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Cultural capital, habitus and reading futures

**Cultural Capital, Habitus and Reading Futures: Middle-Class Adolescent Students' Cultivation of Reading Dispositions in Singapore**

**Abstract**

The acquisition of cultural capital can only be understood in the light of the formation of habitus, including the socialisation process, and in the context of the field in which any such capital has value. Yet, the relation between cultural capital and habitus is seldom discussed in research. Drawing on the data from focus groups with 96 students and a survey of 5,779 students from six Singapore secondary schools, we analyze how reading as a form of cultural capital is distributed among High-SES, Mid-SES and Low-SES students in Singapore. We show how middle-class practices of *intensive immersion* in school-valued reading practices is a form of habitus that prepare some students better than others for engaged reading. The findings highlight how reading as a form of cultural capital is operationalized through students' familial habitus and argues that making visible familial habitus provides insights for transforming institutional habitus for students' reading futures.

**Keywords:** Habitus, reading practices, socioeconomic status, cultural capital, adolescents

## Cultural capital, habitus and reading futures

### Introduction

A substantial body of research have examined the relationship between cultural capital, socioeconomic status (SES) and academic achievement in Western (Bodovski, Jeon, and Byun 2016; Brown, Hurst, and Hall 2016; Sullivan 2001, De Graaf, De Graaf, and Kraaykamp 2000) and Asian contexts (Tan and Liu 2017, Cheng and Kaplowitz 2016, Byun, Schofer, and Kim 2012). While the concept of cultural capital has been operationalized in various ways, including participation in highbrow culture activities such as concert and museum visits (DiMaggio 1982; Kisida et al. 2014), home resources (Teachman 1987), extracurricular activities (Lareau 2003), computer skills (Paino and Renzulli 2012), online reading (Notten and Becker 2017) and non-cognitive skills such as students' work habits and ways of relating to teachers (Farkas et al. 1990; Lareau 2003), we focus in this study on the cultivation of reading habits as a distinctive and dynamic form of cultural capital that may be more important than parents' SES for students' reading proficiency, academic achievement and social mobility as it is correlated to students' educational success (Araujo and Costa 2015; Chiu and Chow 2010; De Graaf et al. 2000; Jaeger 2011; Sullivan and Brown 2015; Tramonte and Willms 2010). Given that access to educational opportunities for students from different SES is widening in developed countries (Reardon 2013; Park 2008), it is crucial to examine the potential of reading as a form of cultural capital to transform low-income students' reading, economic and social futures.

There have been many studies in recent years examining reading as a form of cultural capital (Araujo and Costa 2015; Chiu, Hong, and Hu 2015; De Graaf et al. 2000). However, these studies have not examined cultural capital together with habitus, and we show in this paper that cultural capital needs to be understood in relation to habitus within specific contexts.

Habitus is the embodied mental perceptions and attitudes of an individual which is developed

## Cultural capital, habitus and reading futures

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2  
3 through years of socialisation, often through one's early upbringing (Bourdieu, 1977, 1984).  
4  
5 An individual's inclination to read (or not) is cultivated through everyday practices of reading  
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7 engaged in through early childhood and these practices shape students' orientations towards  
8  
9 books and reading in ways that may or may not be valued within the educational system.  
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14 Singapore provides an unusual case study. While Singapore shares certain similarities with  
15  
16 other East Asian contexts in having standardized examinations, a strong emphasis on  
17  
18 academic achievement and parental investment in the "shadow education" industry, it cannot  
19  
20 be assumed that all East Asian contexts are the same (Yamamoto and Brinton 2010).  
21  
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23 Singapore is different from other East Asian contexts such as Korea and Taiwan with its  
24  
25 multicultural composition and the use of English as the main medium of language for  
26  
27 education and business (Gopinathan 1980). Moreover, although it has been shown that  
28  
29 cultural capital is less influential in Confucian heritage countries such as Singapore and  
30  
31 Taiwan than in non-Confucian heritage countries such as Finland and Canada (Tan and Dian  
32  
33 2017), the influence of SES and cultural capital on academic achievement is still present in  
34  
35 Singapore (Tan, 2013). Additionally, within Singapore, there is increasing disparity in  
36  
37 educational access for children from different SES (Ng 2013; Tan 2013), similar to situations  
38  
39 in other developed nations (Park 2008). For example, despite Singapore's high scores on  
40  
41 international tests such as the Programme for International Students Assessment (PISA)  
42  
43 (OECD, 2016b), the performance is largely limited to top performers, with the results of low  
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45 performers stagnating between 2009 to 2015 (OECD, 2016a).  
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52  
53 To understand the gap between top-performing and low-performing students, it is important  
54  
55 to examine the role of cultural capital and understand how it is operationalized by middle-  
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57 class parents through their everyday practice of habitus to provide their children with  
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## Cultural capital, habitus and reading futures

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3 advantage in schooling, in this case through the cultivation of reading dispositions for reading  
4  
5 futures. Examining how the habitus is operationalized in relation to cultural capital (Ren and  
6  
7 Hu, 2013) can provide insight into how students learn to read across the lifespan. To our  
8  
9 knowledge, there have not been any studies examining the specific application of the concept  
10  
11 of cultural capital and habitus to understanding the acquisition of middle-class students'  
12  
13 reading dispositions. For this article, we draw on focus group and survey data from a large-  
14  
15 scale study of reading in six Singapore secondary schools to examine the following research  
16  
17 questions:  
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- 20  
21 1. What is the cultural capital of middle-class adolescent students in Singapore, in the  
22  
23 area of reading?  
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- 26  
27 2. How is reading as cultural capital operationalized through habitus?  
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30  
31 This study extends the understanding of cultural capital, habitus and reading through the  
32  
33 concept of *intensive immersion*, which describes the middle-class familial investment of time  
34  
35 and energy to cultivate positive dispositions and behaviours that orientate their children  
36  
37 towards books and reading. Discussions of cultural capital often lead to a reproductive view  
38  
39 of schooling, resulting in deficit perceptions of student learning (Valencia 2010). However,  
40  
41 the concept of habitus includes agentic control and this article demonstrates that making  
42  
43 visible middle-class practices of learning to read makes possible the rethinking and  
44  
45 restructuring of institutional habitus for educational change (Loh 2017b).  
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### **Cultural Capital, Habitus and Reading**

