



Press Release

From Cognitive Skills to Chinese Reading Comprehension Ability: The HKU Faculty of Education Speech, Language and Reading Lab is recruiting Hong Kong children with and without Autism Spectrum Disorder from Grade 3 to Grade 4

The Speech, Language and Reading Lab (SLR Lab) in the Division of Speech and Hearing Sciences at the Faculty of Education, the University of Hong Kong (HKU) is recruiting 500 school children diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), and 500 typically developing children from Grade 3 to Grade 4 to participate in a three-year longitudinal study on the cognitive, linguistics and social emotions of the ASD children and their relationship with Chinese reading comprehension ability (HREC Reference No.: EA1801018). This project is funded by the Hong Kong Research Grant Council (RGC)/General Research Fund.

ASD is a complex neurodevelopmental disorder that there is a wide variety of types and severity of symptoms one may experience. In general, autism spectrum disorder exhibits social and communicative difficulties, repetitive but restrained behavior and circumscribed interests. According to the information published by the Education Bureau, in recent years, there has been a surge in the enrollment number of children with intact IQ and ASD in the mainstream primary schools. Nevertheless, a surprising lack of information regarding the cognitive, linguistics and reading comprehension ability of the children with ASD is available to the Hong Kong teachers and parents. This would in turn hinder the ASD population in receiving supporting and intervention programmes in the mainstream schools in a timely and effective manner, thus affecting their academic achievement and psychological well-being in the long-term.

It has well-acknowledged that children with ASD encounter various kind of learning difficulties with different level of severity. Notably, our SLR lab concerns whether the learning ability and needs of these children have been well-accommodated in the mainstream school curriculum, which the answer to that remains doubtful. On the basis of our previous research, we aim to recruit 500 children with ASD and normal intelligence and 500 typically developing children from Grade 3 and Grade 4 to join the longitudinal study.

This project offers one assessment every year for three consecutive years, which includes: (1) Chinese reading comprehension task; (2) Cognitive and social emotion tests; and (3) Standardised Chinese literacy tests. The children will participate in one-on-one testing session(s) conducted by trained research assistants. Participants will be requested to give verbal and written response and make judgement through key pressing. Selected participants would be invited to participate in an

eight-to-ten-weeks neurocognitive intervention programme (free of charge) in the later stages. The tasks will not cause any discomfort to participants. Prior to testing, parents need to complete a language and social background questionnaire for their children. This current study will examine the strengths and weaknesses, as well as the development trajectory, of children with and without ASD in three domains - cognitive, linguistics and social emotions - and their contribution towards reading comprehension respectively. The results of this study will advance our understanding of the reading comprehension deficits arose from ASD, and help develop effective assessment tools and intervention programmes for school-age children with ASD studying at mainstream schools.

Upon completion of the experiment, participants and/or their guardians will:

- Receive a HK\$200 book coupon as a token of appreciation for each stage of testing;
- Receive an individual performance report and certificate of participation; and
- Be invited to join our free parent-teacher workshops.

To join this study, please complete the online application form **by July 30, 2019 (Tuesday)** (<https://goo.gl/forms/zKiOxH2nW9hguh93>). Eligible participants will receive further notification regarding the testing date and time.

About the Speech, Language and Reading Lab

The SLR Lab was established and is led by Dr Shelley Tong, Associate Professor in the Division of Speech and Hearing Sciences at the Faculty of Education, HKU. We unify three psycholinguistic areas: speech perception and production, language learning, and reading acquisition. We focus on (1) the mechanism underlying suprasegmental speech and orthographic processing in bilingual children to formulate speech-print associations; (2) uncovering the links between oral language skills and literacy outcomes; and (3) promoting an integration of speech-language-literacy in clinical and educational practice for bilingual children. We aim to understand the prerequisite skills underlying rapid language and literacy acquisition, and to further explore specific language and literacy disorders at the cognitive, linguistic, and social-behavioural levels.

For further details about the SLR Lab, please visit: <https://slrlab.edu.hku.hk>.

For media enquiries, please contact Ms Cecilia Fung, research assistant of the SLR Lab, HKU (Tel: 2241 5984 / email: slrlab.asd@gmail.com). Please visit <http://web.edu.hku.hk/press> to view the e-version of the press release.

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