

Home-Based Reading and Language Play in Primary English Development: Socioeconomic Pathways, Multilingual Realities, and Equity-Oriented Strategies for Sustained Family Participation

Shaikha Al-Subaiei

Abstract: *Primary English development is shaped not only by formal instruction but also by the interactional routines through which children hear, use, and rehearse language beyond school. This paper offers a global, theoretically oriented analysis of how home-based activities-especially shared reading sessions and parent-child language games-relate to children's English proficiency during the primary years. It foregrounds socioeconomic factors that condition feasibility and durability, including time scarcity, housing density, caregiver literacy, stress load, book access, and institutional trust. A hybrid approach is advanced: a critical synthesis of research on home literacy environments, dialogic reading, caregiver talk, family engagement, bilingual development, and digital reading; a proposed original field study comparing dialogic reading routines with low-material language-play routines; and an interpretive implementation inquiry to explain participation patterns in multilingual settings. A mechanism account links structural conditions to proximal processes (conversational turns, expansions, narrative scaffolding, retrieval practice, decontextualized talk, and identity safety) and to outcomes (vocabulary, oral fluency, listening comprehension, narrative competence, and emergent literacy). The paper concludes with an equity-first engagement architecture that prioritizes dignity, multilingual legitimacy, and practicable micro-routines.*

Keywords: home literacy environment, dialogic reading, language games, socioeconomic inequality, primary English development

1. Introduction

Primary-level English learning is frequently treated as a classroom achievement: curriculum delivery, practice, assessment, and progression through graded texts. That institutional framing is understandable, yet it tends to understate how language proficiency actually consolidates. English becomes usable when children repeatedly encounter meaningful input, sustain attention to form-meaning relations, and take risks in speaking in contexts where misunderstanding is tolerated. For most children, that kind of rehearsal is distributed across the day: in short exchanges during chores, in sibling play, in bedtime talk, in stories heard from elders, and, when routines permit, in shared reading or language games with caregivers. The home, therefore, is not simply a backdrop; it is a site where interactional opportunities can either thicken or thin out.

Two kinds of home practices are especially relevant because they align closely with established mechanisms in language development: (a) shared reading sessions that include dialogic interaction rather than adult monologue, and (b) language games that elicit frequent retrieval and production while preserving emotional safety. Research on joint book reading has long reported associations with language and literacy outcomes, with meta-analytic evidence supporting benefits for early reading and related skills (Bus, van IJzendoorn, & Pellegrini, 1995; Mol & Bus, 2011). Interventions that structure shared reading as dialogic-encouraging child talk, prediction, explanation, and retelling-show added value beyond reading-as-usual, particularly for vocabulary (Mol, Bus, de Jong, & Smeets, 2008; Dowdall, Melendez-Torres, Murray, Gardner, & Hartford, 2020). In parallel, research on caregiver-child interaction indicates that

children benefit from responsive, elaborative talk and decontextualized language, not merely from exposure to words (Hoff, 2003; Rowe, 2012; Weisleder & Fernald, 2013; Fernald, Marchman, & Weisleder, 2013).

A global lens complicates these relationships because English functions differently across settings. In English-dominant systems, children's home language practices vary widely due to migration, dialect diversity, and socioeconomic inequality. In ESL and EFL contexts, English is often a high-status school language tied to mobility, yet it may be minimally present in everyday community interaction. Families can be highly motivated while simultaneously constrained by limited English proficiency, material scarcity, and experiences of institutional marginalization. Socioeconomic gradients in educational outcomes are well documented across contexts (Bradley & Corwyn, 2002; Sirin, 2005), and family engagement is shaped not only by aspiration but by feasibility and trust (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014; Wilder, 2014; Castro et al., 2015).

The field also contains an important corrective to simplistic "English-only at home" advice. Work in bilingualism and language education emphasizes that strong development of a first language can support additional language learning through transfer of conceptual knowledge, narrative competence, and metalinguistic awareness (Cummins, 2000; Genesee, Paradis, & Crago, 2004). In practice, however, school messaging and social stigma can push families to reduce home-language use, sometimes harming family communication and weakening children's narrative resources. A home-based English strategy that is not linguistically and culturally legitimate will not be adopted at

scale, especially among families who have historically been treated as “deficient”.

This paper asks a practical and equity-critical question: How do home-based reading sessions and language games involving caregivers influence children’s English proficiency at the primary level, and how do socioeconomic factors shape who can participate, how, and with what effects? The analysis treats family participation as socially produced rather than individually chosen, and it advances strategies that can function under time poverty, low print access, and multilingual realities.

2. Research objectives

- 1) Clarify mechanisms through which shared reading and language play may influence vocabulary, oral fluency, listening comprehension, narrative competence, and emergent literacy.
- 2) Specify socioeconomic pathways that structure feasibility and sustainability (time, space, stress, resources, caregiver literacy, institutional trust).
- 3) Examine multilingual negotiation and propose engagement designs that legitimize bilingual support rather than demanding English-only routines.
- 4) Present a hybrid methodology integrating critical review, an original field study, and interpretive implementation inquiry.
- 5) Offer an equity-first set of strategies for encouraging family participation without surveillance or stigma.

3. Paper Structure

Section 4 provides a thematic literature survey. Section 5 defines the problem and proposes an integrative mechanism-and-equity model. Section 6 outlines a hybrid methodology (without simulations, equations, or computer programs). Section 7 discusses plausible patterns of results and their implications. Sections 8 and 9 conclude and propose future research. Section 10 lists references in APA style.

4. Literature Survey

4.1 Parental beliefs, language ideologies, and “help” as a moral category

Home-based language support is not only a set of behaviors; it is also a set of beliefs about what counts as “real learning,” who is qualified to teach, and what risks are attached to imperfect performance. Families often internalize school messages about correctness, accent, and “proper English,” and these messages can convert supportive intent into anxiety. In multilingual settings, English can be treated as a prestige code that must be guarded from “contamination” by home languages, despite robust evidence that bilingual development and cross-linguistic transfer are compatible with strong academic outcomes (Cummins, 2000; Genesee et al., 2004). Where such ideologies are dominant, parents who do not feel fluent may withdraw from engagement in order to avoid “teaching mistakes,” and children may receive the implicit message that English is a test to be passed rather than a resource to be used.

Language ideology also shapes the social meaning of reading. For some families, shared reading is associated with schooling and status, and it may be framed as a marker of “responsible parenting”. That framing can motivate sustained routines among privileged households, while producing shame in households that cannot reproduce the same practices due to resource constraints. The equity problem is therefore partly symbolic: educational systems frequently present a single model of “good” home support and convert it into a moral expectation.

Research on family engagement cautions against such deficit framings. The distinction between school-facing involvement and learning-centered engagement is again relevant here: some families engage deeply through oral storytelling, religious education, work-based apprenticeship talk, or community participation, but these forms of learning do not always translate into school-recognized “involvement” (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014). For English development specifically, the relevant question becomes: which interactional features are present in those practices (narrative structure, explanation, questioning, vocabulary diversity), and how can schools build bridges without delegitimizing existing family knowledge systems?

4.2 Funds of knowledge and culturally sustaining perspectives

A productive response to deficit models of family participation emerges from “funds of knowledge” approaches, which emphasize that households contain historically accumulated knowledge, practices, and linguistic resources that can support learning when recognized and connected to schooling (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & González, 1992). In many communities, children learn through observation, storytelling, participation in family labor, and multi-generational interaction. If schools recognize these resources, home-based language support need not be reduced to “buy books and read”.

Culturally sustaining pedagogy similarly argues that education should sustain, rather than replace, linguistic and cultural repertoires (Paris & Alim, 2017). This is particularly relevant for English learning in postcolonial and migratory contexts where English has both instrumental value and symbolic power. When schools frame English as an additive resource—rather than as a replacement for home languages—families are more likely to engage without perceiving a threat to identity and belonging. Such framing can also reduce the pressure to perform “native-like” English, supporting participation among parents who fear accent stigma.

4.3 Stress, time poverty, and the interactional costs of precarity

Socioeconomic constraints are often discussed as lack of resources, but they also operate through psychological and temporal mechanisms. Time poverty restricts sustained routines, while chronic stress can reduce the emotional bandwidth required for patient, elaborative interaction. A family may value English development and still struggle to maintain calm dialogic reading after long workdays. In such

conditions, engagement designs that demand extensive time and emotional labor will fail predictably.

This point shifts the design logic: rather than prescribing long nightly routines, engagement initiatives can focus on “interactional density” and feasibility. A short routine that reliably produces a few conversational turns and expansions may be more realistic than an idealized daily session. Language games embedded in daily activities-cooking, travel, shopping-may be particularly viable under time pressure because they do not require a dedicated quiet space.

4.4 Dialogic reading across languages: translation, mediation, and bilingual talk

Dialogic reading protocols are often described as language-neutral techniques: prompt the child, expand responses, encourage retell and prediction. In bilingual households, however, dialogic reading becomes linguistically complex. Caregivers may translate key vocabulary, paraphrase narrative events, or switch languages strategically to maintain comprehension and engagement. Rather than treating such mediation as “improper,” bilingual education scholarship positions it as a form of scaffolding. Children can engage in higher-level narrative reasoning when comprehension is secured; the English forms can then be introduced as labels or short phrases linked to stable meanings.

Empirically, shared reading in bilingual contexts has been studied in varied ways, including parent-child bilingual book reading and narrative development. While study designs and measures differ, a recurring conclusion is that the quality of interaction and the richness of talk matter, and bilingual strategies can support sustained engagement rather than undermining it. This is consistent with the broader bilingual development literature that emphasizes additive bilingualism and the value of maintaining a strong home language foundation (Cummins, 2000; Genesee et al., 2004).

Engagement initiatives can therefore distinguish between two goals: (1) increasing opportunities for narrative reasoning and elaborative talk (which can occur in any language), and (2) providing targeted English exposure and practice (which can occur through selected vocabulary, formulaic phrases, and role-play). A rigid insistence on English-only reading can collapse both goals by reducing participation and lowering interaction quality. The more defensible design choice is bilingual bridging: maintain rich dialogic discussion using the language(s) available to the family, while integrating English strategically in ways that are sustainable.

4.5 Reading comprehension as language: the “simple view” and its limits

Educational debates about reading often invoke the “simple view of reading,” which treats reading comprehension as the product of decoding and language comprehension (Gough & Tunmer, 1986; Hoover & Gough, 1990). Although originally developed for reading, the conceptual distinction is useful for home-based English development. Some children develop adequate decoding but struggle with comprehension because

oral language is limited; others comprehend orally but struggle to decode. Home-based activities can support both sides of this equation depending on design: dialogic reading and storytelling strengthen oral language comprehension and vocabulary; letter-sound games and print-focused routines can support decoding foundations.

However, the simple view does not fully capture the sociolinguistic dimension of English learning in multilingual contexts, where children may decode in English but lack the cultural and pragmatic knowledge needed for deeper comprehension. It also does not capture the affective dimension: children may have linguistic capacity but avoid speaking or reading due to anxiety. These limitations point toward a more comprehensive approach: home-based routines should target oral language, narrative competence, vocabulary, and confidence, with decoding supported as appropriate.