#### *Engaged Reading as Cultural Capital*

54  
55 Cultural capital consists of the skills acquired by students that are valued in the schooling  
56  
57 context and have the capacity to yield other forms of value (Lareau and Weininger 2003).  
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## Cultural capital, habitus and reading futures

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2  
3 According to Bourdieu (1986), cultural capital can exist in three different forms. Cultural  
4  
5 capital can be embodied “in the form of long-lasting dispositions of the mind” (p. 47). It can  
6  
7 be objectified in the form of cultural goods such as books and pictures owned. Finally,  
8  
9 cultural capital can be in an institutionalized form, such as educational qualifications that  
10  
11 accord a certain status to its possessor. In relation to reading as cultural capital, the number of  
12  
13 books at home has often been used as a measure of objectified cultural capital. Reading as a  
14  
15 form of cultural capital, in comparison to participation in cultural events, is strongly  
16  
17 associated with academic achievement and adult literacy leading to social mobility,  
18  
19 regardless of the SES background of participants (Araujo and Costa 2015; Chiu and Chow  
20  
21 2010; De Graaf et al. 2000; Jaeger 2011; Sikora, Evans and Treiman 2015; Sullivan and  
22  
23 Brown 2015; Tramonte and Willms 2010). This is likely because reading is strongly  
24  
25 correlated to vocabulary acquisition and competency in other language skills, and is the  
26  
27 prerequisite for independent knowledge acquisition (Krashen 2004; Cunningham and  
28  
29 Stanovich 1998).  
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38 In today’s global and technological age, reading as a form of cultural capital does not just  
39  
40 constitute reading proficiency but includes reading engagement, or the desire to read  
41  
42 independently and voluntarily as a bootstrap to further learning (Chiu et al. 2015; Zasacka  
43  
44 and Bulkowski 2017). Technician or universal views of literacy adopted by government  
45  
46 agencies tend to view reading as a skill to be mastered sequentially and fail to recognise that  
47  
48 particular skills are valuable only within its context of use (Collins and Blot 1993). On the  
49  
50 other hand, social or ideological perspectives of reading emphasizes that there are multiple  
51  
52 ways of reading which are valued differently in different contexts of use (Street 1984). In a  
53  
54 global context of ever-increasing literacy expectations, it is *engaged* reading resulting in wide  
55  
56 and independent learning across one’s lifespan that is valued more than the basic ability to  
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## Cultural capital, habitus and reading futures

read and write (Kirsch et. al. 2009). Reading dispositions such as viewing reading as a hobby, leisure activity and learning tool hold greater value than mere ability to decode within the field of school, Singapore and globally (Loh 2013; Khan 2012; Reay 2006).

### *Operationalizing Cultural Capital through Habitus*

Cultural capital needs to be operationalized through habitus (Bourdieu 1977, 1984), which is the orientation toward using the resources that one has (Dumais 2002). Bourdieu (1977) explains that the material conditions or environment in which an individual is immersed produces habitus, which are “systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures” (p. 72). Habitus is “structured structures” in that these habits are cultivated through early upbringing to be part of one’s personality, so much so that one’s instincts, words and actions are often shaped by these ingrained ways of thinking and acting. The familial socialisation process, in the form of parental behaviours and expectations, are learnt by the child who comes to see the world in the same way as those around him (Bodovski 2017). These structures, orientations or beliefs are so ingrained that they are seen as second nature (Bourdieu 1977), embodied into the very dispositions, ways of thinking, feeling and behaving that shapes everyday practices and attitudes. Yet, these structures are not set in stone and individuals possess the agency to change the course of their life paths. The “structures” influence the daily “improvisations” (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner and Carole 1998) that individuals make.

Annette Lareau (2003) has shown how middle-class parents engage in “concerted cultivation” to encourage their children to develop their talents and relationships with authority. Working-class parents are more likely to adopt a “natural growth” model of child rearing and spend less time deliberately grooming specific skills and talents. Concerted

## Cultural capital, habitus and reading futures

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2  
3 cultivation in the area of reading includes the provision of resources in forms such as shared  
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5 book reading, library visits, role modelling reading and buying of books (Araujo and Costa  
6  
7 2015; Chiu et al. 2015; Zasacka and Bulkowski 2017). For example, Susan Neuman & Donna  
8  
9 Celano (2012) found in their study of public libraries that middle-class children are more  
10  
11 likely to have adults accompany them to the public library and spend quality time reading to  
12  
13 them and with them compared to children from poorer homes. Janice Radway (1997), in her  
14  
15 historical study of the middle-class readers of the *Book-of-the-Month* club members in the  
16  
17 United States describes how middle-class readers try to read the “right books” by  
18  
19 subscription and learn ways of reading and talking about reading through joining book clubs.  
20  
21 She points out that “social training and pedagogy” (p. 262) is used to develop habitus, or  
22  
23 specific ways of reading, thinking, feeling and behaving around books. This habitus shapes  
24  
25 the way students respond to books and reading.  
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33 Students’ familial habitus may be replaced or strengthened by the institutional habitus of  
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35 school (Gaulter and Mountford-Zimdars 2018; Reay 1998), and a key argument in this article  
36  
37 is that knowing how familial habitus shapes students’ reading may provide insight for  
38  
39 transformation of institutional habitus to support school-directed acquisition of reading as a  
40  
41 form of cultural capital.  
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### *Institutional Habitus within the Field of Singapore’s Education System*

