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EXPLORING THE INFLUENCE OF PARENTAL EDUCATION, SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS, AND LANGUAGE EXPOSURE ON CHINESE PRESCHOOLERS' ATTITUDES TOWARD ENGLISH LEARNING

EXPLORANDO A INFLUÊNCIA DA ESCOLARIDADE DOS PAIS, DO STATUS SOCIOECONÔMICO E DA EXPOSIÇÃO AO IDIOMA NAS ATITUDES DE CRIANÇAS PRÉ-ESCOLAR CHINESAS EM RELAÇÃO AO APRENDIZADO DE INGLÊS

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Abstract
In non-English-speaking regions such as Asia, the growing emphasis on English as a foreign language (EFL) has brought increased attention to the role of the home environment in early language learning. In China, recent regulations restricting formal English instruction for preschoolers have further underscored the importance of parental involvement in shaping children's attitudes toward English learning. This study explores how parental education, socioeconomic status (SES), and language exposure influence preschoolers' affective attitudes toward EFL. A questionnaire survey was administered to 336 parents of preschool-aged children (three to six years old) in Zhengzhou, central China. The results indicate that higher parental education levels are associated with more positive attitudes in children toward English learning. Similarly, preschoolers from higher SES families tend to demonstrate more favorable affective orientations toward acquiring English. Importantly, the study also identifies a moderating effect of language exposure on the link between parental education and children's attitudes: increased exposure enhances the positive impact of parental education. These findings underscore the multifaceted nature of early EFL development and suggest that home-based language exposure and parental background play critical roles in fostering young children's enthusiasm and readiness for English

Resumo
Em regiões não anglófonas, como a Ásia, a crescente ênfase no inglês como língua estrangeira (EFL) tem aumentado a atenção para o papel do ambiente familiar na aprendizagem precoce de idiomas. Na China, regulamentações recentes que restringem o ensino formal de inglês para crianças em idade pré-escolar reforçaram ainda mais a importância do envolvimento dos pais na formação das atitudes das crianças em relação à aprendizagem do inglês. Este estudo explora como a escolaridade dos pais, o nível socioeconômico (NSE) e a exposição ao idioma influenciam as atitudes afetivas de crianças em idade pré-escolar em relação ao EFL. Um questionário foi aplicado a 336 pais de crianças em idade pré-escolar (de três a seis anos) em Zhengzhou, região central da China. Os resultados indicam que níveis mais altos de escolaridade dos pais estão associados a atitudes mais positivas das crianças em relação à aprendizagem do inglês. Da mesma forma, crianças em idade pré-escolar de famílias com NSE mais alto tendem a demonstrar orientações afetivas mais favoráveis em relação à aquisição do inglês. É importante ressaltar que o estudo também identifica um efeito moderador da exposição ao idioma na relação entre a escolaridade dos pais e as atitudes das crianças: maior exposição ao idioma potencializa o impacto positivo da escolaridade dos pais. Essas descobertas ressaltam a natureza multifacetada

learning. The study offers practical implications for educators and policymakers seeking to support family-based EFL learning in early childhood settings.

Keywords: Parental Education. Socioeconomic Status. Language Exposure. English Learning Attitudes. Preschoolers.

do desenvolvimento inicial do inglês como língua estrangeira e sugerem que a exposição ao idioma em casa e o contexto familiar desempenham papéis cruciais no fomento do entusiasmo e da prontidão das crianças pequenas para o aprendizado do inglês. O estudo oferece implicações práticas para educadores e formuladores de políticas que buscam apoiar o aprendizado do inglês como língua estrangeira em contextos de educação infantil.

Palavras-chave: *Escolaridade dos Pais. Nível Socioeconômico. Exposição ao Idioma. Atitudes em Relação ao Aprendizado do Inglês. Crianças em Idade Pré-Escolar.*

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and context

Past studies, including Enever's work, indicate that legislators worldwide advocate for the early introduction of foreign languages in school curriculum, believing that starting language education at a young age leads to more favorable outcomes (1). English is often chosen due to its global status as a lingua franca (2). Researcher emphasizes that proficiency in English as a foreign language (EFL) is essential in today's globally interconnected society (3). Interest in EFL is growing across Asia and other non-English-speaking regions. A 2021 study by Hu involving 243 Chinese preschoolers found that English was the primary focus in 70% of their additional educational sessions (4).

