



Parental Perspectives on Children's Second Language Learning: Insights, Challenges, and Expectations

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates how parents support their children's second language (L2) learning in Indonesian bilingual and English-enriched primary schools, using Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory and the concept of parental involvement. Involving 27 parents, the research used interviews and observations to explore how their motivations, attitudes, and practices influence children's L2 development. The findings highlight three key parental roles: motivator, learning facilitator, and resource provider. Most parents showed positive attitudes toward bilingualism and were eager to help their children learn English. However, differences in socioeconomic status, education, and language skills influenced how actively and effectively they could be involved. The study emphasizes the importance of strengthening home-school collaboration and suggests inclusive strategies to help all parents—regardless of background—support their children's language learning in multilingual contexts.

Keywords: parental perspectives, second language learning, second language development

Introduction

In today's interconnected global landscape, the ability to communicate in multiple languages has become increasingly valuable. As a result, many parents are keenly interested in their children's acquisition of a second language (L2), recognizing the potential benefits for cognitive development, cultural awareness, and future career opportunities (Al-Hoorie, et al., 2022; Derakhshan, 2022). Parental involvement is widely acknowledged as a critical factor in children's educational success, and this holds true in the realm of L2 learning. Parents' attitudes, beliefs, and engagement can significantly influence their children's motivation and proficiency in acquiring a new language (Aji et al., 2023; Arndt, 2023; Cabangcala et al., 2021). Understanding these parental perspectives is essential for educators and policymakers aiming to support effective L2 education. This introduction explores the multifaceted role of parents in children's L2 learning, highlighting insights from recent research and identifying areas requiring further investigation.

Research has consistently demonstrated that active parental involvement positively impacts children's L2 acquisition. For instance, studies by (Dovchin, 2021) and (Hashim et al., 2021) identified distinct motivational profiles among elementary-school-aged children learning English and found that varying levels of parental involvement corresponded to differences in children's intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Specifically, when parents respected their children's learning styles, provided relevant information, and offered emotional support, children were more likely to exhibit higher-quality motivational profiles (Garrote et al., 2021; Kenny et al., 2024). Conversely, parental pressure was associated with lower-quality motivational profiles, underscoring the importance of supportive rather than coercive involvement (Dixon et al., 2022; López, 2023; Moybeka et al., 2023). These findings suggest that the nature and quality of parental engagement are crucial determinants of children's success in L2 learning. Moreover, they highlight the need for parents to adopt supportive strategies that align with their children's individual learning preferences and emotional needs.

Cultural factors also play a significant role in shaping parental attitudes toward L2 education. Families from diverse cultural backgrounds may hold varying beliefs about the importance of bilingualism, the status of different languages, and the appropriate methods for language instruction (Uccelli, 2023; Liando et al., 2023). Furthermore, immigrant parents' acculturation attitudes influenced their children's second language development (Shao, et.al., 2023; Ruan et al., 2021). The research revealed that parents who maintained positive attitudes toward their heritage language often had children with stronger bilingual abilities, while those who prioritized assimilation into the majority culture tended to emphasize proficiency in the dominant language, sometimes at the expense of the heritage language. These findings highlight the complex interplay between cultural identity, parental beliefs, and children's language learning experiences. Understanding these dynamics is essential for developing culturally responsive educational practices that honor and leverage the linguistic diversity of students (Reiber-Kuijpers et al., 2021; Rasekh Eslami & Zohoor, 2023).

Socioeconomic factors further influence the degree and nature of parental involvement in children's L2 learning. A study from (Purwanto et al., 2024) examined the differences in parental involvement between families from varying socioeconomic backgrounds. The research found that parents from higher socioeconomic statuses (T20 families) were more likely to engage in activities such as reading with their children, enrolling them in extracurricular language classes, and providing a language-rich environment at home. In contrast, parents from lower socioeconomic backgrounds (B40 families) faced challenges such as limited time and resources, which constrained their ability to support their children's L2 education. These disparities suggest that socioeconomic status can create unequal opportunities for children in L2 acquisition, highlighting the need for policies and programs that provide additional support to families with fewer resources (Pawlak, 2021; Rorintulus & Wuntu, 2023; Vitta & Al-Hoorie, 2023). Addressing these inequities is crucial for ensuring that all children have access to quality language education, regardless of their socioeconomic background.

