

Reading ENVIRONMENTS & HABITS

Of Students

IN GRADES
4
to
6



Acknowledgement

This survey report would not be possible without tremendous support from our key stakeholders and teams. We especially thank all grade 4 to 6 students from the nine target provinces who were willing to be actively involved in the survey and provided valuable information on their reading experiences and habits.

We would also like to show our gratitude to Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, especially school directors and teachers in the target provinces, without their assistance the report would not be possible. Their continued support and coordination is critical to achieving our shared goals of ensuring quality education for Cambodian children.

We are grateful for Mr. Seng Krisna, the lead consultant, and the data collection team. The quality data and initial analysis is the basis for this report.

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Disclaimer and Citation

Findings in this report are based on a survey conducted in July 2016. Reading resources at school and home might have increased or decreased since the time of data collection. This report is an explorative survey about student's experiences, habits and reading environments. It serves to improve the quality and impact of education programmes and to support the decision making of the Royal Government of Cambodia, and other key stakeholders, for changes that will improve the education of every child in the country.

Reference as:

World Vision International (2016). Reading Environments and Habits of Students in Grades 4 to 6. Survey Report. Phnom Penh: Cambodia.

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About World Vision

World Vision's ministry focuses on improving the lives of the poorest children and their families in Cambodia. We partner with children and youth, their families and communities, across all faiths, religions, gender, ethnicities and political associations.

We aim to empower our staff and the communities we serve to take part in building a better future for Cambodian children. This future includes the "fullness of life" and the will to carry out the work that transforms community members, making families stronger and more resilient to economic uncertainties.

Through a holistic and integrated approach, we are able to achieve our child well-being strategic priorities that focus on improving the nutritional status of children in their first 1000 days of life, primary education that fosters quality learning, children being prevented and protected from abuse and exploitation, and preparing youth to be creative, active citizens, and the leaders of tomorrow.

Vision Statement

**Our vision for every child, life in all its fullness.
Our prayer for every heart, the will to make it so.**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As part of its new strategy for Education & Life Skills programming in Cambodia, World Vision (WV) has conducted a series of assessments across WV's nine target provinces in 2016. An initial study observed reading resources that children had access to at school by analysing the conditions of libraries compared to the national standards for school libraries (MoEYS, 2011). This survey follows from this and is a quantitative survey about the reading experiences, habits and environments of 507 students in grades 4 to 6 (from 39 schools across Banteay Meanchey, Battambang, Kampong Chhnang, Kampong Thom, Kampong Speu, Kandal, Preah Vihea, Takeo and Siem Reap).

The purpose of the study is to help WV develop improved strategies that will increase the impact of education programming, and advocate to the Royal Government of Cambodia, and other key stakeholders, for changes that will improve the education of every child in the country.

The survey produced significant findings; however, also has limitations. The main limitations included difficulties in student selection due to the different school "shifts" at primary schools, challenges in reaching some schools after rain reduced access and road conditions, and a lower number of schools with no library than originally planned.

I. Students' Experiences with Reading Environment at Home

Students reported that mothers and fathers were the second and third most important people who helped students to read and write at a young age (66% and 61% respectively), teachers were considered the most important (72%). Almost all students (94%) said a family member "often encouraged" them to read, and 74.4% said a family member "often read out" stories or books to them.

The survey showed that these good practices in the home (family reading habits), both current and when children were at a young age (such as reading stories to children, supporting with homework), can influence a child's perception and enjoyment of reading. Both reading to a child at a young age and encouraging them to read while young results in students reading more often and enjoy reading more. These findings provide significant evidence to suggest that improving family reading habits should be an integral component of literacy programmes.

Textbooks were the most commonly available reading material at home with almost all students (98%) reported owning at least one textbook. Around half of the students (53.6%) reported having storybooks, while very few students reported having other types of reading materials at home.

To help improve their reading, students suggested that family provided them with a strong support, attention while regularly spending time to teach the children, helping them with pronunciation and facilitating them to come to school regularly.

2. Students' Experience with Reading Environment at School, especially Library

At school, many students reported receiving support from teacher regarding teaching them of sounds of letters and words (93%) and reading books other than textbooks aloud to them (68.8%). Additionally, 77% of all students found teacher's support "very useful" while 22.7% found it "somewhat useful".

85% of all students from 32 schools reported having a library at their school. However, from their report of opening day and hour of library, the survey showed many libraries are not consistently operating. In fact after running statistical test for significant relationship, it revealed that libraries that were open 1, 2 or 3 days a week were also likely to be open for less time per day.

Frequency of student usage of library differed considerably with 16% reporting "never used" the library in the week preceding the survey. In addition to this, the rate of students borrowing any books from library was very low, with 45.2% never borrowing anything from the library this year. In fact, service of borrowing received the least satisfaction with 25% reporting "somewhat dissatisfied". The most common reason was students were concerned about losing or damaging the book, a perception that was reinforced by librarians and/or teachers.

While the reading environment at schools is not only about libraries, it does appear that many issues that (may) discourage reading at school are related to poor quality of actual library facilities and services, as compared to the standards outlined in MoEYS's "Standards for Primary School Library" policy (2011). The main suggestions from students to help improve the school reading environment largely relate to meeting these library standards; therefore, further investment and support to schools to meet these standards would likely result in improved reading habits of students.

3. Students' General Reading Preferences and Habits

Most students (82%) reported that they "read print materials" as one of their leisure activities. Students mostly read textbooks (96%) and storybooks (76%). However, when given a choice of reading materials, students also expressed interest in reading other types and genres of reading materials.

Home was the most preferred reading location, followed by a school library.

Other than textbooks, students spent between 2 and 5 times a week on reading. However, the length of time spent reading per week is short – around 1 hour. On average, students reported reading 12 books within the last 12 months, and there was an association between the number of books read by students and schools with and without a library. In schools with a library, the number of books students read in a school year was higher.

It would appear then, that improving the variety of genre and content accessible to students could have a positive impact on their reading behaviour, and motivate them to read more frequently and for longer time. Such practice with reading is essential to consolidating literacy skills and enabling children to move from 'learning to read' (learn the skills of reading) to 'reading to learn' (reading for the purpose of increasing knowledge).

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the key findings, some recommendations are suggested to relevant key stakeholders, including civil society organizations and NGOs, for supporting and improving children's reading habits.

Recommendations for the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYS):

- Ensure there is adequate number of librarians at schools. Ensure that all librarians are trained to properly manage library resources and ensure the effectiveness of the library for supporting students to read.
- Increase the variety, diversity and quantity of reading materials available at libraries and ensure borrowing of books encouraged.
- Better coordinate with sub-national structures to ensure that monitoring of school services, including library service, is being conducted regularly and with tangible action points and support for schools to meet the Standards for Primary School Library.
- Ensure that any public awareness raising activities of the Ministry include the topic of important role that family play in encouraging children to read and learn.

Recommendations for School Directors, Teachers and School Support Committees:

- Schools directors and teachers should take practical steps that encourage students to access and use the school library more often, including encouraging them to spend more time in the library and borrow more reading materials to read outside of the library.
- Where libraries are limited in resources and do not meet national standards, seek further support from the Commune Council and District Education Office to access financial support to get closer to meeting standards.
- Increase emphasis on activities and programmes that involve parents and caregivers in education of their children, including encouraging parents to read with/to children at home, encouraging their children to borrow from the library, and purchasing more, and varied, reading materials (other than textbooks) for children to read at home.

Recommendations for Parents and Caregivers:

- Allocate time to read with and to children at home.
- As much as possible, provide a range of reading materials for children at home and ensure they have good space for reading at home.
- Become more involved in the life of the school, including participation in management meetings, events, and programmes that will improve the management and governance of the school .

INTRODUCTION

1.1 About World Vision's Education Programme

In Cambodia, World Vision works to improve the education of children aged 3-12 through early childhood development and literacy intensive interventions, as well as life-skills instruction. The organisation aims to directly affect millions of girls and boys, ages 3-12 years, through education interventions in 2017 and 2022. Currently, WV works in about 650 schools across 9 provinces.

World Vision's programmes are designed to be complementary to, and work within the parameters of, the Royal Government of Cambodia's public education system. The aim of its education interventions is to improve and strengthen the national education systems so that it delivers high quality services, which result in children being equipped with the basic skills of literacy and numeracy, as well as critical life skills.

World Vision recognises that many actors are committed to improving education quality, and enhancing learning outcomes, for children in Cambodia – especially the Royal Government of Cambodia. Achieving these outcomes requires collaboration, coordination and commitment to shared goals, especially **Sustainable Development Goal 4** – *Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all*.

1.2 Survey Background and Objectives

As part of its new strategy for Education & Life Skills programming in Cambodia, through out 2016 World Vision (WV) conducted an assessment of library resources in primary schools across WV's target provinces. The aim of this study was to analyze access to reading resources and reading support that children received at school, and provide insights into the condition of school libraries compared to the national standards for primary school libraries (MoEYS 2011).

The survey showed that many libraries did not meet the government's standards in terms of number of trained librarians (based on school working's hour and class size) and that most libraries were limited in the number and type of books available for children to read.

The main activities at the library were independent reading, storytelling, study games, art activities and some class research. Not all libraries allowed students to borrow books for fear that the books, which were already of limited quantity, would be lost or damaged.

To complement the analysis of library conditions, World Vision subsequently embarked on a quantitative inquiry about the reading experiences and habits of children in grades 4 to 6. The study had three objectives:

1. To explore students' experiences with reading in school library, and home environment/s.
2. To identify differences in reading habits or behaviours based on gender.
3. To determine whether or not there is a correlation between availability of/access to resources (libraries) and student reading behaviour.

The purpose of the study is to help WV develop improved strategies that will increase the impact of education programming, and advocate to the Royal Government of Cambodia, and other key stakeholders, for changes that will improve the education of every child in the country.

There is general agreement in the field of literacy that the amount of print experience has an important influence on a person's literacy development (Duke, 2000; Goldenberg, 2004).¹ Furthermore, it is also widely acknowledged that literacy skills emerge within a community of literacy-related activities and exposure: "human interactions such as sharing a picture book, telling a story and talking about experiences are central to emergent literacy" (Wilson, 2003, p. 77).² This is the theoretical foundation for WV's interest in exploring (1) library facilities; and (2) children's reading habits in and outside of the classroom.

The survey focusses on student perceptions of reading ability, habits, and resources. While these perceptions are not necessarily objectively verifiable, they do represent a student's reality and are therefore important. No standardised literacy test was conducted as part of the survey.

¹ Duke, N. K. (2000). For the rich it's richer: Print experiences and environments offered to children in very low- and very high-socioeconomic status first grade classrooms. *American Educational Research Journal*, 37(2), 441-478. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1163530> and Goldenberg, C. (2004). *Successful school change: Creating settings to improve teaching and learning*. New York: Teachers College.

² Wilson, R.A. (2003). *Special educational needs in the early years* (2nd edition). New York, NY: Routledge Falmer.

2 SURVEY METHODOLOGY

To achieve the objectives outlined above, the reading experiences and behaviours study was conducted using a primarily quantitative survey, complemented by a few open-ended questions to facilitate understanding of “how” and “why”. An independent consultant was recruited to develop and manage the data collection, as well as analyze initial findings.

