

Libros en Casa: A Case Study of an Online Spanish Book Club for Latino Youth During COVID-19

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ABSTRACT

This case study presents data on the impact of “Kindles4COVID”, a novel youth-led book club initiative to promote student reading while staying socially connected in the era of COVID-19. We report on quantitative outcomes of US heritage Spanish-speaking students, ages 10 -13, who participated in a Spanish-language version of the online book club. Research on Latino youths’ social activities and literacy is especially important since one out of four students in US public schools is Hispanic; also, serious mental health issues are on the rise for US Spanish-speaking students ages 12 - 19. We collected weekly survey data of 40 bilingual and biliterate Spanish book club participants during one academic year. Our findings show that students across all age groups, socioeconomic classes and genders reported increased reading and a wider circle of friends due to book club activities. 100% of participants commented positively about having a ‘safe’ space to be with students who shared their Latino identity. This study has important implications for how communities can support Latino youth, both academically and culturally.

Introduction

This case study examines the outcomes of an online reading program providing heritage language and literacy support as well as social outlets to Hispanic teens during the COVID pandemic. In the US, a heritage language speaker is a bilingual who grows up hearing (and speaking) a language other than English in the home, and who learns English either along with the heritage language or shortly afterward. For heritage Spanish-speaking youth in the US, Spanish is an important marker of personal, social and political identity that often is linked to cultural bonds attached to the language. Unfortunately, heritage Spanish speakers encounter many roadblocks in English and Spanish that can close their path to continued literacy and well-being. Obstacles include immigration history, social class, racism and motivation related to negative attitudes about Latino/a ethnic identity. Roughly one out of four students in the US educational system will be from Latino families by the year 2040 (Pew Hispanic Research, 2021). Even prior to the COVID crisis, studies indicated that overall mental health issues, and especially depression were on the rise in young Latinos (SAMSHA, 2020).

Long-standing evidence shows that heritage language children who first develop strong reading skills in their non-English home language, gain higher reading scores in English (Griskell, Gámez & Lesaux, 2022; August & Shanahan, 2006; Cummins, 1987). However, resources to aid Spanish development for heritage language learners are not widely available in US schools, even while 78% of all children classified as “English Language Learners or Limited English Proficiency” in US public schools come from Spanish-speaking homes. Sadly, many of this same group will become high school dropouts (NCES, 2022).

The challenges Spanish heritage language students face have been magnified by COVID-19. In 2021, 37% of high school students reported that they experienced poor mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic (Center for Disease Control, 2021). On average, COVID left K-12 students lagging 4 months behind in reading gains, with students of color showing the most drastic losses. Across the US, reading scores fell on average six percentage points for White students and even more for African American and Latino students (Binkley, 2022).

In 2020, two grassroots 501c3 non-profit organizations came together to support US Hispanic adolescents, and this partnership forms the basis of our case study. *Bykids4kids*, founded in 2017, is a youth-led organization with the mission to serve all young people and to inspire change in the world. Some of *Bykids4kids* community projects include TedX Events, ArtKits4Kids and Community Gardening. *En Nuestra Lengua (ENL)* (“In Our Language” in Spanish) was founded in 2010, and is a Saturday academic program for heritage Spanish students. Its mission is to preserve young speakers’ native Spanish knowledge and to promote pride in Hispanic culture. With over 200 students enrolled in ENL, its long-term outcomes are significant: 80% of students reading at grade level in Spanish and 90% at grade level in English (Satterfield, 2021). *Club Lector* (the ‘Readers Club’ in Spanish) is a component of ENL for youth heritage speakers, ages 10 – 15, to maintain advanced Spanish reading, writing, and rhetorical skills while interacting with fellow Hispanic youth. *Club Lector* participants are able to have profound discussions and connections with students who share their age and language.

By combining efforts, *Bykids4kids* and ENL have been able to target aspects such as youth mental well-being, Latino identity, Spanish language and literacy growth through a unique student-initiated program,

Kindles4COVID. The current research contributes new information on bilingual and biliterate US Hispanic youth not found in previous studies. The questions guiding our case study are: (1) Does Spanish literacy achievement increase after participation in the Spanish *Kindles4COVID* Book Club? (2) Are digital reading materials beneficial for (Latino) teens (in Book Clubs)? (3) How do communities support underrepresented/low-resourced teens? and (4) What are some effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on Book Club participation? The rest of the paper addresses these questions and is laid out as follows: we next discuss key literature for the research. We then describe the study methods and goals. The subsequent sections provide results and discussion. A final section concludes with closing thoughts and points for future research.

