

Chinese preschoolers' English Foreign Language (EFL) learning: A comprehensive review of research from 2014 to 2024

Qingyun Li Kimberley Kong¹⁾ Saima Khan
Universiti Sains Malaysia

Abstract

This review synthesizes findings from 36 studies published between 2014 and 2024, examining the attitudes of preschoolers towards English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning, the influence of parental factors, and gender dynamics in the context of home-based education in China. The recent shift towards home-based EFL learning, driven by policy changes, necessitates a deeper understanding of how parental involvement and socioeconomic status (SES) affect young learners' language development. The review reveals that preschoolers generally exhibit positive attitudes towards EFL when interactive and engaging methods, such as digital games and storytelling, are employed. These methods align with the developmental needs and natural learning preferences of young children, contrasting with the more structured approaches suited to older learners. Parental beliefs and SES significantly shape the home learning environment, with higher SES parents providing more resources and support, thereby enhancing their children's language outcomes. Gender differences in EFL learning are nuanced; while overall attitudes do not significantly differ, preferences for reading materials and learning activities vary between boys and girls, highlighting the need for gender-sensitive educational strategies. The novelty of this study lies in its focus on preschool-aged children within China's unique sociocultural context, an area often overlooked in EFL research. The findings underscore the importance of providing parents with adequate resources and support, addressing socioeconomic disparities, and employing interactive teaching methods to optimize early EFL learning experiences. This review contributes to the broader understanding of EFL education and offers practical recommendations for enhancing language learning outcomes for young learners.

Keywords : *English as Foreign Language; Parental Involvement; Socioeconomic Status; Home-based Learning*

Corresponding author, ¹⁾ kimberley.kong@usm.my

Introduction

In recent decades, China has witnessed significant economic growth and an expanding presence in global markets. This era has also seen heightened competition among students in the realm of education. Throughout Chinese history, education and exams have served as tools for upward social mobility, utilized by both governments to select political elites and individuals to enhance their social status (Xia, 2023). In the context of Chinese culture, it has been the responsibility of parents to create conducive academic environments for their children, allowing both parents and students to navigate the pressures effectively (Butler & Le, 2018). Studies by Chen et al. (2022) and Wang (2021) indicate that academic achievement is increasingly prioritized in Chinese society, prompting parents to focus more on academic skills than other abilities.

English, as one of the most widely spoken international languages, is the preferred foreign language in China. Over the past two decades, the country has prioritized the integration of English courses in primary education (Butler, 2014). Increasingly parents are eager to provide their children with early English education, employing various approaches such as in-school instruction, private tutoring, and enrollment in specialized institutes catering to early childhood English as a foreign language (EFL) learning, tailored for ages three to six and sometimes even younger (Chen et al., 2022).

Several interrelated factors drive Chinese parents to prioritize early English language learning for their children, including perceived academic advantages, future career prospects, and global competitiveness. Many parents believe that early exposure to English can boost cognitive development, facilitate later academic success, and open doors to better opportunities in higher education and the international job market (Li, 2014; You & Dörnyei 2016). These views often lead parents to actively seek English language instruction, both formally and informally, at a very young age.

Within this context, English learning centers have proliferated across the nation, emphasizing the concept of gaining an advantage from the very beginning (Hu, 2021). Parents often enrol their children in these centres, seeing it as essential for gaining the necessary skills needed to navigate the increasingly globalized world (Lee, 2016). However,

the success of these programs is uncertain. While most 'immersion' programs, frequently equated with 'quality education', are offered at prestigious schools in wealthier regions in China and attract affluent parents, it is not uncommon to find programs that were implemented on a trial-and-error basis without securing sufficient resources, such as trained teachers (Hu, 2009). Researchers have reported significant disparities about access to and quality of early English education between rural and urban areas in China (Feng, 2012).

Although the notion that "the younger the better" for language acquisition is widely held, empirical evidence in foreign language learning contexts remains limited (e.g., Muñoz, 2006). This belief, combined with widening disparities in school achievement among young learners by socioeconomic status (SES), prompted the Chinese government to introduce a policy in 2021. Enacted by the Ministry of Education, this policy prohibits kindergartens and extracurricular classes from delivering elementary school-level content, including English language learning to preschoolers (Ministry of Education of China, 2021). The policy stipulates that Chinese pupils will only begin learning English in Primary 3, aiming to minimize regional and socio-economic gaps in access to English education.

