



# **Book ownership and its relation to reading enjoyment, attitudes, behaviour and attainment**

## **Some findings from the National Literacy Trust first annual survey**

**Christina Clark and Lizzie Poulton  
National Literacy Trust**

**2011**

*Transforming Lives*

Registered address:  
**National Literacy Trust**  
68 South Lambeth Road  
London SW8 1RL

☎ 020 7587 1842  
☎ 020 7587 1411  
✉ [contact@literacytrust.org.uk](mailto:contact@literacytrust.org.uk)  
[www.literacytrust.org.uk](http://www.literacytrust.org.uk)

National Literacy Trust is a registered charity, no. 1116260, and a company limited by guarantee, no. 5836486. Registered in England and Wales. VAT reg no. 919 3158 11.

♻️ Paper manufactured using 100% de-inked pulp recycled fibre. Produced at a mill which is ISO 9001, ISO 14001 and FSC certified.

This report is the property of the National Literacy Trust and is protected by Copyright law.

The National Literacy Trust will consider requests to use extracts or data from this publication provided that you:

- acknowledge that the content is the work of the National Literacy Trust and provide appropriate references in any publications or accompanying publicity;
- anonymise all data to protect the identity of any individual or organisation;
- state that any views expressed are yours and not necessarily those of the National Literacy Trust.

Suggested reference for this report is: Clark, C and Poulton, L. (2011). *Book ownership and its relation to reading enjoyment, attitudes, behaviour and attainment*. London: National Literacy Trust.

*Please note that due to a coding error, some of the data relating to young people who read above the expected level for their age were incorrect. The trend, however, remains the same. The data in the attainment table were corrected on 6 December 2011.*

## Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the pupils and staff at the following schools without whom this study would not have been possible:

*Armagh School, Ashton-on-Mersey School, Attleborough High School, Birdwell Primary School, Boston Spa, Brimsham Green School, Brook Green Centre for Learning, Buttershaw School, Carlton Le Willows School, Cawston, Cheam Park Farm Junior School, Chesterton Community College, Christ Church, Cirencester Kingshill School, Claverley Primary School, Cowley St Laurence CE Primary School, Cramlington Learning Village, Dagenham Park C of E School, Dobcroft Junior School, Doverpark, Ecclesfield School, Endsleigh Holy Child RC VA Primary School, English Martyrs School, Falinge Park High School and Performing Arts College, Farndon St. Peter's C of E Primary, Fortismere School, Foxhills Junior School, Goffs School, Gordon's, Greasbrough Primary School, Great Torrington Community School, Hagley Park Sports College, Hatch End High School, Henry Beaufort School, High Ercall Primary, Holloway, Houghton Kepier Sports College, Hounslow, Ibstock Place School, Lurgan High, Lyngford Park, Margaret Beaufort Middle School, Monks Walk, Netley Abbey Junior School, Newport Junior School, Northgate Primary, Northolt High School, Notley High, Oban High School, Old Palace of John Whitgift School, Pangbourne, Parish Church (CE) Junior School, Park Hall Academy, Park Junior School Wellingborough, Passmores School and Technology, Paston Ridings School, Poplar Primary School, Primrose High School, Priory College, Ryedale School, Salendine Nook High School, Shebbear College, Sheffield School, Sidegate Primary School, Sinfon Community School, South Holderness Technology College, Southwater Junior, St Andrew's CE VA Primary School, St Barnabas CE Primary, St Mary's CEVC Primary School, St Michael's CE School, St Peter's School, Stockwell Primary, Stoke Newington School, Stroud Green Primary School, Swaythling Primary School, Tanfield School, Tenbury High School, The Broxbourne School, The Burgate School and Sixth Form Centre, The Challenger Centre, The Henry Cort Community College, The Mirfield Free Grammar and Sixth Form, The Nottingham Bluecoat School, The Romsey School, Tile Hill Wood School and Language College, Tolworth Girls' School, Tudhoe Grange School, Tunbridge Wells Grammar School for Boys, Turves Green Girls School and Technology College, Twickenham Preparatory School, University Academy Keighley, Weald of Kent Grammar School, Westborough High School, Westover Green Community School, Wheatley Park School, White Woman Lane Junior School, Wicklewood, Wildridings School, Wilmington Grammar School, Woodford Valley CE VA Primary*

Many thanks also to the pupils and teachers who helped develop parts of the questionnaire and to the 100 pupils who tested it.

## Table of contents

Acknowledgements .....	3
Tables and figures .....	4
Executive summary .....	5
Book ownership in young people: A brief introduction .....	6
Methodology.....	6
Participation rate.....	7
Sample characteristics: Demography and attainment.....	7
Who has books of their own? Some background information .....	8
Having books of one's own and enjoyment of reading .....	8
Having books of one's own and reading frequency.....	9
Having books of one's own and reading length.....	9
Having books of one's own and number of books read in a month .....	9
Having books of one's own and number of books in the home .....	11
Having books of one's own and types of materials read .....	11
Having books of one's own and reading opportunities .....	14
Having books of one's own and attitudes towards reading .....	14
Having books of one's own and reading attainment.....	15
Summing up.....	16
References.....	17
Appendix A: Background information on our Omnibus survey .....	18
Appendix B: Breakdown of ethnic background .....	19

## Tables and figures

Figure 1: Book ownership and enjoyment of reading .....	8
Figure 2: Book ownership and reading frequency.....	9
Figure 3: Book ownership and reading length.....	10
Figure 4: Book ownership and number of books read a month.....	10
Figure 5: Book ownership and number of books in the home .....	11
Figure 6: Book ownership and types of materials read .....	13
Figure 7: Book ownership and reading opportunities .....	14
Figure 8: Book ownership and attitudes towards reading.....	15
Table 1: Sample age .....	7
Table 2: Percentage of young people who read below or at or above the expected level and whether they have their own books or not (N = 5,580).....	15
Table B: Ethnic background .....	19

## Executive summary

18,141 young people aged 8 to 17 participated in our first annual online survey in November/December 2010. While the survey focuses on young people's attitudes towards reading, writing and communication skills as well as technology use, it included a question about book ownership, which is the focus of this brief report.