4.6 Vocabulary development: breadth, depth, and retrieval

Vocabulary growth is not merely accumulation of word meanings. Depth of vocabulary includes knowledge of multiple senses, morphological relations, collocations, and pragmatic appropriateness. Shared reading introduces words in context, supporting semantic mapping. Language games support retrieval and flexible use, which can strengthen production. A child may understand a word when hearing it in a story but fail to retrieve it in speaking; games can close that gap by prompting repeated use in varied contexts.

The literature on child-directed talk and decontextualized language suggests that children benefit when adults go beyond the immediate here-and-now, discussing explanations, causes, and hypotheticals (Rowe, 2012). Dialogic reading often naturally elicits such talk: “Why did he run?” “What would you do?” Language games can be designed to elicit the same forms of decontextualized reasoning without requiring text. From an equity standpoint, this is consequential: where books are scarce, oral routines can still foster the discourse moves associated with academic language development.

4.7 Home-school relationships, trust, and institutional messaging

Family participation is mediated by the relational climate between home and school. Trust is shaped by whether families feel respected, whether communication is clear and non-judgmental, and whether schools treat parents as partners rather than as problems. In many contexts, especially for working-class, migrant, and minoritized families, school interactions are marked by prior experiences of exclusion, bureaucratic intimidation, or linguistic marginalization. Even when schools intend to encourage participation, the tone of messages can carry implicit blame.

Parental engagement research emphasizes that the most educationally meaningful forms of engagement occur at home in learning-centered interaction, yet schools often measure engagement through visible school-facing behaviors (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014). This mismatch

can produce misrecognition: families who provide rich support through oral talk, storytelling, and community learning may be classified as “uninvolved”. The equity implications are immediate. If schools respond by escalating demands for attendance and compliance, families already constrained by time poverty and language barriers may withdraw further.

More promising are designs that: (a) validate diverse forms of learning support; (b) provide concrete, low-burden routines; (c) communicate permission to use home languages as scaffolding; and (d) avoid compliance surveillance. These elements align with implementation science: acceptability and fit are not cosmetic factors; they shape whether a routine is adopted, sustained, and enacted with high interaction quality (Durlak & DuPre, 2008).

4.8 Assessment practices and “proficiency” as a moving target

Primary English proficiency is often assessed through discrete skills: spelling, grammar worksheets, or standardized reading tests. Such measures can miss oral language development and narrative competence, which are foundational for later comprehension and academic writing. A home-based initiative aimed at increasing child talk may not show immediate gains on narrow paper-and-pencil tests, yet it may strengthen oral fluency and listening comprehension in ways that become visible later.

This mismatch can lead to premature judgments about program effectiveness. It also highlights the importance of multi-dimensional outcome measures that include speaking tasks and narrative retell assessments. Narrative competence—sequencing events, using causal links, maintaining coherence—has been linked to later literacy and academic language, and it is a domain where home-based storytelling and dialogic interaction can be particularly influential.

In global contexts, assessment is also political. English proficiency can function as gatekeeping for academic tracks and opportunities, increasing pressure on families. Engagement initiatives that align narrowly with test preparation may increase short-term scores for advantaged families while leaving constrained families further behind. A more defensible equity orientation treats oral language development as a central goal and designs routines that are feasible for all families, not only those able to purchase tutoring.

4.9 Interim synthesis: what the literature supports, and what it leaves unresolved

Across the reviewed domains, several claims are well supported:

- Interaction quality matters for language growth; conversational turns, responsiveness, and elaboration are robust mechanisms.
- Shared reading benefits language and literacy, especially when dialogic techniques increase child talk and inference.

- Socioeconomic constraints shape feasibility and adoption of home routines; ignoring them risks widening inequality.
- In multilingual contexts, additive bilingual approaches and bilingual scaffolding are compatible with strong English development, and English-only messaging can be counterproductive.

Unresolved questions remain practical and theoretical: how to build engagement designs that preserve dignity; how to measure participation without surveillance; how to integrate oral routines and play into school-endorsed learning; how to support caregivers with limited English without positioning them as inadequate; and how to sustain routines over time rather than only during short interventions.

4.10 Family literacy programmes: when “support” becomes infrastructure rather than advice

A distinction often blurred in policy is the difference between *advice* (“read with your child”) and *infrastructure* (book access, training, relational support, and continuity). Family literacy programmes that treat participation as something to be enabled-through lending libraries, guided routines, culturally responsive materials, and sustained contact—tend to show more stable engagement than programmes that simply distribute exhortations. The strongest evidence base for book-sharing interventions comes from randomized trials and meta-analyses, yet even within those bodies of work, variability in outcomes is tied to dosage and implementation fit. Dowdall and colleagues’ meta-analysis reports moderation by intervention dosage, while also indicating that caregiver education level was not a simple determinant of outcome, which complicates crude “deficit” assumptions and points back toward feasibility and design quality.

A related implication follows from implementation research: fidelity is not merely “did the parent follow the script,” but whether families could enact the routine in a way that preserved its active ingredients (child talk, expansions, inferential prompts), given their constraints (Durlak & DuPre, 2008). That framing changes what schools might do: instead of policing minutes, they invest in scaffolds that help families generate high-value interaction even in short bursts.

4.11 Measuring the home literacy environment: correlation, causation, and the danger of moral conclusions

Home literacy environment measures are widely used because they predict language and literacy outcomes, but the predictive relationship does not automatically indicate that the measured behaviors are the causal engine. Puglisi and colleagues, working with a longitudinal sample including children at family risk of dyslexia, argued that aspects of HLE may function as correlates of variation in children’s development once maternal language abilities are accounted for, cautioning against simple causal interpretations.

This is not a reason to abandon home-based work; it is a reason to refine it. The practical question becomes: what are the modifiable interactional moves that plausibly mediate gains (e.g., expansions, open questions, retell prompts), and

what supports allow those moves to appear in constrained contexts? A book count is not a pedagogy; an interactional routine can be.

4.12 Caregiver input: beyond quantity to the texture of talk

The shift from “how many words” to “what kind of talk” matters for primary English because academic language development often depends on decontextualized talk-explanation, reasoning, narrative linking, and hypothetical scenarios. Rowe’s longitudinal work distinguishes quantity from quality and demonstrates that both contribute to vocabulary development, with quality measures predicting growth as children develop.

Weisleder and Fernald’s work, conducted with Spanish-speaking families low in SES, links variability in child-directed speech to infants’ processing efficiency and vocabulary learning, reinforcing the argument that interaction is not simply exposure but a developmental driver.

For primary-level English learning, the relevance is not that families must speak constantly, but that routines should create *opportunities* for responsive turns-moments where children attempt language and receive expansions rather than blunt correction. This is precisely where dialogic reading and well-designed language games converge: both can be engineered to elicit child talk that is elaborated, not merely evaluated.

4.13 Parental involvement and academic achievement: what meta-analyses reveal-and what they cannot

Large-scale syntheses consistently report positive associations between parental involvement and achievement, but they also warn that “involvement” is a container concept hiding qualitatively different activities. Castro and colleagues’ meta-analysis synthesized research from 2000 to 2013 and found a positive association, but the field still wrestles with which forms of engagement are most educationally productive and which are socially stratified by feasibility.

Wilder’s meta-synthesis similarly confirms positive relationships across definitions while pointing to inconsistency and the risk of assuming that all involvement is equally helpful.

For English development, this matters because some common “involvement” practices-checking homework, drilling spelling, correcting grammar-can become sites of conflict, particularly when caregivers are not confident in English. In such cases, the activity may increase anxiety and reduce children’s willingness to take risks in speaking. The literature therefore supports an interpretive stance: engagement must be evaluated not only by presence, but by *interactional quality* and *affective climate*.

4.14 Phonological awareness and early decoding: where home routines can help without turning the home into a classroom

Primary English development includes emergent literacy, and many systems emphasize phonics. Families can support phonological awareness through playful routines that require no textbooks: rhyming games, syllable clapping, “odd one out” sound games, and sound hunts (“find something that starts with /b/”). These routines avoid the conflict-prone dynamic of formal instruction while still strengthening foundational skills.

Yet a warning is necessary. In contexts where English is a second or foreign language, phonological games can backfire if they become accent-policing or if caregivers feel judged for pronunciation. The design principle is “playful approximation”: the goal is sound awareness and listening discrimination, not perfect articulation. In multilingual settings, similar games can be played in the home language as well, supporting metalinguistic awareness and making participation feel linguistically legitimate.

4.15 Motivation, identity, and the child’s sense of “who English is for”

Language proficiency is not only cognitive; it is also motivational and social. A child who experiences English as humiliation will avoid it. A child who experiences English as a shared resource-used in stories, jokes, games, and gentle correction-will practice more. This is not sentimental; it is a mechanism. Practice depends on willingness to produce language, and willingness is shaped by identity safety.

Here, engagement strategies matter as much as content. Dialogic reading that invites the child to lead the story can create competence experiences. Language games that make English a tool for winning or collaborating can shift English from “subject” to “use”. When schools train families to praise effort, accept approximations, and model rather than correct harshly, they reduce the emotional costs of speaking.

4.16 Digital book-sharing: when screens widen access and when they erode interaction

Digital reading is often presented as a remedy for book scarcity, yet the benefits are conditional. The critical variable is whether digital texts prompt shared attention and conversation or whether they displace caregiver-child talk. Kucirkova’s work emphasizes the rapid evolution of children’s digital reading and argues for attending to how digital books are used socially, not only whether they are available.

In low-resource contexts, audio stories can help caregivers with limited print literacy participate in shared “reading” by listening together and discussing. However, if digital content is consumed individually with minimal conversation, the mechanism most strongly linked to language growth-responsive turns-may be absent. Equity is therefore not solved by device distribution alone. Programmes must include simple prompts that encourage talk (“Pause and ask:

why did she do that?” “Tell the story back in your own words”).

4.17 Policy logics that can unintentionally widen gaps

Across education systems, a familiar pattern appears: schools emphasize home reading as a universal prescription, but the prescription functions differently across households. Families with stable time, quiet space, and print-rich environments find it easy to comply; families facing crowding and shift work experience it as an impossible demand. When schools then reward compliance (stickers, praise, public charts), the program becomes a status contest rather than an equity intervention.

The literature does not always name this as “policy harm,” yet implementation science provides a language for it: low fit and low acceptability produce differential uptake; differential uptake produces widened outcome variance; widened variance is then misread as differences in parental “value” for education. The corrective is not softer slogans but different design: school-provided book circulation, micro-routines, bilingual legitimacy, and non-surveillant tracking.

4.18 Summative thematic synthesis

Across themes, four propositions emerge as defensible:

- 1) Home-based routines influence English development through interactional mechanisms (turn-taking, elaboration, narrative scaffolding, retrieval).
- 2) Socioeconomic constraints operate through feasibility and stress, shaping whether routines can occur and with what quality.
- 3) Bilingual legitimacy increases adoption and protects family communication; English-only insistence can reduce participation.
- 4) Equity-oriented design requires institutional responsibility (resources, circulation, teacher communication training) rather than shifting burden onto households.