2.1 Sampling

In total, World Vision works with approximately 650 schools across 9 provinces of Banteay Meanchey, Battambang, Kampong Chhnang, Kampong Thom, Kampong Speu, Kandal, Preah Vihear, Siem Reap and Takeo. 40 Schools were randomly selected from those schools where WV works and has detailed information on existing library resources.

For this survey, students in grades 4 to 6 were interviewed to gain understanding on their experiences of the reading environment at school and at home, as well as their individual reading habits. The size of the student sample was 507, drawn to give an accuracy of at least 5% at 95% confidence. The detailed processes for selecting the 40 schools and students is outlined below.

Phase I: Choosing the 40 schools

Objective number 3 looks to compare the reading habits and reading environments between schools with and without a library. Therefore, stratified sampling was used to draw 40 schools out of the 83³ schools where WV already had full and complete information on library facilities and resources. The following steps were taken:

1. Step 1: All 83 targeted schools in the 9 target provinces were put together, as a primary sampling unit (PSU).
2. Step 2: All 83 schools were stratified into two strata: the schools with a library (46 schools) and the schools without a library (37 schools).
3. Step 3: From each stratum, the fraction method ($f=n/N$) was used to identify how many schools from each stratum should be selected to form up to 40 schools, which is proportionate. This required selection of 22 schools with a library and 18 schools without a library, resulting in a total sample size of 40 schools. One school was subsequently dropped from the sample due to accessibility issues (see Limitations section for more details).
4. Step 4: A simple random sampling method was used to select the required 22 schools from the 46 schools with a library, and the 18 schools from the 37 non-library schools. In total 40 were selected.

³ The original 83 schools were taken from a random sample of the 622 primary schools from all schools that are covered by World Vision education programming.

Phase 2: Selecting grade 4-6 students

The disproportional method was used to calculate the number of students in each school. The sample size required 500 students, resulting in 13 students in each of the 40 schools. Students were selected and interviewed equally based on grade level and gender (4 students from grade 4, 2 males and 2 females; 4 students from grade 5 with 2 males and 2 females; and 4 students from grade 6 with 2 males, 2 females), and the 13th student was rotated between gender and grade levels.

The 13 students from each school were selected from student lists (using a simple random sampling method) through coordination with school directors and teachers.

2.2 Training Enumerators

The lead consultant and World Vision staff trained eight experienced enumerators.

The eight enumerators were briefed on WV's education sector programming. The whole team first went through the questionnaire line by line to ensure deep understanding of both the questions and the purpose of asking them; then practiced interviewing one another. All enumerators also conducted a mock interview with an external respondent to help hone their skills and make them more comfortable with the questionnaire before going to the field.

The enumerators and consultant signed WV's Child Protection Behaviours Protocol and were instructed on child safe and participatory research procedures.

2.3 Data Entry and Analysis

Three enumerators, already experienced with data entry, completed the data entry process. They received extra training from the lead consultant in using SPSS, the template of the data entry, as well as quality control procedures. To ensure accuracy, the lead consultant reviewed the three data sets.

Data cleaning was conducted thoroughly after data entry was completed. Any errors or unclear information were checked against the original data collection form.

Descriptive statistics, frequencies, and cross-tabulation were used for data analysis. Some significant tests between variables were performed using inferential statistic testing (e.g. Independent T-Test, Chi-square and Correlation).

All the opened-ended answers were carefully encoded, categorized and analysed to reveal patterns and trends. Responses were also quantified to facilitate statistical analysis.

Note: In some graphs presented in the report, the total percentage (%) will add up more than 100%, because some question were asked and given a multiple choice with multiple answers. Graphs are presented on the basis of meaningful result of either percentage of case or percentage of responses.⁴

2.4 Limitations

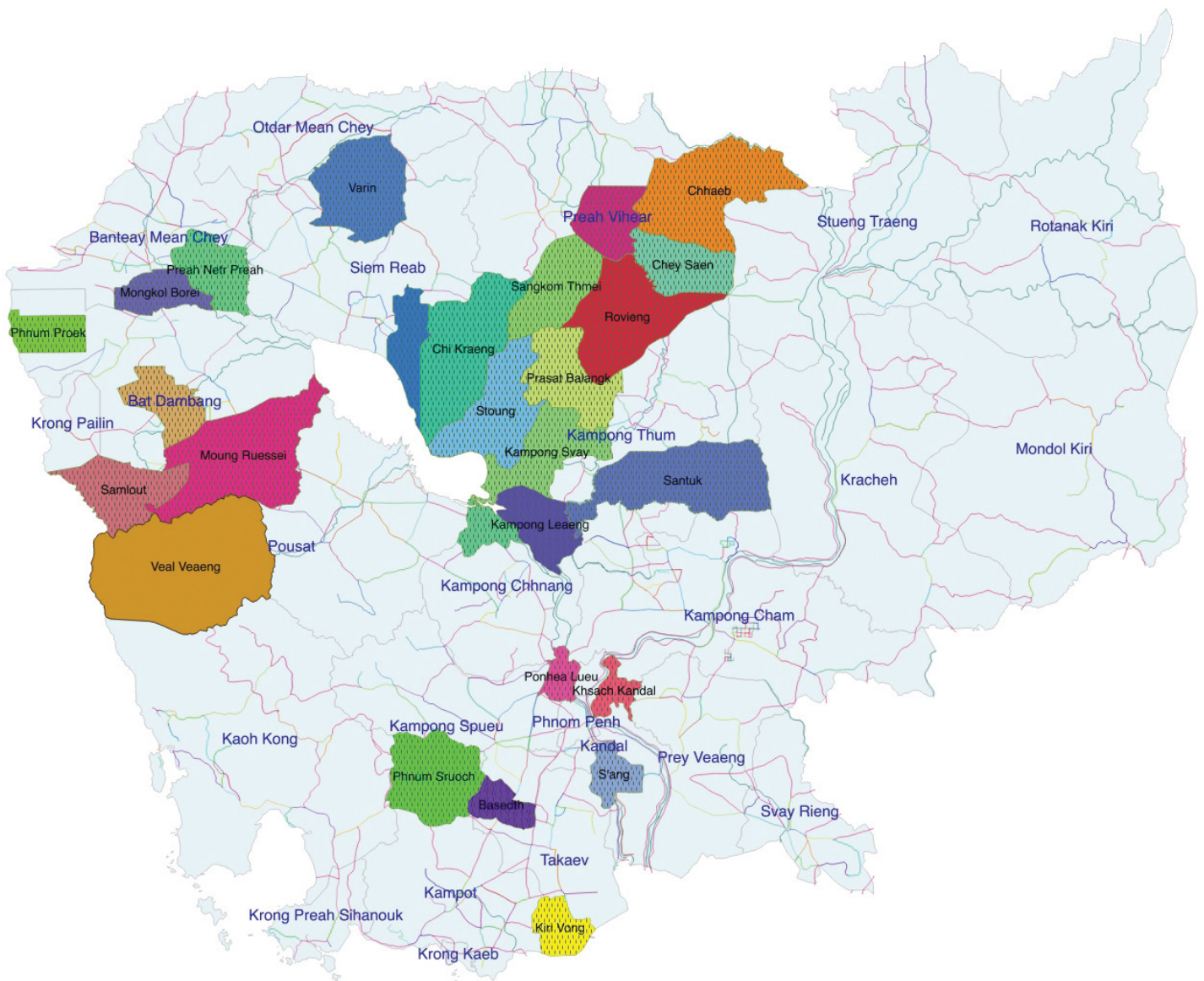
There were three particular challenges in conducting this survey:

- In a few schools it was difficult to consistently apply the method for selecting students for interview because of the variable shift system in Cambodian primary schools i.e. in some schools students study only in the mornings, while in other schools students study both in the morning and afternoon. The enumerators only visited each school once, and some students selected from the random sampling process were not present. In these cases, additional students were randomly selected from students present at the time of survey.
- The long distances between schools and the rainy season hampered travel in rural areas; one of the originally selected 40 schools was not reachable, therefore only 39 schools were surveyed.
- Of the 39 schools, 7 of them were schools without a library. This differed from the original plan of reviewing 18 schools without a library in order to compare the two types of schools. As result, 7 schools with a library were randomly selected to compare with the 7 schools without a library (which may limit the robustness of the survey in addressing Objective 3).

⁴ The percent of responses is the overall percentage. The percent of cases is the percentage for individual item.

Study Coverage

(9 provinces, 27 districts and 39 schools)



3 FINDINGS

The findings are presented under four main headings: (1) demographic profile of the students, (2) students' reading experiences at home and (3) at school, and (4) students' reading habits.

3.1 Demographic Profile of the Surveyed Students

In total, WV surveyed 507 students in 39 schools across 27 districts in the 9 provinces of Banteay Meanchey, Battambang, Kampong Chhnang, Kampong Thom, Kampong Speu, Kandal, Preah Vihear, Siem Reap and Takeo.

Of those surveyed, there were 51% (or 261) female and 49% (or 246) male. Among the 507 students, 170 students were from grade 4, 176 students from grade 5 and 161 students from grade 6. The age distribution of respondents ranged from a minimum of 8 to 16, with the median age being 12. Many of the students interviewed were older than the standard age for their grade. This is either due to the student's late enrolment into school or having to repeat a grade.

Table 1. Respondents by gender and grade

Current school grade of respondents				
	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Total/Gender
Gender Male	82 (16.2%)	87 (17.2%)	77 (15.2%)	246 (48.5%)
Female	88 (17.4%)	89 (17.6%)	84 (16.6%)	261 (51.5%)
Total/Grade	170 (33.5%)	176 (34.7%)	161 (31.8%)	507 (100%)

Table 2. Respondents by age

Age of respondents	
Minimum	8
Maximum	16
Median	12

3.2 Students' Experiences with Reading Environment at Home

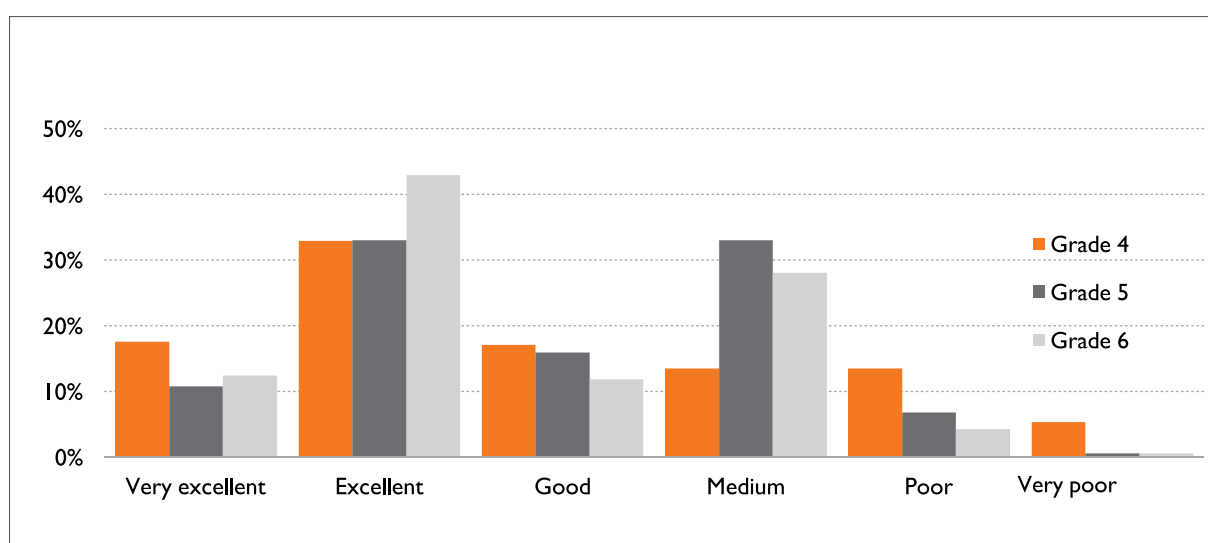
A significant factor that affects a student's reading habits is their family and home reading environment. This section describes students' reading experiences at home and what affects the home reading environment may have had on their reading activities and self-perception of reading ability.