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48  
49 The education system is the field or the “network, or a configuration, of objective relations  
50  
51 between positions” (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992), often compared to a “game” where the  
52  
53 value of any capital only makes sense within the field in which it is being evaluated over  
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55 time. In the case of Singapore, the strong emphasis on academic excellence means that  
56  
57 reading is perceived as a cultural capital that is valued and provides the possessor of the skill  
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## Cultural capital, habitus and reading futures

with power for social mobility. Skills Future (2019), a national movement to encourage lifelong learning, and the National Reading Movement (n.d.) initiated in 2015 are two current initiatives that contribute to the importance of reading as cultural capital that matter within Singapore and global markets.

However, fields shift and change over time, and the value and shape of particular cultural capital and habitus shift along with the change in field. Within the Singapore context, rapid growth in literacy rates have led to expanding economic opportunities and a growing middle class within the span of 50 years. While reading has always been perceived as important and central to the national curriculum, the shift towards lifelong learning in a digital, networked and globally connected society has resulted in higher expectations of reading competency (Skills Future 2019). At the same time, a growing class of educated middle-class parents means that some children are more likely to come to school already reading or prepared to read, whether through parental intervention or tuition (Ng 2013). The growing gap between low-income and middle-class parents may be in the amount of investment supplied prior to and during the course of formal schooling. The value of reading as cultural capital and the habitus within which reading practices are developed needs to be understood within this educational field.

### **Method**

The study is part of a larger study of reading and school libraries conducted in six Singapore secondary schools between September 2016 to November 2017. The data collection included a large-scale reading survey that was completed by 5,779 students and focus group sessions with 96 students across the six schools. The focus group data provided in-depth

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2  
3 understanding of the complexities and dynamics of the utilization of cultural capital to foster  
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5 habitus, whereas the survey revealed broader patterns across the large dataset.  
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### *Participants*

10  
11  
12 For representation, purposive sampling was used to select the six participating schools, which  
13  
14 included two Integrated Programme schools and four government schools. Streaming occurs  
15  
16 within the Singapore secondary schooling system, and students are streamed into Express,  
17  
18 Normal Academic (NA) or Normal Technical (NT) streams based on their results from the  
19  
20 Primary School Leaving Examination (PSLE). Express students take a 4-year route to the  
21  
22 GCE O-Level Examination whereas NA students take a 5-year route to the GCE O-Level  
23  
24 Examination. The Normal Technical course prepares students for vocational training.  
25  
26 Integrated Programme (IP) schools take in the top students in each cohort and the assumption  
27  
28 is that students from IP schools are slated for university education. A student's stream can be  
29  
30 broadly used as an indicator of academic achievement<sup>1</sup>.  
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38 To measure SES, students' self-reported parents' educational level and Financial Assistance  
39  
40 Scheme (FAS) status were used as rough indicators of SES. To qualify for FAS, the Gross  
41  
42 Household Income of a student must not exceed \$2,500 per month or the Per Capita Income  
43  
44 must not exceed \$625 per month at the time of the survey. Students on FAS receive help in  
45  
46 the form of waiver of school fees, free textbooks and school attire, and bus and food  
47  
48 subsidies (Ministry of Education 2017). Three categories of SES were identified: students  
49  
50 who had at least one parent with a university degree and were not on FAS were considered as  
51  
52 High-SES students (n = 2784, or 48.2% of all the participants), which is consistent with  
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59 <sup>1</sup> The streaming system will be abolished by 2024 (Chia, 2018).  
60

## Cultural capital, habitus and reading futures

official figure that approximately 50% of Singaporeans are upper or middle class (Tan 2015).

Students who were on FAS and whose parents did not hold university degrees were considered as Low-SES (n = 615, or 10.6% of all the participants), and 41.2% of the students who were not on FAS and neither of their parents held a university degree were considered Mid-SES (n = 2380). For the purpose of the study, we categorised High-SES students as middle-class students, while recognising that this is a permeable category consisting of different kinds of families (Ho and Lim 2014).

We choose to focus on High-SES students in this article as a large proportion indicated in the survey that they enjoyed reading or saw themselves as readers. As such, they provide a good indicator of the resources required to cultivate engaged reading habits (Loh 2013; Reay 2006).

### *Data Collection and Analysis*

**Focus Group Data.** Focus Groups were conducted with 96 Secondary 2 students (14-year-olds) from different streams across the six schools. Each student participated in two focus groups, which typically lasted between 45 to 90 minutes. The first focus group focused on the students' reading networks and practices, as well as parents' occupation and educational levels. The second focus group allowed us to track the students' changes in reading attitudes and practices over the year and to probe deeper into issues surfaced earlier or not dealt with in the first interview (Seidman 2006). During the second interview, we also brought a variety of books as artifacts for discussion about reading practices and book choices, and to observe the student book selection practices. We transcribed the focus group data and analysed the data using Nvivo and Microsoft Word. Constant comparison analysis (Charmaz 2014) was used to discern emerging themes around reading resources and family networks based on an

## Cultural capital, habitus and reading futures

invisible network of resources framework drawn from an earlier study (Loh 2013). The focused coding categories included: (1) family as resource, (2) peers as resource, (3) libraries as resource, (4) bookstores as resource, (5) school as resource, and (6) other media as resource. Various new themes emerged from the round first of coding and subsequently, we conducted a second round of coding to explore other emergent themes such as reading ease, reading while travelling, and reading as hobby. New sub-categories were also devised. For example, in the previous study conducted between 2009-2010, students reference to the use of Youtube, watching movies and playing video games constituted the category “other media as resource” (Loh 2013). However, new ways of engaging with media emerged in this study, including reading on iPads and Kindles and reading fanfiction online, reflecting changing contexts. Elsewhere, we have examined adolescents’ use of technology for reading in detail (Loh and Sun 2019). For this article, we draw on the focus group dataset from three schools with a greater proportion of High-SES students.