Theoretical frameworks, such as Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, offer valuable insights into the mechanisms through which parental involvement influences L2 learning. According to this perspective, social interactions, including those between parents and children, are fundamental to cognitive development. A study by (Yu, 2023) emphasized that when parents engage in meaningful social interactions and scaffold their children's learning experiences, they create an environment conducive to language development. This involvement not only enhances children's linguistic abilities but also fosters higher-order thinking skills and cognitive growth (Rorintulus & Wuntu, 2023). These findings underscore the importance of viewing language learning as a socially mediated process, where parental engagement serves as a critical component of the child's learning ecosystem. By actively participating in their children's language education, parents can provide the necessary support and guidance to facilitate effective L2 acquisition.

Despite the recognized importance of parental involvement, there remains a need for more nuanced research that delves into the specific expectations, challenges, and support strategies that parents employ in the context of their children's L2 learning. While existing studies have highlighted the positive correlation between parental engagement and children's language outcomes, there is limited understanding of how parents perceive their roles, the obstacles they encounter, and the resources they require to effectively support their children's language education. Addressing these gaps is essential for developing targeted interventions and resources that empower parents to contribute meaningfully to their children's L2 learning journeys. Furthermore, such research can inform educators and policymakers in creating programs that effectively engage parents and address their concerns, ultimately enhancing the overall effectiveness of L2 education.

This study aims to fill this gap by exploring parental perspectives on their children's second language learning, focusing on the insights, challenges, and expectations they hold. By examining these aspects, the research seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the parental role in L2 acquisition. The study will investigate how

parents perceive their involvement in their children's L2 education, the strategies they employ to support language learning, and the challenges they face in this process. Additionally, it will explore the expectations parents have regarding their children's language proficiency and the outcomes they anticipate from L2 acquisition. Through this exploration, the study aims to shed light on the complex dynamics of parental involvement in L2 learning and identify areas where additional support and resources may be needed.

The central research question guiding this study is: How do parents perceive their involvement in their children's second language learning, and what challenges and expectations do they associate with this process? Addressing this question will contribute to the existing body of knowledge on language acquisition by providing detailed insights into the parental role in L2 education. It will also inform the development of strategies and policies aimed at enhancing parental engagement, ultimately supporting more effective and equitable language learning experiences for children. By understanding the perspectives of parents, educators and policymakers can better collaborate with families to create supportive environments that foster successful L2 acquisition.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research design to explore parental perspectives on their children's second language (L2) learning. Qualitative methods are particularly suited for investigating complex social phenomena, as they allow for an in-depth understanding of participants' experiences, beliefs, and attitudes (Creswell, 2013). By utilizing this approach, the research aims to capture the nuanced insights, challenges, and expectations that parents hold regarding their children's L2 acquisition. This design facilitates the exploration of subjective experiences and the construction of meaning, which are central to understanding the multifaceted role of parents in L2 education. Furthermore, qualitative research enables the researcher to adapt to emerging themes and patterns during data collection, ensuring a comprehensive examination of the topic. This flexibility is essential when delving into the diverse and individualized experiences of parents in supporting their children's language learning journey.

The study's participants comprise twenty-seven parents of elementary school-aged children who are currently engaged in learning a second language in Semarang, Indonesia. Purposeful sampling is employed to select participants who can provide rich and relevant information pertinent to the research question (Rorintulus & Wuntu, 2023; Misra, 2007). Criteria for inclusion include parents' willingness to participate, their active involvement in their child's L2 education, and representation from diverse cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds. This diversity ensures a comprehensive understanding of the various factors influencing parental perspectives on L2 learning. By including participants from different backgrounds, the study aims to capture a wide range of experiences and insights, thereby enhancing the validity and applicability of the findings. Additionally, ensuring ethical considerations, such as informed consent and confidentiality, is paramount in the recruitment and participation process.

Data collection involves semi-structured interviews, a method well-suited for exploring participants' perspectives in depth while allowing for flexibility in responses (Creswell, 2013). An interview guide is developed to cover key topics, including parents' motivations for supporting L2 learning, the strategies they employ, challenges encountered, and their expectations regarding outcomes. Open-ended questions encourage participants to share detailed narratives, providing rich qualitative data. Interviews are conducted in a comfortable setting chosen by the participants to facilitate open and honest communication. Each interview is audio-recorded with the participants' consent to ensure accurate data capture for subsequent analysis. This approach allows for the collection of nuanced data that can reveal underlying themes and patterns related to parental involvement in L2 education. Furthermore, the semi-structured nature of the interviews enables the researcher to probe deeper into specific areas of interest that may emerge during the conversations.