3.2.1 Perception of Reading Ability

Of all the surveyed students, 13.6% reported their reading proficiency as "Very Excellent", 36.1% as "Excellent", and 15% as "Good". Only 24.9% stated medium level, 8% as "Poor" and 2% as "Very Poor". Since the surveyed students were from different grades (4 to 6), their reading proficiency in reality would differ from grade to grade and student to student.

Therefore, a statistical test was used to determine significant difference between student's perception of reading proficiency and grade. The test confirmed the assumption and proved the difference to be significant at $p < .05$, meaning higher-grade students are likely to self-report greater perception of reading proficiency, while lower-grade students demonstrated perception of lower reading proficiency.

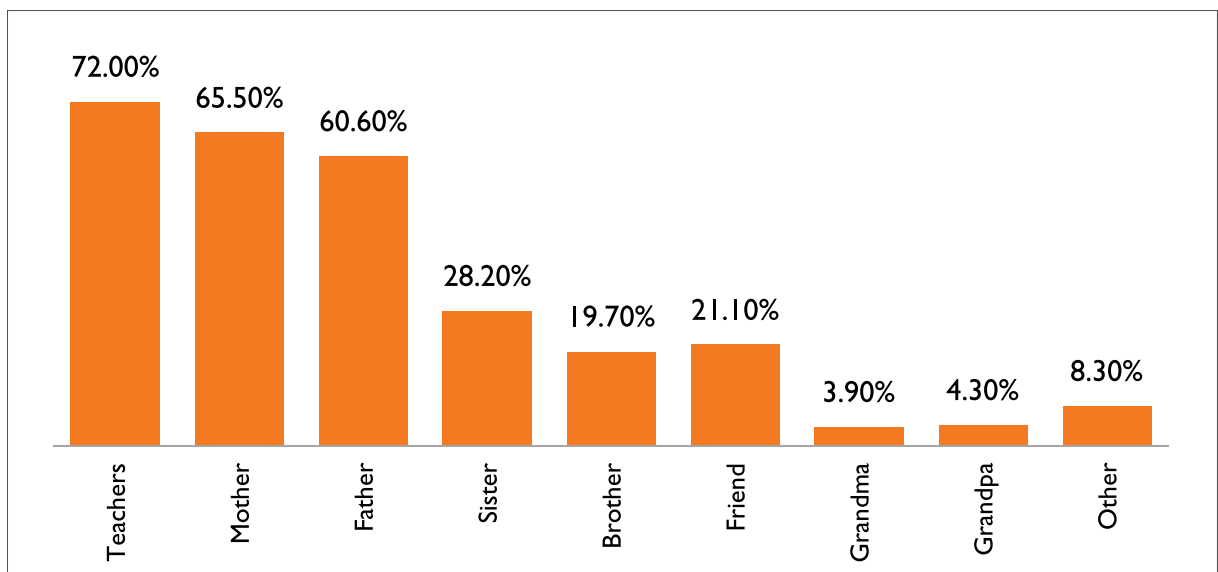
Figure 1. Student's perception of reading proficiency by school grade



3.2.2 Home Literacy Environment

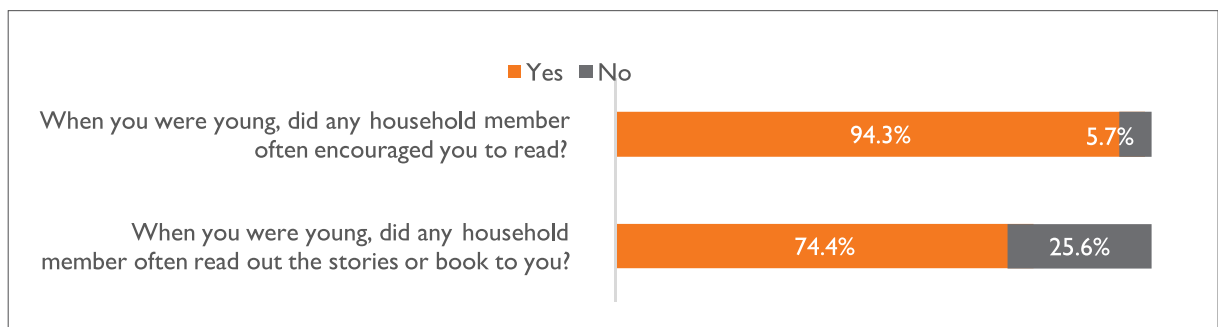
The survey showed the important role that family members have in helping students learn how to read and write at a young age. While the survey suggested that student felt teachers were the most important person in helping them to read (72%), mothers (66%) and fathers (61%) closely followed. A high percentage of students also reported that their sister (28.2%), brother (19.7%) or friends (21.1%) were important in helping them learn to read.

Figure 2. Three most important persons helping children to read and write at a young age



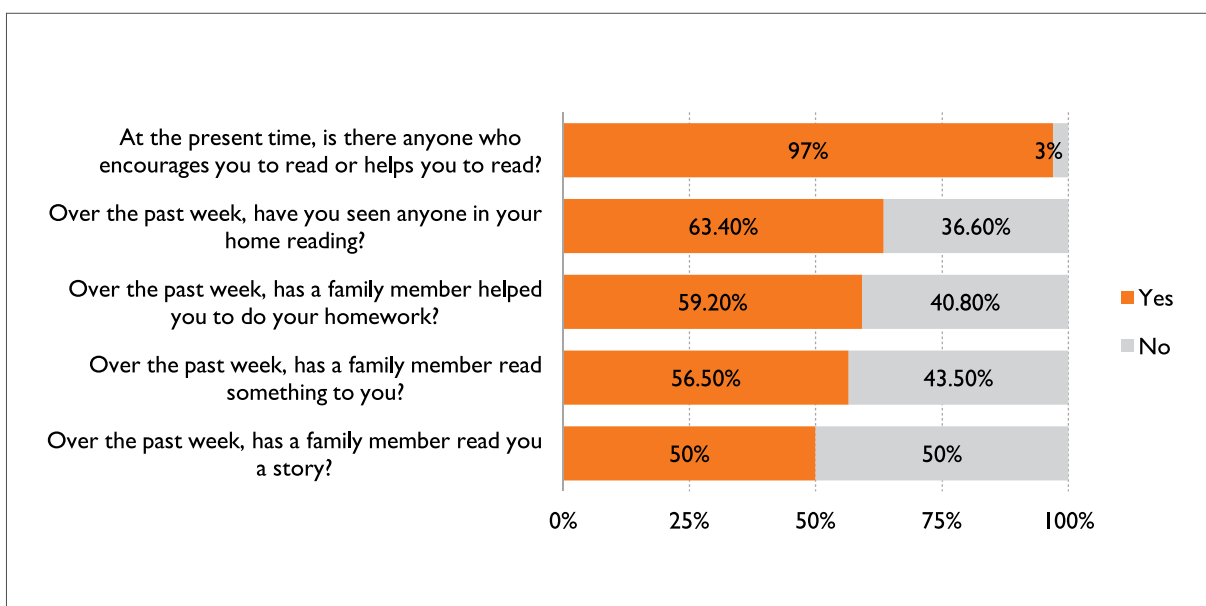
The surveyed students reported quite a positive reading environment at home and reported that family members were involved with them around reading. Almost all students (94%) said that a family member “often encouraged”, or helped them, to read when they were younger. Slightly fewer (74.4%) said that a family member “often read out the stories or book” to them when they were young.

Figure 3. Students’ exposure to reading at home at a young age



When asked about recent reading exposure at home (within the past week), the student's experience showed a different trend. Over the past week, 63.4% reported having seen someone at home read. The percentage dropped when asked about more active involvement of family members – 59.2% of all students reported that a family member helped them do homework, 56.5% had a family member read to them, and only 50% had a family member read a story aloud for them.

Figure 4. Students' current exposure to reading by family

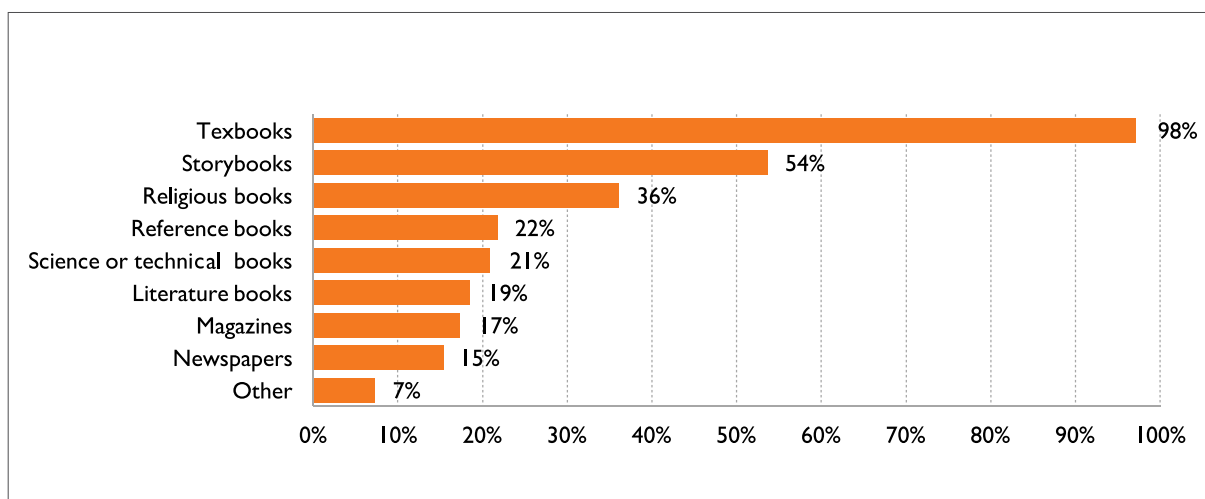


3.2.3 Reading Materials Available at Home

When it came to resource availability and diversity at home, students reported that textbooks were the most commonly available reading material. Almost every single student reported owning a textbook, followed by storybooks and religious books.

The following graph shows that 97.6% out of the 507 students reported having at least one textbook at home, while 53.6% reported having storybooks and 36% had religious books. Not many students reported having any other types of reading materials at home, as shown in Figure 5.