Literature Review

Studies such as Suárez-Orozco, Suárez-Orozco & Todorova (2008) and Menken & Kleyn (2009) examine literacy and its relation to Latino youth identity. An important point discussed is the negative effect caused when Latino students’ language and culture are not valued in the US educational system. Stewart (2014) carries out a single-case study on the literacy practices of one second-generation heritage Spanish adolescent in Arizona. The study’s findings link negative effects to the largely White school system that treated the student’s Spanish skills and Latino culture as a deficit, rather than an asset. McNamara (2020) examines youth literacy instructional techniques and notes that adolescent literacy continues to decline over the past ten years. During the pandemic, McNamara (2020) designed a year-long course using a variety of reading modes to improve English literacy skills in 138 Latino and White middle-class freshmen in a rural California high school. The outcomes were positive, with students reading four times as much as their reading habits before the study, and expressing positive attitudes towards multiple modes of reading.

Connell, Kirkpatrick, Lauricella & Wartella (2013) look at reading and the use of electronic media in US Latino homes through survey responses of 663 Latino caregivers with children eight years and

younger. While Connell et al. (2013) report that 80% of survey participants used the English-language version (and not the Spanish option), they do not ask about what portion of the screen activities the children carry out in English versus Spanish. The study finds that home language and income level affect access and use of digital technology; yet, in general Latino family attitudes and practices around screen media were the least restrictive, and stem from the belief that their children need to develop digital/computer skills to be successful in life. Hispanic children spend more time using computers and smartphones each day, and read on average fourteen minutes longer per day than children of other ethnic/racial groups. In contrast, Merga (2014) questions the popularity of digital readers for American and Australian teens, showing that print books were the overall preference. Merga & Roni (2017) surveyed 997 fourteen-year-olds in Western Australia and found that students' reading frequency actually declined with greater access to e-Readers and smartphones. Loh & Sun (2022) find that while the COVID-19 pandemic brought in greater overall access to online reading materials and improvements in technology, the majority of secondary school students still prefer physical books, even though the main factor for increasing literacy was having access to interesting literature, no matter what the platform or device.

Adding on social aspects to digital literacy, Stover (2016) explores the benefits of book clubs in an online setting pertaining to both teachers and students, and discusses the implications that this teaching model has for the 21st century. The study consisted of third graders organized into groups based on their reading levels. Students used blogposts to express their observations about the books in expansive ways, including images, diagrams, audio, and video to enrich their response. The book clubs were guided and supervised by preservice teachers, who would interact with the students through blogposts every week. Most students exceeded the required amounts of posts, and students were able to interact with each other in various ways. Colwell (2018) looks into how adolescents participate in an online book club with minimal structure from adults. The book club was part of an eight-week program through a local public library. The format consisted of twelve voluntary participants, students ages 13 – 17, who read a book for ten days and had five days for discussion. Students were only allowed to choose one book from each of the five genres per each reading-discussion cycle. Colwell (2018) analyzes the quality of each discussion and finds that participants used formal literary skills and were able to produce thoughtful discussions around the various books. The study suggests that "minimal teacher involvement in online discussion spaces can yield thoughtful discussion about literature" (Colwell, 2018; p. 20). Schreuder & Savitz (2020) questions how multiple elements in a book club influence adolescents' reading motivation through a case study where fifteen students (grade 12) participate in an online book club. The participants were allowed to choose one out of six young adult books to read and discuss. Participants were then placed with fellow peers who had read the same book. These groups had weekly discussions and answered questions from college students (these questions were recorded in an online video-sharing platform). Participants in the study answered pre/post assessments to determine how and why their motivation to read increased/decreased, using the Adolescent Motivation to Read Profile. The majority of students' motivation to read increased, as 73% of students had more total reading motivation as a result of the book club. About 67% reported that their interactions with college students increased their reading motivation. At the end of the book club, 58% of the participants reported that they were more likely to read another young adult book. This study suggests that many factors in a book club can positively influence an adolescent's reading motivation, including book choice and interactions with older, role-model peers.