Recent policy developments in China have led many parents to explore home-based learning alternatives to bypass institutional restrictions on English education. This shift has increased the role of parents in EFL education, making it crucial to understand how parental factors influence preschoolers' learning outcomes, including their attitudes towards learning. While most existing studies on language learning, such as those conducted by Butler and Le (2018), Carreira (2012a, 2012b), Adachi (2011, 2012), and Hu and McGeown (2020), have focused on older children, the acquisition of EFL by preschool children remains underexplored. Preschool children's EFL learning is a complex process influenced by various factors, including parental involvement and support. Parents play a crucial role in shaping their children's language learning experiences, as they provide the primary linguistic input and create the environment in which language development occurs (Golden et al., 2014). However, there is a scarcity of data on young Asian learners' EFL learning experiences within their unique sociocultural context.

In addition, although extensive research has focused on how preschoolers acquire EFL, there remains a need to examine preschoolers' attitudes toward EFL learning as a critical

component of early language acquisition. Prior studies suggest that young learners' motivational and affective factors can significantly influence their willingness to engage in language-related activities, ultimately affecting both short-term learning outcomes and long-term linguistic development (e.g., Smith & Johnson, 2020). By investigating preschoolers' attitudes, this research aims to capture the affective and motivational dimensions of EFL learning, shedding light on how children's perceptions, interests, and enthusiasm shape their early language experiences.

Moreover, understanding how parental factors influence preschoolers' EFL learning at home is particularly relevant in this context. Family environments play a significant role in shaping young children's early learning experiences and attitudes. Investigating the impact of parental factors can lead to the development of more effective strategies to support parents and optimize early foreign language learning experiences for preschoolers. Additionally, examining parental factors can help identify disparities in educational opportunities, ensuring that all children receive quality English education. This aligns with the recent Chinese policy objectives to mitigate educational inequalities.

For example, existing literature has identified parental SES and beliefs as significant factors in shaping home-based English learning practices (Lai et al., 2022), which, in turn, impact children's EFL experiences (Choi et al., 2020a). Scholars have cautioned that some home-based learning practices designed for older learners may be developmentally inappropriate for young children (Xia, 2023). However, there is limited research on how diverse parental practices, influenced by beliefs and SES, affect young children's ELF learning (Forey et al., 2015). Understanding these influences is crucial for developing appropriate and effective early language learning strategies.

Similarly, gender has been consistently recognized as a potential moderator of children's language development, with scholars pointing to differences in parental attitudes, societal expectations, and cultural norms that can influence boys' and girls' engagement with language learning (e.g., Brown & Lee, 2019). However, fewer studies have investigated how gender operates in the home context, particularly for preschoolers learning English as a foreign language. This research thus targets this underexplored aspect by examining how gender influences preschoolers' EFL learning at home, offering insights into whether and

how boys and girls might experience different levels of support, encouragement, or access to EFL resources in their early learning environments.

This study aims to conduct a comprehensive review of literature published between 2014 to 2024 on preschoolers' EFL education in China. This period captures contemporary educational practices and policies, significant advancements in learning technologies, and evolving cultural attitudes towards early childhood education. By including recent policy changes in China that affect EFL learning, the review ensures relevance to current issues. Additionally, it encompasses advancements in research methodologies, providing a detailed view of trends and patterns over the past decade. This approach ensures a thorough and up-to-date analysis, addressing the latest challenges and opportunities in EFL education. The review seeks to bridge existing gaps in the literature by focusing on three primary inquiries: 1) preschoolers' attitudes towards EFL learning; 2) the impact of parental factors on preschoolers' EFL learning; and 3) the influence of gender on preschoolers' EFL learning attitudes.

Through these three questions, the present study not only integrates psychological, social, and cultural dimensions of language acquisition but also highlights the multifaceted nature of preschoolers' EFL learning processes. In doing so, it provides a comprehensive framework for understanding attitudinal, parental, and gender-related factors that shape children's early English language experiences.

Literature Review

Nurturing Foreign Language Learning Attitudes in Children

The concept of "language learning attitude" refers to learners' persistence and emotional involvement in the language acquisition process (Díez-Palomar et al., 2020). This attitude, which encompasses both positive and negative inclinations towards acquiring a foreign language (FL), plays a crucial role in determining the success of language learning (Gardner et al., 1985; Hu, 2021). However, current research suggests that children's motivation often

declines, and anxiety increases after a period of home-based English language learning, primarily due to low-quality EFL education, which can result in negative learning experiences (Kim, 2002; Lai et al., 2022). Parental influence is critical in shaping children's learning attitudes and academic performance, with studies showing a positive correlation between parental factors and children's emotional engagement in the learning environment (Choi et al., 2020b; Chen et al., 2022; Susperreguy et al., 2020). Despite the recognized importance of parental influence, there is limited research specifically on how these factors affect foreign language learning, particularly for monolingual Chinese preschoolers (Forey et al., 2015). Understanding and nurturing positive language learning attitudes in children, especially through high-quality educational practices and supportive parental involvement, are essential for fostering successful language acquisition.