Figure 5. Percentage of students by reading materials available at home



3.2.4 Suggestions for Family to Help Students Read Better

In students' perception, family does have a role in improving student reading skill. From an open-ended question, the students suggested ways in which their family members could help them to read better. The most common suggestion was family providing support, attention and regularly spending time teaching them how to read, by reading aloud to them so that they could repeat after them. Students wanted their family members to encourage them especially in their study and help them with pronouncing or spelling of difficult words.

A few students reported that they needed their family to allow more time to study rather than requiring them to do other work (this was not specified, but interpreted to mean tasks such as cooking, caring for siblings, and other household chores), and to facilitate them to come to school regularly. In addition, the students indicated that they wanted help from their family on monitoring their study, and using non-violent approaches with them and buying them books to read. Further investigation into these reasons, including more concrete examples of those that are causes for concern (such as "non-violent approaches") will be conducted.

3.3 Students' Experience with Reading Environment at School

This section looks into classroom-based reading exposure, access and usage of library. It also includes suggestions from students for ways to encourage more library usage.

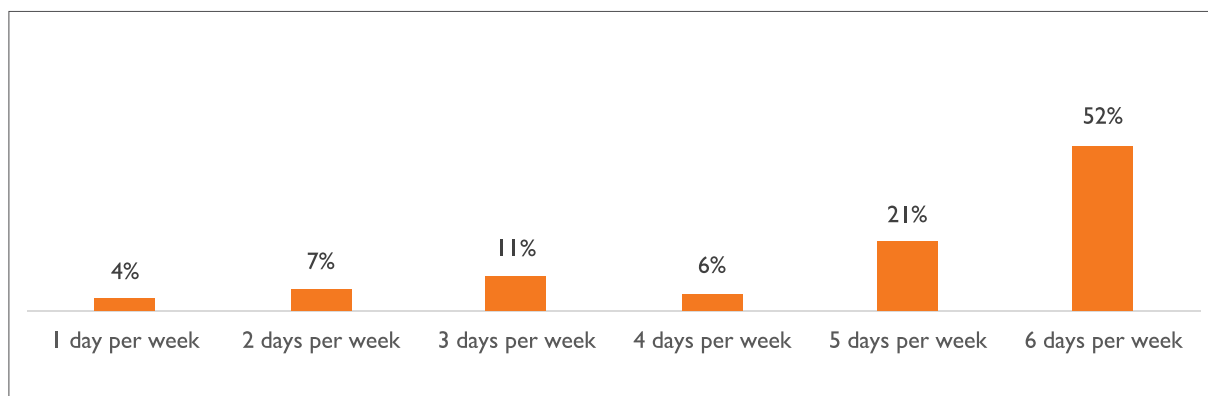
3.3.1 Students' Reading Support in the Classroom and by Teachers

The number of students who reported that they were satisfied with teacher support was very high: 93% of the students said their teachers taught them the sounds of letters and words, and 68.8% reported that their teachers read books other than textbooks aloud to them. Considering these kinds of activities, 77% students found teacher's support "Very Useful", while 22.7% found it "Somewhat Useful" and only 0.3% thought it was "Not Useful At All". Additionally, 92.7% of students reported that teachers asked them about what they were reading⁵, and 83.3% reported that they have learned songs or games as part of classroom activities. Almost all the surveyed students (97.2%) reported that at school they read with their classmates. 87% of the students reported that they were able to read quietly by themselves without needing any help at all.⁶

3.3.2 Library Accessibility

In regards to accessibility of school libraries, the survey showed 433 students (85%) from 32 schools have a library⁷ at their school, while 15% of the students from the remaining 7 schools reported having no library at school. Of those students reporting a school library, many (73%) stated that library was open between 5-6 days a week. Just over a quarter of students reported it being open 4 or fewer days per week.

Figure 6. Number of days the library was open a week, as reported by students



⁵ This question corresponds to teaching practices to improve reading comprehension; however, the detail of what they were reading and where they were reading it is not specified.

⁶ This was a seemingly high level of confidence in independent reading compared to surveys of actual literacy competency (such as rates of children passing standardized Khmer subject, reported in MoEYS. National Education Congress report 2016)

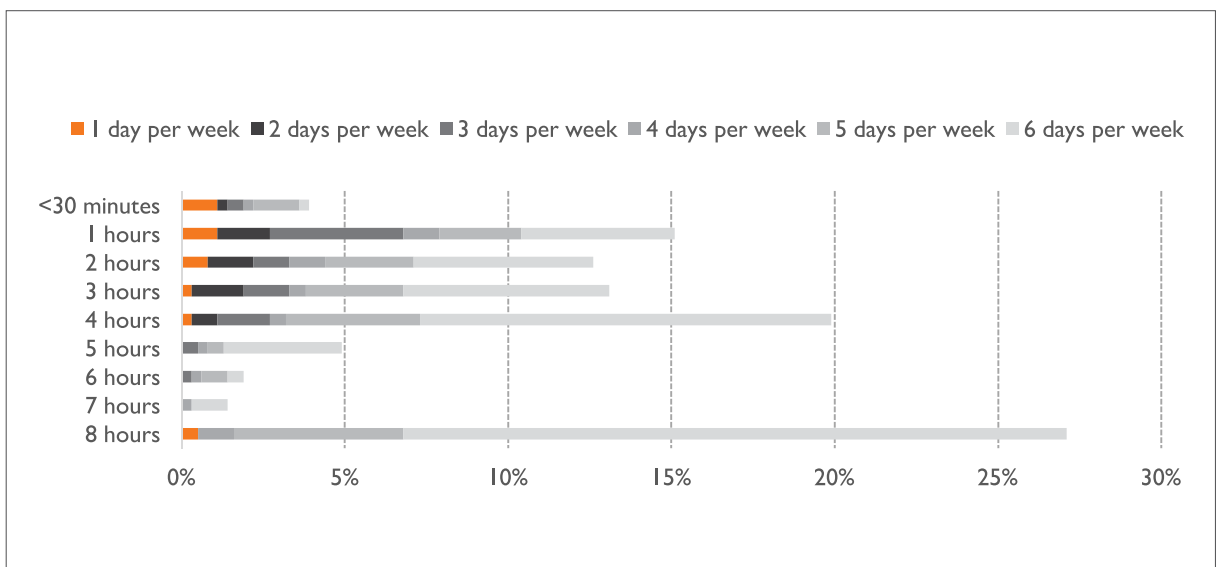
⁷ This could refer to any of the five different forms of library included in the Standard for Primary School Library by MoEYS (2011)

Libraries were reported to be open quite frequently (at least 3 days per week as reported by 90% of students). However, when it came to actual opening hours per day, students reported much more variation: 23.1% said that library was open 8 hours, 1.2% said 7 hours, 1.6% reported 6 hours, 4.4% said 5 hours, 16.9% stated 4 hours, 11.1% reported 3 hours, 10.6% said 2 hours, 12.7% stated 1 hour; and 3.2% reported less than 30 minutes. The knowledge of the students may be limited here based on whether they attend school in the morning or afternoon (this limitation is recognised in the limitations section).

These results show that many libraries are not consistently operating according to schools working hours, as required by MoEYS' (2011) Standards for Primary School Library. This matches previous findings by World Vision.

Figure 7 depicts library operation by comparing number of days per week and number of hour per day that a library was reported by students to be open. A statistical test was run to determine the degree of significance of the above. The test result showed there was a very strong significant association at $p < .05$ between the number of days and length of time the library is open each day. In other words, libraries that were open only 1, 2 or 3 days a week were also likely to be open for less time per day.

Figure 7. Number of day per week vs. number of hour per day that a library was open, as reported by students

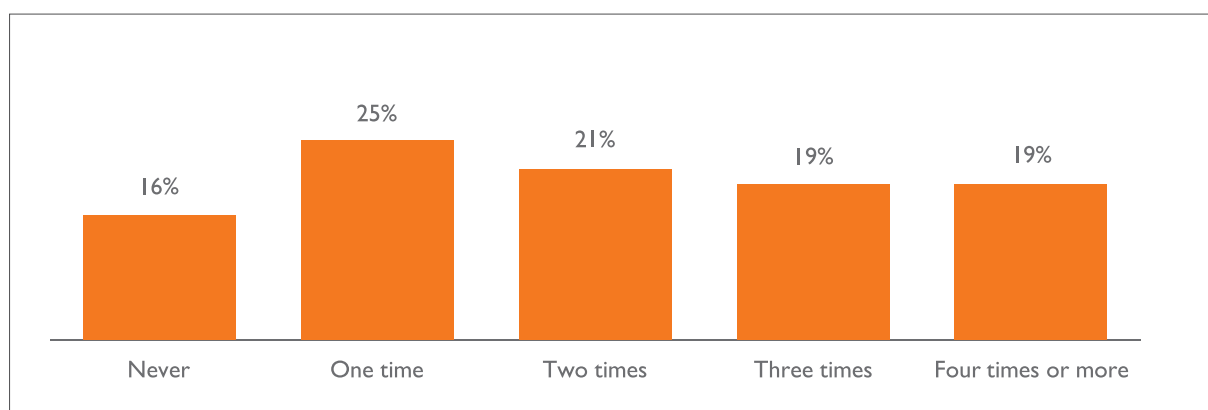


3.3.3 Students' Recent Access, Usage and Satisfaction of School Libraries

The frequency of student usage of libraries in the past week differed considerably. 16% of students at schools with libraries had not used the library facilities in the past week; and a third of students had used it one time or less.

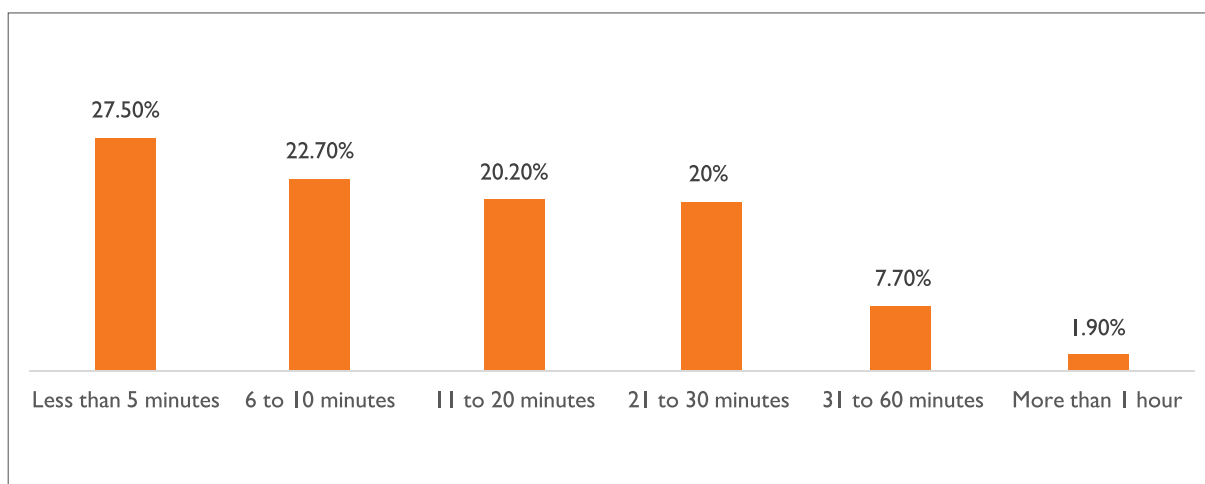
Reasons for no, or one-time, library usage are hypothesised to include libraries not having many reading resources and/or not having skilled librarians to motivate students to use the library when it is open. WV's previous library survey [unpublished] found that 60% of 83 schools did not have sufficient number of librarians.

