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Parental Engagement in Early English Language Acquisition: Motivations, Methods, Challenges and Coping Strategies

Gurdip Kaur Saminder Singh [1,2,3,*], Washima Che Dan [2], Mohd Al Mahdi Hussain [2], Farah Naaz Yunos [4] and Veena Joshi [5]

[1] Faculty of Education and Humanities, UNITAR University College Kuala Lumpur (UUCKL), Kuala Lumpur 50450, Malaysia
[2] Faculty of Education and Humanities, UNITAR International University, Petaling Jaya 47301, Malaysia
[3] Faculty of Education, Open University Malaysia (OUM), Petaling Jaya 47301, Malaysia
[4] Centre for English Language Studies, Sunway University, Bandar Sunway 47500, Malaysia
[5] Department of Primary Care Medicine, Faculty of Medicine, MAHSA University, Jenjarom 42610, Malaysia
[*] Correspondence: drgurdipsaini@gmail.com

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Abstract: The increasing prominence of English language proficiency in Malaysia has prompted many parents to take an active role in supporting their preschool children's language learning beyond the formal education system. While parental involvement in education is not new, limited research has explored how Malaysian parents facilitate English language acquisition at home during the early childhood years. This qualitative study sought to explore the motivation, teaching methods, perceived challenges and coping strategies in home-based English language teaching and learning among parents of preschool-aged children. Data were collected through in-depth interviews involving diverse groups of parents from urban and semi-urban settings in Malaysia. The thematic analysis of data collected revealed five dominant themes that discussed agency and motivation, strategies and resources, strategic use of digital tools, challenges of consistency and confidence, as well as coping strategies. The study's findings highlight the evolving role of Malaysian parents as co-educators in early language development and underscore the need for greater institutional support and resource curation for home-based English learning. Implications suggest that early childhood education policies and programs should integrate parent-focused digital literacy initiatives and provide accessible, culturally relevant language learning tools to bridge gaps in parental knowledge and capacity.

Keywords: Parental Involvement; English Language; Preschool Children; Challenges; Coping Strategies

1. Introduction

Across education systems worldwide, early English language acquisition has become an increasing priority, largely due to the expanding role of English as a global language of communication in education, science, technology, and international exchange. With more than 1.5 billion people using English as a second language globally, proficiency in English is no longer viewed simply as an academic advantage but as a key form of human capital in an increasingly globalized economy [1]. Within Asia, levels of English proficiency vary widely; however, Malaysia consistently ranks among the highest-performing non-native English-speaking countries. This reflects a sustained

national emphasis on English language learning from the early years of schooling [1], reinforced by public and policy discourse that positions English proficiency as essential to Malaysia's future workforce competitiveness and global engagement [2].

Beyond formal educational settings, a substantial body of international research highlights the significant role parents play in supporting young children's second language (L2) development, particularly during the preschool years. Studies conducted across diverse sociocultural contexts demonstrate that parental involvement through shared reading, oral interaction, guided play, and the provision of language-rich home environments positively contributes to children's vocabulary development, emergent literacy skills, and confidence in using a second language [3–5]. These findings underscore the importance of the home as a complementary learning space that supports and extends early childhood education.

Much of this research is grounded in sociocultural perspectives, which conceptualize parents as active mediators of learning who scaffold children's language development through everyday interactions. This aligns closely with Vygotsky's notion of the "More Knowledgeable Other" (MKO), whereby learning is facilitated through guided participation within social contexts [6]. Methodologically, existing studies have employed survey designs, observational approaches, and analyses of parent–child interactions, collectively offering strong evidence that home-based language support plays a critical role alongside institutional early childhood education.

The importance of parental involvement in L2 learning became particularly evident during the COVID-19 pandemic, when prolonged school closures shifted early education almost entirely into home environments. International research conducted during this period reported a marked increase in parental engagement in children's online and home-based learning, accompanied by significant challenges related to limited pedagogical knowledge, digital literacy, and heightened emotional strain [7–10]. While parents were often highly motivated to support their children's English learning, many lacked the professional scaffolding strategies typically provided by trained early childhood educators. Consequently, disruptions in early literacy development, especially in foundational reading and writing skills were widely reported [11].

Within the Malaysian context, emerging post-pandemic studies reflect similar patterns. Recent research indicates that Malaysian parents assumed expanded instructional roles in early English learning during and after the pandemic, engaging in bilingual home practices and digital learning activities with varying levels of confidence and effectiveness [12]. Although these studies provide valuable insights into parental perceptions and experiences, the existing literature remains limited in both scope and depth. Much of the research focuses on parental attitudes or general involvement, with comparatively less attention given to how parents enact pedagogical scaffolding in practice, how they understand their instructional role, and how these practices align with established learning theories such as sociocultural theory and the MKO framework.