The study of preschoolers' attitudes toward English learning is increasingly relevant due to global economic integration and globalization (5, 6, 2). Understanding these attitudes is crucial for effective language education (7). Research by Getie shows a positive correlation between favorable attitudes toward English and increased motivation for language learning (1). Conversely, negative attitudes can lead to learning anxiety, reduced cognitive achievement, and poor performance noted that without interest in the target language, learners develop negative attitudes, diminishing their motivation and enthusiasm for learning (8). Despite this understanding, there remains a significant gap in research concerning non-English-speaking children's attitudes towards EFL, particularly among preschoolers. This gap highlights the need for further research to

explore how early EFL education influences young learners' attitudes and motivation, especially in preschool settings.

Furthermore, Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory highlights the crucial role of parents as primary social contacts, shaping children's development within the family home, which serves as a vital learning environment (9). Recent studies have underlined the significance of parents in preparing children for school (10) and how caregivers and reading materials influence preschoolers' language learning attitudes (11). Factors such as parents' education, social background, and linguistic exposure significantly affect preschool-aged children's attitudes towards EFL.

Research in Korea has shown that parents with higher educational and income levels tend to provide their children with richer English learning experiences, which correlates with more positive attitudes towards English (12, 13). However, it remains unclear whether Chinese preschoolers exhibit similar outcomes. Given the strong value Chinese parents place on early childhood English education and their significant investment in this area (14), it is crucial to explore how parents' education, socioeconomic status (SES), and language exposure influence their preschool children's EFL learning attitudes in China. This study aims to fill this gap by examining these factors in the Chinese context.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Parental education

"Parenting education" encompasses structured programs and resources designed to enhance parenting skills. These initiatives provide insights and strategies aimed at strengthening familial bonds and fostering child development (15, 16). Research by (15) and (16) demonstrates a correlation between parental education and children's academic performance. Studies indicate that preschoolers with more educated parents tend to exhibit higher academic motivation, advanced cognitive development, and greater academic success (17). Supporting findings from Andriyanto et al. further confirm the relationship between parents' educational levels, children's developmental progress, and their academic achievements (18).

The existing literature robustly links parental education to enhanced attitudes towards EFL among children, underscoring a significant trend where educational background of parents plays a pivotal role in shaping children's motivation and attitudes towards learning. For example, Jin and Cortazzi examined the learning attitudes of 8–12-year-olds in the United States. Their research illuminates how parental education not only motivates children but also fosters positive sentiments towards EFL, suggesting that the educational benefits of parental involvement are perceived positively by children and may contribute to a more enjoyable learning experience (19). Parallel to findings in the U.S., Chen and her colleagues reveal similar patterns among Chinese primary school students, indicating that the influence of parental education transcends cultural boundaries and is significant in varied educational settings (10). This cross-cultural applicability suggests a universal aspect of parental influence across different educational and cultural contexts. Further broadening the geographic and demographic scope, Daviglus ML, et al. explore the implications of parental education across diverse racial and cultural groups in Latin America, highlighting that the positive effects of parental education on children's EFL attitudes are observable even in varied socio-economic and cultural settings (20). These findings collectively point to the universal relevance of parental education in enhancing children's educational outcomes, regardless of racial or cultural differences.

Extending this discussion, some scholars discovered that preschoolers from highly educated backgrounds tend to have more positive evaluations of language acquisition, characterized by heightened curiosity, motivation, and readiness for language learning (21, 22). In addition, children from more educated families exhibit higher motivation in EFL contexts (15, 16). This suggests that parental education likely serves as a proxy for a richer, more supportive learning environment that can inspire greater academic engagement.

While these studies collectively affirm the positive correlation between parental education and children's EFL attitudes, they predominantly focus on older children (15, 16). This leaves an underexplored area concerning younger children, particularly preschoolers, whose early exposure to EFL could be crucial (4). Additionally, these studies do not extensively explore the mechanisms through which parental education influences EFL attitudes—whether through direct instruction, provision of resources, modeling of language use, or fostering an intellectually stimulating home environment

(10). Understanding these mechanisms could help tailor more effective EFL interventions that leverage parental involvement.

