

Reading-related burnout in upper secondary and university students

Bachelor's thesis

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<p>Tiivistelmä – Abstract</p> <p>Lukemisella on lukuisia hyötyjä, ja suomalaisten on todettu lukevan suhteellisen paljon. Silti monet suomalaiset opiskelijat, jotka ovat olleet ahkeria lukijoita peruskoulussa, menettävät lukuintonsa siirtyessään lukioon ja yliopistoon. Lukemista ja lukemaan oppimista on tutkittu laajalti, samoin kuin koulunkäyntiin liittyvää uupumusta lukio- ja yliopisto-opiskelijoissa, mutta lukemiseen liittyvää uupumusta ei ole tutkittu yhtä kattavasti. Tämän tutkimuksen tarkoitus oli löytää vapaa-ajalla tapahtuvan lukemisen vähentymisen syyt ja tarjota joitakin alustavia ratkaisuja luku-uupumukseen. On tärkeää ymmärtää, mitkä syyt johtavat luku-uupumukseen, koska lukemisella on useita hyötyjä opiskelijoille sekä koulumaailmassa että sen ulkopuolella. Kun luku-uupumuksen syyt ovat tiedossa, sitä on myös helpompaa ehkäistä.</p> <p>Tutkimusta varten haastateltiin viittä suomalaista nuorta aikuista, jotka kaikki olivat kokeneet luku-uupumusta. Haastattelut toteutettiin teemahaastatteluna, jota varten oli etukäteen laadittu lista kysymyksiä, ja data analysoitiin temaattisen analyysin kautta. Haastatteluista nousi esiin neljä hallitsevaa teemaa, jotka olivat: fiktion lukemiseen kohdistuva paine koulutyössä ja valinnanvapauden vähyys, muiden viihteen muotojen kulutus lukemisen sijaan, uusien kirjojen löytämisen vaikeus ja yleinen väsymys. Nämä neljä syytä vaikuttivat lukemisen vähentymiseen.</p> <p>Luku-uupumusta voitaisiin mahdollisesti ehkäistä ja lievittää tarjoamalla opiskelijoille laajemmat valikoimat erilaisia tekstejä lukehtavia varten sekä perustelemalla kattavasti sen, miksi lukehtavia tehdään. Lisäksi kouluissa voitaisiin esitellä opiskelijoille enemmän erilaisia kirjoja ja kirjailijoita, jotta opiskelijoiden olisi helpompi löytää uutta luettavaa. On myös hyvin keskeistä, että opiskelijoiden yleistä hyvinvointia tuetaan ja heidän yksilölliset taitotasonsa otetaan huomioon.</p>	
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1 INTRODUCTION	1
2 THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK.	2
2.1 The benefits of reading fiction.....	2
2.2 Reading skills and motivation.....	4
2.3 Defining student burnout.....	5
3 THE PRESENT STUDY	6
3.1 Research aim and question.....	7
3.2 Data and methods	7
3.3 Ethical aspect.....	9
4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION	10
4.1 The frequency of reading for pleasure before burnout.....	10
4.2 The decrease of reading for pleasure.....	14
4.3 The reasons behind reading burnout.....	15
5 CONCLUSION.....	18
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	20
APPENDIX.....	22

1 INTRODUCTION

Reading fiction has numerous benefits to an individual's mind; for example, it helps us in becoming more empathetic (e.g. Marshall 2020) and keeps our brains active (Yates et al. 2016). Finns are among the most literate people in the world (OECD 2018, as cited in Hanifi 2021: 135). Still, many Finnish students who have been enthusiastic readers in primary and secondary school lose their interest towards reading as they become older (Hanifi 2021: 135). According to Hanifi (2021: 134-135), the most avid readers in their study were 10 to 14-year-old children but reading had decreased in 15 to 24-year-olds. The purpose of this research is to discover what the causes of this phenomenon are.

This research focuses on university students who have experienced a reading-related burnout in upper secondary school or in university, and five people who had firsthand experience of this were interviewed for the study. All of them were native Finnish speakers. Additionally, when discussing reading in this thesis, I am referring to reading fictional texts for pleasure. I chose to research this topic because I myself have experienced a reading-related burnout during upper secondary school and university, and many people whom I know have struggled with it as well, and thus I wanted to discover the reasons behind why this burnout occurs.

