

Why do children in Singapore read? An exploratory study

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ABSTRACT

The study aims to find out why Singaporean children read, as well as the role and benefit reading plays in their lives. It also probes into their motivation for reading and how they choose books. Thirty children were interviewed and the findings of several previous studies confirmed. A significant new finding was that although children are aware of the benefits and pragmatic reasons of reading, they read for their own satisfaction, and any benefit they reap is incidental and not intentional. Recommendations to improve library services for children are made at the end.

Keywords: Singapore children; Reading habits; Reading behaviour; School reading programmes; Public libraries.

INTRODUCTION

Teachers, researchers and parents have long realized the importance of reading for children (Johnsson-Smaragdi and Jönsson 2006). Avid readers are more likely to have a larger vocabulary and a better grasp of complex grammatical constructions (Krashen 2004). Wilson and Casey (2007) who reported on the recreational reading patterns of secondary school students add that, "here appears to be a link between student self-esteem and reading frequency" (p. 40).

While many studies have explored children's reading habits and motivations, little research is available on Singaporean children and reading. Majid and Tan (2007) examined the reading habits of upper primary children aged nine to twelve in Singapore and found that, in contrast to many western country-based studies that show children reading for leisure, few Singaporean children do so, mostly associating the habit of reading with academic work.

Singapore is a multicultural country with four official languages: English, Mandarin Chinese, Malay and Tamil, however English is the main language of administration and is used as a medium of instruction in schools. Using a qualitative research approach, we investigate why younger children (six to ten years old) in Singapore read; the role reading plays in their lives; their motivation for reading; and how they choose books. Therefore, the reading activities mentioned in this study primarily refer to as reading of English materials unless otherwise stated.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Clark and Foster (2005), reporting on a survey of over 8,000 primary and secondary pupils in England, found that children and young people generally like to read with half the sample of pupils claiming that they enjoy reading either very much or quite a lot. Adventure, comedy and horror/ghost stories were the most frequently cited as their choice of fiction. As to why they were reading, most students read because it is a skill for life, helps them find out what they want or need to know and because it is fun. However, 20% of pupils indicated they read because they have to.

In the same setting five years later, Clark and Douglas (2011) published the results of a further study of 17,089 pupils aged 8 to 16). It affirmed that young people held positive attitudes towards reading. Most agreed that reading is important and they enjoyed it. The report also showed that 32% of young people read outside class every day and 29% read two to three times a week. However, 7% did not read outside of class. The report also indicated that girls read outside of class more frequently than boys and that reading frequency declines with age.

McKool (2007) studied children's motivations to read. He found that active parents and involved schools are key. He suggested that children tend to be more motivated to read in a home where parents actively promote reading. Such parents are typically avid readers themselves and are able to recommend age-appropriate titles. Reading-supportive schools provide opportunities for children to select their own reading material from a choice of titles suited to a child's interests. But other factors also influence motivation: preschool literacy experiences, personal thoughts about reading, reading preferences and access and lastly, social influences.

Hollard (2009) argued that all children want are good books that make them want to read. In her quantitative study, fifty-two percent of the 402 third, fourth and fifth graders from an intermediate school in Rotterdam New York, said that they would read more if there were books that interested them more. All the other options (to what could make them read more) combined did not equal this one answer.

Robin H. Boltz's 2007 study, conducted with thirty-five boys, aged ten to thirteen, found that about forty-three percent of the boys "like to read sometimes" and forty percent indicated that they "do enjoy reading for pleasure". However, when it comes to what they get from reading, over a third of the boys mentioned that reading teaches them or that they learn from it. She wrote, "interestingly, not a single boy mentioned enjoyment or entertainment." (Boltz 2007, p. 10)

In another 2007 study conducted with students in grades five through eight, Hughes-Hassell and Rodge found that out of students who read, sixty-four percent of males read for pleasure, compared to seventy-eight of females. Also, sixty-nine percent of the students reported that they read more than two books per month outside of school and most do their reading after school or at night, not during the weekend. The three main reasons indicated by the majority of the students why they read in their spare time are: for fun and relaxation, to learn new things, and because they were bored (Hughes-Hassell and Rodge 2007).

