, Student B said he reads all his classwork, he always reads non-traditional texts, and rarely reads traditional texts.

Student C

Student C is a 9th grade female student who is not involved in any extracurricular activity. Student C has the responsibility of picking her little sister up from the elementary school and walking home together. On the questionnaire, Student C was one of the 12% of students who said they very often read school related texts, opposed to the 81% who said they always read
these kinds of texts. She also said she very often reads non-traditional texts and never reads traditional texts.

**Student Responses**

**Question 1. Would you say you enjoy reading overall? Why or why not.**

In response to question one, both Student A and Student B stated they do not enjoy reading. Student C said she enjoys reading only if the book was interesting. I did not distinguish between what kind of reading because I wanted to see what each student considered reading to be.

**Question 2. What motivates you to read something? What determines if you read a certain text or not? This can include traditional books, magazines, blog posts, text messages, anything that is something you can read.**

Student A explained he reads most when it is an assignment, however if it is too much, he probably will not read all of it. He also says he would read long social media posts if it were something that everyone is talking about, and he doesn’t want to be “lame and left out”.

Student B said he always reads anything that has something to do with celebrities and drama. He loves Twitter Threads. He said if it is trending then he most likely will read it. He also said he reads most of his homework with his mom because she helps explain concepts to him and makes sure he gets his homework done.

Student C expressed her parents are the reason she reads all of the work for school. They ask her teachers to email their assignments daily or weekly, so they know exactly what she needs to do. She also stated that if someone tells her should read something because she may like, she will also do that. In regards to choosing to read something on her own, Student C said “I might read something if I feel I will like it”.

40
**Question 3. Do you read traditional books or e-books for personal pleasure outside of school? Why or why not?**

In response to question three, all students relayed they do not read traditional books outside of school. Student A mentioned he doesn’t have time to read because he has practice after school and has to do “regular homework” when he gets home. Student B said he wants to make sure he gets his work done and still have time to relax because reading requires a lot of work and he “just wants to relax sometimes.” Student C said she hasn’t read a book she liked since elementary school and has other things to do than read. Student C is responsible for picking her little sister up from school and helping her with her homework daily.

**Question 4. What are some things you enjoy reading? This can include magazines, blog/social media posts, cookbooks etc.**

Student A answered he did not know what kind of things he likes to read, but he likes thriller and suspense tv shows and thinks he would probably like reading the same type of things if he had time. He also stated he might like reading about the music industry because if his football career doesn’t turn out the way he plans, he hopes to get involved in the music industry.

Student B asserted he likes reading material that is about celebrities and he mainly reads blog posts on *The Shade Room*, a celebrity gossip platform that posts updates and drama dealing with celebrities and influencers, no matter how long they are. He also likes to read about his favorite celebrities’ personal lives. Student B also included text messaging threads as his favorite things to read.

Student C explained she hasn’t done much reading on her own, but she would like to read more books about witches, fantasy, and magic because they are interesting and she thinks it is
some truth to it, which makes it more interesting to her. She also states she likes her books to be easy to understand so that she can quickly read through them.

Question 4. Name any books you have read for school purposes that you enjoyed. (If students name books ask them what they enjoyed about them)

Student A claimed he liked *The Giver* (Lowry, 1993) and couldn’t remember what grade he read it in. He said he liked it because he remembers it having a lot of twists and thinks it was interesting that everybody had no emotions and that they give “young people jobs that they will do their whole life so soon.” He also said he remembers “they used to kill people they didn’t want in the community but called it going elsewhere. Student A also liked reading books with black people in them because most of the time he could picture himself in their situations.

Student B claimed he could not remember any books he really liked. He said *Romeo and Juliet* was okay because his teacher changed the characters into pop culture so that it was more interesting, but it was still hard and boring to read chapters on his own.

Student C expressed she liked *The Lightning Thief* (By Rick Riordan) because it was easy to read, and she read it faster than the rest of her class. She said she didn’t remember much from it at the time except the fact that he (the main character) had a magical sword, but she does remember enjoying reading it.

Question 6. Do you find it easy to write or answer questions about things you have read in school? Why or why not?