There are two hypotheses in this study: firstly, when students become older, their motivation for reading for their own enjoyment decreases because of the larger amount of mandatory reading that they have to do for school. Secondly, their energy is directed towards different activities such as watching TV shows or movies or spending more time on social media instead of reading for pleasure. According to Matikainen (2011: 15, as cited in Hanifi 2021: 133), newer generations are growing up with the increasing presence of media and communications technology. Furthermore, students may experience an overall loss of motivation, which negatively impacts their enthusiasm towards reading for pleasure. According to Parviainen et al. (2021: 232-233), not much is known about the antecedents that precede upper secondary education students' burnout because of a lack of research on the subject. However, school burnout among upper secondary school students is a widespread and alarming issue (Walburg 2014, as cited in Parviainen et al. 2021: 240).

Teachers and other adults play an important role in children's interest and motivation for reading (Lerkkanen et al. 2018: 65). Therefore, it is important to ensure that instructional methods that are being practised in classrooms support students' motivation and maintain their interest to prevent burnout at an older age. Lerkkanen et al. (2018: 64) state that child-centred pedagogical practices that acknowledge the development of children's autonomy, their perception of competence and the social aspects of their lives support children's interest in reading. An example of such practices are educational contexts where children's autonomy is promoted without strict evaluation of their performance (Lerkkanen et al. 2018: 65). Reading for pleasure has many benefits to all students. For example, Howard (2011) reports that researchers have found that students who read recreationally performed better on reading tests. This is why it is important to understand how to support students' interest in reading and help those who are experiencing burnout. Furthermore, when the reasons behind the burnout are understood, preventing it becomes easier.

2 THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

As mentioned in the introduction of this thesis, reading fiction has various benefits which I will explore later in this section. Reading fiction teaches us empathy (e.g. Marshall 2020; Stansfield and Bunce 2014), improves the theory of mind (Kidd and Castano 2013), strengthens the regions responsible for language processing in the brain (Berns et al. 2013) and induces visual and abstract thinking and prevents dementia and other cognitive impairments later in life (Yates et al. 2016).

Reading and teaching to read have been widely studied (e.g. Chambers & Gregory 2006: 101-128; Day 2020: 11-22; Nation 2009: 22-74; Lerkkanen 2018: 69-70; Grabe & Stoller 2013: 129-133), and burnout in upper secondary education and university students has also been researched broadly (e.g. Salmela-Aro & Read 2017: 21-28; Parviainen et al. 2021: 231-245; Salmela-Aro, Savolainen & Holopainen 2009: 1316-1327). However, students' experience with burnout in relation to reading has not been studied as extensively. The present study will examine the connection of these two matters to better understand why reading burnout happens.

2.1 The benefits of reading fiction

Howard (2011) has studied the significance that reading has for young teens, which is a particularly relevant point of view in the framework of my own research. While reading, teens acquire important skills such as self-identification, self-construction and self-awareness, and these abilities help them as they mature (Howard 2011: 53). The teens who had participated in Howard's (2011) research reported that they read recreationally for multiple reasons and valued it as a leisure activity. For example, they read in order to improve their cognitive skills, which benefited them educationally, to gain a better understanding of the world and to learn empathy and to be entertained and to relax (Howard 2011: 49-53).

Reading literary fiction for pleasure in one's early years will most likely have beneficial consequences later in one's life. Students who frequently read for pleasure were found to be more proficient in reading comprehension, have diverse vocabularies and possess better general knowledge than their peers who were not avid readers (Krashen 2004, as cited in Howard 2011: 47). Furthermore, it is possible that recreational reading prepares teens for adult life (e.g. Faulkner 2002, as cited in Howard 2011: 47-48). According to a report on American reading habits by National Endowment for the Arts (2007, as cited in Howard 2011: 47-48), reading for pleasure may aid in becoming employed as employers value reading and writing skills, and therefore avid readers have better career opportunities than those who do not engage in reading regularly.