Parent Factors Affecting Preschoolers' EFL Learning

Previous research highlights the significant impact of attitudinal variables on foreign language learning, demonstrating that attitudes are not fixed but can evolve through various experiences, including teaching approaches, parental influence, and social contexts (Bratož et al., 2021). In shaping preschoolers' approach to language learning, the roles of both educators and learners are crucial. Vygotsky's (1978) work underscores the social nature of learning, where young learners progress by interacting with more experienced individuals within their social environment. Among these influences, parents play a primary role in guiding preschoolers within their immediate social contexts, significantly shaping their language learning experiences (Coskun, 2015; Sheldon, 2002).

Additionally, Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory presents a comprehensive framework for examining how a child's immediate and broader environments shape development. It posits that multiple layers of influence-ranging from microsystems (e.g., parental involvement, teacher interactions) to exosystems (e.g., local community or educational policies) and macrosystems (e.g., cultural beliefs, social norms)-work together to impact various learning processes. By accounting for the dynamic interplay of these environmental layers, Bronfenbrenner's model illuminates how children's motivation and

engagement in early language acquisition can be deeply influenced by both close-knit relationships and larger societal contexts.

Parental Beliefs towards EFL Learning

Parental beliefs about child development and education play a crucial role in shaping how they support their children's EFL learning, particularly through the home literacy environment (Chao, 1996; Ma et al., 2015). In China, parents who prioritize English for academic success tend to invest more in literacy resources and technology-based learning tools (Xia, 2023), shaping the range of activities available at home and linking early English exposure to later academic success (Lai et al., 2022; Chen et al., 2022). Parents who value reading are more likely to engage in reading activities, maintain a larger selection of books, and start reading earlier, fostering greater engagement in their children. Across different socioeconomic statuses, most parents recognize the importance of developing English literacy skills before elementary school. Positive parental attitudes toward EFL not only enhance children's motivation and academic achievement but also encourage practices such as shared book reading and the use of digital resources (Froiland et al., 2012). In Hong Kong, these parental practices, including providing English books and learning apps, are strongly tied to their educational beliefs (Zhang & Lau, 2022). Parents generally view their role in their child's English development positively and invest substantially in resources like private tutoring and at-home activities (Forey et al., 2015). However, variability in beliefs about the best learning approaches (Zhang & Lau, 2022) indicates a need for further research to optimize strategies for supporting young learners' EFL education.

Impact of Socioeconomic Status on Parental Engagement

Parental engagement in children's education is significantly shaped by SES, which includes factors such as occupation, education, and income (Conger & Donnellan, 2007; Wigfield et al., 2006). Research shows that SES influences not only interparental dynamics and parenting methods but also the socioemotional development of children, extending to their motivation for language learning and attitudes towards English (Butler & Le, 2018; Jin et al., 2016). Higher-income households tend to provide more enriched learning

environments, such as access to private tutoring, and foster more positive attitudes towards English learning (Chen et al., 2022). Similarly, children with highly educated parents exhibit more positive attitudes towards language learning than those whose parents have lower levels of education (Choi et al., 2020b).

Studies affirm the importance of reading for preschoolers' English learning, with dialogic reading enhancing phonological awareness and motivation, especially when supported by educated mothers (Chow et al., 2010). However, disparities exist, as white-collar families, with their educational advantages, are more successful in fostering home reading habits that positively impact children's language learning interests and skills (Yeung & King, 2016).

Extensive research has highlighted the impact of SES on children's language and literacy skills, with findings showing that SES significantly shapes vocabulary and language development, particularly during early childhood (Nevo, 2023; Kamal & Hashim, 2018). In China, SES is positively correlated with children's achievements in both English and Chinese, particularly in vocabulary and reading abilities (Zhang et al., 2019). The home literacy environment, influenced by family SES, plays a crucial role in preschoolers' language learning motivation and outcomes (Li et al., 2023). Additionally, SES influences parenting styles, with authoritarian parenting linked to more negative attitudes towards EFL learning, while higher parental education and income are associated with better English learning outcomes and more autonomous learning styles in children (Butler, 2017; Butler & Le, 2018).

Despite the substantial body of research on parental effects on children's EFL achievement, there remains a critical need to understand how specific parental factors shape Chinese preschoolers' attitudes towards EFL learning, particularly in the context of the new policy shift towards home-based English learning. This understanding is crucial because early attitudes towards language learning can significantly influence long-term academic success and motivation. With the increased importance of home-based learning, parental beliefs and behaviors during the preschool years are more impactful than ever. Addressing this gap can lead to more effective educational strategies and interventions tailored to the unique needs of young learners across diverse socioeconomic and cultural contexts.