All students’ answers were very similar. They stated they did not find it easy to write about things read in school because the readings are either boring or hard to understand. Student B also said, the questions are sometimes hard to understand even if the book is easy.
Question 7. If you could choose to read about any topic or genre of books in your English class, which topic or genre would you choose?

Question 8. Do you think you would find it easier to write or answer questions about the above topic than books that you currently read in school? (Questions are combined because Question 7 is an extension of question 6.)

Student A replied he would choose to read relatable books about teenagers, football, and music. He said he would also like books that have a lot of plot twists that you don’t expect to happen, and newer books written “no later than 2010.” Student A said he does not know if reading those types of books will make it easier to write about and it depends on what he would have to write.

Student B explained he would choose to read books about people he likes such as musician autobiographies/biographies or tell all’s. Student B explained tell all’s “to be exposing truths about certain people or things.” He also said if he can deal with books like Romeo and Juliet, but how his teacher taught it with up-to-date concepts because “it did have a lot of drama.” He said it would be easier for him to write about these types of text because he has a strong opinion on the topics and find them interesting. He feels if he can talk about, comment about, and text about these things then he can do assignments on them as well.

Student C, similar to her response in question 3, said she would like to read fantasy and witchcraft books or books about magic. She said she wants to find out who started writing about magic because it “has to be” some truth to it. Student C stated depending on the type of writing prompt, she feels she would be able to write about these topics with more ease than with current reading selections in class.
**Question 9. How does what you have to read for class/in school affect how you feel about reading or does it?**

Student A responded that he feels teachers choose books they know students wouldn’t want to read on their own or probably won’t like and expect them to want to discuss it in class. He also feels always having to read so much for school makes him hate reading and sometimes when he gets books that have words he doesn’t know, and the teachers don’t explain the word he feels it is because he should know them, and that makes him feel behind.

Student B added he doesn’t think what he reads in school affects how he feels about reading because he always hated reading things other than what is in blogs and pop culture. He did say, however, he thinks school force kids to read so much until they have no choice but to dislike it, “just like writing.”

Student C relayed what she reads in school makes her not want to read only because it is usually hard to understand, old, or boring. She also said the topics are always the same every year even in different classes with different books. Student C said she remembers Accelerated Reading and she never liked it, however, at least they could pick which books they read.

The students’ responses correlated well with the larger scale questionnaire for majority of the questions. Their answers were consistent with how often the other students read traditional books and non-traditional texts. Knowing the students’ extra-curricular involvement was necessary to determine if these activities affected their reading habits. Figure 4 above, helps examine how well the selected students represented the larger number of students who participated in the questionnaire. In question 2 and 3, Student A’s, who is a student athlete, response is consistent with the athletes in Figure 4 in which every athlete mentioned time as a
factor in whether they read texts. He also stated (school) assignments as reasons for reading texts which is another common reason amongst student athletes in the questionnaire for reading texts.

Student B mentioned time as well in question 3 for why he did not read, this response, however, is least common amongst the other questionnaire participants who are in non-athletic clubs. However, Student B also mentioned parents and trending topics as a reason to read which are the most popular answers amongst all participants of the questionnaire.

Student C mentioned her parents as the main reason she reads, which was the most popular answer among students who are not in any extracurricular activities. She also mentioned if someone recommends her a text based on her interests, she will read it which is the second most popular answer amongst non-extracurricular activity students. The students’ responses, although not exactly matching the responses in the questionnaire, correlate well enough with the responses for each student to be considered a suitable representative for the larger student body.

The Assignment

As stated above, the assignment involved providing the three students with an interest related text selection based on their interviews and comparability in text complexity to another reading provided by the school’s curriculum. There were plenty of books that matched each students’ interest however, I chose books that were of the same Lexile scale as the unit text. The students read each selection and responded to identical higher order thinking questions specified and provided by LDOE’s Guidebook’s Curriculum. The assignment was:

Directions: In a short response, explain how the main character of the text shows a certain level of Maslow’s hierarchy of needs? Include textual evidence in your response.

The students were expected to do this assignment for A Lesson Before Dying by Ernest Gaines, which was the current Guidebook’s unit the class was on and a selected text by the researcher.
based on student’s interests. In order to score these answers, a rubric for written responses from LDOE was used. See Appendix A below.

