

Exploring the Relationships between Parental Influence on Preschoolers’ Early Language in a Multi-lingual Context

Lois Lim, Vicki Lim & Shehnas Alam
Dyslexia Association of Singapore



INTRODUCTION

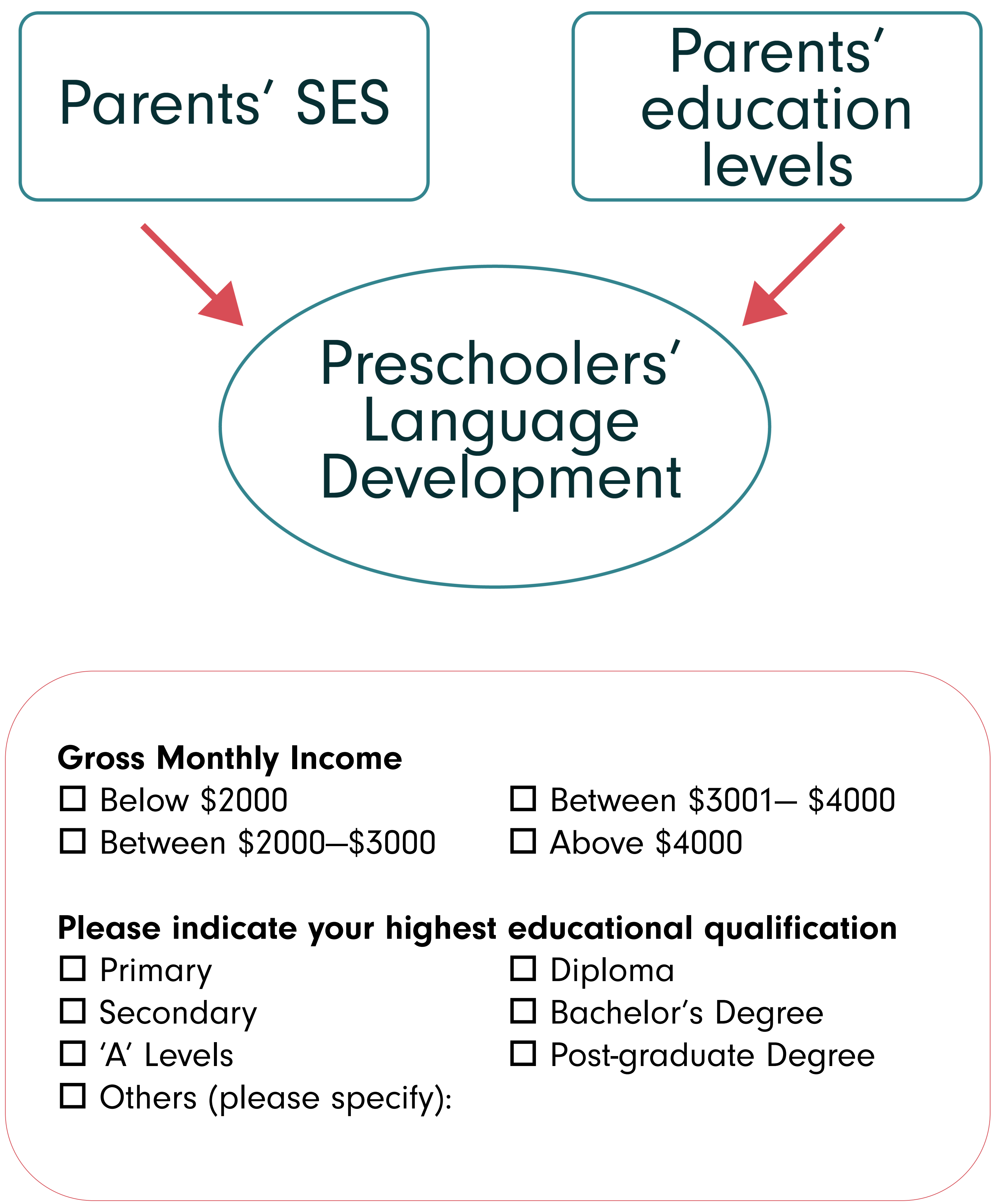
Previous research documenting the '30 million word gap' has highlighted that parental characteristics such as socio-economic status (SES) and educational levels have shown significant influences on children’s vocabulary growth (Hart & Risley, 1995). Children from low SES families have higher risks of difficulties in developing reading-related skills like phonological awareness (PA) (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998).

