

## Leisure Reading in Two Languages: Reading Habits and Preferences of Bilingual Children in Singapore

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### KEY IMPLICATIONS

- Reading enjoyment/pleasure should remain the central focus of reading programmes/instructions.
- Children's reading interest needs to be reinforced throughout their primary school years.
- Both English and Mother Tongue (MT) reading programmes will benefit children, though the challenges faced by children speaking each language may differ.
- Easy access to high-quality reading materials should be provided in both languages and in both formats (print and digital).
- Students need to be explicitly and carefully socialized into reading digitally.
- The reading programmes' design should consider children's language, language proficiency, age, and gender.

### BACKGROUND

Despite the well-established benefits of leisure reading, little research has examined bilingual children's leisure reading in their two languages concurrently. It is thus of theoretical and practical interest to investigate children's reading habits and preferences in bi-/multilingual contexts to understand better how to develop reading curricula, programmes, and instructional methods to promote reading in more than one language.

### FOCUS OF STUDY

The four main objectives of this project are:

1. Conduct a large-scale reading survey to investigate the general patterns of Singaporean bilingual children's reading habits and preferences, both in English and in their MT;
2. Conduct focus group discussions (FGDs) to provide a more nuanced understanding of children's reading habits and preferences in their two languages;
3. Investigate cross-linguistic relationships between children's reading habits and preferences in English and MT languages;
4. Examine changes in children's bilingual reading habits and preferences before and during the COVID-19 school closure.

### KEY FINDINGS

- Participants expressed more enjoyment of reading books in English than in their MT, which may be due to their uneven proficiency in the two languages. They also read English books more often and for longer durations. Whether reading in English or their Mother Tongue, children who enjoy reading are more likely to read more often and for a longer time. Fostering reading enjoyment should remain the central focus of reading programmes and instructions in all languages.

- Participants' reading habits and preferences evolve as they progress through grade levels. Reading needs to be promoted at different points in time during primary school years, with different strategies to cater to children's varied needs across grade levels.
- Participants demonstrate a clear preference for print reading over reading digitally. Devices were generally underutilized for reading purposes, as children have difficulty locating digital reading materials. Children should be taught explicitly how to use devices for reading effectively and how to search for enjoyable content.
- Boys and girls show differences and similarities in their reading habits and preferences. More nuanced understanding is needed.
- Participants' reading enjoyment, frequency, and duration in English and MT were significantly correlated. Enjoying reading good books in either language may motivate children to seek the same enjoyment in both languages if they are afforded time for reading and have access to appropriate reading materials in either language.
- The COVID-19 lockdown effect was not equal across all children and was especially detrimental to their weaker languages.

## SIGNIFICANCE OF FINDINGS

- This study provides baseline data on Singaporean primary school bilingual children's reading habits and preferences in their two languages.
- We developed an infographic report summarising the main results, which has been shared with the participating schools, CPDD (MTL Branch), LKYBF colleagues, and Language Centre colleagues ([https://www.nie.edu.sg/docs/default-source/oer/report-on-the-reading.pdf?sfvrsn=cbb06553\\_2](https://www.nie.edu.sg/docs/default-source/oer/report-on-the-reading.pdf?sfvrsn=cbb06553_2))
- Proposed Follow-up Activities: Longitudinal studies are needed for mapping the developmental trajectories of leisure reading in children's two languages.

## PARTICIPANTS

A total of 4326 students from eight primary schools participated in the project in 2020.

## RESEARCH DESIGN

The study adopted an explanatory sequential mixed methods design in which quantitative data (a reading survey) was collected and analysed first and then expanded on and corroborated by qualitative data obtained from semi-structured FGDs.

## About the authors

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