**Survey.** An online reading survey that sought to understand how the cultural capital of Low-SES, Mid-SES and High-SES students differed was designed and piloted. The items selected for the survey were based on previous research and theories related to cultural capital as well as an analysis of existing instruments designed for assess reading habits. The survey included the following components:

1. Students’ reading engagement, measured by their enjoyment of reading, identification as readers, reading frequency, and reading duration (embodied cultural capital);
2. access to reading resources in the form of the number of books at home (objectified cultural capital);
3. visits to bookstores and libraries (embodied cultural capital); and
4. parents’ reading habits (embodied cultural capital).

## Cultural capital, habitus and reading futures

One-to-one interviews were conducted with some participants, during which we asked the participants to paraphrase the questions in the survey and interpret them. Survey items were then refined based on the results from the interviews. The finalized survey contained 50 questions and took approximately 25 - 35 minutes to finish.

The survey was administered to Secondary 1 to Secondary 5 students from the six schools at the beginning of the academic year between January to March 2017. The class teachers informed the students about the research and clarified that participation was voluntary. In total, 7,208 students participated and 5,779 students or 80.2% of the students completed the survey, either during class time using school devices or at their own time using their own devices. Data were analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS version 24). Descriptive analyses and correlational analyses between SES and cultural capital measures (Pearson's  $r$ ) were conducted.

**The Context.** Examining the survey data, students' streams were found to be significantly correlated to their SES background ( $r = 0.50$ ,  $p < .01$ ). To better demonstrate the relationship, Table 1 presents the percentage of students in different streams by their SES background. As shown, the distribution to various streams differed significantly by students' SES background. Nine out of ten High-SES students in the survey were in the IP/Express streams and fewer High-SES students go to the NA or NT stream. For the Mid-SES students, two thirds of them were in IP/Express streams, nearly one quarter of them were in NA and almost one tenth were in NT. By contrast, more than one third of the Low-SES students were in the least proficient stream (i.e., NT), nearly two fifth of them were in NA, and only one third of them made to IP/Express streams.

## Cultural capital, habitus and reading futures

Insert Table 1. Percentage of students in different streams by SES.

It is against this context that we examine the cultural capital, habitus and reading futures of Singapore adolescent students.

### **Students' Habitus for Reading: Intensive Immersion in Reading**

When I'm free, I'll just take out a book and read. (Jason, Confucius High)

I love reading and I prefer reading to doing other things. Reading is my first choice. (Rajan, Quest Secondary)

I read when I'm coming to school or going to tuition. Like on the bus. That will be half an hour, so I just read. (Voan, Confucius High)

I read a lot. I read classic literature. I read dystopian and utopian. (Noreen, St. Mary's Convent)

Middle-class or High-SES students were more likely to see reading as a hobby and to read for pleasure. The quotes above show how students see reading as part and parcel of everyday activity, choosing to read when they are free (Jason), over other activities (Rajan), when travelling (Voan), and reading widely and voraciously (Noreen). This habit of independent reading is correlated to reading proficiency and academic achievement in other contexts (Sullivan and Brown 2015) and we argue that the reading disposition of engaged reading is a specific form of cultural capital that is valued in school contexts.

This ease with reading is highlighted in the survey data which showed that High-SES students were more likely to be engaged readers. Reading engagement was measured by asking the students if they liked reading and saw themselves as readers, as well as how frequent and how long they read. Table 2 summarises the correlations between SES and reading engagement.

## Cultural capital, habitus and reading futures

1  
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3                   Insert Table 2. Correlations among Students' SES Background and Reading  
4                   Engagement Measures.  
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7  
8                   There are two noteworthy patterns. First, students' SES background was significantly  
9  
10                  correlated with all reading engagement measures ( $r_s = .08 - .25, p_s < .01$ ). Second, all reading  
11  
12                  engagement measures were significantly associated ( $r_s = .37 - .60, p_s < .01$ ), with the  
13  
14                  correlation between I like to read and reading duration being the highest ( $r = .60, p < .01$ ).

15  
16  
17                  Together, these results indicated that students with higher SES background were more likely  
18  
19                  to like reading, see themselves as readers, engage in reading on a regular basis and for longer  
20  
21                  sessions.  
22  
23

24  
25  
26                  Students' development of such dispositions of independent reading and reading engagement  
27  
28                  is supported by students' habitus. Middle-class students developed a familiarity with books  
29  
30                  through their early socialisation practices (Loh 2013, Heath 1986; Lareau 2003), and the  
31  
32                  findings show how middle-class parents foster habitus to encourage the development of  
33  
34                  reading habits and dispositions. The concept of *intensive immersion*, which grounds this  
35  
36                  article, suggests that the children are exposed so much to particular books and reading that it  
37  
38                  becomes natural and is perceived as a habit, a disposition, a preference. The habit of reading  
39  
40                  is naturalised, seen as second nature (Bourdieu 1977), a key personality trait rather than  
41  
42                  something that is learnt from home.  
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49                  Four themes emerged from the focus groups data. Students' intensive immersion in reading  
50  
51                  practices included: (1) access to books at home and outside the home, (2) parental role  
52  
53                  modelling, (3) and control and management of time and resources (4) teaching reading. The  
54  
55                  juxtaposition of the students' cultural capital and habitus or socialization practices in this  
56  
57                  section highlight their interdependency. Our discussions of reading include reading on print  
58  
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## Cultural capital, habitus and reading futures

and devices, and it is of note that adolescent readers still prefer print, but tend to read more online and across different devices as they get older (Loh and Sun 2019; Merga 2014).