The literature shows that social aspects of literacy must also include community responses. Canfield (2018) examines how national literacy programs associated with pediatric care affect low-income families' use of community literacy resources. The study notes how low-income families trail in literacy from early on compared to their higher income counterparts. However, it spotlights national initiatives that help counteract this lag, such as Reach Out and Read, a program that partners with pediatric clinics to give parents access to materials and guidance in order to establish strong literacy habits. Jones (2018) looks at the

SPARK literacy model and how it addresses the needs of low-income and minority schools and helps sustain literacy levels in younger students. SPARK is a combination of tutoring and after school enrichment programs to engage children by making fun programs where young students can enjoy reading and writing.

The previous references provide a strong foundation and important background information for our study. We will focus on youth ages 10 – 13, a group which is not covered in the reviewed literature. Furthermore, although previous studies were conducted with English, we are centering Spanish as the exclusive language of literacy and social activities for the current study, because ENL students are unique in the US for their age group due to their advanced reading and writing skills in both Spanish and English. Even with this unique bilingual and biliterate population, our study will have a larger sample than the adolescent book clubs reviewed, which consisted of 12 – 15 participants. Also, since most of the reviewed literature was carried out prior to the COVID-19 pandemic and general school-age remote learning, it is likely that those studies' literacy outcomes would be significantly different (both positively and negatively) with the large-scale impact of COVID. On this point, Bao, Hang, Ruixiong & Hogan (2020) tracks the impact of school closures on grades K – 5 children's daily literacy. Their results suggest that reading to children somewhat helps combat the reading loss brought on by the pandemic. Marques de Miranda, da Silva, Sena Oliveira & Silva (2020) reports on youth mental health conditions including depression, anxiety and stress linked to the COVID-19 crisis. The study shows that older adolescents exhibit more depressive symptoms than younger ones. Other studies show that more Latino children have now been documented with difficulties related to mental health during the pandemic (López 2020). López (2020) also examines how the pandemic has disproportionately affected the Latino community, and Latino youth in particular, due to lower incomes and lower levels of education. Our research may result to be in line with Pulaczewska (2021) who considers media effects on Polish language and literacy maintenance, based on the heritage language of thirty Polish-German bilingual adolescents growing up in Germany. Pulaczewska (2021) uses a survey to examine whether age affects the youths' Polish use in social media, YouTube, music, internet, gaming and contacts with Polish-German bilingual peers. The author's findings show that age and quality of contact with bilingual peers significantly affect the use of Polish in all forms of media. We will return to this study in a later section of the paper.

Methods

Procedure

During the COVID-19 pandemic, *Bykids4kids's* created a virtual program, *Kindles4COVID*, where youth were paired with a reading buddy. The primary goals were to strengthen community bonds and to improve literacy. All *Kindles4COVID* participants had the option to request reading buddies of the same age, older, or younger, and buddies of the same gender, other or a mixture. To ensure that all participants had access to the same reading materials, a Kindle Fire Tablet was provided to each participant, through a community grant. Participants completed readings each week (sometimes collaboratively), then met once a week for approximately 40 minutes via Zoom. All buddies worked with a high school-aged facilitator to assist them with ongoing meetings.

Spanish *Kindles4COVID* Implementation

“Facilitadores”

En Nuestra Lengua partnered with *Bykids4kids* to establish a heritage Spanish-speaking youth version of *Kindles4COVID* for *El Club Lector* students. The *Kindles4Covid* program began with an onboarding pro-

cess where facilitator welcome guide kits were translated to Spanish and emailed out. An adult coordinator for the *Club Lector* recruited ten high school Spanish heritage language facilitators, ages 14 – 16, who were former *Club Lector* participants and who, for the most part, had been volunteering in ENL classrooms in-person before the pandemic.

The *facilitadores* received an orientation in Spanish for the Kindles4COVID program and training for preparing activities for weekly meetings with their reading groups, or *compañero/as*. The facilitators specific roles were to complete the readings so as to be able to lead the discussion in Spanish with the *compañero/as*, as well as carry out tasks such as assigning essays, asking discussion questions, scheduling interactive activities, and assigning book segments to read. *Facilitadores* had regular ‘check-ins’ with the *Club Lector* coordinator and also submitted weekly survey ‘reflections’ after each virtual group meeting. The coordinator observed each *facilitador* during one of the online group sessions in order to provide feedback and support.

