



A Study of Factors Motivating Vietnamese High School Students to Read *Harry Potter*

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Abstract

The overarching question of this descriptive and interpretive study was “What motivated Vietnamese students to read the Harry Potter series as well as other fantasy novels?” This study used the reader response theory as the method to understand reading interests, habits, and attitudes of Vietnamese high school students. The participants were 50 students who were in Grade 10 at Nguyen Viet Hong High school, Can Tho City, Vietnam. Data were gathered by means of questionnaires and interviews. The results of this study showed that the students who read Harry Potter were different from the general population of Vietnamese students in many ways: they preferred reading adventure and fantasy, and for pleasure more frequently, and were more likely to perceive themselves as having strong reading skills. Factors identified as initially motivating this group to read Harry Potter were predominantly from friends most often identified as encouraging them to join them in the experience. Continued motivation to read fantasy novels was largely found to be intrinsic in nature with personal associations and emotional attachments between readers and the characters.

Keywords: *Harry Potter, Reader response, Fantasy, Reading habit, Nguyen Viet Hong High school*

1. Introduction

The past few years have been very good for authors of fantasy, especially in the myth area. There are more books, short stories and series targeting fantasy readers than ever before. Back in the day, fantasy would be bundled as a subset of science fiction and there were fewer titles to read. Readers only had few choices from the earliest myths and legends such as the Arabian Nights stories, Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, Lord Byron’s *Manfred*, Mary Shelly’s *Frankenstein* or Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*. Now entire shelves are devoted to fantasy, and if you look at the most popular books in the teen section over the past few years, many of them are fantasy (think of the works of JRR Tolkien, C.S.Lewis, J.K. Rowling, Rick Riordan and Christopher Paolini). It is no secret that bestselling books tend to come from this popular genre. If you look back at the top grossing bestselling books since 2012, you will see the overlap: *Harry Potter*, *Twilight*, and the *Hunger Games*. Moreover, series which are not popular by themselves but have a big impact on films and television shows such as *Game of Thrones* or *True Blood* are also based on the fantasy genre.

This new type of bestsellers has sold in larger quantities than the previous bestsellers in the last two decades. Although they have created cultures and languages that have had very little in common with those of the original intended audience. They have spread like a virus, and it is hard to go anywhere in the world where these books have not known and at least some people have read them, either in translation or in English. The typical example of these kinds of books is the *Harry Potter* series. Its title exploded throughout the world very quickly, spinning off movies along with collectibles and toys that are sold in ordinary shops and even as high end products in Amazon.

The reason that fantasy (in the case of *Harry Potter*) is so popular for Vietnamese students is that they offer escapism from school into a different realm. If you are reading about elves or magic then the worries of homework or examinations are forgotten and everyone can let their imagination run wild. This is probably the reason that fantasy is such a broad category and unites almost everyone, from students to those just starting to read, or to take an interest in films. A number of scholarly research studies have attempted to



explain why this series of books became so popular and what has motivated so many young readers to read them. Over 800 peer-reviewed essays on the subject of Harry Potter have been published; however, very few of these included noteworthy focus on young readers and their response to Harry Potter. While each of these studies strove to contribute to better understanding the appeal of the Harry Potter series for young readers, practically all of the conclusions were constructed from adult perceptions of young readers' responses rather than derived from descriptions of reading experiences from young readers themselves. Sales demonstrate these books are popular, but the question remains: why do young readers think this series of books motivated them to read?

This study explored the influence of fantasy genre in the case of the Harry Potter books on Vietnamese high school students. Explanations developed using responses drawn from the young readers themselves provide greater understanding of the reading interests and motivations of young readers than documented in previously existing explanations for Harry Potter's appeal.

Literature reviews

Genre

Genre is a term of literary theory which tends to be defined again and again in every work of literary theory. Etymologically, the word genre comes from French genre (kind, sort) having its roots in Old French gender and Latin genus. In English, the term genre was not widely used in the literary theory and criticism until the beginning of 20th century. Literary kind was expressed by the term species. In the most general view, a genre is a type of text classified by the given formal elements (Montgomery, 1992). However, these elements are not exactly stated, and the boundaries between the genres are blurred. Thus, it is almost impossible to provide a text which is a pure embodiment of a particular genre.

Montgomery (1992) summarizes the basic terms of the literary theory necessary for advanced reading skills; see a genre as an expression of conventional agreement and a simplifying label. They also pose the question whether it is only the formal elements themselves which classify the text in terms of the genre. Their answer to this question can be the genre classification working on the basis of formal arrangement (e.g. sonnets), as well as theme (e.g. pastoral), mode of address (e.g. letter, ode), and attitude or anticipated response (e.g. elegy, war poetry).

After mentioning the list of the classificatory approaches, the article provides the definition of the genre of a literary work is also influenced by the text's intelligibility because genre label creates readers' and critics' expectations as well as the interpretative assumptions. Apparently, definition and classification of the genre of the literary work are not straightforward matters. There is variety of theories of genres and each of them can treat the issue from a different point of view. Even though there are such obvious obstacles in the area of literary genres, a genre analysis is one of the frequent principles of literary criticism. It attempts to summarize the roots of the genre as well as its development. It should include sources which were of a particular importance to the concrete genre throughout the history and it should be able to trace the elements and features typical for the genre structure.

The Fantasy Genre

Fantasy is a difficult genre, as scholars have been for years, and are still discussing definitions. The term has been the matter of constant critical speculation, there is no agreement on a precise definition (Clute & Grant, 1997). And that is quite understandable; fantasy has expanded through modern times, and is still evolving, where sub-genres are created and cross each other. The researcher will here try to make the definitions clearer and to place fantasy in a bigger literary setting.