Although other factors such as socio-economic status and gender may have a part to play in children and young people's relationship to books and reading, the relationship between book ownership and reading attitudes and abilities is consistently strong. When compared to peers who do not have books of their own, children who own books:

- enjoy reading more
- read more books
- read more frequently
- read for longer lengths of time when they do read
- have more books in the home
- read more of every kind of material not just books
- are more likely to have been bought a book as a present
- are more likely to have ever visited a library or bookshop
- have more positive attitudes to reading
- find it easier to find books that interest them
- have higher attainment

Do children and young people enjoy reading more because they have access to books or does having access to books foster the enjoyment? There are no easy answers, but the fact remains that without access to books of their own young people are less likely to have positive experiences of reading, less likely to do well at school and less likely to be engaged in reading in any form.

The National Literacy Trust's Young Readers Programme works to tackle both negative attitudes toward reading and lack of access to books for disadvantaged children across the UK. Children taking part in the programme get to choose and keep free books at a series of fun events that are also designed to help them acquire the skills they need to develop as a reader, including knowing how to choose a book that engages them and where they can find books once the project is over. Over the last 15 years, our projects have provided over 825,000 books to more than 331,000 children across the UK.

## Book ownership in young people: A brief introduction

A recent ground-breaking study from the University of Nevada (Evans et al., 2010) found that the number of books in the home has as great an impact on children's attainment as parental education levels. The 20 year study by Evans and her colleagues found that having as few as 20 books in the home still has a significant impact on propelling a child to a higher level of education, and the more books you add, the greater the benefit.

Similarly, a German study (Schubert and Becker, 2010) found that the home print environment was a strong predictor of reading achievement, even when income, parental education, aspects of schooling, language used at home, and other aspects of the home environment were controlled. This was the case at age 15 and also at age 10. The home print environment was about as strong a predictor as socio-economic status.

Furthermore, a meta-analysis of evidence from 108 relevant studies by Reading is Fundamental in the USA (Lindsay, 2010) found that access to print material improves children's reading performance, encourages children to read more and for longer lengths of time and produces improved attitudes toward reading and learning among children.

In summary, evidence is accumulating to show that book ownership has a strong influence on educational attainment irrespective of other factors. This brief report outlines additional findings that show that book ownership is not only associated with attainment but is also related more broadly to literacy and education, from reading enjoyment and frequency to confidence, attitudes towards reading and reading opportunities.

## Methodology

An invitation to participate in this online survey was sent out in National Literacy Trust (NLT) newsletters at the beginning of September (for information on the rationale for the Omnibus Survey see **Appendix A**). Schools were invited to express their interest to participate in one of three surveys:

- 1) A simple Omnibus survey (without attainment data or name field)
- 2) An amended Omnibus survey with two attainment questions for pupils to fill in
- 3) An amended Omnibus survey with a name field and schools were asked to send us the reading and writing attainment data for participating pupils

The basic online survey consisted of 33 questions exploring young people's background, reading and writing enjoyment, behaviour and attitudes, attitudes towards communication skills and technology use. Due to the complexity of the questions and some concepts, the decision was made to restrict the age range of participating pupils to upper KS2 (9 to 11 years) and older.

148 schools expressed an interest in taking part in one of the three surveys. A link to the online survey alongside guidance notes for teachers was emailed to the schools at the beginning of November. The survey was online between 15 November and 10 December. It took an average of 25 minutes for young people to complete the survey. Schools were offered a school-specific summary report as an incentive to take part.

## Participation rate

Overall, 18,141 pupils from 111 schools participated in our online survey, of which 100 were schools from England, three from Wales, three from Scotland and three from Northern Ireland. Two international English-speaking schools with a UK curriculum also took part. However, data from these schools are not included in the analyses in this report.

## Sample characteristics: Demography and attainment

Overall, 18,141 young people participated in this survey in November/December 2010. There was an almost equal gender split in the sample, with 48.2% of boys (N = 8,680) and 51.8% of girls (N = 9,320) participating in this survey.

**Table 1** shows that the majority of pupils were 11, 12 and 13 years old. To investigate the impact of age, three broad categories were identified according to key stages: KS2, KS3 and KS4. The KS2 category (22%, N = 3,704) refers to pupils aged 7 to 11, KS3 (63%, N = 10,842) refers to pupils aged 11 to 14, while KS4 (15%, N = 2,543) applies to pupils aged 14 to 16.

**Table 1: Sample age**

	%	N		%	N
8	5.1	911	13	18.1	3,258
9	6.9	1,247	14	9.5	1,717
10	8.0	1,430	15	6.3	1,134
11	21.3	3,846	16	2.0	361
12	22.2	4,007	17	0.5	86

(based on N = 18,017)

The percentage of pupils who receive free school meals (FSM), which is frequently used in educational research as a crude indicator of socio-economic background, was 13.8%. The percentages of FSM uptake in this study are lower than the national average for primary and secondary pupils (17% and 14%, respectively; DCSF, 2010).

Using additional help at school as a crude indicator of educational needs, the percentage of young people who say that they receive help at school was 25.7%, which is slightly higher than the national average. According to DfE figures from 2010, 20.9% of young people have a SEN (2.7% with statement; 18.2% without statement).

When asked how they would describe their ethnic background, most pupils said that they were White British (72.3%, N = 11,381). The second and third most frequent ethnic categories in this sample were Asian or Asian British Pakistani (5.6%, N = 877) and White other (3.0%, N = 480). See **Table B1 in Appendix B** for a full breakdown of ethnic background.