(All student responses are recorded as typed in the original assignment).

**Student A**

Student A received the novel *IXI: Rise of The King* by Bryan and Paul Johnson. In his interview, Student A mentioned he liked suspense and music, I hoped this book would be a good fit for him. Due to time being a factor, he was only instructed to read the first two chapters in the book in order to complete the assignment.

In response to the assignment question for *A Lesson Before Dying* student A responded:

“The character Grant is in the self-actualization stage of Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs because he feels he has reached his full potential and is sure of himself. I know this because in the book it says “I do everything I know how to do to keep people like him from going there. He's not going to make me feel guilty” (Gaines 123). This shows Grant knows that he tries his hardest and he won’t let anyone else tell him differently. I think he reached the highest level of the needs chart.”

Student A received a rubric grade of 7 out of 12 possible points on his response to the question for *A Lesson Before Dying*. His answer was valid, however the connections and explanation to the text was very vague and unclear.

In response to the assignment question for *IXI: Rise of The King* student A responded:

“The character Solomon in chapter 1 of “Rise of the King” feels like he the man because of his rapping. He has a lot of fans rapping his lyrics that he used to feel like nobody would listen and support from his close friend who is his manager now. Solomon is in the esteem level of Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs. In chapter one it says, “He looked at the people chanting his
lyrics ...and was reassured that he’s chosen the right moniker...King Solomon”. He believes his fans connection with his music makes him a king. He is not in the self-actualization level yet, because he is still asking his manager about being signed to a record label, showing he has more growth to do. In chapter 2 Sonny is in the safety needs level of Maslow’s because he is worried about how he can escape a shelter if he needs to and doing everything for his protection.

“...Sonny couldn’t taste it anyways. He no longer ate for pleasure. Food was fuel, and he needed to stay in the fight” I think the fight is to stay alive and because he is worried about security, food, and staying alive he is only in the safety needs level.”

Student A received a rubric grade of 11 out of 12 possible points on his response to the question for IXI: Rise of the King. His answer and evidence chosen were both very insightful and well connected; however, I would have liked for this student to go into more detail on the main character being in the level of esteem, instead of talking about why the character was not in the level of self-actualization.

Student B

It was difficult choosing a book to fit the needs of Student B’s interests because Student B was mainly and very firmly interested in celebrity pop-culture. I started to select another teen novel filled with romantic drama similar to Romeo and Juliet, however, I choose to do a biography on one of student B’s favorite artists instead because he mentioned he likes reading about celebrity lives. The book was Lil Wayne- An Unauthorized Biography by Jake Brown. I felt this was perfect for him; however, I did not know how well it would translate over into the assignment.

In response to the assignment question for A Lesson Before Dying student B responded:
“In A Lesson Before Dying by Ernest Gaines chapters 16-17, the main character Jefferson is in the Esteem Needs level of Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs. This is true because in these chapters we can tell that he is sad, hurt, and angry by what is lawyer called him. He says to his grandma, “Corn for a hog” (Gaines 122). Because he is calling himself a hog and that’s what his lawyer called him we can tell he is hurt by it and it effects how he feels about himself.”

Student B received a rubric grade of 5 out of 12 possible points to his response to the A Lesson Before Dying writing prompt because although he answered the question, the textual evidence was very minimal, and he provided no detail on how his quote connects or relate to the indicated level of needs. The response was general and could be evidence that the chapters were not fully read.

In response to the assignment question for Lil Wayne- An Unauthorized Biography student B responded:

“In the biography on Lil Wayne the first two chapters are about him going to jail. He was number one and he got into some trouble, which made he plead guilty, and he ended up receiving jail time. Even though they said he was surprised that he actually had to go to jail, he still looked at it as God’s plan and saw it as something that needed to happen for him to become even bigger. Because of this Lil Wayne is shown in the Self-Actualization level. In the book it said he was at the height of his career when he went to jail and “Nobody know the future” (Brown 4). He was worried about his legacy even though he felt he was already at the top. While he was in jail his record label made sure he was still putting out music and videos they already recorded so he stayed on top. In Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs the only level that keeps going once you receive it is the self-actualization level and since Lil Wayne don’t give up his career will keep getting better.”
Student B received a rubric grade of 10 out of 12 possible points for his *Lil Wayne- An Unauthorized Biography* response to the writing prompt. Student B’s answer was clear and directly related to the prompt. He also showed his knowledge of the book as well as understanding of the level of Maslow’s hierarchy of needs. His response, however, still needs to utilize textual evidence a bit more to make stronger connections.

