

THE PENNSYLVANIA STATE UNIVERSITY  
THE GRADUATE SCHOOL

DEPARTMENT OF CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

FLIPPING THE PAGE: ANALYZING STUDENT PREFERENCES TOWARD DIFFERING  
READING MODALITIES

A Thesis in  
Curriculum and Instruction  
by

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements  
for the Degree of  
Master of Science

August 2017

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## ABSTRACT

There has been a plethora of research in the past about high school students and their interaction with reading materials in different formats (including paper, audio, and online texts). However, the majority of this research has been focused on the effectiveness of these forms on overall comprehension for these students. But what happens when our students do not read outside of class? How do we assess their comprehension in any format when they have not done the reading? In this study, I aim to target student preferences toward these different reading formats (paper, audio, online, or any combination of these) to see if students were more willing to read on their own time if provided alternative and favorable methods. Through anonymous surveys and student interviews, I was able to gather a multitude of responses as well as resources for each of these alternative formats to common texts. Although this study did not conclusively find one method far more enjoyable to 11th grade suburban students than the others, it did reveal the rationale behind these preferences and choices so that educators can incorporate and integrate these into our core text lessons.

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my advisors, Jamie Myers and Anne Whitney, for contributing feedback on my inquiry throughout the entirety of the process. Their contributions helped to inspire me endlessly and motivate my curious nature in the classroom. I could not have completed this work without the constant support of my mentor teacher, Allison Becker, and my student-teaching advisors, Veronica Iacobazzo and Raeann Horgas, for continuing to foster my love of education—all of whom have been role models to me. I would also like to thank my family and friends for their ever-present support and encouragement of my endeavors throughout my collegiate career.

## **Chapter 1**

### **Why Should We Care?**

#### **Inspiration for Inquiry**

What inspired me to generate this inquiry?

In response to the anonymous survey question I provided my 11th grade high school classes (“Would you prefer a different reading option other than a paper copy in the future?”), one student responded, “Maybe, I’m lazy.”

This type of response from my students is exactly what generated my curiosity in this topic in the first place. I really wanted to be able to help all of my students who struggle with feeling limited to just their paper texts outside of the classroom, but I also mainly wanted to target my lower motivated students who will very infrequently read outside of class. As I continued to ponder this, I also realized that even my most highly-motivated students struggle with finishing the reading on their own time, as they are incredibly involved in other activities like sports or music practices or jobs or volunteering after the school day. When I began to receive responses that claimed their main reasoning for not finishing the reading chapters was either being too busy or too lazy, I knew there had to be some way to revitalize the reading and make it more accessible to my students’ different interests and needs.

By incorporating and offering multiple different ways to engage with the text (visually, auditory, online, or any combination of these), I thought this might help my students not only finish their reading, but also enjoy doing so along the way. It began with an interest in

preference for my students to find the reading enjoyable, but it soon led to an interest in accessibility as well. Many students continued to claim that if they had not forgotten their paper copy of the book at home or if they could have read it in the car, they would have finished the reading. I realized that if I provided these alternative options, it could not only increase motivation to engage with the texts, but also make the texts more accessible in their busy lifestyles.

Many research studies have found that student attitude toward assigned reading will tend to be negative initially no matter the given text, since they did not have a say in the decision of the material: “[The students] expressed their displeasure for assigned reading in their courses. For the most part, they considered what they were assigned uninteresting and/or irrelevant and preferred items they chose themselves. This preference for self-signed materials is consistent with previous study findings concerning rural teens and the teen population in general” (Becnel & Moeller 2015a). If we wish to combat this ingrained distaste for assigned reading material, we need to give some ownership back to the reader.

### **Relevancy to Field**

So why is student preference important or even relevant in best serving our students? To answer this I would also have to ask: how will our students’ comprehension improve if they still do not read the text? I would argue that willingness to interact with a text is incredibly important for maintaining and improving literacy skills and comprehension; these different reading formats (print, audiobook, and e-book) only promote this increase in engagement that will benefit the students. This implementation of choice also provides an opportunity for increased intentional technology use both in and out of the classroom:

This void in the literature is unfortunate, because research focused on the relationship between digital and traditional literacy is extremely important at this point in time, particularly given that 21st-century skills represent a turning point from those of traditional literacy. This line of research is also important because it has been proposed that new classroom practices are needed to support today's learners, who are said to demonstrate different learning characteristics as a result of exposure to and experience with technology (Seok 2016).

Although I acknowledge the importance of preference for my students, I must also realize that these options are still restricted. The students do not have complete and open choice of what or how they would like to read; they still have to read it in school, and they still have to read one of the options provided to them by us teachers. Although understanding this preference is relative to that of a school-chosen book, I think preference is still key to these students' success. Since they are not typically offered these multiple options in the classroom, any opportunity for possible preference is key to engaging those students who would otherwise be unmotivated.

One particular student I had in class moved often throughout his schooling experience, and it was his first year in this particular district. He did not have much motivation to meet our classroom expectations because he was accustomed to not staying very long in one place—he felt no need to follow the rules when he would most likely leave soon. When provided reading time in class on the assigned text, he would open to the next page and quickly put his head down to fall asleep at his desk. One day, I offered him the option to listen to the book. He immediately sat up. He constantly had headphones in listening to music during class time, and he seemed to find this alternative route to reading much more enjoyable. He acted as if he had discovered some secret way to read the book without having to turn any pages. From then on, he



listened to the audiobook version in class, and began to complete questions on reading checks (as he had actually learned from the material). Instead of simply sitting in class, he soon became productive when offered these other options and engaging in his preferences.