According to the study conducted by Stansfield and Bunce (2014), reading fiction is related to experiencing cognitive empathy, referring to the ability to comprehend another person's point of view as well as their beliefs and intentions (Blair 2005, as cited in Stansfield and Bunce 2014). Because literary fiction gives the readers a chance to delve into a fictional world through the characters of the story, it provides the readers with many favourable circumstances to develop cognitive empathy (Lodge 2002, as cited in Stansfield and Bunce 2014). Reading literary fiction at an early age has been found to contribute to the development of empathy, which implies that there is a connection between empathising with fictional characters and feeling empathy for real people (e.g. Adrian et al. 2005, as cited in Stansfield and Bunce 2014). Furthermore, reading fiction has been found to enhance the theory of mind, which is the ability to understand that other people have their own beliefs and desires that may not be similar to an

individual's beliefs and desires (Kidd and Castano 2013). This also contributes to experiencing empathy while reading literary fiction. Additionally, Kidd and Castano (2013) mention that reading fiction improves theory of mind more effectively than nonfiction.

Reading fiction also has both short- and long-term effects on the brain. The results of the study done by Berns et al. (2013) suggest that reading improves the functionality of language processing areas of the brain. Furthermore, reading fiction affects the brain through embodied semantics, meaning that the act of reading may cause neural activity that is connected to bodily sensations (Berns et al. 2013). A study conducted by Kåreholt et al. (2011, as cited in Yates et al. 2016) found that mentally stimulating leisure activities, such as reading, correlated considerably with later life cognition. Saczynski et al. (2008, as cited in Yates et al. 2016) reported similar results, stating that regular engagement in such activities was connected to improved memory, processing speed and executive functioning. Additionally, Yates et al. (2016) point out that reading books as a leisure activity leads to a reduced risk of dementia later in life, and therefore it would be beneficial to promote it as a way to maintain cognitive well-being.

2.2 Reading skills and motivation

Grabe and Stoller (2013: 130-131) explain that in order for students to become fluent readers, they need to be able to recognise and process words and phrases quickly, which requires extensive reading, practising fluency and spending time on expanding students' vocabulary in the classroom. Additionally, students should be given the chance to utilise the knowledge that they already have about the language in which they are reading (Grabe and Stoller 2013: 131). Other key factors in developing reading skills include reading for extended periods of time and student motivation (Grabe and Stoller 2013: 131-132).

Stanovich (1986, as cited in Lerkkanen et al. 2021: 65) points out that students' motivation in reading is reportedly linked to the number of texts that they read, which is consecutively connected to their performance in reading. Interest in reading has been found to decrease during the school years (Jacobs et al. 2002, as cited in Lerkkanen et al. 2021: 66) no matter how high the students' motivation for reading was when they started school (e.g. Fredrics & Eccles 2002,

as cited in Lerkkanen (2021: 66). Lerkkanen (2021: 67-68) presents a number of explanations for this decrease; for example, according to Hidi and Renninger (2004, as cited in Lerkkanen 2021: 68), a shortage of support and encouragement may cause the lack of interest. Another possible reason for the decline is inadequate individual attention from teachers (Fredrics & Eccles, 2002, as cited in Lerkkanen 2021: 68). This suggests that more attention and support should be given to students in order to prevent a lack of motivation and the decline of interest. Lerkkanen and Kiuru et al. (2012, as cited in Lerkkanen 2021: 70) found that young students who studied in child-centred classrooms where their individual needs and characteristics were paid more attention to, had a higher interest in reading. Although the present study focuses on upper secondary education students and university students, it is important to recognise that preventing a lack of motivation and burnout when students are young is always easier than tending to troubles caused by inadequate support later.

2.3 Defining student burnout

Salmela-Aro et al. (as cited in Salmela-Aro & Read 2017: 21) define student burnout as a state of emotional exhaustion that is a result of perceived high standards in studies, feelings of inadequacy and developing a negative attitude towards studying. One of the first characteristics of burnout in higher education is chronic exhaustion, which is a consequence of burdensome studies. Even though higher education functions as an important framework in young people's development, burnout in higher education has not been researched extensively (Salmela-Aro and Read 2017: 21). Studies have found that students who have experienced burnout in educational contexts are at risk of being depressed later in life (Salmela-Aro, Savolainen & Holopainen 2009; Salmela-Aro & Upadyadya 2014, as cited in Salmela-Aro & Read 2017: 22).

