

A Study to Assess the Awareness of the Importance of Reading among the Students in the Middle Adolescence Age Group

Shwetha G Bhat

Semester IV, Department of Psychology PG Studies Centre for Distance and Online Education,
JAIN (Deemed-to-be-University), Bengaluru, Karnataka, India

Abstract: *Reading is understanding the writing in a language. It is a receptive skill where one receives information and learns. It is one of the important language skills alongside listening, speaking and writing. To read we need to recognize, comprehend and have fluency. Reading has numerous benefits along with expanding our knowledge. Hence it is a very important skill one should develop. It exercises, relaxes and calms the mind, helps develop better cognitive skills, improves vocabulary, helps to have better comprehension and critical thinking skills, improves memory, builds confidence, helps to socialize, improves focus and concentration, helps develop empathy and emotions etc. In spite of all these numerous benefits, recent studies indicate there has been a significant reduction in the percentage of kids and young adults who enjoy reading. Hence the question arises – are children aware of the importance of reading in the first place? which forms the aim of this study. A descriptive survey study was conducted to collect data from 150 students in middle adolescence age group (14 to 17 years) of a private English medium school. A survey questionnaire consisting of 20 questions was used for the study.*

Keywords: reading importance, awareness, middle adolescence, students, school

1. Introduction

Among all the living beings, human beings are the unique ones to have the cognitive ability to read. Human brain has evolved to repurpose the ability to recognize and differentiate patterns in the nature e.g. plants and animals, to differentiate between written symbols like letters and punctuations¹. Unlike speech which is an innate ability, reading is a skill that is learnt and mastered with effort². It forms one of the four main requirements in developing any language skill along with listening, speaking and writing. It is a receptive skill where one receives information and learns. When we read, we are looking at the letters and with the help of our brain we convert them to meaningful words and sentences. Each time we read, we are strengthening and stimulating certain areas of the brain such as Temporo-parietal cortex, Inferior-frontal cortex and Occipito-temporal cortex which are all connected by the white matter pathway.² To read, we need to be able to recognize the words, comprehend and have fluency. Reading fluency brings word recognition and comprehension together allowing an individual to read smoothly.

Reading has numerous benefits which makes it an important skill one should develop. It is an exercise for the mind. It relaxes and calms the mind reducing stress, helps develop better cognitive abilities, enhances vocabulary, helps develop better comprehension and critical thinking skills, improves memory, improves analytical skill, builds confidence, helps people socialize over topics of common interest, improves focus and concentration, helps develop empathy and many more³.

In spite of all these numerous benefits, there has been a significant reduction in the recent times in the percentage of kids and adolescents who enjoy reading due to the rise of digital media and changes in lifestyle etc⁴. This study helps us to understand if children are aware of the importance of reading.

Objectives

The objectives of this study are as follows:

- To know the basic concept of reading as a cognitive skill.
- To understand the importance of reading.
- To understand about the existing awareness of the importance of reading among the students of middle adolescence age group.
- To provide suggestions accordingly.

2. Literature Review

An article by Alviz Rengel, Kristina mentions of the importance of reading to children. It says reading stimulates empathy and logical thinking and also makes them stronger. It says reading books brings in new imagination allowing children to use such imaginations to explore people, places, times and events beyond their own experience⁵.

An article by Avani Bavishi et. al. mentions a 20% reduction in mortality being observed for those read books compared to those who didn't read books. It also highlights the survival advantages was mainly through a cognitive mediator⁶.

An article by Dr. Josie Billington et. al. mentions that the clinical data of their study indicated of statistically significant improvement in the mental health of depressed patients during a 12 month period in which they had attended reading groups. Though the study couldn't specifically conclude due to the absence of control group, they did note an association between better mental health and reading. The study concluded that reading helped the patients suffering from depression by improving their social, emotional, psychological and mental wellbeing. It helped improve the patients personal confidence, reduced social isolation, improved concentration and helped develop an interest in learning new things⁷.

An article by Maja Djikic et. al. University of Toronto mentions that fictional literature has a role in facilitating the development of cognitive empathy⁸.

An article by S. Eftimova, M. Garvanova, B. Nikolova mentions that their study results revealed that young people who read are more likely to develop important skills, traits, intrinsic motives and values which would help develop their personality. The study mentions reading helps to build benevolence, intellect, imagination, competence etc. when compared to illiterate ones⁹.

An article by Elena del Pilar Jimenez and group mentions of a reading intervention program that was carried out on high school students for a period of 2 years so as to evaluate the effectiveness on reading comprehension and emotional intelligence. The study revealed a direct relationship between reading habits, reading competence and emotional intelligence¹⁰.

An article by Jeremy Jacobs et. al. mentions of the study that was conducted to examine a non-strenuous activity such as a reading activity, relationship on aging and mortality. It mentions that reading contributed to improve aging and predicted a reduced mortality among men¹¹.

An article by Katie Priske mentions of a research done at New School in New York city that found an evidence, which states literary fiction improves a reader's capacity to understand what others are thinking and feeling. It also mentions that the study suggested readers have a greater emotional intelligence and empathy¹².

An article by Ronita Lena Sari Silaban and group mentions that the provision of good illustrations in picture books and the use of such picture story books helps develop creativity and imagination in early childhood¹³.

An article by S. L. Levine, S. Cherrier and A. C Holding mentions a research was conducted to examine whether recreational reading is beneficial for mental health during college. The study concluded recreational reading helps college students cope with mental health problems, it reduced psychological distress and acted as a buffer against the frustration of one's basic psychological needs which helped to improve the mental health¹⁴.

An article by Junita Sinamo and group mentions of a study that explains the role of picture books in developing children's social skills such as empathy, communication, cooperation. Tolerance and critical thinking. It allows children to respect differences and provides them a means to handle conflicts¹⁵.

An article by Viqar, Sana and group conducted a study to find out if leisure reading had any impact on the stress levels of medical students. The study concluded high perceived stress was shown by fewer students among the readers and more in non-readers¹⁶.

An article by Jackson V Wagstaff states reading not only helps people to become better readers but it also enhances thinking and problem solving skills. It mentions reading can improve

student academic grades, helps develop awareness of other people and thereby develops empathy and better understanding of people. It also mentions of emotional advantages that also lead to health advantages like increase in life expectancy¹⁷.

An article by Paul Wright says reading a book is like providing a super food for our brain. It mentions reading stimulates the brain neural pathways, which has been observed by the changes to the blood flow in the brain and studies done using fMRI. The article also specifies reading as a stimulation that enhances brain activity such as memory and cognitive function along with enhancing creativity and capacity to learn. It also specifies that reading can improve emotional health, provides stress relief, provide entertainment and also act as means for social engagement¹⁸.