"Fantasy, as a literary genre, is composed of works in which non-rational phenomena play a significant part" (Boyer et.al, 1979). This means that the events, in some cases places and beings, could not have taken place or could not exist according to our reality and does not apply to our natural laws. Fantasy is a genre that one places under one big umbrella called non-realistic literature, the other umbrella is realistic literature. In realistic literature the world is just like the one we live in, according to our natural



laws. The world's past and presence is an exact copy of our reality. What we read in realistic literature could have been real; it would not break with our view of reality. Non-realistic literature has that break with our view of reality: something we know cannot or will not happen. In this type of literature magic and mythical creatures are just as natural as the Internet and horses are to us. The non-rational phenomena are a natural part of the laws in non-realistic literature. Fairytales, fables, legends and myths are other sub genres of fantastic literature, and fantasy has borrowed many traits from the other genres, from structure, magic and strange beings.

Other genres that are related to fantasy are science fiction, magical realism, horror, to mention some. Here we also find the presence of non-rational phenomena's, but the difference is that the non-rational phenomena have a logical explanation (Boyer et.al, 1979). In dream visions, the explanation can be the sleeping minds dreams, or the unconscious in work of someone in a coma. Science fiction is in many ways close to fantasy, but in this case the reality is something that can become reality. The realities and the worlds of science fiction can be possible in the future; they can be the result of research, discoveries and man-made scientific inventions (Boyer et al, 1979).

The fantasy genre is a genre that is not static, as it keeps on developing, and this might be the reason for why it is hard to make accurate definitions and the constant expanding of the jungle of sub genres and sub-sub genres in fantasy.

Reader response theory

Over the past eighty years, numerous scholars have developed theories about how to analyze the response of readers to literary works. These theories were developed to facilitate a move away from the more narrow text-based analysis of literary meaning and to account for the role of readers as well as the author. Reader response theory allows consideration of various elements that may impact responses: the text itself, the reader, the impact of other readers, as well as interactions with other readers. As a literary theory, reader response is not a unified concept but rather a term for a variety of positions held together only by their concern with "what goes on in the mind of the reader when he or she picks up and peruses a book" (Wright, 1995) or their association with any area of investigation focused on "the words reader, the reading process, and response" (Tompkins, 1981).

Reading Motivation

The Role of Intrinsic Motivation

Intrinsic motivation, which comes from internal desires, interests, and experiences, has long been established as integral to reading motivation and engagement. Most reading experts believe that intrinsic motivation, as opposed to extrinsic or external motivation, is imperative to lifelong reading. When viewed from a reading perspective, intrinsic motivation refers to an individual participating in reading for its own sake, enjoying the knowledge constructed from text, and being disposed toward engaging (Guthrie & Wigfield, 1999), or one might say the motivated reader is interested in what he or she is reading. An engaged reader is one who reads for intrinsic reasons. "Engaged readers seek to understand; they enjoy learning and they believe in their reading abilities" (Guthrie, 2001). Schiefele (1991) found that college students who were interested in what they were reading had higher reading comprehension and learned more than students with similar reading abilities but a lower level of interest in the materials. Interest in what is being read is therefore an essential component of reading motivation. Motivational factors related to interests include reading preference and self-efficacy, terms that are explicated below.

Reading Interests, Preferences, and Self-Efficacy

The difference in what children want to read versus what they actually do read is reflected in studies of reading interests and reading preferences. Sturm (2003) drew on Spangler's definitions (1983) in order to clarify how reading interests differ from reading preferences. Personal interest, considered one of multiple motivational processes by Guthrie and Wigfield (1999), is described as an individual's valuing and associating in a positive way with topics contained in texts. Self-efficacy refers to people's beliefs about their capabilities to carry out actions required to achieve a confident level of achievement (Bandura, 1993).



Self-efficacy is linked to motivational beliefs like interest, value, and utility, as well as positive affective reactions. Collectively, these characteristics of self-efficacy demonstrate a relationship between self-efficacy and academic performance. Studies have shown that learners' self-efficacy enhances their motivation and advances learning (Bandura, 1993; Wigfield, 1997; Zimmerman & Martinez-Pons, 1990).

The factors make Harry Potter a worldwide bestseller

There have always been best sellers since the beginning of the book industry starting with the era of the hand press (Steinberg, 2005). In the modern era, major commercial publishing houses have to depend on bestsellers for the majority of their profit (Greco, Rodriguez & Wharton, 2007). Research has shown 7 out of 10 front list books actually lose money, 2 out of 10 break even and only 1 book in 10 is that big hit that covers the cost of the losses of the rest (Greco, Rodriguez & Wharton, 2007).

As of 2008, the Harry Potter series has sold over 400 million copies worldwide and has been translated into 67 languages (Dammann, 2008). When Harry Potter and The Order of The Phoenix was released, Borders, Barnes & Noble and Walmart combined sold more than 1,966,000 copies in the first week ("Phoenix sales remain strong" Publishers Weekly, 2003). The global sales for Harry Potter and The Order of The Phoenix on the first day alone are estimated at 6.8 million (Gunelius, 2008). This peaked with Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows at 11 million sales on the first day (Gunelius, 2008).

The Good Story

The first element is the inability of the reader to compete with the main characters (Tucker, 1999). Readers are reading books for entertainment. The reader will not be entertained if the hero in the book makes them feel stupid about themselves or belittles them with their actions in the story. In Harry Potter, the inability to compete is very clear. Harry Potter and the other characters in the book excel in magic, something that does not exist in the real world. This means that readers can enjoy the success of Harry Potter and other characters without feeling that they would fail at that same activity. Certain characters who are known as the smart ones or super good students do not offend readers in the same way because their success is not possible in the reader's real life. The second element is that the reader feels as if he is part of a secret (Tucker, 1999). In Harry Potter it is being part of this secret wizard world. The reader is given a glimpse of this secret world, which exists alongside the normal world, and is allowed to participate. In most other fantasy genre books the entire world is a magical world such as books by J. R. R. Tolkien and George R. R. Martin. In the Harry Potter books, the magical world is a sub-culture in our own world that normal people do not know about. The reader is allowed in on the secret and they feel that they are part of the world of high art and Catholic power (Drummond, 2006). The last element for a successful book is the reader's desire to feel that they fit in and belong with their group or friends (Drummond, 2006). This ties directly into opinion leadership theory which has found that that opinion leaders, an active media user who is considered an expert, has more effect on what people purchase or consume than professional marketing (Elihu, 1956). If an opinion leader says a book is good and should be read people are more likely to read it. When multiple opinion leaders emphasize this point then non-opinion leaders in that area will want to read it more.

