

Poorer reading skills following changed computer habits of children

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Sweden and the US are two countries in which increased leisure use of computers by children leads to poorer reading ability. This is the conclusion from research carried out at the University of Gothenburg, Sweden.

Professor Monica Rosén of the Department of Education and Special Education has analysed differences between different countries over time in order to explain change in reading achievement among 9-10-year olds. Within the framework of the research project she and her colleagues have studied how pupils' [reading skills](#) have changed since 1970. Hungary, Italy, the US and Sweden have been included in all of the international comparisons. [Reading ability](#) has improved steadily in Italy and Hungary, while it has fallen rapidly since 1991 in both the US and Sweden.

During this period, many factors within the school system have changed, as have also society in general and the after-school activities of children in particular. The Swedish and American pupils described a large increase in the use of computers in their free time during this period, while a similar increase was not reported in Hungary or Italy.

Reading underdeveloped

"Our study shows that the entry of computers into the home has contributed to changing children's habits in such a manner that their

reading does not develop to the same extent as previously. By comparing countries over time we can see a negative correlation between change in reading achievement and change in spare time computer habits which indicates that reading ability falls as [leisure](#) use of computers increases", says Monica Rosén.

The investigation shows that the frequency of leisure reading and the number of leisure books borrowed from the library have both fallen as computer use in the home has increased.

Thus, it is not the computers in themselves or the activities they are used for that impair reading skills, but rather the way in which the computers have stolen time from leisure reading.

The new [computer](#) habits do not promote the development of reading ability in the same way as leisure reading of books does. Reading of printed media has fallen also among adults. In many homes it is becoming evermore unusual that somebody actually sits down and reads something.

Fewer high-performing children

"We have shown that the poorer results are principally caused by a fall in the skills of those from the centre of the ability range and upwards. It is not that case that there are more less-gifted readers or that the skills of these readers have become poorer. What has happened is that there are fewer high-performing children", says Monica Rosén. She points out that it is very difficult to measure and compare reading skills over time.

"It is important that we do not jump to the conclusion that the complete explanation for poorer reading is deficiencies in education. On the contrary, the way in which computers undermine reading shows very clearly that leisure time is at least as important when it comes to

developing high-quality reading skills", says Monica Rosén.

Provided by University of Gothenburg

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