A similar study in Singapore was carried out in 2007 by Majid and Tan with 440 upper primary children aged ten to twelve, using a survey questionnaire. The report confirmed

the same trends observed in western-based studies that girls were keener on leisure reading than boys. The report also suggested that sixty-two percent of children read in order to get better grades and improve language skills. It could be concluded that fewer Singapore children read for leisure purposes and they were likely to associate reading with purely academic purposes. Even their motivations to read were mostly for academically inclined reasons. Majid and Tan (2007) also found that the preferred genre of fiction read by Singaporean children was 'mysteries, crime and detective stories' read by sixty-three percent of the surveyed children. This was followed by adventure stories with sixty-percent and humorous stories/jokes at fifty-seven percent. The results were similar for both boys and girls. For information books, the popular subjects were hobbies (handicraft, cooking and so on), animals, plants and sports. Majid and Tan concluded that Singaporean children desire to read for leisure but are constrained by academic demands, which leave them little time for leisure reading.

If we step away from the individual studies, what the literature tells us is that children want to read, but that their motivations for doing so differ greatly. Given that reading imparts a multitude of useful skills and is intrinsically valuable in its own right, understanding the motivations of individual groups of children is an important aspect of the work facing information professionals. Given that few studies have been made of the reading behaviour of Singaporean children, this work aims to explore the reasons why younger children (six to ten years old) read as well as the role reading plays in their lives.

METHOD

This is a qualitative study that involved interviewing children. Rather than using a survey or group study, interviews were chosen in order to get a set of richer, more complex data. However, interviewing children is challenging. There are ethical and practical issues to consider, such as getting access to them in the first instance and obtaining consent from parents and caregivers. It is easy to forget that children may have very little experience in talking one-to-one with adults, and usually may only do so when they have done something 'wrong' (Mahon et al. 1996).

Based on research by Cameron (2005), interviewers need to: use child-accessible language; inform the child of the interview's purpose; encouraging free narrative; assure the child that it is alright not to know the answers and to take their time in answering the questions; and be careful with our non-verbal communication, such as seating position and facial expression. Cameron (2005) also recommended using tools such as toys, drawings and charts that were child-accessible. We adopted a chart of facial expression-emotion words so that children could point to the facial expressions to inform us of how they felt when reading. We also took note of Westcott and Littleton's (2005) injunction that in order to get the child to relax related objects should be introduced during the interview, in this case, by showing him or her various children's books.

Several possible interview questions were devised:

- How often do you read?
- How do you choose your books?
- How old were you when you first started reading by yourself?
- Why do you like reading?
- How does reading make you feel?

These questions were used to conduct trial interviews with five children aged six to ten. The purpose was to determine if the questions were appropriate, and if they were able to actively engage our targeted subjects. Our pilot study allowed us to finalize our questions and interview structure as:

- How often do you read? When?
- How do you choose your books?
- How and when did you start reading?
- What kind of books do you read? What are your favorite books? What titles? Why?
- Why do you like to read? How do you feel when you read?

While the first question does not contribute directly to the research objectives, it serves two important functions. First, it acts as a rapport builder and introduction to the interview proper. Second, it helps to gauge the child's love of reading as children will only keep doing things they love. And this love or interest in the experience of reading could present itself as a major motivation for their reading.

Thirty Singapore children aged six to ten were interviewed as they visited the public library. Due to time and resource constraints, it was decided to restrict the study to children using the library in order to make sure that they actually did read. Children randomly approached outside the library may not be readers and since the study was of reading behaviour they would not be able to contribute. Prior to each interview, we approached the child and his or her parents in order to obtain consent from both parties for the child's participation in the interview. A sound recorder was used to record each interview and these were later converted to written transcripts. The transcripts were analyzed and then classified into themes which are discussed in the following section.