Parviainen et al. (2021: 231) point out that upper secondary education can be an especially stressful time of life for young people as it involves autonomous study, which may pose new challenges for students, and the need to plan one's future, which students may experience as pressuring. According to Salmela-Aro et al. (2009, as cited in Parviainen et al. 2017: 231), occasional study-related stress is common but experiencing stress for an extended period of time may lead to burnout. Parviainen et al. (2017: 240) found in their study that students who reported to have experienced exhaustion and cynicism (which both are symptoms of burnout) in primary school were more prone to experience similar symptoms in upper secondary education. The symptoms of burnout increase during the school years, starting from primary

school (Engels et al. 2019; Lee & Lee 2018, as cited in Parviainen et al. 2017: 240). The study conducted by Parviainen et al. (2017: 241) showed that many early symptoms that indicate school-related burnout later in life can be seen already in primary school, and students who experience these symptoms in primary school are particularly at a risk of burnout in upper secondary education. Parviainen et al. (2017: 240) emphasise that the early signs of burnout symptoms should be taken seriously already in primary schools because students experiencing these symptoms are at a heightened risk of burnout later in their education.

The emotional and psychological repercussions of school burnout are a central contributing factor in students' possibilities to attend upper secondary education (Virtanen et al. 2021, as cited in Vasalampi et al. 2023). Vasalampi et al. (2023) found that reading achievement, motivation and school burnout have an impact on the choices that students made regarding their educational paths after the Finnish comprehensive school. The students with a higher PISA reading achievement and a positive concept of their own level of literacy were more likely to enter upper secondary school, which is considered to be the more academic educational path; however, they were found to be exhausted (Vasalampi et al. 2023). The students who possessed a lower PISA reading achievement and a negative concept of their level of literacy were inclined to enter vocational school, which is regarded as the vocational path that prepares students for working life (Vasalampi et al. 2023). Conversely, they were found to be more cynical than their peers who attended upper secondary school (ibid.). As stated by Vasalampi et al. (2023), the choices that young people make concerning their educational choices have a significant impact on the following years of their lives, and this is why comprehensive schools should pay close attention to the development of literacy motivation and students' well-being.

3 THE PRESENT STUDY

In this section, I will explain the research aim and the research questions of this study. I will discuss the goals of this research in a general sense and then closely examine the interview questions that I chose for gathering the data. I will also present a theoretical framework concerning the methods that I used to gather and analyse the data.

3.1 Research aim and question

The present study will examine how and why many students experience a reading-related burnout. The research question is as follows: *why do many students, who have been avid readers in primary and secondary school, experience a reading burnout in upper secondary education and university?*

This topic provides an intriguing possibility for research since reading-related burnout in particular has not been widely studied. The answer to the research questions will be found through a set of interview questions that are stated in section 3.2. The interview questions aid in specifying the reasons behind the burnout and what factors make students prone to experiencing a burnout.

3.2 Data and methods

I chose to conduct semi-structured interviews because this method leaves room for the interviewees to elaborate on their experiences while still providing me with a framework of predetermined questions to which I could refer to during the interviews. The semi-structured interview allows for an in-depth exploration of the interviewees' personal life experiences and interests (Denscombe 2014: 186; Curtis and Curtis 2011: 61; DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree, 2006: 315). Even though the interviewer has prepared an agenda of the issues that will be addressed in the interview, the open-ended questions give the interviewee a chance to freely elaborate on their experiences and thoughts (Denscombe 2014: 186-187). Additionally, this method makes it possible for the interviewer to ask follow-up questions to acquire more information, which will help the interviewer understand the issue more comprehensively (Denscombe 2014: 193). Five people, who all had experiences with reading-related burnout in upper secondary education and university, were interviewed for this study. The interviews were conducted face-to-face or held remotely online. The language of all of the interviews was Finnish, and I translated the excerpts from the original transcripts into English.

The interview questions are as follows:

1. *What kind of books did you read in primary and secondary school?*

I wanted to start the interview by asking the interviewees this rather broad question in order to gain an understanding of which books they enjoyed reading in primary and secondary school. This question provided me with extensive answers as the interviewees listed various books as well as often mentioning their favourite genres of fiction; the overall most popular genre was fantasy.

2. How often did you read for your own enjoyment in primary and secondary school?

I chose to include this question to find out how frequently the interviewees read books before suffering from reading burnout. The number of times that they read books for pleasure pre-burnout varied greatly from the number of times that they read post-burnout.

3. How many books did you read per month? A rough estimate is enough. Similarly to the previous question, I asked this question because it was important to discover how drastically the number of books that they read changed as they experienced reading burnout.