Figure 8. Frequency of library usage by students in the past week



Positive results on library usage must be tempered, by appreciation for the actual length of time students spent in the library per session. Half of students using libraries do so for less than ten minutes each time. 40% used the libraries between 11-30 minutes. Just 1.9% of surveyed students spent more than an hour in the library per session.

Figure 9. Students' reported length of library usage per session

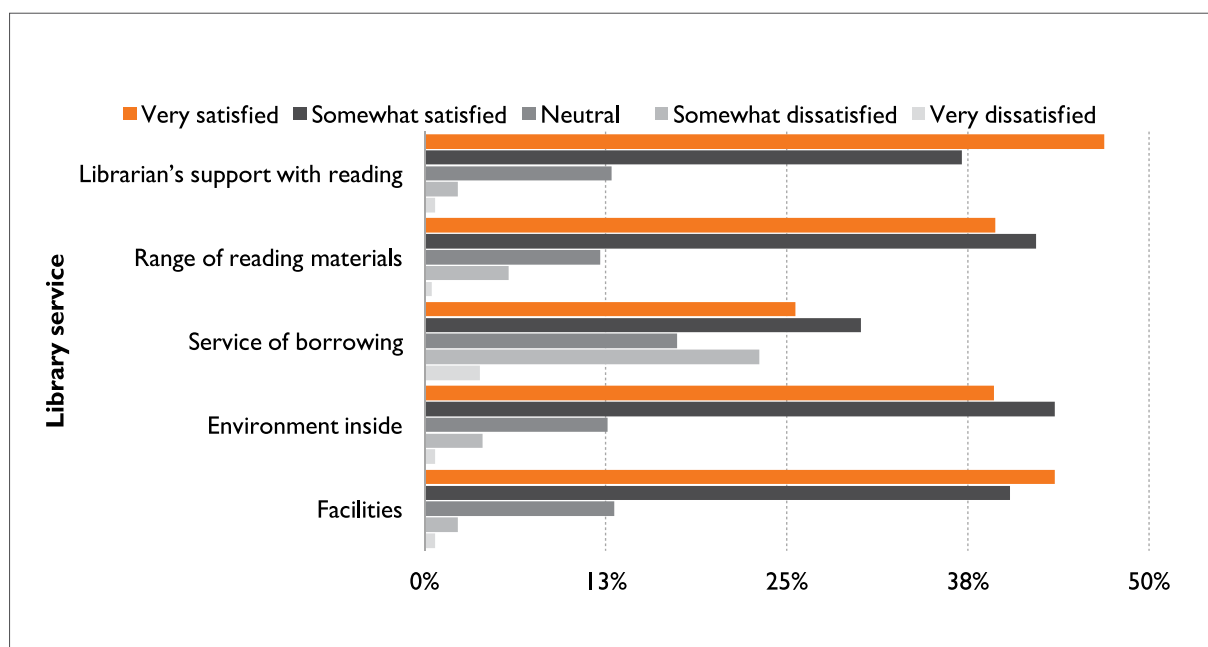


The rate of students borrowing any books from the library was low; only 54.8% of students reported that they had ever borrowed from the library, while the remaining 45.2% had never borrowed anything at all.

The most common reason for students' limited borrowing of books was concern about losing or damaging the book when they brought it home. Other students gave related answers, such as they were afraid that the teacher would punish or blame them if they damaged or lost the book, and thus they did not dare to borrow. Some students also reported that the teachers did not allow them to borrow books, since there were not many books in the library and it would create a shortage of books for other students to read. The indicator of "library satisfaction", perhaps not surprisingly, received the highest dissatisfaction rate out of all measured services, with about 25% of students reporting "somewhat dissatisfied".

When reflecting on their experiences of using their school library, students reported that the library did not always have the reading materials they looked for; only 32% reported to have always found what they were looking for, while 54.2% reported to have sometimes found, and 13.8% found it rarely or not at all. However, the overall rating of the school library was good.

Figure 10. Students' reported satisfaction on library usage experiences



3.3.4 Students' Suggestions to Improve Library Usage

Open-ended questions facilitated students' suggestions for increasing their use of the library.

The most frequent suggestion was to have a greater range and variety of books, such as all types of textbooks, new storybooks, books with more written words, books related to agriculture and health, religious books, English language books, dictionaries, and other books that students can use for reference in schoolwork.

Other frequent suggestions related to the library building and facilities, including having a separate building or room for the library (a standalone library) rather than combining with a classroom or the school director's office. Previous World Vision's library observations showed that 23% of libraries (of 83 surveyed) are either a mobile library, a library in a corner of an office or classroom. Another recommendation for improvement related to issues of cleanliness and hygiene. Some students suggested that the library should be better organised, and some suggested that the library rules should be respected (such as keeping quiet for reading).

Finally, the students also had recommendations for librarians: that they have good attitudes (friendliness, kindness, and being welcoming), and that they more frequently read stories aloud for students.

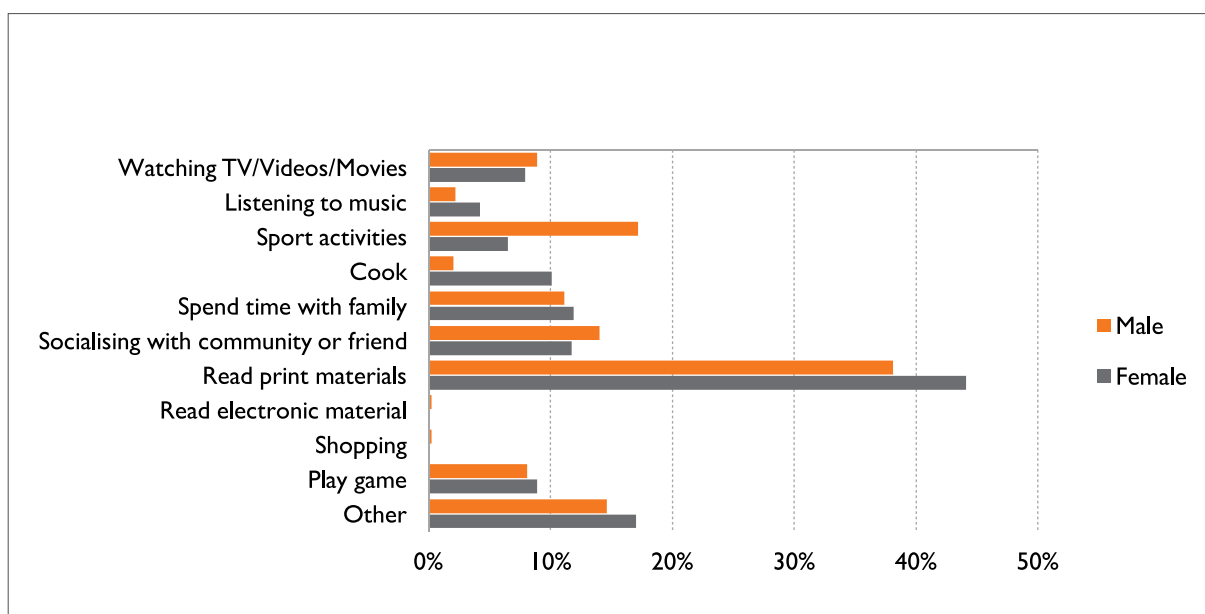
3.4 Students' Reading Habits

This section looks at the general reading habits of students, regardless of at home or at school. It reports on findings related to how often children read, what kinds of materials they prefer to read, and how much they enjoy reading. For these variables, responses have been disaggregated by gender and students' exposure to family reading practices at home, to analyse significant difference between the habits of boys and girls and those with or without family's support with reading at a young age.

3.4.1 Reading as Part of Student Leisure Activities

The students were asked about the activities they did during their leisure time. The survey showed 82% of the students reported "read printed material" as something they do during their leisure time. Other activities listed were socializing with community or friends (25.7%), doing sport activities (23.7%), and spending time with family (23%).

Figure 11. Leisure activities by gender



3.4.2 Preferred Reading Materials and Location

This section outlines the reading preferences of students (given the choice), including preferred type, genre and topic for reading, and their preferred reading location.

Textbooks were the most common books the students read (96%), followed by storybooks (76%) (Figure 12), which corresponds directly to the availability of reading materials. When students were asked about what book genres they liked to read, they responded with storybooks (74%) and textbooks (55%), while only a few indicated historical fiction (Figure 13) and very few cited liking any other genre. Again, the limited variation in response may simply reflect exposure to and familiarity with a narrow range of different content, genre, and types of print materials.

