

**Beyond the household: unveiling the impact of the bilingual experience on reading comprehension in Spanish as a Heritage language.**

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**Abstract**

Beyond the household: unveiling the impact of the bilingual experience on reading comprehension in Spanish as a Heritage language.

This project aims to explore the reading comprehension abilities of children in the UK with Spanish as a Heritage Language by focusing on decoding abilities and oral proficiency. We analysed the linguistic profiles of children aged 7 to 12 and their relationship to Spanish reading comprehension. The study had two main objectives: (i) to assess how various aspects of the bilingual experience impact reading comprehension abilities, including input quantity and quality, age of first language exposure, and engagement with the home language outside of the home, and (ii) to examine the role of oral language and decoding in reading comprehension for this population.

The study comprised 10 participants aged 7 to 12 ( $M=9;1$ ). They were exposed to Spanish at home and received formal education within the UK. Participants completed the Q-Bex questionnaire (De Cat et al., 2021) to ascertain their bilingual profile. Reading abilities in Spanish were assessed through a decoding task (Defior Citoler, 2006) and two reading comprehension screenings: one for children aged 7 to 9 (Defior Citoler, 2006) and another for those aged 10 or older (Abusamra et al., 2010). Additionally, an adapted sentence repetition task from Solon et al. (2021) was utilised to establish oral proficiency in Spanish.

Non-parametric statistical analysis was employed to analyse the results due to the size of the sample. Results showed that children's decoding abilities improved with age, aligning with the Simple View of Reading (Hoover & Gough, 1990). Furthermore, oral language proficiency proved to be an essential component for reading comprehension and particularly in the older participants, parallel to findings in monolinguals (LARRC, 2017). Regarding the background measures of the questionnaire, use and exposure to Spanish outside the home-setting and during holidays were found to be key measures accounting for the richness of the linguistic experience, explaining some of the variability in proficiency scores. Results will be discussed in relation to the literature of reading comprehension development in monolingual and bilingual populations and will highlight the importance that engagement with the heritage language outside of the household has for the development of not only oral proficiency but also reading comprehension.