Gender Differences in Language Learning

Prior studies in EFL suggest that gender stereotypes and expectations significantly influence the language learning experiences of both boys and girls. Females generally exhibit greater competitiveness and more positive attitudes toward language acquisition (Altun, 2019; Heinzmann, 2013). For example, research has shown that girls often outperform boys in language learning, displaying higher motivation levels and a stronger interest in cultural aspects related to the language (Van Der Slik et al., 2015). However, the role of gender in language learning is complex, with recent studies revealing that these differences can vary depending on specific contexts and tasks. For instance, female students tend to surpass male students in vocabulary and overall English proficiency during their sophomore years (Gu, 2002).

Despite these findings, the impact of gender on preschoolers' attitudes towards English learning remains relatively underexplored (Butler & Le, 2018). Given the current study's focus on preschoolers' EFL learning attitudes, it is crucial to consider how gender differences may shape these early learning experiences. Understanding gender-related dynamics in language learning can provide valuable insights for developing tailored interventions that support positive learning outcomes for both boys and girls. This is particularly important in the context of the cultural and socioeconomic factors that influence educational opportunities in China. By addressing gender-related differences, educators can work towards creating a more equitable and effective educational framework for young learners.

All above, despite the valuable insights offered by the studies reviewed (e.g., Forey et al., 2015; Yeung & King, 2016; Zhang et al., 2019), several limitations persist in the existing literature that underscore the need for further investigation. First, much of the work has focused on general outcomes of early EFL learning without considering contextual variations, such as differences in home support, cultural expectations, and resource availability. Second, many studies rely on cross-sectional designs, limiting their ability to capture longitudinal changes in children's language attitudes and development. Furthermore, the small or non-diverse samples in some research restrict the generalizability of findings across different populations. Lastly, methodological inconsistencies, such as varying instruments to measure

children's attitudes and parental involvement, make direct comparisons across studies challenging. Recognizing these gaps not only highlights the necessity for more comprehensive and methodologically rigorous studies but also justifies the focus of the present systematic literature review, which aims to address these critical shortcomings by employing an in-depth, context-sensitive approach to examining early EFL learning.

Method

The current systematic literature review (SLR) delved into empirical research from 2014-2024 on the attitudes of Chinese preschoolers towards learning English at home. It also examines the impact of learners' gender and parental factors (e.g., SES). This comprehensive review aims to offer insights and answers that individual studies may have overlooked. By synthesizing existing knowledge, this review provides a comprehensive overview of the field and establishes a foundation for future inquiries. Additionally, it identifies areas that warrant further investigation (Page et al., 2021; Yang et al., 2023).

Guided by the PRISMA framework (Page et al., 2021), this systematic review encompasses three core themes: (1) preschoolers' attitudes towards EFL learning, (2) parental factors that shape preschoolers' EFL experiences, and (3) the influence of gender on preschoolers' EFL learning attitudes.

Search Strategy

A meticulous screening procedure encompassed peer-reviewed sources and electronic databases, notably SCOPUS, Google Scholar, Semantic Scholar, World Cat, and Web of Science. To ensure that only the best quality data are indexed, articles from these indexes are subjected to stringent content selection and continuous review by an independent Content Selection and Advisory Board (Baas et al., 2020). This rigorous search spanned from January 2014 to March 2024. In order to find current and pertinent information, the authors restricted the search to articles that had been published during the last ten years (Gottlieb, 2003). The

authors of this review directed their initial focus on empirical studies centered in Mainland China, investigating English learning experiences of preschoolers within the domestic environment. Despite the existing body of research, a dearth of comprehensive literature tailored specifically to children aged 3 to 6 years old was apparent. A substantial portion of available studies centered around the Hong Kong and Taiwan regions, which, due to cultural disparities, cannot be directly equated with Mainland China. This implies that the EFL journey for young learners in these distinctive locales might substantially vary. Acknowledging the limited available studies specifically grounded in Mainland China, the scope broadened to encompass Chinese second language learners hailing from Hong Kong and Taiwan.

To systematically identify relevant literature, a set of keywords pertinent to this review were judiciously chosen. These search terms aimed to yield the maximum number of pertinent articles within the review's framework. Five core search terms employed across databases were “*English learning*”, “*preschoolers' attitudes*”, “*gender*”, “*parental factor*”, and “*China*”. To augment the search scope, supplementary synonymous terms (including “Boolean” operators) were integrated, such as “*second language*” OR “*dual language*”, AND “*children's interests*” OR “*motivation*”, AND “*boy*” OR “*girl*”, AND “*father*” or “*mother*”, AND “*Chinese*”, as illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1. *Query String/Keywords Used to Retrieve Articles from Databases*