**Student C**

Student C received *Witch Dreams* by Vivian Vande Velde. It was extremely clear from her interview that she liked witchcraft and fantasy novels. Upon conducting research into the Lexile Score system, I found this novel that seemed to hit all of Student C’s interests relayed in her interview.

In response to the assignment question for *A Lesson Before Dying* student C responded:

“In *A Lesson Before Dying* the author shows one of the main characters Jefferson in the safety, belongingness and love, and esteem levels in Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs. Since Jefferson feels like he is going to die that is his safety. Also, he feels he is a pig and doesn’t deserve to live because of what they said about him in court, those are both belongingness and love and esteem levels. I feel bad for him because he doesn’t feel like he has a reason to be human.”

Student C received a rubric grade of 2 out of 12 possible points for the *A Lesson Before Dying* response to the writing prompt. Student C did answer the question and mention aspects of the text, however with the rubric and the writing prompt the student is missing the textual evidence, which is specified in both documents as a requirement. She was only able to receive minimal points.

In response to the assignment question for *Witch Dreams* student C responded:
“In Witch Dreams the author shows the main character Nyssa in the safety and security, and belongingness and love levels of Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs. Because Nyssa has very vivid dreams, she was able to find out who killed her parents and hurt her brother when she was little. She is in the safety and security level because she has to keep being a witch a secret even though she knows who hurt her family from seeing his dreams. She is in the belonging and love stage because since her family was killed, her life changed bad, and she is now a servant for another family. “Nyssa no longer had her own bed in her own room in her own father’s house. …While she was no longer in danger of being sent off against her will to a convent, neither would she be marrying some tradesman” (pg 10). Even though her dad always wanted to send her away because she was a witch, she now is in a worse situation where she will never find love or have her own family because she has to serve somebody else.

Student C received a rubric grade of 11/12 for her Witch Dreams response to the writing prompt. Her response showed she understood the question and had sufficient knowledge of her book. She also provided relevant textual evidence to support her answer; however, I would like her to connect her evidence and level of needs more.

All students made improvements on responses to the writing prompts when they were given the chance to read books that were relevant to their interests. It was evident in their responses that they connected with and understood their interest related texts greater than the unit text. Student B’s response stood out the most to me because students both in the questionnaire and in student interviews stated they complete reading if they have to do it for school assignments; however, Student B’s response and quote pulled from the chapters in A Lesson Before Dying were so vague and general that it seems the chapters were not read in their entirety. Even though Student A discussed why the main character was not in a certain level of needs,
which was not part of the assignment, I loved how he connected with the book and was able to talk more about it. It showed he truly understood the storyline of his book. I also liked how Student C was able to talk about her book in a lot of detail as well. She chose multiple levels of needs and were able to talk about the parts in the book were these levels occurred. All students asked to keep their books and Student A and Student C, even kept reporting to me their twists and plots of their books as they continued to read even though their part of the assignment was completed.
CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION

Implications For Teaching

After concluding this study, I realized just how important it is to include student interests in selecting texts for the classroom. Years of school and reading as a chore left students with a disdain for reading and only making the decision to read traditional texts if it is for their classwork. Teachers can use this research as a general outlook on the interests and reading habits of similar students to help select novels read for class, or to offer up as suggestions for students to independently read. This research can also help teachers act as advocates for a broader selection of reading material to teach reading. As shown with each student’s assignment responses, students were able to connect more with the topics they were interested in and even show a better understanding of the unit’s own specified question. Whereas the book selected by the unit, generated generic responses to the writing prompt. This leaves the question on if incorporating students’ interest, especially if too many variations, in classroom lessons are feasible.