None of my students are the same. So why are we as English teachers assuming that all of our students will complete and enjoy the assigned reading when we have provided it to them all in the same way? I have discovered through this inquiry and argue that online and audiobook versions of core texts should always be offered along with the paper version in class (and if other methods of reading become prevalent in the future, to continue to adapt and offer those as well). The possibility of supporting comprehension with expansions to our offerings of course texts is immense:

Much of the research conducted to understand and reduce reading difficulties has understandably focused on the cognitive components of reading, such as those typically addressed in cognitive skill profiles. However, recent studies have demonstrated that motivational components add unique variance to reading comprehension of specific texts and to overall reading achievement. These investigations suggest that measures of affective dimensions have the potential not only to complement and extend cognitive profiles but also to contribute to a fuller understanding of reading development and success. The practical potential of such measures lies in accounting for a greater range of factors contributing to achievement and, according, for a greater share of the comprehension variance among students (Conradi, Jang, et al 2012).

This inquiry seeks to delve into these concepts about how student preference supports comprehension in different forms of text.

According to “Perceptions and Preferences of Digital and Printed Text and Their Role in Predicting Digital Literacy:”

Attempts to define literacy have proven difficult because literacy is in a continuous state of transformation. This is especially the case when viewed from sociocultural contexts. This has, in part, led to redefining adolescents’ learning characteristics in the digital information age and investigations into identifying pedagogical changes in instruction. To arrive at possible instructional solutions, some researchers have advocated for studies comparing adolescents’ behaviors and perceptions of digital and printed text along with their current performance level in digital literacy and predictors (Seok & DaCosta, 2016).

The definition of comprehension is fluid as our society and students adapt to changes in technology and culture. Therefore, we should adapt our methods of differentiating for and supporting this comprehension as well. In order to benefit the field of education, teachers should tap into these additional resources to supplement core texts in order to increase student willingness to read and accessibility to materials, which will in turn promote comprehension.

These three distinct concepts then became the driving force of my categorization of data and themes of my inquiry: willingness, access, and comprehension.

## Chapter 2

### Prior Research

Prior research related to this topic of inquiry has been twofold: these studies either investigate reading formats as a means of improving comprehension or they delve into other types of ways to provide choice for literature. Much of the research that has been done reiterates the importance of interest in reading and the positive outcomes that can result from these changes:

“...the study of reading attitudes broadens our understanding of adolescents’ reading identities. By recognizing that each adolescent has multiple reading identities and that these extend beyond those constrained by school-based literacies, we will be able to ground more nuanced conceptualizations of adolescent readers. As Moje and O’Brien have observed, adolescents develop positive reading identities when their out-of-school literacy practices are valued by their teachers and peers and connected to meaningful literacy activities in school. In fact, previous research has indicated that students may be labeled as struggling readers due to their difficulties with academic, school-based literacies, despite their positive attitudes toward reading and participation in rich literate experiences outside of the classroom context. It follows that assessing their attitudes toward reading in multiple dimensions, which include both in-school and out-of-school literacies and reading in both traditional and digital settings, has the potential to provide useful information for designing more inclusive and motivating instructional practices and in facilitating the development of positive reading identities. (Conradi, Jang, et al 2012).

Previous research on choice in reading has not been solely focused on modality of the text, but rather other options to promote student engagement. Some of these options include choice in author, length, and genre to attempt to tap into student interest and increase willingness to read. One study in the *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy* found that “literature deemed by teens to be relevant to their lives can help them explore issues related to their environment, their evolving identities, and their relationships” (“What, Why, and How They Read”). The study emphasized the influence novels have on young adults in our classrooms when they have the ability to decide the topics of these stories (so that they can choose pieces more applicable to their everyday lives).

This research consistently confirms the necessity for student input into these choices in their classroom environment and curriculum: “The 2010 National Council of TE standards even stated in direct correlation to this line of research: ‘specific information on students’ knowledge, skills, strategies, and attitudes helps teachers, parents, and students set goals and plan instruction more thoughtfully’” (Conradi, Jang, et al 2012). Regardless of the means of providing choice in the classroom, the immense impact this has on students’ willingness to pick up these books is clear.

Although a lot of prior research has focused mainly on comprehension, some has delved into the topic of access as well:

These teens may actually prefer reading traditional books, or they may have associated the act of reading with reading a book, something that they undoubtedly encounter in their school work in some fashion every day.

Alternately, these participants may not have access to high-speed Internet

services, which would make accessing reading materials on electronic devices more difficult” (Becnel & Moeller 2015b).

The students in my study were all provided with 1:1 access to personal Chromebooks through the school district; however, this is still quite uncommon across the country due to the costs inferred to grant this technology to each individual student. This would then create an inability for ease of access to online copies of texts for many students, which would reflect in their preferences as well. Studies continuously reference the importance of implementation of technology:

In recent years, technology has had a significant impact on literacy and dissemination of information, with ongoing advancements concomitantly altering the field of literacy. In essence, these advancements have changed the way we read, write, attain, act on, use, evaluate, and produce information, not to mention the manner in which we engage in society and socially interact and communicate (Seok & DaCosta 2016).