### *Access to books at home and outside the home*

The findings showed that middle-class students are exposed to books through the presence of books and other print material such as newspapers and magazines at home. Parents support children's readings by buying books and bringing them to the public library. Sometimes, these habits are supported by other members of the extended family such as grandparents, uncles, aunts and cousins. Jennie, echoing other students, describes how she has her own shelf of books at home but noted that as she moved from primary to secondary school, she has found study books colonising her bookshelves.

I've got my bookshelf of books in my room but there are more study books now!  
(Jennie, St. Mary's Convent)

Parents and other family members amplify students' access to books by ensuring continuous access to new books, whether through purchase or loans from the public library.

I do remember that when I was young, I used to go to the library a lot. My whole family would go there. My parents would bring me there and since one side is the young adult section and the other side is children's section, my sister and I would go to the children's section with my mom, and my dad and brother would go to the young adult's section. (Rita, Quest Secondary)

Rita's sharing illustrates time is set aside time to visit public libraries, a deliberate investment by parents to ensure regular access to the newest books. Parental resource is divided when there are more children, with her father accompanying her brother to the young adult section and her mother accompanying the younger siblings to the children's section. Time is well-utilized for maximum enjoyment and utilization (Neuman and Celano 2012).

When I go Popular [a bookstore], my mom would buy the books for me. Sometimes my father will read the book and if he finds it interesting, he will ask me if I want to buy the book. (Janice, Confucius High)



## Cultural capital, habitus and reading futures

Janice's example shows that parents encourage reading not just by providing the money to buy the books but by recommending titles to their children. Parents would nudge their children towards particular kinds of books by making suggestions about what to read.

I buy books online sometimes. My mom pays for it but I have to pay her back. (Lali, Quest Secondary)

Finally, Lali's example also demonstrates how parents further support their children's reading by allowing them to purchase books from not just physical but also online bookstores, thus amplifying access and choice.

This access to books is borne out in the survey data, as shown in Table 3. Students' SES background was found to be significantly correlated with their cultural capital in the form of access to reading resources: i.e., the number of books owned at home ( $r = .37, p < .01$ ), the frequency of bookstores visits ( $r = .13, p < .01$ ), and the frequency of libraries visit ( $r = .05, p < .01$ ). Moreover, students were also asked to rate how much they agree with the statement "I read because reading is my hobby", on the scale of "all the time", "often", "sometime", "rarely", and "never". Students' response on this question was significantly correlated with the number of books they owned at home ( $r = .43, p < .01$ ).

Insert Table 3. Correlations among Students' SES Background, Their Access to Books, and Their Perception of Reading as a Hobby.

The survey data also showed that there is a qualitative difference in terms of how students from different SES backgrounds made use of public libraries. In the survey, students were provided with a list of activities and asked to rank the top three activities they would do in public libraries, and results are presented in Table 4.

## Cultural capital, habitus and reading futures

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3                   Insert Table 4. Students' Top Three Activities in Public Libraries by SES.  
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8                   Borrowing books is the top public library use for High-SES students, followed by studying  
9                   and doing homework, then by reading. For Mid-SES and Low-SES students, studying and  
10                  doing their homework is the top use of the public libraries, with borrowing books and reading  
11                  lagging behind. The differentiated behaviour reflects their different perception of how public  
12                  resources can be used. High-SES students borrow books so they can read more at home,  
13                  thereby feeding their reading habit. On the other hand, Mid-SES and low-SES students who  
14                  use the library are more appreciative of the space afforded by the library for studying and  
15                  doing their homework, though they do borrow books from and read in the library. Middle-  
16                  class parents are more likely to dedicate time to bringing their children to the public library  
17                  and teach them how to independently source for books and in that way, build book borrowing  
18                  habits from young (Neuman and Celano 2012). This may explain why High-SES students are  
19                  more likely to see borrowing from the public library as a priority compared to Mid-SES and  
20                  Low-SES students.  
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40                  Together with patterns revealed by focus groups earlier, it can be suggested that students with  
41                  higher SES background were more likely to have the resources and access to be socialised  
42                  into reading at an earlier age and learn to treat reading as a leisure activity. In the same vein,  
43                  lacking this access may put low-income students at a disadvantaged position for cultivating  
44                  reading proficiency and engagement.  
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***Parents as Reading Role Models***

54                  Parental role modelling of reading practices includes whether the students see their parents  
55                  reading and how many types of reading material they observed their parents reading. Since  
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children are likely to learn from their parents, it is probable that students whose parents read more materials would read more themselves. Reading more types of texts is correlated to students' reading proficiency (Kirsch et. al. 2009).

My mum reads magazines, and sometimes she also reads the book that my dad reads, and then they'll talk about it. Sometimes, it's a good author writing about how he sees the country or something like that, then they will read it. (Ping, Confucius High)

The above quote illustrates the reading habits modelled unconsciously by parents. Ping's parents read about books and discuss the books read, demonstrating to Ping that books are useful for enjoyment, learning and conversation. This early socialisation allows Ping to learn how to use books in a meaningful way.