An article by Yu-Hung Chang and group mentions that reading protects cognitive function in later life. Frequent reading activities were associated with a reduced risk of cognitive decline for older adults irrespective of the education levels¹⁹.

3. Research Methodology

This survey study is done (after taking due permissions from the management of the educational institution) by providing a structured questionnaire to the students, to be completed within a specified time limit.

Survey Questionnaire

A structured questionnaire of 20 questions developed using the review of literature, is used to understand the existing awareness of the students of an educational institution, regarding the importance of reading. Each question has 3 options to choose from i.e. 'Yes', 'No' or 'Not Sure'. After the questionnaire responses are collected from 150 samples (students), the data then would be analyzed. Only the 'Yes' answer would be considered to understand the percentage of awareness regarding each parameter in the questionnaire. Overall percentage of awareness of the 150 students would also be analyzed.

Source of Data:

- 1) Primary data – shall be collected using the responses to the survey questionnaire given to the students of the age group between 14 and 17 years in an educational institution.
- 2) Secondary data – shall be collected from journals, websites and books.

Sample Size:

The sample size would be 150 students of middle adolescence age group (14 to 17 years).

Sampling Design:

Purposive sampling design

Study Design:

A descriptive survey study.

Setting of the study:

A private English medium educational institution catering to middle adolescence age group students.

Inclusion criteria:

- Private English medium educational institution
- Students of middle adolescence age group (14 to 17 years)

Exclusion criteria:

- Non-English medium educational institution
- Government or Aided institutions
- Students below 14 years and above 17 years

Limitations

The limitations of the study are as follows:

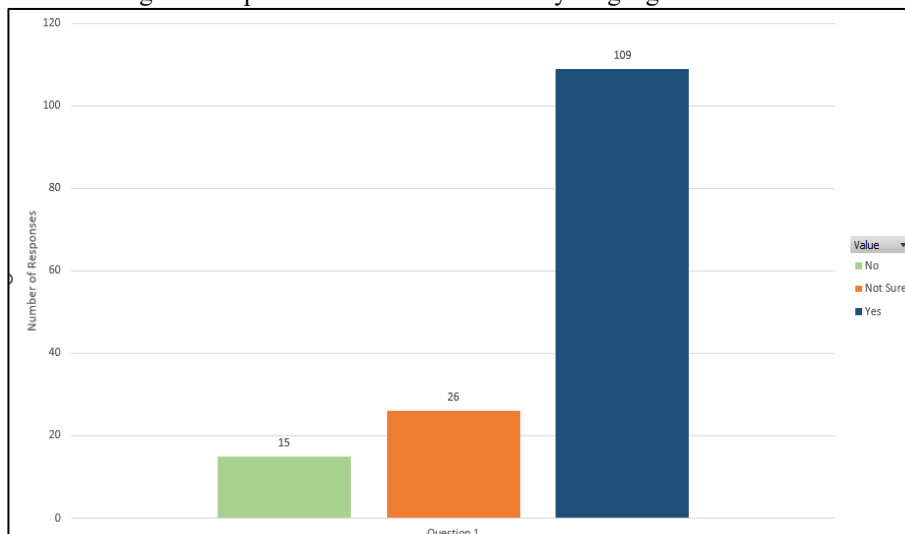
- Study is limited to one educational institution
 - The sample size is 150 students only
- The data is collected through a questionnaire in English language

4. Data Analysis and Interpretation**Procedure**

Each student of the sample is provided a questionnaire to be answered. After collecting the responses, the data is then analyzed using statistical methods and graphical illustrations. Only the 'Yes' answer is considered to understand the percentage of awareness regarding each parameter in the questionnaire. Overall percentage of awareness of the 150 students is analyzed and summarized.

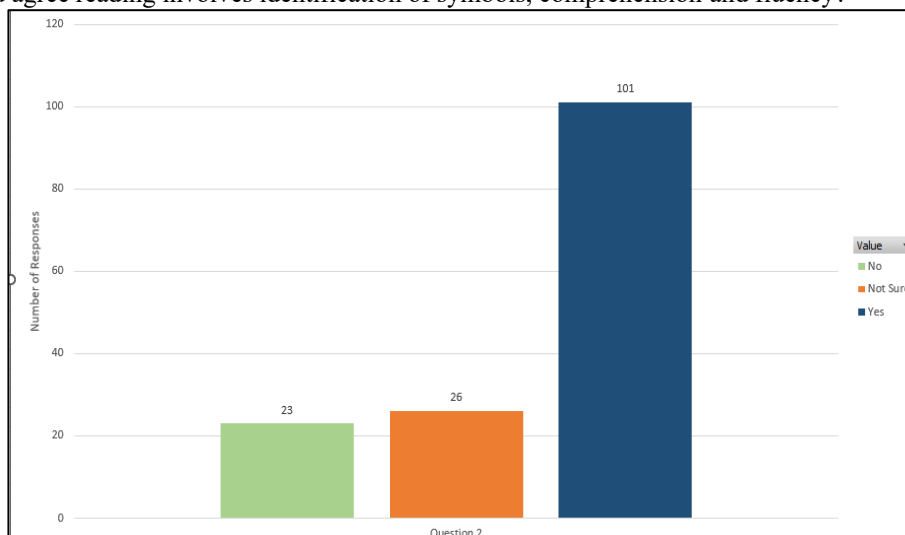
Analysis and Interpretation

Question 1: Do you think reading is an important skill to understand any language?



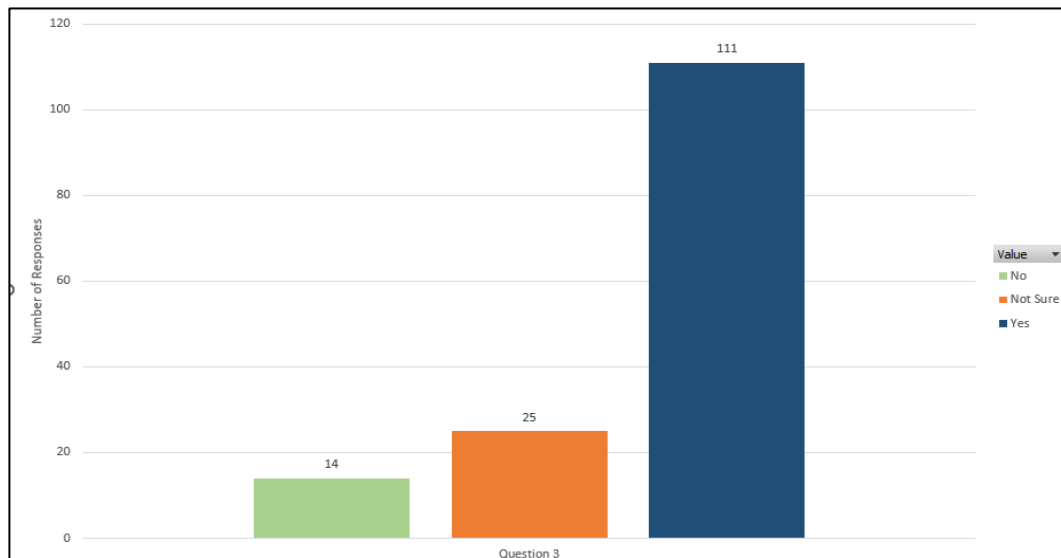
Percentage of awareness among the 150 students: Yes – 72.67%

Question 2: Do you agree reading involves identification of symbols, comprehension and fluency?



