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## ***On High School Students' Reading Habits and Teaching Literature Courses<sup>2</sup>***

### **Extended summary**

The pronounced *reading crisis* has been a topic of discussion in our education circles for a long time; the altered reading habits of children and youth have been caused by various factors – the development of modern technologies, the use of Internet, constant reading of diverse content from various screens, altered models of thinking, “accelerated” time, etc. Such a context leaves little space for reading books and other printed publications, especially fiction, giving rise to concern among all those included in education, and particularly teachers of literature and language, as they are professionally involved in the aspect of reading and the development of reading competencies in students. Creating efficient methodology for the reinforcement of reading skills of children and youth is the primary, most important task of modern literature teaching. It is necessary to develop new ways to bring the wonderful world of literature closer to children and youth until the moment when “the story rolls out” and each newly-read piece of literature becomes new motivation for reading the next one. This awakening and maintaining the internal reading motivation is a pronounced professional challenge for any literature teacher. In order to reach such outcomes, it is necessary to have a good insight into the current situation and know your starting positions. Therefore our research focus was on the attitude of high school students toward books and reading, both in the literature courses and outside, in the private domain. The goal was to compare their reading habits and attitudes towards

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books and reading with the results of other similar studies in order to determine the nature of changes that happened in the meantime, and to use this new knowledge to create serious, empirically-based methodological strategies for improving the currently evaluated situation. The central part of this paper includes the results of a research conducted on a sample of 1177 students from 13 high schools in the regions of Niš and Novi Pazar in late 2018 and early 2019. The data were collected through an anonymous questionnaire, including family and school habits of students in relation to books and reading, their attitudes towards assigned reading, libraries, e-books and online literature, creativity, and studying literature at college.

The completed study has generally supported what we have known for more than a decade about the reading crisis, students' attitudes toward assigned reading, libraries, and participation in the cultural life of their community. Compared to a similar study from 2007, which was used as a point of correlation, the percentage of students who do not read anything at all was somewhat higher (14.5%), while the percentage of those who read only school-assigned books, those always reading books, and those who choose reading as a leisure activity remained almost identical (21.8%, 8% and 8.2%, respectively). The interviewed students expressed dissatisfaction with the selection of books in school reading lists (60%) but when asked to suggest the titles of the books that they would include in the school curriculum, they generally had no suggestions. According to the stated number of the books read during the summer holidays, it was concluded that students are reading insufficiently, matching their self-assessment. It is encouraging that almost 70% of the interviewed students believed that they should read more and 40.8% stated that they sometimes read free-choice books, in addition to school curriculum, while the percentage of students who read because they like it was 43.3%. Students mostly discussed books with their friends (50%), but teachers were also desirable as interlocutors (18.4%). The students are aware of the importance of reading books for the development of various personality traits and believe in the power of literature to influence character development. As many as 78.9% of the interviewed students believed that books may influence the way people think and change their attitudes and behavior.

The results of this study have confirmed the initial hypotheses on insufficiently utilized educational resources of libraries. The deviation from the expected results occurred in relation to reading e-books and printed books. The initial hypothesis stated that students would be more inclined toward electronic publications, while the obtained data have shown that the majority (63.7%) still prefer reading printed books. As 55.7% of the interviewed students stated that they do not circumvent reading of the assigned books by downloading the retold content from the Internet, the study suggests that this issue should not be automatically approached with the belief (based on the first impression) that using Internet notes would be regular in most high school students.

The authors tried to present the results in a way that draws attention to the positive aspects of the analyzed situations. The challenges are complex and the existing issues cannot be solved quickly or easily. In order to carry out the necessary revisions of the curricula and optimize and adapt the teaching methodology, it is necessary to undertake more extensive research, not only of the reading habits in different categories of student population, but also of

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their interests, life priorities etc., as well as many other aspects of educational systems that were only briefly touched upon in this preliminary work.

**Keywords:** reading, teaching literature, reading habits, assigned reading, library.

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