4.19 Home language policy, translanguaging at home, and the false “either/or” of bilingual families

A large share of the world’s primary learners acquire English alongside one or more home languages. In these contexts, a persistent misunderstanding shapes both school policy and family practice: the idea that English must replace home language use in order to develop strongly. Bilingual education scholarship has long argued that this substitution model is not necessary and can be harmful when it weakens family communication and children’s conceptual resources (Cummins, 2000; Genesee et al., 2004). Translanguaging work adds that bilingual speakers use integrated repertoires in meaning-making; rigid separation can reduce communicative effectiveness and create unnecessary anxiety (García & Wei, 2014).

For home-based English development, the implication is practical. The core interactional work-explaining, narrating, predicting, justifying-can be done in any language. English growth benefits when these higher-order moves are maintained, rather than sacrificed to English-only

performance. Schools that explicitly authorize bilingual scaffolding (home language for explanation, English for selected words, phrases, and role-play) can improve adoption among families who otherwise disengage due to fear of errors. Importantly, bilingual scaffolding need not become a vague permission; it can be structured. For example, a story discussion can happen mainly in the home language, while children practice three target English words and one short “sentence frame” (“I think because”). This respects both feasibility and mechanism logic.

4.20 “Dialogic” as interactional stance, not a script

Dialogic reading is sometimes taught as a fixed set of prompts. That approach helps beginners, yet it can become brittle when families feel they must perform scripted behavior. An alternative is to treat dialogic reading as an interactional stance: the adult’s goal is to secure child talk, extend it, and invite reasoning. This stance is compatible with diverse cultural practices. In some communities, elders narrate and children listen; in others, children are encouraged to question and negotiate. Neither pattern is inherently educationally inferior; what matters is whether children get opportunities to produce language and to elaborate meanings in ways that expand their competence.

The active ingredients discussed in meta-analyses-child participation, expansions, and open prompts-can be implemented flexibly. A caregiver might ask fewer questions but consistently expand the child’s responses. Another might focus on retelling. A third might invite the child to “teach” the story to a younger sibling. These variations matter for feasibility and dignity, and they shift the focus away from compliance toward interaction quality.

4.21 Oral narrative traditions as language resources for English development

In many households, especially where books are scarce, language development is supported through oral narrative: family histories, folktales, religious stories, and everyday recounting of events. Such practices can develop narrative structure, sequencing, characterization, causal explanation, and evaluative language. When schools fail to recognize oral traditions, they can misclassify language-rich homes as “low literacy” simply because print materials are limited. Heath’s ethnographic work remains influential here, showing how community language practices can diverge from school-valued norms without being linguistically impoverished (Heath, 1983).

For primary English development, oral narrative traditions offer a bridge. Families can continue storytelling in the home language while gradually incorporating English labels, repeated phrases, or short refrains. Children can be encouraged to retell stories partly in English, using picture cues and sentence frames. This approach preserves cultural practice while steadily expanding English production.

4.22 Home tutoring markets, shadow education, and the limits of “family participation”

In many EFL contexts, English learning is heavily shaped by private tutoring and commercial language centers. This “shadow education” environment produces a sharp equity divide: families with resources can purchase more exposure, more exam preparation, and more confidence-building speaking practice. In such contexts, home-based reading and language games cannot fully compensate for systemic inequality. Yet they can reduce the gap in a narrower, more defensible sense: they can increase the frequency of low-cost conversational rehearsal and normalize English use at home without turning the household into a pressured classroom.

This is a point where scholarly caution is required. Promoting home routines as a substitute for structural provision is ethically risky. A responsible framing treats home routines as complementary supports that can be equity-sensitive when schools provide infrastructure (book circulation, multilingual prompts) and avoid shifting responsibility for national language policy outcomes onto families.

4.23 Caregiver literacy and the overlooked role of non-parental adults

Family participation is frequently imagined as mother-child interaction. That narrowing misses important household realities. In many contexts, grandparents, older siblings, aunts/uncles, and non-parental caregivers play major roles in daily care. Engagement strategies that address “parents” only may underreach. Sibling interaction can be a powerful site for language play, imitation, and repeated practice, particularly when older children have more school-based English.

Design implications follow. Materials can be written so that any caregiver can facilitate them. Games can be designed specifically for siblings (“Teach-me-the-word,” “Guess my object,” “Role-play the shop”). Schools can invite family participation as a household practice rather than as parental performance, reducing the burden on single adults and aligning with multi-generational living arrangements.

4.24 Gendered labor and participation: the invisible constraint

Even in households where both parents’ value English development, participation can be shaped by gendered labor divisions. Mothers may carry disproportionate childcare and household management, while fathers may be positioned as economic providers. Programmes that implicitly assume the mother will implement reading routines can intensify burden and resentment. Equity-oriented participation strategies therefore include inviting fathers and male caregivers into short, game-based routines that fit their available times (early morning, commuting, weekends) and that feel socially legitimate in their context. The research base on father involvement in literacy is smaller than on general parental involvement, but a consistent practical insight emerges across contexts: participation increases when the routine matches the caregiver’s role identity and time structure, and when it is not framed as a remedial duty.

4.25 What “encouragement” actually means: beyond motivational slogans

Calls to “encourage families” are common, yet encouragement is often operationalized as repeated reminders. In constrained contexts, reminders become noise or judgment. Encouragement that changes practice usually has three features: (1) it reduces effort costs, (2) it offers concrete scripts and examples, and (3) it communicates dignity and permission to be imperfect. This is why teacher modeling matters. When teachers demonstrate a two-minute routine at pick-up time, the routine becomes visible, doable, and socially authorized. When schools send multilingual prompt cards that explicitly state “Use your home language to explain; practice just a few English words,” families receive permission rather than pressure.

4.26 Critical appraisal: what counts as evidence in home-based language research

A recurring methodological challenge is that home-based practices are difficult to randomize ethically and practically, and participation is often self-selected. This creates interpretation problems. Families who adopt routines may differ in unmeasured ways (education, stability, child temperament). Intervention studies reduce this risk, but implementation variability remains large. Meta-analyses help by aggregating across contexts, yet they also flatten important differences (language status, schooling systems, cultural norms). A responsible literature survey therefore avoids treating average effects as universal truths. Instead, it asks: under what conditions were effects observed, and what assumptions about feasibility were built into the intervention?

This paper’s theoretical stance-mechanism-and-equity-treats the evidence base as a map of plausible causal pathways rather than as a single ranking of “best activities”. Dialogic reading is not universally superior if it is infeasible for many households; language games are not inherently weaker if they generate more child talk across diverse contexts. The evidence must be read alongside participation patterns.

4.27 Converging evidence: interactional mechanisms recur across research traditions

Despite diversity in methods, several mechanisms recur across traditions:

- Conversational turns: opportunities for children to speak and be responded to.
- Expansions and recasts: adults repeating child utterances with added structure and vocabulary.
- Decontextualized talk: explanation, prediction, and reasoning beyond the immediate context.
- Narrative scaffolding: sequencing, causal linking, evaluative language.
- Affective safety: low shame, high permission to approximate.

These mechanisms are visible in caregiver talk research (Hoff, 2003; Rowe, 2012), in dialogic reading work (Mol et al., 2008; Dowdall et al., 2020), and in engagement scholarship that distinguishes meaningful learning support from superficial involvement (Goodall & Montgomery,

2014). The convergence strengthens the plausibility of the model proposed in Section 5: structural conditions shape participation; participation shapes mechanisms; mechanisms shape outcomes.

The literature supports the educational value of home-based routines, but it also warns against simplistic prescriptions. Home routines are not neutral; they are socially shaped and linguistically political. Equity-oriented strategies must therefore do more than propose “more reading”. They must reshape infrastructure and legitimacy so that constrained and multilingual families can participate without stigma.

4.28 The “language gap” debate and what it means for designing family participation

Work on socioeconomic variation in early language experience is frequently cited in public discourse, sometimes in ways that flatten complexity. Hart and Risley’s observational study popularized the idea that differences in language exposure accumulate and relate to later outcomes (Hart & Risley, 1995). Subsequent research has refined the picture by emphasizing quality of interaction and children’s processing efficiency, not only raw quantity (Rowe, 2012; Weisleder & Fernald, 2013). The debate is instructive for primary English development because it exposes how easily research can be converted into moral narratives about “good” and “bad” parenting.

A design-oriented reading is more useful. If interactional opportunities are unevenly distributed, the educational task is not to shame families but to increase feasible opportunities. Home-based routines should be engineered to fit constrained lives and to preserve dignity. In this framing, the question is not “Why don’t these parents read?” but “What routine can this household realistically sustain, and how can the school make that routine easier?”

4.29 Shared book reading: what is robust, what is fragile

The most robust finding across decades is that shared book reading relates to vocabulary, narrative understanding, and emergent literacy, especially when it includes discussion rather than passive listening (Bus et al., 1995; Mol & Bus, 2011; Sénéchal & LeFevre, 2002). What is fragile is implementation: the routine depends on access to books, time, and adult comfort with reading aloud. Where any of those are missing, uptake declines and the routine risks becoming an equity divider.

One response has been the development of book-gifting and book-bag programmes. These interventions are often well received, yet their effects vary with follow-up support. Without modeling and prompts, families may read in a monologic style that produces fewer opportunities for child talk. With prompts and examples, families are more likely to adopt dialogic moves. For multilingual households, prompts that authorize home-language explanation can further increase uptake.

4.30 Dialogic reading: why questions are not the point

Dialogic reading is often summarized as “ask questions while reading,” but that reduction misses the mechanism. The point is to increase child participation and to elicit language that can be expanded. A caregiver who asks questions rapidly, corrects errors, and rushes the child can undermine the routine. A caregiver who asks fewer questions but listens, expands, and invites retell can strengthen it.

This nuance matters because it changes training. Instead of distributing complex prompt lists, schools can teach three core moves:

- 1) Invite: “Tell me what you see / what happened”.
- 2) Expand: repeat the child’s idea with richer English (“Yes—he *ran quickly* because he was *scared*”).
- 3) Link: connect to prior experience (“When have you felt scared?”).

These moves are teachable, culturally adaptable, and compatible with bilingual scaffolding.

4.31 Language games as retrieval practice and pragmatic rehearsal

Language games are often underestimated because they look informal. Yet many games align closely with what language proficiency requires: rapid retrieval, flexible meaning negotiation, turn-taking, and pragmatic appropriateness. A guessing game (“I’m thinking of something...”) requires category knowledge, descriptive adjectives, and question formation. Role-play (“shop,” “clinic”) requires functional phrases, politeness forms, and repair strategies (“Sorry, can you say that again?”).

From a theoretical perspective, games can be read as structured participation frameworks. They create stable roles and expectations, allowing children to rehearse language without the high-stakes frame of “schoolwork”. This is especially relevant for children learning English as an additional language, for whom confidence and willingness to speak are often bottlenecks. A child may possess receptive knowledge but remain silent in school; games at home can create a safer rehearsal environment.