## Who has books of their own? Some background information

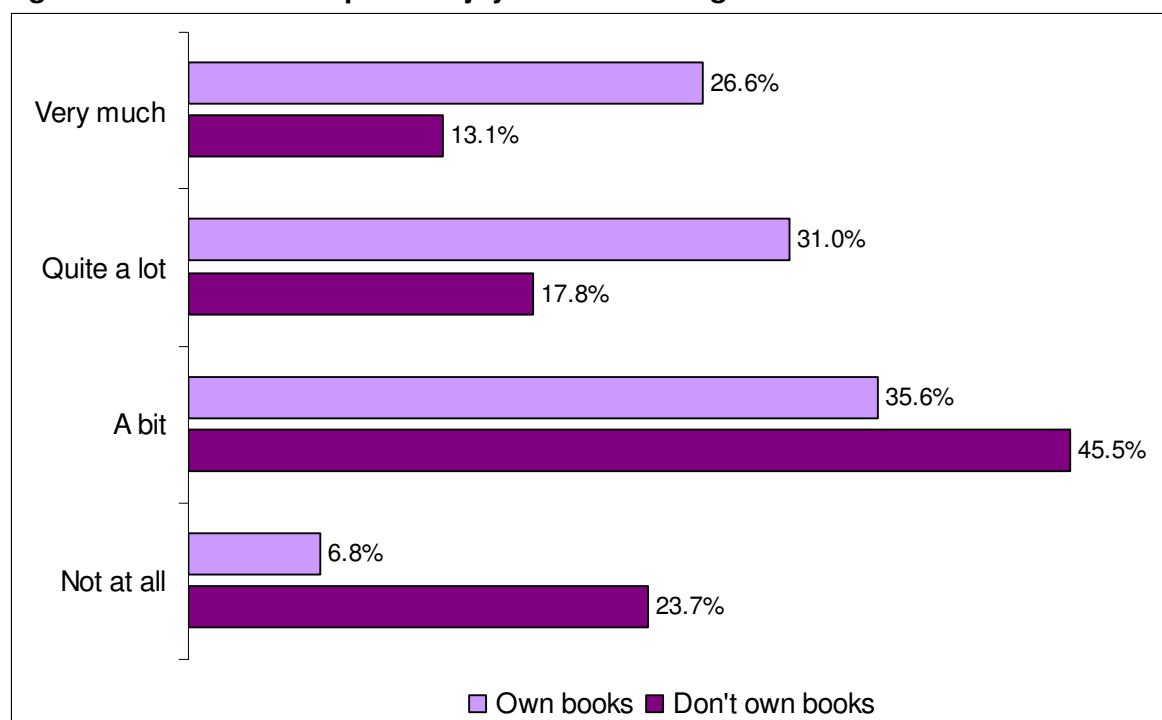
7 in 10 young people said that they have books of their own (66.8%). Girls are more likely than boys to say that they have their own books, with 7 in 10 girls compared with 6 in 10 boys saying that they have books of their own. Fewer older pupils say that they have books of their own, with only 5 in 10 KS4 compared with 7 in 10 KS2 and KS3 pupils saying that they have their own books. Young people who do not receive FSMs are more likely to say that they have books of their own compared with young people who receive meals, with 7 in 10 compared with 6 in 10 saying they do have their own books. Young people from White and Mixed ethnic backgrounds are more likely to have books of their own compared with young people from Black and Asian ethnic backgrounds. Young people who do not receive additional help at school are more likely than those who do receive additional help to say that they have their own books, with 7 in 10 compared with 6 in 10 saying they have books of their own.

At a crude brushstroke, young people who have books of their own are more likely to be girls, in KS2 or KS3, socio-economically better off, from White or Mixed ethnic backgrounds and without a special educational need.

## Having books of one's own and enjoyment of reading

Young people who have books of their own enjoyed reading more than young people who don't own books (see **Figure 1**). More specifically, young people who have books of their own are twice as likely as those who don't own books to enjoy reading very much. Conversely, young people who don't have their own books are three times more likely than those who do have books of their own to say that they don't enjoy reading at all.