4. In what language(s) did you read?

The purpose of this question was to discover in which languages the interviewees preferred to read. Additionally, I asked the interviewees this question to see if they had kept reading in a certain language after having quit reading in another or if they had switched their preferred languages.

4.1 In case you read in English, please specify what kind of books you read, and also how old you were when you started reading in English.

I chose to include this question to tie this research even more closely to my own subject, English.

5. When and why do you think your reading started to decrease?

This is arguably the most important question since it gave the interviewees the chance to reflect on their past experiences related to reading burnout. With this question, I was able to prompt the interviewees to think deeply about their history with burnout, and it provided me with complex answers.

After having conducted the interviews, I proceeded to transcribe the interviews and do qualitative analysis on the data to see if there are common themes among the responses and how the responses relate to previous research. I approached the data from the angle of qualitative analysis, and more specifically, thematic analysis. One of the strengths of qualitative research is that it allows the researcher to ask meaningful questions and receive answers from the participants of the research (Guest, MacQueen and Namey 2012), and this is why thematic analysis and the semi-structured interview method work well together. According to Guest, MacQueen and Namey (2012), thematic analysis is primarily concerned with presenting the participants' experiences accurately and thoroughly, which correlates with the aim of my research; the experiences of my study's participants are the most central matter in understanding reading-related burnout.

I wanted to identify common themes and patterns among the answers and see how they relate to the hypotheses and previous research. Here, an inductive approach was the most useful one in recognising these themes and patterns since it allows the researcher to draw conclusions from identifying different patterns in the data. Qualitative analysis makes it possible for the researcher to understand the interviewees' responses more deeply (Guest, MacQueen and Namey 2012; Galletta and Cross 2013). Furthermore, thematic analysis is well-suited for understanding phenomena such as people's personal experiences (Guest, MacQueen and Namey 2012). I organised the data by coding recurring themes and seeing how they relate to my research question, which will require closely examining the transcripts (Galletta and Cross 2013: 121). Then, I checked to make sure that the transcriptions are accurate; Galletta and Cross (2013: 121) emphasise that this process is essential to building my confidence in analysing the data. Moreover, when data is being extracted from its original source (for example to present excerpts), its authenticity and reliability are obligatory (ibid.).

3.3 Ethical aspect

Before participating in this research, all interviewees were assured that participating in this study was voluntary and that they had the right to stop the interview or withdraw from the research at any time. Before the interviews, they were explicitly informed about this study, its purpose and the research methods. Additionally, they signed an online consent form prior to the interview. I use the gender-neutral pronoun 'they' to refer to the interviewees, as the gender

of the interviewees is not relevant to the research. Furthermore, the interviewees are referred to as A, B, C, D and E to preserve their anonymity, and when the excerpts from the interviews were chosen, I ensured that the interviewees' identities would still remain protected. The recordings of the interviews and their transcripts were transferred to JYU Google Drive where they were protected by the university's data security.

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In the following section, I will present the findings of this research. I have identified three recurring themes from the data through thematic analysis, and I will include excerpts from the research interviews that relate to these themes. The themes are: the frequency of reading for pleasure before burnout, the decrease of reading for pleasure and the reasons behind the burnout as concluded by the interviewees. The last theme will be examined through four subsections, which are: pressure to read fiction in school, other forms of entertainment as distraction, the inability to find new books to read and overall exhaustion. The analysis of the data along with the excerpts will demonstrate how drastically the burnout affected the interviewees and unveil the reasons behind the burnout as they are understood by the interviewees.

4.1 The frequency of reading for pleasure before burnout

All of the interviewees stated that they had been enthusiastic readers from a young age, as can be seen in the excerpts. They all read books with complex language and themes, such as *Lord of the Rings* by J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Chronicles of Narnia* by C. S. Lewis, and Stephen King's horror novels. The students in comprehensive school in Finland are usually 7 to 12 years old, and so reading such books at that age is remarkable. The most common genre that the interviewees read was fantasy.

Example 1:

A: I read a lot of fantasy books and thrillers in primary school, like *Eragon*, *Harry Potter*, *Orrin*, *Lord of the Rings*, *Warrior Cats* and *Nancy Drew*. In secondary school, I read fantasy and dystopia and some horror novels by Stephen King.

Example 2:

B: I read a lot of prose in primary school, sci-fi and fantasy and such. I read through all of the fantasy books in the little local library. [...] I read fantasy in secondary school, but not really much else. I had to read a book by Ilkka Remes against my will [for schoolwork], though.