Items	Search Terms	Boolean
English Learning	English* OR English language* OR English language learning* OR English as a foreign language learning* OR EFL* OR second language* OR second language acquisition* OR SLA* OR bilingual*	AND
Preschoolers' Attitudes	Preschoolers' attitudes* OR child's attitudes* OR children's motivation* OR English language learner attitudes* OR dual language learner engagement* OR ELL interest* OR ELL enjoyment*	AND
Gender	Gender* OR boy* OR girl* OR male* OR female*	AND
Parental Factors	Parent* OR father* OR mother* OR caregiver* OR adult* OR socioeconomic status* OR SES* OR low-SES*	AND
China	Chinese* OR Hong Kong* OR Taiwan*	AND

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The subsequent step involved a thorough screening process. The authors selected peer-reviewed journal articles published in English, covering the period from 2014 to 2024. This stringent criterion aimed to guarantee a collection of high-calibre literature. The focus was solely on empirical research, encompassing both cross-sectional and longitudinal studies. This selection procedure was enacted through the application of two distinct classification criteria: the inclusion and exclusion criteria. To enhance clarity, these terms were augmented with detailed definitions and specifications, as elucidated in Table 2.

Table 2. *Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria*

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Studies published between 2014-2024	Studies published before 2014
Studies focusing on China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan	Studies focusing on any country other than China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan
Empirical studies	SLR, concept papers, editorials, or grey literature
Studies focusing on preschoolers (3 – 6-year-old)	Studies focusing on any age above or below preschoolers (3-6 years old)
Studies focusing on English language learning	Studies focusing on learning languages other than English
Text available in English and/or Chinese language	Text available in languages other than English and/or Chinese

Quality and Relevance Assessment

In order to ensure the rigor and trustworthiness of the studies included in this review, the authors adopted a two-step evaluation process. First, the authors screened all articles based on their alignment with this research objectives (e.g., focus on preschool or early EFL learning) and methodological clarity (e.g., sufficient detail on sample size, data collection procedures, and analysis methods). Only those studies that explicitly addressed early English language learning in a preschool or kindergarten context were retained. Second, the authors performed a quality appraisal using a standardized critical appraisal checklist. Each article

was scored on criteria such as research design appropriateness, data validity and reliability, clear reporting of methods, ethical considerations, and robustness of analysis. Studies achieving at least a moderate rating (e.g., above 60% on a standardized score) were deemed sufficiently rigorous and thus included in the final synthesis. This two-tiered approach ensured that only methodologically sound and contextually relevant studies contributed to the systematic review, thereby strengthening the overall credibility of the findings.

Screening Process

Starting in late March 2024, the authors conducted a systematic search using specified keywords across databases including the Web of Science Core Collection, Science Direct, Google Scholar, Scopus, Semantic Scholar, and World Cat. The initial search returned 1,899 articles. After eliminating 598 duplicates published before 2014, 1,301 articles were retained for further analysis. A preliminary screening based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria detailed in Table 2 resulted in the exclusion of 235 articles. An additional 163 articles were removed during the abstract review phase. Subsequently, a comprehensive full-text review led to the exclusion of 300 more articles.

The screening process involved a meticulous alignment of the articles with the established criteria. When the primary criteria did not provide clear guidance for inclusion or exclusion, a third criterion was applied to ensure consistency and focus within the SLR. Ultimately, 36 empirical studies on preschoolers' English learning in Mainland China, published between 2014 and 2024, were selected for the review. The selection process, following PRISMA guidelines, is illustrated in Figure 1.