**Figure 1: Book ownership and enjoyment of reading**

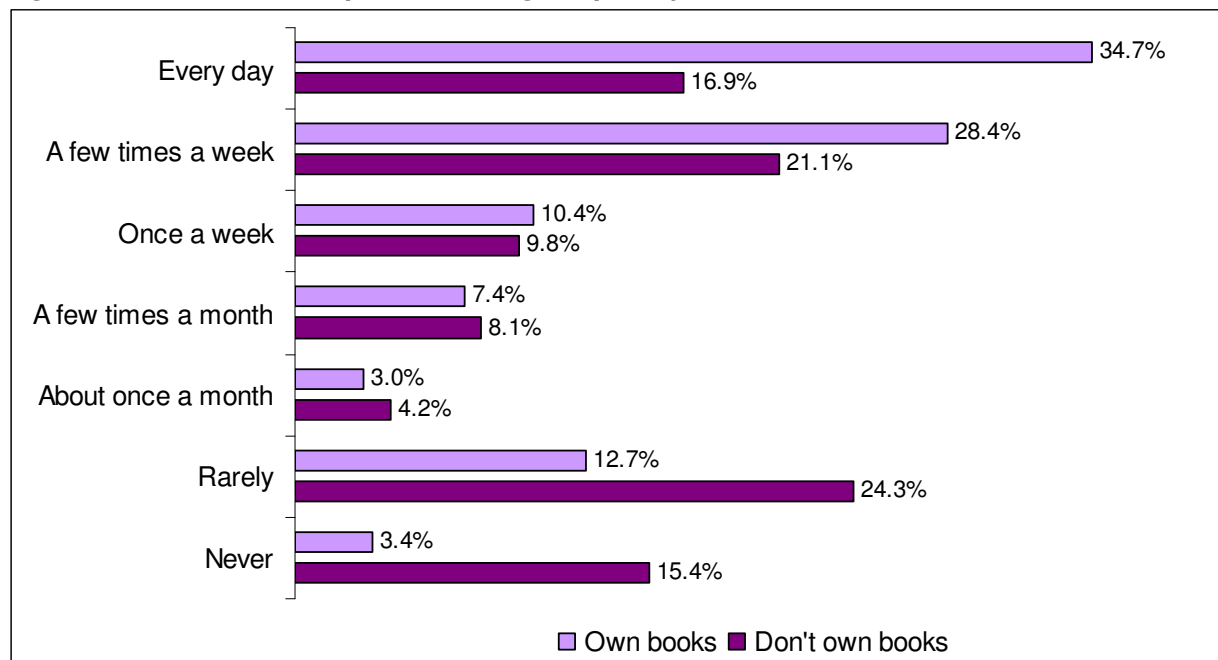




## Having books of one's own and reading frequency

Having books of one's own is associated with more frequent reading (see **Figure 2**). Young people who have their own books are twice as likely as their peers who don't have books of their own to say that they read every day. By contrast, young people who don't have books of their own are twice as likely as those who do to say that they rarely read and a whopping five times as likely to say that they never read.

**Figure 2: Book ownership and reading frequency**



## Having books of one's own and reading length

Not only are young people who have books of their own more likely to read more frequently than their peers who don't have their own books, but they are also more likely to read for longer stretches of time (see **Figure 3**).

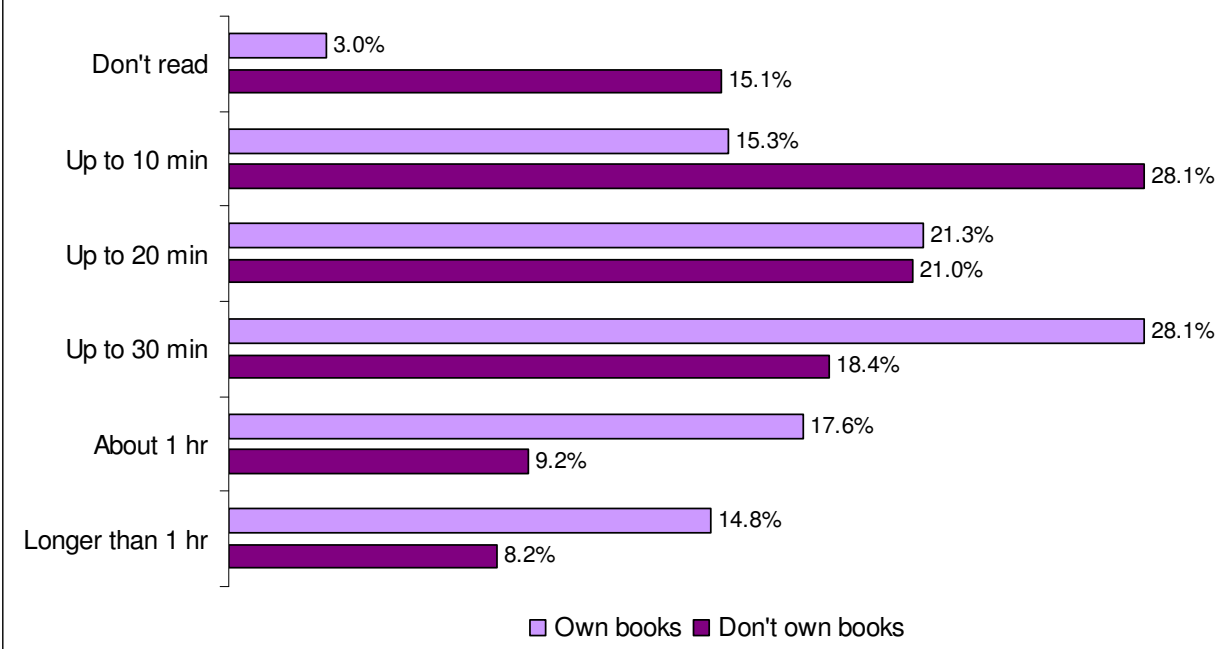
While young people who don't have their own books are twice as likely as those who do to say that they read for up to 10 minutes at a time, young people who have books of their own are more likely to say that they read for up to 30 minutes and are twice as likely to say that they read for one hour or even longer.

## Having books of one's own and number of books read in a month

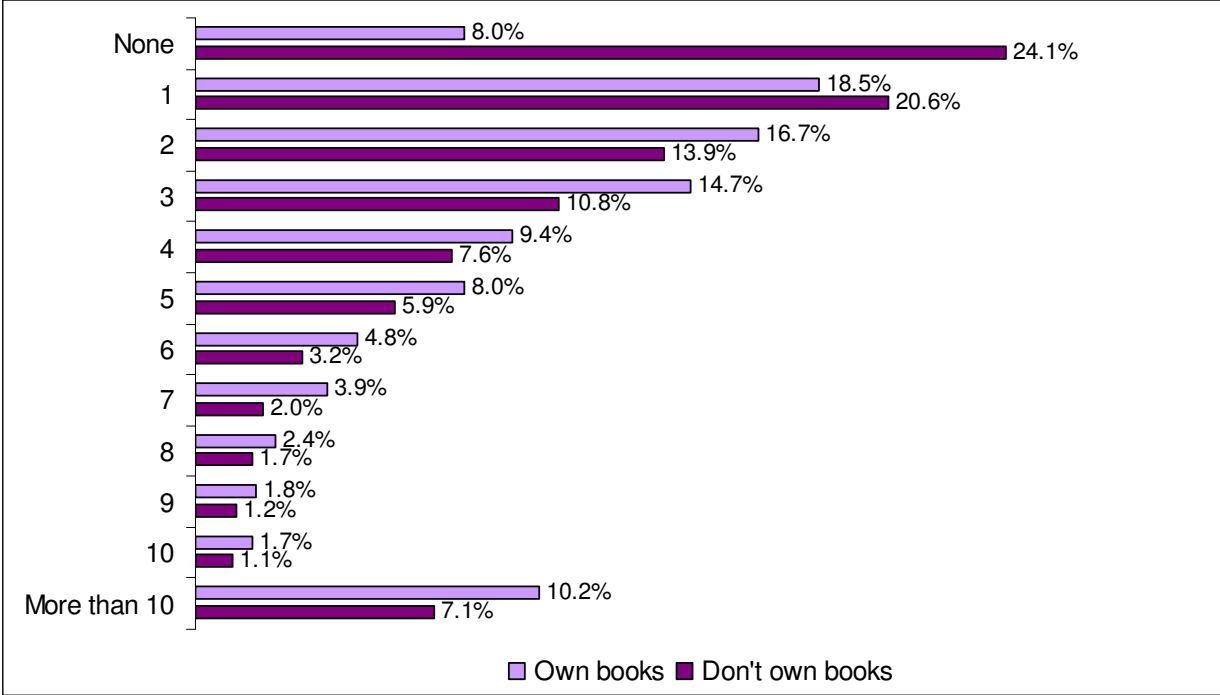
Not only do young people who have books of their own read more frequently and for longer periods of time compared with young people who don't have their own books, but they also read a greater number of books within a month (see **Figure 4**).