Fantasy elements

Rowling somehow struck the perfect balance in terms of detailing the nuances of her fictional world while at the same time managing to avoid over-loading the readers with thousands of facts and figures. The magic is rooted in science with their precise wand movements, the way the curses and spells are uttered and the emotional state involved. All the spells have names that are creative and yet have a meaning, rooted in a language other than English which indicate the effect they have.



Magical creatures

Magical creatures are a colorful aspect of the fictional "wizarding world" contained in the Harry Potter series by J. K. Rowling. Throughout the seven books of the series, Harry and his friends come across many of these creatures on their adventures, as well as in the Care of Magical Creatures class at Hogwarts. Rowling has also written *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them*, a guide to the magical beasts found in the series. Many of these are derived from folklore, primarily Greek mythology, but also British and Scandinavian folklore. Many of the legends surrounding mythical creatures are also incorporated in the books. "Children ... know that I didn't invent unicorns, but I've had to explain frequently that I didn't actually invent hippogriffs," Rowling told Stephen Fry in an interview for BBC Radio 4. "When I do use a creature that I know is a mythological entity, I like to find out as much as I can about it. I might not use it, but to make it as consistent as I feel is good for my plot" (BBC, 2005).

Magical objects

A magical object is one which is inherently magical in and by itself, whereas an enchanted item is one which has been intervened to become magical. In other words, does the Harry Potter universe have both enchanted things (a normal object with a spell on it) and magical things (objects that are innately magical)? For example, a magic fire-sword that can throw fire in people's faces is magical, but a normal sword that is enchanted so it is burning and able to throw fire in people's faces (my new favorite spell) is enchanted.

The Ministry of Magic

The Ministry of Magic is the government of the Magical community of Britain in J. K. Rowling's Harry Potter series. First mentioned in *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, the Ministry makes its first proper appearance in *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*. Throughout the books, it is generally depicted as either corrupt, incompetent, or both, with its high officials blind to actual events and dangers. It reaches a nadir of corruption before being effectively taken over by Lord Voldemort. At the end of the final book, following Voldemort's death, Kingsley Shacklebolt takes over the ministry, and likely de-corrupts the ministry, changing it for the better.

Hogwarts

Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, shortened to Hogwarts, is a fictional British school of magic for students aged eleven to eighteen, and is the primary setting for the first six books in J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter series (Cleave, 1999). Rowling has suggested that she may have inadvertently taken the name from the *Hogwarts* plant (*Croton Capitatus*), which she had seen at Kew Gardens some time before writing the series, (Renton, 2001) although the names "The Hogwarts" and "Hogwart" appear in the 1954 Nigel Molesworth book *How To Be Top* by Geoffrey Willans. Hogwarts School was voted as the 36th best Scottish educational establishment in a 2008 online ranking, outranking Edinburgh's Loretto School. According to a director of the Independent Schools Network Rankings, it was added to the schools listing "for fun" and was then voted on (Rowling, 2013).

Quidditch

Quidditch is a competitive sport in the WIZARDING World of Harry Potter, featured in the series of novels and movies. Matches are played between two teams of seven players riding flying broomsticks, using four balls: a Quaffle, two Bludgers, and a Golden Snitch. Six ring-shaped goals are situated atop poles of different heights, three on each side of the pitch. It is an extremely rough but very popular semi-contact sport, played by wizards and witches. In the WIZARDING World of the Harry Potter universe, Quidditch has a fervent fan following. Harry Potter plays an important position for his house team at Hogwarts: he is the Seeker and becomes the team captain in his sixth year at school. Regional and international Quidditch competitions are mentioned throughout the series. In *Goblet of Fire*, Quidditch at Hogwarts is cancelled for the Triwizard Tournament, but Harry and the Weasleys attend the Quidditch World Cup. In addition, Harry uses his Quidditch skills to capture a golden egg from a kind of dragon called the Hungarian Horntail (in



the first task of the Tri-Wizard Tournament), to capture a flying key in *Philosopher's Stone*, and on two vital occasions in *Deathly Hallows* - getting hold of Ravenclaw's Diadem and during the final fight with Voldemort - Harry's Quidditch skills prove extremely useful. Harry has owned two broomsticks, the Nimbus 2000 and the Firebolt, both of which are lost by the series' end. His Nimbus 2000 is destroyed by the Whomping Willow in *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* and his Firebolt is lost in *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*.

Spells

Spells in *Harry Potter* occur in the fictional wizarding world of the series of books by author J. K. Rowling. Magic spells are used by many of the characters to achieve useful effects without the benefit of modern technology. The main depiction of a "spell" in the *Harry Potter* books consists of a gesture made with the character's wand, combined with a spoken or mental incantation. In the books and the associated film series, the names of the majority of these spells or the incantations used to affect them are derived from the classical languages, particularly Latin (Langford, 2007). These phrases are not grammatically correct in any language; most of them use words resembling Latin ones of appropriate meaning, but are not proper Latin themselves.

Related studies on the factors motivating readers to read *Harry Potter*

"What has Harry Potter Done for Me?" – The research of Steve Dempster on how the books have changed young British attitudes to reading.