4.32 Correction, recasts, and emotional climate: how “help” can become harm

Families often equate language support with correction. In some households, this becomes relentless: grammar policing, pronunciation correction, and comparison to peers. The intention is educational, yet the effect can be avoidance. In primary years, especially for additional language learners, willingness to attempt speech is critical. Harsh correction can reduce attempts and thereby reduce practice.

A widely applicable alternative is modeling after the child speaks. The caregiver responds naturally, using the correct form, without explicitly labeling the child as wrong. For example:

Child: “He go school yesterday”.

Caregiver: “Yes, he *went* to school yesterday. What did he do there?”

These preserves meaning, supplies the form, and keeps the child talking. The same approach can be used in bilingual contexts: caregivers can accept a home-language explanation and then model a short English phrase tied to it.

4.33 The teacher's pedagogy shapes what families can do

Family routines do not exist in isolation; they are shaped by what schools teach and how they teach it. If classroom English learning is grammar-heavy and test-centered, families may feel compelled to drill worksheets at home, even if the child would benefit more from oral language rehearsal. If classroom practice includes storytelling, retelling, and speaking frames, families can mirror those routines more easily.

This suggests a strong alignment strategy: schools can choose a small set of speaking frames used in class and share them with families for home games. Examples include:

- "I think because".
- "First, then, after that".
- "My favorite part was".
- Such alignment reduces cognitive load for families and increases coherence between home practice and school language expectations.

4.34 Early literacy as socially distributed practice: what homes contribute that classrooms cannot replicate

A persistent simplification in school discourse is that literacy begins and ends with print. Early literacy research has repeatedly shown that children's later reading comprehension is grounded in oral language, narrative competence, vocabulary depth, and the ability to use language for explanation and inference (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998; Scarborough, 2001). Homes contribute to these capacities in ways classrooms struggle to replicate because home interaction is continuous, contextualized, and relational. A child who talks through daily events, negotiates rules in play, and hears stories that connect to lived experience is practicing discourse skills that later anchor reading comprehension and academic writing.

Yet the "home contribution" is not automatically available. In households under high stress, conversation can become compressed and instrumental ("eat," "hurry," "sleep"), and children may receive fewer opportunities for elaborated talk. This is not a moral failure; it is a predictable consequence of structural conditions. The literature suggests that small shifts—adding brief "why" questions, encouraging retell, inviting explanation—can increase decontextualized talk without requiring large time investments (Rowe, 2012). Consequently, family-linked interventions that emphasize interactional moves rather than lengthy routines are better aligned with equity.

4.35 Print awareness and the home: what matters besides reading books

Print awareness (noticing letters, directionality, word boundaries) is often taught through shared reading, yet research demonstrates that adults can also build print awareness through brief, everyday print encounters: reading

labels, noticing signage, comparing word shapes, and "hunt for a letter" games (Justice & Ezell, 2002). These routines are attractive in low-resource settings because they do not require book ownership. In multilingual contexts, they also allow caregivers to engage with English print in low-stakes ways, reducing fear of performance.

4.36 Second-language acquisition perspectives: input, interaction, and the value of negotiated meaning

Second-language acquisition traditions differ, but many converge on the importance of comprehensible input, interaction, and feedback that supports meaning-making. In home-based primary English development, the relevant insight is not theoretical allegiance; it is practical translation: children benefit when English exposure is linked to meaning, when they are invited to produce language, and when feedback supports communication rather than punishes error.

Sociocultural theory emphasizes mediated learning and scaffolding, framing language development as participation in social interaction rather than as isolated skill accumulation (Vygotsky, 1978; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). This theoretical lens strengthens the case for home-based routines because the home is a primary site of mediated participation. It also supports bilingual bridging: mediation can occur through the home language while still supporting English acquisition through selective incorporation of English forms.

4.37 Classroom discourse and home routines: alignment as a neglected variable

Many studies examine home practices and language outcomes, but fewer examine how classroom discourse shapes what families can realistically reinforce. When classroom instruction privileges short-answer recitation and workbook grammar, families may imitate those practices at home, even if they generate minimal child talk. When classroom discourse values storytelling, explanation, and student-led retell, families can mirror these moves in everyday talk.

This is a critical oversight in some family engagement initiatives: they ask families to provide a discourse environment that the classroom itself may not model. A coherent program therefore treats alignment as part of the intervention: teachers explicitly model the discourse moves families are encouraged to use. In practical terms, if teachers routinely use sequencing language ("first... then... after that...") and reasoning frames ("I think... because..."), children can carry these into home games, and caregivers can adopt them without needing to invent a pedagogy.

4.38 Literacy as participation: reading logs versus reading lives

A policy culture of accountability often converts home reading into paperwork. Reading logs are intended to motivate, but they can become compliance devices that reward bureaucratic capacity rather than learning. Families may fill logs without meaningful reading; others may read but avoid logs due to time or negative experiences with school forms.

The literature on parental engagement warns against conflating measurable school-facing behaviors with learning-centered engagement (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014). For English development, the risk is that log culture shifts attention away from conversation and toward minutes. The design implication is simple but consequential: track routines in ways that preserve dignity and reduce paperwork—brief reflective prompts, optional check-ins, or teacher-child conferences where children retell a book they read at home, thereby linking home routine to classroom discourse without requiring parental documentation.

4.39 Children as agents: the overlooked driver of routine sustainability

Home routines are often described as caregiver behaviors, yet children are active agents. Some children demand stories, invent games, and recruit caregivers; others resist routines associated with correction or failure. Sustainability is therefore partly child-driven. Interventions that help children experience competence and enjoyment-through predictable short routines, playful language use, and non-punitive feedback—are more likely to persist because children themselves become the routine’s advocates.

5. Problem Definition

5.1 Problem statement

Children’s primary-level English proficiency is shaped by home-based interactional opportunities, yet socioeconomic constraints and language ideologies limit many families’ ability to sustain the school-endorsed forms of participation. As a result, well-intended initiatives (e.g., “read 20 minutes daily”) can intensify inequality unless designed for constrained and multilingual realities.

5.2 Conceptual clarifications

English proficiency (primary years) is multidimensional: receptive vocabulary, expressive vocabulary, oral fluency, listening comprehension, narrative competence, emergent literacy, and speaking confidence. These are interrelated but

not identical. For example, children may understand many words but speak little due to anxiety; they may decode words without deep comprehension; they may narrate well in a home language yet struggle to map that competence into English.

Home-based activities are not a single category. At minimum, they include:

- Shared reading (adult reads, child listens)
- Dialogic reading (child talk and inferential discussion)
- Oral storytelling (often multilingual)
- Language games (retrieval, categorization, role-play, guessing)
- Digital story engagement (with or without caregiver interaction)

Socioeconomic conditions are not a mere label. They are a bundle of exposures that shape feasibility: time poverty, schedule rigidity, housing density, stress load, parental literacy, book access, connectivity, and the degree of trust in school institutions.

5.3 Mechanism-and-equity model

The model advanced here links three layers:

Layer 1: Structural conditions

Work schedules, commuting time, household crowding, access to books or devices, caregiver literacy, and language ideologies, alongside school-home trust and histories of inclusion/exclusion.

Layer 2: Participation formation

Families adopt routines when they are doable, dignified, and culturally legitimate. Participation is sustained when routines align with daily rhythms and do not require parents to perform “ideal parenting” for the school.

Layer 3: Proximal language processes

Routines influence outcomes when they generate conversational turns, expansions, narrative scaffolding, retrieval practice, decontextualized talk, and identity safety.

5.4 Practical design constraint table

Constraint commonly faced	Why it matters for engagement	Equity-oriented design response
Time scarcity / shift work	Blocks long, fixed routines	Micro-routines (2-10 minutes) embedded in daily activities
Low print access	Reading routines become classed	Book circulation; story prompts without text
Caregiver low English confidence	Fear of “wrong English” reduces participation	Bilingual bridging; emphasize interaction, not correctness
Household crowding	Quiet reading hard to sustain	Oral games; shared talk during chores/commute
Low institutional trust	School tasks perceived as judgment	Respectful messaging; private reflection, not public compliance

5.5 The equity paradox in family-based English initiatives

A recurring paradox appears in many education systems. Home-based activities are promoted as low-cost ways to support language development, yet the conditions for adopting them are often distributed inequitably. When a routine requires books, quiet space, and confident adult facilitation, it is effectively an advantage amplifier. The paradox is not resolved by merely encouraging families more strongly; stronger encouragement can intensify shame and

withdrawal. It is resolved only by redesigning routines and supports so that constrained families can participate without disproportionate burden.

5.6 Two common misinterpretations to avoid

Misinterpretation 1: Nonparticipation equals low aspiration. Many families hold high educational aspirations for children but face structural constraints that reduce feasible time and emotional energy. Interpreting constraint as

disinterest leads to punitive policy and misdirected school interventions.

Misinterpretation 2: English proficiency is produced by English-only exposure. In bilingual development, comprehension and narrative competence can be built in the home language and transferred to English; bilingual scaffolding can increase engagement and preserve family communication. English-only policies can reduce participation and lower interaction quality, thereby undermining English outcomes indirectly.

5.7 Operational problem statement for research and design

The operational problem addressed in the proposed study is: to identify home-based routines that can reliably generate high-value interactional moves (turn-taking, expansions, narrative elaboration, retrieval) under diverse socioeconomic and multilingual conditions, and to specify the institutional supports required to make those routines equitable.

This formulation centers mechanisms and conditions rather than generic claims about “family involvement”. It also foregrounds sustainability: routines must persist beyond a short intervention period if they are to influence long-term proficiency trajectories.

5.9 A global typology of constraint: not a deficit inventory, but a design map

To avoid moralizing, socioeconomic constraint is treated here as a design map of conditions that shape feasible routines. Five constraint clusters recur globally:

- 1) Temporal constraint: long work hours, unpredictable shifts, caregiving for multiple dependents, and commuting.
- 2) Spatial constraint: overcrowding, lack of quiet space, and multi-family living.
- 3) Linguistic constraint: caregivers’ limited English proficiency, fear of accent stigma, limited print literacy.
- 4) Resource constraint: limited book access, cost of tutoring, unreliable connectivity.
- 5) Relational constraint: low trust in school due to prior experiences of blame, discrimination, or bureaucratic intimidation.

Each cluster alters which home-based activities can be sustained. For example, a bedtime reading routine is sensitive to temporal and spatial constraints; language games during chores may be resilient under those conditions. Audio story listening may address linguistic constraints; book circulation addresses resource constraints; respectful messaging and multilingual communication address relational constraints.

5.10 Proficiency outcomes as trajectories, not snapshots

Primary English proficiency is often treated as a single score, yet development occurs as a trajectory with uneven growth across components. A child may show early gains in receptive vocabulary from shared reading but later gains in speaking confidence from language play. Another child may

show small short-term changes but strong longer-term reading comprehension because narrative competence improved.

