

Multilingual book clubs: Reading in your heritage language at school

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Abstract Reading interventions typically focus solely on the school language, neglecting the potential of multilingual students' heritage languages. This study examines the impact of a multilingual book club intervention, where 12- to 13-year-old students read and discussed books in their heritage language during Dutch language classes. Using an explorative mixed-methods approach, we analyzed how students perceived the book clubs and reading in their heritage language, and whether the (multilingual) book clubs led to increased intrinsic reading motivation and more positive reading attitudes. While quantitative results show no improvements in reading motivation or attitudes, qualitative findings highlight the value of social interaction and acknowledging students' multilingual literacy. The study suggests that integrating multilingual literacy in education may foster student engagement, inclusivity and awareness of linguistic diversity.

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1 Introduction

In recent years, Dutch youth have reported increasingly negative attitudes towards reading and low motivation to read compared to European peers. These developments are part of a wider 'reading crisis' characterized by a decline in reading skills (Dood et al., 2020; Gubbels et al., 2017, 2019; Meelissen et al., 2023; Swart et al., 2023). One approach to counter this trend is the implementation of book clubs in schools, where students engage in collaborative reading and discussions (Van der Deijl et al., 2019; De Kleijn, 2025; Polleck, 2010, 2022; Tijms et al., 2018). Such book clubs aim to foster stronger motivation and more positive attitudes towards reading by offering a social and enjoyable reading experience. However, like most reading interventions, book clubs are typically carried out in the school language, overlooking the rich linguistic diversity present in classrooms (Wouters et al., 2024). Multilingual students are rarely given the opportunity to read in their heritage languages, and the question of whether utilizing multilingual literacy in the classroom might positively impact students' reading motivation and attitudes remains largely unexplored.

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Therefore, we organized a book club intervention for 12- to 13-year-old students, in which multilingual students could read and discuss a book in their heritage language. While heritage languages have been defined in slightly different ways in previous research (Aalberse et al., 2019), we follow a broad definition which emphasizes that heritage speakers are connected through personal, ethnic or ancestral ties to a language that is not the official language of their country of residence (Fishman, 2001).

Using a mixed-methods approach combining questionnaires and semi-structured interviews, this study investigated how students experienced the book clubs, as well as their perspectives on reading in the heritage language during the project. Additionally, we tested whether the book clubs led to increased intrinsic reading motivation and more positive attitudes towards reading in general, and we explored whether there might be additional benefits of reading in the heritage language for multilingual students.

1.1 Reading motivation in adolescents

Several studies show that both primary and secondary school students in the Netherlands report negative attitudes towards reading and exceptionally low motivation to read (Dood et al., 2020; DUO Onderwijsonderzoek, 2017; Swart et al., 2023). While reading attitudes and reading motivation are partially overlapping constructs, they differ in the sense that attitudes emphasize how someone feels towards reading, whereas motivation emphasizes why someone intends to read or not (Schiefele et al., 2012). We can distinguish between hedonic reading attitudes (i.e., related to reading for pleasure) and utilitarian reading attitudes (i.e., related to the instrumental value of reading) (Broeder & Stokmans, 2013). Furthermore, reading motivation can be intrinsic or extrinsic in nature. Extrinsic motivation relies on external factors and is driven by anticipated outcomes, such as higher grades or social recognition. In contrast, intrinsic motivation refers to the desire to read driven by the enjoyment or satisfaction derived from the activity itself, for example out of curiosity or to be immersed in a story (Schiefele et al., 2012). In the Dutch context, the latter appears to be most relevant: readers in primary and secondary education are primarily driven by intrinsic motivation (DUO Onderwijsonderzoek, 2017).

Since intrinsic reading motivation and positive attitudes are strongly correlated with reading behavior and competence (McGeown et al., 2015; Schiefele et al., 2012), it is crucial to target reading enjoyment. When students gain positive reading experiences, this might trigger a virtuous reading cycle, as more positive attitudes and increased motivation stimulate reading behavior, which in turn boosts reading competence, leading to stronger intrinsic motivation to continue reading, and so on (Mol & Bus, 2011).

However, very few studies have specifically addressed reading motivation in multilingual students, who may be able to read and write in more than one language (Smith et al., 2023). As limited attention is paid to reading promotion targeted at multilingual students, the potential of fostering multilingual literacy is typically overlooked (Wouters et al., 2024).

1.2 Book clubs as a didactic tool

A promising way to stimulate reading engagement in young readers is talking about a book together (Chambers, 1993; Schrijvers et al., 2019). Specifically, the use of book clubs, in which students read and discuss books with their peers, may be beneficial because the social dimension of this approach makes reading more enjoyable, and because it gives students a sense of agency. Moreover, talking about a book together may improve students' reading comprehension and engagement with a story (De Kleijn, 2025; Polleck, 2022).

Polleck (2010) describes a book club intervention with twelve 14- to 17-year-old girls in New York. Based on a qualitative analysis of interviews, classroom observations, surveys and transcriptions of book club discussions, she argues that the book clubs supported both social-emotional development and literacy skills. Tijms and colleagues (2018) adapted Polleck's intervention to the Dutch context, aiming to quantitatively test the effects of this intervention on reading attitudes, motivation and comprehension, and social-emotional competencies, in 40 12- to 14-year-old students in Amsterdam. Although there were no significant effects on reading motivation, the results showed that the book clubs led to a protective effect on reading attitudes: as expected, reading attitudes declined in the control group, but this was not the case for students who participated in the book clubs. Additionally, the intervention led to larger gains in reading comprehension and better self-reported social-emotional skills.