“*Compañero/as*”

Students who participated in the pilot term of the Spanish Kindles4COVID were 30 members of *Club Lector* 1 (ages 10 – 11; however, later terms also included 12 additional participants from *Club Lector* 2 (ages 12 – 13). The participants attended various schools and lived in various cities throughout southeastern Michigan. Students had the option to request reading *compañero/as* of the same age, older, or younger, and *compañero/as* of the same gender, other or a mixture. Participants are paired with two to three virtual Spanish-speaking *compañer/as*. The ENL coordinator assigned younger facilitators to help younger *Club Lector* students, and similarly assigned older facilitators to work with older *Club Lector* students.

ENL created a list of online Spanish books available on Kindle from which each group of *compañero/as* could choose to read for a period of 10 weeks. The list of Spanish book recommendations was organized according to participant's age and whether they were members of *Club Lector* 1 or 2. *Facilitadores* were able to choose if they wanted to follow these recommendations based on their group's reading level and interest in a particular book. Each student was provided a Kindle, where they would be able to read and annotate their book. Groups would meet with their facilitators once a week for 40 – 45 minutes to talk and discuss the readings, as well as to share the essays they had written, if assigned by the facilitator. Meetings took place via Zoom or Google Meet, but *facilitadores* also kept in contact with their group members via email. All *compañero/as* also met as a large *Club Lector* group for 40 minutes on Saturdays with an ENL adult docent to talk about their week and share information on the books that they were reading. All interactions were carried out exclusively in Spanish. Every week, participants filled out an online survey in Spanish to evaluate the week's experience in the online book club. Survey questions covered a range of topics such as liking/disliking the Kindles4COVID program, technology issues with the device, and getting along with *compañero/as*.

Data Analysis

All data analyzed were taken from Spanish survey responses. An initial Spanish questionnaire gathered information regarding participants' baseline demographics and literature preferences. At regular periods for 30 weeks during the school year, participants and facilitators completed surveys in Spanish (different surveys for each group) on their recent session and reading practices. Surveys documented the range of activities and how often, how long, and extent of participation. These surveys also captured the participants' current understanding of and use of digital technology.

The process of organizing and coding the participant questionnaire responses was carried out after the conclusion of the Spanish Kindles4COVID program for the school year. The goal of the current case

study is to analyze the overall quantitative findings on the *compañero/a* data only; the facilitador data is not included. We repeat the questions guiding this research, and include our projected outcomes, based on past literature findings:

RQ1. Does Spanish literacy achievement increase after participation in the Spanish Kindles4COVID Book Club? Here we predict that there will be an overall increase in frequency of Spanish reading after participation in the Book Club.

RQ2. Are digital reading materials beneficial for (Latino) teens (in Book Clubs)? We predict that the new technology, coupled with new experiences of the Spanish Book Club will be considered beneficial by the participants (Latino teens).

RQ3. How do communities support underrepresented/low-resourced teens? We predict that the heritage Spanish youth participants in this study will feel safe to express their identities precisely due to community-based support and through additional organizations that collaborate with the Kindles4COVID activity.

RQ4. What are some effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on Book Club participation? We predict that COVID-19 will result in more digital reading and more social interactions online for teens in this study.

To obtain the results, survey responses were calculated as numerical variables and also grouped by topic themes. The processes of reading, re-reading, coding and checking were carried out by the members of the research team. The completed organization and coding were then validated in consultation with the researchers' advisor, a scholar in community-based literacy programs, who has a record of publication on Latino youth as Spanish heritage language speakers. Inter-rater reliability was conducted between two researchers of the team and the expert, to determine the level of consistency between the researchers' categorizations. Quantitative data were calculated using the Google Spreadsheet tools. The thematic analysis method (Block, 2015) was adopted to categorize the open-ended comments from the surveys.

