

Exploring the World from Home: Measuring the Effect of Little Passports on Children's Global Understanding

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Abstract

This study evaluated the impact of the Little Passports World Edition Kits on children's global curiosity and core skills using a mixed-methods approach. The study assessed changes in children's geographical and country-specific knowledge, cultural curiosity, problem-solving skills, and parent beliefs about the educational value of hands-on play and the importance of global citizenship. Results indicate improvements in children's geographical understanding, country-specific knowledge, cultural curiosity, creativity, and problem-solving skills. Parents also observed evidence of learning transfer. Parents' views on global citizenship shifted, with most now considering it more important than before. These findings suggest that the Little Passports World Edition Kits can support young children's development of global knowledge and cultural awareness while fostering their curiosity about the world.

Introduction

In an increasingly interconnected world, fostering global awareness and cultural understanding in children is essential (Mansilla & Jackson, 2022). Exposure to diverse cultures has been shown to enhance empathy, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills, all of which are crucial for success in a globalized society (Cheng et al., 2011; Leung & Chiu, 2010; Sandell, 2024). Media and experiential learning approaches, such as hands-on activities and storytelling, can enhance children's engagement with and retention of geographic and cultural knowledge (Berdan & Berdan, 2013). Storytelling and role play can foster young children's understanding of cultural and ethnic diversity because it provides opportunities to empathize and see the world from different perspectives (Wee et al., 2016).

The Little Passports World Edition Kits introduce children to different countries and cultures through authentic, play-based learning experiences. Limited research has been conducted on their effectiveness in fostering global curiosity and knowledge. This study is the first to examine the impact of the Little Passports World Edition Kits on children's understanding of geography, country-specific knowledge, cultural curiosity, and skills like creativity and problem-solving.

Methodology

Participants

The study included nine families with children who had no prior experience with Little Passports. The parents were from eight different states across the United States. The participants consisted of four 6-year-olds and five 7-year-olds. Four children identified as boys and five as girls.

Procedure

During Week 1 of the study, parents completed a 17-item pre-study survey to assess their perceptions of their child's understanding of geography, interest in learning about different countries and cultures, curiosity, critical thinking skills, global citizenship, and the educational value of hands-on activities. The survey was completed before families received the Little Passports kits.

After completing the pre-study survey, each family received four Little Passports World Edition Kits—featuring Brazil, France, Japan, and Egypt—by mail. These are the first four kits of a 12-month subscription. Along with the kits, parents received a structured calendar outlining a four-week engagement period, during which they were instructed to explore one kit per week with their child, engaging with them in the order they would have received the kits if it were a subscription. They were not given specific instructions on how to engage with each kit. Throughout the study, families documented their experiences in weekly journals and completed a short check-in survey after engaging with each kit.

During Week 5, parents completed a post-study survey that included the same 17 items from the pre-study survey, along with five additional open-ended questions. These questions asked parents to reflect on their favorite aspects of the experience, any suggested changes, surprising behaviors observed in their child, instances of knowledge transfer beyond the study activities, and any other feedback they wished to provide. Parents had the option to participate in a focus group discussion during Week 6. Insights from the weekly journals and post-study surveys informed the focus group conversation.

Data Analysis

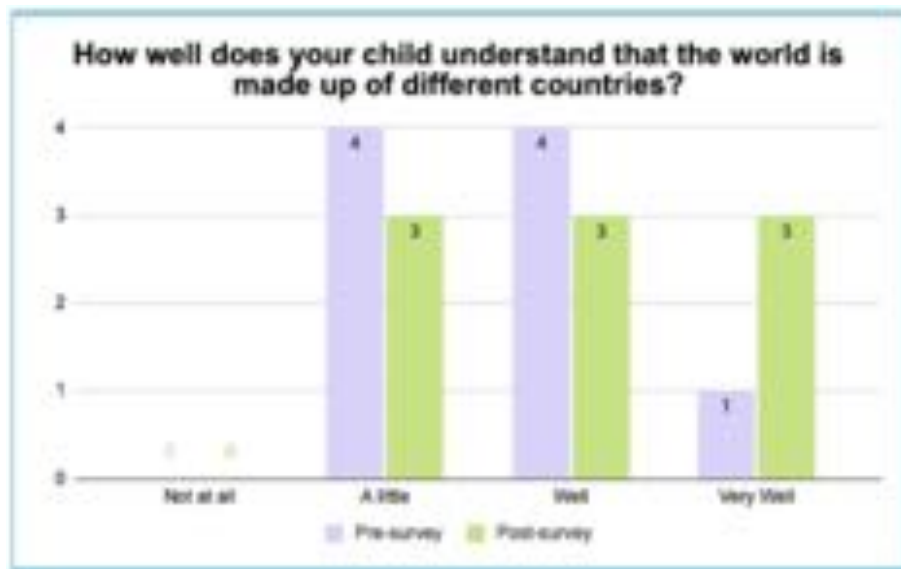
Quantitative data from pre- and post-study surveys were analyzed to assess changes in parental perceptions from Time 1 to Time 2. Qualitative data from journal entries, open-ended survey responses, and focus groups were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify key patterns and insights related to engagement, learning outcomes, and cultural curiosity.