My parents read the newspapers. My mother, she downloads the BBC news app. (June, St. Mary's Convent)

My father reads sometimes. When he feel like reading, he'll just buy the book on Kindle, then he'll read. I think he reads classics. He reads *Black Beauty* and *Totto Chan*. (XW, St. Mary's Convent)

Reading practices are not limited to print as parents use online resources and model for their children how they can be used for reading and learning (Notten and Beck 2017). Middle-class parents read regularly, read both physical books and online, read for information and for pleasure, thus socializing their children into understanding how reading particular kinds of texts should and can be part of their daily routine and providing examples of the kinds of texts that can be read. The mobile phone, a ubiquitous tool in the hands of most Singaporeans, is used to expand reading possibilities.

The survey data supported the findings of the focus group data, as shown in Table 5. Parental role modelling was measured by students' report about whether they saw their parents reading and what types of texts they were reading (newspapers, magazines, fiction, non-fiction). Results revealed certain disparities between the reading and variety of texts that Low-SES, Mid-SES and High-SES students were exposed to at home. One quarter of the

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Low-SES students are less likely to report seeing their parents read (26.5%), but only 7% of the High-SES students do not see their parents reading. About two fifth of the High-SES parents read more than one type of text (37%), more than one fifth of Mid-SES parents read more than one type of text (22.7%), and only 17.6% of Low-SES parents read more than one type of text. The relationship between SES and the number of types of reading materials parents observed reading was significant,  $r = .26, p < .001$ .

Insert Table 5. Parents' Observed Reading Habits.

### ***Control and Management of Resources for Reading***

Control and management of time and resources (e.g., device usage, books access, TV access) is another way that parents signal what is important to their children and manage their reading habits. By telling children that reading is good for them, parents explicitly state that reading is a valued activity. By restricting online and screen time for other forms of leisure such as gaming or watching television, parents deliberately steer their children's leisure time towards reading so that reading becomes a default leisure activity.

My younger brother (9-years old) doesn't read. My parents try to get him to read. They don't let him watch TV, don't let him play, just ask him to read. (Valerie, Quest Secondary)

For example, Valerie who considers herself a reader and her brother a non-reader explains how her parents try hard to get her brother to read by explaining the value of reading to him and limiting his screen time. This management requires active monitoring on the part of the parents to enforce.

Middle-class students are not completely isolated from technology. Instead, differentiated use of technology ensures that they learn how to use technology for reading. For example, some

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students shared about how they were given Kindles to encourage reading. Unlike other multifunctional mobile or tablet devices, the Kindle serves the singular function of reading.

My uncle is an avid reader and he gave me his Kindle when he bought a new one. So I could just download my e-books and read. I take the public transport and I will just read along the way. (Daniel, Confucius High)

For Daniel, the Kindle was a useful device for reading when travelling to school, until he exhausted the collection of stories in the Kindle. Daniel learns from his uncle's example that technology can be used for reading and becomes familiar with using devices for reading. Elsewhere, we have shown how the same set of data revealed that adolescent students continued to prefer reading print to reading e-materials or online. Moreover, we found that students who read on print were more likely to read online than students who did not read or read regularly (Loh and Sun 2019). Early childhood socialisation into reading is associated with later online reading (Notten and Becker 2017) and the High-SES readers in the study were more likely to report reading lengthier texts (such as fanfiction on *Wattpad* and newspaper articles) online.

### **Teaching Reading**

Explicit and implicit teaching are another feature of intensive immersion. Parents spent time with their children teaching them to read or bringing them to places such as the public library to encourage reading and borrowing.

When I was younger, 3 or 4. My mother made me read next to her every day. I usually read picture books when I was younger so I will like see the images already. Then I read books without images, then I also my own mind will form images on its own. (Larissa, St. Mary's Convent)

Larissa's quote shows how parental teaching involves time and commitment. Her mother would get her to read every day to acquire language proficiency and familiarise her with the habit of reading. The bedtime reading activity (Heath 2005), well-sedimented in the literature

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and educational brochures on early childhood, is adopted eagerly as part of what counts as “good parenting”. The early investment results in the child learning to read independently.

Teaching did not just include learning the alphabet. Students learn how to source for books independently through the scaffolding of their parents who model how to look for books and read. As alluded to earlier, parents also manage students’ reading by recommending books to their children or limiting their book purchases to specific kinds of books. The quotes below show how parents actively invest time and effort into influencing their children’s taste in books by providing recommendations, helping with selection and critiquing the books.

I remember going to the library with my family when I was young. Like in primary school, and when my brother was more interested in books. So me, my mom and my brother would drive to the library. Mostly me and my brother would be borrowing. My mother would just judge and criticize the books. (ZY, St. Mary’s Convent)

For example, ZY’s mother would take on an active role of commenting on the choices her children made in the school library, thus training them in the art of distinguishing between books of different qualities (Bourdieu 1984). Middle-class children learn ways of evaluating books, ways of talking about and distinguishing books from home and these ways of approaching books can be further refined in the schools they attend (Loh 2013; Khan 2012).

When we go to the bookstore, my father will let me buy the book if it is non-fiction. He doesn’t let me buy fantasy or romance. But my mother will let me buy them. We will search online and we’ll order it. I won’t let my father know. (Larissa, St. Mary’s Convent)

In the more humorous example of parents with conflicting visions of what their daughter should read, we see how Larissa’s father tries to steer her towards non-fiction, which he feels to be more relevant and how her mother indulges her desire for reading popular culture by buying her books from online sources. These two perspectives are not conflicting with the first focusing on reading for learning and the second focus on cultivating the habit of reading for pleasure, which is a precursor for students to see reading as a valid leisure activity.