Example 3:

D: I read all sorts of children's books in primary school, like *Nancy Drew* and *Warrior Cats*. Lots of fantasy, too, and all kinds of nice books that I could find from the library. I read fantasy in secondary school, but also more realistic books.

When asked about the regularity of reading for pleasure in primary and secondary school, all of the interviewees reported to have read at least a few times a week in secondary school but noted that they had trouble remembering the frequency of recreational reading in primary school. A, B and E stated that they did read multiple times a week in secondary school, whereas C and B said to have read daily. E pointed out that when they had more free time on the weekend, they could read an entire book in two days.

Example 4:

A: I read for fun every week in primary school. I read many books at the same time, and I also finished them all.

Example 5:

B: I read multiple times a week [in primary school], I carried 8 or 10 books home from the library weekly. I read about one book per week in secondary school.

As the following excerpts from C and E show, having more free time affected the frequency of reading for pleasure.

Example 6:

C: In the summer, I read throughout the day, from dawn to dusk, because I had more time for it, I did not have a summer job or anything.

Example 7:

E: I read a few times a week, but on the weekend, I could easily read a whole book when I was in primary school.

The number of books that the interviewees read for their pleasure ranged from two or three books to twenty books per month. A said to have read approximately six books in a month in primary school and two in secondary school. According to B, they had read perhaps even twenty to thirty books in a month in primary school and four in secondary school, making them the most avid reader in primary school out of all of the interviewees. D was not sure how many books they had read in primary school but stated that they had read approximately eight books in a month in secondary school. C and E both estimated that they read two or three books per month in primary and secondary school, although C noted that if they were reading a book that they found especially enjoyable, they could easily finish it in a day.

Example 8

B: I read maybe about twenty or thirty books in a month in primary school, pretty much everything that the city library had to offer. There was not a single fantasy book [in the local library] that I had not read.

Example 9:

E: It did vary a lot but let's say two or three [books per month] if we're being careful.

Additionally, A and D reported to have read for personal achievement; A read books that were required for the completion of a reading diploma in primary school, and D monitored the number of books that they read in secondary school. D's goal was to read one hundred books in a year, which they managed to achieve multiple times.

Example 10:

D: The primary school times are a little difficult to remember but I read a couple of books in a week in secondary school. I even kept track of how many I had read. If the maximum number of books that I read per year was one hundred, then I must've read about eight books per month.

Every interviewee had experience in reading in more languages than one; they had all read in both Finnish and English, although none of them mentioned having read in any other languages for recreational purposes. Most of them had started reading in English after completing primary school but before starting upper secondary school, and the books that they read were largely similar to what they were reading in Finnish, and A, B and D mentioned that they had read books in English that they had already previously read in Finnish.

Example 11:

C: I mostly read in Finnish but then when I started learning more English, I started reading in English, too. The books I read in English were similar to what I read in Finnish, fantasy and dystopia, like *Divergent*. [...] I think I was about thirteen or fourteen years old.

Example 12:

B: I read in Finnish until the sixth grade and after that, I read exclusively in English. Books like *Harry Potter* and *Game of Thrones* and *Water for Elephants*.

Example 13:

D: I started [reading in English] with familiar books that I had already read in Finnish, like *Harry Potter* and Terry Pratchett's fantasy novels.

A fascinating occurrence that emerged from the data was that two of the interviewees sometimes found it easier to read in English than in Finnish despite them both being native Finnish speakers. Interviewee B noted that they occasionally understood English texts better than their Finnish translations. They could not give an explanation as to why, but it can be speculated that certain words do not necessarily have a clear translation from English to Finnish, which may cause confusion while reading. Interviewee A also mentioned that reading in English helped them in their attempts to overcome reading burnout.

Example 14:

B: I read Shakespeare, too, and some words [in Shakespeare's works] were easier to understand in English than in Finnish.

Example 15:

A: Reading in English has helped because my comprehension is a little bit more limited, and I've managed to maintain this hobby in English.

Two of the interviewees also mentioned that they read fanfiction (a type of literary fiction that features characters from another form of fictional media, such as a TV series, a film, a book, or a video game). The language in which they read was predominantly English.

Example 16:

E: I started reading fanfiction in secondary school, after starting to watch more TV shows, and it was mostly in English.