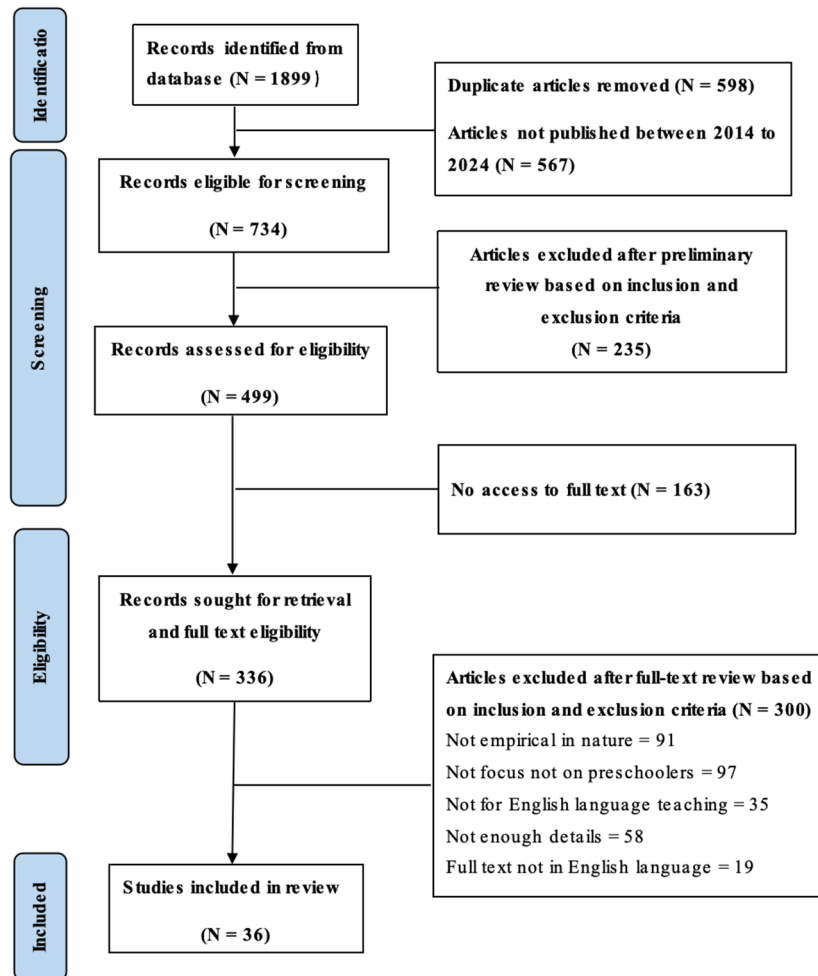


Figure 1. Article selection process based on PRISMA

Findings

The three research questions were used to structure and classify the findings, thereby offering deeper insights into the role of parents and child gender on Chinese preschoolers English learning experiences.

Research Question 1: What are Preschoolers' Attitudes towards English as a Foreign Language Learning?

The review of literature over the past decade indicates that preschoolers generally exhibit positive attitudes towards English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning. Despite their limited articulation skills, various methods, including the use of metaphors and narratives, have been employed to gauge their EFL experiences. Studies by Hu (2018) and Jin et al. (2014) reveal an overall optimistic outlook among preschoolers regarding their English learning journey. However, preferences for instructional methods vary, with traditional rote learning, such as memorizing vocabulary, being less favored, while interactive methods like digital games and videos are preferred (Forey et al., 2015).

Studies indicate that preschoolers generally exhibit positive attitudes toward EFL learning, often characterized by enthusiasm and curiosity. Interactive and play-based activities, such as storybooks and songs, are particularly effective in fostering motivation, as children frequently describe these experiences as enjoyable and engaging (Garton et al., 2014; Shin & Crandall, 2018). However, some children demonstrate hesitancy or anxiety, often linked to limited exposure, a lack of practice opportunities, or concerns about pronunciation, particularly in larger group settings (Copland et al., 2014; Rich & Dörnyei, 2020).

These findings emphasize the importance of child-centered, developmentally appropriate strategies in early language education, which not only enhance motivation but also address individual differences in confidence and engagement (Ellis, 2021). This aligns with broader discussions on how supportive environments and meaningful exposure are critical for fostering positive attitudes and sustained interest in EFL learning during early childhood (Hasselgreen, 2019).

Additionally, some preschoolers perceive English learning as a way to gain attention and approval from their parents, suggesting that their attitudes may be influenced by their parents' beliefs and enthusiasm (Hu, 2019). These findings underscore that while preschoolers generally hold positive attitudes towards EFL learning, the instructional methods and parental influence significantly shape these attitudes.

Research Question 2: How do Parental Factors Influence Preschoolers' EFL Learning?

This synthesis explores how various parental factors, including beliefs, socioeconomic status (SES), and engagement, influence preschoolers' EFL learning. The analysis is organized around key themes: parental beliefs on teaching methods, family literacy activities, the emphasis on effort over innate aptitude, and the impact of family SES on EFL learning outcomes.

Parental beliefs play a crucial role in shaping the foreign language learning practices and attitudes of preschoolers. Research consistently shows that these beliefs influence the methods parents employ at home, ranging from structured language acquisition approaches to the use of digital learning applications. For instance, Liu (2020) notes that some parents view English as essential, advocating structured teaching methods. This belief is prevalent across all socioeconomic backgrounds. Butler (2014) found that parents from varying SES levels in China consider English learning critically important. However, there is a divergence in the use of digital applications for language learning, driven by differing educational priorities. Parents focused on academic outcomes often favor English learning apps like "Jiligula" and "ABCmouse" (Lai et al., 2022), while others express concerns about the potential negative effects of excessive technology use on children's focus and engagement (Butler, 2017).

Family literacy activities, particularly those conducted in native languages, also play a significant role in enhancing vocabulary acquisition among preschool dual-language learners. Yang (2016) points out a gap in parental awareness regarding the importance of home reading time in developing reading skills, despite its acknowledged role in early foreign language learning. Engaging in regular reading activities at home is crucial for fostering language development, yet many parents do not fully appreciate this aspect of early education.

The emphasis on effort over innate aptitude is another critical aspect of parental influence on EFL learning. Butler (2014) found that most parents attribute academic success to diligent study rather than inherent language ability, underscoring the value they place on consistent practice and effort. This belief significantly shapes preschoolers' learning experiences and attitudes towards English.