Results

The study revealed an increase in children's geography knowledge and curiosity (Figure 1). Parents reported that their children developed a clearer understanding of the world as a collection of different countries. As one parent shared, "She is starting to make that distinction that the world is made up of continents and then countries and then states, starting to see there are different places that have different cultures... to understand and have more empathy and awareness... that's really expansive for her." Additionally, interest in maps and geography grew, with most parents noting that their child actively engaged with maps to explore distances and country locations.

Figure 1

Children's Geographical Understanding

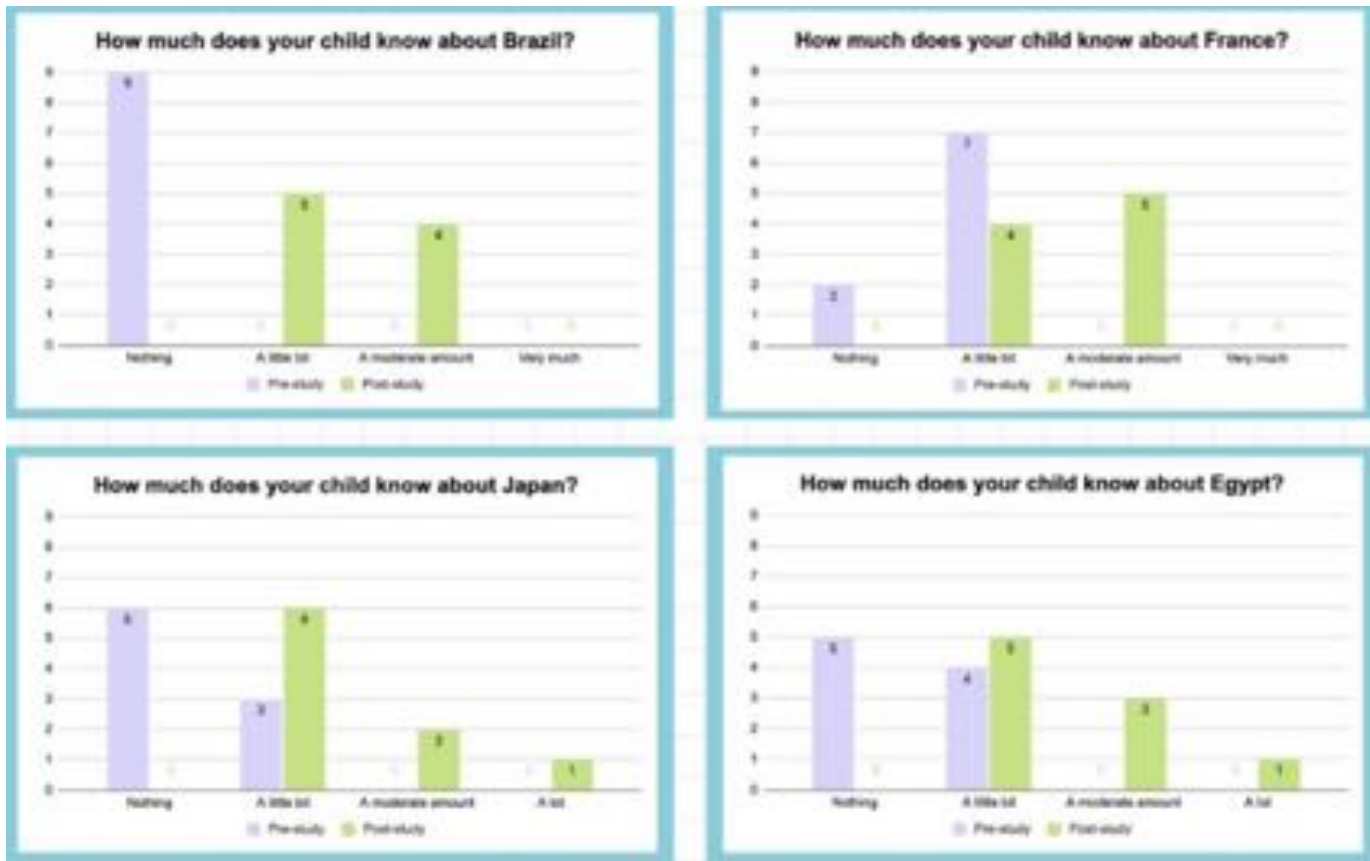


Parents observed a noticeable increase in their children's cultural awareness and curiosity. Many children developed an interest in different foods, languages, and customs, often initiating discussions about cultural experiences and international dishes. One parent shared, "We were in Seattle for the day, and she was asking if the Bao we were eating was from Japan and if we could find food from France or Brazil, which we did!"

Knowledge of the featured countries—Brazil, France, Japan, and Egypt—improved (Figure 2). Prior to engaging with the kits, many parents noted that their children had little to no knowledge of these countries. However, following the study, parents noted clear gains in their children's understanding of the featured countries. The kits were praised for offering an accessible introduction to global cultures. As one parent shared, "I thought this was a great way to expand her mind, and teach her about different cultures and countries."