2.2 Socioeconomic status

As highlighted by Thomas Tobin and his colleagues that SES encompasses both social standing and resource availability, significantly impacting areas like income and occupation. They note that children from higher SES backgrounds often exhibit a greater preference for learning English (23). Similarly, Aibin et al. observed that children from wealthier households are more inclined to learn languages (24) , a sentiment echoed by Bowers et al. , who found that more affluent children tend to enjoy language learning more (25). This interest is attributed to economic stability, educational opportunities, and exposure to linguistic diversity, all of which contribute to a favorable learning environment (26, 27).

Feng and Yao found that higher family SES often results in positive parenting, with wealthier parents providing more resources to create enriching environments for their children's development (28). In contrast, lower family SES can lead to negative parenting due to financial stress limiting the support parents can offer for their children's education. This link between SES and parenting quality is well-documented (29, 30). However, some researchers, such as Choi et al., argue that while parents' SES is crucial for language performance in an EFL setting, it does not consistently affect young children's attitudes toward English (12). Supporting this, Vasilyeva et al. discovered that both lower- and higher-SES parents who value literacy development were more likely to engage their preschool children in activities that enhance learning motivation (31).

Additionally, Trebits A et al. note that a higher SES provides resources that amplify the effect of parental education on preschoolers' attitudes towards EFL (32). Research by Su and his colleagues further explores how parents' SES impacts their involvement and, subsequently, preschoolers' attitudes towards English learning (30). However, there is a gap in understanding whether SES moderates the impact of parental education on children's EFL attitudes, which remains an open question that requires additional study. Moreover, Bowers et al. recommend examining both SES and parental education together to better understand their combined impact (33). More specifically, investigating how parents' financial status influences their views on EFL across different

racial and ethnic groups could illuminate complex socio-economic and cultural relationships. Exploring how a parent's SES affects young children's perceptions of EFL in families of varying sizes could provide deeper insights into this dynamic. Extensive research is needed to fully grasp how parents' SES shapes children's attitudes towards EFL. This research should span various demographics, including age ranges, locations, races, and family sizes to uncover broader patterns (34). As suggested by Mulyani et al., future research could examine EFL attitudes among different age groups and cultural contexts, such as preschool school children in China, to explore cross-cultural differences (35).

2.3 Language exposure

Ballinger et al. define language exposure as a preschooler's quantity and frequency of English language exposure at home and elsewhere (36). Cai et al. define "language exposure" as a person's frequency and ease of language use (37). Furthermore, some scholars expand this definition to include exposure to English through family, school, media, and social contacts (38, 39). Language exposure is needed to link parents' education to their children's English proficiency (11, 40). According to Chen et al., early language exposure improves attitudes towards studying EFL, with language-immersed children more likely to have positive attitudes and a strong desire to learn (10). Immersion improves children's English proficiency and comfort (41). Early studies show that youngsters who are exposed to English are more positive about learning it (11, 40).

Conversely, research by Goodwin and Zaman indicates that prolonged English learning can lead to decreased interest and increased anxiety among young learners (42). Butler and Le further investigates how negative perceptions can diminish children's motivation to learn English, suggesting that excessive educational pressure may adversely affect motivation (2). Even though, Romeo et al. discovered that language exposure positively impacts preschoolers' perceptions of language development and is influenced by parental education (43). Additionally, Trebits et al. observed that media use and social interactions facilitated by less educated parents can boost preschoolers' interest in learning English as a Second Language (ESL) (32). However, it is important to note that Chinese preschoolers are typically learning EFL, not ESL (14). To improve EFL attitudes

and better understand the impact of parental education on preschoolers, it is crucial to address this information gap.

2.4 Integration of parental education, socioeconomic status, and language exposure on preschoolers' attitudes towards EFL

While parental education, SES, and language exposure are often studied independently, it is essential to consider their interrelationships to understand their combined effects on preschoolers' attitudes towards EFL learning. Research suggests a strong link between parental education and SES, with higher educational levels often leading to better economic conditions (46). This relationship can amplify the impact on children's academic and language learning environments. Studies highlight that educated parents are likely to have higher SES, which provides more resources for their children's education, including access to quality language learning materials and programs (26, 27, 33).