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When I was young, it used to be my mother [who recommended books to me]. She would read book reviews and then she will recommend a few books to me. But nowadays, it's my friends. (Valerie, Quest Secondary)

Finally, Valerie explains how the early recommendations were useful in primary school though as a teenager, she is less reliant on her mother and more dependent on her friends. This supports the view that home socialisation is particularly crucial in the earlier years. However, having done well in primary school and been posted to a good school and class, Valerie is more likely to have reading peers to support her reading habits (Loh 2017a).

### Discussion

The study makes three key contributions: Firstly, it demonstrates how reading as a form of cultural capital is correlated to academic achievement and SES in Singapore. Secondly, we extend the understanding of reading as a form of cultural capital by explaining how reading engagement or reading as a hobby is the critical reading skill that is valued in school contexts. This distinction is crucial as it helps explain why despite schools' focus on reading proficiency, middle-class students seem to do better at reading. Home socialisation practices that focus on cultivating independent and wide reading habits are key to the acquisition of school-valued ways of reading. Since these ways of reading are valued in the national and global economy, having these dispositions put middle-class children at an advantage for reading and academic achievement that leads to social and economic mobility. While we should not assume that all High-SES, Mid-SES or Low-SES students have the same access or opportunities, the lack of access or opportunities is certainly more acute for students from lower-income homes. Most significantly and finally, the study explains how the practice of reading and of reading particular kinds of books as a form of cultural capital is operationalized through students' habitus or socialization into reading habits. Rather than



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focusing solely on cultural capital as a static good, the study highlight how habitus shapes the way cultural capital is used within the field of the current Singapore educational context.

The concept of *intensive immersion* makes visible the habitus of reading that helps middle-class children develop positive orientation towards books and reading. Rather than “misrecognizing” (Bourdieu 1977) reading as a natural talent, the findings demystify the elements that contribute to the cultivation of reading habits and practices by recognising that middle-class students’ habitus shape their “natural” preferences. This understanding helps educators to move away from a deficit mentality (Valencia 2010), to understand that children come to schools differently resourced, not just in terms of the number of books but in terms of reading dispositions. The investment practices of middle-class parents in the form of providing access to books, role modelling, control and management of children’s time, and teaching reading are the features of familial habitus that contribute to these students’ familiarity with books and reading that prepare them to be engaged readers, in alignment with school-valued literacies. Recognizing these features of familial habitus can help policymakers, educators and parents see that learning to read is not an easy task, highlighting that social factors (in addition to cognitive ones) need to be considered in thinking about how to help students learn to read and to become engaged readers.

The findings of the study have great transformative potential (Mills 2008) as the various factors identified as key components of familial habitus can in fact be translated to institutional habitus through re-evaluation of reading strategies, programmes and goals. The habitus of these middle-class children may consist of explicit teaching but also includes many incidences of chance encounters with books in the form of visits to bookstores, conversations about books and discoveries of books at home or elsewhere. In high-stakes testing



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environments, there tends to be much attention on reading comprehension and other visible signs of teaching reading. However, recognizing that having access to a large number of books *and* role models for learning to read emphasizes the need for teachers to serve as role models in reading for pleasure. Instead of focusing on reading comprehension, more attention can be paid to how schools introduce pleasure into reading experiences at school (Cremin et al. 2014), with the school library taking a central role (Loh et. el. 2017). Competencies such as book selection and knowledge of Young Adult Literature can be recognized as crucial skills for developing independent reading habits, so that teachers and librarians can be equipped to recommend books to adolescents and teach students how to find books. The findings add to the knowledge base of research on reading motivation, explaining how and why this extraneous work for developing reading engagement is necessary.

The study highlights that concepts of cultural capital and habitus needs to be understood within the specific field, which changes with time. This current snapshot of the reading practices of Singapore adolescents provides insight into how home reading practices shape middle-class students' development of positive orientations towards reading, thus preparing them to be engaged readers, whether on print or online, adding to our understanding of how to close the reading gap between rich and poor students in developing and developed countries. The findings suggest that policymakers and schools need to rethink the goals and shape of reading curriculum and instruction to understand how better to cultivate reading habits that lead to reading futures.

One limitation of the study was the use of Express, Normal Academic and Normal Technical as a rough gauge of academic achievement from schools. While the survey data also provide a broad view of reading, cultural capital and academic achievement, against which the

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3 qualitative data can be read in more complex detail, it would be helpful to have more precise  
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5 measures of academic achievement in follow-up studies. Moreover, the scope of the article  
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7 did not allow for detailed exploration of the cultural capital and habitus of the Mid-SES and  
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9 Low-SES students. Moving forward, longitudinal studies and comparative studies of reading  
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11 as cultural capital, habitus and SES at national and international levels can extend our  
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13 understanding of how cultural capital develops over time, and how habitus shifts within  
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15 specific national contexts. This study has only focused on reading in the English language  
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17 while being cognizant that Singapore students are living in a multilingual society and  
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19 learning two languages at school. Giving that globalization will only lead to increased  
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21 connections between different nations and people, further research should examine bilingual  
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23 and multicultural reading as forms of cultural capital, and the kinds of habitus that support  
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25 the development of bicultural or multicultural reading identities for the reading futures of  
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	<b>IP and Express</b>	<b>NA</b>	<b>NT</b>
<b>High-SES</b>	90.1	7.9	2.0
<b>Mid-SES</b>	66.8	23.7	9.4
<b>Low-SES</b>	32.6	38.5	28.9

Table 1. Percentage of students in different streams by SES.