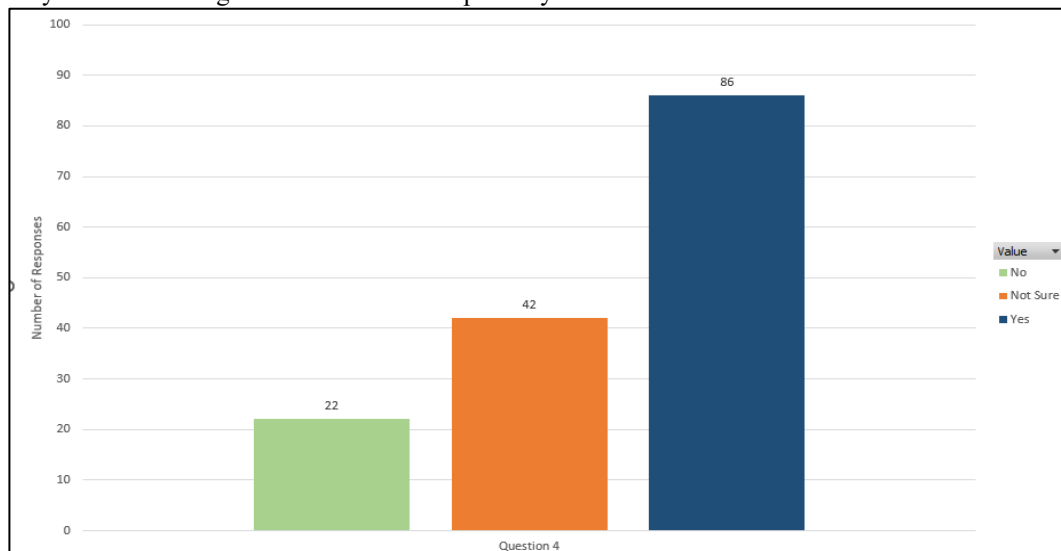
Percentage of awareness among the 150 students: Yes – 67.33%

Question 3: Do you agree reading improves vocabulary?



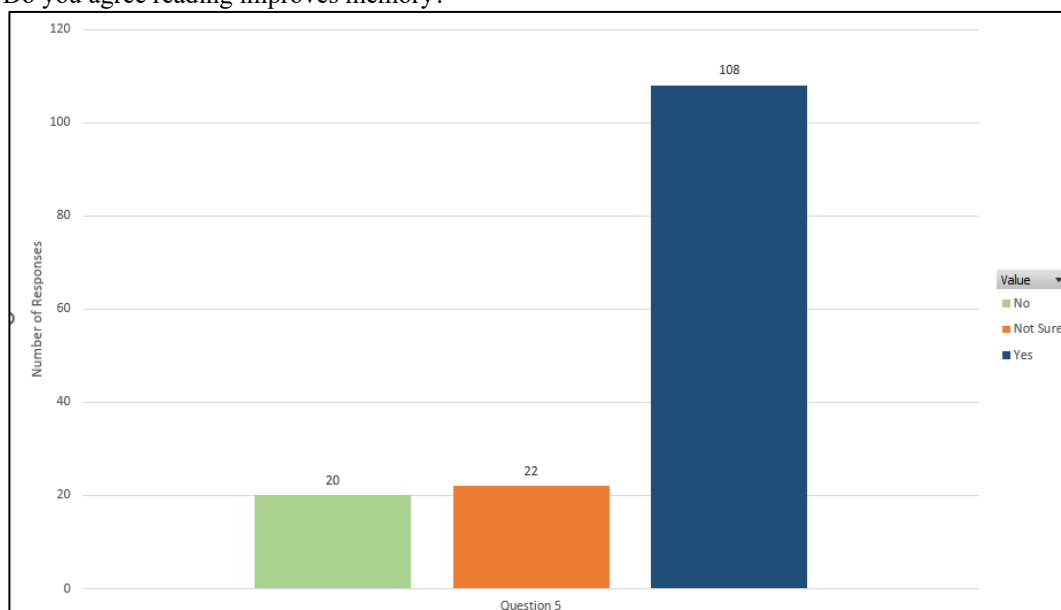
Percentage of awareness among the 150 students: Yes – 74.0%

Question 4: Do you think reading stimulates the neural pathways in the brain?



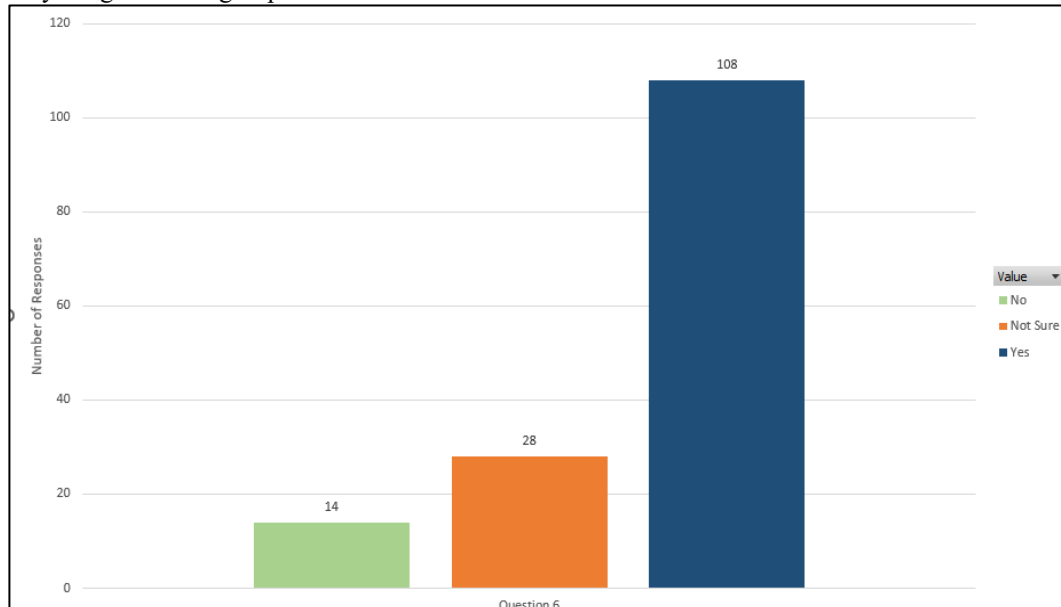
Percentage of awareness among the 150 students: Yes – 57.33%

Question 5: Do you agree reading improves memory?