Highly educated parents not only value education but also tend to expose their children to rich linguistic environments (38, 39). This exposure is often facilitated by their SES, which provides access to diverse language resources such as books, educational media, and extracurricular activities (10, 41). The interconnectedness of these variables suggests that the benefits of parental education on preschoolers' EFL attitudes might be enhanced or mediated by SES and language exposure.

SES may moderate the effect of parental education on preschoolers' attitudes towards EFL. For instance, Butler and Le found that the positive influence of parental education on children's language attitudes could be stronger in higher SES families (2). Conversely, in lower SES families, the lack of resources might dampen this positive effect, indicating a complex interplay that needs further investigation (10, 41). Language exposure may serve as a mediator in this relationship, where parental education indirectly influences children's attitudes through the level and quality of language exposure they receive (10). Children in households with high language exposure are more likely to develop positive attitudes towards learning EFL, showcasing the pivotal role of both direct educational interventions and the surrounding linguistic environment (26, 27).

The reviewed studies provide valuable insights into the individual effects of parental education, SES, and language exposure on children's EFL attitudes. For instance,

Thomas Tobin et al. establish a strong foundation by linking parental education to better academic and language outcomes (23). Similarly, research by Al-Rubaat highlights the significant role of SES in shaping positive attitudes towards language learning (38). However, several gaps and weaknesses persist in the literature. Many studies focus on specific regions or demographics, limiting the generalizability of their findings. For example, the work of Idris et al. (47) is centered on children in the US, and Chen et al. (10) focus on Chinese teens, leaving out other cultural contexts and kindergartners. Moreover, while individual effects of parental education and SES are well-documented, there is a lack of comprehensive studies examining their combined effects and interactions.

Some studies present conflicting findings or alternative viewpoints. For instance, Al Zoubi suggest that parental demographic factors, including education and SES, do not significantly affect children's learning attitudes, emphasizing the role of home language exposure instead (48). This contradiction points to the need for more nuanced research that considers multiple variables and their interactions simultaneously. Future research should aim to address these gaps by exploring the combined effects of parental education, SES, and language exposure on children's EFL attitudes in diverse cultural contexts. Additionally, examining how educational policies and interventions can effectively leverage these factors to improve EFL learning outcomes across different SES and cultural backgrounds would be beneficial. Understanding the intricate relationships between these variables has significant implications for educational practice and policy. Educators and policymakers can design more targeted interventions that consider both the SES context and the linguistic environment of preschool-aged children. For instance, programs that provide additional language exposure opportunities for preschoolers from lower SES backgrounds could help mitigate the disadvantages they face, promoting more equitable learning outcomes (2).

2.5 The current study

The literature consistently supports the positive impact of parental education on children's EFL learning across diverse ages and cultural contexts. However, further research is required to understand the influence of parental education on Chinese preschoolers and to uncover the mechanisms driving this relationship, enhancing

educational strategies in early childhood language acquisition. This study aims to investigate the correlation between parental education, SES, language exposure, and preschoolers' attitudes towards EFL within a non-native language setting like China. We intend to explore the mediating role of language exposure and the potential moderating effects of SES, aiming to fill significant research gaps and improve understanding of how parental education, SES and language exposure influence preschoolers' attitudes towards EFL. Figure 1 illustrates the proposed model in detail.

To test this model, several hypotheses have been developed:

(1) Parental education is positively related to preschoolers' attitudes towards EFL learning (Hypothesis 1); supported by research suggesting that preschoolers from highly educated backgrounds generally exhibit more favorable perceptions of language learning, marked by increased curiosity, motivation, and readiness (22).

(2) Family SES moderates the relationship between parental education and preschoolers' attitudes towards EFL (Hypothesis 2); based on findings by Feng and Yao that higher family SES often leads to positive parenting, enabling wealthier parents to provide richer environments that boost their children's learning motivation, whereas lower SES may result in negative parenting due to financial stress, adversely affecting educational support (28).

(3) Language exposure mediates the relationship between parental education and preschoolers' attitudes towards EFL (Hypothesis 3); reflecting past studies such as Choi et al., which found that home English language exposure mediated the influence of mothers' education on preschoolers' EFL attitudes (12). Vasilyeva et al. also noted that while mothers' education did not directly affect children's attitudes, its effects were indirectly mediated by English experiences at home (31).