Although copious studies have been published, all of this attention to implementation of technology is void if the students cannot access it.

Other studies have also highlighted the importance of willingness as a factor in student engagement with different forms of text as well:

...for comprehension development e-books can go beyond the opportunities traditionally afforded by print books for encountering new vocabulary or practicing comprehension strategies. E-book features such as on-demand word definitions and synonyms, comprehension strategy suggestions and tutorials, summarizing resources, and other functions may support comprehension skills in

unique ways. Another potential benefit of e-books is that they can be motivating, particularly for reluctant readers. Thus far, it is unclear if the entertaining, interactive features of e-books only foster a positive attitude toward literacy temporarily—until the novelty wears off—or if the motivational aspects of e-books can sustainably support increased engagement, and thereby comprehension (Mckenna, Moody, & Zucker 2009).

Willingness often overlaps with comprehension, which is not surprising to find. When students feel more inclined to engage with a text, it seems logical that greater understanding of the story follows suit. This overlap in willingness and comprehension further emphasizes the necessity of providing options in the classroom, as student interest in different forms of text is often correlated with their academic success.

### **Incongruity of Data to Research**

Although many researchers in this field initially believed students would strongly prefer digital content due to the current ever-present technological climate of adolescents, these studies did not generally find this sentiment to be true:

Although the [students] acknowledged that they and their peers often read digital content, they expressed a strong preference for print. Although in conflict with research on urban/suburban populations that demonstrated a teen preference for digital materials, this finding is in line with several other studies that concluded that teens generally prefer print for their recreational reading activities (Becnel & Moeller 2015a).

Similarly, the *Journal of Documentation* discovered in their research a preference for paper in spite of the current digital age: “People’s preference of paper as a medium for reading (especially in-depth reading) also implies that paper is unlikely to disappear in the digital age. In the digital age, printing for reading remains one of the major driving forces for the increasing consumption of paper” (Lui 2005).

When prior research does not overlap with the data my students provide in this study, it proves a conundrum at first as to how to decide what methods to incorporate in a classroom. However, every student is unique in personality and learning style. Dependent on the sample of adolescents used in any given research study, the responses could vary immensely; therefore, it is important only to analyze the overlapping themes of rationale in response to interest.

### **Chapter 3** **Research and Design Methods**

When initially delving into the data collection component of this research, I knew the importance of gathering feedback directly from the students. If I wish to tap into their personal interests and preferences in engagement, I cannot achieve this by merely observing their work habits or grading a test based on their reading. I needed to hear specific responses in an informal manner in order to attempt the most genuine responses: “The design of our study was rooted in the belief that talking directly to youth about what they think and want would provide us with reliable and trustworthy results” (Becnel & Moeller 2015b).

This study was conducted using anonymous survey responses from students as well as dictations from student interview recordings: “We must engage in discussion with young adults to understand the intricacies of this issue” (Becnel & Moeller 2015b).

This study encapsulates approximately 90 students in an advanced 11<sup>th</sup> grade English classroom in a suburban community. This school district is known for the university environment surrounding it as well.

#### **Timeline**

- **December 12/13:** I began my research with an anonymous online survey to all of my students. The first survey was in a set of three for the assigned reading of the text *The Great Gatsby*. This survey aimed to gauge the unprompted reading styles of the students to see what methods they sought out on their own or from past experiences after having



been handed only the traditional classroom paper copy of the text. The questions had open-ended answer components. The questions in this first survey included:

- “When reading Chapters 1, 2, and 3 so far in *The Great Gatsby*, did you read the paper copy from class, read an online text version of the book, listen to an audiobook version, did not finish the reading, or did not start the reading?”
- “If you finished the reading, did you enjoy the way that you read it (paper, online, audio)?”
- “If you did not finish/start the reading, do you think another way of reading (paper, online, audio) would have worked better/been more interesting to complete?”

Based on the overwhelming variance in the responses of preference from this initial survey, I decided to continue to provide surveys for feedback after offering alternative methods, including an audiobook and e-book version of the text.

- **December 14/15:** I administered the second anonymous survey to follow up and see if more students had chosen alternative methods of reading.
- **December 18/19:** I provided a third and final anonymous survey for *The Great Gatsby* in which I analyzed if students chose alternative forms of the text and if they enjoyed using those as well. The questions remained the same throughout the surveys (only slightly adapted to reflect the newer reading chapters).
- **January 23/24:** During a choice reading unit, students had the option to select from six books with overlapping themes to read. I provided a similar survey in which I gauged student interest and decision in selection of which form of reading they used (while

providing links to online and audio versions of all six of these texts, as well as the paper copies administered in class).

- **January 24/25:** I followed up with another similar survey. At the end of this anonymous survey, I provided a space for students to write their names if they would be willing to be interviewed as well. Those students who were willing to interview took place during these class periods as well.

### **Findings**

The direct quotes from student interviews provided the opportunity for authentic data. Upon analysis, it became abundantly clear that each quote illustrated working definitions for three distinct concepts: willingness, access, and comprehension, as well as the relationships between these concepts when approaching each form of text. The students' words ultimately define these three key concepts.