This research reports findings from a small-scale focus-group study funded by the British Academy. Drawing on Herbert Marsh and Richard Shavelson's notion of "Intrinsic Motivation" and David Barton and Mary Hamilton's view of literacy as context-specific social practices, the authors examine what young British *Harry Potter* enthusiasts perceive as the influence of the novels on their subsequent reading behavior and academic development. Specifically, they consider whether these children feel that *Harry Potter* has helped improve their literacy skills after reading them. The researcher found that *Potter* books were a major contributor to both reader's self-identification and their wider literacy development. The most striking change the subjects reported was the confidence and motivation to try more challenging books or more books in general. Pupils who persevered with the series considered it a positive achievement, which potentially heightened their Intrinsic Motivation. Readers thus know that reading *Harry Potter* has benefitted their reading; and moreover, they gain emotional payoffs such as pride and confidence in their abilities. These can motivate them towards further reading and trying more complex texts, which may subsequently result in higher attainments in school literacy activities.

The positive findings of this study must be seen as part of a bigger picture, in which many British children read *Harry Potter* but lack the motivation or interest to continue with the series beyond the first book. Furthermore, the data suggests that around 50% of children have not read *Harry Potter* at all, and thus have not been able to benefit from the books. However, focus group data of *Harry Potter* enthusiasts suggest that the series can have a positive effect in changing children's attitudes towards reading and their motivation on reading.

"Growing Up with Harry Potter: What Motivated Youth to Read?" – A research of Colette L.

Drouillard.

The goal of this research project was identification of factors of young readers report as motivating them to read *Harry Potter* and development of themes in order to expand current knowledge. The focus of this study was young readers who grew up in the United States, were born between 1984 and 1990, began reading *Harry Potter* between the ages of 8 and 13 and continued reading the series as the books were published until they had read each of the seven books one or more times. The selection of readers between 8 and 13 years old when the first book was published in 1998 and between 18 to 23 years of age when the seventh book was published in 2007 roughly parallels the age of the characters in Rowling's series. A purposive sample of 671 readers who responded to a request posted on three online discussion forums



completed a web-based survey with results clarified or expanded via semi-structured interviews. The members of this unique-in-time group were born between 1984 and 1990 (18 to 24 years old at the time of the study), grew up in the United States, began reading the Harry Potter before 2000 and read each book as the series was published. The questionnaire administered during Phase One of this mixed methods explanatory model approach addressed the relationship of young readers who grew up with Harry Potter and the factors these readers identified as impacting their motivation to continue reading Rowling's series during the 10 years the books were published. The quantitative and qualitative results of the Phase One influenced the questions asked during Phase Two guided selection of the most appropriate subjects to interview. Phase Two utilized semi-structured qualitative interviews to more fully explore themes and data derived during analysis of Phase One data.

Findings of this study have several potentially important implications for theory and practice. This study substantiates the validity of reader response theory as a method to understand reading interests, habits, and attitudes of youth. This enables the ability to extend the scope of reading interest research. Finally, this study documents intrinsic motivation as more important than extrinsic motivation, at least in enthusiastic readers. Extrinsic motivators attracted new readers, but the magnitude of intrinsic factors on motivation to continue reading brings into question the widespread and often controversial use of extrinsic motivators for all children in school settings

Research question

The following research question guided the study: what are the general reading interests, habits, and attitudes towards reading of Vietnamese high school students who participated in this study? What factors do these types of readers identify as initially attracting them to Harry Potter? And what factors do they identify as motivating them to continue to read other fantasy novels?

2. Objectives

The goal of this research project was to identify the factors Vietnamese high school students report as motivating them to read Harry Potter and to develop themes in order to expand current knowledge and understanding of their reading interests, habits and attitudes. The specific aims of this study were to identify the general reading interests, habits, and attitudes towards reading of Vietnamese high school students who participated in this study, to identify initial factors that attract Vietnamese high school students to Harry Potter series and to identify factors motivating them to continue to read other fantasy novels.

3. Materials and Methods

This study was carried out with the participation of 50 Nguyen Viet Hong high school students who were in Grade 10 in Can Tho City, South Vietnam, in the Lower Mekong Delta Region. Their ages ranged from 15 to 17 years old. The study took place during the first semester of the academic year 2016-2017.

Research design

This study employed both qualitative research and quantitative research.

Research instruments

Questionnaire: Questionnaire was used to collect information about what factors of the Harry Potter series make it so popular with Vietnamese high school students. Specifically, the questions focus on whether these students feel that Harry Potter has helped improve their literacy skills and whether they think the books have changed their attitudes to reading. There are two questionnaires in total and both of them were designed into parallel languages: English and Vietnamese to ensure that participants could completely comprehend. These questionnaires are divided into three parts: A, B and C. Part A consists of four items regarding background information of respondents such as gender and age. Part B contains items aiming to



investigate the respondents' reading experiences on Harry Potter. Finally, part C defines the respondents' reading behavior for further fantasy books.

Interviews: Besides the questionnaire, the interview was the second data gathering instrument which was used in this research to investigate what factors of the Harry Potter series make it so popular with Vietnamese high school students. The researcher designed a list of questions for the interview with the number of 3 questions which were based on students' perception about subsequent reading behavior and academic development. Interviews were conducted in Vietnamese and then translated into English for analysis. There are 7 out of 50 participants who had taken part in the questionnaire and were accidentally chosen to answer the interview.

Summary of main questions for interview

1. Please describe the primary reason(s) you decided to read more books in the Harry Potter series.
2. In what ways did this impact your experience reading this series?
3. In what ways did your motivation or approach to reading Harry Potter change after you read the series?