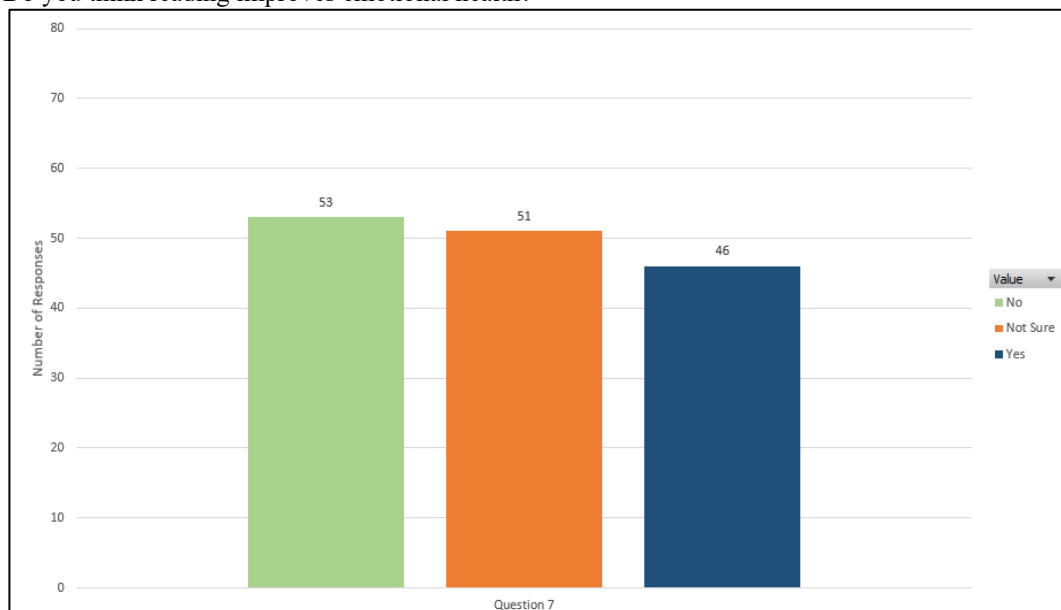
Percentage of awareness among the 150 students: Yes – 72.0%

Question 6: Do you agree reading improves focus and concentration?



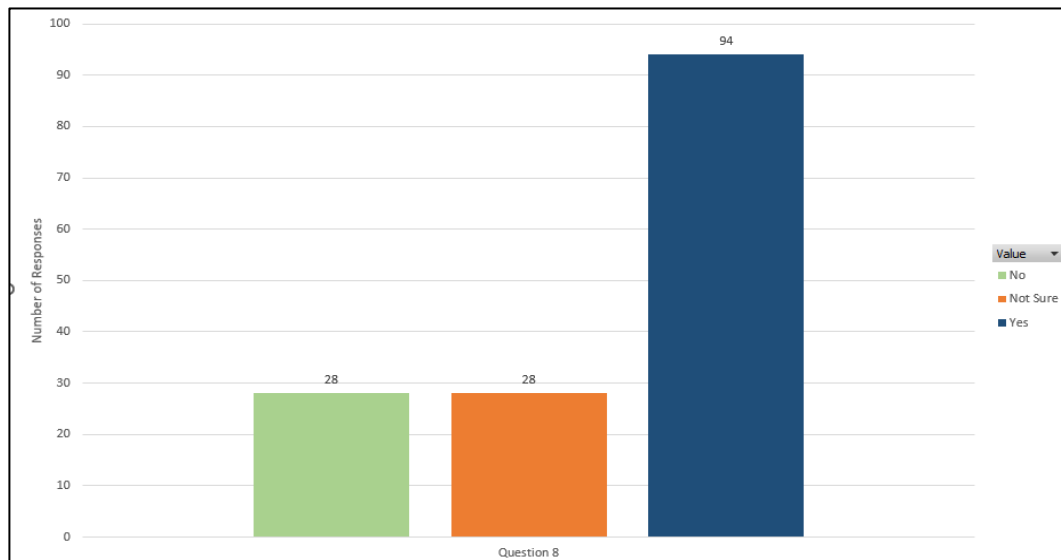
Percentage of awareness among the 150 students: Yes – 72.0%

Question 7: Do you think reading improves emotional health?



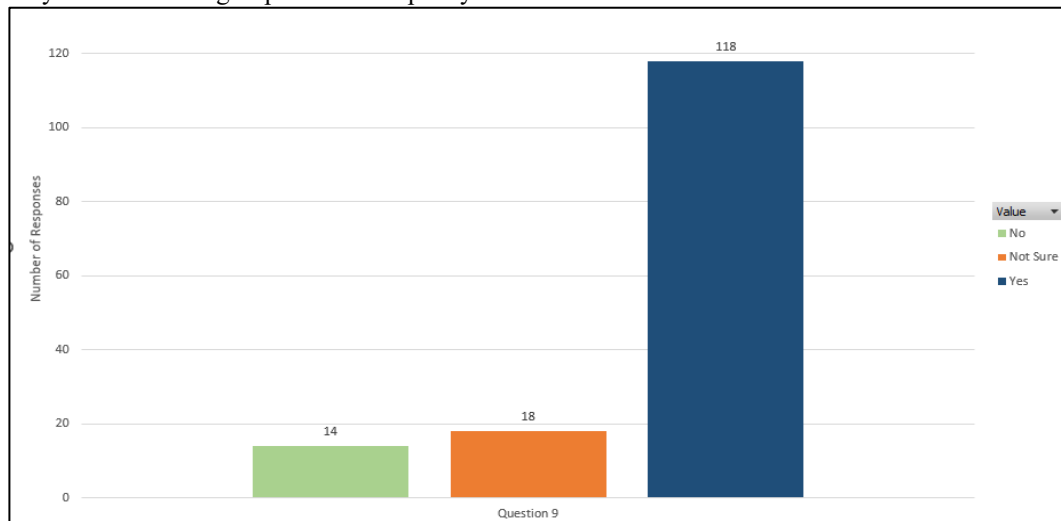
Percentage of awareness among the 150 students: Yes – 30.67%

Question 8: Do you think reading enhances creativity?