Recently, De Kleijn (2025) also investigated the effects of book clubs in Dutch secondary education, focusing on 15- and 16-year-old students. Although she did not find significant direct effects on reading motivation, the results of this project are promising: most students appreciated the book discussions, because they enjoyed socializing with their peers and exchanging opinions and perspectives. This led not only to a better grasp of the story, but also to personal growth, which was positively related to reading motivation.

Thus, previous research suggests that book clubs may have various positive effects. The interventions described above, however, all focused on reading in the majority language, even if participants had diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. We aimed to fill this gap, by organizing book clubs in which multilingual students could read a book in their heritage language.

1.3 Multilingual approaches in education

Whereas in the past heritage languages were often banned from schools, during the last decades multilingual approaches have been given more attention in research and educational practice (Meier, 2017). The advantages of this type of approach are twofold. Firstly, fostering linguistic diversity may lead to a more inclusive learning environment in which students do not have to leave a part of their identity at home. This seems to be beneficial

for students' sense of belonging at school and general well-being (Carbonara & Scibetta, 2022; Van der Wildt et al., 2017), which is in turn positively related to learning outcomes (Korpershoek et al., 2020). Secondly, encouraging students to draw from all linguistic resources that are available to them may benefit their school results in a more direct way. Several studies suggest that multilingual approaches support understanding of academic content as well as language and literacy development (Baker & Wright, 2017; Duarte, 2019; Collier & Thomas, 2004). This is also beneficial for the school language, since certain literacy-related skills may be transferred across languages, as they are assumed to rely on a shared knowledge base (Cummins, 1979; Proctor et al., 2017). We conjecture that such linguistic interdependence may extend to affective factors like attitudes and motivation: if students gain positive reading experiences in their heritage language, this might also promote reading in the majority language.

While the literature on multilingual approaches in education is rapidly growing, less attention has been paid to the potential of supporting literacy in multiple languages (Wouters et al., 2024). Previous research suggests that translanguaging in literacy practices may benefit language development and learning outcomes, as it leads to a more profound understanding of texts and improved meta-linguistic awareness (García & Kleifgen, 2019). Moreover, Smith and colleagues (2023) show that multilingual children's reading motivation tends to align with how they perceive their multilingual, multicultural and multiliterate identities. These identities may be shaped by reading experiences in multiple languages, leading to improved self-esteem, a sense of belonging, and feelings of pride (García & Kleifgen, 2019; Molyneux & Aliani, 2016; Smith et al., 2023; Vorobel et al., 2020; Yu, 2023). Education plays a crucial role in identity formation, and in an increasingly globalized world, engaging students' multiliteracy in class provides them with valuable opportunities to cultivate their multilingual and multicultural identities (Fisher et al., 2020; Yu, 2023).

1.4 Research questions and hypotheses

This study addresses the use of (multilingual) book clubs among Dutch students attending the first grade of secondary education. Using questionnaires and interviews, we investigated (1) how students perceive a project in which they read and discuss books in small groups together with their peers, and (2) whether reading in the heritage language brings additional benefits according to students. In addition, we tested (3) whether book clubs might lead to increased intrinsic reading motivation and more positive attitudes towards reading, and (4) if there are any differences in motivation and attitudes between students who participated in Dutch book clubs and their peers who participated in heritage language book clubs.

Considering the positive results of previous research addressing students' perception of book clubs in secondary education (De Kleijn, 2025; Polleck, 2010, 2022), we expect that most students will appreciate the book clubs (RQ 1). Discussing a book with peers

is expected to make the experience of reading more enjoyable, not only because of the social aspect, but also because it can increase engagement with the story and deepen students' comprehension of the text. Since a previous study conducted with Dutch students of the same age has shown a protective effect of a book club intervention on reading attitudes (Tijms et al., 2018), we predict that our book clubs might also have positive effects on reading attitudes and, possibly, reading motivation (RQ 3). We focus on hedonic attitudes (i.e., related to reading for pleasure rather than utilitarian motives) and intrinsic reading motivation (i.e., based on an internal drive rather than external rewards).

Moreover, in light of the growing amount of literature showing that multilingual approaches in education are beneficial for students' motivation, well-being and literacy development (García & Kleifgen, 2019; Van der Wildt et al., 2017; Wouters et al., 2024), we expect that heritage language book clubs may bring additional advantages (RQ 2). Firstly, we hypothesize that utilizing students' heritage languages will stimulate multilingual students' sense of belonging, since it acknowledges a part of their identity that is not always valued at school. We also expect that seeing other students read in different languages may trigger multilingual awareness and curiosity about languages spoken by peers. Secondly, assuming that positive reading experiences in one language might spill over to other languages and lead to positive attitudes towards reading in general, we predict that any positive effects of the intervention on reading attitudes and intrinsic motivation will be stronger in students who read in their heritage language (RQ 4).

2 Methods

2.1 Participants

A total of 246 students participated in our research: 122 took part in the book clubs (the experimental condition) and 124 completed at least one of the questionnaires about reading attitudes and motivation but followed the regular school program (the control condition). Out of 122 participants in the book clubs, 112 students completed a project evaluation questionnaire that was administered immediately after the intervention, and 42 multilingual students were interviewed about their experience in the (multilingual) book clubs. The participating classes had no prior experience with school-based book clubs.