## Chapter 4

### Willingness

The ability for my students to choose the form with which they engaged with the texts in my English classroom generated a plethora of responses; they continuously cited the increased relevancy to their lives. Their comments about modalities showed their connection to reading and identity, which ultimately represented an overall increase in willingness to read these texts. My students generated their working definitions of willingness in regards to each form of reading: paper, audiobook, and e-book.

#### Paper

The definition of willingness in relation to paper texts culminated in both positive and negative responses to this type of reading. Overall, the most common rationale cited for increased willingness to read a paper book included engagement and the physical aspect of the book:

- “With the book I’m physically doing something that keeps me engaged.”
- “I like turning the actual pages...there’s something cool about that.”
- “I think there’s something satisfying about being able to look at how many pages you are into the book...it’s a chunk of book that you’ve finished.”
- “There’s a certain authenticity to it: the feeling of turning the page, getting done with a chapter, folding over the page to save it.”
- “The paper copy adds to the satisfaction of completion.”
- “I really like the paper books just because you can see how far you’ve gotten and with e-books, I feel like I’m not getting anywhere with it.”

- “I like being able to hold something physically while I read.”
- “I really like to be able to hold the book, and Kindles are nice and all, but having a sense of how much I’ve read and how much left to go.”
- “If I’m alone at home I prefer the paper copy because it’s more engaging.”
- “I enjoyed [reading the paper version] because I tend to be a visual learner.”
- “I always find reading at a personal pace to be nice and satisfying when finishing a book and closing it up.”
- “I read it on paper and thought it was okay. Reading from books always calms my mind, and I usually sleep good, so I like to read from the paper copies.”
- “I can’t tell you how or why, but I think it’s boring...just turning pages and looking at black and white...I don’t know.”
- “Sometimes when I sit down with a book and just read, I get bored pretty quickly, and then I’m not as likely to finish it.”
- “I really like reading, but I like reading books that I enjoy so when you’re given a text that’s boring and it just takes a while, you start to get stir crazy...you don’t want to just sit in one spot...just having to take a solid hour or so depending on how much reading you have, you just sit there and try and invest yourself into the book...I feel like when I say ‘tedious’ a lot of time what I think of is just going over the same paragraph seven times because you just can’t focus and get yourself into the book (so that’s why I really like an audiobooks to keep it from getting that way.”

Some of the major themes that emerged from these responses include the commonality of increased engagement and physicality of a paper book. Many students felt a sense of accomplished completion when they could physically turn pages and look at how much progress

they had made in the reading. At the same time, many students were less willing to use paper versions of a text and found themselves getting bored relatively quickly, as it seemed to be a slow and mundane process of turning pages.

### **Audiobook**

When my students discussed their experiences with audiobooks, they defined willingness to use this form most commonly as relaxing and paced well:

- “I probably would like to listen to it on audio since it’s been very hectic before break and listening is easier to multitask with.”
- “I do enjoy the reading in this particular situation; if it is a book I do not like however, I will often listen to an audiobook (it helps me when I cannot focus on the words).”
- “[The reading] was interesting enough, I simply procrastinated too much for me to be able to finish. I feel I was too tired to actually read so maybe the audiobook may have been better this time.”
- “I feel like audiobooks are the best because I can listen more quickly compared to when I read, which is much slower.”
- “Audiobooks keep you at a pace, and if I don’t really like reading something, I won’t stick with it otherwise, and it’ll drag on really slow, and if you have someone reading it with you—not necessarily reading it to you—but reading it with you, you kinda just stick with it...because with *The Great Gatsby*, if I tried reading it [in paper], it would take me so long, but I put the audio version on and I finished it in an afternoon.”
- “You can kinda just relax and sit back and just listen to the information, and it would be easier to process when you’re just listening to it.”

- “If I’m listening to it, I can lay however I want and not have to look at something or worry about having enough light.”
- “With audiobooks, I can picture what’s happening in my brain a lot better...I can just close my eyes, head back, and let it do the work.”
- “One of the big things [about audiobooks] is you can’t control the speed that they’re reading or maybe the voice just annoys you.”
- “I don’t like not being able to go at my own pace, and I feel like the way I read it versus however the way the person is reading it...hearing them reading it gives their interpretation of it but I like my interpretation of it...I like to create how the story is in my own mind.”

The concept of pacing and multitasking with audiobooks generated both positive and negative responses. Some students were thrilled to have the option to listen to a text at a quicker pace or while they were completing other activities in their lives. Other students were hindered by this component of audiobooks and less willing to use them because the pace was either too slow or fast for their personal listening abilities or multitasking proved too distracting in practice.

### **E-book**

My students most commonly cited a decreased willingness to engage with e-books because of the potential for headaches due to the strain on eyes from the screen:

- “Sometimes looking at the screen for too long gives me a headache, hurts my eyes.”
- “The screen kinda just hurts your eyes...it strains your eyes a lot more than looking at paper.”
- “If I’m reading it on a computer, I can’t get into a more comfortable position...and then I have to sit and read instead of lounging about and reading.”

- “I’m traditional—I find that if I read from an electronic screen, my eyes become strained. So I prefer the paper copy from class.”
- “I feel like my eyes would get tired honestly...online is more for short articles...reading a whole book online, I feel like that wouldn’t be very good for my eyes and I would get really tired.”
- “When I get to the end of an e-book, it doesn’t feel like I finished a book...I have an e-reader that is backlit so it looks like a book, and it’s shaped like a book but when I get to the end of the story, it’s so easy for me to forget that I read it for some reason just because it’s online...and if I got back and reread it, I’ll be looking for it and I won’t be able to find it and then I’ll realize I read it on my e-reader.”