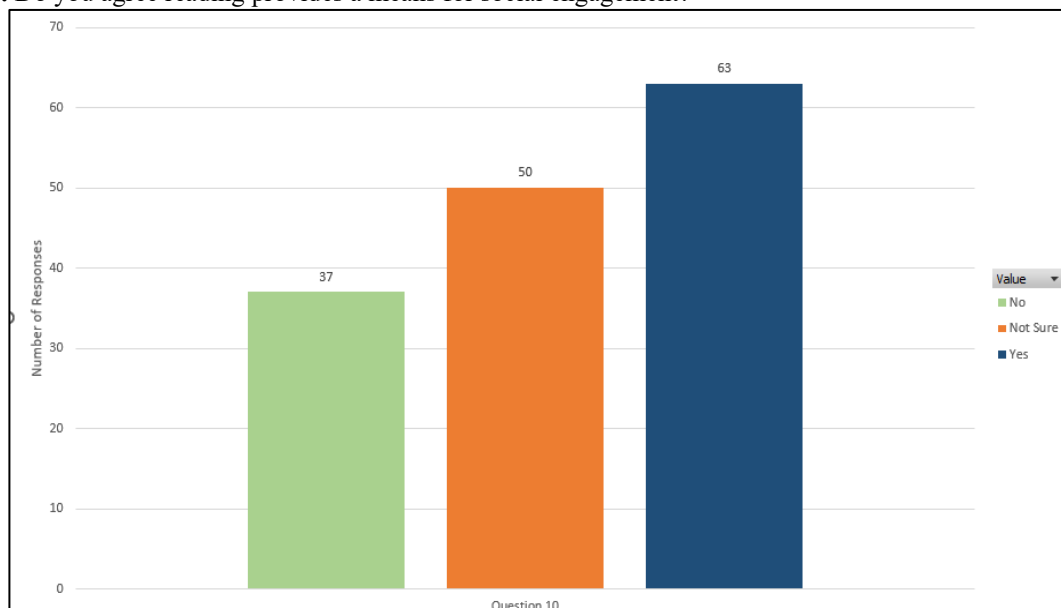
Percentage of awareness among the 150 students: Yes – 62.67%

Question 9: Do you think reading improves our capacity to learn?



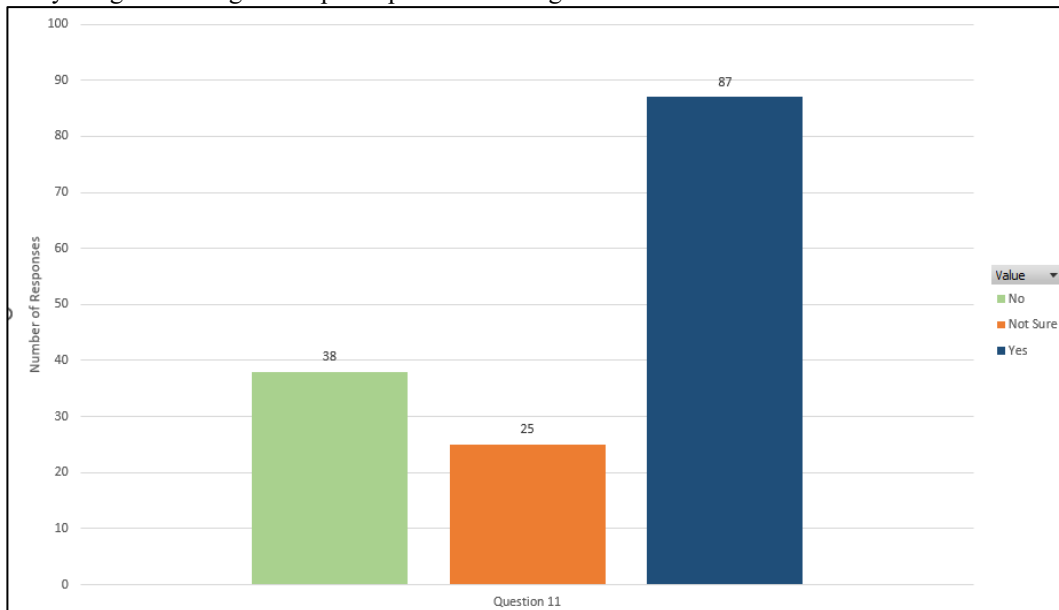
Percentage of awareness among the 150 students: Yes – 78.67%

Question 10: Do you agree reading provides a means for social engagement?



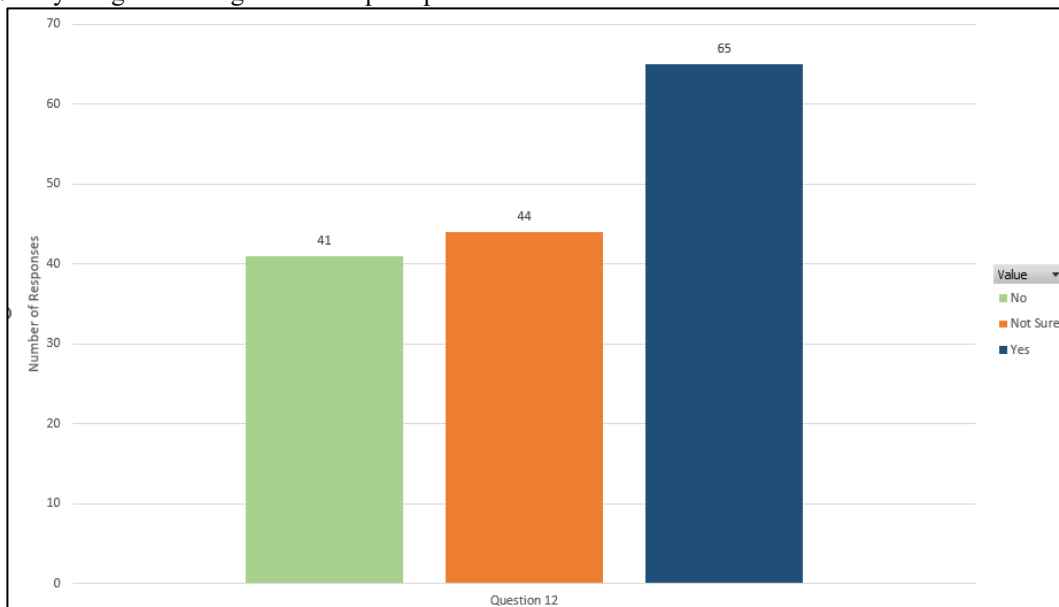
Percentage of awareness among the 150 students: Yes – 42.0%

Question 11: Do you agree reading can improve problem solving skills?