Data collection procedure

Questionnaire

Totally, Nguyen Viet Hong High school had 360 students in Grade 10 which was divided into 6 classes from 10A1 to 10A6. According to Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2012), when the study population is under 500, the researcher can take samples from 40 – 43 for a reliability of 90% and from 46 – 49 for a reliability of 95%. Therefore, this thesis took the number of 50 samples in order to make the data analysis easy. In addition, this was a control experiment in which the researcher only asked for students who had read all of the seven books in Harry Potter series. By questioning some details in the series which only readers who had actually read can answer, the study sorted the population until the sample reached the needed number. 50 copies of questionnaires were distributed to participants and taken back by the researcher. On the cover page, the participants were informed about the thesis and the aim of this study and also provided with instructions to complete the questionnaire. In responding to questions, the participants were requested to answer all the questions on the questionnaire during their 10 – 15 minute break times in class under the observation of the researcher.

Interviews

In the second step, interviews were conducted to collect additional information on high school students. Setting of the interviews depends on interviewees' desire. Seven interviewees were randomly chosen from the volunteered students. Before carrying out the interview, interviewees were informed of the research and its purpose. The answer to the interview questions were written down using stenography by the researcher.

4. Results and Discussion

Results of quantitative data

Demographics: A total of 50 survey responses were received with 50 submitted by subjects meeting the research criteria: Vietnamese high school students who were studying in Grade 10 at Nguyen Viet Hong high school; aged between 15 and 17; read each of the seven books at least one time (*Figure 1*).

Age: The age data showed a clear number (*Figure 1*), with students aged 16 take the most part of the survey. The reason is that 16 years old is the common age of Grade 10.

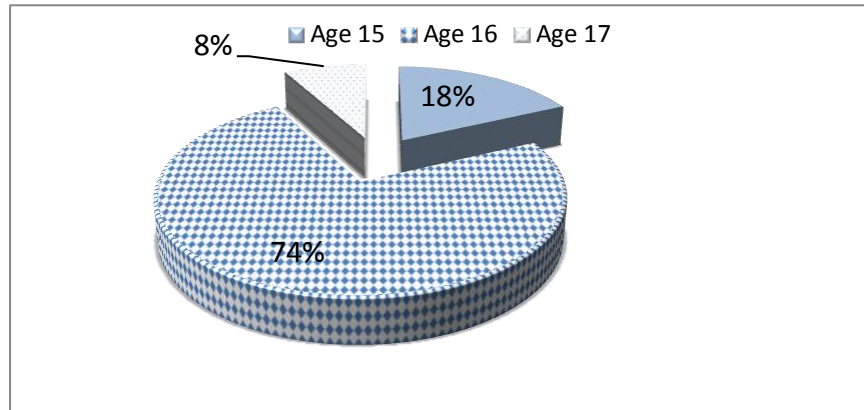


Figure 1 The age of Harry Potter survey subjects

Sex of subject: In this study, females were more than twice as likely as males to have read the Harry Potter series and respond to this survey. A total of 50 responses were received with “Male” selected by 16 subjects (32%) and “Female” by 34 subjects (68%).

Attitudes toward reading

The readers who submitted responses for this survey were very likely to perceive themselves as having strong reading skills. Approximately three-quarters of the subjects (39 or 78 %) identified themselves as being above average readers and with only 1 (2%) identifying themselves as poor readers (*Figure 2.*)

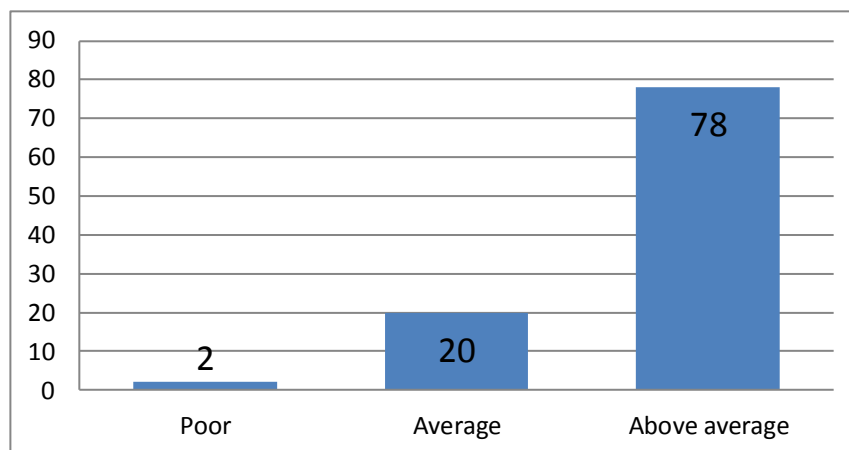


Figure 2 Perceived reading ability of Harry Potter study readers

In Table 1, when asked to identify, the person that first told them about Harry Potter subjects identified parents and family 18 (36%) times, with friends identified 14 (28%) times, book store employee 11 (22%) times and teachers 7 (14%) times.

**Table 1** The person first introduced the reader to Harry Potter series

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Teacher	7	14.0	14.0	14.0
Friends	14	28.0	28.0	42.0
Parents	18	36.0	36.0	78.0
Book store employee	11	22.0	22.0	100.0
Total	50	100.0	100.0	

Attitudes, in Table 2, towards reading were further explored using questions adapted from the previously discussed instruments used to assess child, adolescent and adult reading motivation (Gambrell, et al., 1996; Pitcher, et al., 2007; Schutte & Malouff, 2007) to assess self-concept as a reader and value of reading.

Table 2 Attitudes toward reading

Question asked and aspect of reading evaluated (self-concept or value of reading)	Very Often	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Reading a book was something I like to do (Value of Reading)	25	14	6	2	3
Reading a book not required for school is something I do almost every day (Value of Reading)	19	16	10	4	1
My friends thought I was a very good reader (Self-Concept as Reader)	22	10	16	2	0
I think I read a lot better than my friends (Self-Concept as Reader)	7	15	24	1	3
My close friends thought reading was fun (Value of Reading)	21	21	8	0	0
I told my friends about good books I read (Value of Reading)	12	2	24	8	4
I liked to talk to my friends about what I was reading (Self-Concept as Reader)	27	5	1	10	7

From Table 3, the self-concept as readers and values of reading were further considered specifically as related to reading Harry Potter.