Results



Figure 1a

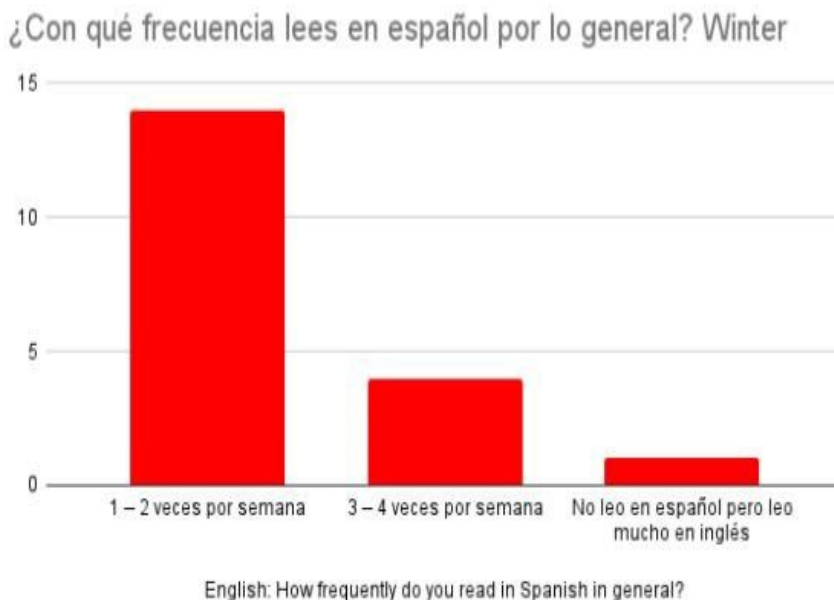


Figure 1b

Figure 1. Participant End of Season Reading Frequency

Figure 1 evaluates participant reading frequency. Participants self-reported amount of times they read in Spanish per week, with the choices ‘*No leo casi nunca en español*’ (*I almost never read in Spanish*), ‘*No leo en español pero leo mucho en inglés*’ (*I don’t read in Spanish but I read a lot in English*), ‘*1-2 veces por semana*’ (*1-2 times per week*), ‘*3-4 veces por semana*’ (*3-4 times per week*), ‘*5 o más veces por semana*’ (*5 or more times per week*). Figure 1a shows the participant results at the end of the fall session, whereas Figure 1b shows the results at the end of the winter session.

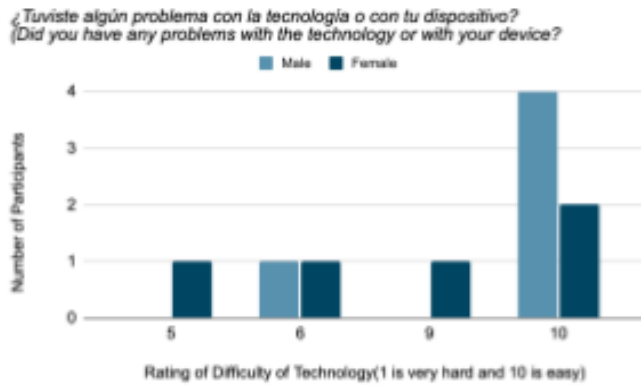


Figure 2a

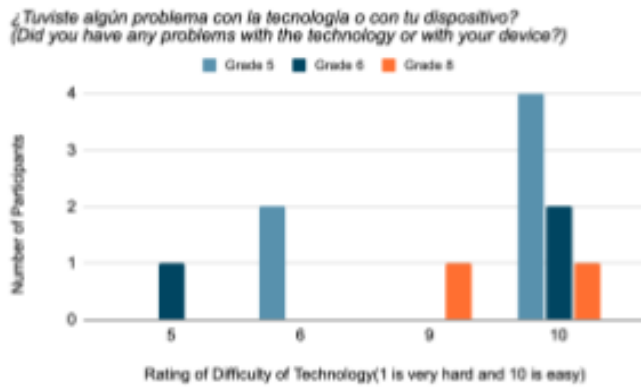


Figure 2b

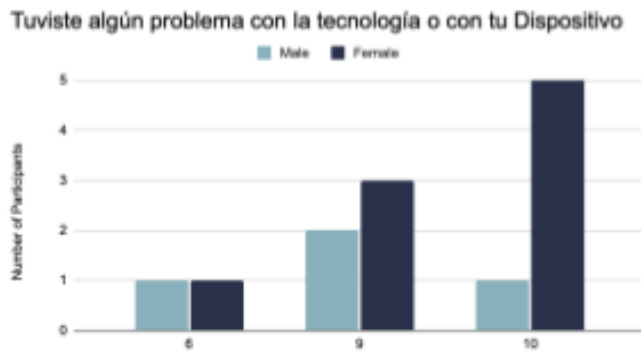


Figure 2c



Figure 2d

Figure 2. Participant Trouble with Technology

Figure 2 demonstrates the level difficulty of participants using the technology. Participants answered the question

¿Tuviste alguna dificultad con la tecnología o tu dispositivo? (*Did you have any problems with technology or your device?*) on a scale from 1-10, 1 representing the participant had many problems, 10 representing none. Figures 2a and 2c show difficulty with technology by gender, Figures 2b and 2d show difficulty by grade-level.

