A Scale to Measure Attitudes Toward Reading

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Associate director of the McGuffey Reading Center, University of Virginia, the author thanks Dr. Anna L. Heatherly, at the University of Arkansas, and Mrs. Paige Counts, Title III director in Fluvana County, Virginia, for helping collect and analyze data used in the development of this scale.

Aside from the question of whether pupils can read rests a question with an even more elusive answer: Will pupils read? Certainly, how students feel about reading is as important as whether they are able to read, for, as is true for most abilities, the value of reading ability lies in its use rather than its possession.

Fortunately, Books and the Teen-Age Reader, by G. Robert Carlsen (1967); Hooked on Books: Program and Proof, by Daniel Fader and Elton McNeil (1966); and Developing Attitudes Toward Learning, by Robert Mager (1969), have replaced the mystery of attitude change with specific suggestions.

A corollary problem has remained unsolved thus far, however. How does one measure change in attitude toward reading? At present, very little help is available to the teacher with this question. Concern over this state of affairs led to the preparation of the attitude scale which will be described herein. It is hoped that reading teachers will see the scale as useful in its present form, but will feel free to modify it to fit their
needs. An aid in further development of the scale will soon be available (Estes, in preparation).

Construction of the Scale

Of the several types of attitude scales which could have been designed, the "Likert" or "summed ratings" type was chosen because of its ease of use and generally high accuracy. Such a scale is composed of a list of statements to each of which the examinee is asked to respond on a one to five point scale varying from "I strongly agree" to "I strongly disagree." Each of the statements in this scale was worded in such a way as to call to mind the object "reading." A summation of the values of each student's responses on the scale will yield a quantitative representation of his attitude toward reading. (Hence, the term "summed ratings scale.")

The first step in the construction of the scale was to secure a pool of statements from which could be selected approximately thirty for a tryout scale. A group of twenty-seventeen high school and elementary teachers in the Charlottesville, Virginia, area were asked to contribute to the initial item pool. Each teacher was given a description of the kind of scale to be constructed and was asked to contribute "statements the response toward which will reflect attitude toward the activity of reading." Criteria for attitude scale item formulation and selection, as outlined by Edwards (1957), were provided for the teachers and were utilized in the selection of items for the tryout scale.

The tryout scale consisted of twenty-eight items. These were administered to a sample of 283 pupils in grades 3-12. Specifically, two classrooms of pupils at each grade level, 3-12, were given the tryout scale. The classes were purposely chosen for their heterogeneous nature. It was desirable to include as wide a variety of attitudes toward reading as possible in order that the scale items have a chance to demonstrate the quality of separating pupils with positive attitudes from those with negative attitudes toward reading. (A crucial question to be asked in the analysis of the scale is that of whether each item tended to be answered positively by those pupils with positive attitudes and negatively by those with negative attitudes.) Earlier research has suggested that one way to insure representation of a wide variety of attitudes is to sample a wide variety of ability levels (Estes, 1969).

Analysis of the Data

Following the tryout administration, the resulting data were analyzed in a two-stage procedure. First, an estimate of the scale's general performance was secured through computation of the mean, standard deviation, and reliability data. Second, an individual analysis of each item was made in terms of its ability to separate a group of people on the basis of attitude toward reading.

Each pupil could rank each of the twenty-eight items on a one to five scale, five being most positive and one most negative. Hence, the theoretically possible range of scores was 28 to 140. The actual range of scores obtained was 55 to 138. The mean of the 280 scores was 102.