Although I first believed many students would very willingly use e-books with the current technological era, most students preferred not to engage with them due to an overwhelming sense of physical discomfort such as posture or eye strain.

Prior research has also reiterated that students would be more willing to interact with a classroom text if they had the option to access the online version: “Many participants made spontaneous comments or left written notes about how much they enjoyed using the Kindle, such as: ‘Interesting,’ ‘I like it,’ ‘Might consider buying one in the future,’ ‘Really cool,’ ‘I enjoyed using the e-book for my first time,’ ‘I would love to use one again,’ and ‘I liked using an e-book more than I thought I would’” (Moyer 2011). Hearing the positive feedback toward reading from traditional non-readers provides hope as to the future of engaged reading in the classroom, despite my students’ current responses toward it: “Based on semi-structured interviews with 74 secondary-level students, [this study] found that 76% of their sample were in favor of Internet use for reading, describing it as ‘easy,’ ‘interesting,’ and ‘fun,’ whereas they perceived

traditional books as ‘irksome,’ ‘unpleasant,’ and ‘more work’” (Seok & DaCosta 2016). If the students describe their experience as “fun” and “interesting” when reading a book online, why not shift toward providing this option for all reading in the classroom?

Although many students in my study cited eye strain from online screens as a shortcoming of willingness to use e-books, many other studies have found different results from participants:

One interesting conclusion that can be drawn from the e-book studies in educational settings, particularly those with younger readers is that eyestrain does not seem to be an issue. Most of the e-books in use in education settings are still computer based (and often interactive) or use dedicated devices that use LCD screens, yet eye fatigue or other issues related to backlight screens are never mentioned as a problem. This may very well be a result of the age of the participants. Younger children may spend less time overall using computers, or they may be so used to interacting with technology using an LCD screen that it never becomes an issue. This is another indication that there may be significant generational differences with readers of e-books” (Moyer 2011).

Moyer’s study may indicate that even in the next few years, student responses indicating a lack of willingness to engage with screens for long periods of time may change as the new generation is more accustomed to frequent interaction with technology on an even more regular basis than my students.

Overall, this first theme of willingness proved a crucial component in engaging my students in reading both in and out of the classroom.



## Chapter 5 Access

Another recurring theme in the student responses as to the reasons they chose to engage in different text formats included access. This working definition incorporated the busy lives of my students outside of the classroom in other activities including the desire for convenience in reading material and ability to multitask while engaging with a text. One particular response from a student who did not finish the reading fascinated me, as it seemed to reiterate my prior notion that providing multiple forms of the text would prove more convenient for student schedule and interest:

- “[The reading] was interesting enough, I simply procrastinated too much for me to be able to finish. I feel I was too tired to actually read so maybe the audiobook may have been better this time.”

### **Paper**

Many of my students defined accessibility in reading as the ability to easily travel with a paper version of a text, as well as the lack of hassle to find an outlet for charging an electronic form. Some students, however, found paper versions less accessible due to the need for proper lighting while engaging with this format and the possibility for headaches when reading while in a car.

- “It was convenient because my Chromebook died and there was no way for me to read online.”
- “I enjoyed the reading, as it was portable which made it convenient to finish. I did not have to worry about cramming the reading in because I could read in the car or during free time.”

- “[The paper version] was the most convenient way for me to read it and helps me to connect to the text more.”
- “I enjoyed read it on paper; it’s portable and easy to access.”
- “The ability to pick up a book and bring it with you wherever is just easier.”
- “Reading on the bus (or cars in general) sometimes gives me a headache.”
- “Having to worry about not having enough light is sometimes annoying.”

Many students cited how easy, portable, and convenient the paper copies are for reading in different locations. While I initially thought audio or e-books would actually be far more convenient, it seemed easier for my students to not have to worry about charging or reading in the sun; however, some students still deemed paper books inaccessible in specific locations like car rides.

### **Audiobook**

The busy schedules of my students involved in extracurriculars or jobs after school have led many of them to deem access as a priority in terms of reading for homework. When they have the ability to easily multitask while listening to an audiobook, many students find this to be the most preferred experience for efficiency purposes:

- “Audio is always a good way to finish a book quick.”
- “I think I will listen to an audio version in the future because it will allow me to listen to the book while showering or working out, or doing other things that take up time from sitting down and reading. I’ve done this in the past with other books, and it works well for me.”
- “I’ve listened to an audiobook on a car trip before just because a lot of time when you read in the car, it can make you sick and that is a good time to use an audiobook.”

- “Audiobooks are nice if you’re going on a trip or something because I know over Thanksgiving break when we read *The Great Gatsby* it was nice to have an online text or audiobook so I didn’t have to bring it with me.”
- “I listen to it while I’m doing other things, and I find it more efficient...while I’m listening to the audiobook, I can do other things so it’s more time efficient.”
- “It makes me feel like I’m not spending as much time, or if I’m in a time crunch for something I can listen to it while I’m eating dinner or I could listen to it while I’m on the bus...so it makes me feel like it’s not taking as much time...it’s one less thing to think about.”
- “I think especially if you’re busy, you could work out while you’re listening to your audiobook, you can multitask and not multitask like doing your other homework, but like I said exercising and doing it would be really nice for me because I’m really busy after school, and it would be nice to get it out of the way.”
- “I definitely like the audiobook for the ability it has to do other things so even if you’re driving to school in the morning you can listen to it.”