This trajectory framing matters because it changes evaluation. Programs should not be judged solely by immediate test score changes; they should be judged by whether they shift the *everyday opportunity structure* for language use—whether children encounter more chances to hear and speak English in safe contexts.

5.11 Reformulating the central research question

The central question can now be formulated with greater precision:

Which home-based routines can be adopted and sustained across diverse socioeconomic and multilingual conditions, and which interactional mechanisms within those routines best predict growth in primary English proficiency components?

This formulation avoids treating participation as an individual virtue and instead treats it as a product of routine design and institutional support.

5.12 A conceptual diagram described in text: pathway logic without mathematical formalism

The pathway model can be imagined as a three-stage flow:

Stage A: Conditions

Time availability, household stress, space, book access, caregiver literacy, caregiver English confidence, multilingual ideology, and school-home trust.

Stage B: Routine adoption and enactment

Whether families adopt a routine, how often it occurs, and whether it is enacted in a way that produces child talk and elaboration.

Stage C: Mechanisms to outcomes

Conversational turns, expansions, inferential talk, narrative practice, and identity safety support growth in receptive vocabulary, expressive fluency, listening comprehension, narrative competence, and emergent literacy.

A crucial feature is feedback: when children experience competence and enjoyment, routines become self-reinforcing; when routines create conflict or shame, they extinguish. In this sense, engagement is dynamic, not static.

5.13 Defining “family participation” in an equity-consistent way

Participation is often defined as “minutes of reading” or “number of completed logs”. Such definitions reward households that can perform bureaucratic tracking and punish those that cannot. An equity-consistent definition emphasizes:

- The presence of interactional opportunities (child talk + adult response),
- The sustainability of micro-routines across weeks,
- The dignity and emotional climate of practice,
- And multilingual legitimacy where relevant.

This definition aligns with the educational purpose: language grows through interaction, and interaction must be sustainable.

5.14 Why language games deserve equal status with shared reading

In many school cultures, reading is treated as the only respectable literacy activity. This status hierarchy can hide an educational mistake: oral language development is a precondition for later comprehension and academic writing. Language games that generate oral practice can be as educationally consequential as reading routines, especially for children learning English as an additional language. Treating games as “extra” keeps them peripheral and underfunded. Treating them as legitimate engagement pathways makes them scalable.

5.15 Three household scenarios and what they reveal about feasibility

A theoretical analysis becomes sharper when anchored in realistic scenarios. The following are not stereotypes; they are design-relevant configurations seen across contexts.

Scenario 1: Time-poor household with high aspiration (urban, shift work).

Caregivers value English strongly but return late, and the home is crowded. A 20-minute reading prescription fails. A two-minute “story retell” routine during dinner cleanup, plus a weekend shared reading session with borrowed books, is feasible. The design task is to provide micro-routines and book access without demanding nightly performance.

Scenario 2: Multilingual household with limited caregiver English confidence (ESL context).

Parents fear “teaching wrong English,” so they avoid speaking English with the child. The child understands classroom English but speaks little. A bilingual language game routine-home language for explanation, English for three target words and one sentence frame-can reduce fear and increase child production.

Scenario 3: EFL household in a tutoring-driven market (rural/ peri-urban).

English is taught mainly as a subject. Families may lack books and connectivity, and tutoring is expensive. Home games can provide oral rehearsal, but structural inequality remains. The design task is to avoid framing home routines as substitutes for public provision and instead to position them as low-cost complements supported by school-supplied materials.

5.16 The central equity problem restated

Across scenarios, the core problem is consistent: schools often prescribe the same activity to all families, but feasibility varies systematically with socioeconomic and linguistic conditions. The result is unequal adoption and, therefore, unequal benefits. Equity-oriented design requires multiple pathways that preserve the same active ingredients while varying the medium and time demand.

6. Methodology and Approach

6.1 Hybrid design and theoretical stance

The methodology combines:

- 1) A critical evidence synthesis focused on mechanisms and moderators;
- 2) An original field study design comparing dialogic reading routines with language-play routines;
- 3) An implementation-focused qualitative inquiry to explain feasibility, meaning, and sustainability of participation across socioeconomic and linguistic contexts.

The stance is theoretical analysis with empirical orientation: the aim is to explain how and why routines work (or fail) under real constraints, not to treat outcomes as detached from lived conditions.

6.2 Component 1: Mechanism-focused critical review

Corpus construction: peer-reviewed research on home literacy environments, shared reading and dialogic reading, caregiver-child talk, parental engagement, bilingual development, translanguaging, and digital reading practices. Priority is given to education and linguistics journals, major syntheses, and well-cited monographs.

Analytic protocol: each study is examined for (a) definitions of home-based practices, (b) outcome measures, (c) treatment of socioeconomic and multilingual factors, (d) implied causal pathways, and (e) implementation assumptions.

Output: a mechanism map identifying likely active ingredients (e.g., expansions, inferential prompts, retell scaffolding, retrieval) and moderators (time poverty, book access, caregiver confidence, institutional trust).

6.3 Component 2: Proposed original field study

6.3.1 Design overview

A multi-site, school-linked study is proposed with three arms:

- **Arm A:** guided dialogic reading routine + book circulation support;
- **Arm B:** structured language-play routine requiring minimal materials;
- **Arm C:** comparison group receiving standard school communication.

The study runs across one school term with a subsequent-term follow-up to examine durability.

6.3.2 Sites and participants

To support global interpretability, sites include:

- English-dominant contexts with social inequality and linguistic diversity;
- ESL contexts where English is a school and institutional language;
- EFL contexts where English is taught mainly as a subject and tutoring markets shape access.

Schools are selected to represent socioeconomic variation. Participants include children in early-to-mid primary years and their caregivers. Multilingual households are included intentionally rather than treated as confounds.

6.3.3 Intervention materials (low-burden, dignity-preserving)

Dialogic reading pack: short guidance cards modeling open questions and expansions; rotating book bags to avoid purchase requirements; optional audio narration for caregivers with limited print literacy; conversation prompts ensuring interaction remains central.

Language-play pack: picture prompts, role-play scripts, and “everyday English” games; bilingual instruction options; routines designed for 10-15 minutes with 2-5 minute fallback options; scripts that privilege warmth and curiosity over correction.

6.4 Component 3: Implementation inquiry

Semi-structured interviews and focus groups explore how families interpret school requests, what feels feasible, how bilingual practices are negotiated, and how children experience correction, praise, and play. Teacher interviews examine communication strategies, perceived barriers, and the relational climate of school-home contact.

6.5 Measures (field-realistic)

Child outcomes include receptive vocabulary, expressive vocabulary and fluency (structured speaking tasks), listening comprehension, narrative retell quality, emergent literacy indicators, and speaking confidence (child-friendly scale plus teacher observation). Participation is tracked through brief, private reflections emphasizing “what worked” rather than compliance surveillance. Context measures capture schedule rigidity, housing density, access to books through circulation, caregiver literacy and English confidence, and indicators of school-home trust.

6.7 Ethics and relational design in family-linked research

Research on home-based learning enters intimate spaces. Ethical design must therefore address more than consent forms. It must consider dignity, stigma, and the possibility that data collection itself becomes a surveillance practice. Several principles guide the proposed design:

Principle 1: Non-punitive participation tracking. Weekly check-ins are framed as reflective (“What worked this week?” “What was difficult?”) and are private. No public charts, no ranking, and no linking participation to punitive consequences.

Principle 2: Linguistic respect. Communication is offered in the language(s) families use, and bilingual scaffolding is explicitly legitimized. Caregivers are not positioned as deficient if they are not fluent in English.

Principle 3: Minimal burden. Data collection is designed to be short, optional, and flexible, recognizing time poverty.

Principle 4: Reciprocity. Families receive usable materials (books through circulation, game prompts, story cards) and clear support. The study does not extract information without giving practical value.

Principle 5: Avoiding “compliance theatre”. The goal is to understand what families can sustain and why, not to encourage families to perform idealized engagement for researchers or teachers.

6.8 Sampling logic and analytic comparability

The design aims for comparability across socioeconomic strata and multilingual contexts without treating these as confounds. Stratified sampling within each site ensures that families facing time poverty, low print access, or limited English confidence are included at meaningful numbers. This approach makes feasibility patterns visible rather than statistically “controlled away”.

Comparability is also supported by using consistent core outcome measures across sites while allowing contextual adaptation (e.g., culturally appropriate story retell prompts). The analytic emphasis remains interpretive: outcome differences are read alongside qualitative accounts of adoption, trust, and routine fit.

6.9 Measurement of outcomes without reducing language to test scores

The study proposes multi-dimensional measures that capture oral language growth: receptive vocabulary, expressive vocabulary and fluency through structured speaking tasks, listening comprehension through short narratives, and narrative retell quality (coherence, elaboration, causal linking). Emergent literacy indicators are included where relevant. Speaking confidence is assessed through child-friendly prompts and teacher observation.

This combination responds to a common problem in English education: the tendency to treat proficiency as grammar accuracy alone. In primary years, oral language development and narrative competence are often the pathways through which later reading comprehension and academic writing become possible.

6.10 Intervention design details: preserving “active ingredients” under constraint

Rather than prescribing a single routine, the proposed study uses a structured menu within each arm, allowing families to select routines that fit their conditions while retaining active ingredients.

Dialogic reading arm (Arm A):

- Core routine: 8-12 minutes, 3 days/week, with 2-4 prompts per page maximum to avoid fatigue.
- Micro-routine fallback: 2-4 minutes (“One page + retell + one why-question”).
- Active ingredients specified: child talk ratio (child speaks at least once per page), caregiver expansions (repeat + add), and inferential prompts (why/how/predict).
- Supports: book-bag rotation, optional audio narration, multilingual prompt cards, and teacher modeling through short live demonstrations at school pick-up times.

Language-play arm (Arm B):

- Core routine: 10 minutes, 3-5 days/week, designed for households without books.
- Micro-routine fallback: 2-3 minutes (“Three-word challenge,” “Describe-and-guess,” “Story from three pictures”).
- Active ingredients specified: retrieval practice (child must produce target words), narrative sequencing (beginning-middle-end), and low-stakes repetition.
- Supports: picture prompt cards, role-play scripts linked to daily life, bilingual instructions, and a “no correction script” (model the correct phrase after the child speaks).

6.11 Teacher role: communication training as an intervention component

The study treats teacher communication style as part of the intervention context. Teachers receive brief training focused on:

- Framing engagement as partnership rather than compliance;
- Validating bilingual scaffolding;
- Emphasizing interaction quality over minutes;
- Using strength-based language in messages;
- Avoiding public comparison systems.

This component is not decorative. Relational trust and message tone are likely to shape adoption across socioeconomic strata, particularly where families have histories of institutional blame.

6.12 Qualitative inquiry: capturing meaning, not only behavior

Interviews are designed to surface:

- What families believe English is for (mobility, status, school survival, identity);
- How correction is negotiated (who corrects, how, with what emotional effects);
- How bilingual talk operates in practice;
- What routines feel possible on weekdays vs weekends;
- How school messaging is interpreted (invitation vs judgment).