Young people who don't have their own books are three times as likely as their book-owning peers to say that they haven't read a book in the last month. Furthermore, while those who don't have their own books are more likely to say that they have read one book in the past month, young people who have books of their own report reading a greater number of books in a month across the rest of the categories.

**Figure 3: Book ownership and reading length**



**Figure 4: Book ownership and number of books read a month**



## Having books of one's own and number of books in the home

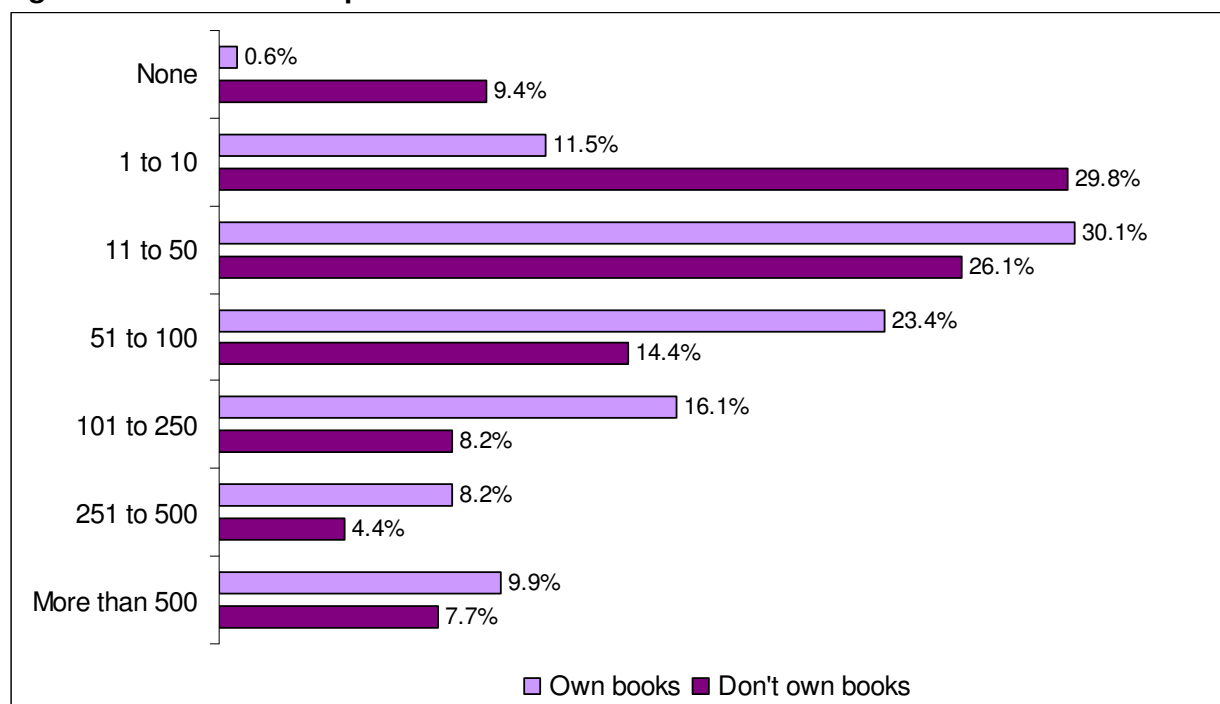
In addition to reporting how many books they have read in the past month, the young people in our survey were also asked to estimate how many books there are in the home overall. While the accuracy of these figures should be taken with a pinch of salt, they nevertheless give a good indication of the value that is placed on books and reading within the home.

**Figure 5** illustrates how having books of one's own is also associated with a greater number of books in the home. Less than 1% of young people who have books of their own reported that there are no books in the home. By contrast, young people who don't have their own books were 10 times as likely to say that there are no books in the home. They were also three times as likely as their book-owning peers to estimate that there are up to 10 books at home.

Young people who have books of their own generally report a greater number of books in the home. For example, they are twice as likely as those who don't have their own books to estimate that there are up to 250 and even up to 500 books in the home.

Perhaps curiously, a similar proportion of those who have books of their own and those who do not estimate that there are over 500 books in the home (9.9% and 7.7%, respectively).