As indicted by the students' assignment, finding interest-related texts on grade level is doable. Sites such as Lexile, used for this study, are able to match interests with grade level, compare text complexities, and even give a range of scores to books that will show how easy or hard the books will be to certain students at different reading levels. This makes the search for books; individual students are interested in less complicated. Even my student whose interests are solely pop culture related was able to receive a book he enjoyed. The factor of time, however, is an anticipated challenge for other educators wishing to do this same study with their own students. All students had distinctly different interests and this was only three students, whom I
already knew some of their interest prior to conducting this study. With a larger number of students trying to learn all of their interests and find books that not only fit their interest, but the level of complexity per their grade level can be difficult if there is not a huge overlap in interests. To follow, I will discuss the insights gained by the study for each research question.

**What are the reading habits of my students?**

As shown in the responses to the questionnaire, my students are readers, just not readers of traditional texts for pleasure. Most students said they read texts such as magazines, blog posts, social media posts, and text messages all the time despite how long they are. We know that social media and technology in general are a huge part of society, therefore I already assumed these types of texts to play a large role in the type of reading my students do. On the other hand, my students do not read traditional books for pleasure. Adolescents’ biggest motivation to do anything is usually extrinsic, (Becker, McElvany, and Kortenbruck , 2010) motivated by outside sources such as peers, parents, society, etc. As shown above in Figure 4, teachers and parents are the biggest motivations for why my students read a text, and these texts pushed by parents and teachers are usually those done so for school. There is usually little to no motivation for my students to complete reading for pleasure.

**Does students’ involvement in extracurricular activities affect students reading habits?**

Per the questionnaire and student interviews, most students regardless of involvement of extracurriculars or not, had about the same kind of reading habits. Most students read traditional books only for school purposes and not for pleasure. Students also read non-traditional texts such as social media posts most of the time. Student athletes did mention time as one of their factors for reading or not, more than the other categories of students. Per the student interviews, all
students had a different genre of interests, therefore I don’t think extra-curriculars had any
bearings on these interests, it was simply each student’s own personal interest.

The assignment also examined how I could use my students own interested related text
and translate them over to the curriculum specified writing prompt. In my case, I must follow
strict LDOE Guidebooks’ Curriculum when teaching ELA. This makes adjustments and
flexibility on lessons hard, even if I know they will help my students. While conducting the
study, we were in the A Lesson Before Dying unit of Guidebooks and throughout the unit we
used the supporting text of Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs to follows the characters development.
I used the exact same question deemed as a higher-order thinking (or critical thinking) in the unit
for each students’ interest related text. I also used the same rubric we use to assess these
responses also from LDOE’s website. Students were able to answer and support their answer
more with the texts related to their interests which was done solely independently versus the
texts we have been working on for months with teacher and peers’ guidance. Again, developing
general higher order thinking questions will be a time-consuming effort; however, teachers who
have more freedom on their lesson would be able to execute this with more ease than teachers
who must follow stricter curriculums such as Guidebooks.

*How does a student’s connection or interests with a text affect their ability to answer higher
order thinking questions?*

As previously stated, the students in this study showed tremendous improvement on their
responses when dealing with a text of their interests. The responses to the same question on A
Lesson Before Dying prompted general responses that were repeated many of times in class
discussions and had little to no personal input from the students. Whereas the students’
individual texts prompted more explanation on both their readings and the Maslow’s Hierarchy
of Needs texts. Their interest-related texts not only showed their ability to explain and understand a text thoroughly but also showed their ability to connect their text with another and understand character development to a greater depth.

Using a *A Lesson Before Dying* for this study simply because when Guidebooks were updated in 2019 to include more representation in their curriculum, and this was the novel chosen as the Black representation, is a step in the right direction but is also is questionable. However, my students were not impressed, to say the least, by this update. Their responses and effort in class discussions were exactly the same if not worse than in other Guidebooks’ units. Often times class discussion led to conversations on why all Black books were about slavery or Jim crow oppression and this was no different in *A Lesson Before Dying* unit. When Student A, our student athlete, was able to receive a book that included representation, which was a common genre desired by students in Figure 5, and relevant interest related topics, he continued to read the book even past the two chapters required for the assignment. He did so with no outside factors to gain but the completion and enjoyment of a storyline. All students’ ability to answer the assignment’s writing prompt was much more significant when dealing with the topics they were interested in.