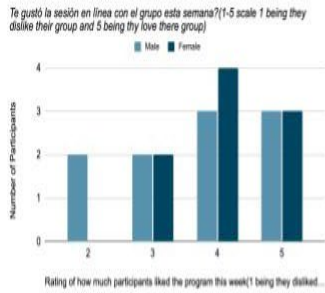


Figure 3a

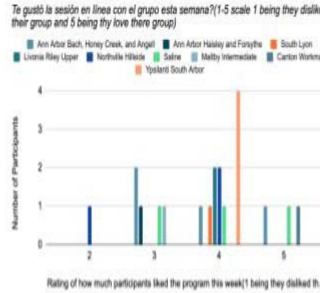


Figure 3d

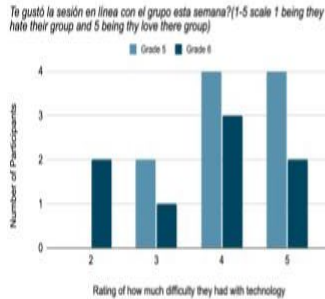


Figure 3b

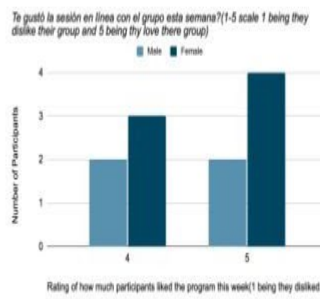


Figure 3e

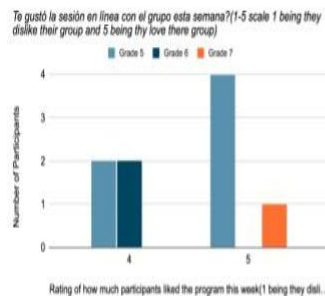


Figure 3c

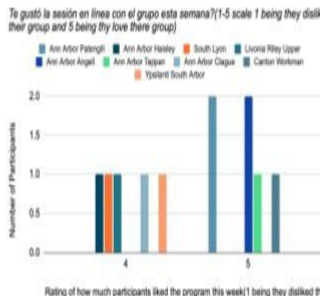


Figure 3f

Figure 3. Participant Approval of the Program

Figure 3 looks at participant approval of the program, where participants answered the question ¿Te gustó la sesión en línea con tu grupo esta semana? (*Did you like your online session with your group this week?*) with a value of 1-5, 1 signifying the lowest approval, 5 the highest. Figures 3a and 3e look at participant approval by gender, Figures 3b and 3c look at approval by grade-level, and Figures 3d and 3f look at approval by area/school.