The data collection process also incorporates field notes and observations to complement the interview data. These additional data sources provide context and help triangulate the findings, enhancing the study's credibility (Reiber-Kuijpers et al., 2021). Field notes capture non-verbal cues, environmental factors, and the researcher's reflections, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of the participants' experiences. Observations may include parental interactions with their children during language learning activities, offering insights into the practical aspects of parental involvement. By integrating multiple data sources, the study aims to construct a holistic picture of the phenomena under investigation. This triangulation strengthens the validity of the findings and provides a richer, more nuanced interpretation of the data. Additionally, maintaining detailed records of observations and reflections supports the transparency and rigor of the research process.

Data analysis follows a thematic approach, as outlined by (Braun & Clarke, 2006), involving systematic coding and identification of patterns within the data. The process begins with familiarization, where transcripts are read multiple times to immerse the researcher in the data. Initial codes are generated to capture significant features, which are then collated into potential themes. These themes are reviewed and refined to ensure they accurately represent the data set and address the research question. Thematic analysis allows for the identification of both explicit and implicit meanings within the data, providing a rich and detailed account of parental perspectives. To enhance the reliability of the analysis, coding is conducted independently by multiple researchers, and discrepancies are discussed and resolved collaboratively. This collaborative approach helps mitigate individual biases and ensures a more objective interpretation of the data.

The theoretical framework underpinning this study is Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, which emphasizes the fundamental role of social interaction in cognitive development. This theory is particularly relevant in understanding how parental involvement influences children's L2 learning, as it highlights the importance of collaborative learning and the transmission of cultural tools. According to Vygotsky, parents act as more knowledgeable others who guide and support their children's

learning within the zone of proximal development. This guidance enables children to perform tasks they would not be able to accomplish independently, thereby facilitating cognitive and linguistic growth. By applying this theoretical lens, the study seeks to explore how parents' interactions and support strategies contribute to their children's L2 acquisition. Understanding these dynamics can inform the development of educational practices that effectively engage parents in the language learning process. Furthermore, this framework provides a basis for interpreting the complex social and cultural factors that influence parental involvement in L2 education.

In ensuring the rigor and trustworthiness of the study, several strategies are employed, including member checking, triangulation, and maintaining an audit trail (Creswell, 2013). Member checking involves sharing findings with participants to validate the accuracy of interpretations, thereby enhancing credibility. Triangulation, as previously mentioned, utilizes multiple data sources to cross-verify findings, strengthening the study's validity. An audit trail documents the research process, decisions made, and reflections, providing transparency and allowing others to assess the dependability of the study. Ethical considerations are upheld throughout the research, with informed consent obtained from all participants, confidentiality maintained, and the right to withdraw at any time emphasized. These measures ensure that the study is conducted with integrity and respect for the participants, contributing to the overall quality and ethical standards of the research. By adhering to these rigorous methodological practices, the study aims to produce findings that are both credible and valuable to the field of L2 education.

Findings

The analysis of data collected from the 27 parents who participated in this study revealed several key themes regarding their perceptions of their children's second language (L2) learning. These themes include parental motivation and attitudes, support strategies employed, challenges encountered, and expectations for L2 proficiency. The findings illustrate the complexity of parental involvement in L2 acquisition and highlight variations in engagement based on socioeconomic status, educational background, and cultural perspectives.

Parental Motivation and Attitudes Toward L2 Learning

A majority of parents expressed strong motivation for their children to acquire proficiency in a second language, citing career advantages, cognitive benefits, and global communication as key reasons. Many parents emphasized that L2 proficiency would open up better educational and professional opportunities for their children in the future. Several parents linked L2 learning to cognitive advantages, stating that bilingualism enhances problem-solving skills and critical thinking. However, some parents viewed L2

learning as an obligatory school requirement rather than a meaningful skill. Meanwhile, another parent expressed a more neutral stance.