A total of 71 multilingual students were included in the quantitative analysis of the attitudes and motivation questionnaires and/or the qualitative analysis of the interviews and the project evaluation questionnaire. They spoke a wide variety of heritage languages, the most common ones being Turkish, Arabic and English. Of the multilingual students, 73.2% ($n = 52$) were born in the Netherlands and 18.3% ($n = 13$) were born abroad (missing data for 6 students, 8.5%). The mean age of arrival of the students born abroad was 4.8 years ($sd = 2.6$, range = 1-8). When asked about language use, 56.3%

Table 1 Participant data, focusing on students who were included in the quantitative analysis of the reading motivation and attitudes questionnaires

	Dutch book clubs	Heritage language book clubs	Control group
<i>N</i>	65	32	91
Sex	40 boys (61.5%) 25 girls (38.5%)	15 boys (46.9%) 17 girls (53.1%)	50 boys (54.9%) 40 girls (44%) 1 other (1.1%)
Language background	29 multilingual (44.6%) 36 monolingual (55.4%)	32 multilingual	46 multilingual (50.5%) 45 monolingual (49.5%)
School type	26 vmbo-t/havo (40%) 28 havo/vwo (43.1%) 11 vwo (16.9%)	18 vmbo-t/havo (56.3%) 7 havo/vwo (21.9%) 7 vwo (21.9%)	35 vmbo-t/havo (38.5%) 16 havo/vwo (17.6%) 40 vwo (44%)

($n = 40$) indicated to speak both the heritage language and Dutch with their parents, 26.8% only the heritage language ($n = 19$), and 7% ($n = 5$) only Dutch (missing data for 7 students, 9.9%).

With respect to literacy, 83.1% ($n = 59$) claimed to be able to read (at least a little bit) in their heritage language (missing data for 4 students, 5.6%), 59.3% of whom ($n = 35$) eventually chose to read a book in this language. In addition to Dutch, participants read books in ten different heritage languages, namely in English ($n = 11$), Turkish ($n = 9$), Arabic ($n = 4$), Spanish ($n = 3$), German ($n = 2$), Polish ($n = 2$), and French, Hungarian, Rumanian and Chinese ($n = 1$ each).

For the quantitative analysis of the effect of the book clubs on reading motivation and attitudes, we only included students who participated at all three measurement moments (pre-test, post-test, delayed post-test). This led to a sample of 97 students in the experimental group and 91 students in the control group, comprising both multilinguals and monolinguals. One additional participant had to be excluded in the analysis of the motivation data (in the experimental group) and six in the analysis of the attitudes data (four in the experimental group and two in the control group), since they did not complete the relevant part of the questionnaire.

All participants were enrolled in the first grade of Dutch secondary education, which means that they were around 12 or 13 years old. Table 1 provides an overview of demographic information about our participants, focusing on the subset that completed all three questionnaires ($n = 188$). This table shows that participants were not equally divided across conditions in the three different school types, due to practical limitations related to recruitment of schools, willingness of parents to participate and students' language choice in the book clubs. Note that the proportion of multilingual students was greater

for vmbo-t/havo students than for havo/vwo and vwo students (84.8% versus 39.2% and 34.5%, respectively).

Of the 42 multilingual students who participated in the interviews (22 boys and 20 girls), 66.7% ($n = 28$) were in the vmbo-t/havo stream, the school type that prepares for vocational education or universities of applied sciences, 23.8% ($n = 10$) were in the havo/vwo stream, which prepares for universities of applied sciences or research universities, and 9.5% ($n = 4$) were in the vwo stream, which prepares for research universities.

2.2 The book club intervention

The book clubs were inspired by previous book club programs used in secondary education (Van der Deijl et al., 2019; De Kleijn, 2025; Polleck, 2022; Tijms et al., 2018). Our materials were mostly based on those used in Tijms et al. (2018).

The intervention consisted of five lessons that took place once a week during Dutch language classes. Participants read and discussed a book in groups of three to five students. Multilingual students were given the option to read a book in their heritage language or in Dutch. This led to three different types of groups: book clubs in Dutch, book clubs in which students read a book in a heritage language that was shared by all group members, and multilingual book clubs in which students with different language backgrounds read translations of the same book. When all group members spoke the same language, they could also use this language during the discussions. The groups were made by the students' teacher, taking their language background and group dynamics into account.

The books were selected in consultation with the public library of Amsterdam. We aimed to provide popular youth fiction of different genres and reading levels corresponding to students' developmental stage. The Dutch books were selected using the library's lists of most borrowed youth books in 2022 and 2023, considering the advice of a reading consultant of the library. For books in other languages, we aimed to follow similar requirements, although the selection was to a larger extent based on availability in the library and in local and online bookshops. When possible, we used translations of the same books in different languages, and in other cases we used original works. Each group was offered at least three options to choose from. An overview of the books used in the project can be viewed here: https://osf.io/bx6h9/files/gjp89?view_only=797dd8e80ec44550a5f1c2f26b5141cd.

The book clubs were guided by the first author and a research assistant, in collaboration with the teacher, but students worked largely independently. During the first lesson, each group chose a book and started reading together. The following lessons typically had the same structure: the meeting started with a discussion based on students' notes and discussion prompts, after which students continued reading together. At the end of each lesson, students decided together until which page to read before the next meeting.

2.3 Materials & procedure

The book clubs were evaluated using a mixed-methods approach combining paper-and-pencil questionnaires with semi-structured interviews. The questionnaires and interview guide are available here: https://osf.io/bx6hg/?view_only=797dd8e80ec44550a5f1c2f26b5141cd. Parents of participating students were asked for their informed consent prior to participation. The protocol was approved by the ethics committee of the Faculty of Humanities of the University of Amsterdam.

Firstly, all participants completed a questionnaire focusing on demographic variables and their linguistic background. Students were asked which languages they spoke with their family, whether they could read in these languages, and if they would potentially be interested in doing so at school.