These data are necessary because participation cannot be explained by “awareness” alone; it is formed within constraints and meaning systems.

6.13 Data collection flow: sequencing that respects family rhythms

A feasible data collection schedule over one term can be structured as follows:

Week 0-1 (Baseline):

- Child language assessments (short sessions in school).
- Caregiver survey capturing constraints and linguistic resources (offered in multiple languages).
- Teacher interviews about communication practices and school context.

Week 2-10 (Routine period):

- Families enact selected routines.
- Weekly micro check-in (one minute, optional): “Which routine happened?” “One thing that worked?” “One barrier?”
- Midpoint brief teacher-family touchpoint (optional) to troubleshoot respectfully.

Week 11-12 (Post):

- Repeat child assessments.
- Caregiver interviews with a stratified sample, prioritizing constrained households to understand feasibility.
- Teacher focus groups on what messages and supports mattered.

Follow-up term (later):

- Short follow-up assessment and brief caregiver reflection to examine sustainability.

The goal is not exhaustive monitoring. It is to capture enough information to relate routine enactment to outcomes, while preserving dignity.

6.14 Analytic approach: integrating quantitative change with qualitative explanation

The analysis compares outcome growth across arms while treating participation as a mediator shaped by conditions. Qualitative data then explain why adoption differed: which routines fit time scarcity; how bilingual permission affected confidence; how school messaging influenced willingness. This integration avoids a common problem: concluding that an intervention “works” without understanding who it works for and under what conditions.

6.15 Practical validity: designing for realistic school capacity

A proposed study that requires intensive home visits or complex measurement may produce elegant data yet fail to inform scalable practice. The present design prioritizes school-feasible supports: book circulation, short prompt cards, brief teacher modeling, and low-burden check-ins. This increases ecological validity and makes findings more usable for policy and practice.

6.16 Detailed outcome measures and why each is included

To avoid reducing English proficiency to a single score, the proposed study uses complementary measures:

- 1) Receptive vocabulary: short picture-based tasks appropriate for primary learners; captures comprehension growth often supported by reading exposure.
- 2) Expressive vocabulary and oral fluency: structured speaking prompts (describe a picture, tell a short story); captures production gains often supported by games and dialogic talk.
- 3) Listening comprehension: short narrated passages followed by inferential questions; captures ability to construct meaning beyond word recognition.
- 4) Narrative retell quality: child retells a brief story using picture cues; coded for sequencing, causal linking, and elaboration; captures discourse-level growth central to later comprehension.
- 5) Emergent literacy indicators: where relevant (letter knowledge, word reading); included to trace links between oral language and early reading.
- 6) Speaking confidence: child-friendly self-report prompts ("How easy is it for you to speak English in class?") plus teacher observation; captures the affective pathway that influences practice.

6.17 Fidelity without surveillance: a pragmatic approach

Traditional fidelity monitoring can become intrusive in home-based research. Instead, fidelity is operationalized through brief indicators tied to active ingredients:

- Did the child speak during the routine?
- Did the adult expand at least once?
- Did the routine include one inferential or linking prompt?

Families can report these as yes/no reflections without detailed logs. A small subsample may volunteer audio snippets for richer analysis, but this remains optional and consent-based.

6.18 Coding of narrative retells and interaction quality

Narrative retells can be coded using a simple rubric:

- Structure: presence of beginning/middle/end.
- Causal links: use of because/so/therefore or equivalent linking.
- Elaboration: descriptive details, emotions, motivations.
- Cohesion: pronoun reference clarity and temporal markers.

This rubric is adaptable across contexts and allows analysis of discourse competence, a domain often missed by narrow tests.

6.19 A hybrid design that treats theory as a generator of testable propositions

The proposed hybrid approach is organized around propositions derived from the conceptual pathway model rather than around a single method. The design combines:

- 1) An original multi-site intervention component (two routine pathways: dialogic reading; language play).
- 2) A structured review component embedded within the study logic (mapping which mechanisms and feasibility conditions are most consistently identified across prior research).

- 3) A theoretical analysis component that interprets patterns through an equity lens (how structural conditions and language ideology mediate adoption and outcomes).

The design avoids simulations, mathematical modeling, and programmatic analytics. Its technical rigor comes from careful operationalization of constructs, transparent measurement, and integration of qualitative explanation with outcome change.

6.20 The review component as a scaffold for design decisions

Rather than treating the literature survey as a purely descriptive section, the methodology uses it to justify design choices:

- Dialogic reading is included because evidence supports vocabulary and comprehension gains when interaction is child-centered (Mol et al., 2008; Dowdall et al., 2020).
- Language play is included because oral production and confidence are common bottlenecks in additional-language learning, and games can deliver repeated retrieval and pragmatic rehearsal with low resource demands.
- Bilingual legitimacy is built in because bilingual development research cautions against subtractive models and highlights additive pathways (Cummins, 2000; Genesee et al., 2004; García & Wei, 2014).
- Implementation features (micro-routines, low-burden tracking, teacher messaging training) are included because implementation research shows that uptake and fidelity depend on fit and acceptability (Durlak & DuPre, 2008; Proctor et al., 2011).

The review component thus functions as a design audit: each element must be traceable to a defensible mechanism and an equity rationale.

6.21 Strengthening the qualitative strand: interpretive depth and cross-site comparability

To support a global perspective, qualitative work is structured with a shared interview protocol across sites while allowing localized prompts. Core domains include: caregiver language ideology, perceived risk of error, time poverty, household participation ecology (siblings, grandparents), and experiences of school communication.

Cross-site comparability is achieved by coding for the same theoretical constructs (trust, legitimacy, feasibility, affective climate) while permitting different cultural expressions. The aim is not cultural flattening; it is conceptual coherence.

6.22 A theoretical analysis of "participation" as a sociolinguistic event

Participation is often treated as a frequency count: how often a routine occurs. A theoretical analysis treats participation as an event shaped by discourse norms, language ideologies, and power relations. A home routine is not just "time spent"; it is a moment where a caregiver and child negotiate roles ("teacher," "learner," "play partner"), negotiate language

authority (“who is allowed to correct”), and negotiate identity (“whose English counts as acceptable”). These negotiations are shaped by schooling histories and by socioeconomic stress.

Therefore, the proposed study does not treat participation as a neutral mediator. It treats participation as an outcome in its own right, influenced by school communication, linguistic legitimacy, household ecology, and time poverty.

6.23 Integrating the review component into instrument design

The review component informs the creation of instruments in three ways:

- 1) Mechanism-focused caregiver check-ins. Instead of asking “Did you read?” the check-in asks about child talk and expansions. This reflects the literature’s emphasis on interaction quality.
- 2) Constraint-sensitive caregiver surveys. Surveys explicitly capture time structure, space constraints, and language confidence, allowing the study to interpret adoption patterns without blaming families.
- 3) Narrative-based child assessment. Narrative retell tasks are prioritized because narrative competence is a cross-context indicator of language development and links to later literacy outcomes (Snow et al., 1998; Scarborough, 2001).

This integration reduces the common disjunction between “what the literature says matters” and “what the study measures”.

7. Results and Discussion

7.1 Differential benefit profiles across routines

A plausible pattern, consistent with mechanism logic and prior syntheses, is that dialogic reading yields stronger gains in receptive vocabulary and listening comprehension, particularly where caregivers use inferential prompts and expansions (Mol et al., 2008; Dowdall et al., 2020). Language-play routines plausibly yield stronger gains in expressive fluency and speaking confidence because they elicit frequent retrieval and production in low-stakes frames. Both routines can support narrative competence when they involve sequencing and causal explanation.

The practical implication is not that one routine replaces the other, but that schools should avoid a single “gold standard” that becomes classed by feasibility. A menu of routines aligned to mechanisms is more equitable than a single routine aligned to middle-class time and resources.

7.2 Socioeconomic moderation as feasibility mechanics

Participation is expected to vary by time, space, and resource access. Families facing time scarcity may prefer routines that attach to existing activities: language games during travel, word play while cooking, brief retell routines before sleep. Families with lower print confidence may avoid reading aloud in English but may engage strongly in oral storytelling

and bilingual talk. Where books are scarce, book circulation becomes a determinative condition; without it, reading routines become structurally exclusionary.

A key interpretive warning concerns “minutes logged”. Duration is a crude proxy. Language development benefits depend on interactional moves-turn-taking, elaboration, and decontextualized talk (Rowe, 2012). A short, lively exchange may be more valuable than longer passive exposure.

7.3 Multilingual legitimacy and identity safety

In multilingual contexts, bilingual bridging is likely to increase participation because it reduces fear of “wrong English” and affirms the home language. Children’s willingness to speak is sensitive to correction climate. If English practice becomes a site of shame, children may retreat into silence, limiting production opportunities. Engagement designs that authorize code-switching as scaffolding can protect identity safety while still promoting English growth (Cummins, 2000; Genesee et al., 2004; García & Wei, 2014).

7.4 Common program failures (cross-context)

- 1) Material assumptions: expecting book ownership or stable connectivity.
- 2) Surveillance framing: public charts and punitive messaging discourage constrained families.
- 3) English-only ideology: undermines participation among caregivers with limited English and may weaken home-language resources.
- 4) Communication mismatch: school instructions are unclear, judgmental, or culturally tone-deaf.
- 5) Teacher capacity gaps: teachers are expected to “engage families” without training in respectful engagement.

7.5 Equity-oriented engagement architecture

An equity-first model emphasizes: micro-routines, book circulation, bilingual legitimacy, dignity-preserving monitoring, and teacher communication training. It treats family participation as co-designed and relational, not demanded and audited.

7.6 Illustrative cross-context patterns: three global configurations

A global analysis benefits from specifying plausible configurations rather than offering generic statements. Three configurations are common:

Configuration A: English-dominant schooling with linguistic diversity. Children may have abundant English exposure in public life, but home languages and dialects shape early narrative competence and identity. Home-based routines that validate linguistic diversity can protect engagement; punitive correction climates can reduce speaking risk-taking.

Configuration B: ESL schooling where English has high institutional status. English may be present in schooling and official domains but not in intimate home interactions. Families may value English strongly but feel intimidated by

“correctness”. Bilingual bridging and language games that reduce evaluation pressure can increase child production.

Configuration C: EFL schooling in tutoring-driven markets. English exposure may be largely classroom-bound, with private tutoring creating major inequality. Home-based routines cannot substitute for systemic inequality, but they can provide low-cost conversational rehearsal when designed feasibly. The risk is that book-centered routines become another advantage channel unless schools provide circulation and support.

7.7 Mechanism interpretation: why language games may be unusually equitable

Language games can be implemented with minimal materials and can be embedded in daily life, making them more accessible under time poverty and low print access. Mechanistically, they can generate frequent retrieval practice and productive talk. They also offer a protective affective frame: play reduces correction anxiety, which can be a major barrier to speaking in English.

From an equity standpoint, games can function as a “first step” into engagement for families who do not feel confident reading English texts. Once trust is established, reading routines can be introduced gradually through shared picture-based stories and book circulation.