Family SES further influences parental involvement in EFL education, with higher SES parents typically more engaged in both formal and informal literacy activities. Research by Zhang et al. (2019) shows a positive correlation between parents' educational levels and their children's English proficiency, particularly in settings like Dalian, China. This engagement, facilitated by the financial capacity of higher SES families, includes both direct involvement in language learning activities and investments in additional resources, such as books and digital tools (Butler, 2014). Conversely, lower SES parents are generally less involved, leading to limited English exposure until primary school, which can hinder the development of positive attitudes towards EFL learning. The financial impact of SES on parental involvement is particularly evident in the disparity between urban and rural Chinese parents, with urban parents investing significantly more in their children's EFL education (Guangzhou Statistic Bureau, 2019).

Finally, varied strategies for EFL learning highlight the importance of adapting teaching methods to the needs of different SES groups. Yang (2016) found significant improvements in EFL learning among high SES parents using touchscreen reading, while Forey et al. (2015) revealed that digital games and videos are more enthusiastically received than traditional rote learning methods. These findings emphasize the need for diverse and equitable educational strategies that accommodate the unique challenges faced by families across different socioeconomic backgrounds.

In conclusion, parental factors, including beliefs, SES, and engagement, are pivotal in shaping preschoolers' attitudes and opportunities for learning English. These influences underscore the importance of developing tailored educational strategies that ensure all children, regardless of their background, have the opportunity to develop positive attitudes and proficiency in English from an early age.

Research Question 3: How does Gender Influence Preschoolers' EFL Learning at Home?

The influence of gender on preschoolers' EFL learning at home in China presents a complex and nuanced picture. While broader perceptions often suggest that girls are

generally better at language learning (Gu, 2002; Van Der Slik et al., 2015), research indicates that gender may not play as significant a role in early EFL learning as commonly believed. For instance, Jin et al. (2016) conducted a cross-sectional study across three Chinese cities and found that parental beliefs regarding preschoolers' EFL learning were consistent regardless of the child's gender. Additionally, their study revealed no significant gender differences in preschoolers' attitudes towards English learning, with only a slight variation in motivation observed in one city.

Despite these findings, gender differences become more evident when examining specific aspects of EFL learning, such as reading preferences and literacy development. Yang (2016) explored the impact of various reading methods on preschoolers' literacy at home and found that, while overall language abilities did not significantly differ by gender or age, boys and girls displayed distinct reading preferences. Girls tended to favor fairy tales, while boys were more inclined towards fantasy and adventure stories. These preferences were closely linked to the children's willingness to read, underscoring the importance of selecting appropriate reading materials to support literacy development in line with gendered interests.

Moreover, while gender may not be a major factor in shaping overall attitudes towards language learning, it does influence learning approaches. Choi et al., (2020b) found that gender was less critical in determining language learning attitudes during the preschool years. However, Xia (2023) emphasized that learning approaches, which are integral to the learning process, are significant predictors of positive learning attitudes and behaviors. Their research indicated that girls scored higher in positive learning behaviors compared to boys, highlighting a gender difference in how learning is approached and engaged with during these formative years.

In conclusion, the influence of gender on preschoolers' EFL learning in China is multifaceted and context dependent. While parental beliefs about EFL learning do not significantly vary by gender and overall language abilities remain comparable between boys and girls, there are clear differences in reading preferences and learning behaviors. These findings suggest that gender-specific strategies could enhance early EFL learning, emphasizing the importance of tailored educational practices that cater to the unique needs and preferences of both boys and girls.

Discussion and Implications of Findings

This review synthesized findings from 36 studies published between 2014 and 2024, offering critical insights into preschoolers' attitudes towards English as a Foreign Language (EFL), the influence of parental factors, and gender dynamics in home-based EFL learning in China. A thorough examination of the three key findings reveals that they are closely tied to cultural values and social dynamics prevalent in the Chinese context. For instance, many Chinese families place strong emphasis on academic excellence as a pathway to better future prospects, which shapes attitudes and practices surrounding early English language learning. The findings have significant implications for policymakers, particularly in light of the recent Chinese government ban on institutionalized English learning, which has shifted the responsibility of EFL education to parents at home.

The review consistently shows that preschoolers exhibit generally positive attitudes toward learning English, driven by intrinsic motivation and enthusiasm (Hu, 2018; Jin et al., 2014). However, these positive attitudes are heavily influenced by the instructional methods employed. Young learners tend to favor interactive and engaging methods, such as digital games and videos, over traditional rote learning approaches (Forey et al., 2015). This preference underscores the importance of ensuring that home-based learning practices are developmentally appropriate and aligned with the natural learning tendencies of preschool children. For policymakers, this highlights the need to support the development and dissemination of engaging educational resources that cater to the developmental needs of young learners, respecting their right to an education that is both motivating and suitable for their age.