**Figure 5: Book ownership and number of books in the home**



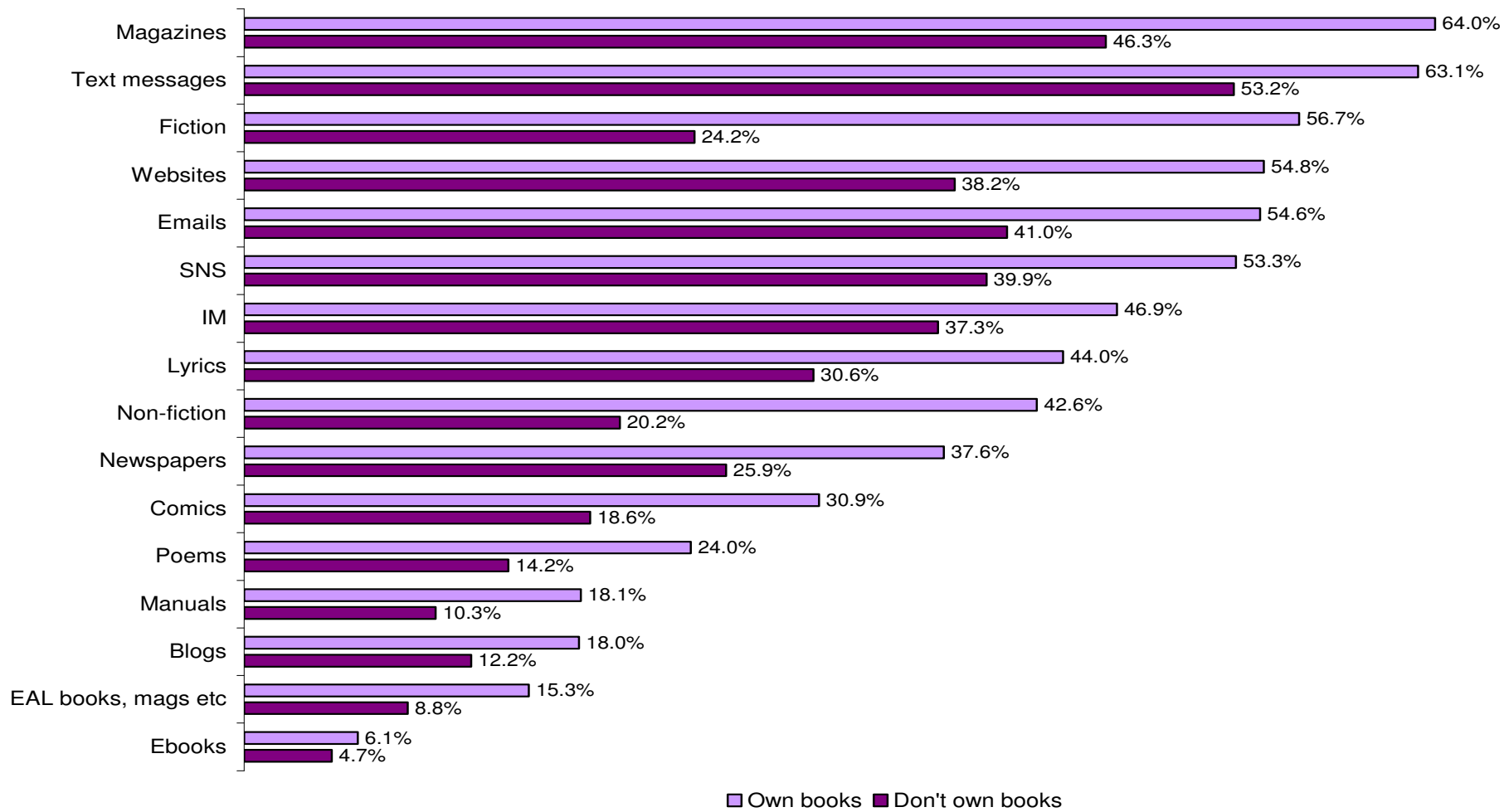
## Having books of one's own and types of materials read

So, young people who have books of their own read a greater number of books in a month and also estimate to have more books overall in the home than young people who don't own books. Are there any types of reading materials that are more commonly read by those who have their own books?

When asked what types of materials they read outside of class at least once a month, young people who have books of their own indicated that they read a greater variety of materials compared with young people who don't have their own books.

The biggest difference between the two groups exists with respect to the more traditional forms of reading, such as fiction, non-fiction and, to a lesser extent, poems. For example, over twice as many young people who have books of their own as those who do not said that they read fiction (57% and 24% respectively) and/or non-fiction (43% and 20% respectively) at least once a month outside of class.

What types of reading do young people engage in at least once a month outside of class? **Figure 6** shows that technology-based materials dominate as reading choices, with text messages, emails, websites and reading on social networking sites most commonly read by young people at least once a month. Magazines were the most frequently read non-technology material. Fiction was read by less than half of the sample at least once a month. Although often touted as the new way of reading, ebooks were read the least in a month.



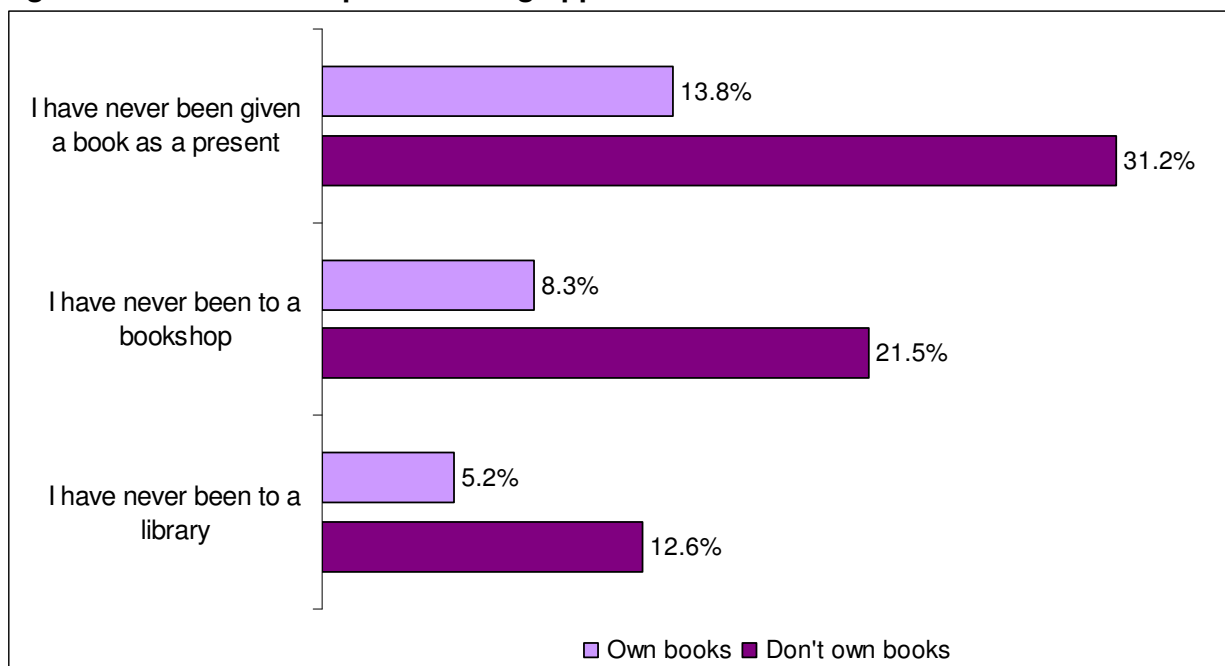
**Figure 6: Book ownership and types of materials read**