"I want my child to be fluent in English because it will help them secure a better job in the future." (Parent 3)

"We focus on English mainly because it's a school subject, not because we see a real necessity outside of school." (Parent 12)

"My child's future is global, and English is the global language." One parent also mentioned, "Learning a second language helps children think differently and be more open-minded." (Parent 15)

This division in attitudes suggests that while many parents recognize the broader benefits of bilingualism, others may require further awareness and support to fully embrace its significance.

Support Strategies Employed by Parents

The study found that parents employed a variety of strategies to support their children's L2 learning. Common strategies included enrolling children in extracurricular language courses, providing access to digital language-learning tools, and encouraging exposure through media such as books, movies, and music. Some parents with higher educational backgrounds and financial resources reported hiring private tutors or sending their children to bilingual schools. In contrast, parents from lower socioeconomic backgrounds relied more on school instruction and free online resources.

"We use online apps and YouTube videos to supplement what our child learns in school." (Parent 10)

Another parent with more financial resources stated:

"We send our child to an international school because we believe full immersion is the best way to learn a language." (Parent 17)

"I make sure my child watches cartoons in English and reads simple English books every night." (Parent 19)

"We practice speaking English together during dinner so it becomes part of daily life." (Parent 21)

The findings indicate a disparity in access to L2 learning support, reinforcing the need for inclusive policies that ensure all children receive adequate language-learning opportunities.

Challenges Faced by Parents in Supporting L2 Learning

Despite their efforts, parents encountered several challenges in facilitating their children's L2 learning. Time constraints emerged as a primary issue, particularly among working parents who struggled to balance professional and family responsibilities. Another significant challenge was the lack of confidence in their own L2 proficiency, with many parents feeling unqualified to assist their children in practicing the language.

"I can't really help my child with English because I don't speak it well myself." (Parent 1)

"I only finished junior high school, so I never learned much English. I just let the school handle it." (Parent 3)

Additionally, parents expressed concerns about the quality of L2 instruction in schools, with some believing that the curriculum lacked interactive and practical elements necessary for fluency development.

"The school focuses too much on grammar and writing, but my child struggles with speaking. I wish there were more conversational practice." (Parent 14)

"I'm afraid I might teach the wrong pronunciation or grammar if I try to help too much." (Parent 20)

These findings suggest that parents require additional support, such as accessible training or workshops, to enhance their ability to contribute effectively to their children's L2 education.

Expectations for L2 Proficiency and Future Use

When asked about their expectations for their children's L2 proficiency, parents' responses varied based on their aspirations and perceived necessity of bilingualism. Some parents aimed for complete fluency and native-like proficiency, particularly those who planned for their children to pursue higher education or careers in international settings. Others focused on functional communication skills, believing that conversational proficiency was sufficient for travel or basic interactions. Interestingly, a small subset of parents expressed skepticism about the long-term retention of L2 skills, citing a lack of consistent exposure outside of school as a limiting factor.

"I want my child to be fluent like a native speaker, but I know it's difficult without living in an English-speaking country." (Respondent 6)

"I don't think my child will retain much English unless they continue to use it after school." (Respondent 12)

"I just want my child to be confident enough to speak with foreigners without fear." *Respondent 22)

"If they can read, understand movies, and write simple emails in English, I think that's enough." (Respondent 27)

This range of expectations highlights the need for structured and continuous language exposure to ensure lasting proficiency.

Variations in Parental Involvement Based on Socioeconomic Status

The findings also revealed noticeable differences in parental involvement based on socioeconomic factors. Parents from higher-income families reported greater access to supplementary educational resources and opportunities, such as study-abroad programs and international summer camps. In contrast, parents from lower-income backgrounds often relied on public education and free language apps, with limited access to personalized instruction. One parent from a higher socioeconomic background stated:

"We send our child to an English summer camp abroad every year to improve their fluency."

Meanwhile, a parent from a lower-income household explained:

"We can't afford private lessons, so we rely on free online resources and the school's English program."

"I wish we had more affordable language programs in our area."

"We do what we can, but the extra classes and books are too expensive for us."

While all parents expressed a desire for their children to succeed in L2 learning, financial constraints significantly influenced the level of support they could provide. These disparities suggest a need for more equitable language education programs that provide equal opportunities for children regardless of their economic status.