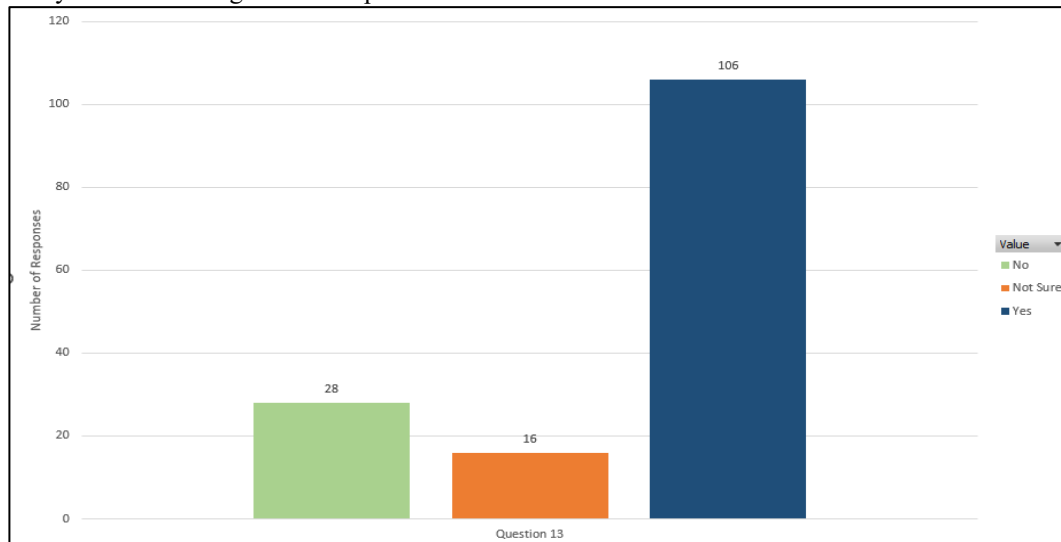
Percentage of awareness among the 150 students: Yes – 58.0%

Question 12: Do you agree reading can develop cooperation and tolerance?



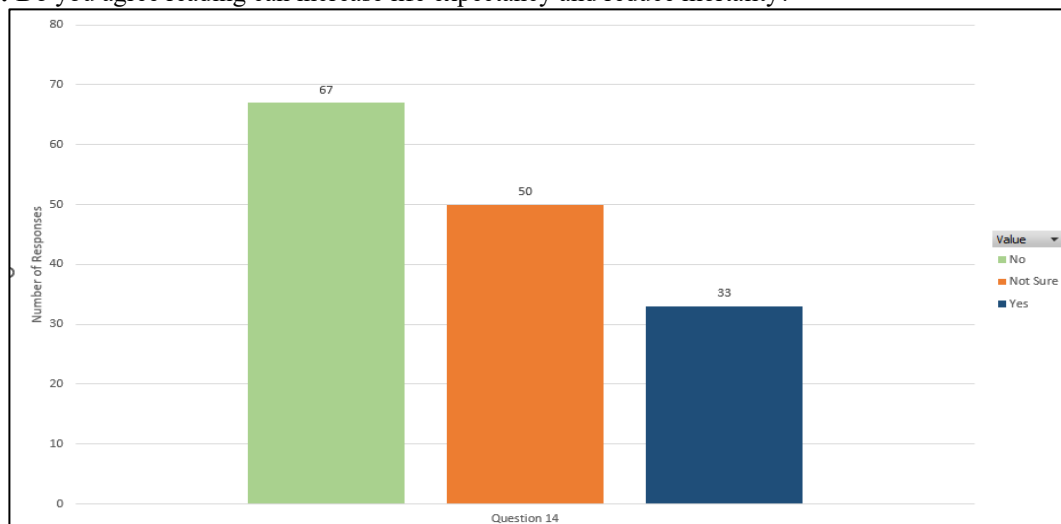
Percentage of awareness among the 150 students: Yes – 43.33%

Question 13: Do you think reading can develop communication skills?



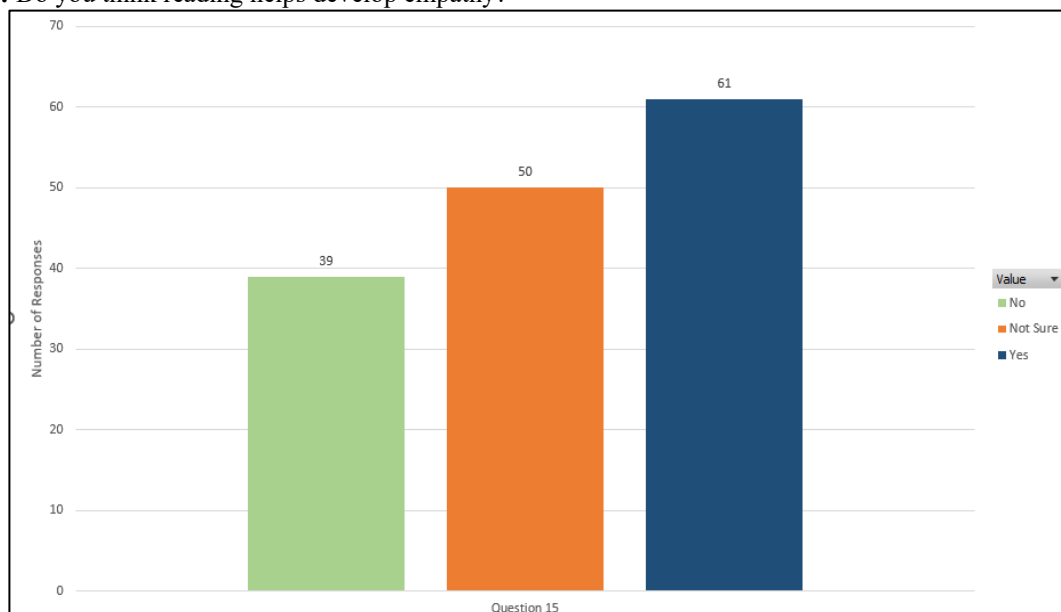
Percentage of awareness among the 150 students: Yes – 70.67%

Question 14: Do you agree reading can increase life expectancy and reduce mortality?