With the overwhelmingly busy nature of my students’ lives, they largely found audiobooks a positive experience for accessibility. They could still complete the reading while multitasking on other activities, chores, or exercise in order to continue their balanced lifestyles.

### **E-book**

In the process of defining access in terms of e-book reading of a text, my students commonly described the convenience of pulling up the material on any tablet outside of the classroom. The same reasons for positive feelings toward e-books in terms of access, however, created negative

sentiments for other students; the need to have a fully-charged electronic device on them caused a disinterest in this format as well.

- “I like to read the paper version, but when I don’t have it around, I like having the ability to access online versions.”
- “It was very handy because I left my book at home, but I was still able to read during study hall.”
- “The online option was helpful and made it easier to read when not at home.”
- “It was more convenient to read on my phone because I was traveling when I read it.”
- “I have the easiest access to the online version.”
- “With an online book, it’s really easy to find quotes.”
- “I don’t have an e-book reader, and I really hate reading off of a screen.”
- “I don’t really like how most of the time they’re inaccessible—like if you’re going somewhere, you don’t have the ability to read them online without downloading them.”
- “If it’s online, it’s so hard to go back to look at something; whereas paper you can just flip back...and it’s hard when you don’t have a page number, and you’re just aimlessly scrolling.”
- “I have a Nook, and it seems like it would be easier to search for things, but it’s actually a lot harder for me to scroll and find stuff.”
- “On a computer it’s more bulky, and I don’t really like looking at computer screens so paper books don’t have that problem.”
- “You can’t take them outside because of the glare from the sun, and I like to read outside a lot.”

Many students found e-books incredibly accessible whenever they did not have the paper copy with them. Although access to online versions of texts can also prove a hindrance or burden to some adolescent readers, many have expressed an interest in using them in the future: “While only 25% of the population currently reads e-books, more than 60% are interested in reading one or learning more about them, numbers that libraries need to seriously consider when allocating collection budgets, and most library patrons would be willing to check out e-books and many would even buy a device just to access library collections” (Moyer 2011). Additionally, other studies have found, “as many as 91% of participants said they would not bother buying a print version if they could get it digitally” (Moyer 2011). If classroom teachers lobbied for these additional resources to become a regular component of their teaching, many of these students would choose to engage with their texts in this manner.

Many of the comments about accessibility overlapped with the previous notion of willingness, which further reiterates the recurring importance of these themes in engaging our students.

## **Chapter 6 Comprehension**

The majority of prior research in relation to these differing reading formats has been about student comprehension of material. These studies are incredibly important in crafting effective lessons for students; however, what happens then when there is a disconnect between the form that generates the highest comprehension and the form that generates the highest interest in engagement? Through my student interviews, these adolescents developed a working definition for the reading format they believed to be most effective for their own comprehension.

### **Paper**

The working definition my students determined for comprehension of paper books largely included the importance of the physical nature of the book and the self-pacing of the reading:

- “There’s a lot of value to having the physical book where you can mark pages, and it gives you a better idea of where you are in the book...and you can easily flip pages back to find what you just read...and for me, I like that more.”
- “With reading a paper version, I can put sticky notes, I can mark off certain things to use quotes so that’s why I like the physical copy.”
- “I like that I can flip back easily because with audiobooks I get super distracted like I used to listen to those in the car, but I wouldn’t be able to read a book that I would then have to recall things.”

- “I can recall what I’ve read more because I’ve actually been turning the pages, and I can remember where things are on the pages.”
- “If I’m writing a paper on it, I think a paper version would be more in my favor...I feel like it’s more about how much of an understanding you want to get...I feel like the understanding is not as good from an audio or an e-book.”
- “I always enjoy reading a physical text more than any other format and I feel that it helps me to stay focused and retain more information about the text.”
- “I find paper copies of books to involve me more in the reading. I feel like I am actually seeing the events unfold, not just reading about them.”
- “I liked reading the paper copy because I am easily able to go back over paragraphs again or I can read at my own speed.”
- “I like reading the hard copy because I can go back or focus certain passages if I need to.”
- “I can read it at my own pace and pause to think about the reading...online reading hurts my head sometimes.”
- “I can go at my own pace, and I can follow it, and I can reread if I don’t understand certain things so it’s just easier for me to understand and analyze the text.”
- “I enjoyed [the paper copy] because I can imagine what is happening when I read, and it allows me to have creative freedom in what I envision the scene to be.”
- “Whenever I read it, I have the ability to think of what the characters would sound like or what they would look like...so I just get that whole form of imagination.”
- “It’s more difficult for reading a play because instead of setting the scene, it just uses words and actual paragraphs, and it says it all in the beginning and you have to imagine it

as it goes...and plays are mostly just dialogue, and I think that can make it kind of confusing from a character perspective because you don't really get everyone's thoughts or see their emotions unless you're actually watching the play...you just kind of read about it, and it's more up for interpretation I guess."