**Conclusion**

Ajzen’s Theory of Planned Behavior (1991) tells us that attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavior control are the deciding factors in whether or not a person completes a behavior. In relation to this study, that behavior for students is reading. Most of their attitudes, shaped mainly by years of school and the dynamic change of society, has earned reading a negative attitude. Despite the fact, they read all the time on social media, reading has a negative connation to most of them. The subjective norm surrounding my students as it relates to reading
is to read what needs to be done for school to make the grades needed to pass. There is little to no motivation for students to read traditional texts for anything other than school. Only one student mentioned the difficulty of a book as a reason to not read it, which indicates the students’ perceived behavior control, or their ability to read successful is not low, however, with all of these aspects combined, and expressed in the study, students’ probability of reading a traditional text for pleasure is low. Their probability of reading a traditional text for school is high and their probability of reading non-traditional texts are also high.

This research can be used as a guideline on how teachers choose texts for their classroom. Currently, many educators must follow a certain curriculum with certain texts, however with elective classes, teachers have more freedom. Therefore, teachers can conduct the same type of questionnaire with their classes to determine common genres to select for students to read or generate questions and assignments that can translate across multiple type of texts similar to the assignment in this study, to allow students to all have their specific needs met with reading selections.

This study examined reading habits, and I quickly learned that reading habits is too broad of an element because there are different habits based on different kinds of text. I did also want to show that our students simply just “don’t read,” but they don’t want to read the things school makes them. If we can consider what our students do enjoy hearing about, we can re-create a community of readers who enjoy reading traditional texts, whether for school or personal pleasure. We will also be able to develop our students’ skills as it relates to comprehension and analyzing while reading texts. By including student interests in our reading selections for school, we can possibly change the negative connotation of reading in our student’s attitude and create a developing norm in communities to read traditional texts for pleasure or relaxation. As educators
we want to prepare our students for life beyond school, and reading could be a significant aspect of their life if we aide them in this journey. I am happy to relay that both Student A and Student C have shown a continuance interest in my personal classroom library of books. Student A has read 3 books for pleasure since concluding the study. Student C has read 4 books since the conclusion of the study. Student B, with suggestions from me, have decided to begin starting his own gossip blog. All my students have shown that all it takes is listening to them to truly make a difference in their lives.
## APPENDIX. ASSIGNMENT RUBRIC

### Using the Supports Flow Chart

What does it likely mean if students are struggling to meet the first two criteria on the rubric?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>4 exceeds</th>
<th>3 proficient</th>
<th>2 approaching</th>
<th>1 beginning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Does response show a clear understanding of the text? Is the assertion valid?</td>
<td>Responds directly to the question with an insightful assertion</td>
<td>Responds directly to the question with a valid assertion</td>
<td>Response addresses the question with a valid assertion, but may be vague, general, too broad or too narrow</td>
<td>Response may not address the question</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does the student choose relevant evidence from the text?</td>
<td>Evidence is not only accurate and relevant, but particularly well-chosen to support the assertion</td>
<td>Evidence is accurate, relevant, and specific</td>
<td>Evidence is accurate, but may be insufficient, imprecise, general, repetitive vague</td>
<td>Evidence may be minimal, irrelevant, absent, or incorrect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does the student explain how the evidence supports the assertion / point?</td>
<td>Connection between evidence and assertion is insightful and nuanced</td>
<td>Connection between evidence and assertion is clear and valid</td>
<td>Connection between evidence and assertion may be vague or unclear</td>
<td>Connection between evidence and assertion may be missing or invalid</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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REFERENCES


VITA

Tia Denise Walker, a native of Chicago, Illinois by way of Glendale Heights, Illinois, received her bachelor’s degree at Southern University and Agricultural and Mechanical College in 2019. After, she immediately began her teaching career in a low-income school in Louisiana and decided to continue her education into graduate school in the College of Education at Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College. She anticipates graduating with her master’s degree in December 2021.