Example 17:

B: When my language skills improved, I started reading fanfiction, and it was easier to read [than other forms of literary fiction].

Fanfiction may be easier to read than other types of literary fiction because usually, the reader is already familiar with the characters and their backgrounds as well as the main plot of the work that the fanfiction is based on. Additionally, fanfiction that piques the reader's interest may be less challenging to find than physical books because fanfiction websites, such as Archive of Our Own and Wattpad, provide the user with a variety of filters that can be applied to the user's search as they attempt to find new content to read. Additionally, when reading fanfiction online, the reader can choose between short texts that are easy to digest and more complex texts that may even be longer than a traditional novel.

4.2 The decrease of reading for pleasure

Despite being such enthusiastic readers in primary and secondary school, as the interviewees started upper secondary school, their interest and motivation towards reading decreased rapidly. According to C, D and E, they started experiencing the decrease in interest and motivation at sixteen years old, whereas A noticed that they had started undergoing this when they were eighteen years old. B stated that they had already begun to acknowledge the decrease at thirteen years old in secondary school but they, too, started truly experiencing reading burnout in upper secondary school.

Example 18:

A: I haven't been reading as much since I was eighteen. Apart from a couple of exceptions, like Lovecraft, I often don't finish the books that I've borrowed from the adults' section in the library. Books don't captivate me the way they used to. I don't feel like reading piles of them like I did when I was younger.

Example 19:

D: I think it happened little by little, it's kind of hard to say. But I think that it started going downhill when I was about sixteen, and I haven't really read anything since.

As the excerpts show, the participants were in the age range in which Finnish adolescents study in upper secondary school if that is the educational path that they choose. All of them reported that it was precisely at that time of their lives when the times when they read for pleasure began to decrease.

4.3 The reasons behind reading burnout

In this part, I will proceed to examine the possible reasons for reading burnout through the answers that the interviewees have provided. The four dominant themes that surfaced in the data are: pressure to read fiction for school, other forms of entertainment as distraction, the inability to find new books to read and overall exhaustion. These themes will be analysed in their respective subchapters. Additionally, I will present tentative solutions for preventing reading burnout in schools and improving the conditions of those who experience it.

4.3.1 Pressure to read fiction for school

As students begin studying in upper secondary school, the number of books that they have to read for school increases remarkably; this concerns both fiction and nonfiction. Interviewees A, C and E stated that having to read books that did not interest them for schoolwork impacted negatively their reading motivation. Furthermore, the overall workload that they faced in upper secondary school caused recreational reading to decrease.

Example 20:

A: One of the reasons is that I had to read books that didn't interest me at all for upper secondary school, and being pushed to read Finnish classics killed my inspiration [for reading].

Example 21:

C: The courses we had in upper secondary school were longer compared to those we had in secondary school, and we also had to read a lot more. We had to read prose that didn't interest me, and it caused my reading motivation to collapse. For example, if we had to write about [...] a book in secondary school, we often got to choose it ourselves, but in upper secondary school we only had a few books to choose from.

Example 22:

E: There was a lot more reading that we had to do for homework in upper secondary school that I had no energy to read in my free time.

As can be seen from interview excerpts, the lack of freedom of choice had a negative effect on reading motivation. Perhaps schools could offer a wider range of options when it comes to novels that students are required to read for assignments or allow students to choose them more freely. It would also be beneficial to explicitly tell students why certain books should be read for schoolwork and what they are expected to learn from an assignment or from reading a specific novel. Additionally, the students' level of literacy should also be taken into account when planning reading assignments; students with a higher level of literacy could be provided with more complex books, whereas those with weaker reading skills would have the chance to read simpler, less challenging books.

4.3.2 Other forms of entertainment as distraction

Interviewees D and E noted that as they became older, other forms of entertainment, such as watching TV shows or films, browsing social media or listening to music, replaced reading as a pastime activity. According to interviewee E, visual entertainment (such as TV shows) was easier to receive, and reading felt like it required more effort.

Example 23:

D: Maybe I didn't really have time to read in upper secondary school but also other types of entertainment replaced it, for example I spent a lot more time on the computer.

Example 24:

E: Maybe TV shows started to be more interesting to me and films took more of my time [...] and I preferred to listen to music and I moved onto visual entertainment.