Secondly, one week after the intervention, students who participated in the book clubs completed an evaluation survey consisting of closed and open questions, to examine how they judged the project, which aspects they appreciated or not, and why multilingual students chose to read in their heritage language or not.

During the last week of the intervention and immediately after, we also conducted semi-structured in-depth interviews with a subset of the multilingual students who participated in the book clubs. The aim of these interviews was to gain insight into students' experience in the project, motivations for choosing to read in the heritage language or not, and attitudes towards multilingual literacy. The interviews were carried out by the first author in a quiet room within the school. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed for analysis.

Finally, a questionnaire on reading motivation and reading attitudes was administered at three different points in time: one week before the start of the intervention (pre-test), one week after the end of the intervention (post-test), and three months later (delayed post-test). To measure intrinsic reading motivation, we used a Dutch translation of the Reading Motivation Questionnaire (DUO Onderwijsonderzoek, 2017; Schiefele & Schaffner, 2016). This scale measures on a 4-point Likert scale to what extent students read out of curiosity or because they like to be immersed in a story. To test attitudes towards reading, we used an adaptation of the instrument developed by Stokmans (2007), in which participants indicate on a 5-point Likert scale in between opposing word pairs how they feel about reading books in their free time (e.g., fun vs. boring). We focus on 'hedonic attitudes', which are related to reading for pleasure rather than instrumental values.

2.4 Analysis

To answer the first two research questions, addressing how students viewed the book clubs and how they experienced reading in the heritage language at school, we analyzed the project evaluation questionnaire and the interviews with multilingual students. For

Table 2 Coding scheme for qualitative analysis of the interviews

Code	Sub-code
Positive opinions about the project	Reading in different languages
	Discussions
	Collaboration / togetherness
	Good book
	Something different
	Time to read
	Autonomy
Negative opinions about the project	Reading itself
	Did not like the book
	Differences in reading pace
	Homework assignments
	Too short to finish the book
	Too busy / Difficulty focusing
Positive opinions about the multilingual approach	Special / New experience
	Awareness of linguistic diversity
	Metalinguistic comparisons
	Identity
	Practicing heritage language
	Easier than Dutch
Negative opinions about the multilingual approach	Less boring than Dutch
	Too difficult
	Weird / Uncomfortable

the interviews, we used a reflexive thematic analysis following the approach of Braun and Clarke (2006), using the program ATLAS.ti. The first twenty interviews (47.6%) were analyzed by two coders, who closely collaborated to identify the most important themes in the data and to develop a uniform coding strategy, for which the responses on the evaluation questionnaire were taken as a starting point. Based on this, a coding scheme was constructed, which was used to analyze the rest of the interview data. This coding scheme is provided in Table 2.

Considering the third and fourth research question, addressing the effect of the book clubs on hedonic attitudes and intrinsic motivation, we analyzed the scores on the reading attitudes and motivation scales of our questionnaires on the pre-test, post-test and delayed post-test. The statistical analysis was carried out in *R* (R Core Team, 2024), using linear mixed-effects models in the *lme4* package (Bates et al., 2015). We modeled attitudes

and motivation scores as a function of condition, the moment of testing and school type, including interactions between them, with random intercepts for participants nested in classes. Details about the models and contrast coding are provided here: https://osf.io/bx6hg/files/2sb6f?view_only=797dd8e80ec44550a5fic2f26b5141cd.

Since the effects on reading motivation differed per school type, we conducted an exploratory follow-up analysis focusing on the different school types, based on visual inspection of the plots. Note however, that the division of participants in the havo/vwo and vwo school types was not balanced across conditions, leading to small sample sizes, which means that these analyses should be interpreted with caution.

3 Results

In section 3.1, we present the results regarding students' perspectives on the book clubs, and in section 3.2, we discuss their views on reading in the heritage language during the project ('Positive/Negative opinions about the project' and 'Positive/Negative opinions about the multilingual approach'; RQ 1 and 2, respectively). These analyses are based on the interview data and students' responses on the project evaluation questionnaire. In section 3.3, we will present the results of the analysis testing whether the intervention led to quantitative differences in reading motivation and attitudes as measured by our questionnaires, and whether this differed for students who read in their heritage language compared to students who read in Dutch (RQ 3 and 4).

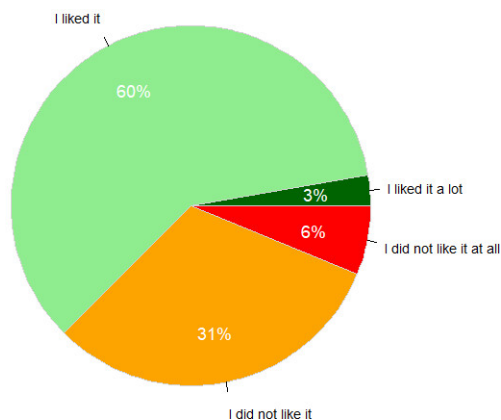
3.1 Students' perspectives on the book club project

First of all, we asked students who participated in the book clubs what they thought about the project and why. As can be seen from Figure 1, in the evaluation questionnaire, 63% of the students indicated that they liked the project, whereas 37% indicated that they did not like it.

Regarding positive opinions about the project, the thematic analysis revealed several themes emerging from the interviews and the open questions on the questionnaire. Most importantly, reading in different languages was mentioned particularly often. Some students emphasized that it was a new experience being allowed to use their 'own language', while others appreciated becoming more aware of the linguistic diversity present among their peers. We will elaborate on this in section 3.2.