FINDINGS

Generally the children interviewed read for at least ten minutes, four or more days a week. Sixteen out of thirty children habitually read every day on top of their reading sessions in school. Eight children read only once or twice a week. Out of these eight children who read less often, six were male.

Eleven out of thirty children spend around 20 to 30 minutes reading in each sitting. Seven children would spend more than one hour reading in one sitting. There was a child who answered, "I normally read as long as I can" which could be up to two to three hours before she gets interrupted or distracted by family members or friends. Another noteworthy reply was, "I read until I finish half of the book". We attempted to ask her to state the duration in terms of minutes but she insisted that, "it depends. I will read more (than half of the book) if the book is interesting".

As to when they read outside school hours, answers depended on whether their school session falls in the morning or afternoon. For those who attend school in the morning, reading was done in the afternoon and vice versa (that is, those who attended school in the afternoon would read in the morning). The children who read on a regular basis also read at night before bed. To put it simply, these children would read when they have the time. One respondent declared, "I read all the time that I can". One obvious pattern is that the children tend to finish up their schoolwork before they spend time reading.

On average, children spend approximately 3.5 hours a week reading outside their classes. While some boys read regularly, very few of these spend a prolonged amount of time reading. Girls who read daily tend to spend a longer amount of time. Twelve out of seventeen boys interviewed read less than two hours per week while more than half of the girls spend at least three and a half hours reading each week.

Twenty-seven of thirty children interviewed chose books from the library by themselves. A small number also had books recommended to them by friends. Only three had books selected for them by their parents or siblings.

The top three reasons influencing choice of book for these children were book cover, browsing through the book, and the genre of book. Each of these reasons was mentioned by at least twenty out of thirty children interviewed.

From the interviews, we found that the book cover plays a significant role in whether the child would select the book. In general, books that have colorful and interesting cover pictures certainly attract a child's attention, but what is an interesting cover? Some children liked pictures of unusual things, such as magic, mystery, a scary mask (as in a horror book cover) or something funny. For example, one child described an unusual book cover which featured pictures of people "flying in the sky or travelling to other countries". Some children favoured covers featuring subjects they were interested in such as animals, places and people just to name a few. Several girls liked books with 'girly' covers, or book covers obviously designed to attract girls. Such book covers are typically pink in colour, shiny or glittery and feature elements girls find appealing such as fairies, dolls, mermaids and princesses. One boy interviewed mentioned that he specifically avoided such 'girly' books.

Browsing the book describes the child's act of spotting a book on the shelf, taking it out and then flipping through the pages to skim through its contents looking at either or both its pictures and text. Children who browse books tend to place more emphasis on content rather than the cover, although an attractive cover would increase a book's chance of being selected for browsing in the first place. The children look for age-appropriate books with interesting content, be it in words or pictures. They want the pictures in the book to aid their understanding of the text. Again, children use the word 'interesting' to describe the kind of book they want, but this term is subjective and differs from child to child. One eight year old mentioned that she would "read the first and last part of the story to know what the book is about". An interesting observation was that there were three girls between the ages of seven to eight who selected books that have 'nice' words such as "kind princess", avoid books with words that are 'disgusting or bad' (like "mean or selfish") and look for books with 'happy' elements in characters, storyline and so on. This suggests that they desire books that make them feel positive and that they would knowingly avoid books with negative content. One seven-year-old boy shared with us that he made a conscious effort to avoid books with pictures as a personal goal as he believes picture books were only meant for younger children. Another observation was that some children browse the book to check if the pictures and text are as interesting as the cover. One child even said "just because a book had an interesting cover and title, does not mean that its content is interesting".