	SES	Like to read	See themselves as readers	Reading frequency
Like to read	.18**			
See themselves as readers	.21**	.55**		
Reading frequency	.08**	.41**	.40**	
Reading duration	.25**	.60**	.48**	.37**

Table 2. Correlations among Students' SES Background and Reading Engagement Measures.

	Number of books owned at home	Bookstores visits frequency	Library visits frequency	Reading as a hobby
SES	.37**	.13**	.05*	.43**

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$

Table 3. Correlations among Students' SES Background, Their Access to Books, and Their perception of Reading as a Hobby.

		Public Libraries	
High-SES	1	Borrow books	37.2
	2	Study and do homework	21.2
	3	Read	18.7
Mid-SES	1	Study and do homework	25.7
	2	Read	17.6
	3	Borrow books	16.2
Low-SES	1	Study and do homework	19.6
	2	Read	17.8
	3	Borrow books	11.9
All Participants	1	Borrow books	28.1
	2	Study and do homework	23.0



3	Read	17.6
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Table 4. Students' Top three Activities in public libraries by SES.

What materials do your parents prefer to read?				
	High-SES	Mid- SES	Low-SES	All Participants
Do not read	7.0	13.3	26.5	11.1
1 type	26.9	30.9	37.9	29.7
2 types	17.9	14.1	11.4	15.6
3 types	12.5	5.8	4.1	8.8
4 types	6.6	2.8	2.1	4.6

Table 5. Parents' observed reading habits.

British Journal of Sociology of Education

Dear Editors,

**Manuscript ID CBSE-2018-0120: Cultural Capital, Habitus and Reading Futures: A Case Study of Middle-Class Adolescent Students' Cultivation of Reading Dispositions in Singapore**

Many thanks for the feedback for our paper, which has been most useful. We have tried to strengthen the theoretical framework for the paper, which was the main weakness pointed out in the first submission. Key changes have been highlighted in yellow.

However, in doing so, we have exceeded the word count of 8,000 words and the manuscript currently stands at 8,375 words. We hope that this is fine as it was not possible to extend on the literature review without substantial addition. We did not want to remove the empirical data as we felt it was important.

Please find below detailed responses to the feedback from the reviewers.

Number	Reviewers' Comments	Response
1.	<p>Reviewer 1 noted that the concepts of cultural capital and habitus are treated in too imprecise a manner and requested for clearer definitions of habitus. Reviewer 1 recommended that the authors examine more closely the various uses of habitus in recent articles in BJSE and elsewhere and specify a definition that can be used more consistently within the article.</p> <p>Reviewer 1 noted that cultural capital and habitus should be discussed in relation to field.</p>	<p>We have tried to give a clearer definition of habitus by returning to Bourdieu and other researchers' work. We have focused on habitus as a "structuring structure" that is developed through a child's upbringing and results in an orientation that allows for the operationalization of cultural capital.</p> <p>We have provided a definition of the concept of field and explained that the value of any capital only makes sense within the field in which it is being evaluated over time. We linked the discussion of field with details about the importance of reading within the Singapore educational and national context.</p> <p>We have also reworked the conclusion and hope that the ideas are sharper and more nuanced based on the reworking.</p>
2.	<p>Reviewer 2 would like more information about IRB approval and survey.</p>	<p>More information about the IRB permissions have been added to the acknowledgement. An additional point has been inserted to explain how the students completed the survey.</p>
3.	<p>Reviewer 2 noted that some of the points made in pages 19-21 (such as the need to move away from deficit perceptions) could have been touched on towards the beginning of the paper. S/he referred to Yosso's (2006) work on community cultural wealth.</p>	<p>We read Yosso's piece which is very interesting and insightful but chose not to refer to it as our key point is that knowledge of home habitus may allow for shifts in institutional habitus.</p> <p>The research lineage that we are referring to include researchers such as Annette Lareau and Diane Reay for whom the social class is key focus.</p> <p>Based on the reviewer's comment and re-reading of the paper, it was felt that the discussion should be sharper. A focused discussion of habitus was included.</p>

4.	Reviewer 2 asked why there was no mention of how class is stratified in ethno-linguistic terms in the context of the study.	<p>The survey did not request for ethnic data and we were thus unable to examine the data in terms of class. There were other forms of information such as stream, parents' educational background that made the survey very lengthy.</p> <p>Although we do not deny the importance of understanding the data from both ethno-linguistic and class perspectives, the scope of the study did not allow for it.</p> <p>However, we feel that this study informs the Singapore and international research on cultural capital and habitus. We have a follow-up study that focuses on bilingual reading and students' ethno-linguistic backgrounds will be explored in that study.</p>
5.	Reviewer 2 asked why the emphasis on printed books "despite evidence offered in the paper shown that respondents or respondent parents were reliant on Kindles, iPads and mobile technology for their reading habits".	<p>The study focused on students' interview and focus group data and in fact, students themselves often talked about print. In another analysis of the descriptive survey data, we found that students prefer print to online reading materials (Authors, 2018) and that avid readers read both on print and online. In contrast, we found that non-readers or less avid readers tend to read less, whether on print or online. Although there are some quotes referring to adults reading online, it is interesting that students themselves report preferring print.</p> <p>While the lack of space does not allow detailed examination of reading on print vs technology, we have included a paragraph to explain the constant reference to print and have made an effort to emphasize the use of technology throughout the findings and in the conclusion.</p>
6.	Corrections suggested: Acronym for SES should be written out Page 15, line 7: more appreciative	The use of SES for socioeconomic status has been marked out in page 2, line 1.