Figure 2

Children's Knowledge of Featured Countries



Enjoyment of hands-on, problem-solving activities increased throughout the study. All parents reported that their child enjoyed the activities, with most noting full engagement with the challenges presented. Many parents noted that their child demonstrated persistence in completing tasks such as origami and pyramid-building. One parent reflected, *"Doing the pyramid in the Egypt kit taught her she could do anything if she tried,"* highlighting how the activity helped their child recognize her ability to tackle difficult tasks.

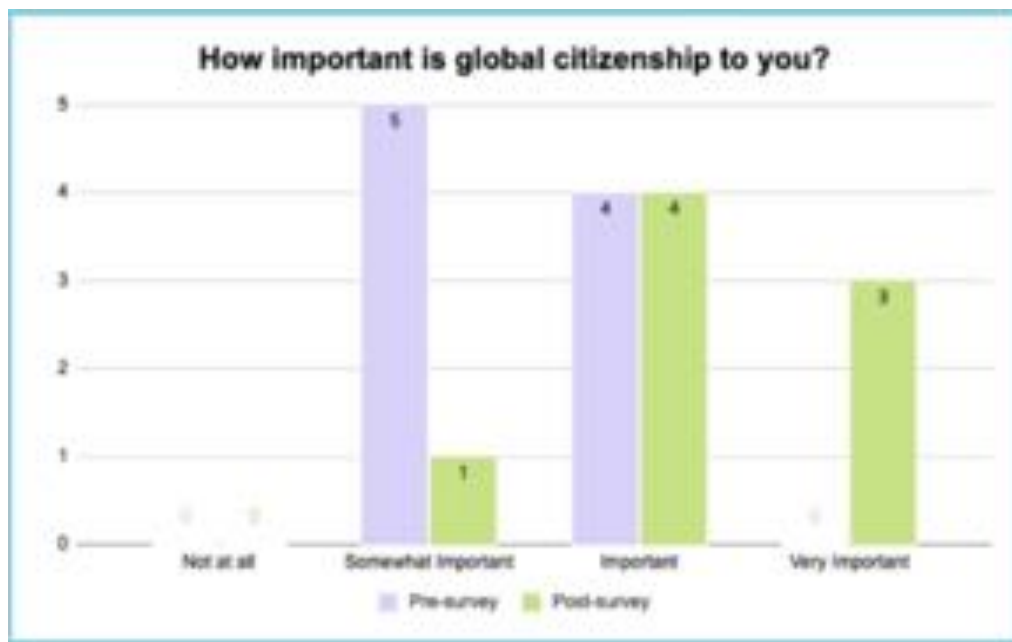
All parents reported that the kits inspired meaningful conversations and provided valuable opportunities to spend quality time with their children. The structured yet enjoyable nature of the activities allowed parents to engage with their children in a fun and educational way. As one parent shared, "It's a really good way to spend some quality time with your kid because they will probably need help. It's a fun excuse and fun way to spend time with them. You will be able to see their creativity and observe them, and you might even learn a bit yourself too." This appreciation for the time spent together and the chance to observe their child's creativity was a common sentiment among parents.