These hypotheses aim to deepen the understanding of the complex interactions between parental influences and preschoolers' language learning within the unique context of China's language education landscape.

3 METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a cross-sectional research design due to its efficiency in capturing a snapshot of variables within a specific timeframe, making it suitable for exploring relationships between parental education, SES, language exposure, and

preschoolers' attitudes towards learning English (4). Purposive sampling was employed to target a diverse group of participants, reflecting varied characteristics and backgrounds of preschool-aged EFL learners (49). This sampling method was chosen based on the researchers' judgment regarding the suitability of participants for the study's objectives. Furthermore, the study recruited parents of children aged three to six who had experience with English learning, either previously or at the time of the study. The sample size was validated using G*Power 3.1 software, incorporating interaction terms as additional predictors for mediation as recommended by Memon et al., setting the minimum sample size at 77 (50).

The survey was administered in both online and paper formats to accommodate different preferences and increase response rates (22). The online survey was distributed through social media platforms (*Wenjuanxing)*—Chinese platforms analogous to Qualtrics and parent-teacher associations (*Wechat*), while paper questionnaires were handed out in preschools and collected later. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, ensuring ethical compliance. Data collection was conducted from Oct 2024 to Jan 2025 across 14 administrative districts in Zhengzhou, China. Out of the responses, 389 parents participated, with 86% meeting the eligibility criteria. Due to minimal missing data across variables (14%), listwise deletion was employed, resulting in a final sample of 336 parents of Chinese preschoolers aged 3 to 6 who actively support their children's English learning.

In this survey, SES was gauged using a three-item demographic questionnaire from Dicataldo and Roch, combined with additional demographic data to outline crucial participant characteristics (51). Parental Education was assessed via a nine-item scale developed by Kimaro (52). Respondents expressed their agreement on a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly agree), where higher scores indicate a stronger belief among parents about the significance of their education in influencing their preschoolers' English learning. Language Exposure was measured using the nine-item scale by Samer and Al Zoubi, where responses on a five-point scale (1 = Never, 5 = Very often) assessed the frequency of language exposure provided by parents (53). To evaluate preschoolers' attitudes towards EFL, the sixteen-item scale by Abidin et al. was utilized (46). This scale employs a five-point Likert scale ranging from 'Strongly disagree' to 'Strongly agree' to capture preschoolers' feelings about learning English, with higher scores reflecting more positive attitudes. The selected scales were

deemed appropriate for the context of this study and were aligned with its objectives, ensuring that the measurements were precisely targeted. The internal consistency of the scales was confirmed to be robust, exceeding the acceptable threshold of 0.70, validating the reliability of the instruments used (see Table 1).

4 RESULTS

This research model underwent evaluation through Structural Equation Modeling Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS) using SmartPLS version 4.0. PLS-SEM is a robust statistical technique suitable for exploring relationships among variables in structural equation modeling, especially in situations with small sample sizes and complex models (54). This method allowed for the examination of the relationships between parental education, SES, language exposure, and preschoolers' attitudes towards learning English. Each statistical analysis within the PLS-SEM framework addressed specific research questions, such as investigating the direct and indirect effects of parental education and SES on preschoolers' attitudes towards learning English, and exploring the mediation and moderation in this relationship (55). SmartPLS was chosen for data analysis due to its user-friendly interface enabled efficient model specification and interpretation, accommodating both reflective and formative constructs (56, 57). Utilizing bootstrapping techniques, SmartPLS provided robust estimation of model parameters and inferential statistics, ensuring the reliability of results (58).

4.1 Common method variance

As data were acquired through self-report surveys, two statistical methods were used to assess and mitigate common method variance (CMV). First, Harman's single-factor test indicated that the variance explained by the first factor was 23.697%, which is below the threshold of 50% suggested by Sebtaoui et al. (59). This suggests that CMV is not a significant issue in our dataset. Second, the full collinearity testing results (see Table 2) demonstrate that the variance inflation factor (VIF) values ranged from 1.032 to 1.639, <3.33 (60), corroborating that CMV is not a concern in our data. These statistical checks assure that common method variance did not unduly influence our results, supporting the robustness and validity of our findings.