- "Reading on paper doesn't really stick in my head, and I find myself rereading stuff constantly."

Many of my students found the paper version of the book far easier to comprehend as they had the ability to physically turn back to certain sections of the book, mark pages, and use sticky notes whenever necessary. Also, many students enjoyed the ability to read at their own pace, which in turn helped improve comprehension as they could slow down or re-read passages they found difficult.

### **Audiobook**

My students began to define comprehension with audiobooks as the ability to slow down the pacing with a narrator and listen more closely to the text:

- "I enjoyed listening to it after I read because it helps me to fully digest the text."
- "Of what I read, I enjoyed the paper copy most of all; however, I feel with the correct resources, the audio version would help to grasp a better understanding of the novel and catalyze closer observations and connections to what Fitzgerald is implying using his characters."
- "I liked the audio because it forced me to slow down and listen closely to the text."
- "When I listen [to an audiobook], I tend to understand it more and remember it better."



- “It’s also nicer if you’re confused on the topic, having someone read it to you, and also you don’t have those instances where you can’t even pronounce the word because you always hear it.”
- “I enjoyed the audiobook because since I am a slow reader, it helped me read faster and stay focused.”
- “I really like the pace because I’m a slow reader, so I don’t think it’s too slow...I always do 1.5 speed on YouTube.”
- “It’s slower because I read really fast so I like when it goes slower, so I can understand it in depth more.”
- “The thing that I found most beneficial is that it keeps you engaged...I feel like with a paper book, you have more freedom with being able to go back and reread pages, but an audiobook you’re more limited, so you have to pay closer attention.”
- “It incorporates in my opinion some of the different sensory stuff like hearing instead of sight, and I think I can retain that a lot better.”
- “So it was a 6-hour YouTube video recording, and it was a little time consuming, but it was worth it in the end, I mean I retained all of it.”
- “The woman who read the book gave some of the characters slightly different voices so it was easier to keep track of who was talking and how they might have been saying their words. When I started, I used the paper copy, and I was lost the whole time, but listening to it instead made everything much clearer.”
- “I’m a very visual learner so if I hear something, I don’t really retain it...so audiobooks, it’s just in one ear and out the other, and I don’t get anything from it.”
- “If someone’s just reading through it, I won’t process what’s happening.”

- “For me it’s so easy to listen to it and do other things so I worry that if I just listen to the audiobook, I would get distracted...I might even just fall asleep in the middle, and I don’t want that to happen so I’m just taking an extra step to not just listen to it alone.”
- “With the audio, it’s especially easy to get off task because you can do other things—I can look around, I don’t have something stimulating any of my senses other than hearing and so there’s not really something to captivate my interest, so I’m more likely to go and maybe walk around while doing it...I’m just listening in and out so I’ll start talking to my mom or something...something like that which could really just detract from my enjoyment of the book or at least my understanding of it.”
- “I just can’t really focus on them...it’s kinda like listening to music and then you realize you need to do this instead, whereas if I’m reading it I have to stop, and with audio I’m like, oh, I can just get it on my phone.”
- “If someone has trouble paying attention to two things at once, they probably shouldn’t use an audiobook.”
- “With a book I can imagine it, and it ruins the deal for me if someone else is talking I guess...and that keeps me from being able to make my own visual for it.”
- “I feel like I develop a voice for a character, and I’ll read how I think the character would read it in my mind, so then it just throws me off.”
- “It would be more beneficial for me just to listen to the audiobook instead of looking in the book too just because I can focus more on it when I’m hearing it.”
- “I don’t like how you can’t go back as easily and reread, and also it doesn’t really do anything except read you the words, so it just seems weird to me...I just like to be able to read at my own pace and go back and reread, and I like quiet reading.”

Some student felt they thoroughly comprehended the material when using an audiobook as the narrator allowed the ability to slow down the pacing and grasp what was occurring in the text. Other students, however, did not feel they benefited from this form of reading, as it was easy to become distracted when not following along with a paper text.

### **E-book**

My students began to define comprehension in terms of e-books as largely distracting:

- “Using a paper copy helps me to focus better than using an electronic copy.”
- “I would zone out and lose focus when I read text online.”
- “You could just be reading and think to yourself, I need to check Facebook or check the weather or something and then you get sidetracked doing other stuff for an hour instead of reading...the distractions probably the biggest thing, there’s just so much you do on a computer.”
- “I get distracted easily because I’ll get a notification or something, so I’ll just go to that and then I spend time on Instagram or Snapchat or something.”
- “I’ll go onto my tablet or computer and sometimes I’ll get bored of the text, and if I’m sitting in bed reading or sitting on the couch reading and I get bored of the text, and I have to physically put the book down...with a computer or my tablet or something, I could literally hit the home button and just go onto a different thing. It’s a lot more of a final gesture to put down a book and go walk around and do something else than just having a book in front of my face, and ok, I’m gonna go look at iFunny or Imurgur or something...it’s just a lot easier to distract myself.”

This particular method of reading proved largely negative for my students in relation to comprehension of the material, as it was incredibly easy to become distracted. Many prior

studies have also reiterated the sentiments shared here by my students; online versions of texts can often be far too distracting for deeper comprehension to occur. According to the *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*:

As justification for their preference for print, students mentioned experiencing difficulty reading on a Kindle, iPad, or computer. They indicated that it is difficult to read on these devices while lying in bed and they disliked the artificial light from the devices. Further, several students remarked that they were too distracted when online content was available, a sentiment echoed by others in each group (Becnel & Moeller 2015a).