Furthermore, while international research on parental influence in preschool L2 acquisition is well established, empirical studies grounded specifically in the Malaysian early childhood context remain scarce. This is particularly evident in the limited use of qualitative or mixed-method approaches that examine both parental practices and the challenges parents encounter. Many existing studies draw heavily on findings from Western or East Asian contexts, where cultural expectations, language policies, and family dynamics differ considerably from those in Malaysia [3,4]. As a result, the applicability of these findings to Malaysian families remains constrained.

In response to these gaps, the present study seeks to advance understanding by examining Malaysian parents' roles in supporting early English language learning at home, with particular attention to scaffolding practices, perceived challenges, and post-pandemic learning conditions. Anchored in sociocultural theory and Vygotsky's MKO framework [6], this study positions parents not merely as supportive figures but as active instructional agents whose everyday practices shape young children's early English learning trajectories. By situating parental involvement within a Malaysian sociocultural and educational context, the study offers nuanced, contextually grounded insights that extend and complement existing international research on parental influence in preschool second language acquisition.

1.1. Vygotsky's Social-Cultural Theory and Parental Involvement

Vygotsky's sociocultural theory emphasizes the pivotal role of social interaction in children's development and learning. Central to this theory is 'scaffolding' in the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), the gap between what a child can accomplish independently and what they are able to do with effective guidance or assistance from a

more competent other [6]. With respect to language accomplishment, the ZPD provides a theoretical explanation of how parental involvement, in this case called the More Knowledgeable Other (MKO), leads to accelerated language acquisition.

For Vygotsky, effective parental involvement constitutes a type of scaffolding such as providing temporary assistance allowing the child to accomplish tasks they cannot achieve on their own. As depicted in **Figure 1** below, when parents scaffold learning through modeling, prodding, or assisted practice, they guide children towards more advanced levels of functioning from where they are currently functioning [13]. Of importance, the willingness and readiness of the child to engage in the learning process determine how effectively they progress through their ZPD.

Figure 1. Parental scaffolding influence on children's language learning.

In the language learning context, parents have a double role [14]. First, as overt facilitators of practice at home, and second, as partners to teachers to implement a sharedness of language exposure. Clear parent-child interactions such as reading together, controlled conversation, and the use of electronic aids, can bridge the gap between current capacity and potential development [15]. This collaboration between teachers and parents is in harmony with Vygotsky's concept that learning is by its nature a social phenomenon.

As shown in **Figure 1**, parental support functions as the scaffold that bridges the child's present limitations and their potential achievements in communication. Over time, as the child gains competence, the level of parental scaffolding gradually decreases, fostering independence.

In early childhood, parental involvement is known as the foundational support for children's learning, behaviour, and long-term academic achievement. Parental involvement denotes a situation where parents are actively engaged in the growth and development of their children across multiple domains, including cognitive, physical, emotional, social, and psychological well-being [16,17]. Although not a new phenomenon in a child's education, it has consistently been recognized as a critical determinant of positive developmental outcomes [18,19]. In all circumstances, parents serve as a child's first teachers, shaping initial learning experiences, language development, and socio-emotional skills [3].

In second language classroom contexts, such as in Malaysia, parental involvement becomes even more critical in ensuring children achieve optimum acquisition of the English language not just in schools but also at home. Research suggests that when parents actively support language learning through storytelling, shared reading, and digital tools, children show greater motivation and linguistic gains [20,21]. In fact, home-based English learning has gained prominence in recent years, particularly due to the increased availability of interactive digital platforms and the growing parental awareness of English as a global and economic necessity [22]. Consequently, fostering parental engagement in early English language learning not only enhances linguistic competencies but also strengthens parent–child relationships and prepares children for formal schooling. As such, understanding how parents contribute to early English language learning is vital for designing current and relevant, supportive interventions in early childhood education systems.

1.2. Aim and Purpose of Study

This study was designed to explore how Malaysian parents of preschool-aged children engage in and perceive their role in supporting English language learning at home. More specifically the study was premeditated with a focus on the strategies parents employ, challenges encountered, and perceived effectiveness of digital learning tools. The following research questions were organized to guide the study:

1. How are Malaysian parents involved in teaching English to their preschool children at home?
2. What strategies and resources do parents use to support home-based English language learning?
3. How do parents perceive the effectiveness of technology-enhanced learning tools in supporting their children's English language acquisition?