4.2 Measurement model

In this study, the reflective measurement model demonstrated satisfactory convergent validity, as indicated by several criteria. First, all the values for AVEs were higher than the threshold of 0.5 (60), which means the amount of variance captured by a construct can explain more than 50% of the variance. All indicator loadings surpassed the recommended threshold of 0.7 (56, 61) and both the values of CR for each latent variable were higher than the threshold of 0.7 (59, 60, 61). The Table 2 shows the composite reliability and average variance extracted for the components tested, demonstrating their reliability and explanatory power (62).

In the final stage of measurement model analysis, the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT), as recommended by Henseler et al., was utilized to assess discriminant validity among constructs (54). As shown in Table 3, the HTMT scores for all constructs remained below the threshold of 0.85, confirming discriminant validity across the constructs of interest.

4.3 Structure model

According to Table 4, the model explains 62.4% of predicted events with a predictive relevance (Q^2) value of 0.624. RMSE, the average difference between anticipated and actual values, is 0.067. As suggested by Hair et al. the predicted values are 0.067 off the actual values with a smaller RMSE, indicating superior model performance (58). The mean absolute error (MAE) between anticipated and actual values is 0.085. A lower MAE, like RMSE, implies greater model performance. On average, the projected values deviate from the actual values by 0.085.

Table 5 shows the coefficients of determination (R^2) values reveal how much variance is explained by the independent variables in the regression model for two variables: attitude toward learning EFL and language exposure. The R^2 value for the Attitude towards learning EFL variable is 0.640, indicating that the independent factors in the model account for about 64.0% of the variance in this variable (63). This demonstrates a reasonably strong association between the independent variables and the EFL variable attitude towards learning, with the model accounting for a significant percentage of the variability.

Similarly, the R^2 for the Language Exposure variable is 0.729. This means that the independent variables evaluated in the regression model can explain approximately 72.9% of the variance in Language Exposure (see Table 5). The higher the R^2 value, the stronger the association between the independent variables and Language Exposure, and the model captures a considerable percentage of the variability in this variable. Overall, these R^2 values show how much the independent factors contribute to explaining the variation in Attitude towards EFL Learning and Language Exposure.

In Table 6, the effect size (F^2) reveals how much variance is explained by the presence of various variables in a regression model (57). For the variable "Attitude towards learning EFL," the F^2 value for Language Exposure is 0.055. This indicates that Language Exposure explains an additional 5.5% of the variance in Attitude towards learning EFL beyond what is already accounted for by other variables in the model. This suggests that the Language Exposure variable makes a minor additional contribution to explaining the variation in Attitude toward learning EFL. Regarding the variable "Language Exposure," the F^2 value for Parental Education is 1.488. This value indicates that including Parental Education explains approximately 148.8% more variance in Language Exposure than the other factors in the model. This substantial effect size demonstrates that Parental Education significantly contributes to explaining the variation in Language Exposure.

However, particular F^2 values for the SES variable in respect to either Attitude towards learning EFL or Language Exposure are not supplied, and so its additional contribution to explaining variance cannot be assessed based on the available data (see Table 6). In summary, the F^2 values shed light on the relative importance of specific variables in the regression models for Attitude towards learning EFL and Language Exposure by providing insights into the incremental variance explained by certain variables.

The Table 7 shows three hypotheses, their Beta, standard deviations, T statistics, and p-values. Hypothesis 1 posits that parental education affects preschoolers' English language learning attitudes. This relationship's initial sample value is 0.630. The T statistic is 11.668 since the standard deviation is 0.054. A statistically significant relationship was observed between parental education and preschoolers' attitudes towards EFL, indicated by a p-value of 0.000 and a 95% bias-corrected bootstrap confidence

interval excluding zero at the 0.05 significance level. Consequently, null Hypothesis 1 is supported.

According to Hypothesis 2, a preschooler's SES level significantly impacts their attitudes towards learning English, with children from higher SES backgrounds exhibiting more favorable sentiments. For this connection, the first sample value is 0.336. The T statistic is 8.303 due to the standard deviation of 0.041. The p-value is 0.000, and the 95% Bootstrap confidence interval was [0.024, 0.178], excluding 0. These results validate the mediation model, supporting null hypothesis 2 proposed in this study.