Similarly, Hoff & Tian (2005) reported that mothers’ education significantly impacted children’s language-related skills. Dual language exposure has also been found to influence children’s language proficiency (Place & Hoff, 2011). However, little is known about the interplay of these on children’s language development in a multi-lingual context like Singapore where a typical Singaporean child is exposed to at least two languages at home.

The Dyslexia Association of Singapore (DAS) provides early literacy intervention to >200 preschoolers every year and many of them go on to be assessed to investigate if they might have dyslexia. This study looked explored parents’ influence on their preschoolers’ early language development.

AIMS

- Explore the relationships between parents’ SES and educational levels and their preschoolers’ early language development within a multi-lingual context like Singapore.
- Inform parents and educators about the factors that could impact early language development.

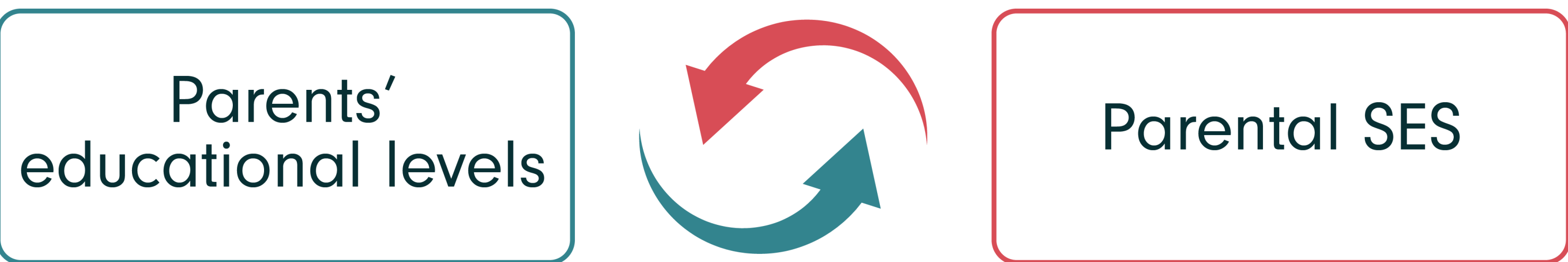


METHOD

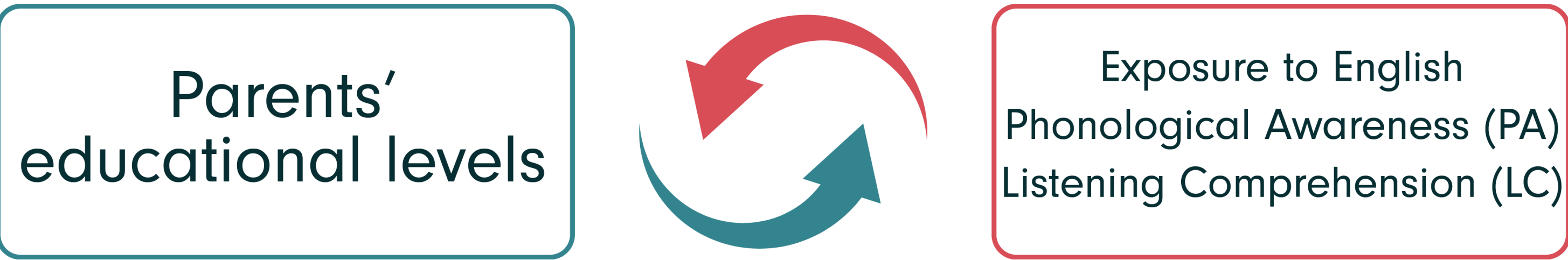
- 63 preschoolers assessed at the DAS, with their age in the ranges of 6:00 to 6:11 (M = 6:03, SD = .031).
- Language and PA skills were measured via selected subtests from the Differential Ability Scales, 2nd Edition (DAS-II) and Wechsler Objective Reading and Language Dimensions – Singapore (WORLD Singapore)
- Parents completed questionnaires and interviews stating their educational background and income levels, as well as English exposure at home.
- Regression analyses were used to see which parental variables predicted preschoolers’ early language skills.

RESULTS

Correlational Analyses



Parents’ education significantly correlated with parent’s socio-economic status, *r* approximately between .43 and .49, *p*< .01.