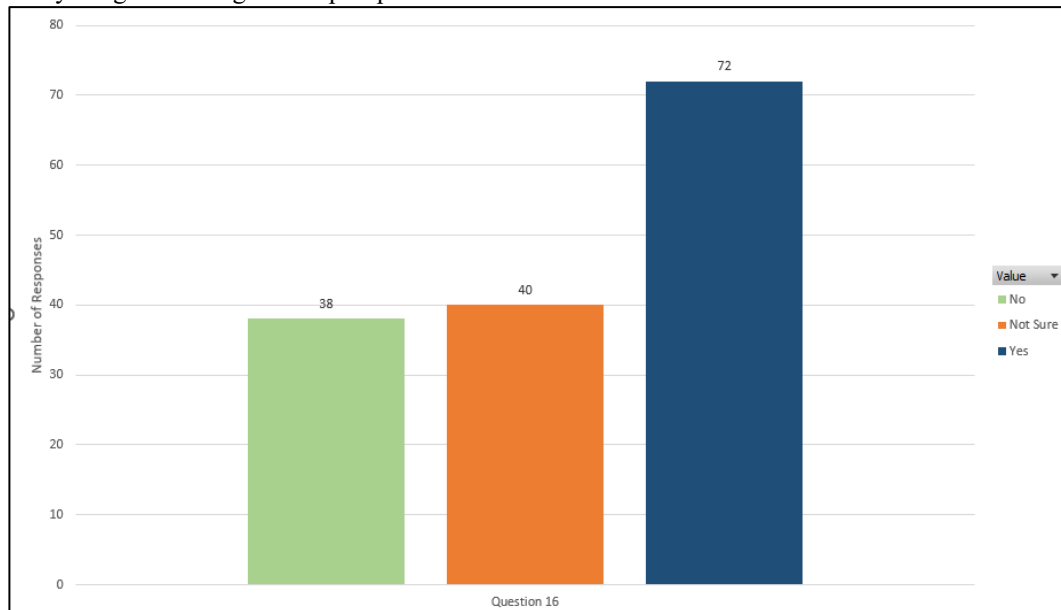
Percentage of awareness among the 150 students: Yes – 22.0%

Question 15: Do you think reading helps develop empathy?



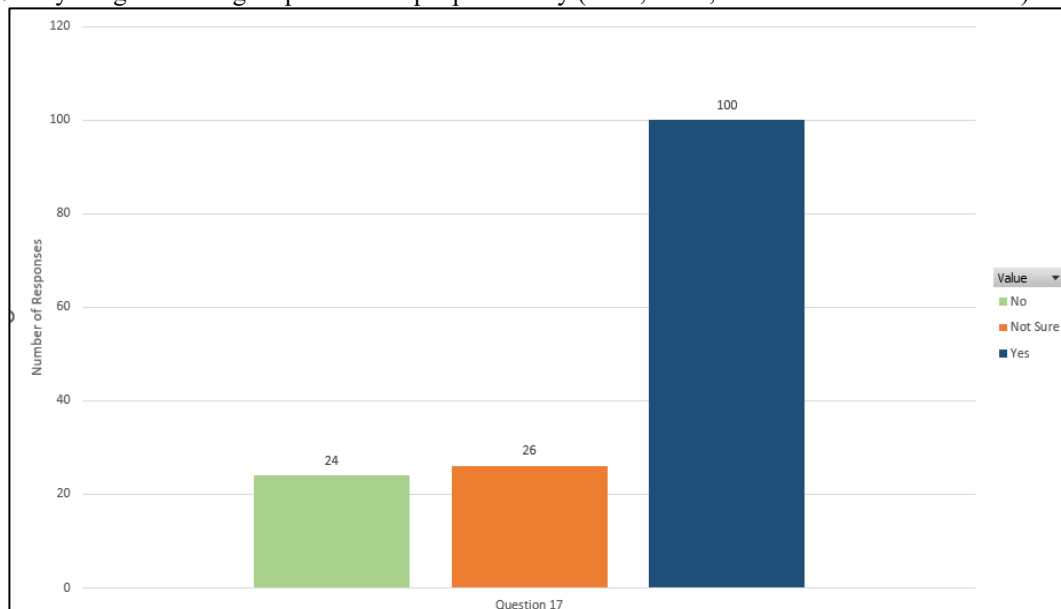
Percentage of awareness among the 150 students: Yes – 40.67%

Question 16: Do you agree reading can help improve mental health?



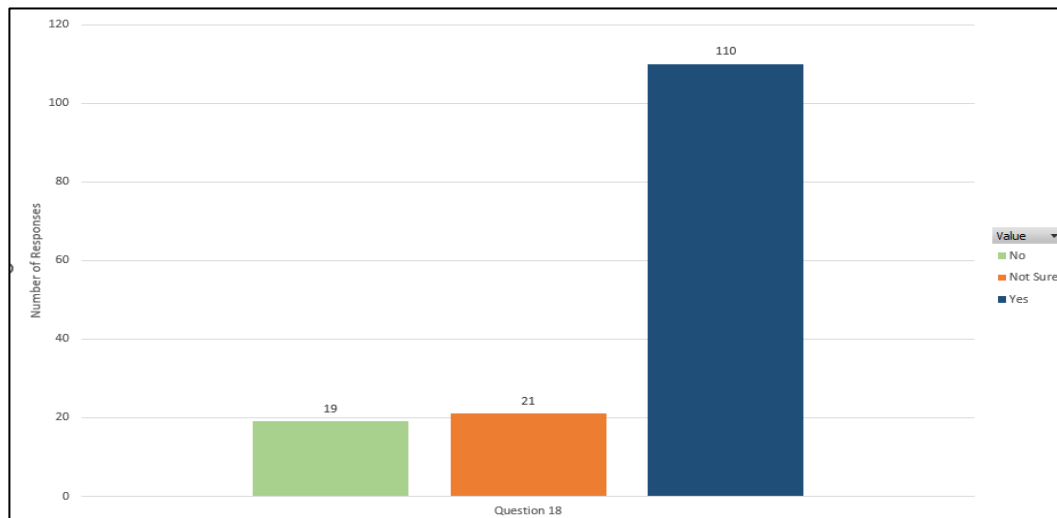
Percentage of awareness among the 150 students: Yes – 48.0%

Question 17: Do you agree reading helps to develop a personality (traits, skills, values and intrinsic motives)?