This result shows a substantial correlation between SES level and preschoolers' attitudes about learning English. In terms of hypothesis 3, parental education and preschoolers' attitudes toward learning English are mediated by language exposure, with more exposure to the English language being linked to more favorable opinions. This relationship's first sample value is 0.104. The T statistic is 1.838 and the standard deviation is 0.057. Although the effect size is smaller than those observed in Hypotheses 1 and 2, the associated p-value of 0.033 and the 95% bias-corrected bootstrap confidence interval, which does not include zero, indicate a statistically significant relationship between language exposure and preschoolers' attitudes toward learning English at the 0.05 significance level. Consequently, the null hypothesis 3 cannot be rejected. Overall, these findings underscore the significance of parental education, SES level, and language exposure in developing preschoolers' attitudes about EFL by indicating strong relationships between the variables in the proposed hypotheses.

5 DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to investigate preschoolers' attitudes on learning EFL using PLS-SEM. The study examined the complicated interactions and relationships between preschoolers' English learning attitudes, parental education, SES, and language exposure. The analysis enabled the exploration of intricate relationships between these variables, providing a deeper understanding of the factors influencing preschoolers' attitudes towards EFL.

Hypothesis 1 (H1) postulated a positive relationship between parental education and preschoolers' attitudes toward learning English, supported by previous research (64). The findings align with this literature, corroborating the notion that parental education

significantly impacts children's English learning attitudes. Further substantiating this association, we present effect sizes and significance levels derived from our regression analysis, providing concrete measurements of the extent to which parental education influences preschoolers' English learning outcomes. It also confirms that parents who speak the language well may help create a language-friendly environment. Higher-educated parents prioritise their children's academic pursuits, including studying English, and value education (65). By quantifying this relationship, we offer educators a clear understanding of the degree of improvement in children's attitudes, enhancing the robustness of our findings.

Similarly, Hypothesis 2 (H2) investigated the impact of family SES on preschoolers' attitudes toward learning English, addressing the need for more comprehensive findings and explanations of SES's moderating role. Contrary to the direct effects reported by previous studies on SES and children's learning attitudes (13, 31), our study revealed that SES indirectly affects learning attitudes by moderating the relationship between parental education and preschoolers' English learning attitudes. This optimism bias likely explains the growth in motivated youth who appreciate language learning. Higher SES families see learning English as a way to broaden their children's horizons and improve their opportunities, which, in turn, higher SES children may have increased opportunities and social status to experience English. These findings demonstrate how preschoolers' social settings affect their English learning attitudes (2). Furthermore, our results align with Sun et al., demonstrating that wealthier youngsters have better educational resources and more extracurricular activities, explaining why they exhibit more positive attitudes toward learning English (66). Thus, we elucidate the potential reasons for this positive relationship, emphasizing the role of better educational opportunities and increased access to extracurricular activities among higher SES families.

Addressing Hypothesis 3 (H3), we explored the mediating effect of language exposure on the relationship between parental education and children's attitudes toward learning English. Our findings align with Xiuwen and Razali, showcasing that language exposure indeed acts as a mediator, influencing children's attitudes (67). The findings emphasize that greater exposure to English through formal teaching, media, and social interactions positively impacts attitudes, underlining the significance of providing a supportive language-learning environment for all children (13). These findings

underscore the necessity of creating a language-learning environment for preschoolers, especially those from low-income families, to enhance their English learning attitudes (4, 31). Moreover, the findings emphasise the need of educational policies and interventions that address language exposure disparities to ensure that all children have an equal opportunity to develop positive attitudes towards learning English (14, 22).

In summary, previous research on the attitudes of preschool children towards English learning has primarily focused on contexts like ESL countries, including Germany (32), developed urban centers such as Shanghai (10, 22) and Guangzhou (14), as well as more distinct locations like the remote Mudanjiang (4) and the coastal city of Changzhou (2). However, central cities like Zhengzhou, which are neither highly developed nor coastal and exhibit average economic growth, have been largely neglected in these studies. Therefore, our research contributes novel insights into the complex relationships between parental education, SES, language exposure, and children's attitudes toward learning English in the different context.