There were several unique replies from the interviewed children. An eight-year-old girl shared "I decide at home what book I want and see the books I want to borrow in my mind, before coming to the library". In other words, she visualized in her mind exactly

what kind of book she wants before coming to the library. Another nine-year-old girl searched for the title of the book she wanted from the Internet and would use the Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC) in the library to locate its call number. An eight-year-old boy stated that he would look out for books with “interesting information, good language and vocabulary usage and pictures that help the reader visualize things in three dimensions (3D)”. There was a seven-year-old girl who chose books based on her own experiences. She did not like books that were funny – she preferred books that are “happy yet serious” as she did not like reading about people playing pranks on others. Some children have unique personal preferences that stand out, such as the selection of any random book, books that do not belong to a series, books with nice pictures that can be drawn and books with lots of words. There was an eight-year-old boy who shared that, similar to an adult; he will only look for books if he requires information such as information on a city that he and his parents are traveling to.

The majority of children interviewed remember reading on their own before starting formal education (Elementary One) at the age of six or seven. More than half started when they were in kindergarten and the average age is five years old. Although Singapore’s Ministry of Education does not list ‘ability to read’ as one of the desired preschool education outcomes, it has a framework under the section called ‘Language and Literacy’ that recommends preschool education providers promote interactive skills in speaking, listening, reading and writing. Most nurseries and kindergartens have embraced this principle and some of these institutions have taught children how to read as early as pre-nursery level (MOE 2010). However, there were four children who started to read independently in primary school. The reason for this is that they have learned how to communicate using a second language such as Chinese, Malay or Tamil.

We found that children of both genders read mainly to feed their interests (seven boys and six girls state this as their main reason). Some of them, especially girls, read in order to emulate a specific character (for example, a kind and beautiful princess or characters that portray their concept of desirable behaviour). In general, the girls read mainly for these two reasons, although there was one girl who read to capture the feeling of “fun” from the books.

In contrast, boys read for more varied reasons. Many boys read for interest, however, a few read to capture certain feelings (for example, the thrill of reading about “large and scary” dinosaurs). Other boys read to emulate a character (to be funny and full of tricks) or to learn facts. The unique reasons the children (all were boys) read include wanting to be smarter, appreciating the language and creativity in the story, and looking forward to plot twists. One of them also read simply because he views himself as a “bookworm” and so does what a “bookworm” does – which is to read.

The children we interviewed also perceived various benefits of reading. All of them are aware that reading improves their writing and vocabulary. Many also find that reading helps them learn new things. Unique benefits were mentioned by two girls who felt that reading helped them “create stories of their own either to share” with other friends or to role-play with a sibling. One boy felt that the benefit of reading was in learning new facts to impress his sister. Another boy’s perceived benefit of reading was finding new things to draw while a third boy’s perception was that “reading could help him score better in class”.

The majority of the children we interviewed feel happy and excited when reading (twenty-two mentioned “happy” and twelve “excited”). This is mainly because they are doing

something they like. Others feel excited because they learn new things or could not wait to find out what comes next in the story. Some children feel satisfied or thoughtful because they learn new things. Interestingly, nine children felt as if they were watching a movie when reading while another five felt as if they were transported inside the book. There are a few unusual feelings: surprised and suspicious. Two girls felt surprised learning unusual facts while one boy felt suspicious for the simple reason that books such as *Horrid Henry* by Francesca Simon were not horrid at all but instead quite funny. Another boy felt suspicious while reading some books because he wondered what questions his father might ask him about the contents thereafter. Others felt amused, or in a state of concentration. One girl described that she felt so close to the books while reading that she wanted to keep on reading and not stop.