## Having books of one's own and reading opportunities

**Figure 7** illustrates that young people who have books of their own differ from those who do not, not only in terms of their enjoyment of reading and reading behaviour but also in terms of the reading opportunities that present themselves to them.

Twice as many young people who don't have their own books as those who do say that they have never been given a book as a present. Only 8% of young people who have books of their own say that they have never been to a bookshop compared with nearly three times as many young people who don't have their own books. Similarly, only 5% of young people who have books of their own say that they have never been to a library compared with over twice as many young people who don't have their own books.

**Figure 7: Book ownership and reading opportunities**



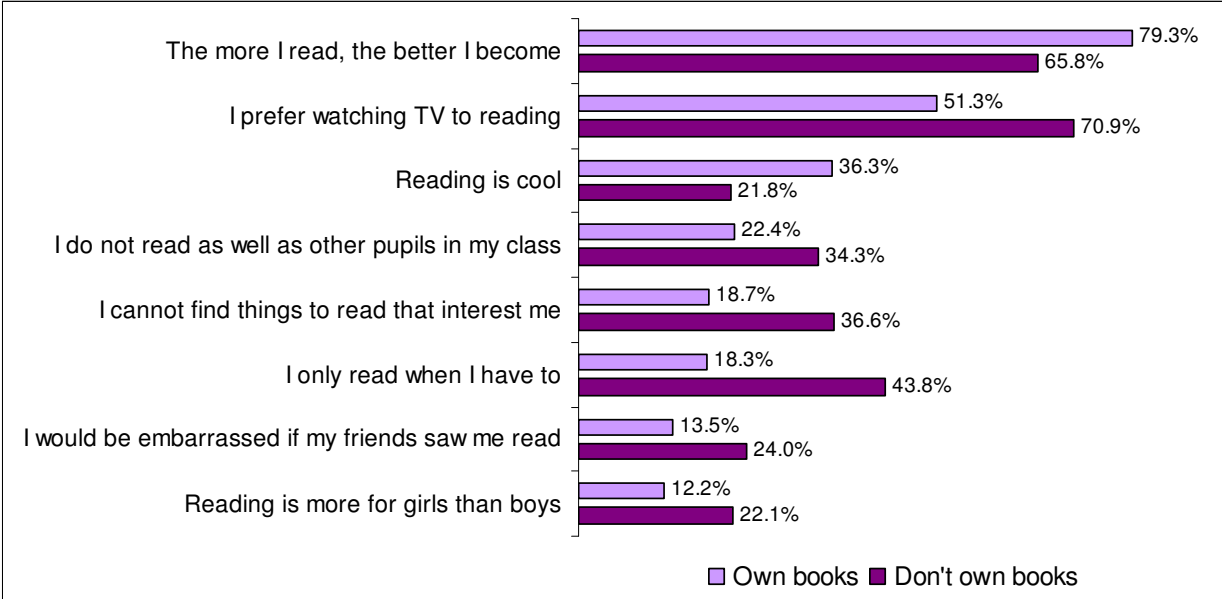
## Having books of one's own and attitudes towards reading

Finally, we also asked young people what they think about several statements about reading. **Figure 8** shows that young people who have books of their own generally think more positively about reading than young people who don't have their own books.

For example, young people who have books of their own are more likely than their non-book-owning counterparts to agree with the statement that they become better at reading the more they read. They are also nearly twice as likely to agree with the statement that reading is "cool".

Similarly young people who have their own books are less likely than those who do not have books of their own to agree with the statements that they prefer to watch TV to reading, that they cannot find things to read that interest them, and that they would be embarrassed if their friends saw them read.

**Figure 8: Book ownership and attitudes towards reading**



**Having books of one’s own and reading attainment**

Attainment data for reading were available for 5,580 **KS2** and **KS3** pupils. Since our attainment data contained a varied set of levels and spanned young people aged 9 to 14, we standardised the data to form three crude categories to be applied to all ages: below expected level for their age, at expected level for their age and above expected level for their age.

Nearly 9 in 10 young people read at (72.6%) or above the expected level for their age (16.1%). However, 11.3% read below the expected level for their age, which is lower than the national average.

Taking book ownership as the starting point, one can look at the relationship between book ownership and attainment in the following way (see **Table 2**). Of those who have books of their own, 17.9% read above the expected level for their age, while over 74.4% read at the expected level. Of those who say that they have books of their own, only 7.6% read below the level expected for their age. By contrast, of those who say that they do not have books of their own, over double (19%) read below the expected level for their age.

**Table 2: Percentage of young people who read below or at or above the expected level and whether they have their own books or not (N = 5,580)**

	<i>Below expected level</i>	<i>At expected level</i>	<i>Above expected level</i>
	%		%
<b>Have books of their own</b>	7.6	74.4	17.9
<b>Don't have books of their own</b>	19.0	68.7	12.3

## Summing up

So, what have we found out regarding book ownership amongst young people and how it is related to reading enjoyment, behaviour, attitudes and attainment?