In addition to the multilingual approach, most students also liked the book discussions. Students pointed out that it allowed them to exchange opinions and understand the story better, suggesting that book discussions might aid comprehension. Another prominent theme was collaboration and togetherness: students appreciated the fact that they could work in groups and read together. Additionally, some students mentioned that they liked their book, the fact that they were given time to read, or the change that

Figure 1 Students' judgement of the book clubs, as a response to the question 'What did you think about the project?' on the evaluation questionnaire



the book clubs constituted from the regular program. A few students also added the relative autonomy they had in choosing their book and deciding what to read when as a positive aspect.

With respect to negative opinions about the project, many students mentioned that they did not like 'reading itself', although they were typically not able to elaborate on this any further. Other students did not like their book, or they were unhappy about having to take notes as a homework assignment to prepare for the book club. In addition, some students pointed out that it is difficult that not everyone reads at the same pace, or that they did not have enough time to finish the book because of the short duration of the project. Finally, a few students complained about their peers, mentioning that it was too busy for them to focus in class.

3.2 Students' perspectives on reading in the heritage language

To gain more insight into students' perspectives on the multilingual approach of the project, we again aimed to identify both positive and negative opinions. However, students' responses were predominantly positive.

Regarding positive views on the multilingual approach, the most prominent theme was novelty, as many students pointed out that reading in the heritage language at school was *'very special'* or *'a new experience'* for them. This is illustrated by example 1.

- (1) A bit different, because actually I have never read Turkish outside of my home. Definitely not at school. So that was fun, but also a bit different. [...] Fun different.

A second theme that emerged from the data was awareness of linguistic diversity. As shown by example 2, students got to know each other better, since their heritage languages, including different scripts, were suddenly very visible in class. Related to this, our multilingual approach stimulated metalinguistic awareness, as some students in the multilingual groups explicitly compared translations of the same book in different languages (see example 3).

- (2) Nice, because then you can see which languages your classmates know and that is also very fun. Some really know many different languages, also with different symbols.
- (3) It's also fun that sometimes – that the sentences are written differently than in Dutch. Because my two group members read in Dutch, so then the sentences are sometimes different. If there is a proverb that is not relevant in Hungarian, then they translate it differently, so that it fits better in Hungarian.

Another important theme was identity. Some students chose to read in their heritage language because they considered it important for their cultural heritage and language maintenance, which is illustrated by example 4. When students were asked to look back on their experience in the multilingual book clubs, some mentioned that it triggered personal memories (see example 5), while others viewed the project as an opportunity to practice reading in their heritage language (see example 6).

- (4) It's my origin and it should stay, you know? My own origin and for example – not completely forget, you know?
- (5) Very nice, because it made me think back of how I did in school in Morocco.
- (6) I thought it was a very good idea. My mother also said 'wow, so nice, they also give you Turkish books to read' and so on. I think it is good that everyone gets a book in their own language and – some think it's difficult, but like that your vocabulary in the own mother tongue becomes bigger.

The quote shown above (example 6) also illustrates that many students saw this project as an opportunity to practice their heritage language. In some cases, students even noticed improvements during the course of the project (example 7).

- (7) I think it's going better now than before, because I had – for example if I read a French book – yes, really super boring and then you stop again. But here I know that I just have to continue and actually I kind of like it. I think it's just OK and fun.

It's not the best book I've ever read, but I like that now I – I see that I sort of can read better in French now, I think.

At the same time, there were also a few students who appreciated the multilingual approach precisely because reading in the heritage language was easier for them than reading in Dutch (see example 8).

(8) I understand it better, it's just more fun. Look, if you get it it's more fun to read, but I think Dutch is a bit difficult to understand.

Finally, some students contrasted their experience with a negative attitude towards reading in Dutch, mentioning that they considered reading in the heritage language 'less boring' (see example 9).

(9) I don't know, but it was just a fun project. It was better than Dutch books, that's my opinion.

Regarding negative opinions about the multilingual approach of the project, a few students mentioned that reading in the heritage language turned out to be too difficult for them, because it took too long or because they failed to fully understand what they were reading (see example 10).

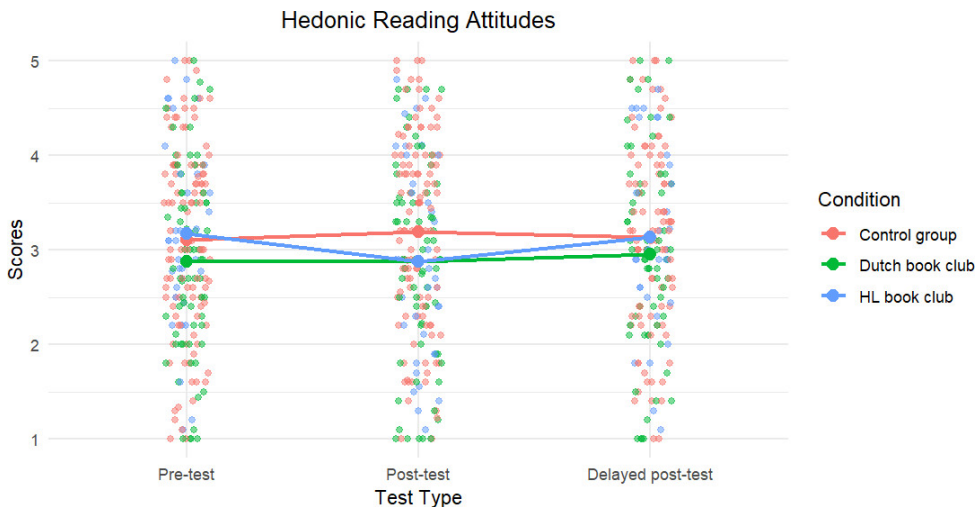
(10) It's not like I can really read continuously and understand what it says – some words I can understand and yes, I can sort of guess what it's about, but I can't tell exactly what it means. It was difficult.