One question which arose was whether the scale was performing dif-
ferently for younger pupils, grades 3-6, as compared to more advanced pupils, grades 7-12. The range of scores and the means and standard deviations for each of these groups of pupils, as well as for the total group, are reported in Table 1. (As might have been predicted, the younger pupils in this sample revealed more positive attitudes toward reading.) The three mean scores (for grades 3-6, grades 7-12, and the total group) were all on the positive end of the scale, since a mean score of 84 would likely indicate a relatively neutral position on the part of many pupils. (The neutral response is always three on such a five-point scale; multiplying this value by the total number of items, 28, yields a value of 84.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source of data</th>
<th>Range</th>
<th>X</th>
<th>s.d.</th>
<th>rel.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grades 3-6</td>
<td>57-138</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>16.4</td>
<td>.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grades 7-12</td>
<td>55-127</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>17.1</td>
<td>.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Group</td>
<td>55-138</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>17.1</td>
<td>.94</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[ t = 4.06, < .001 \]

Table 1: Ranges, means, standard deviations, and reliabilities, for grades 3-6, grades 7-12, and the total group, with accompanying t-test.

The wide standard deviation on this administration of the scale suggests that a wide variety of attitudes toward reading was represented in the sample and that, considering the rather high discriminatory power of the items, the scale will be sensitive to a variety of attitude types in future administrations.

The reliability data for the scale was computed by the split-half method. The substantial reliability values obtained suggest that in its tryout form, the scale was performing with good consistency — repeated administrations would likely obtain similar results.

The second stage of data analysis was the item discrimination analysis. This was done by the procedure of analyzing each item for its discrimination of high scorers from low scorers on the scale. The items retained were those on which pupils with a positive attitude are likely to respond with a high scoring response and on which those pupils with a negative attitude are likely to respond with a low scoring response. In other words, the items retained were those on which a pupil's total score is likely to be high if he has a positive attitude but low if he has a negative attitude toward reading.

Administration and Scoring

The following directions will be helpful to those who wish to use the scale in its present form.

1. Reproduce the scale and draw up a separate answer sheet that carries five multiple choice spaces (A-E) for each of twenty items.

2. Students should be assured that the manner in which they respond to the scale will not possibly affect their grade or standing in the course.

3. Notice that some items are positive statements and some are negative. Responses to these items will differ in value. (To "agree" to a positive statement is to reflect a positive attitude, whereas to "agree" to a negative statement is to reflect a negative attitude.) The following table should therefore be referred to in scoring.

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4. With practice, the scorer can mark the negative items just prior to scoring and assign the proper value to each item at a glance.
5. The student's total score is a quantitative reflection of his attitude toward reading.
6. By administering the scale on a pre and post (October and May) basis, the teacher can note changes in attitude toward reading by subtracting the early score from the later one.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>E</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The negative items: Nos. 1, 3, 4, 6, 8, 9, 11, 12, 13, 16, 17, 20</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The positive items: Nos. 2, 5, 7, 10, 14, 15, 18, 19</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Response values to assign to each possible response to each item.

Summary
A scale to measure attitudes toward reading has been described from its inception to its present hopefully useful form. Directions for use of the scale have been delineated. The scale will allow teachers of reading to measure objectively how pupils in their schools and classes feel about reading, allowing a view of the pupil not presently permitted by testing programs.

References

Estes, T. H. "The Measurement of Students’ Attitudes Toward What They Study." In H. L. Herber and P. L. Sanders (Eds.), Research in Reading in the Content Area: First Year Report. Syracuse, New York: Reading and Language Arts Center, Syracuse University, 1969.

Attitude Scale
A = strongly agree
B = agree
C = undecided
D = disagree
E = strongly disagree

1. Reading is for learning but not for enjoyment.
2. Money spent on books is well-spent.
3. There is nothing to be gained from reading books.
4. Books are a bore.
5. Reading is a good way to spend spare time.
6. Sharing books in class is a waste of time.
7. Reading turns me on.
8. Reading is only for grade grubbers.
9. Books aren’t usually good enough to finish.
10. Reading is rewarding to me.
11. Reading becomes boring after about an hour.
12. Most books are too long and dull.
13. Free reading doesn’t teach anything.
14. There should be more time for free reading during the school day.
15. There are many books which I hope to read.
16. Books should not be read except for class requirements.
17. Reading is something I can do without.
18. A certain amount of summer vacation should be set aside for reading.
20. Reading is dull.