Table 3 Attitudes toward reading Harry Potter books

Question asked and aspect of reading evaluated (self-concept or value of reading)	Very Often	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
I encouraged my friends to read Harry Potter (Value of Reading)	22	17	5	2	4
I think the Harry Potter books motivated me to read more than I did before I read them (Self-Concept as Reader)	24	12	9	3	2
I read books for fun before I started reading Harry Potter (Self-Concept as Reader)	20	10	13	4	3
I thought it was important to read Harry Potter to feel 'in' with my friends (Value of Reading)	7	18	21	1	3
Reading Harry Potter increased my interest in reading other books (Value of Reading)	19	20	6	2	3
After reading Harry Potter I felt more confidence in my reading ability (Self-Concept as Reader)	13	4	23	7	3



Reading Preferences

Readers in Table 4 responding to this study identified “Fantasy” and “Adventure” as the kinds of books they most often read after reading Harry Potter. “Fantasy” books were identified as being read “Often” or “Very Often” by 47 subjects (94%), with “Adventure” books read “Often or Very Often” by 40 subjects (80%). “Romance Novels” were the least preferred kind of book, identified as being read “Rarely” or “Never” by 28 subjects (56%).

Table 4 Frequency each kind of book read by subjects after reading Harry Potter

	Very Often	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Adventure	32	8	6	2	2
Fantasy	38	9	1	2	0
Historical Fiction	0	0	35	6	9
Horror	3	2	35	6	4
Humor	8	1	2	36	3
Mysteries or detective fiction	24	19	4	3	0
Non-fiction	4	1	22	9	14
Romance novels	0	3	6	9	32
Romantic fiction	1	3	18	13	15
Science fiction	19	20	1	8	2

Reading fantasy novels

When asked how frequently (Table 5), they read a fantasy novel, more than half of the Harry Potter survey subjects were likely to read it nearly every day.

Table 5 Frequency read a fantasy novel

	Response Percent	Response Count
Every day	32.0	16
4-6 times a week	24.0	12
2-3 times a week	14.0	7
Once a week	22.0	11
Less than once a week	8.0	4
Never	0.0	0

Nearly half of the Harry Potter survey subjects reported reading a fantasy novel six or more hours per week (Table 6). The most frequent response was “10 hours or more” selected by 25 (50%) subjects, while the least frequently selected response “less than one hour per week” was selected by 4 (8%) subjects.

Table 6 Hours spent reading a fantasy novel each week

	Response Percent	Response Count
Less than 1 hour per week	8.0	4
2 - 5 hours per week	20.0	10
6 - 9 hours per week	22.0	11
10 or more hours per week	50.0	25

And in Table 7, the number of hours and frequency of reading a fantasy novel was reflected in the number of books read by these students, with over 70% reading more than one book a week for pleasure.

Table 7 Number of books read for pleasure in an average week

	Response Percentage	Response Counted
Less than 1 book per week	12.0	6
1 - 2 books per week	64.0	32
3 or more books per week	24.0	12



Based on the data collected, the typical Harry Potter reader who responded to this survey is a female student who is aged 16. She heard about Harry Potter from her parents or another family member. Her self-concept as a reader and value of reading are both very high. Although her close friends only thought reading was fun, and it was something she really liked to do. Encouraging friends to read Harry Potter was something this student often did even though she did not feel it was important herself to read Harry Potter in order to feel 'in' with her friends. Other kinds of books she read were most often fantasy and least likely to be romance or history fiction. She read books coming from the fantasy genre every day, reading one book and ten or more hours each week and reading one to two this type of book per week.

Results of qualitative data

Follow-up interviews were conducted with 7 students selected from the 50 Harry Potter survey subjects who volunteered to participate in follow-up interview.

Factor 1 - Detail and depth of storylines

The dense detail and complex intricacy of the storyline across the seven Harry Potter books enhanced the reading experience, particularly when the books were read multiple times. This was not only identified as an attribute when rereading the early books in the series, but also mentioned as a necessity in order to identify and absorb fully the rich detail found in later books. The suspense of finding out what would happen next kept interest high until the final book was published, while the complexity and detail in the final story motivated many readers to return and read earlier books in the series yet again.

Below were the answers of interviewees which were grouped:

- *Intricacy of the story*

Student 1 expressed, *"It increases in complexity as series progressed."* And student 2 said, *"The story line is complex and is carefully woven throughout the series."* While adding his ideas to this issue, he posed, *"The subtext and the stuff between the lines became much more interesting to me than wondering what would happen in the next."* (Student 3) and, *"The Harry Potter series created a world that I wanted to visit again and again,"* (Student 4).

- *Found new or different things or elements*

Having expressed about the new things from this issue, Student 1 added, *"The vast amount of information in each book that tied into the next book made me read it,"* while Student 2 also stated, *"There are so many different unique characters and plot lines that draw you in,"* and *"It started as a fun story and evolved into me trying to unravel the mysteries of the book,"* (Student 3).

The subjects participating in the follow-up interviews confirmed the perception that the complex intricacy of the storyline strongly impacted their reading experiences. They expanded upon the importance of the rich detail and depth in the stories as an aspect of motivating reading.

Factor 2 - Associations with and emotional attachments to characters

Characters became as familiar to these readers as real people and the attachment to Harry Potter and his friends became stronger as the series progressed. Situations in the books were more real to some readers than distant events in the real world. The experience of growing up along with the characters enhanced the engagement particularly when readers shared common experiences with one or more characters.