Table 1 and 2 display the fiction reading preferences of boys and girls in the study. The number in the third column for both tables refers to how many boys and girls read each genre. Girl fantasy is defined as fiction books specially written, designed and targeted towards girls that are typically in the form of a series. They can be identified through their book covers which feature predictable elements such as glitter, sparkles and bright colors (especially pink) and pictures of princesses, dolls, fairies and other characters which girls stereotypically love. These are well received by slightly more than half the girls interviewed. Examples of girl fantasy are the *Rainbow Magic* series by Daisy Meadows and the *Tiara Club* by Vivian French. One ten-year-old boy admitted that he secretly read books from the *Rainbow Magic* series because he found the adventures interesting. It may be possible that other boys may read these types of books too, but are embarrassed to admit it. Males also avoid fairy tales and books about princesses, with the exception of one seven-year-old boy who enjoys fairy tales. This could be due to his age as none of the other boys older than seven years old read fairy tale books. From the findings, it can be deduced that girls generally avoid fantasy books, particularly titles targeted towards males.

Table 1: Fiction Books Boys are Reading According to Genre, Ranked in Order of Popularity

Genres	Examples mentioned	No of responses
Humor	<i>Geronimo Stilton</i> , <i>Horrid Henry</i> , <i>Diary of a Wimpy Kid</i> , joke books, books by Roald Dahl, funny stories	7
Horror	<i>Mr Midnight</i> , scary stories, horror stories	6
Adventure & Mystery	<i>Mr Mystery</i> , mystery books such as the disappearance of boats and ships in the Bermuda Triangle, <i>Zac Power</i>	5
Fantasy	<i>Harry Potter</i> , <i>Beast Quest</i> , <i>Star Wars</i>	4
Cartoon & comic	Japanese Manga such as <i>Naruto</i> and <i>Dragon Drive</i> and Chinese comics	3
Fairy tales	Fairy Tales such as <i>Goldilocks and the Three Bears</i>	1
Animals	Dinosaur adventure stories	1
Others	A seven-year-old likes the storybooks <i>When I grow up</i> by Leonid Gore; <i>Kipper's Idea</i> by Roderick Hunt; and Alex Brychta of the Oxford Reading Tree series.	

Table 2: Fiction Books Singaporean Girls are Reading According to Genre, Ranked in Order of Popularity

Genres	Examples mentioned	No of responses
Girl Fantasy	<i>Secret Unicorn, Magical Pony, Rainbow Magic, Malory Towers, Tiara Club, Winx Club, Books on 'Barbie', Megastar Mysteries, Magic Ballerina, Nina Fairy Ballerina</i>	7
Adventure & Mystery	<i>Magic Tree House, Totally Spies</i>	6
Fairy Tales	<i>Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, Disney Fairy Tales</i>	6
Princess	<i>Cinderella, Sleeping Beauty, Princess and the Pea, Little Mermaid and other Princess related books</i>	6
Humor	<i>Geronimo Stilton, Comic books, Diary of a Wimpy Kid</i>	5
Horror	<i>Mr Midnight, Ghost books about a haunted house</i>	3
Cartoon & comic	<i>Ben 10, Batman, Scooby-Doo</i>	2
Animals	<i>Berenstein Bears</i>	1
Others	An eight-year-old likes reading about kind people for e.g. <i>Peter and Jane Ladybird</i> book series	

From Tables 3 and 4, it can be clearly seen that non-fiction books on animals are equally popular with boys and girls. However, the animals they like to read about differ. Girls prefer domestic animals (for examples, cats, dogs, horses) whereas boys prefer reading about wilder animals (for examples, insects, reptiles, dinosaurs). Very popular choices of information book among the boys interviewed were books about dinosaurs and books about volcanoes.

For the thirty children that were interviewed, it appears that males show more interest in a wider variety of information books as compared to girls but this could also be due to males showing more interest in information books as compared to storybooks. One common theme enjoyed by both boys and girls is science and technology, especially space-related books.

