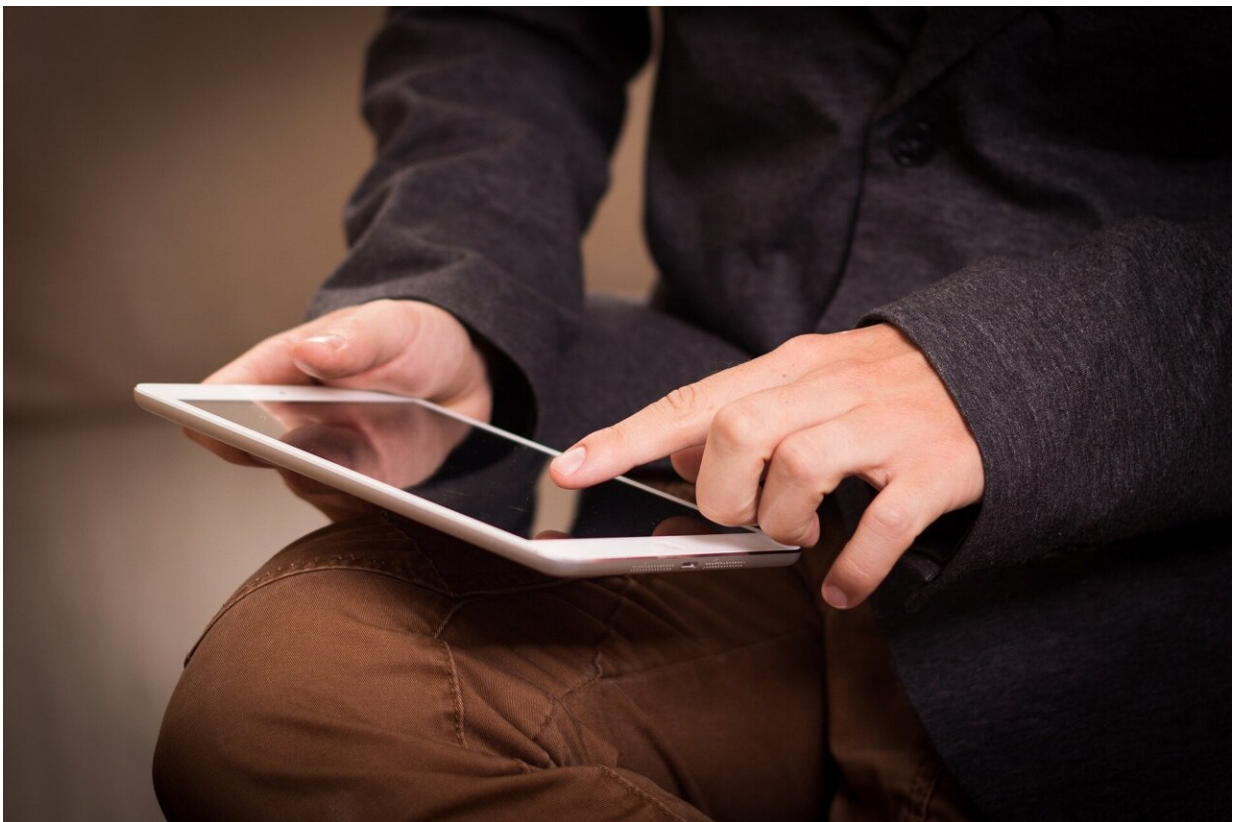


Study shows digital leisure reading does little to improve reading comprehension for students

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For years, research showed that print reading, whether for leisure or school, improved developing readers' ability to comprehend text.

However, the explosive use of digital reading devices, constant access to these devices, and new types of reading materials have introduced new reading habits.

Now, a new comprehensive review of research on digital [leisure](#) reading habits finds a virtually nonexistent relationship between digital reading and improvement in reading comprehension among students.

The study, "Do new forms of reading pay off? A meta-analysis on the relationship between leisure digital reading habits and text comprehension," was published in *Review of Educational Research* and was conducted by Lidia Altamura, Cristina Vargas, and Ladislao Salmerón, all at the University of Valencia.

"In sum, for developing readers, leisure digital reading does not seem to pay off in terms of reading comprehension, at least not as much as traditional print reading does," said study co-author Lidia Altamura, a Ph.D. student at the University of Valencia.

"Our findings are particularly surprising when you compare them to what we already know about the well-established positive association between reading frequency in print and text comprehension."

Extrapolating from what is known from previous studies, the authors estimate that if a student spends 10 hours reading in print in their free time, their ability to comprehend will likely be six to eight times higher than if they read on digital devices for the same amount of time.

Co-author Lidia Altamura discusses findings and implications of the study:

"We expected that digital leisure reading for informational purposes, such as visiting Wikipedia or other educational webpages, or reading the

news, would be much more positively linked to comprehension," said Altamura. "But even that was not the case."

The study is the first [meta-analysis](#) of research that has focused on the specific links between leisure reading habits on digital devices and reading comprehension.

The authors found that at early stages (primary and [middle school](#)), there were small negative relationships between leisure digital reading and comprehension, while at later stages ([high school](#) and university), the relationship turned slightly positive.

Overall, regardless of education stage, digital reading habits had a smaller relationship with reading [comprehension](#), compared to print reading results from previous research.

The findings are based on the authors' synthesis of 25 studies, published between 2000 and 2022, involving around 470,000 participants from at least three dozen countries.

Altamura and colleagues suggested two reasons why digital reading may not pay off for developing readers compared to print reading. First, digital reading devices can serve many purposes other than reading, which distracts readers. Second, the internet has brought new types of reading, with features such as short- and fast-paced stimuli, lower quality content, and less sophisticated vocabulary.

The authors emphasized that educators and parents should encourage students, especially younger ones, to read in [print](#) more often than on [digital devices](#).

"Based on our results, we cannot just assume that all leisure reading will be beneficial for developing readers," said Altamura. "The medium used

matters."

More information: Lidia Altamura et al, Do New Forms of Reading Pay Off? A Meta-Analysis on the Relationship Between Leisure Digital Reading Habits and Text Comprehension, *Review of Educational Research* (2023). [DOI: 10.3102/00346543231216463](https://doi.org/10.3102/00346543231216463)

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