4. What challenges do parents face when teaching English at home, and how do they address these challenges?

2. Methodology

2.1. Research Design

Due to the exploratory nature of this study, a qualitative methodology through focus group discussions was adopted to understand how Malaysian parents of preschool-aged children engage in and perceive their role in supporting English language learning at home.

2.2. Population and Sampling

This study employed a purposive sampling, specifically a purposive cluster sampling strategy. Purposive sampling is commonly used in qualitative research to ensure that participants possess rich, firsthand experiences related to the phenomenon under investigation [23,24]. This sampling method was beneficial to identify and recruit participants who met specific inclusion criteria relevant to the study's objectives. Given the study's focus on parental involvement in preschoolers' English language learning at home, clusters were drawn from early childhood education centres within selected urban and semi-urban regions in Malaysia. For confidential purposes, parents were given the pseudonyms Parent Urban and Parent Semi-urban followed by a number. For example, Parent Urban 1 or Parent Semi-urban 5, and so on. A detailed demographic representation is discussed in **Table 1** below.

Table 1. Parents' pseudonyms, geographical data and children's age and level at preschool.

Parents' Pseudonyms	Geographical Area	Child's Age	Level at Preschool
PT1	Semi-urban	4	Pre-K1
PT2	Semi-urban	4	Pre-K1
PT3	Semi-urban	4	Pre-K1
PT4	Semi-urban	4	Pre-K1
PT5	Semi-urban	4	Pre-K1
PT6	Semi-urban	4	Pre-K1
PT7	Semi-urban	4	Pre-K1
PT8	Semi-urban	5	Pre-K2
PT9	Semi-urban	5	Pre-K2
PT10	Semi-urban	5	Pre-K2
PT11	Urban	5	Pre-K2
PT12	Urban	5	Pre-K2
PT13	Urban	6	Pre-K2
PT14	Urban	6	Pre-K2
PT15	Urban	6	Pre-K2
PT16	Urban	6	Pre-K2
PT17	Urban	6	Pre-K2
PT18	Urban	6	Pre-K2
PT19	Urban	6	Pre-K2
PT20	Urban	6	Pre-K2

As part of the process for purposive selection, participants were eligible for inclusion if they met the following criteria:

i. They were primary caregivers responsible for English instructions of at least one preschool-aged child (aged 4 to 6);
ii. They had either previously engaged in or were currently involved in supporting their child's English language learning at home; and
iii. They demonstrated sufficient English language proficiency to participate meaningfully in qualitative data collection activities such as focus group discussions.

This sampling approach allowed for the selection of information-rich participants capable of providing in-depth insights into the strategies, experiences, and perceptions central to the study [25]. Based on the sampling approach, four schools around the Klang Valley agreed to participate, covering two urban and two semi-urban areas. Each geographical group included 10 participants, totaling approximately 20 participants (**Table 1**).

2.3. Research Instrument

The interview guide, summarized in **Table 2** below, consisted of five questions that were designed to answer the four research questions in this study. The first two interview questions were solely on the parents and the child's demographic, education and frequency of partnership between child and parent in teaching and learning of English. Question 3 was designed to capture strategies and resources parents used to support home-based English language learning whereas Question 4 probed further on technology-enhanced learning tools. Question 5 was designed to solely focus on the challenges parents faced in supporting English language acquisition at home and how they addressed the issues.

Table 2. Description for each question in the interview guide.

Question	Description
Question 1	Parents' and child's demographic
Question 2	Frequency of partnership between child and parent in teaching and learning of English
Question 3	Strategies and resources used to support home-based English language learning
Question 4	Perceptions on technology-enhanced learning tools
Question 5	Challenges faced in supporting English language acquisition and suggested solutions

2.4. Data Collection and Analysis

For this study, data were gathered through in-depth interviews with parents, a method considered particularly effective for capturing detailed and nuanced insights into their experiences and viewpoints [26]. Interviews were arranged at times and places convenient to participants to ensure maximum participation. Each focus group lasted around 30 minutes and was audio-recorded after participants' informed consent.

Once the verbatim transcripts were finalized, participants also got an opportunity to glance at their transcripts in order to ensure that their ideas had been accurately represented. This exercise, generally referred to as "member-checking" [27], not only confirmed participants' feedback but also helped in making the data more credible in terms of strength [28].