Finally, there was a small group of students who did not appreciate the multilingual approach because reading in the heritage language made them feel weird or uncomfortable. In some cases this was related to normative ideas about the use of other languages at school (example 11), while in other cases it was related to insecurity or fear of being different (example 12).

(11) Actually I thought it was a little bit weird, because during Dutch lessons you just need to learn Dutch, not other languages.

(12) The weird feeling, I don't like it. I don't know, it's not my thing to read in Turkish. [...] There's something in my stomach, a kind of butterflies. [...] Yes, too much tension.

Figure 2 Scores on hedonic reading attitudes in the three conditions before the intervention, immediately after the intervention and three months later. A score of 1 represents fully negative attitudes and a score of 5 represents very positive attitudes.



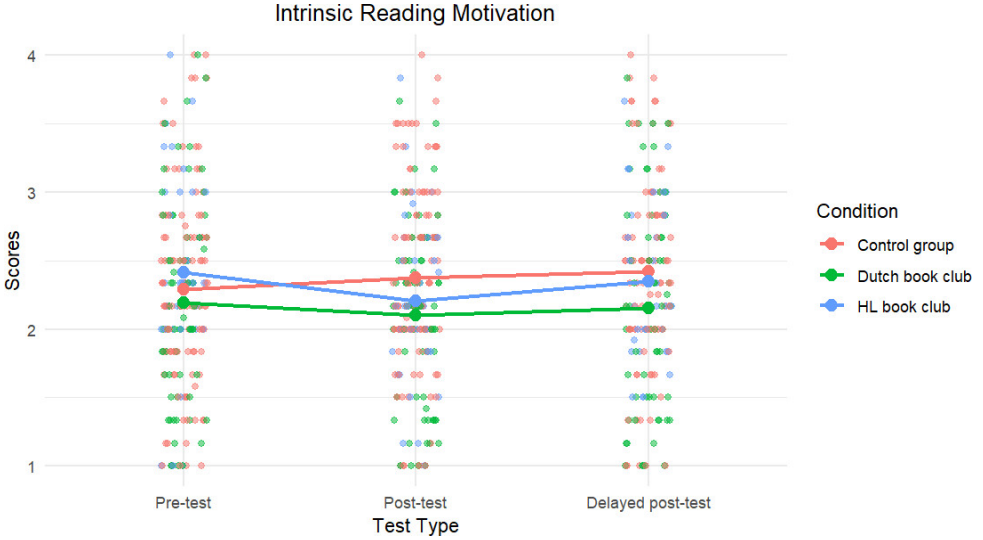
3.3 Quantitative analyses of reading attitudes and motivation

To answer our third research question, we first checked whether there were significant differences in hedonic reading attitudes and intrinsic motivation at the pre-test between multilingual students and monolingual students, which was not the case ($t = -.946, p = .345$ for attitudes; $t = -.692, p = .489$ for motivation). However, attitudes and motivation both differed significantly across school types, with vwo students showing more positive reading attitudes (Est. = .531, $p = .003$) and higher reading motivation (Est. = .342, $p = .007$) than havo/vwo students, who showed more positive attitudes (Est. = .760, $p < .001$) and higher reading motivation (Est. = .408, $p = .003$) than vmbo-t/havo students. Therefore, school type is taken into account in the subsequent analyses. Statistical details and the full model output of all our analyses are provided here: https://osf.io/bx6hg/files/j57rb?view_only=797dd8e80ec44550a5f1c2f26b5141cd.

3.3.1 Hedonic reading attitudes

Figure 2 presents students' scores on hedonic reading attitudes at the three time points, showing that there was great variation in reading attitudes among students, which were on average neither positive nor negative. The linear mixed-effects model revealed no significant effects of the intervention on hedonic reading attitudes (Est. = $-.173, p = .111$) and no significant differences between Dutch book clubs and heritage language book clubs (Est. = $.175, p = .273$).

Figure 3 Scores on intrinsic reading motivation in the three conditions before the intervention, immediately after the intervention and three months later. A score of 1 represents no motivation and a score of 4 represents very strong motivation.



3.3.2 Intrinsic reading motivation

Scores on intrinsic reading motivation across the three time points are plotted in Figure 3. The linear mixed model demonstrates a negative immediate effect of the intervention on intrinsic reading motivation that was significantly modulated by school type (Est. = $-.672$, $p = .023$), with no significant difference between Dutch book clubs and heritage language book clubs (Est. = $-.411$, $p = .380$).

To be able to interpret the interaction with school type, we created separate plots for vmbo, havo and vwo students. Since there were no significant differences between Dutch book clubs and heritage language book clubs, we merged these two conditions into one, to minimize the problem of small group sizes. Figures 4, 5 and 6 show that the negative effect was fully driven by the subset of vwo students and that it recovers at the delayed post-test, while reading motivation remained stable in the other school types. Recall, however, that only 18 students joined the book clubs in the vwo stream.