Figure 12. Types of reading materials students normally read

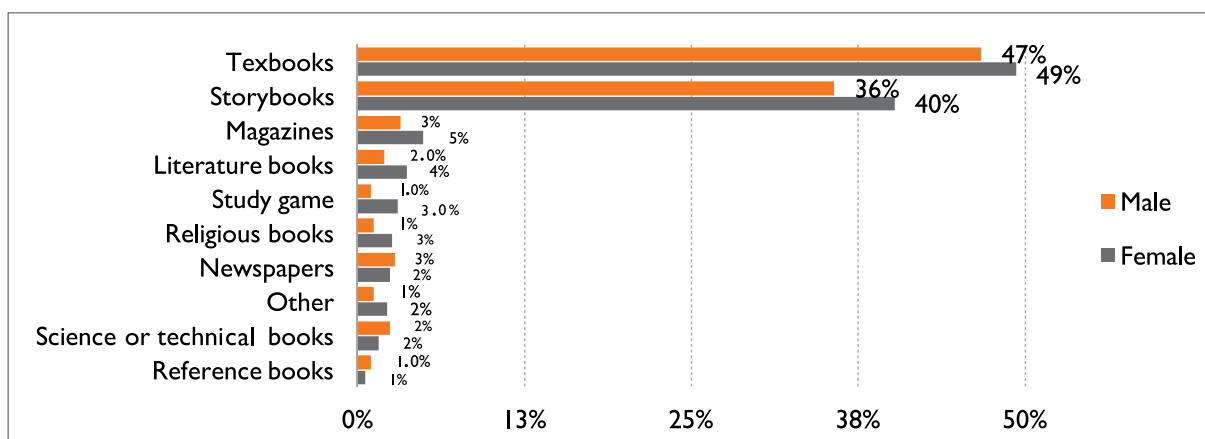
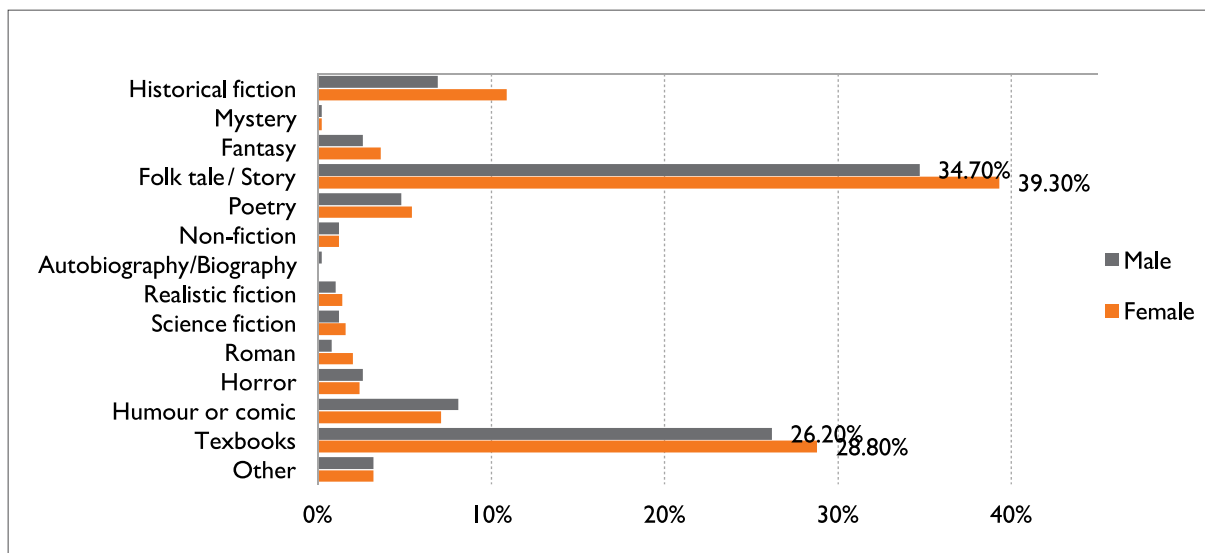
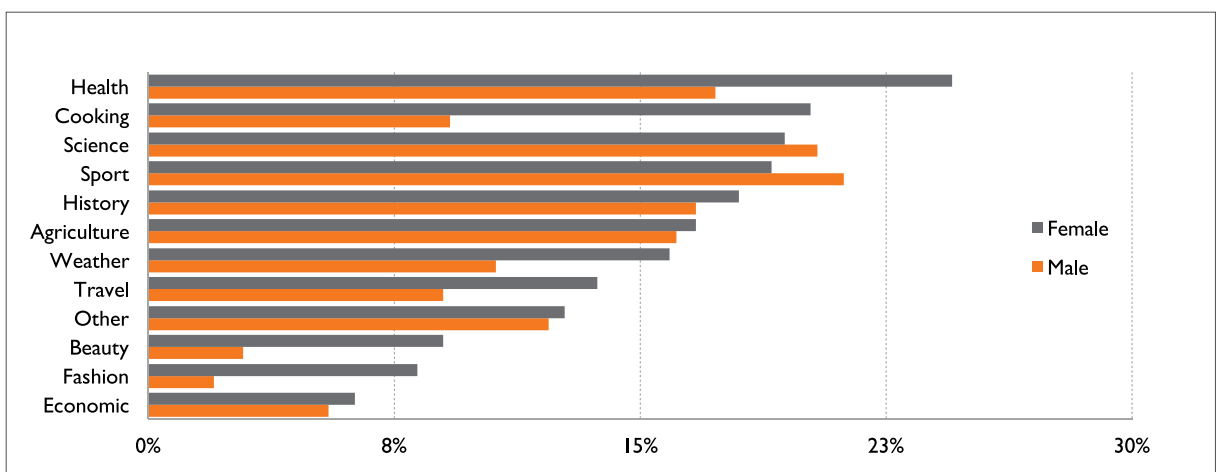


Figure 13. Book genres students normally read



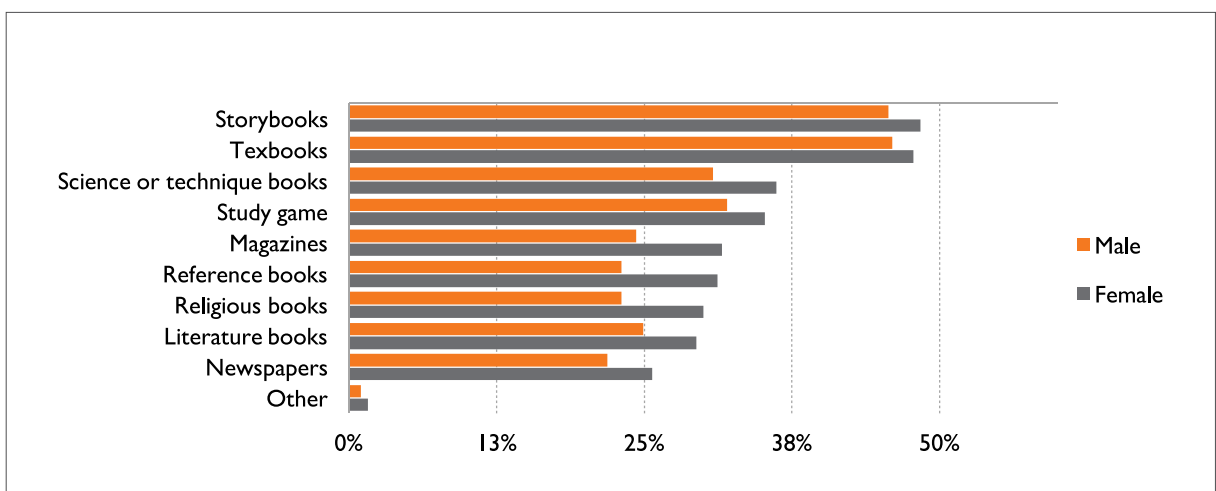
When students were asked about what topic they liked to read about (within a range of given topics) most of the topics listed were selected, except fashion, beauty, and economics (Figure 14). The most common topics children reported liking to read about were health, sport, science, agriculture and history. The survey also showed that girls are more likely to read about health-related issues than boys are, while boys are a little more likely to read about sports than girls are.

Figure 14. Topics that students liked to read



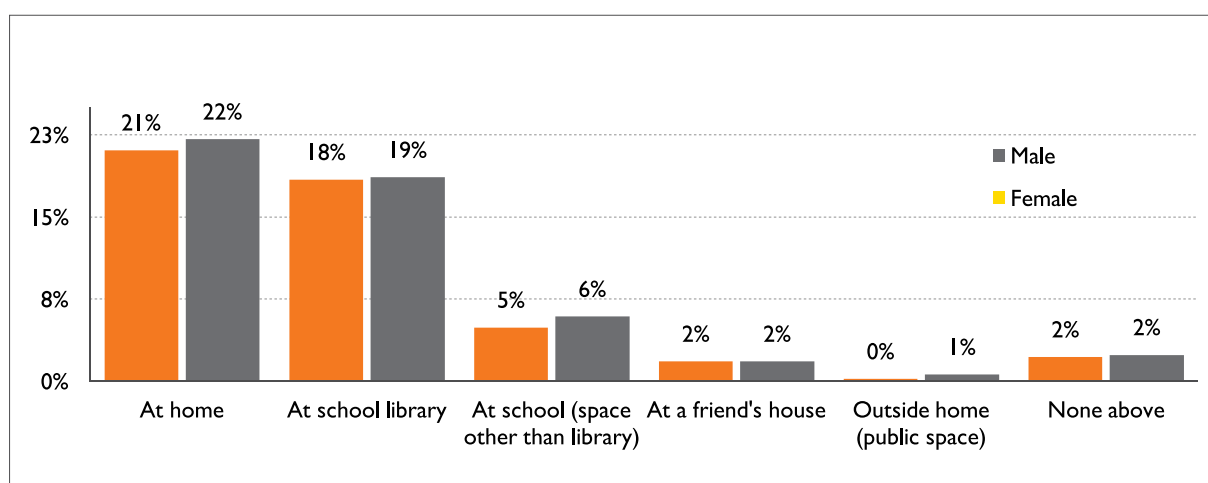
When given a choice of reading materials, many of the students expressed interest in reading a variety of materials, not only the textbooks and storybooks that are the most common reading resource they can currently access. WV's survey results clearly show that children have limited access to the kinds of reading materials they may like to read.

Figure 15. Students' preferred books when given choice, by gender



Regarding reading location, the survey showed that home is the place most preferred by the students for their reading (43%). The next preferred location was school library (37%). A minority (11%) of students preferred to read at school in spaces other than the library.

Figure 16. Students' preferred reading location



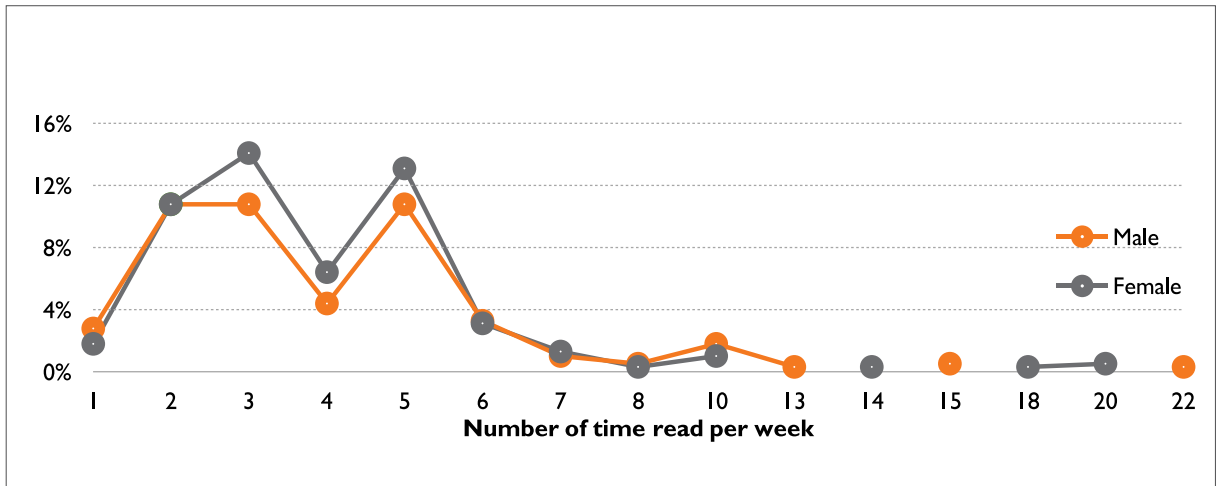
3.4.3 Reading Frequency (Non-Textbook) and Correlation with Other Variables

In order to determine reading frequency, the survey included questions about 1) the number of times students read per week, 2) the length of time spent reading per week, and 3) the number of books read per year. The questions all specified that students should exclude time spent reading school textbooks.

The number of times students read per week ranged from one time, right up to 22 times per week. However, the majority of students (80%) reported reading between 2 and 5 times a week (the median score was 3 times per week). The remaining 20% of students reporting that they read between 6 and 22 times per week.