Overall, the findings of this study highlight the central role parents play in their children's L2 learning, alongside the enthusiasm and challenges they face. Most parents recognize the benefits of bilingualism and actively support their children's language acquisition. However, socioeconomic disparities, time limitations, and varying levels of confidence in language instruction affect the extent and effectiveness of their involvement.

Discussion

The findings of this study reveal that parents generally hold positive attitudes and strong motivations toward their children's L2 learning, aligning with previous research emphasizing parental belief in the long-term benefits of bilingualism (Nasution, et.al., 2022; Garrote et al., 2021). Many participants linked L2 proficiency with cognitive development, career advancement, and global mobility, reinforcing the view that parental motivation significantly shapes language learning success (Pawlak, 2021). However, the presence of some indifferent attitudes—seeing L2 merely as a school subject—supports the observation by (Hashim et al., 2021) that not all parents fully internalize the importance of bilingualism, especially when they lack exposure to its practical benefits.

Parental support strategies observed in this study reflect a diverse range of practices depending on socioeconomic and educational backgrounds, confirming previous findings that such factors strongly influence home language environments (Kenny et al., 2024). The use of digital tools, private tutoring, and immersive programs among affluent families aligns with findings by Baker (2011), who notes that economic capital provides access to more effective language input. Conversely, the reliance on public schooling and online resources by lower-income families illustrates the inequality in language-learning opportunities. This supports (Liando et al., 2023) claim that socioeconomic disparities often translate into unequal parental involvement in education, particularly in language development.

The challenges reported by parents—such as time constraints and low self-confidence in L2 proficiency—mirror the findings of Derakhshan (2022), who noted that

even highly motivated parents struggle to provide consistent support due to limited time and language skills. The perceived inadequacy of school-based instruction, especially the focus on grammar over speaking, is consistent with criticisms in the literature that many L2 curricula in non-English speaking contexts emphasize form over function (Aji et al., 2023; Brown and Lee, 2025). This finding suggests a need for schools to adopt more communicative approaches and include parents as partners in the process, echoing (Lailiyah and Wediyantoro, 2021) recommendation for collaborative, home-school language learning efforts.

Expectations regarding children's L2 proficiency varied among parents, with some aiming for native-like fluency and others satisfied with functional communication. This divergence supports findings by Reiber-Kuijpers et al. (2021) who emphasized that parental expectations are often shaped by cultural values and perceived future needs. The concern about long-term language retention without consistent exposure outside the classroom echoes from Rajasekar et al. (2006), which found that sustainable bilingualism depends not only on early education but also on continued meaningful interaction. Hence, this study supports the call for extended language use contexts beyond formal schooling to maintain and deepen L2 proficiency.

Significant disparities in parental involvement based on socioeconomic status also surfaced in this study, echoing the conclusions of (Nasution, et.al., 2022), who highlighted how middle- and upper-class parents are more likely to engage in "concerted cultivation," actively managing and supporting their children's educational pathways. The access to elite schools, language camps, and international travel among wealthier families contrasts starkly with the limited resources of working-class families. This inequality reinforces the urgent need for language education policies that ensure equity and inclusion, as suggested by Yu (2023), who emphasized the importance of bridging the gap between home and school for effective bilingual education.

In sum, the findings both confirm and extend prior studies on the critical role parents play in L2 acquisition, shaped by their beliefs, resources, and educational contexts. While parental motivation and involvement are generally strong, structural and contextual barriers hinder their full participation, particularly among lower-income families. The findings support Zhao & Chun (2008) assertion that effective family language policy must consider not only parental aspirations but also the systemic factors affecting implementation. These insights suggest that educators and policymakers must design inclusive programs that empower all families to participate actively in their children's language development.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study highlights the pivotal role of parental motivation, attitudes, and support in shaping children's L2 learning experiences, while also revealing disparities influenced by socioeconomic and educational backgrounds. Despite a generally positive orientation toward bilingualism, parents face challenges such as limited time, low confidence in their own English skills, and unequal access to resources,

which can hinder optimal support. These findings imply the need for more inclusive language education policies and school programs that actively engage parents across social strata, offering guidance, training, and accessible resources. Future research should explore the dynamic interplay between family language practices and school support systems across diverse regions and cultural contexts, particularly focusing on longitudinal impacts and the role of digital technologies in facilitating L2 learning at home. Ultimately, empowering parents as co-educators in language development holds promise for fostering equitable and sustainable bilingual education.

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