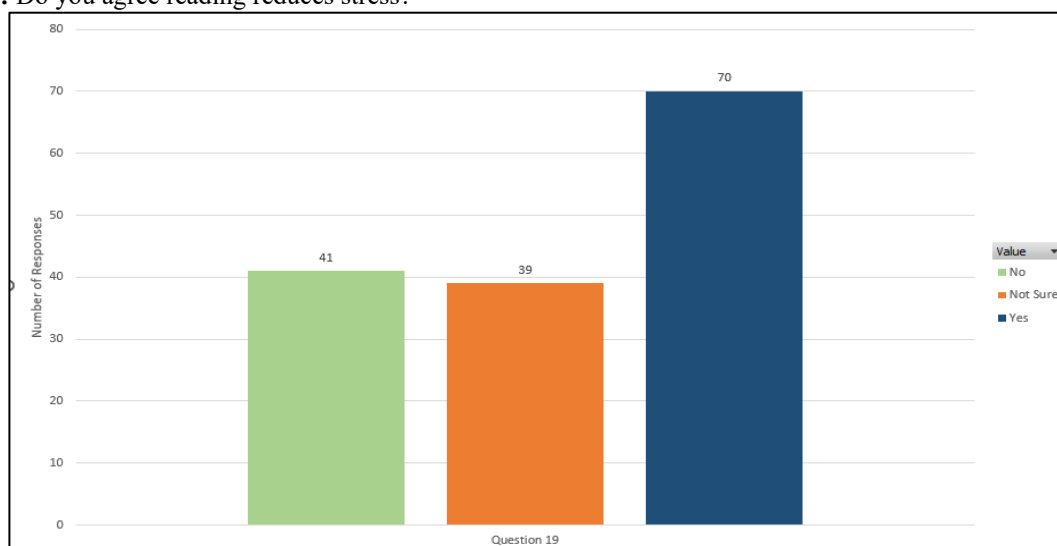
Percentage of awareness among the 150 students: Yes – 66.67%

Question 18: Do you think reading increases the ability to imagine?



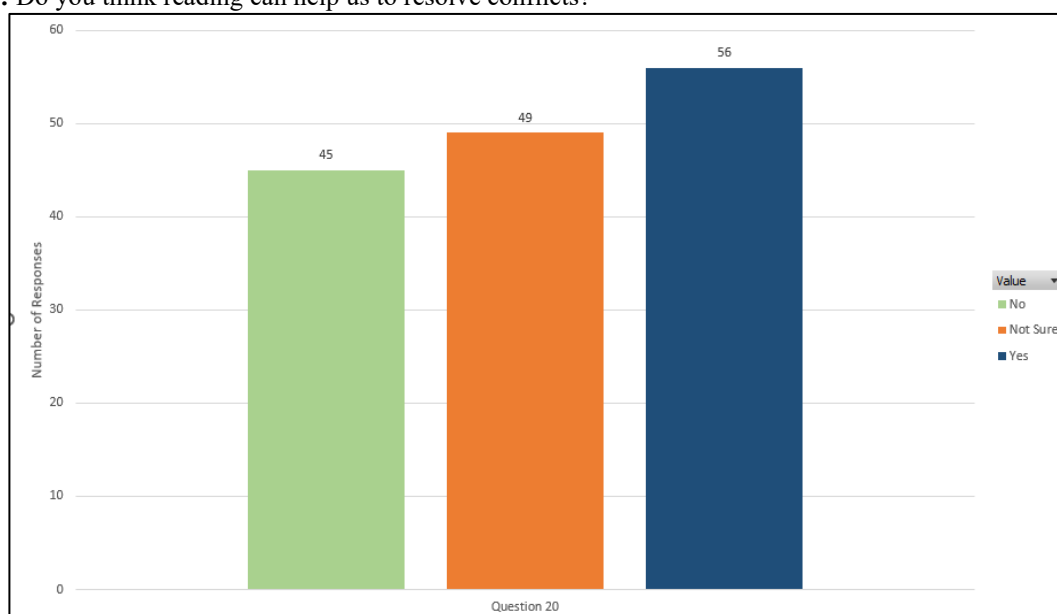
Percentage of awareness among the 150 students: Yes – 73.33%

Question 19: Do you agree reading reduces stress?



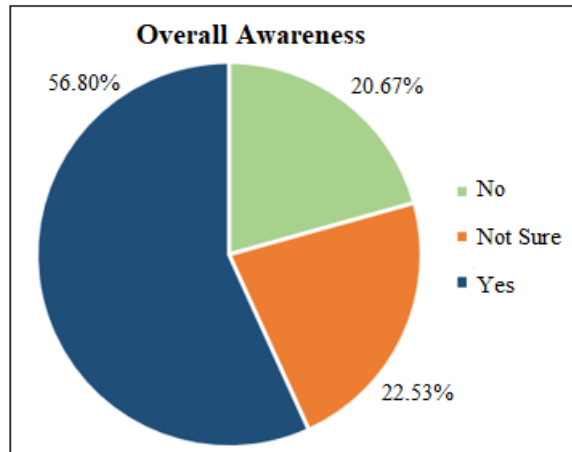
Percentage of awareness among the 150 students: Yes – 46.67%

Question 20: Do you think reading can help us to resolve conflicts?



Percentage of awareness among the 150 students: Yes – 37.33%

Overall Awareness on the importance of reading among the 150 middle adolescence students is found to be: 56.80%



5. Discussion

From the above data analysis it can be observed that in the 150 students who participated in the survey, there is 72.67% awareness regarding reading helps understand language, 67.33% awareness about reading involving identification of symbols, comprehension and fluency, 74% awareness in reading improves vocabulary, 57.33% awareness in reading stimulates the neural pathways in the brain, 72% awareness in reading improves memory, 72% awareness in reading helps improve focus and concentration, 30.67% awareness in reading improves emotional health, 62.67% awareness in reading enhances creativity, 78.67% awareness in reading improves our capacity to learn, 42% awareness in reading provides a means for social engagement, 58% awareness in reading can improve problem solving skills, 43.33% awareness in reading can develop cooperation and tolerance, 70.67% awareness in reading can develop communication skills, 22% awareness in reading can increase life expectancy and reduce mortality, 40.67% awareness in reading helps develop empathy, 48% awareness in reading can improve mental health, 66.67% awareness in reading helps to develop personality, 73.33% awareness in reading increases the ability to imagine, 46.67% awareness in reading reduces stress and 37.33% awareness in reading can help to resolve conflicts. The overall awareness regarding the importance of reading among the 150 middle adolescence age group students was found to be 56.80%.

6. Conclusion

The above descriptive survey study conducted at a private English medium school, using a survey questionnaire with a sample of 150 middle adolescence age group students, suggests that the awareness regarding the importance of reading is not very satisfactory and just above average.

7. Summary

Reading is one of the important language skills which involves recognizing what is printed or written and how we comprehend the content. Different areas of the brain get stimulated in the process of reading. Reading provides numerous benefits along with expansion of knowledge. It is

important children be made aware of these benefits by the teachers and parents so that they develop reading as a regular habit.

This study can be further explored by other researchers to understand the awareness gender specifically and region specifically across different schools and with a larger sample size

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