Figure 4 Intrinsic reading motivation scores of vmbo-t/havo students

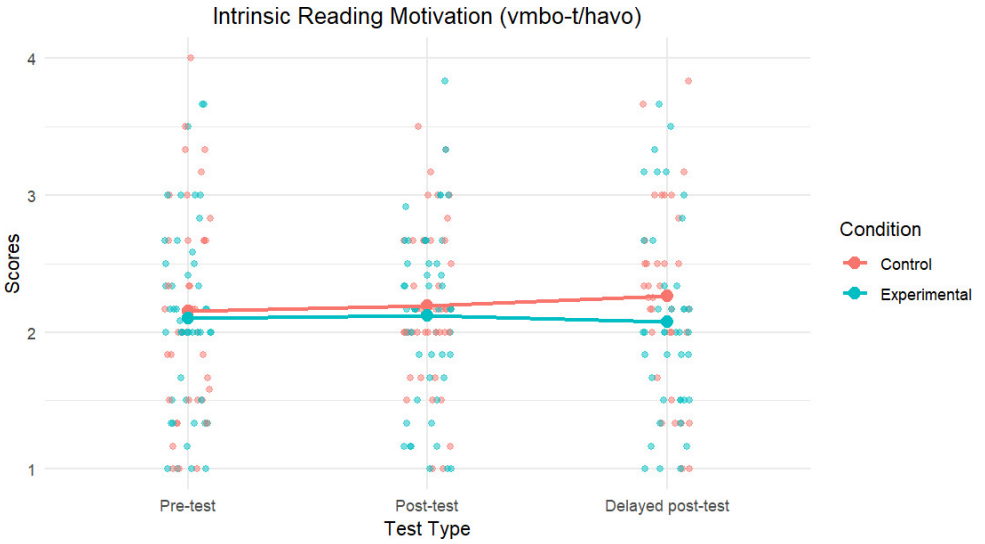
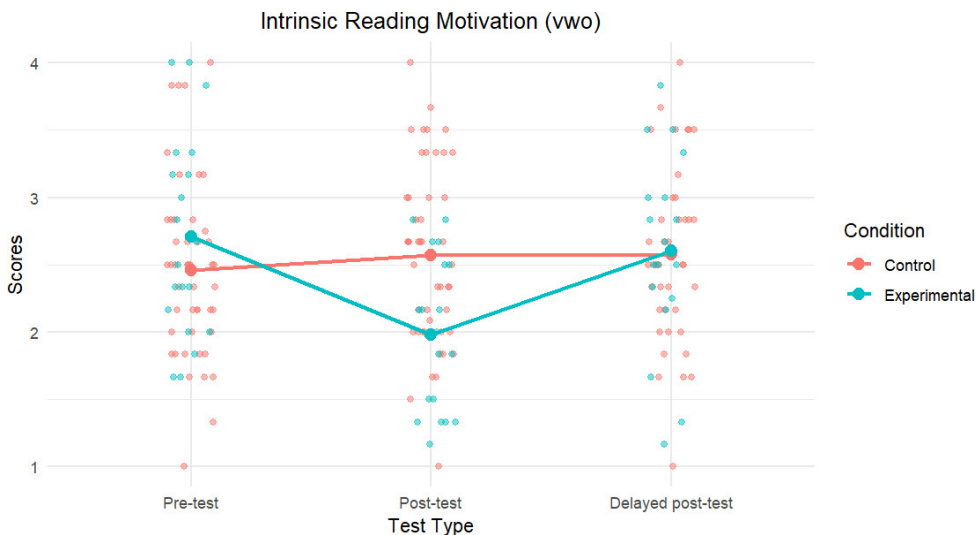


Figure 5 Intrinsic reading motivation scores of havo/vwo students



Figure 6 Intrinsic reading motivation scores of vwo students



4 Discussion

The aim of this study was to investigate how Dutch first-grade secondary school students perceive a book club project in which multilingual students are given the opportunity to read and discuss a book in their heritage language at school. We focused on the strengths and weaknesses of the book club format, as well as potential benefits of taking a multilingual approach. Additionally, we tested whether book clubs lead to more intrinsic reading motivation and more positive hedonic reading attitudes, and if this differs for students who read in their heritage language compared to students who read in Dutch.

4.1 Students’ perspectives on (multilingual) book clubs

Regarding student’s perception of the book clubs, we found that the majority appreciated the project. Our results revealed several strengths, as well as some challenges, which will be discussed first. The main challenge appears to be that many students continue to insist that ‘reading itself’ is boring, even if they enjoyed their book and the discussions. This confirms the strong negative connotation that exists with respect to reading in this population (Dood et al., 2020; DUO Onderwijsonderzoek, 2017). In addition, having to take notes as a preparation for the book clubs was not always appreciated, although in many cases it seemed to support the discussion. A final challenge when organizing in-class book clubs seems to be navigating individual differences among students in reading level, reading pace, book preferences and motivation, as well as classroom management.

An important strength of the project relates to collaboration and togetherness, which foster the creation of social bonds and a positive climate. Both aspects were also highlighted by previous studies on students' perception of book clubs (De Kleijn, 2025; Polleck, 2010; 2022). Additional strengths include being given time to read in class, the 'newness' of the program, the selection of books, and the sense of agency students experienced in the student-led book clubs. Some students also emphasized that book discussions facilitate engagement with the story and text comprehension. While the current study did not measure reading comprehension, previous studies suggest that book clubs may benefit students' understanding of texts (Polleck, 2010; Tijms et al., 2018).

Moreover, the multilingual approach of our project emerged as a highly prominent strength, as reading in the heritage language at school was a completely new experience for most students. Our results confirm that multilingual literacy is often closely related to the multilingual and multicultural identity of students (Smith et al., 2023), which is why most of them appreciated being encouraged to read in their 'own language' in class. Not only did it give them the opportunity to practice something they often considered challenging but important, but it also recognized a part of their identity that is too often ignored at school. Previous research has shown that such inclusive multilingual practices may foster students' self-esteem and sense of school belonging (García & Kleifgen, 2019; Van der Wildt et al., 2017).