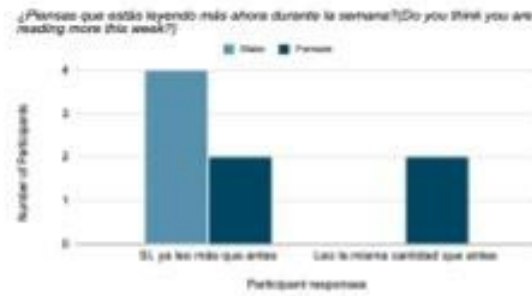


Figure 4a

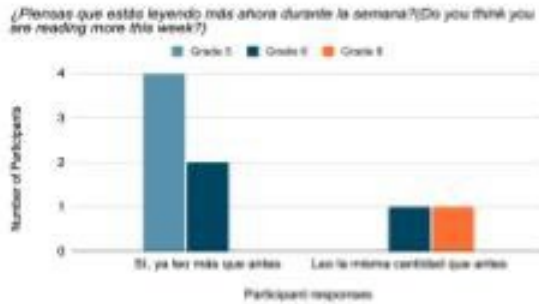


Figure 4b

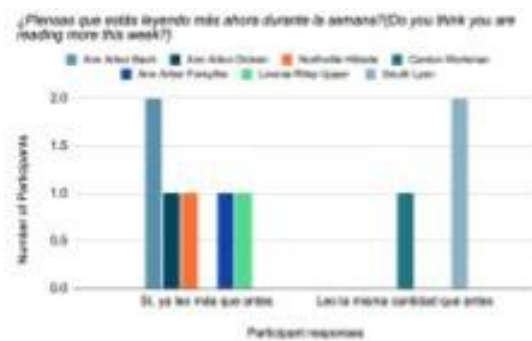


Figure 4c



Figure 4d

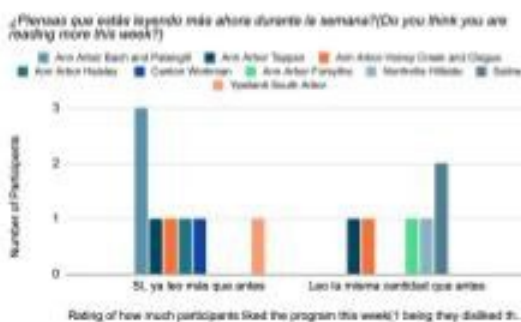


Figure 4e

Figure 4. Participant Weekly Reading Frequency

Figure 4 examines data on how many participants reported if they read less, the same amount, or more than the previous week. (¿Piensas que estás leyendo más?) Figure 4a looks at reading frequency by gender, Figures 4b and 4d look at reading frequency by grade, and Figures 4c and 4e look at reading frequency by area/school.

Discussion

Our first research question was: “Does Spanish literacy achievement increase after participation in the Spanish Kindles4COVID Book Club?” We predicted that the frequency of Spanish reading for *compañero/as* would increase. Based on the results, Spanish literacy achievement among these participants increased throughout the Spanish Kindles4COVID program. This finding is actually very interesting, because the outcome that the participants would increase reading in Spanish was not guaranteed. While the online book club gave participants a space to read in Spanish and discuss literature in Spanish in small groups, these students were already participating in *Club Lector*, where they could read and discuss literature in Spanish as well, so the fact that they read more in the online format is informative. Participants responded to the question “¿Piensas que estás leyendo más durante la semana? (*Do you think you are reading more throughout the week?*)”, as a ratio of responses given to one answer to the total number of answers (i.e., if three students respond that they have read more throughout the week and six students respond in total, the ratio would be 0.5). Throughout the 30 -week period, most participants responded that their reading had increased, and the number of students who reported on their reading frequency also increased. We note that no participants reported that their reading decreased during this period. There is also a possible growth effect in the data, since at the end of the ten-week fall survey period, the data show that substantially more students reported reading three to four times per week than at the end of the ten-week winter survey period. The spike of participants who reported an increase in reading in the fall, stabilized in the winter. When participants were asked about their favorite part of the program, one answered that “Pude leer mucho más (*I was able to read a lot more*).” It is clear that overall literacy increased during the program.

The second research question asked whether digital reading materials are beneficial for (Latino) teens (in Book Clubs). We predicted that the new technology, coupled with new experiences of the Spanish Book Club would be considered beneficial by the participants (Latino teens). The outcomes confirm that digital reading materials were beneficial for this group of Latino teens. A question used in the pre- and post-surveys was: ¿Tuviste problemas con la tecnología o con tu dispositivo? (*Did you have any problems with the technology or with your device this week on a 1-10 scale (1 being very hard and 10 being easy)?*) We compared data from the first week of the program to the last week of the program to identify the degree of change. In the beginning of the program, 90% of participants gave a rating between four and ten on problems with the technology. Originally, participants had more trouble using the Kindle, and a few reported that the technology was hard to use. Early comments had to do with difficulties in initiating an account and opening books on the Kindle. By the end of the program, 100% responses were between a rating of six and ten, which shows the improvement in managing the technology. We view this change as demonstrating learning and mastery of the technology and, as such, it is a benefit for the participants. All told, the results matched our predictions, with survey responses including positive remarks about how they loved the Kindle and would use it in the future. “Me gusta mi libro mucho!! La KINDLE está muy bien para usar (*I like my book a lot! The Kindle is very good to use*),” commented one participant. “Me parece super chévere que podamos leer en el Kindle (*I think it’s super cool that we get to read on the Kindle*),” reported another.

