



# Relations among reading motivation, reading amount, and reading comprehension in the early elementary grades<sup>☆</sup>



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## ABSTRACT

In this study, we examined the associations of intrinsic (i.e., involvement-oriented) and extrinsic (i.e., competition-oriented) reading motivation with reading amount and reading comprehension (at the word, sentence, and text level) in a sample of second- and third-grade elementary students ( $N = 1053$ ). Cognitive ability and socioeconomic status were taken into account as control variables. Reading amount was assumed to mediate the relation between reading motivation and reading comprehension. Moreover, the potentially moderating role of gender was explored. Structural equation analyses revealed that *involvement* contributed significantly to reading comprehension, and this relationship was mediated through reading amount. Competition-oriented reading motivation was directly and negatively related with reading comprehension. The predictive contributions of reading motivation were confirmed in an alternative model with text-level comprehension as the dependent variable and both word- and sentence-level comprehension as additional predictors. Finally, gender did not moderate the obtained relations.

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## 1. Introduction

A main objective for the early elementary school years refers to the development of reading competence (Duke & Martin, 2008; Foorman & Connor, 2011). The ability to read constitutes an important prerequisite for learning, and deficits in that ability have considerable consequences for the acquisition of other necessary skills (Kirsch et al., 2002). Therefore, factors influencing reading competence (such as, for example, phonological awareness, reasoning ability, and particular instructional practices) are of importance to educators and researchers alike. As one of these factors, previous studies have identified students' motivation to read (e.g., Baker & Wigfield, 1999; Morgan & Fuchs, 2007; Wigfield & Guthrie, 1997). In particular, there is evidence for a positive association between intrinsic reading motivation and reading comprehension, whereas extrinsic reading motivation has been found to be nonsignificantly or negatively related to comprehension performance (e.g., Andreassen & Bråten, 2010; Wang & Guthrie, 2004; for an overview, see Schiefele, Schaffner, Möller, & Wigfield, 2012).

Theoretically, the relationship between intrinsic reading motivation and reading competence is hypothesized to be mediated through reading amount (Guthrie, Wigfield, Metsala, & Cox, 1999; Wigfield & Guthrie, 1997). Intrinsic readers who enjoy reading are more likely to read in

their spare time. Thus, they practice more often and tend to increase several desirable reading-related outcomes (e.g., automatization of basic reading processes and higher reading self-efficacy). In line with these assumptions, a significant positive relation between reading amount and reading competence has been demonstrated (e.g., Cipielewski & Stanovich, 1992; Cunningham & Stanovich, 1997). However, direct empirical evidence for a mediation effect of reading amount is scarce (McElvany, Kortenbruck, & Becker, 2008; Schaffner, Schiefele, & Ulferts, 2013). In particular, there is a lack of research on the mediating role of reading amount in the early elementary grades.

A further shortcoming of previous research pertains to the neglect of gender as a moderator of the relations among reading motivation, reading amount, and reading comprehension. This is noteworthy because several studies have demonstrated gender differences in reading motivation, reading amount, and reading competence (e.g., Baker & Wigfield, 1999; Logan & Johnston, 2009). Although differences in mean values do not necessarily imply differences in relations among variables, it seems important to determine moderating effects of gender because these may have consequences for programs intending to increase girls' and boys' reading competence.

Referring to the deficits of previous research, the purpose of the current study was to examine the relations among reading motivation, reading amount, and reading comprehension in second- and third-grade elementary students. Thereby, the moderating role of gender was examined. In the following, past research on reading motivation and its relations with reading amount and reading comprehension is reviewed. Based on this review, we then outline the present research questions.

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## 2. Conceptualization and measurement of reading motivation

Quantitative and qualitative studies suggest that reading motivation represents a multidimensional construct that consists of various aspects (e.g., Guthrie, Van Meter, McCann, & Wigfield, 1996; Nolen, 2007; Watkins & Coffey, 2004; Wigfield & Guthrie, 1997). More specifically, reading motivation is defined in terms of an individual's subjective reasons for reading (cf. Schiefele et al., 2012; see also recent reviews on conceptual issues pertaining to reading motivation by Conradi, Jang, & McKenna, 2014, and Unrau & Quirk, 2014). These reasons or incentives are typically categorized as intrinsic or extrinsic reading motivation (Unrau & Schlackman, 2006; Wigfield & Guthrie, 1997). Intrinsically motivated readers read for enjoyment and because they find the process of reading rewarding in itself. In contrast, extrinsically motivated readers read in order to attain some goal that lies beyond the process of reading (e.g., receiving good grades in school).

Although a wide variety of dimensions of reading motivation have been suggested (cf. Schiefele et al., 2012), most researchers have used unitary measures or combined individual dimensions into composite scores of intrinsic and extrinsic reading motivation. Moreover, the majority of previous studies have not offered explicit definitions of reading motivation (Conradi et al., 2014). In our research, we strongly refer to the influential framework of reading motivation by Guthrie and Wigfield and their colleagues (e.g., Guthrie et al., 1999; Wang & Guthrie, 2004; Wigfield & Guthrie, 1997). These authors have based their framework on various motivation theories including expectancy-value theory (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000), self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2002), and self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1997). In addition, Guthrie and Wigfield's framework was informed by a qualitative interview study on third- and fifth-grade students' motivation to read (Guthrie et al., 1996).