Students could potentially be encouraged to arrange time for recreational reading; for example, they could be advised to try reading ten minutes per day and gradually increase the time. Additionally, they could also be made aware of the various benefits of reading that have also been discussed previously in this thesis, which might give them motivation to read.

4.3.3 The inability to find new books to read

A notable theme that was identified in the data was that some participants struggled to find new books to read after they had “outgrown” children’s books and young adult fiction. Interviewees A and D both explained that shifting from children’s books and young adult fiction was challenging – if not impossible – for them because they could not be sure where to start, or if the quality of the new books was up to their standards.

Example 25:

A: Adults’ books rarely offer what I’m looking for. I can’t empathise with the protagonists of adults’ novels, and the topics often feel unpleasant, and they don’t offer the escapism that I want from books.

Example 26:

D: I got tired of young adult series, but it was more difficult to move on to adults’ books because I didn’t know where to start. There’s a lot of variation in adults’ books.

Interviewee A pointed out that they have become rather critical towards books after educating themselves on the principles of good writing. They explained that because they have less time for reading, they do not want to waste their time reading a book that does not satisfy them.

Example 27:

A: I often ask too much of them. I become disappointed when a book doesn’t meet my expectations or continuously breaks the principles of good writing – things that I wasn’t aware of as a child.

These excerpts raise the question of if it is necessary for one to move on from young adult fiction to fiction written for adults if the latter does not satisfy its reader; it is more important to read novels or other texts that one finds fulfilling recreational reading is most often done for pleasure, after all. However, schools (especially upper secondary schools) could potentially provide their students with knowledge about various genres and authors, which could work as a foundation for finding new, interesting novels to read.

4.4.4 Overall exhaustion

The final theme that surfaced from the interview data was overall exhaustion in terms of schoolwork, which had a detrimental effect on reading for pleasure. Both B and E mentioned that they were exhausted because of schoolwork.

Example 28:

B: I was thirteen when I first noticed it [the reading burnout] and I was tired and going through an overall burnout. I read maybe two books per year in upper secondary school, I didn't even read the books that were required for coursework.

It is vital that the mental health of students is taken into consideration in schools. Students should be provided accessible mental health services, and teachers should pay close attention to building a positive atmosphere in the classroom that not only supports learning but also enhances school satisfaction, starting at the first grade of comprehensive school.

5 CONCLUSION

The results of this study will hopefully improve the understanding of reading-related burnout in students and possibly help teachers comprehend their students' behaviour, especially if I choose to do further research on this issue in my Master's Thesis. Even though reader burnout has not been widely researched, it is still an occurrence that affects many students, which is

why it should be studied more in order to prevent it from happening and to offer support to students who are affected by it. It was deduced from the data that factors such as the lack of freedom of choice in reading materials and overall exhaustion in regard to schoolwork made students more prone to reading-related burnout. According to Parviainen et al. (2021: 240), the later years of primary school and the early years of secondary school can be considered as a pivotal time for school burnout prevention. In Finland, the completion of upper secondary education is often a prerequisite for accessing higher education and entering the working life (Vasalampi et al. 2023). If students struggle with burnout, whether it is reading-related or generalised, it is likely to have far-reaching consequences.

The results of the study correlate with my hypotheses: as can be concluded from the data, students' motivation for reading does indeed decrease because of the compulsory readings in school, and reading is replaced by other forms of entertainment as students become older. Reading for pleasure supports lifelong learning by contributing to the development of one of its core skills, multiliteracy (Finnish National Board of Education 2023). Furthermore, it is important to consider the benefits of reading not only in the context of academia but also in other aspects of life.

Like all studies, this one also had a few limitations. First, the number of participants was small with only five participants, although all of the data that was gathered from them was useful and relevant. Additionally, it would have been interesting to include a narrative of those students that have attended a vocational school or a university of applied sciences. This research offers intriguing possibilities for future studies; for example, it could be fruitful to research if students who have stopped reading in Finnish continue reading for pleasure in another language, such as English.

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APPENDIX

Interview questions

1. What kind of books did you read in primary and secondary school?
2. How often did you read for your own enjoyment in primary and secondary school?
3. How many books did you read per month? A rough estimate is enough.
4. In what language(s) did you read
 - 4.1 In case you read in English, please specify what kind of books you read, and also how old you were when you started reading in English.
5. When and why do you think your reading started to decrease?