The following answers of interviewees were grouped:

- *Emotional attachment to characters*

Linking to this matter, Student 1 said, *"It was the attachment to the characters that drove the urge to read, and continue to read, and re-read to see what information was missed. It was the characters,"* and *"It was, when the magic was put aside, like I was reading about similar events in my own life,"* (Student 2).

- *Turned to books for comfort or to help get through something*

How to apply what the students read from this series to their real life, Student 1 implicated, *"As Harry's life got more difficult as the series went on, so did mine, though in different ways. I grew to relate to Harry even more than I had previously,"* and also Student 2 added, *"I think growing up in school where I was an*



outcast, and going through the horrible time period of life and all the troubles, it was like having friends when reading the books, because they were experiencing much of the same problems."

Interview subjects confirmed that they felt strong associations and affection towards the characters. When interviewed subjects were asked to discuss the feeling that they knew these characters and had strong emotional attachments, examples showed the strength of connection was enhanced when a common experience was shared with a character.

Factor 3 - Storylines and connections between books

The detail in the books, particularly aspects linking storylines across volumes in the series provided the motivation for many readers not only to continue reading until the final book was published but to return and revisit earlier books in order to follow threads in story that were not initially evident.

Here were the answers of interviewees which were recorded:

Story in later books ties to details in prior books

Taking about the more information as details in the next book in the series, Student 1 said in confidence *"There are so many different elements to the series. There are details you read in book seven that relate to something you read in the first book, and you reread them to tie together any loose ends,"* and added from Student 2 *"I loved finding bits where she had mentioned something casually in one book, only to discover it was a big part of one of the later books in the series,"* and *"They are my favorite books and often things that you find out at the end of the book or books make you want to reread previous sections,"* (Student 3),

- *Re-familiarize with the world of Harry Potter*

From this aspect, Student 1 said, *"The story is complex and pieces from book one are explained in other books – the same goes with each book."*

Interviews emphasized the links between books and gave examples of a small detail that became important in a later book. These examples occurred particularly when they were discussing the reasons for repeated readings.

Factor 4 - Books are fun or easy to read

The pure joy and entertainment found in a book was reflected in this category. While the focus has often been on the complexity of story and interconnections in plots, the fact that these books were just plain fun to read is an element that was also identified as motivating students to read and re-read these books.

The answers of interviewees were expressed as follows.

- *A fun or enjoyable read*

Just speaking out the simple reply to this matter, Student 1 said quickly, *"It is such an easy read, but is not as light as to bore me. I always find I pick up on less important plotlines the second time,"* and *"The story lines were easy to follow, and it was easy to get carried away in reading them,"* (Student 2). Also, *"I really enjoy the way that JK Rowling writes, it is a form that I can read easily and I really enjoy the books"* from Student 3.

This was not specifically discussed during the follow-up interviews; however, references to aspects of this factor category were found in responses to other interview questions. The entertainment and ease of reading were both mentioned, but the concept most emphasized in the interviews was simply the fun of reading the books.

Factor 5 - Influence of friends reading the books

The most frequently identified motivation for initially reading Harry Potter was found to be friends. While friends were frequently specifically identified as recommending the books, they also motivated new readers simply through the act of reading the books in public or by being overheard while talking about the books. A sub-category are responses from readers who initially did not want to read Harry Potter yet found themselves drawn into reading the series as a result of their friends.

After friends, parents were most often identified as providing initial motivation for reading Harry Potter. Reasons for this ranged from suggesting the books because they had heard other students enjoy Harry Potter



to buying the books or otherwise making them available to the readers. Parents were also identified by readers as unintentionally providing them with the motivation to read Harry Potter. The exploration of what initially attracted readers to the Harry Potter books illustrates the importance of friends and family as well as teachers in initially motivating readers. And the following would be the answers from interviewees:

- *To see what friends or family were talking about*

Giving the view to this thing, Student 1 expressed simply, “*I saw a friend of mine reading it in class.*” And adding the idea, Student 2 finally posed, “*There were so many friends raving about Harry Potter. I had to become enthralled by the series.*” In addition, Student 3 went on, “*At first, I started to read the book just to see what my friends were talking about.*”

Interview responses supported both the impact of friends motivating the initial reading of Harry Potter as well as the initial resistance to reading Harry Potter because it seemed everyone was reading it.

Discussions

The study was conducted with the rationale of investigating and clarifying the research question “What factors make fantasy as a popular genre in the work of J.K.Rowling towards Vietnamese high school students?” Both quantitative and qualitative data were fathered for analysis. The total subjects employed in this study involved 50 Vietnamese high school students who were studying in Grade 10 at Nguyen Viet Hong High school, Can Tho City, South Vietnam.

The questionnaire and interviews were administered as a research instruments for collecting data. Based on previous literature of the research issue, the questionnaire was designed as an optional test and using a five-point Likert scale. The process of delivering questionnaires took place in an academic semester. Data collected by questionnaire was processed with the assistance of SPSS program. Interviews were also carried out with 7 out of the 50 students who have answered the questionnaire. The answers were taken as notes in shorthand.

Reading interests

The original research question was asked about reading interests. Researchers have studied teenagers’ reading interests and preferences using a variety of methods, such as surveys and interviews. Spangler (1983) clarified the distinction by defining preference studies as those that look at teenagers’ expressed attitudes toward reading, and what teenagers might read if given the opportunity. Reading interest studies, on the other hand, examine actual reading behaviors of teenagers by analyzing the books teenagers have actually read.

Harry Potter readers identified “Fantasy” and “Adventure” as the kinds of books they most often read. These interests are different from those found in other studies. Horror and science fiction have identified as the most frequently selected kind of book by readers between 12 and 18 years of age (Children’s Literature Research Centre, 1996; Hopper, 2005), yet were selected “Sometimes” or “Rarely” by Harry Potter readers. However, in a British study (Clark, Torsi, & Strong, 2005) a difference in genre preference between reluctant and enthusiastic readers was found. This study established that enthusiastic readers preferred adventure most frequently, while horror was the type of fiction most frequently preferred by reluctant readers.