In order to measure students' reading motivation, Wigfield and Guthrie (1997) have developed the multidimensional *Motivations for Reading Questionnaire* (MRQ). According to Wigfield and Guthrie, the core dimensions of intrinsic reading motivation are *curiosity* (to learn more about topics of one's interest), *involvement* (to get lost in a story or experience imaginative actions), and *challenge* (preference for difficult or complex reading materials), whereas extrinsic reading motivation includes the dimensions of *grades* (to improve one's grades in school, particularly in reading), *competition* (to reach higher levels of school achievement than other students, particularly in reading), and *recognition* (to get praise for good reading performance). In the process of adapting Wigfield and Guthrie's (1997) MRQ for German secondary students, we had captured the dimensions of *curiosity* and *involvement* as indicators of intrinsic reading motivation, whereas extrinsic reading motivation was specified by *achievement*, *competition*, and *recognition* (Schaffner & Schiefele, 2007; Schaffner et al., 2013). The subscale *achievement* replaced the MRQ scale *grades* and refers to improving one's reading performance instead of improving one's grades in reading or other school subjects. This adaptation seemed necessary because secondary students do not receive reading grades in Germany. The dimension of *challenge* was not included as part of intrinsic reading motivation because it rather represents a possible consequence but not a form of reading motivation. Also, in their analysis of the MRQ, Watkins and Coffey (2004) did not find evidence for *challenge* as a separate factor. By means of confirmatory factor analysis, Schaffner et al. (2013) validated the assumed factorial structure of the resulting instrument. Accordingly, *curiosity* and *involvement* were shown to be indicators of the higher-order factor intrinsic reading motivation, whereas *achievement*, *competition*, and *recognition* were attached to the higher-order factor extrinsic reading motivation. These findings lend support to the composite measures of intrinsic and extrinsic reading motivation as they were suggested by Wigfield and Guthrie (1997).

## 3. Reading motivation and reading comprehension

Previous studies with students beyond third grade have consistently found positive associations between intrinsic reading motivation

and reading comprehension, while extrinsic reading motivation showed negative or no relationships with reading comprehension (e.g., Andreassen & Bråten, 2010; Becker, McElvany, & Kortenbruck, 2010; Law, 2008, 2009; Retelsdorf, Köller, & Möller, 2011; Taboada, Tonks, Wigfield, & Guthrie, 2009; Unrau & Schlackman, 2006; Wang & Guthrie, 2004). These results hold even when controlling for other predictors, such as prior reading competence, verbal ability, and decoding skills (Retelsdorf et al., 2011; Wang & Guthrie, 2004). Pertaining to younger students (below fourth grade), two studies (Hamilton, Nolen, & Abbott, 2013; Law, 2008) have confirmed the assumed negative relation between measures of extrinsic reading motivation and reading comprehension in samples of second-grade students. However, the evidence for significant relations between intrinsic reading motivation and reading comprehension in younger age groups is weak. Specifically, previous studies did not find significant positive relations between intrinsic reading motivation and reading comprehension in first- and second-grade students (Baker & Scher, 2002; Chapman & Tunmer, 1995; Hamilton et al., 2013; Law, 2008; Nurmi & Aunola, 2005). However, for third-grade students, McElvany et al. (2008) reported a significant correlation between intrinsic reading motivation and reading comprehension.

As a possible reason for the failure of past research to find significant relations between intrinsic reading motivation and reading comprehension in elementary students at Grades 1–3, Stutz, Schaffner, and Schiefele (2015) referred to the assessment of intrinsic reading motivation. Specifically, prior studies (e.g., Baker & Scher, 2002; Chapman & Tunmer, 1995; Nurmi & Aunola, 2005) mostly used ad hoc instruments that defined intrinsic reading motivation as liking of reading and were not based on more specific accounts of the nature or dimensions of intrinsic reading motivation (see, however, Hamilton et al.'s, 2013, goal theory approach). Accordingly, Stutz et al. indicated intrinsic reading motivation by a scale capturing *involvement* and observed significant correlations between that scale and various measures of reading comprehension in students at Grades 1–3.

A related issue that may have contributed to the lack of findings with first and second graders refers to the development of suitable self-report measures of motivation for young populations. Specifically, the item word choice, the sentence structure, and the response formats must be developmentally appropriate, and yet, should still be applicable in longitudinal comparisons (Chapman & Tunmer, 1995; Fulmer & Frijters, 2009; Paris & Carpenter, 2004). Furthermore, it can be quite challenging for young children to cognitively process complex items in which motivational constructs are combined with contextual references (Karabenick et al., 2007). Thus, young children often need one-on-one assistance in answering the questions, either because they are not yet able to read well or because the items frequently require clarification (Elliott, 2004). Unfortunately, the field of reading motivation research is marked by a shortage of reliable and valid instruments for use with younger children, which might be in part responsible for the inconclusive findings described above.

## 4. The mediating role of reading amount

Empirical evidence supports the assumption that both intrinsic and extrinsic reading motivation are related to reading amount, and that reading amount in turn contributes to reading competence (cf. Schiefele et al., 2012). More specifically, a variety of studies involving samples of students at fourth grade or higher have shown positive relations between intrinsic reading motivation and reading amount, even when controlling for prior reading achievement, gender, parent's education, and reading efficacy (e.g., Becker et al., 2010; Durik, Vida, & Eccles, 2006; Guthrie et al., 1999; Lau, 2009; Wang & Guthrie, 2004). Positive relations between intrinsic reading motivation and reading amount have been also confirmed for third-grade (McElvany et al., 2008) but not for second-grade students (Baker & Scher, 2002).

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