Parents’ education significantly correlated with English exposure at home, PA, LC, *r* ranging from .37 to .55, *p*< .01.

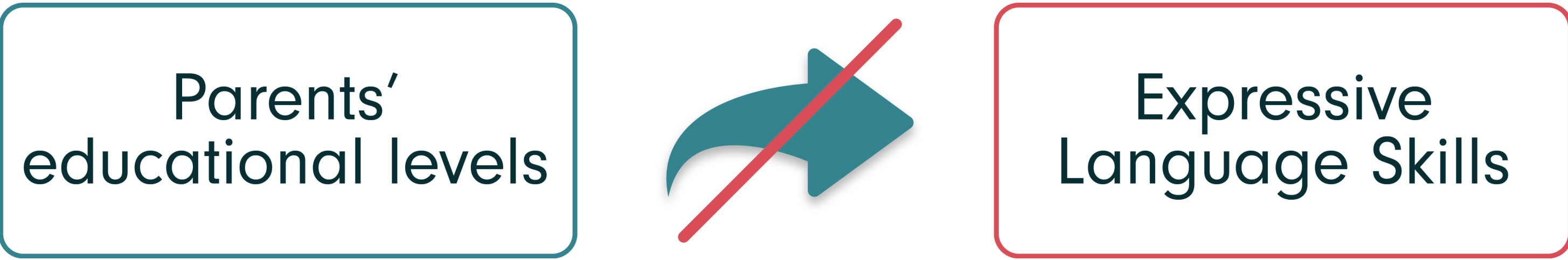


Levels of English exposure at home significantly correlated with PA and LC, *r* ranging from .29 to .43, *p*< .01.

Regression Predictors: Parents’ educational levels



Parents’ educational levels significantly accounted for about 20% of the variance of preschoolers’ PA and LC skills.



Parents’ educational levels were not significant, accounting for only 6% of preschoolers’ expressive language skills.



Parents’ SES was not significant, accounting between 6 to 13% of preschooler’s PA, LC and expressive language skills.

DISCUSSION & FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The relationship between parents’ educational levels and exposure to English with preschoolers’ language development

- With greater English exposure at home, which appears to be more likely when parents are better educated, preschoolers show better development of receptive language skills (LC) and PA. Unsurprisingly, parents with higher educational background are likely able to provide not only greater quantity but also better quality of English exposure at home. Future studies can explore the impact of the quality of English exposure on the preschoolers’ language development.
- Supplementary support in enhancing the quality and amount of English exposure would confer greater benefits for preschoolers of parents with lower educational backgrounds, or on those who speak English as a second language. Hence, it is vital for teachers to identify these preschoolers who may benefit from language enrichment/ intervention initiatives implemented by the government.

- It is interesting to note that parents’ education did not seem to influence the development of preschoolers’ expressive language skills. Perhaps other factors such as schooling as well as the use of other languages or mode of communication could have a stronger impact and can be investigated in future.

The relationship between parents’ SES and preschoolers’ language development

- Contrary to the findings of the "30 million word gap" between preschoolers from “rich and poor” family backgrounds, parents’ SES did not appear to be related to preschoolers’ language development in this study. Perhaps in Singapore, where government-initiated literacy programmes are increasingly available, the impact of lower SES potentially hindering a child’s access to English language support may have been minimised.
- Nonetheless, further differentiation of the income groups, particularly for income levels above \$4000, may be warranted for more insight regarding the relationship between parents’ SES and preschoolers’ language development.

References

Hart, B. & Risley, T.R. (2003). The Early Catastrophe: The 30 Million Word Gap by Age 3. American Educator. Retrieved from <https://www.aft.org/sites/default/files/periodicals/TheEarlyCatastrophe.pdf>

Hoff, E. & Tian, C. (2005). Socioeconomic status and cultural influences on language. Journal of Communication Disorders, 38, 271 - 278.

Place, S., & Hoff, E. (2011). Properties of Dual Language Exposure That Influence 2-Year-Olds' Bilingual Proficiency. Child Development, 82(6), 1834-1849. doi:10.1111/j.1467-8624.2011.01660.

Whitehurst, G. J., & Lonigan, C. J. (1998). Child development and emergent literacy. Child Development, 69, 848 – 872.

a Development Support Program (DSP), Focused Language Assistance in Reading (FLAIR)Polya, G. (1945). How to solve it. Princeton: Princeton University Press. ISBN 0-691-08097-6.