
Title	Parental capital and children's reading habits: A case study of two contrasting high- and low-income families
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Parental Capital and Children's Reading Habits: A Case Study of Two Contrasting High- and Low-Income Families



By **Charlene Goh & Loh Chin Ee*

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Leisure reading is associated with many advantages such as improving language skills and academic achievement, developing emotional intelligence and supporting social mobility. Children's dispositions to read are shaped by instrumental and social factors, and the home reading environment is an important factor that encourages the development of leisure reading habits. This study examines how parental cultural capital, in the form of parents' educational qualifications,

identification as readers and ability to provide their children with resources (e.g., books, comfortable reading environments, devices and subscriptions for reading) support children's development of positive reading habits.

Method

This article is part of a larger research study that examined the reading habits and practices of families from different socioeconomic statuses (SES). Qualitative data was collected through in-depth interviews, using semi-structured questions. We studied two parent-child dyads at opposing end of the income spectrum: Jenna and Mel, a mother-daughter dyad (household income <\$2,750/month) and Katie and Samuel, a mother-son dyad (household income >\$10,000/month).

Findings

Commonalities

Despite coming from different SES and academic standards, both parents acknowledged the significance of reading and supported the development of reading habits. Jenna, for example, had her children register under an external organisation that aims to promote literacy in children by providing tuition and educational excursions. This same interest in reading was also expressed by Katie as she sees reading as "a good habit", and supports her child's reading by purchasing books and recommending online reading materials. Both parents implemented digital rules to help their children manage their time for their work and encourage reading. ▶

► **Differential Resources for Supporting Reading**

However, though both parent participants view and acknowledge reading as beneficial, the quantity and quality of their children's reading experiences differ, in part due to the difference in parental capital.

Support for Reading. Parents' educational levels influence their ability to help their children with their reading. Not having completed primary school, Jenna struggles to understand and provide necessary guidance and support in reading for her children. In contrast, Katie has a university degree and sees herself as capable of helping her children learn to read.

Parents' Reading Identities. Parents' confidence in their reading shape their own identities and beliefs in whether they can help their child. With limited knowledge and exposure to the English language, due to her education level, Jenna found it difficult to assimilate into the reading scene where majority of the books are written in English. Her reading diet consists of mainly bite-sized news. Katie, on the other hand, sees herself as

an avid reader and reads frequently. She is able to help her children select books and actively encourages them to read by recommending books.

Access to Reading Materials. Access to reading materials like the number, choices and ownership of books is another major factor supporting reading. While Samuel enjoys the privilege of owning his own books, Mel's books are limited, often gifted and shared property. Mel finds herself in situations where she cannot find the book of her choice, at her reading level. This lack of ownership and choice translates into having a weaker bond with books.

Conclusion

Parental cultural capital in the form of educational backgrounds, parental reading identities and ability to provide quality reading materials and experiences support children's development of positive reading habits. While reading is acknowledged as universally beneficial, low-SES families may have fewer resources to offer their children quality reading experiences.

Some ways to support low-SES families reading include the following: External organisations looking at book gifting can offer choice of books to low-SES children and provide book recommendations. Home-school relationships can be strengthened with parents and teachers communicating about their children's reading progress. Schools can improve their school libraries and curate reading experiences to support children with less home support for reading.

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