Engagement with the Little Passports kits inspired a shift in perceptions regarding global citizenship (Figure 3). While most parents initially rated global citizenship as only somewhat important in the pre-test survey, all but one parent expressed that global citizenship was important or very important in

the post-test survey. The importance of expanding children's awareness of the world beyond their immediate environment was recognized through exposure to different cultures and countries. One parent noted that the study inspired discussions about traveling and prompted prioritization of obtaining passports for their children. Another parent emphasized the value of broadening a child's perspective, saying, "It is good to expand and broaden their minds to realize there is more out there than what is just in their immediate circle."

Figure 3

Parents' Value of Global Citizenship



The study found that children transferred and extended their learning from the kits. Several parents described instances in which their child applied knowledge from the kits to real-world experiences. One child taught their friends about origami, while another discussed the different levels of the rainforest with their parents after learning about Brazil. *"She had discussions with her friends about different cultures and even tried to teach them about origami."* Another family incorporated bento box-making into their routine as a creative and calming activity.

Creativity was observed in children as a result of engaging with the kits. Several parents noted that their child approached activities in unexpected ways, such as repurposing origami boxes as furniture for dolls or deconstructing and reconstructing erasers to create new designs. One parent reflected on how their child's approach to playing with a sushi eraser demonstrated a new level of creativity.

Implications

This study found that Little Passports World Edition Kits can positively impact children's global understanding and related skills. The research found that using the kits led to improvements in

children's geographical knowledge, country-specific knowledge, and cultural curiosity. Furthermore, the kits appeared to foster creativity, problem-solving skills, and sparked meaningful conversations between parents and children. Parents also reported a shift in their own views, with more parents recognizing the importance of global citizenship after participating in the study. These findings imply that Little Passports can be a valuable resource for parents and educators seeking to cultivate global awareness and understanding in young children.

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PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

First in Math is an online math practice platform that leverages gamification to build K-8 math skills through more than 200 games. The platform spans basic addition through algebra, using game mechanics to develop fact fluency, computational thinking, and higher-order math reasoning skills. *First in Math* allows students to progress at their own pace while surfacing content that balances challenge and accessibility.

STUDY DETAILS

Sample Size

59 5th graders and 4 instructors with familiarity with *First in Math*

Demographics

- 27 boys, 32 girls
- 39% White students, 11% Black students, 3% Asian or Asian/Pacific Islander students, 44% Hispanic/Latino students, <1% American Indian or Alaska Native students, and <1% Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander students.

Time Frame

15 Weeks

Implementation Description

Instructional Priming: n = 31

Learning Reinforcement: n = 28

Methodology

- Comparing two *First in Math* implementation approaches
- Surveys to measure engagement and metacognitive knowledge using the Student Engagement in Mathematics Scale and Metacognitive Knowledge for Math Questionnaire.

STUDY CONTEXT

While research supports the effectiveness of games in mathematics instruction, questions remain about how the timing of game integration affects learning outcomes. This study examined two approaches to implementing *First in Math*, a game-based platform designed to engage students and build mathematical confidence: using games before instruction (instructional priming) or after instruction (learning reinforcement). Using validated scales, researchers measured three types of engagement (behavioral, affective, cognitive) and three types of metacognitive knowledge (self, task, strategy) to understand how timing impacts student learning.

Gamification as an Instructional Priming



Gamification as a Learning Reinforcement



Key Findings

- Students who used games before instruction (priming) only showed increased metacognitive knowledge about self, with no changes in engagement
- Students who used games after instruction (reinforcement) showed increases in all types of engagement (cognitive, affective, behavioral) and in metacognitive knowledge about both self and task
- Direct comparison between the two groups showed the reinforcement group had significantly greater gains in affective engagement and metacognitive knowledge about tasks compared to the priming group



Learning reinforcement (games used as practice after core instruction) improved students' affective engagement with the concepts and metacognitive knowledge regarding the task.