The third research question asked: “How do communities support underrepresented/low-resourced teens?” We predicted that the heritage Spanish youth participants in this study will feel safe to express their identities precisely due to community-based support and through additional organizations that collaborate

with the Kindles4COVID activity. An increase in literacy achievement through frequency shows the positive impact that the program has on youth who are an underrepresented group in their larger communities. Most, if not all, participants are underrepresented because they are minority language speakers and Latinos, so Kindles4COVID's role in supporting this particular Hispanic youth group is very significant within the Latino community. Without the program, the participants have limited options not only in terms of reading, but also discussing books with friends in Spanish. "Ya los conocía pero nos hicimos más amigos (*I already knew them [the participant's compañero/as] but we became closer friends*)," remarked one participant. Furthermore on a broader scale, the program sought out community-based grants to be able to provide low-resourced youth the opportunity to receive access to books in Spanish during the pandemic and beyond. Books in Spanish for teens can cost three or four times more than the equivalent book in English; that is, when the physical book is available in Spanish. Through Kindles4COVID, local businesses such as restaurants and grocery stores also donated products and showed support for the Spanish book club's activities. Given both the narrow and broader community efforts, we can see that not only were student views of the program high regardless of gender, residential area or school, and grade (Figure 3), but reading frequency rose as well in all of these respective categories.

The final research question looked into effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on book club participation.

Here, we predicted that COVID-19 effects would result in more digital reading and more social interactions online for teens in this study. We were particularly interested in what the responses might tell us about the mental health and well-being of Latino youth in the program. The data show that participants experienced increased friendships and an increase in reading during the COVID-19 pandemic. The questions filtered through pre- and post-surveys were first: "¿Te gustó la sesión esta semana con tu grupo? (*Did you like the program this week with your group?*)", on a 1-5 scale (1 representing that they disliked their group and 5 representing that they loved their group). Data were compared from the first week of the program to the last week to identify if friendships were made during this time when youth were facing social isolation. During the first week of the program, most youth gave responses ranging from two to five. Participant remarks conveyed a sense of aloneness, that they were not feeling very connected. Data for the final week of the program ratings rose to between responses ranging from four and five. Participants felt more connected to their groups and expressed more positivity. One participant said "Me hice amigos porque estaba hablando con otros niños (*I made friends because I was talking with other kids*)". The strategy to allow students to select their own preferences for the age and gender of their *compañero/as* functioned well, as did pairing younger *facilitadores* with younger *compañero/as*. Reading frequency as literacy achievement has been previously mentioned, but it is also a by-product of mental health. We note again that at the end of the school year, participants said they were reading more. The small group format and regular meetings were valuable in helping students feel less isolated and 'safe'. One participant also observed that the small group setting motivated them to stay current with the readings, so that they would be able to contribute to the discussion. This result shows that the program was effective during a time of crisis when Latino youth did not have other spaces to connect with peers.

Conclusion

The current research contributes new information on bilingual and biliterate US Hispanic youth not found in previous studies. Our findings show that participants across all age groups, schools and genders reported increased reading and a wider circle of friends due to book club activities. One hundred percent of participants commented positively about having a 14'safe' space to interact with students who shared their Latino identity. We find that our case study does not support Pulaczewska (2021)'s Polish heritage language outcomes in terms of age or gender effects. The author concludes that as bilingual Polish-German youths' age

increases, there is a decline in the use of Polish media. Through the Kindles4COVID program, the Spanish heritage language youths of our study expanded their circle of same-age, local Spanish-speaking peers, and were able to connect with book club *facilitadores* as models of social development.

This study has important implications for how communities can support Latino youth, both academically and culturally. When community organizations are open to collaborations, they can ensure that there are additive experiences and resources for Hispanic adolescents to explore and express their Spanish-speaking identity. In future studies, it will be interesting to analyze the facilitator data that was also collected during this period, and to link the weekly survey results of the *compañero/as* with the weekly reflections of the *facilitadores*.

Limitations

While conducting this research we encountered a few limitations. Because of access to wifi and unstable internet connections in some participants' homes, different numbers of *compañero/as* completed each survey each time. The results reflect that not all participants were able to respond consistently. Also, after the first 10-week pilot session, two students from *Club Lector 1* did not continue with the project. Additionally, ENL expanded the Kindles4COVID participants to include the older students of *Club Lector 2*, so it is important to note that the sample size was not consistent throughout the study. Finally, it is difficult to find a control group for this project, since ideally, the controls would need to be advanced Spanish-English bilingual and biliterate youth, ages 10 – 13, who did not participate in the Kindles4COVID program. Although there are many Spanish heritage youth who are fluent native Spanish-speakers, there are very few who are able to read and write in advanced Spanish. Instead of a control group, our study uses in-group comparisons.

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