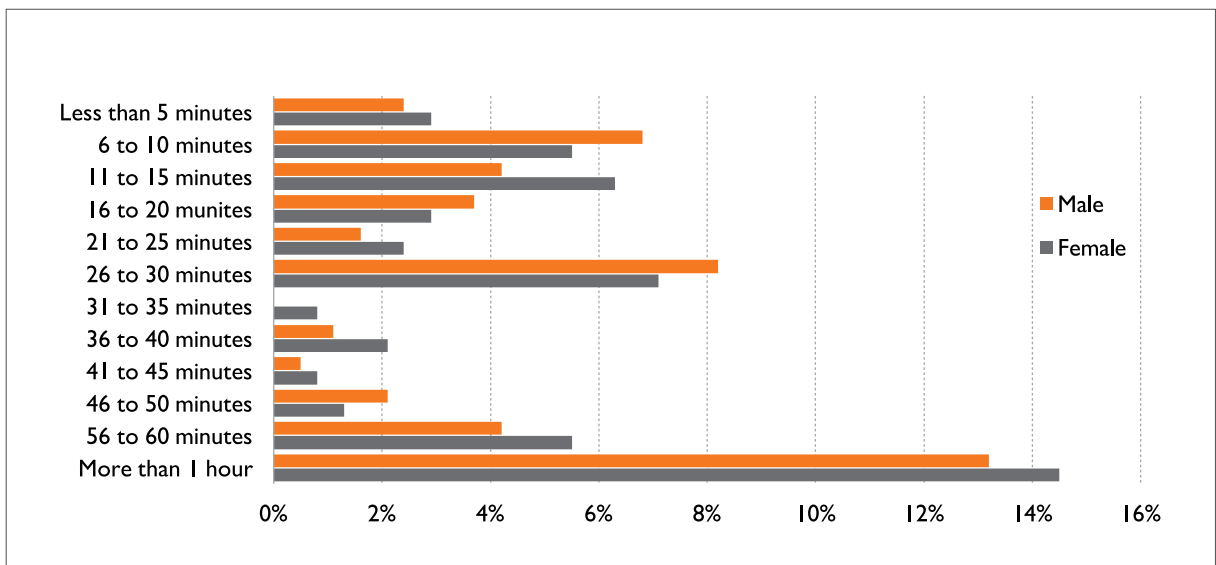
The survey showed that about half of the students reported reading 3 times or less per week. About 35% reported reading 4-5 times a week. Figure 17 shows these results disaggregated by gender.

Figure 17. Frequency of reading per week, as reported by students, by gender



Analysing the amount of time spent reading shows that more than 72% of students reported less than one hour of reading per week outside of class time. Dividing this over a week, 60 minutes in 7 days, suggests that most students spend less than 10 minutes per day engaged in reading any materials other than textbooks.

Figure 18. Length of time students read per week, by gender



The average number of books read **other than textbook** was 12 books in the last 12 months. However, less than 10% of students reported reading between 21 and 200 books, while nearly half of the students (44%) reported reading between 1 and 5 books. The survey did not explore the length or complexity of the reading materials and there did not appear to be any significant difference between genders in the reporting.

Figure 19. Number of books read by students in the last 12 months



The survey found no significant difference nor association between gender or school grade in relation to 1) the numbers of times students read per week, 2) the length of time spent reading per week, or 3) the number of books read per year. However, some correlation was found between the number of books read by students and whether the school had a library or not ($p=0.05$). In schools with a library, the number of books students read in the year was higher.

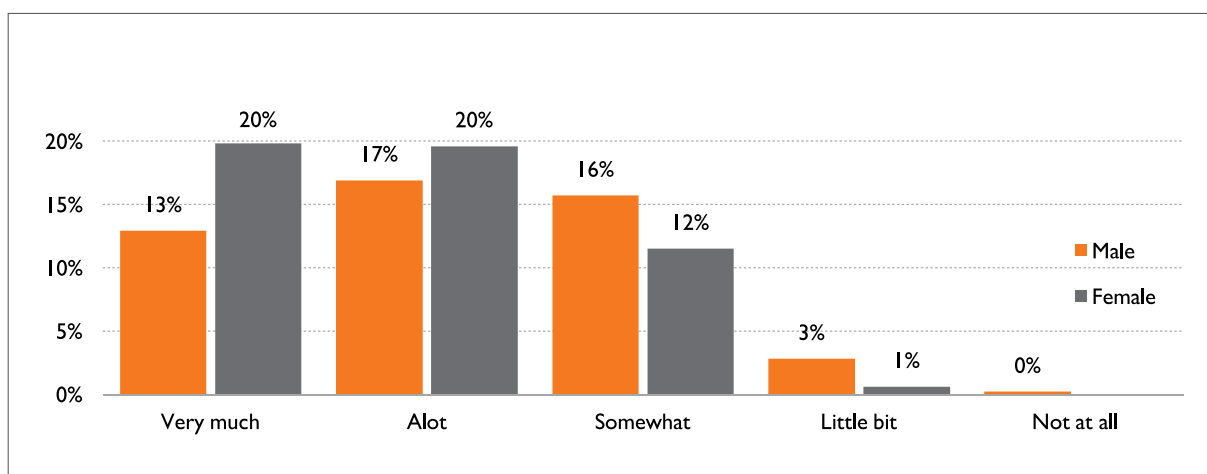
The results also showed that a family's positive habits of 1) encouraging students to read at a young age and (94.4% responded "yes"), and 2) reading books or stories to children at a young age (74.4% responded "yes"), did have a significant relationship with students' reading habits now.

Both questions were tested against the number of times a student read per week during present time (using an independent sample t-test) and showed significant difference for both questions ($p<.05$). The test revealed that students who had family members encouraging them to read and/or reading stories and books aloud to them reported a significantly higher number of times students read per week in the present, than those who did not.

3.4.4 Reading Enjoyment and Correlation with Other Variables

The survey showed that 32.7% of students reported that they very much enjoy reading, 36.5% enjoyed it a lot while 27.2% somewhat enjoy it, and about 4% enjoy it a little bit or not at all. By gender (Figure 20), it appears that female students enjoy reading more than male students do, with 40% of girls recording that they enjoy reading “Very much” or “A lot”, compared to only 30% of males.

Figure 20. Students' reported reading enjoyment by gender

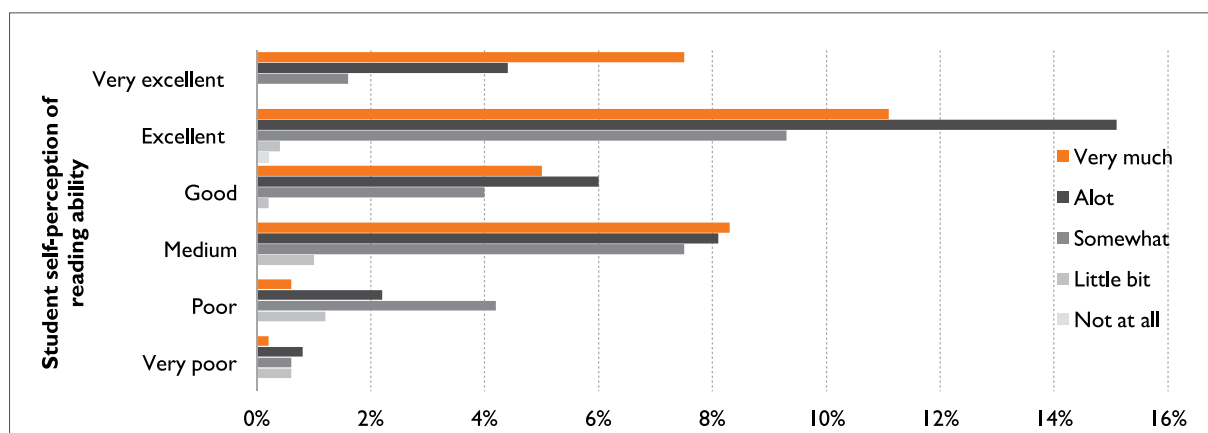


To validate the finding that female students are more likely to enjoy reading than male students, an independent samples t-test was conducted to examine whether there was a significant difference between gender (boy and girl) in relation to level of reading enjoyment. The test revealed a statistically significant difference between boys and girls ($p < .001$). Female students reported significantly higher levels of reading enjoyment than the male students.

Analysis also showed a significant difference in the reading enjoyment of students with positive family reading practices (for example, a family member often read stories or books to them when they were young) compared to those who never experienced this. The test revealed a significant correlation between students whose families had good reading habits and significantly higher reading enjoyment than the student whose family did not read to them.

Finally, statistical testing showed a strong positive correlation between the level of student self-perception of reading ability and reading enjoyment – a student who perceives their reading ability to be low is less likely to enjoy reading; conversely, the higher a student perceives their reading proficiency, the more likely they are to enjoy reading.

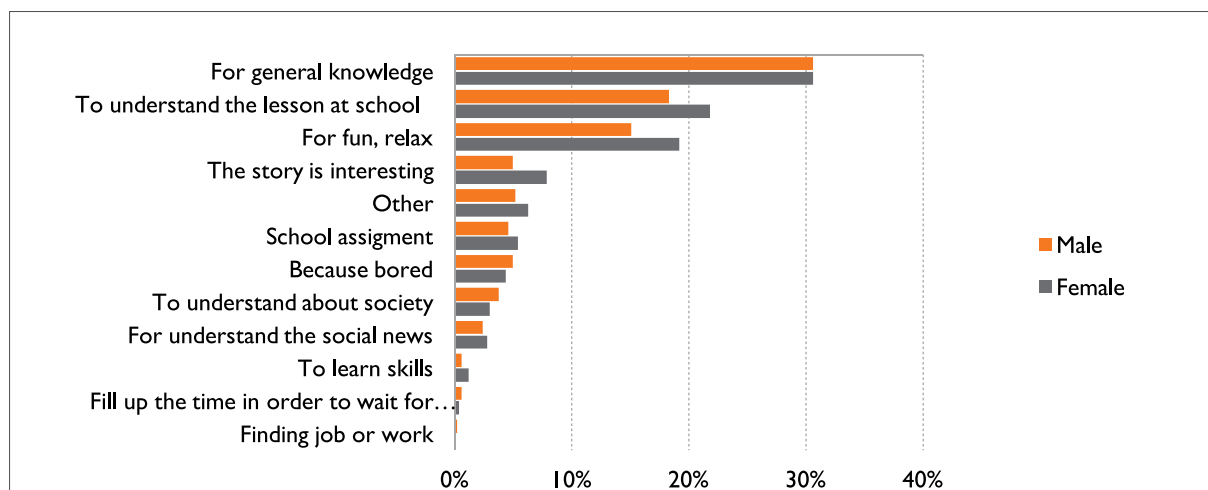
Figure 21. Association between student's self-perception of reading ability and student's reading enjoyment