Students may continuously choose to opt for a different method of reading when they realize the downfalls of easy distraction:

Although scholars are split over teens' preference for digital content, studies of urban populations suggest that magazine and digital content are the preferred format for reading. Conversely, the rural teens in this study expressed a preference for print material over digital, admitting to feeling distracted when trying to read content on computers, phones, or other reading devices (Becnel & Moeller 2015a).

Although many students know to stay away from the temptation of digital screens due to the hindrance they can cause to comprehension, what about our students who do not necessarily have this initial foresight or willpower? We may need to monitor then when preference for a certain format of reading goes too far into halting understanding of the overall material.

Comprehension then becomes the core around which the themes of willingness and accessibility play major factors in our students' overall learning of the material.

## Chapter 7

### Further Research and Conclusions

The findings from this inquiry led me to consider a plethora of other possibilities for further research, including student preferences for students with disabilities, students of different genders, and struggling readers as well.

#### Students with Disabilities

For students with disabilities, online versions of texts offer a wide array of additional accommodations to supplement a reading experience: “Research on digital literacy implementation in the classroom setting has revealed possible benefits for students with and without disabilities” (Moyer 2011). E-books are equipped with a multitude of features that can support students with cognitive disabilities, language disabilities, and more:

...many researchers have argued that e-book features are particularly useful for students with reading and/or language-based disabilities because electronic books represent an assistive technology (AT) that can support one or more reading processes and allow users to understand a text that would otherwise be too difficult for them. When children lack proficiency in decoding or comprehension (McKenna, Moody, & Zucker 2009).

Although access is still a concern when relying on technology to support these students, the advantages of the extra components available in an e-book cannot go unnoticed or unstudied: “Beyond such indirect decoding supports, some e-books embed explicit decoding support, such as letter-by-letter pronunciations...when the student clicks on a word” (McKenna, Moody, & Zucker 2009).

## **Struggling Readers**

Further research could also encompass specific attention to struggling readers: “In considering the effectiveness of e-books for different profiles of readers, the extant literature provides little information for struggling readers or children diagnosed with reading disabilities because no experimental studies addressed this population” (McKenna, Moody, & Zucker 2009). When students have an ingrained disinterest in classroom reading material due to a long history of struggle with reading, it can be a challenge to get these students to engage in a text or read at all. One study reiterates this notion:

This article demonstrates the importance of motivation and engagement as the struggling readers were more highly engaged and motivated to work in the computer based reading program. It also indicates that computer based or e-book reading may be much more appealing and comfortable for young and/or struggling readers than traditional print reading (Moyer 2011).

Future research could aim for participants within this specific category in order to see how best to engage the interests and choice of these students.

## **Gender**

Many prior studies have examined gender differences in relation to self-identity and comprehension in reading: “Research has consistently shown that females generally have more positive attitudes toward reading than males” (Conradi, Jang, et al 2011). These studies aim to see which category of gender (often only in terms of a binary, which is also cause for further study) feels more positively about their reading skills: “The attitudes of females were more positive than those of males toward academic reading in print and digital settings and toward recreational reading of print. In contrast, males exhibited more positive attitudes than females

toward recreational reading in digital settings” (Conradi, Jang, et al 2011). Few of these studies, however, have examined if there is a difference in preference toward different reading forms in gender, binary or non-binary, which would be very intriguing to examine in the future.

## **Conclusions**

If we wish to combat a preconceived and ingrained distaste for assigned reading material in our students, we need to give some ownership back to the reader. The continual overlaps in the themes of willingness, access, and comprehension further emphasize the necessity of providing options in the classroom, as student interest in different forms of text is often correlated with their academic success. I have discovered through this inquiry and argue that online and audiobook versions of core texts should always be offered along with the paper version in class (and if other methods of reading become prevalent in the future, to continue to adapt and offer those as well). I would urge all current and future teachers (both secondary and other levels) to include this variety of reading format option in the regular classroom experience.

It is most important to me that my students succeed. In attempting to achieve this, I hope that they enjoy the material along the way. There is no way to ensure this, but there are many opportunities to attempt to provide that meaningful experience in a way that is most accessible and relevant to them. I did have many surprises throughout my wonderings as well. Some of these include that many students were still content with, if not preferred, reading paper texts. In a technological era, I initially thought they would prefer the electronic options; however, the majority still read the paper version.

These discoveries remind me that sometimes there is not anything new to find at that moment: you cannot force it. There may be great ideas for additions or lessons in the classroom

that fall flat in practice. Although the addition of the audiobook and e-book options ultimately benefited many of my students, it did not affect all of them; therefore, I cannot solely push one of these as a main method in my classroom. I will continue to provide all options as suggestions to my students. I do wonder if this will change in the future as technology begins to become even more prevalent at a younger age, so this inquiry may be revisited in a few years.

I also acknowledge that it is not always so simple to implement these new ideas into our classrooms right away. My current plan moving forward with this inquiry is to provide all of these options to my students for every text I use for instruction. I also plan on looking into any new alternative methods of reading in order to constantly inquire into how to best accommodate my students and ensure their ultimate success. Read on.



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