Table 3: Non-Fiction Books Singaporean Boys are Reading According to Subject Area Ranked in Order of Popularity

Subject area	Examples mentioned	No of responses
Animals	Insects, fishes, dinosaurs, reptiles such as snakes, dogs and lions	7
Science & Technology	Science books on topics such as the human body, science experiments, weather, metals, the environment, life cycle of plants and animals Astronomy related books such as outer space, how to become an astronaut Technology books about cars, airplanes, monster trucks and buildings	7
Geography	Volcanoes and nature	6
Biography	Biographies on famous personalities (Leonardo Da Vinci, George Washington and Benjamin Franklin).	2
Sports	Soccer training and cycling	1
Others	Books on disasters	

Table 4: Non-Fiction Books Singaporean Girls are Reading According to Subject Area Ranked in Order of Popularity

Subject area	Examples mentioned	No of responses
Animals	Any animals, seals, dolphins, kangaroos, horses, common pets such as rabbits, hamsters, kittens, cats and dogs	6
Science & Technology	Human body, Outer space such as planets and solar systems, biology and technology	3
Arts	Art and Craft books	2
Geography	Volcanoes, the World	1
Others	An eight-year-old will borrow information books based on her school project	

DISCUSSION

It appears that schools, reading plays an essential role in ensuring that children do pick up a book and read every day. In most of the primary (Grade 1 to 6) schools in Singapore there is a dedicated reading period. The duration of these sessions varies from one school to another, ranging from as short as two minutes to half an hour. The format of the reading periods is also different depending on each school's policy. Some schools require children to arrive earlier and assemble in a particular area to sit down and read, while waiting for school to start. Some schools have in-between sessions for the students to carry out silent or independent reading. From the interviews, we found that children do read more as a result of these daily sessions. This finding contradicts Chua (2008)'s research that sustained silent reading programmes did not influence students' reading habits after school. However, Chua (2008)'s conclusion that sustained silent reading programmes have a positive effect on cultivating students' leisure reading habits and attitudes is still apparent in our findings.

The findings of our study also confirm earlier findings by Scholastic and Yankelovich (2008) and Majid and Tan (2007) that boys are more likely to be reluctant readers than girls. Our findings also confirm Majid and Tan (2007)'s report that boys and girls alike enjoy reading adventure and mystery books. However, our interviews show that the titles of such books differ for boys and girls. Even for information books, though there are common interests, the gender difference is quite apparent. For example, both genders enjoy books on animals but boys' choices tend towards wilder animals compared to the girls'.

Out of the thirty children interviewed, only one mentioned using the OPAC to locate books in the library while five used the Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC) call number to locate a book. A child would do either one of two things to find books, browse the shelves randomly or go to a specific section, which they consider their favorite. A child who has a specific genre in mind knows exactly where to go to in the library based on prior visits. It can be concluded from the findings that a book cover and title is sort of like an advertisement to the child. This 'packaging' (book's title and cover) plays a big role in whether a child would choose it from the shelf. Whether a child chooses to borrow the book and read it still depends on its content. Most children want to spend more time selecting books within the library premises. They use the book's pictures to gauge how interesting the book is or read the first and last part of the book. These findings support the concept of a book display in libraries as a means to give books more exposure.

As can be seen from our data, girls read for fewer reasons than boys. Girls read mainly to satisfy their interest or in order to emulate a particular fiction character. However, while many boys also read for interest, many others read for a varied number of reasons with no obvious singular trend.

What is prominent from the findings is that the perceived benefits (improving their language skills) are mostly different from their motivations to read (mainly to feed their interests). Thus it appears that children interviewed do not read solely for perceived benefit. Rather they are motivated by other concerns and any benefit they reap is not by intention but incidental. This seems to be in contrast to the finding by Majid and Tan (2007) that children in Singapore generally read for pragmatic academic reasons.

We suggest, however, that the two findings are not at odds but rather our finding may be a refinement of the earlier one. Children read mainly for their own reasons and a varied number of motivations. However, they are also aware of the benefits of reading and thus may adopt these as secondary motivations. It is also very possible that the findings of Majid and Tan (2007) simply reflect the motivations for children older (aged ten to twelve) than the ones we interviewed (aged six to ten) and that children read for more pragmatic reasons as they age.

