

Home Literacy Environment: Child's Literacy Interests and Outcomes

'SKIP Research Bites' is a series of short summaries based on findings from the Singapore Kindergarten Impact Project.

What does research tell us?

Home Literacy Environment (HLE) refers to the aspects of the home environment that contribute to children's early reading development (e.g., Teale & Sulzby, 1986). It encompasses at least three factors, including:

1. *Parent literacy involvement* - the degree of effort with which parents engage children's participation in language and literacy-related activities in the home setting, and parents' planning and modeling of literacy activities (Beals, De Temple, & Dickerson, 1994)
2. *Parent literacy habit* - literacy-related activities parents engage in by themselves and their own beliefs and attitudes towards literacy (DeBaryshe, 1995; DeBaryshe & Binder, 1994)
3. *Child literacy interest* - children's frequency of engagement and level of enjoyment in literacy-related activities (Hume, Lonigan, & McQueen, 2015)

Studies have demonstrated that children's engagement and enjoyment in literacy-related activities are associated with emergent literacy skills, including phonological awareness and letter recognition, and with later reading ability (Baroody & Diamond, 2012; Frijters et al., 2000; Hume, Allan, & Lonigan, 2016; Martini & Sénéchal, 2012). In addition, children's reading interests were also associated with parents' literacy behaviors when interacting with children, such as parents engaging the child in reading and writing, parents modeling reading and writing, as well as parents' verbal participation (Yeo, Ong, & Ng, 2014).

To Learn More:

- © O'Brien, B. A., Ng, S. C., & Arshad, N. A. (2020). The structure of home literacy environment and its relation to emergent English literacy skills in the multilingual context of Singapore. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 53, 441-452
- © Farver, J. A. M., Xu, Y., Lonigan, C. J., & Eppe, S. (2013). The home literacy environment and Latino head start children's emergent literacy skills. *Developmental Psychology*, 49(4), 775-791.
- © Hume, L. E., Allan, D. M., & Lonigan, C. J. (2016). Links between preschoolers' literacy interest, inattention, and emergent literacy skills. *Learning and Individual Differences*, 47, 88-95.
- © Hume, L. E., Lonigan, C. J., & McQueen, J. D. (2015). Children's literacy interest and its relation to parents' literacy-promoting practices. *Journal of Research in Reading*, 38(2), 172-193.

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What is this study about?

In this study, we examined the types of activities that make up the child interest factor within the HLE of 1327 K1 children in Singapore. We wanted to find out if this factor was also related to children's performance on early literacy skills, such as their alphabetic knowledge, word reading and spelling, or phonological sensitivity, in addition to their oral language vocabulary. Children's interest items and early language and literacy for English were evaluated with parent-report surveys, and direct child assessments using individually administered standard measures.



What did we find?

We asked parents to rate how often their children were engaged in different activities related to literacy, including some key activities found in previous HLE research. We found a pattern where one set of activities tended to be highly related – and these included items that indicate the child shows interest in literacy, such as asking questions about print, playing literacy-based games on computer devices, as well as looking at books by themselves and attempting to communicate their thoughts and ideas through simple writing. This was similar to what studies in other countries have found. Another activity that was also related to the child-interest factor was asking a parent to read to them, although this had a weaker relationship to child interest. These were the literacy activities Singaporean children were interested in, as reported by their parents when they were in K1.

The reported frequency of these activities for each child in the large-scale study was then used to predict the children's performance on English literacy and language tasks a year later, when they were in K2. According to the results, child interests (as a whole factor) significantly and moderately predicted both reading and spelling scores while controlling for the effects of their age and family socio-economic status. However, child interest did not predict their alphabetic knowledge, phonological sensitivity or vocabulary abilities.

Child interest is but one of the mentioned factors that make up the HLE, and it may require deeper understanding of how it relates to the other factors. For example, in a previous study by Farver and colleagues (2006), the authors found that child interest may serve to 'bridge' parent involvement and literacy outcomes. So, the importance of parents' role in their children's early development cannot be underscored. Parents' engagement of children in literacy activities and drawing out their enjoyment of these activities may further enhance child outcomes. Indeed, in this study, the child interest factor was highly related to the factors of shared reading, as well as parent literacy involvement and parent literacy habit.

What does it mean for teaching and learning?

Our study conducted in the Singaporean context concluded that child literacy interest significantly predicted reading and spelling outcomes. Though this study investigated the home contexts, the findings could extend to teaching and learning contexts in pre-schools, and provide teachers with ideas on how they may engage children according to their interests in literacy activities. Similarly, teachers may offer tips for adults at home to encourage children's literacy interest by providing the following opportunities:

- Encourage children taking the lead to initiate shared book reading
- Engage in one-to-one reading sessions with children
- Allow children to freely select reading materials
- Provide screen-free time for children to explore and look at physical books individually
- Encourage children to talk and ask about print
- Suggest reading as an alternative filler activity (e.g., if children do not want to take a nap, they could engage in reading individually)
- Simply enjoy reading and focus less on the intention to improve child's reading abilities

