

Do 'Digital Natives' Prefer Paper Books to E-Books?

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November 8, 2016

As digital devices and access to e-books proliferated in schools and homes over the past several years, some ed-tech experts expected that print books would soon become relics—or at least fall out of favor with a generation growing up in an electronic world.

But, in a wrinkle in the digital revolution, that hasn't transpired—at least not yet.

More children now **know what it's like to read an e-book**—61 percent in 2014 compared with 25 percent in 2010, according to Scholastic's 2015 Kids and Family Reading report.

But most students still opt to turn actual pages. In the Scholastic survey, 65 percent of children ages 6 to 17 agreed they would always want to read in print, up from 60 percent in 2012. And 77 percent who had tried e-reading said that the majority of the books they read were in print. That was especially true for younger readers when reading for pleasure: 84 percent of 6- to 8-year-olds read mostly on paper, compared with 62 percent of 15- to 17-year-olds.

Meanwhile, e-books haven't markedly altered the collections of school libraries. According to a 2015 School Library Journal survey, some **56 percent of school librarians** responded that they now make e-books available to students—but that number was down from the previous year. And the librarians surveyed observed that while students use e-books for school projects and research, many still prefer print books, especially for pleasure reading. Only 6 percent of librarians reported a high interest in e-books from students, while 37 percent called it "moderate," and 50 percent said it was "low."

'Tactile Experience'

Those responses appear to be reflected in e-book sales in children's and young-adult categories. E-book sales for publishers have steadily dropped since 2012, according to the Association of American Publishers' annual survey of 1,800

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publishers in the United States, including the five largest traditional ones. Digital books made up 6.4 percent of annual children's and young-adult revenue sales for book publishers in 2015 (around \$271.8 million), compared with 13.1 percent in 2012.

However, it is worth noting that Amazon.com, the maker of the Kindle and the leading seller in the e-book industry, reported **overall growth in e-book sales in 2015**, according to The Wall Street Journal.

Studies point to a number of reasons why young people may prefer print to e-books, including early familiarity with print books, the "tactile experience" of reading on paper, and **possible advantages in comprehension**, particularly for longer texts.

Indeed, the ability to "toggle" between print and digital for different types of information consumption might be a key aspect of effective literacy today.

"Our teachers are using digital books more than ever before," said Susie Harkey, the media coordinator at Park View Elementary School in Mooresville, N.C. "Students are very familiar with digital content, but I don't think they equate reading with their iPads. They like to have something in hand."

But, as the School Library Journal points out, the next generation of students may add a whole new dimension to reading trends. "The first 'smartphone natives' (born since 2007 when the iPhone was introduced) are now just entering elementary school," the group says in its survey. "Will they have a greater affinity for e-books?"

E-books by the Numbers



Source: School Library Journal