Almost all of the children we interviewed associated reading with positive feelings. This was somewhat expected as we interviewed children who visited the library. However, the reasons why they felt happy or excited were significant. They were happy and excited because they learn new things or they want to find out what comes next in the story. This strengthens the claim that good books (such as fiction with great twists in the stories and non-fiction with interesting facts) can play a part in getting children to feel positive.

In addition, almost half the children felt as if they were watching a movie or were transported inside the book they were reading suggesting that most children have the capacity to be absorbed in a book, given it is the right book. The books they were reading in these instances were of their favorite genre, topic or series. Thus there may be a case for letting children select their own books or helping them look for books according to their own criteria.

IMPLICATIONS OF FINDINGS

The study has the following implications for schools, the school library and the public library:

a) The regular school reading sessions

Many of the children mentioned that their regular reading habit was a result of school reading programmes. The school environment is an excellent place to cultivate the reading habit (Taylor, Frye and Maruyama 1990), especially given the number of hours the average Singapore child spends in school every day. But although this is now a common practice in most schools, not all adopt it. It is recommended that a reading time be designated from Mondays to Fridays for thirty minutes every day as it coincides with the amount of time an average child reads per day.

b) Reading programmes

Given that boys are more likely to be reluctant readers, reading promotion programmes that target this gender should be put in place. One example is the Quest reading

programme by the Singapore National Library Board (NLB). Using a fantasy story as a backdrop, game cards are used as collectibles that can be redeemed for every four books read. Tapping onto the genre of fantasy and using game cards as part of the mechanics, this reading programme will likely be popular with boys and more successful in enticing them to read. Schools can adapt this into their own local reading programmes, although going by our findings, genres such as humor or horror may be more popular. However, because boys are motivated to read for a varied number of reasons, besides satisfying their own interests, reading programmes for them also need to be multidirectional, for example, appealing to a wish to learn new facts and impress others or to create their own stories. In contrast, reading programmes for girls can target their interests and appeal to their wish to emulate certain characters, such as a princess or what a princess symbolizes.

c) More emphasis on reading for leisure rather than academic success

Singapore's attitude toward reading has always been highly pragmatic. However, from our study, children seem to enjoy reading more when it is for their own satisfaction. If parents and educators encourage reading for non-academic purpose, the motivation for reading might decline with age at a slower pace.

d) Categorizing books according to genre and topic

Based on our findings on the top three methods Singapore children choose books from libraries, we recommend categorizing books according to genre for story books such as adventure, horror and mystery. Information books remain easy to locate as they are already arranged according to topic using the DDC. Story books on the other hand, are arranged according to the first three letters of the author's surname. This would be favourable if a child chooses books according to their favourite author but according to our analysis, only an estimated 13% of children chose books that way.

e) Thematic book displays

Book displays are a common practice for public libraries but this may not be so for school libraries. Our findings have reaffirmed the benefits of having a thematic book display. Firstly, a thematic book display focuses and highlights a genre or subject topic which children may look for. Even if the child does not look for the genre or topic, having a display will improve book access. Furthermore, a book display showcases book covers – another major factor of choice in choosing books. It also encourages browsing. The thematic book display should feature posters that illustrate book covers and advertise interesting books in the collection.

CONCLUSION

Our interviews have uncovered several findings. Some characteristics of children such as the feelings associated with reading, run across gender while others such as the motivation for reading are different between the genders. We were unable however, to discern trends that follow the age of the children. This perhaps supports current studies in neuroscience that show no strict age banding in the development of children (Goswami 2008). In the course of our inquiry we have also put forth interesting areas that may bear further research, such as the possible reasons why boys are more likely reluctant readers. In conclusion, this is a modest qualitative study involving 30 children who visit a particular public library. It necessarily fills a gap in the research of the motivations and strategies employed by local children when they read. These findings can lead to positive

recommendations to promote reading among children. However, in order for our findings to be generalized to a wider children population or age range, further research is needed.

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