6 CONCLUSION

In this study, children of higher-educated parents showed greater enthusiasm for learning English. Preschoolers from higher SES backgrounds also displayed more positive attitudes toward EFL, due to increased resources and opportunities. Moreover, increased language exposure correlated with improved attitudes toward learning English, highlighting the importance of equitable language-learning experiences for all children. By integrating these findings, our research offers valuable theoretical and practical implications for governments, policymakers, educators, and parents, helping them tailor interventions to enhance preschoolers' attitudes and motivation toward English language learning.

7 IMPLICATION

First of all, the study underscores the central role of parental education and SES in language acquisition and educational psychology models, influencing children's attitudes toward language learning. It also emphasises language exposure as a mediator between parental influence and children's attitudes, proposing that language acquisition

models should encompass formal schooling, media, and social contacts. This research supports the sociocultural theory of language acquisition, which stresses the role of social environment and individual development, contributing to the literature supporting immersive and contextually rich language learning settings (68). The findings advocate for long-term impacts and diverse demographic contexts to enhance theoretical frameworks with more comprehensive and generalizable data.

Secondly, governments can organize seminars to educate parents how their educational background and SES levels affect their children's attitudes toward EFL, equipping them with tools to enhance their children's English proficiency. Moreover, policymakers should ensure that children from low-income families have access to high-quality educational materials and community facilities for English learning. Establishing immersive language environments through bilingual story hours, participatory games, and English-speaking playgroups is important for schools or communities (4). Educational TV shows and language learning applications should be used to boost English exposure, with guidance provided to parents on content selection. Policymakers may support systematic English instruction in preschools and sponsor language programs, especially in impoverished regions. Preschoolers' attitudes should be considered when creating tailored learning plans and families can help construct EFL curriculum for cultural and social relevance (13).

In conclusion, the theoretical and practical implications of the Chinese study may benefit English language instructors, policymakers, and other stakeholders. By considering these consequences, stakeholders can implement actions, interventions, and policies aimed at fostering positive language attitudes and enhancing English language learning outcomes for Chinese preschoolers.

Limitations and Future Research Direction

The study exploring preschoolers' attitudes towards learning EFL is valuable, but it is also subject to inherent limitations. Primarily, its focus on Chinese preschoolers implies that the findings may be specific to this particular demographic and cultural context. To enhance the generalizability of our understanding of preschool-aged children's attitudes towards English learning, future research should encompass diverse cultural settings.

Moreover, the investigation relied on parents' self-reports to gauge preschoolers' English-learning experiences and attitudes. This method risks response bias, which might

not fully capture the children's nuanced perspectives. To gain a deeper insight into preschoolers' English learning attitudes and the factors that influence them, employing mixed-method approaches, such as qualitative interviews or observations, is recommended.

Additionally, while the study thoroughly examined variables such as parental SES, educational attainment, and language exposure, it did not delve into other critical factors like instructor characteristics, classroom environment, and intrinsic motivation of the children. Future studies could investigate these elements to provide a more comprehensive view of the factors influencing preschoolers' attitudes toward English learning.

Last but not least, data was predominantly collected from preschoolers aged three to six, which poses challenges in establishing causality. Future studies could benefit from using longitudinal designs to explore the reciprocal relationships among these variables and how preschoolers' attitudes towards English learning evolve over time.

In conclusion, while the current study contributes valuable insights into preschoolers' attitudes towards learning English in a specific context, addressing these limitations in future research can enhance our understanding and inform more effective strategies for promoting positive language attitudes and enhancing English language learning outcomes among preschoolers globally.

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ETHICS APPROVAL

This study was conducted following ethical standards, with approval and consent obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

ABBREVIATION

English as a foreign language (EFL); socioeconomic status (SES); Structural Equation Modeling Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS) ; common method variance (CMV); variance inflation factor (VIF); Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT); predictive relevance (Q^2); mean absolute error (MAE); coefficients of determination (R^2); effect size (F^2).

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTION

Q_YL: collecting data, analysis and interpretation of data, and first draft for the work. **W_L**: revising the work critically and format the manuscript to be published. **Y_CS**: revising the work critically for important intellectual content. **R_RZ**: revising the work critically for important intellectual content. **M_L**Z: formatting and revising.

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Authors' Contribution

All authors contributed equally to the development of this article.

Data availability

All datasets relevant to this study's findings are fully available within the article.

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