7.8 The role of schools: shifting burden from households to institutions

An equity-first strategy treats book access and guidance as institutional responsibilities rather than household purchases. Classroom lending libraries, rotating book bags, and community partnerships reduce structural barriers. Equally important is how teachers communicate: permission to be imperfect, explicit validation of bilingual scaffolding, and a focus on interaction rather than correctness can increase participation across socioeconomic strata.

Illustrative gain profile (relative, not numeric):

- Receptive vocabulary: Arm A  | Arm B  | Control 
- Speaking confidence: Arm A  | Arm B  | Control 
- Narrative coherence: Arm A  | Arm B  | Control 

The point is not the bars; it is the logic: reading routines tend to enrich input and comprehension; play routines tend to intensify production and willingness to speak; both can strengthen narrative if designed to do so.

7.11 Equity interpretation: when “best” becomes “best for whom”

If Arm A yields higher average gains but lower adoption among families facing time poverty and low English confidence, it can widen inequality unless supported with infrastructure and bilingual legitimacy. If Arm B yields slightly smaller average gains but far higher adoption across constrained households, it may reduce inequality by shifting the opportunity structure more broadly. This is the central

7.9 A plausible participation distribution and what it would mean

Across many family-linked programmes, participation is rarely uniform. A plausible distribution is:

- A group of high consistency participants (often, though not always, advantaged by time and resources),
- A large group of intermittent participants (routines occur in bursts),
- A group of minimal participants (often shaped by constraint and low trust rather than low aspiration).

The interpretive risk is to treat the last group as resistant. A more defensible reading is that routine design and institutional support determine whether intermittent participation can still deliver meaningful interaction. If micro-routines are well specified, intermittent households may still produce enough conversational turns to shift outcomes.

7.10 Hypothetical outcome pattern

A coherent pattern consistent with mechanisms and prior syntheses would be:

- Arm A shows stronger gains in receptive vocabulary and listening comprehension, particularly among families who used inferential prompts frequently (consistent with dialogic reading evidence).
- Arm B shows stronger gains in expressive fluency and speaking confidence, especially where games produced frequent child talk and low correction pressure.
- Both arms show improvements in narrative retell coherence when routines included sequencing and causal talk, regardless of whether the medium was books or picture prompts.
- The comparison group shows smaller gains, with higher variance driven by informal differences in household opportunity.

To make this pattern concrete, a simplified text-based visualization can be used for illustration:

equity trade-off: maximal effect under ideal conditions versus scalable effect under real conditions.

7.12 A deeper reading of “small effects”

Home-based interventions often show modest average effects. In education, modest effects can still matter if they are distributed equitably and sustained. A small shift in daily language opportunity—more child talk, more narrative practice—can cumulate over time. The equity question is whether the shift occurs primarily in already advantaged households or whether it spreads into constrained households.

An intervention with a smaller average effect but broad uptake may reduce disparities; an intervention with a larger

average effect but narrow uptake may widen them. This is why implementation and adoption patterns must be treated as outcomes, not as mere compliance issues.

7.13 Interpreting null results without blaming families

A plausible outcome is that some sites show minimal measured gains. In such cases, the interpretive work matters. Null results may reflect:

- Weak implementation supports (no books, poor communication),
- Low trust due to prior school-home conflict,
- Assessments misaligned with targeted outcomes (e.g., grammar tests missing oral gains),
- Or broader structural barriers (extreme time poverty) that suppress routine enactment.

Treating null results as parental failure is analytically lazy and ethically harmful. A mechanism-and-equity approach instead asks: which stage of the pathway broke-conditions, adoption, enactment quality, or measurement alignment?

7.14 Translating findings into school practice: a three-tier engagement blueprint

A feasible school blueprint can be tiered:

Tier 1 (Universal, low-burden):

Micro-routines for all families (2-5 minutes), bilingual prompt cards, no logs required.

Tier 2 (Targeted supports):

Book circulation priority for book-scarce households; optional audio stories; brief teacher modeling and supportive check-ins.

Tier 3 (Intensive, voluntary):

Small family circles (community-based) where caregivers practice routines together, reducing isolation and stigma.

This tiering reframes engagement: it is not a single demand placed on all households, but a scaffolded support system.

7.15 Micro-routine templates designed for constrained households

The most usable output for schools is often not theory but scripts that reduce design labor. The following templates illustrate how active ingredients can be delivered quickly.

Template A: "One-page dialogic reading" (2-4 minutes)

- 1) Adult reads one page (or describes the picture if reading is difficult).
- 2) Ask one open prompt: "What happened here?"
- 3) Expand: repeat the child's idea with one added word/phrase.
- 4) Link: "Have you seen something like this?"
- 5) Child retells the page in one sentence.

Template B: "Three-word challenge" (2 minutes)

Choose three English words for the week (e.g., *before*, *after*, *because*). During a daily activity, the child must use each

word once. The caregiver responds naturally and expands. No correction lecture; only modeling.

Template C: "Describe-and-guess" (3-5 minutes)

Child describes an object without naming it. Caregiver guesses. Then roles switch. This generates adjectives, categories, and question formation.

Template D: "Story from three pictures" (5-8 minutes)

Child arranges three pictures (or imagines three scenes: home, school, park) and tells a story. Caregiver prompts sequencing ("first/then/after") and one emotion word ("happy/scared/proud"), modeling forms rather than correcting.

7.16 Encouraging participation without shame: message design examples

School messages can be written to increase dignity and feasibility. Examples:

- "Try any one routine for two minutes. If it feels hard, stop and try again another day".
- "Use your home language to explain. Add a few English words when you can".
- "Your child's talking matters more than perfect pronunciation".

Such messages explicitly reduce perfection pressure and authorize bilingual scaffolding, increasing adoption among constrained households.

7.17 The socio-economic gradient is not linear: thresholds, tipping points, and "thin margins"

A frequent analytic mistake is to treat socioeconomic status as a smooth variable with smooth effects. In practice, the relationship between socioeconomic condition and routine adoption often includes thresholds. For families living on thin margins-unstable work, unpredictable income-small disruptions can collapse routines. A child's illness, a change in shift schedule, or a temporary housing change can end a routine even if the caregiver remains committed.

This threshold logic matters for evaluation. If an intervention assumes stable weekly patterns, it will misread disrupted participation as lack of motivation. A more accurate reading is that routine sustainability depends on whether the program offers "re-entry" supports: permission to restart without shame, micro-routines that work during disruption, and teacher communication that treats inconsistency as normal rather than as failure.

7.18 Strategies for encouraging family participation that do not depend on privilege

From the evidence and theoretical analysis, several strategies emerge as more equity-consistent because they reduce structural burdens:

- 1) Reduce time demand without reducing interactional value. Micro-routines that deliver child talk, expansion, and one inferential link can be done in two minutes.

- 2) Provide materials through circulation rather than purchase. Lending systems convert a private cost into a public infrastructure.
- 3) Legitimize bilingual scaffolding explicitly. Families participate more when they are told that explaining in the home language is allowed and useful, and when English practice is framed as small, achievable additions.
- 4) Normalize imperfection. Messaging that values communication and child talk over correctness reduces fear and increases speaking attempts.
- 5) Invite non-parental caregivers. Designing routines for siblings and grandparents expands the pool of feasible facilitators.

7.19 “Family participation” as relationship work: the role of trust in a global frame

Trust is not abstract. In many contexts, schools have historically interacted with low-income and minoritized families through deficit language and discipline. An engagement initiative that ignores this history will underperform. The paper’s theoretical stance therefore treats trust as a precondition: families adopt routines when they believe the school respects them and when participation does not expose them to judgment. Teacher modeling, multilingual communication, and non-surveillant tracking are not optional add-ons; they are trust technologies.

7.20 Limitations that matter for interpretation and for ethical claims

Any research on home-based activities must confront limitations honestly because overclaiming is both scientifically weak and ethically risky.

Measurement limitation: Many assessments privilege school-like language and may under-detect gains in conversational competence, pragmatic ability, and confidence. A child who becomes more willing to speak may not show immediate gains on narrow grammar tests, yet willingness can be a gateway to later growth.

Selection limitation: Even with stratified sampling and supportive messaging, some families will not participate. It is essential not to treat nonparticipation as disinterest. Research must document constraints and design barriers rather than quietly excluding nonparticipants from analysis.

Transfer limitation: Gains in home routines do not automatically transfer to classroom participation if classroom discourse remains rigid, punitive, or dominated by recitation. Home-school alignment is therefore a condition for impact, not an assumption.

Cultural limitation: Engagement strategies can unintentionally import middle-class norms. A respectful design does not equate “good engagement” with one cultural style of talk. It focuses on interactional opportunities and child participation within culturally legitimate practices.

Structural limitation: Home-based routines cannot substitute for equitable schooling, teacher quality, or language policy.

They can contribute, but they cannot bear the full burden of system-level inequality.

7.21 A participation framework that treats engagement as design, not exhortation

In most school systems, “family participation” is handled through occasional workshops, reminders, or homework-related contact. That approach underestimates what families are being asked to do: to create a stable language-learning ecology inside a household shaped by work schedules, stress, multilingual realities, and uneven access to print. If the home is framed as a second classroom, participation becomes fragile and conflict-prone. A more durable approach frames home routines as *language-rich participation* in everyday life, with schools providing the scaffolds that make such participation possible.

The framework proposed here is built around four institutional commitments:

Commitment 1: Multiple legitimate pathways.

Schools offer at least two routes into home-linked English practice: (a) shared reading/ book talk and (b) oral language play routines. Families choose the pathway, shift between them, or combine them. Legitimacy is not symbolic; it is communicated by equal teacher attention, equal materials, and equal celebration of effort.

Commitment 2: Infrastructure before accountability.

Book access is treated as a public good (lending, rotations, community partnerships). Prompt cards, picture cues, and audio materials are provided for families who cannot sustain print-centered routines. Tracking is minimal and reflective, not bureaucratic.

Commitment 3: Linguistic dignity as policy.

Bilingual scaffolding is explicitly authorized. Caregivers are told that home languages can be used for explanation and that English can be practiced in small, achievable units. Schools avoid accent shaming and “native-like” ideals in communications.

Commitment 4: Trust-centered communication.

Messages are written to reduce shame and perfection pressure. Teachers model micro-routines in brief moments (classroom open days, pickup time, short videos) so families can see that “two minutes” is acceptable and meaningful.

This framework shifts the underlying moral economy. Families are not positioned as “failing” when routines lapse; instead, lapses are treated as normal outcomes of constraint, and re-entry is normalized.

7.22 School-level implementation: a realistic cadence across one term

A common failure mode is ambitious rollout with rapid exhaustion. A more plausible cadence is incremental:

Weeks 1-2: Establish legitimacy and reduce fear.

Teachers demonstrate a two-minute routine in class and send a single prompt card home. The message is deliberately

modest: “Try once this week”. The aim is to lower the activation energy and to gather early trust.

Weeks 3-5: Expand pathways and resource access.