Parental beliefs and socioeconomic status (SES) play a pivotal role in shaping the EFL learning experiences of preschoolers. Research indicates that while parents across all SES levels recognize the importance of English proficiency, their approaches and access to resources differ significantly (Butler, 2014; Jin et al., 2016). Higher SES parents are more likely to invest in educational apps and additional learning materials, providing a more enriched learning environment (Lai et al., 2022). In contrast, lower SES parents may have limited access to such resources, potentially hindering their children's language development

(Song, 2018). These disparities underscore the importance of educational equity in EFL learning. Policymakers must address these gaps by ensuring that all families, regardless of income, have access to high-quality educational materials and resources. This approach will help to level the playing field, giving every child the opportunity to develop their language skills in a supportive home environment.

The role of parents in supporting home-based EFL learning is crucial, especially under the new policy that prohibits institutionalized English learning for young children. Parents are now at the forefront of their children's language education, and their involvement is critical in creating a conducive learning environment. Research shows that parental involvement, regardless of SES, is essential for meeting children's psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, which are key to sustaining motivation and positive attitudes toward EFL learning (Butler & Le, 2018). Policymakers should consider providing training and resources to help parents effectively support their children's language learning at home. This support could include workshops, online resources, and community programs designed to equip parents with the skills needed to foster a positive learning environment.

Gender dynamics in EFL learning present another layer of complexity. While broader literature often suggests that girls are perceived to be better at language learning (Gu, 2002; Van Der Slik et al., 2015), findings specific to China show no significant gender differences in overall attitudes towards EFL learning (Jin et al., 2016). However, differences do emerge in preferences for reading materials and learning approaches, with girls tending to prefer fairy tales and boys favoring fantasy and adventure stories (Yang, 2016). These findings suggest that educational practices should consider individual differences in motivation and preferences, ensuring that learning materials cater to diverse interests. Policymakers and educators should promote the selection of educational content that respects these individual differences, thereby supporting every child's right to a personalized and effective learning experience.

The findings can be situated within established theoretical frameworks in early childhood education and language acquisition, particularly Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory and Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory. Vygotsky emphasizes the role of social interaction and cultural context in shaping language development, which is evident in

how preschoolers in this study benefited from interactions with teachers, peers, and parents. These mediated learning highlight the importance of scaffolding and collaborative engagement in fostering EFL proficiency. Bronfenbrenner provides a broader lens to understand how microsystem interactions (e.g., parental involvement, teacher support) intersect with exosystem and macrosystem factors including home literacy resources and language policies. These layers of influence collectively shape young learners' motivation and engagement. By aligning the findings within these frameworks, the study highlights the interconnected nature of social, cultural, and environmental factors in shaping early language development. This theoretical grounding not only enhances the relevance of the conclusions but also identifies pathways for targeted interventions and future research that further explores these dynamics in diverse early childhood EFL contexts.

Limitations of Study and Recommendations

This review, while comprehensive, is not without its limitations. Although the study included articles from Taiwan and Hong Kong, only articles published in English were considered for analysis. This language constraint may have led to the exclusion of relevant research published in other languages, potentially limiting the breadth of perspectives and findings. Additionally, the review focused primarily on literature from 2014 to 2024, which, while offering insights into contemporary practices and policies, may not capture long-term trends in EFL learning among preschoolers.

Another limitation is the reliance on existing studies, which often used cross-sectional data. This approach provides a snapshot of attitudes and behaviors at a single point in time but does not account for how these attitudes and behaviors may evolve. Many studies also relied on self-reported data from parents or educators, which could introduce bias and affect the findings' accuracy. Future research should consider longitudinal studies to track changes in attitudes and behaviors over time, comparative studies between different regions, and experimental research on the effectiveness of various teaching methods in home-based learning contexts.

Additionally, there is a need to focus on underrepresented groups, such as children from

rural areas or lower socioeconomic backgrounds, to better understand and address the barriers they face in EFL learning. Investigating the impact of parental training programs on EFL outcomes would also provide valuable insights into optimizing the home-based learning environment. Addressing these areas will contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of preschoolers' EFL learning and guide more effective educational policies and practices.

Conclusion

The shift to home-based EFL learning in China presents both challenges and opportunities. This review highlights the importance of developmentally appropriate educational practices, the critical role of parents in supporting language learning at home, and the need for educational equity to ensure all children, regardless of their socioeconomic background, have access to quality learning resources. Additionally, recognizing individual differences, including gender-based preferences, is crucial for creating a supportive and effective learning environment. Policymakers must address these factors to ensure that the new educational landscape meets the diverse needs of all young learners, fostering both their academic success and their overall well-being.

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