While other factors such as socio-economic status and gender may have a part to play in children and young people's relationship to books and reading, book ownership as a predictor of attitudes and abilities is consistently strong. When compared to peers who do have books of their own, children who don't own books:

- enjoy reading less
- read fewer books
- read less frequently
- read for shorter lengths of time when they do read
- have less books in the home
- read less of every kind of material not just books
- are less likely to have been bought a book as a present
- are less likely to have ever visited a library or bookshop
- have more negative attitudes to reading
- find it harder to find books that interest them
- are twice as likely to agree they only read when they have to
- have lower attainment

Some of these are perhaps predictable: with less access to books it follows that reading is something they do less frequently and for shorter periods of time. Almost 40% live in homes with 10 or fewer books and they are 15 times more likely to live in a house without a single book. And it is, of course, a chicken and egg scenario: do children and young people enjoy reading because they have access to books or does having access to books foster the enjoyment? There are no easy answers and it is outside of the scope of this paper. But the fact remains that without access to books of their own children are less likely to have positive experiences of reading, less likely to do well at school and less likely to be engaged in reading in any form.

It is not a case of books being irrelevant now technology has superseded printed matter. Children with no books of their own are less likely to be sending emails, reading websites or engaging with their peers through the written word on social networking sites. Children who grow up without books and without positive associations around reading are at a disadvantage in the modern world.

The National Literacy Trust's Young Readers Programme works to tackle both negative attitudes toward reading and lack of access to books for disadvantaged children across the UK. Children taking part in the programme get to choose and keep free books at a series of fun events that are also designed to help them acquire the skills they need to develop as a reader, including knowing how to choose a book that engages them and where they can find books once the project is over. Over the last 15 years, our projects have provided over 825,000 books to more than 331,000 children all across the UK. We have long known the positive effects of book ownership on the children our projects reach and it is great to see research supporting this. In the words of one of our project coordinators: "It is no good encouraging children to foster a love and passion for reading if they don't possess [a book] or have little choice in what they read! Being able to choose a book of their very own was a very special event and a turning point in their lives."



## References

Evans, M.D.R. , Kelley, J., Sikora, J. and Treiman, D.J. (2010). Family scholarly culture and educational success: Books and schooling in 27 nations. *Research in Social Stratification and Mobility*. 28, 171-197.

Lindsay, J. (2010). *Children's Access to Print Material and Education-Related Outcomes: Findings From a Meta-Analytic Review*. Naperville, IL: Learning Point Associates.

Schubert, F. and Becker, R. (2010). Social inequality of reading literacy: A longitudinal analysis with cross-sectional data of PIRLS 2001 and PISA 2000 utilizing the pair wise matching procedure. *Research in Social Stratification and Mobility*, 29, 109-133.

## Appendix A: Background information on our Omnibus survey

We have been surveying children and young people on all sorts of literacy matters since 2005. This has given us great insight into the views and attitudes of children and young people on reading, writing, speaking and listening skills, home resources, role models, perceptions of themselves as readers as well as technology use.

However, what is still lacking in the attitudinal landscape in the UK is annual data on how young people feel about literacy to help us build a continuous picture of their attitudes year-on-year. It is the purpose of the National Literacy Trust Omnibus survey to plug this gap in the evidence base.

Combining previous National Literacy Trust survey topics, the Omnibus survey explores young people's attitudes towards reading, writing and communication skills as well as their technology use. More specifically, the key objectives of the Omnibus survey are to explore:

- Whether young people enjoy reading, how good they think they are at reading, how often they read and for how long, what type of materials they read outside of class, how many books they have in the home and what they think about reading
- Whether young people enjoy writing, how good a writer they think they are, what makes a good writer, what types of materials they write and what they think about writing
- What they think good communication skills are and how important they are to succeed
- How often they use a computer and mobile phone and for what?

In addition to exploring children's and young people's attitudes towards reading, writing, communication and technology use, we will also explore their link to attainment in a subsample of pupils for whom attainment data are available.

These objectives were further broken down into a number of questions. These included the following:

- Do reading enjoyment, behaviour and attitudes differ according to gender, age, socio-economic and ethnic background or educational needs?
- Do writing enjoyment, behaviour and attitudes differ according to gender, age, socio-economic and ethnic background or educational needs?
- Do attitudes towards communication skills and their perceived importance differ according to gender, age, socio-economic and ethnic background or educational needs?
- How is technology use related to gender, age, socio-economic and ethnic background or educational needs?

## Appendix B: Breakdown of ethnic background

**Table B: Ethnic background**

	<b>%</b>	<b>N</b>
<b>White British</b>	72.3	11,381
<b>White Irish</b>	1.6	247
<b>White Traveller</b>	0.4	66
<b>White Romany</b>	0.8	127
<b>White other</b>	3.0	480
<b>Mixed White and Black Caribbean</b>	1.5	243
<b>Mixed White and Black African</b>	0.7	109
<b>Mixed White and Asian</b>	1.4	218
<b>Mixed other</b>	2.1	328
<b>Asian or Asian British Indian</b>	2.2	348
<b>Asian or Asian British Pakistani</b>	5.6	877
<b>Asian or Asian British Bangladeshi</b>	1.5	244
<b>Asian or Asian British Chinese</b>	0.6	100
<b>Asian or Asian British Other</b>	1.6	256
<b>Black Caribbean</b>	1.5	229
<b>Black African</b>	2.2	347
<b>Black other</b>	0.9	142

*(based on N = 15,742)*

To make comparisons by ethnic group meaningful, we combined the subcategories to form "White", "Mixed", "Asian" and "Black" background categories. While this crude categorisation may hide some important differences within ethnic backgrounds, it allowed for general differences to be obtained at this stage.