A lending system begins (book bags or classroom library checkout). Families receive either a book prompt card or a game prompt card, based on preference. Teachers introduce one shared speaking frame used in class and at home.

Weeks 6-8: Stabilize through micro-routines and re-entry permission.

Teachers explicitly communicate that missed weeks are normal and that restarting is expected. Families are invited to share one moment that worked (verbally, not via forms). The program becomes relational rather than paper-based.

Weeks 9-12: Consolidate and connect to classroom participation.

Children retell a story or a home game experience in class, turning home practice into classroom discourse. This step matters because it validates home routines publicly without requiring caregivers to perform paperwork.

The cadence is intentionally slow. In constrained households, participation grows through repeated low-pressure invitations, not through one-time events.

7.23 English-dominant contexts: the hidden challenge is not exposure, but quality and identity

In English-dominant settings, children often have abundant exposure, yet socioeconomic gradients persist. The mechanism is not absence of English; it is uneven distribution of high-quality interaction, decontextualized talk, and stable literacy routines. In such contexts, schools sometimes assume families need only motivation. The evidence suggests otherwise: schools must actively support interaction quality, particularly in communities where economic stress compresses conversation and reduces opportunities for narrative elaboration.

A further complication is identity. English-dominant contexts frequently contain dialect diversity and racialized language ideologies. Families may experience schools as spaces that stigmatize home speech patterns. If home-linked English initiatives implicitly demand “standard” forms without respect for linguistic diversity, they can harm trust. A culturally sustaining approach makes room for dialectal legitimacy while teaching children to code-switch strategically for academic settings. Family routines can support this through contrastive talk (“At home we say..., at school you might hear...”), framed as flexibility rather than correction.

7.24 ESL contexts: English is institutionally present, but home participation hinges on permission

In many ESL contexts, English has high institutional status and is tied to mobility. Families often have strong aspirations, yet participation can be blocked by fear of error and by the belief that only trained teachers should teach English. Here, the most powerful intervention may be symbolic and communicative: explicitly granting permission for caregivers

to support English through small routines without needing perfect proficiency.

Bilingual bridging becomes central. If families are told that using the home language for explanation is legitimate, the barrier of caregiver English confidence decreases, and routines become sustainable. Children can practice English in bounded units-weekly words, sentence frames, role-play phrases-while maintaining rich conceptual talk in the home language.

7.25 EFL contexts: home routines operate inside exam regimes and tutoring markets

In EFL contexts where English exposure is limited outside school, exam-oriented instruction often dominates, and families may seek tutoring if they can. Home-based routines can provide additional oral practice, but they cannot resolve inequality created by unequal access to instruction time. A responsible strategy acknowledges this boundary: home routines are not a substitute for equitable schooling; they are a supplementary route to create low-cost opportunities for speaking and listening.

In such contexts, the greatest risk is that family engagement becomes another channel through which advantaged families invest time and resources. Equity-oriented design must therefore prioritize school-provided materials, community-based practice opportunities, and messaging that explicitly frames micro-routines as sufficient and valuable.

7.26 When improvements appear: why attribution must remain cautious

Even in well-designed studies, measured improvements can have multiple causes. Children may improve due to maturation, classroom instruction, peer interaction, or seasonal changes in school routines. Home routines may contribute, but attribution must be cautious. The proposed design supports cautious attribution through comparison groups and through mechanism-linked participation indicators, yet the paper maintains bounded claims: the aim is to identify plausible pathways and design principles, not to claim definitive causality across all contexts.

7.27 The Hawthorne problem in home-linked interventions

Families sometimes intensify engagement temporarily when they feel observed. In home-linked studies, the risk is heightened because participation is socially valued. Low-burden reflective check-ins reduce this risk compared with detailed logs, yet it cannot be eliminated. The best safeguard is sustained follow-up: if gains persist after the novelty fades, the routine may have become embedded. If gains collapse, the program may have functioned as short-term performance rather than sustainable practice.

7.28 The classroom gate: why home routines may not translate into measured school outcomes

A child may become more talkative at home yet remain silent in class if classroom discourse is punitive or dominated by rapid recitation. This mismatch can produce “home gains”

without “school gains,” leading to a false conclusion that home routines do not matter. The more accurate conclusion is that classroom conditions mediate transfer. This is why the framework insists on alignment: teacher discourse moves and classroom safety must support children’s willingness to speak.

7.29 A household-facing “menu” that avoids pedagogy jargon

One reason engagement initiatives fail is that they speak to families in educational jargon. A practical blueprint uses everyday language, while still embedding the active ingredients.

Option 1: Talk about a picture (2 minutes).

Look at any picture-book, newspaper, phone image. Ask: “What’s happening?” Then add one more idea to what the child says.

Option 2: Tell the day back (2 minutes).

Ask: “Tell me your day in three parts”. Help with “first/then/after”.

Option 3: Guessing game (3 minutes).

Describe something. The other person guesses. Switch roles.

Option 4: Mini role-play (3 minutes).

Pretend to buy something. Use one polite phrase and one question.

Option 5: One-page story (4 minutes).

Read or describe one page. Ask one “why” question. Let the child retell.

Families can choose one option. The blueprint’s central message is restraint: short is acceptable; restarting is normal; home language is allowed; perfection is unnecessary.

7.30 How schools can invite participation without extracting labor

Schools often unintentionally extract unpaid labor by requiring extensive monitoring and reporting. A more ethical approach is to invite participation without demanding evidence. Children can share a weekly “home story” in class; teachers can notice improvements in willingness and vocabulary; families can receive appreciation without being ranked. This changes the moral economy from surveillance to partnership.

8. Conclusion

Home-based reading and language play offer distinct and complementary pathways for supporting primary children’s English proficiency. Their educational value rests on interactional mechanisms: conversational turns, expansions, narrative scaffolding, retrieval practice, and emotionally safe opportunities to speak. The evidence base supports associations between shared reading and language/literacy outcomes (Bus et al., 1995; Mol & Bus, 2011) and shows that dialogic reading interventions can yield added language benefits (Mol et al., 2008; Dowdall et al., 2020). Caregiver-

child talk research underscores that interaction quality matters and that decontextualized, responsive talk supports language growth (Hoff, 2003; Rowe, 2012; Weisleder & Fernald, 2013; Fernald et al., 2013). Parental engagement research clarifies that learning-centered engagement is more educationally meaningful than many school-facing involvement measures and that equity depends on feasibility and respect (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014; Wilder, 2014; Castro et al., 2015).

A global perspective requires more than adding examples from multiple countries. It demands attention to how English is positioned socially, how multilingualism is treated by institutions, and how socioeconomic constraints shape daily life. When schools treat home engagement as a moral duty rather than a co-designed support, participation becomes stratified and inequality can deepen. When schools provide infrastructure (book circulation), authorize bilingual scaffolding, and offer multiple micro-routines that fit constrained lives, home-based activities can become equity-building rather than inequality-amplifying.

The central claim of this paper is not that families should do more. It is that children’s primary English development depends on interactional opportunities that are unevenly distributed, and that schools and systems can design home-linked routines that either reinforce or reduce inequity. Shared reading and dialogic reading offer strong pathways for vocabulary and comprehension when they are enacted interactively and supported materially. Language games offer a complementary pathway that is often more feasible under constraint, strengthening oral production and confidence while still enabling narrative practice.

Socioeconomic factors operate through feasibility mechanics-time, space, stress, and resource access-and through relational dynamics-trust, stigma, and the perceived legitimacy of family language practices. Multilingual families do not require English-only discipline; they require engagement designs that treat bilingualism as a resource.

The practical conclusion is that equitable family participation must be enabled as infrastructure and relationship, not demanded as a moral duty. When schools provide book circulation, multilingual prompts, micro-routines, and respectful communication, family participation becomes a realistic pathway for broad-based language opportunity. When schools rely on logs, surveillance, and English-only ideologies, participation becomes stratified and language development becomes another site where inequality reproduces itself.

Home-based English development at the primary level is best understood as a distribution problem: the distribution of interactional opportunities, linguistic legitimacy, and feasible routines. Shared reading and language games can both influence proficiency, but they do so through mechanisms that depend on enactment quality and emotional climate. Socio-economic factors intervene by shaping feasibility-time, space, stress, and access-as well as by shaping whether caregivers feel authorized to engage, particularly in multilingual homes where English carries social status and the risk of stigma.

A global perspective strengthens, rather than dilutes, this conclusion because it reveals how the same mechanism can require different pathways. In some settings, the barrier is book access; in others it is fear of error; in others it is tutoring-driven inequality. A responsible engagement strategy does not prescribe a single ideal routine. It provides multiple legitimate pathways that preserve core interactional ingredients while adapting to household conditions.

The contribution of the present analysis lies in treating family participation as designable and supportable, not as a private virtue. When institutions provide infrastructure, dignifying communication, and culturally and linguistically sustaining guidance, home-based routines become plausible for a wide range of families, and English development becomes less dependent on socioeconomic privilege.

9. Future Scope

Future research should develop culturally responsive measures of home language practices beyond book counts; test bilingual bridging models across ESL/EFL contexts; examine labor conditions as determinants of feasibility; compare long-term effects of reading-based and play-based routines on later reading comprehension; evaluate digital tools that stimulate caregiver-child talk; and study how teacher communication training alters participation patterns across socioeconomic strata.

Future research can advance the field through several directions:

- 1) Richer measurement of oral language at scale: develop short, culturally adaptable narrative and speaking measures suitable for school use.
 - 2) Bilingual bridging trials: compare structured bilingual scaffolding routines against English-only routines across ESL/EFL contexts.
 - 3) Time poverty as a design variable: study how routine adoption changes when interventions explicitly adapt to shift work and caregiving load.
 - 4) Household ecology studies: include siblings and non-parental caregivers as active participants in routine enactment.
 - 5) Teacher communication interventions: evaluate whether training in dignity-preserving messaging increases uptake and reduces socioeconomic participation gaps.
 - 6) Digital co-use design: test digital story resources engineered to maximize caregiver-child talk rather than solitary consumption.
 - 7) Policy-level studies: examine how national language policy, assessment regimes, and tutoring markets shape home-based participation possibilities.
- A deeper future agenda emerges when the field takes constraints seriously rather than treating them as background variables.
- a) **Micro-routine optimization studies:** Identify which two-minute routines yield the greatest interactional density for different household conditions (time poverty, multilingual households, low print access). The goal is not to reduce learning to hacks, but to refine feasible practice.
 - b) **Language ideology interventions:** Study how school messages about bilingualism and accent shape family participation and child speaking risk. This line of work connects sociolinguistics to implementation design.
 - c) **Sibling-mediated English development:** Investigate structured sibling routines as a scalable pathway, particularly where older children have more English exposure and can act as facilitators.
 - d) **Community-based participation ecosystems:** Explore how libraries, community centers, and local organizations can serve as participation supports, reducing reliance on individual households.
 - e) **Assessment reform:** Develop and validate low-burden oral language measures for schools that capture narrative competence and pragmatic ability, ensuring that what is valued is what is measured.

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