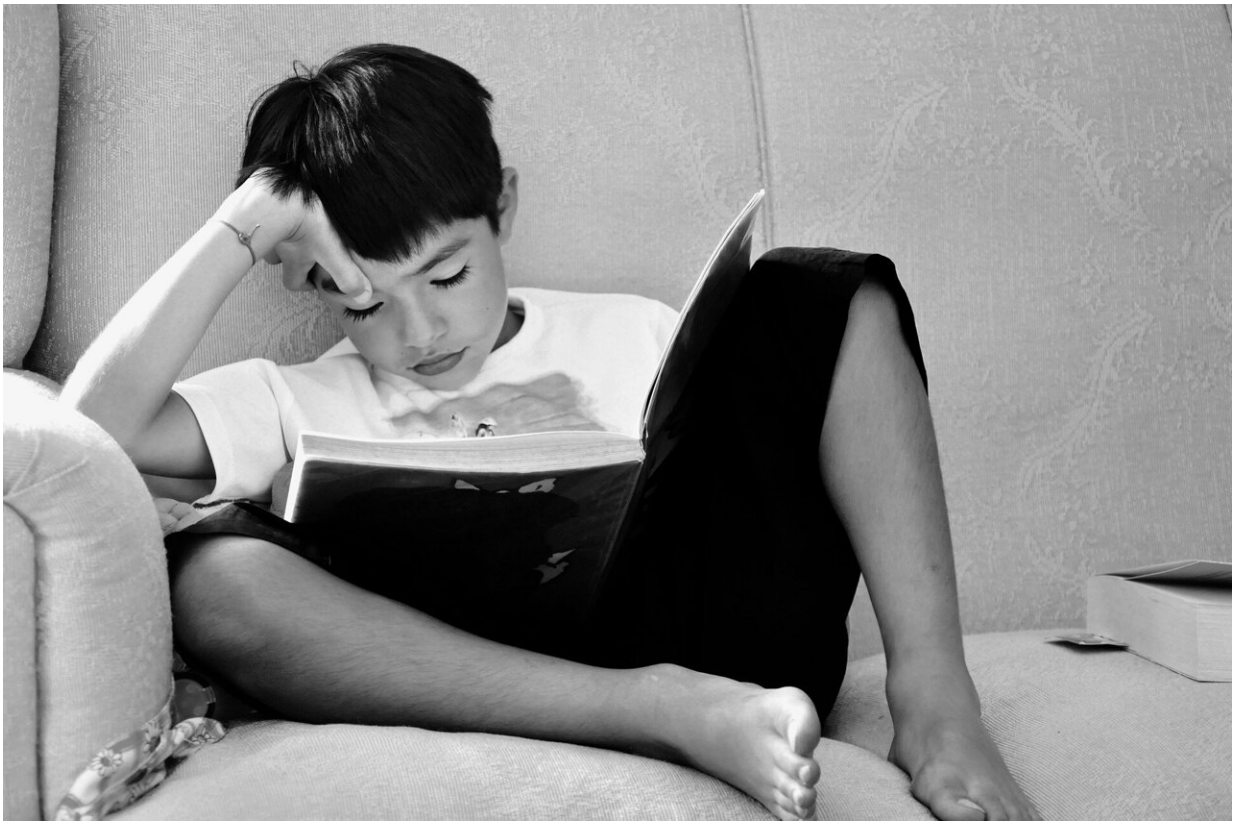


# Boys' reading motivation continues to lag: How schools can address this problem

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Children's reading skills have been declining for some time now. Apart from the known fact that boys' reading skills are worse than girls', it is also common knowledge that they are less motivated when it comes to

reading. But Radboud researchers Margriet van Hek and Gerbert Kraaykamp have discovered that both schools and parents can address the problem of reading motivation. "The active encouragement of reading for pleasure in the classroom really helps boys."

"Dutch teenagers have begun to enjoy reading less and less," says education sociologist van Hek. This is evident from figures from the [global educational study](#) that was carried out by the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) and published in *Poetics*. This study presented the [pupils](#) with statements such as "I only read if I have to" or "For me, reading is a waste of time." It is worth noting that in all of the countries that were surveyed, the [boys](#) enjoyed reading less than the girls.

Van Hek points out that this low level of reading motivation also causes a lag in the boys' educational performance. "We know that of the 79 countries that participated in the PISA, the boys' [reading skills](#) were worse than the girls. And if you have problems with reading, it makes it more difficult to pass your tests. It's important that you're able to read properly, not just for Dutch or English, but for other subjects as well. If your reading skills really start to fall behind, you may become functionally illiterate, which means that you'll have fewer job opportunities. So it's crucial that pupils receive more encouragement to read."

## **Girls' activity**

Together with her colleague Kraaykamp, Van Hek investigated the role that the pupils' social environment plays in boys' and girls' reading motivation. For this purpose, they analyzed PISA data on more than 28,000 pupils from almost 1,600 European schools.

"Parents and schools have a lot of influence on their children's reading

motivation," says Van Hek. But it seems that the sons of families in which the parents themselves are avid readers and who have many books in their home benefitted from this less than the daughters. "This could be because reading is often seen as a more appropriate activity for girls than for boys, because it's a quiet activity that takes place indoors."

## Encouragement helps

Van Hek and Kraaykamp also found that schools can partly compensate for the difference between girls and boys that arises at home. "Boys who aren't given much 'reading material' at home benefit when teachers actively encourage their pupils to read for pleasure in the classroom. Figures have shown that when teachers actively encouraged reading, the reading motivation among boys who were least motivated to read was significantly higher."

One way in which reading motivation can be encouraged is to ask pupils for their opinions on a story, or to ask them to find a link between a book and what's going on in their own life. "Children are more motivated to read when language lessons are more relevant to their experiences," says Van Hek.

Parents can also encourage their sons to read more. "Shared reading activities can give an enormous boost to boys' and girls' reading [motivation](#)." If [parents](#) read aloud to their sons, provide them with more books, or play spelling games with them more often, it can help boys to develop a greater love of reading from an early age.

**More information:** Margriet van Hek et al, Why Jane likes to read and John does not. How parents and schools stimulate girls' and boys' intrinsic reading motivation, *Poetics* (2023). [DOI: 10.1016/j.poetic.2023.101828](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.poetic.2023.101828)

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