3.4.5 Motivations for Reading

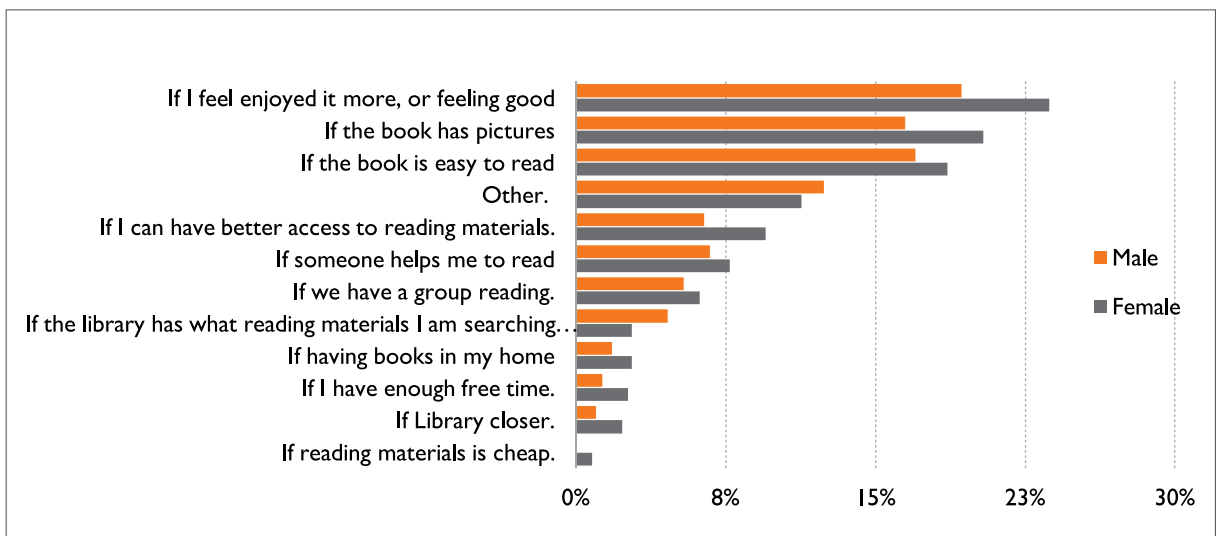
When asked why they read, students gave multiple responses of 966 total responses. The most common response was for general knowledge (31.5% of responses), followed by a desire to understand the lessons at school (20.6% of responses), and then for fun or relaxation (17.6% of responses).

Figure 22. Student's reasons for reading, by gender



When asked about what would make students more likely to *want* to read more, the most common responses were if they felt like they enjoyed it more (43%), if the book was easy to read (36%) and if the book had pictures (37%). Other motivators included if they had better access to reading material (16%), if someone was helping them to read (14%), and if they were reading as a group (12%).

Figure 23. Things that would help students to read more



Conclusions and Recommendations

Summary

World Vision's Reading Environments and Habits Survey has provided insights into the practices and environments that influence children's reading in Cambodia. The findings validate and complement some existing knowledge, but also challenge some prevailing assumption – both of angles are vital to improving education programmes around the country.

The survey differs from other research as it focussed on factors of habit that might contribute to reading proficiency, and is based on student self-reporting and self-perception, rather than quickly linking qualitative data to quantitative education standards. For example, it is common for education programmes to explore the degree to which families encourage a child to attend school, but this is normally related to improving school attendance and minimising dropouts. On the other hand, this survey explores the impact of family encouragement not only with school attendance but also with a student learning and reading habits.

The conclusions, therefore, largely focus on how different habits (both individual and family) might impact students, especially their enjoyment of reading and their self-perception of reading ability. The recommendations also pay attention to the fact that having access to sufficient reading materials is an important part of developing skills in and love for reading.

Student Self-Perception of Reading Ability

In response to the survey, 64.7% of children self-reported their reading proficiency to be “Excellent”, “Very Excellent” and “Good”. These beliefs do not currently correspond with predominantly relied upon literacy rates in Cambodia. World Vision's own project data (and MoEYS' national assessment data) suggests that only about 50% of children in grade 6 can read proficiently.

However, literacy experts suggest that a child's self-perception (or ability self-concept) will influence their selection and commitment to activities, including reading. Children are more likely to participate in activities that they enjoy and feel successful at. Therefore, while the results for self-perception of reading ability does raise questions, it is important to recognise and incorporate this in design of literacy programmes.

Based on World Vision's existing knowledge of libraries at target school, there does not appear to be a correlation between a child's perception of their reading ability and the availability of library resources (including opening hours of libraries, access to a qualified librarian, or number of books in the library). Thus it is possible that child's positive self-assessment may be more related to encouragement from home than from school per se.

Students' Experience with Reading Environment at Home

Global evidence demonstrates that there is a strong link between a print-rich environment, including reading materials, and literacy rates. In Cambodia, where so few homes have reading resources, schools – and libraries – become critical resources in that equation.

The number of students who reported having someone at home reading, supporting reading (such as helping with homework), or reading aloud was encouraging, given the strong links between family support and literacy skills. The results showed a more supportive home environment than expected based on previous project data and assessments (WV unpublished data). Limits to reading at home, however, were seen in the lack of available materials and lack of diversity of reading materials that are available – many students reported that they only had textbooks and storybooks at home, with less access to other reading materials that they were interested in.

The survey highlighted that good practices in the home (family reading habits), both current and when children were at a young age (such as reading stories to children, encouraging children to read, supporting with homework), can influence a child's perception of reading enjoyment and actual frequency of their reading. Both reading to a child at a young age and encouraging them to read while young results in students reading more often and enjoy reading more. These findings provide significant evidence to suggest that improving family reading habits should be an integral component of literacy programmes. It is critical that parents and caregivers understand the value of reading, and creating supportive environments for reading.

However, the survey also points to a limited availability and diversity of reading materials at home (and at school). If the gaps were addressed, alongside reading out aloud to young children and encouraging them to read, the impact on reading habits, and likely literacy levels, would subsequently improve.

Students' Experience with Reading Environment at School, especially Libraries

Cambodia has been making good progress towards improving the quality of its public education system, including policies, laws and guidelines that make primary school more accessible around the country. However, access to school buildings and classrooms is not necessarily resulting in commensurate learning outcomes yet. In this Reading Environments and Habits Survey, there appears to be a regular accessing of libraries (most students reported visiting at least once per week). However, the amount of time spent in the library per visit was very short – approximately half of the students spent 10 minutes or less in the library each time, which limits the quality and depth of “usage” possible.

Contributors to this, according to the survey, could be the limited number of hours the library is open, the lack of a variety of reading materials (with most books being textbooks, and few other story books or books on other topics), or even the cleanliness and location of the library (some are located within other classrooms or the school office).

Another important finding is that only 54.8% of surveyed students had borrowed a book from the library since the school year started, meaning almost half of the students (45.2%) had not borrowed any book during the year. This represents an under-utilisation of library resources, and is supported by the fact that “borrowing services” was the only satisfaction category that received a strong “dissatisfied” rating in the survey. Students also appear discouraged from borrowing books to take home as they fear damaging the books, which are already in limited supply (a perspective apparently conveyed by teachers who also fear loss or damage of the few books available).

While the reading environment at schools is not only about libraries, it does appear that many issues that (may) discourage reading at school are related to poor quality of the library standards that are stated in MoEYS’ “Standards for Primary School Library” policy (2011). The main suggestions from students to help improve the school reading environment largely relate to meeting these library standards; therefore, further investment and support to schools to meet these standards would likely result in improved reading habits of students.

Student General Reading Preferences and Habits

Overall student reading habit was positive in terms of the frequency of reading. However, the length of time students read is a serious concern, as nearly all students reported reading for less than one hour per week, and the number of books read in the last 12 months was relatively low.

Since students lack access to a wide variety of reading materials both at the school library and at home, they mostly read textbooks and storybooks. However, many students indicated that they would prefer to read many different genres of books and about a wide variety of topics. It would appear then, that improving the variety of genre and content accessible to students could have a positive impact on their reading habits, and motivate them to read more frequently and for longer time. Such practice with reading is essential to consolidating literacy skills and enabling children to move from ‘learning to read’ (learning reading skills) to ‘reading to learn’ (reading for the purpose for increasing knowledge).

Recommendations

The recommendations from the *Reading Environments and Habits Survey* all focus on how the reading habits of students can be supported and improved. The findings and conclusions show that by encouraging young children to read, reading aloud to children, providing a diversity of reading materials at home and school, and improving the library services at schools, the reading enjoyment and self-perceived reading ability of students will increase. If a student uses their existing reading skills to read more often, they are more likely to improve their skills.

The recommendations below are targeted at main stakeholders; however, many are also important for civil society organisations and non-government organisations (NGOs) who support and implement projects that aim to improve educational outcomes. These programmes should consider how they can also adopt, or advocate for, the fulfilment of these recommendations.

Recommendations for the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYS):

- Ensure there is adequate number of librarians at schools, based on the schools working hours, to ensure the library can be open and accessible for students.
- Invest in the skills training of librarians so they can better manage library resources and improve the effectiveness of the library – through increased storytelling, encouraging borrowing, and supporting children to make best use of library resource for learning.
- Increase the variety, diversity and quantity of reading materials available at libraries; these materials should be more than textbooks and storybooks. Ensure librarians encourage students to borrow reading materials more often (to read at home and outside of the library).
- Better coordinate with sub-national structures to ensure that monitoring of school services, including library service, is being conducted regularly and with tangible action points and support for schools to meet the Standards for Primary School Library.
- Ensure that any public awareness raising activities of the Ministry include the topic of the vital role that family play in encouraging and enabling children to read and learn.

The Royal Government of Cambodia, through MoEYS, currently has positive standards for libraries and school reading environments. Further supporting successful implementation of these standards at school level will further improve reading habits.

Recommendations for Parents and Caregivers:

- Ensure that children regularly attend school
- Allocate time to read with and to children. Reading with children can improve their reading habits.
- As much as possible, provide a range of reading materials for children at home.
- Encourage children to borrow a diversity of books from the school library and ensure they have good space for reading at home.
- Become more involved in the life of the school, including participation in management meetings, events, and programmes that will improve the management and governance of the school (including to better meet government service standards).

Recommendations for School Directors, Teachers and School Support Committees:

- Schools directors and teachers should take practical steps that encourage students to access and use the school library more often, including spending more time in the library and borrowing more reading materials to read outside of the library. These steps might include opening the library more often (especially during break times or between the morning and afternoon teaching shifts), conduct more storytelling and group reading in the library area, and acquire new reading materials.
- Where libraries are limited in resources and do not meet national standards, seek further support from the Commune Council and District Education Office to access financial support to get closer to meeting standards.
- Increase emphasis on activities and programmes that involve parents and caregivers in education of their children, including encouraging parents to read with/to children at home, encouraging their children to borrow from the library, and purchasing more reading materials (other than textbooks) for children to read at home.
- Ensure full implementation of Dimension 5 of the Child Friendly Schools Policy to “enhance the dynamic relationship and two-way participation between schools and communities so that schools become community-supported resource centres, families and communities become resources for school improvement and play an active role in management” (CFS Policy, 2007).

Recommendations for students:

- Allocate more time for reading, and read a variety of materials.
- Practice reading by going to the library more often and reading a diversity of books
- Ask parents, caregivers, teachers, friends and siblings to read with you, and help with difficult words
- Become involved in Student Representative Councils to advocate for improved library services for you and your classmates.
- Read with your younger brothers, sisters, and other children in your village.



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