

Home Literacy Environment: Shared Reading and Literacy Outcomes

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

What does research tell us?

Children learn essential skills even before and outside of school. There are resources and learning opportunities provided in the home that contribute to the development of a range of skills including language and literacy. Often termed as the Home Literacy Environment (HLE), this support includes the availability of reading materials, acts of reading with their child, visiting the library, and parents' love of reading and writing. Researchers defined main factors of HLE to include more formal activities, like teaching children explicitly about print, and informal activities, such as shared storybook reading and playing language games. Research suggested that formal activities relate to children's literacy outcomes, while informal activities relate to their oral language outcomes.

Studies from different countries confirm the important impact that HLE has on children's language and literacy growth. On the other hand, some differences are reported in the way parents across countries engage with their children in home literacy. Some western countries report more frequent formal activities than others. Within Asian contexts, different regions also report differences in parents' emphasis on more formal vs. informal activities (e.g., Li & Rao, 2000). Previous work on Singapore parents reported that direct, formal teaching was an important component of HLE, and this type of activity was related to children's performance on literacy tasks.

Currently, the make-up of HLE within Singapore has not been well-defined. It is also unclear how different components of HLE will relate to children's language and literacy skills.

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
- ☺ Sénéchal, M., & LeFevre, J. A. (2002). Parental involvement in the development of children's reading skill: A five-year longitudinal study. *Child Development*, 73(2), 445-460.
- ☺ Sénéchal, M., & LeFevre, J. A. (2014). Continuity and change in the home literacy environment as predictors of growth in vocabulary and reading. *Child Development*, 85(4), 1552-1568.
- ☺ Yeung, S. S., & King, R. B. (2016). Home literacy environment and English language and literacy skills among Chinese young children who learn English as a second language. *Reading Psychology*, 37(1), 92-120.

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What is this study about?

Given that studies suggest there are differences in HLE between contexts and cultures, we examined the types of formal and informal home literacy activities and resources within Singapore. We wanted to find out:

1. What were the types of formal and informal home literacy activities and resources within Singapore?
2. How did the different types of home activities relate to child outcomes, including language (vocabulary, phonological awareness) and literacy (reading and spelling) skills?



What did we find?

We found that in the Singapore context, there were four factors in the HLE, namely:

- shared book reading (frequency of reading together, number of books available);
- child interest (child's frequency of engagement and level of enjoyment in reading);
- parent literacy involvement (such as explicit teaching of letter sounds, rhymes and word recognition);
- parent literacy attitude (parents' reading habits and beliefs towards reading).

Shared book reading is influenced by the factors of parent literacy involvement, and child interest. It was also the factor which was shown to have the greatest influence on both children's language and literacy skills, including their receptive vocabulary, phonological awareness, alphabetic knowledge and word reading. Interestingly, neither family reading habits nor formal teaching of skills were related to the children's language and literacy skills.

What does it mean for teaching and learning?

Parents and caregivers provide the first learning environments in children's lives. They lay the foundations for later school-based learning to help children develop an expanding vocabulary and pre-literacy knowledge about print. Spending time with children by reading books together may be the most cost-effective way to ensure their strong beginnings to school readiness.

Our findings highlight the importance of shared reading frequency, responding to child initiated shared reading, and number of books in the home to both oral language and reading development. To encourage shared reading between adults and children at home, the following tips can be shared as part of your parent engagement efforts:

- increase the number of books available to children
- set aside time daily to read individually with children
- support children to express their wants to initiate reading activity
- encourage children to look at books individually
- provide prompts to encourage children to talk about the illustration in the books

By reading books together and talking about the characters and scenes in the stories or pictures in the books, children will learn new words that might not show up in regular everyday conversation. They will learn about book and print awareness such as print is read from left to right and top to bottom, the correct way to handle a book, pointing out the title, author and illustrator of a picture book, recognising that a word is made up of letters and also about the sound structure of language contributing to their phonological awareness amongst other benefits that build children's language and literacy skills.