The results of the current study indicate that reading interests of Harry Potter readers differ from the general population of readers in their choice of fantasy. While the research did not probe why this occurred, a group of readers who read fantasy and adventure by choice would naturally be assumed to like Harry Potter. On the other hand, these readers, certainly enthusiastic, have an overlap in genre choice with other enthusiastic readers – both groups liking fantasy as a genre.

Attitudes toward reading fantasy novels

The Harry Potter readers were more likely than readers in other studies to perceive themselves as having a strong feeling about those books in fantasy genre. A positive self-concept as a reader is one aspect of considering oneself a fantasy reader. Self-concept as a reader was demonstrated in a number of different



responses. The readers' response to the question about friends thinking reading a fantasy novel indicates only a moderate degree of self-concept as readers, which was not consistent with either the results for other questions related to self-concept. Since it was an anomaly, it might be pursued separately in further research but does not affect the overall finding in this study.

Factor attracting students to read Harry Potter

The first books in the Harry Potter series were often described to readers as appealing because they were enjoyable, easy to read, and featured a main character who shared many traits with the young readers even though he was a wizard. The initial reading experiences were often depicted as joyful adventures into a new world and the first time many readers became lost in a story or between the pages of a book. The readers in this study described a much wider range of ways they were introduced to the fun of reading Harry Potter. As found in previous studies, having the story read aloud was a very successful introduction to the fun in these stories for many of this study's readers. Quite a few received the books as gifts because parents or grandparents had read about the books' popularity with children. Siblings who "didn't even like to read" often motivated younger brothers or sisters to read the books after they saw how much they enjoyed them. In general, the greatest motivating factor for the readers participating in this study was the buzz or the hype. The books were something that friends, classmates and family were talking about and these readers wanted to be able to share in the fun of the discussions.

Factors motivating students to continue to read other fantasy novels

According to the readers in the current study, The Harry Potter books were about more than entertainment; they formed an independent universe, people with characters that readers grew to care for and worry about. Many Harry Potter readers found pleasure in the fantasy novels as simple outlets of escape. They recognized, appreciated, and became engaged within many different literary and cultural elements in others fantasy novels.

Factor 1 - Detail and depth of storylines

The dense detail and complex intricacy of the storyline across the seven Harry Potter books enhanced the reading experience, particularly when the books were read multiple times. The suspense of finding out what would happen next kept interest high until the final book was published, while the complexity and detail in the final story motivated many readers to return and read earlier books in the series yet again. The way a fantasy book was read changed time to time with increased awareness and interest in subtext and themes. Readers described differences in the way they read the books depending upon their mood, changes in life experiences, or differences in personal circumstances. A good storyline from a fantasy book is the one where the book will be read again.

Factor 2 - Associations with and emotional attachments to characters

More than anything else, it was the very real human faults and foibles along with the magical abilities and heroic inclinations that readers described as the foundation for developing such deep personal attachments those they became as emotionally involved with these characters as with their real friends and family. Not only Harry Potter, but also every character in others fantasy novels had to be described as having a unique yet universal personality that was able to transcend the pages of the books. It might be this combination of each character's heroic abilities along with their equally evident faults and mistakes that caused so many readers to develop such personal attachments. Characters were described by these readers as being as familiar and real as actual people. Situations in the books must be described as "more real" by some readers than actual events occurring in distant parts of the world. Personal engagement was found to be particularly strong in readers who shared difficult experiences such as the loss of a friend or a parent.

Factor 3 - Storylines and connections between books

The detail in the fantasy books, particularly aspects linking storylines across volumes in series have to be identified as reasons many readers not only continued reading until the final book will be published but spurred them to return and reread earlier books in order to identify details and clues that weren't evident initially.



5. Conclusion

Conclusion

Harry Potter books are considered a major contributor to both student's self-identification as readers and their wider literacy development. Perhaps the most striking change they reported was the confidence and motivation to read more fantasy books. Students who persevered with the series considered it a positive achievement, which potentially heightened their reading interests. Readers knew that reading Harry Potter had benefited their reading; and moreover, they gained emotional payoffs such as pride and confidence in their abilities. These could motivate them towards further reading, which might subsequently result in higher attainments in school literacy activities.

Implications

Theoretically, this study demonstrates how reader response theory and motivational theory can be applied to a single study. It substantiates the validity of the reader response theory as a method to understand reading interests, habits, and attitudes of student. It is one of the first studies emerging from the field of library and information studies that has systematically applied reader response theory. It hopefully will encourage other researchers to use this methodology to delve even more deeply into the reading experience of students from their point of view.

For *Literature teacher*, these findings can help them to understand more about reading interests, habits, and attitudes of their students. From this, they can:

- recognize the multiple literacies in which students are engaging in outside of the classroom and find ways to incorporate them into classroom instruction;
- embrace engaging activities, such as literature circles and book clubs, into regular instruction in schools;
- include reading materials of varied formats, levels, and topics in the classroom;
- incorporate elements of choice in readings and projects

Limitations

The quantitative and qualitative components of this study were deliberately designed to inform one another. This mixed methods approach enabled collection of rich and descriptive data exploring how the Harry Potter book series has influenced Vietnamese students' motivation, however as with any study, the limitations of this study must also be recognized. The sample size for this study was small when compared to the population of Vietnamese high school students. Responses to ended survey questions and interview questions were limited by the readers' ability to express thoughts and ideas. All of the data collected were self-reported responses. Although there is no reason to believe that the readers would not give accurate information, there was no way to verify the accuracy of individual responses given by the study participants.

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