Another advantage of our multilingual approach is that both monolingual and multilingual students became aware of the linguistic diversity present in class. As such, the project triggered curiosity about other languages, and students got to know each other better. Furthermore, some students explicitly compared translations of the same text in different languages, which may be beneficial for the development of meta-linguistic awareness (García & Kleifgen, 2019).

Note, however, that not all students chose to read in their heritage language. In some cases they considered it to be too challenging, especially when it involved a different script, which may lead to lower motivation to read in the heritage language (Smith et al., 2023). In other cases, students preferred to read in Dutch because they considered it too weird or uncomfortable to read in their heritage language. As shown by Van Gorp and Verheijen (2024), multilingual students may sometimes feel emotionally conflicted about using their native language at school. It is therefore crucial that reading in the heritage language always remains an individual choice.

4.2 Reading attitudes and motivation

Despite the largely positive qualitative findings from the interviews and the project evaluation questionnaire, we found no statistical evidence for positive effects of our intervention on reading attitudes and motivation, and no significant differences between heritage language book clubs and Dutch book clubs. Our results show no effects on hedonic reading attitudes, and only a short-term negative effect on intrinsic reading

motivation in the vwo stream (i.e., pre-university education). This negative effect may be interpreted in two ways. Firstly, the intervention, which was originally targeting vmbo students (i.e., pre-vocational education) may not have been appropriate for the vwo group. However, this interpretation contrasts with our own observations and students' comments in the interviews, which were predominantly positive, also among vwo students. An alternative interpretation relates to the unbalanced division of groups across school types and the fact that the vwo group only included 18 students, which may have led to unreliable results. Therefore, this result should be interpreted with caution.

The results of our quantitative analysis of the reading attitudes and motivation questionnaires do not fully align with those of Tijms and colleagues (2018). Using a similar intervention, but only in Dutch, they found that reading attitudes deteriorated in the control group, which may be expected during the first year of secondary school. In contrast, attitudes remained stable in students who participated in the book clubs, which was interpreted as a protective effect of the intervention. Thus, the main difference with our findings lies in the behavior of our control group, which did not show deterioration. This might be due to the fact that our intervention covered a much shorter time period (5 instead of 10 weeks), or there may have been more attention to reading promotion in general in the schools where we conducted the research. Similar to our results, however, Tijms and colleagues did not find an effect of the book clubs on reading motivation among first-grade vmbo students. Likewise, De Kleijn (2025) failed to find direct positive effects of book clubs on reading motivation.

It might be difficult to capture positive effects of a short book club intervention using quantitative, standardized measures of reading attitudes and motivation, especially given the strong negative label that is attached to reading in this population. In other words, students might emphasize in an interview how much they enjoyed reading a book together with peers, but still select all the negative options on a Likert-scale about reading motivation without giving it much further thought. Considering the small effect sizes that are typical for educational interventions (Kraft, 2020), we would need longer interventions that are conducted on a larger scale to be able to observe any possible improvements in quantitative measures of reading attitudes and motivation. For a short-term, largely explorative intervention like ours, however, a qualitative focus on social-emotional aspects is probably more meaningful, because addressing students' perspectives and experiences is the first step when aiming to generate a change in attitudes.

4.3 Limitations and suggestions for future research

Firstly, this study used a generic, non-language-specific construct for reading attitudes and motivation, but attitudes towards reading in the majority language may differ from attitudes towards reading in the heritage language (Smith et al., 2023). Multilingual students may have interpreted non-language-specific questions about reading as referring to reading in Dutch, which they possibly continue to view negatively even if their views

on reading in the heritage language improved. To disentangle this, future studies on reading motivation and attitudes in a multilingual population should explicitly differentiate between languages. Secondly, the current study did not consider reading comprehension, despite its established relationship with reading motivation and attitudes and its potential to be influenced by book clubs (Polleck, 2010; Tijms et al., 2018). Future studies should measure reading comprehension in both languages and relate this to affective factors. Thirdly, although the selection of books appeared to be crucial for students' evaluation of the project, for some languages providing a wide range of different levels and genres proved to be challenging. Finally, our findings are specific to a population of heritage speakers with varying levels of literacy and oral proficiency in the heritage language. To extend our findings, a similar project could be carried out in different populations, including newly arrived migrants.

4.4 Conclusion

This study investigated how multilingual students perceive a book club project in which they could read a book in their heritage language, and whether such a project influences reading attitudes and motivation. While the quantitative findings need to be interpreted with caution due to the small and heterogeneous groups, the qualitative data provide rich insights into students' experiences. These highlight how participants, beyond the novelty of the project, valued the discussions, the social aspect, and especially the opportunity to read in their heritage language. In the Dutch educational context, where encouraging reading among all students remains a key challenge, this project illustrates how small-scale multilingual interventions can foster engagement, inclusivity, and awareness of linguistic diversity. If implemented more broadly, such initiatives could contribute to a more inclusive and motivating reading culture that reflects the realities of a multilingual society.

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Author contributions

Jasmijn Bosch: Investigation, Writing – original draft, Conceptualization, Methodology, Formal Analysis; Suzanne Aalberse: Writing – review and editing, Conceptualization, Methodology, Formal Analysis; Jurgen Tijms: Writing – review and editing, Conceptualization, Methodology, Formal Analysis; Judith Rispens: Writing – review and editing, Conceptualization, Methodology, Formal Analysis.

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The author(s) have declared that there were no conflicting interests.

Statement of technology use

No AI-based generative technology was used in the preparation of this manuscript and the execution of the research that the manuscript reports upon.

Supporting information

All supporting information, including the surveys, interview guide, details about statistical analyses and full output of the statistical models can be found here: https://osf.io/bx6hg/?view_only=797dd8e80ec44550a5f1c2f26b5141cd

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