According to Braun and Clarke's [29] thematic analysis guideline, the results were analyzed using the inductive and deductive techniques (**Figure 2**). The methodology provides an organized method of interpreting qualitative data that is simpler to find recurring themes and patterns that reflect participants' experiences [30]. In accordance with Braun and Clarke's recommendation, both inductive and deductive strategies facilitated a stronger interpretation of the data [31].

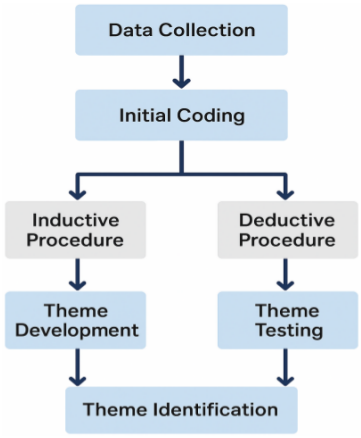

Figure 2. Process of data analysis using thematic analysis through inductive and deductive techniques.

The research was primarily based on an inductive strategy, continuously and closely reading the transcripts so that naturally emerging themes could be identified from the participants' accounts. A deductive strategy, however, based on the study aims and question design, was used to help explain and build on the interpretation. This mix was particularly important at the coding stage when overall themes and sub-themes were first established.

From here, the team built an elaborate thematic chart, listing themes, sub-themes, and units of meaning for them. There were some revisions to the chart. To facilitate the reinforcement of reliability, each researcher analyzed data independently initially. Then interpretations were cross-matched, debated, and refined to prepare a finalized thematic chart draft. This collective effort recognizes [32] idea of "investigator triangulation," which lends general credibility to the analysis as well as the findings.

2.5. Reliability and Validity of Qualitative Data

Accuracy, completeness, and correspondence between data collected and those that occurred in the study setting are critical concerns in qualitative research [33]. With this in mind, making the current research more reliable involved adhering to a systematic, step-by-step, and traceable data analysis approach [34]. Reliability was further strengthened through accurate transcription of interviews, consistency checks in coding, and member-checking for verification of verbatim transcripts.

Validity, which is one of the qualities of qualitative research, is founded on trustworthiness, authenticity, and credibility [35]. In this research, validity was attained through confirmation that the selected sample accurately fulfilled the research purposes and was provided through continual feedback throughout the process. Members were requested to verify their transcripts following each interview through member-checking. This process provided the parents with the chance to clarify their intended meanings, locate and correct errors, and contribute further if needed. Member-checking has been identified by Creswell [36] and Merriam [37] as a critical method to ensure validity, and credibility, of qualitative results.

3. Findings and Discussion

The analysis of focus group discussions generated five overarching themes that illuminate the barriers and coping strategies of Malaysian preschool parents engaged in home-based English language teaching as shown in **Figure 3** below.

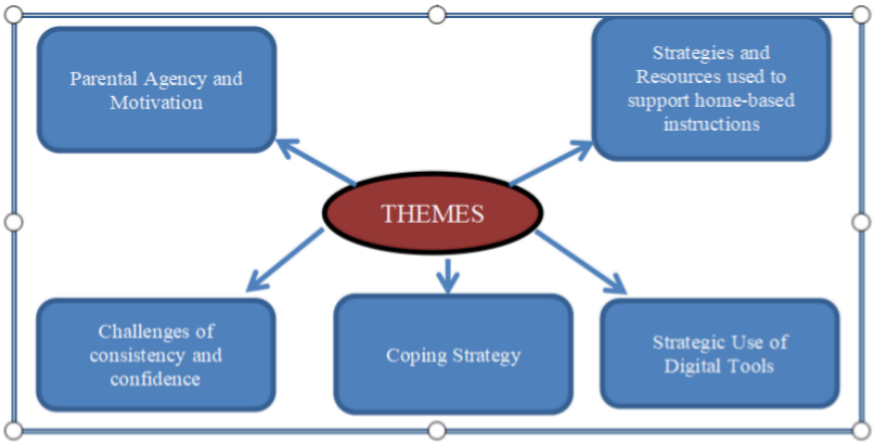

Figure 3. Illustration of themes developed.

Theme 1: Parental Agency and Motivation

Parents consistently expressed a strong sense of responsibility for ensuring their children's English proficiency, describing it as an investment in their children's futures.

One participant remarked:

"English is not just about passing exams anymore. I see it as a passport for my child to access better opportunities, both here in Malaysia and abroad." (Parent, Semi-urban, 9)

This effective parental involvement in scaffolding aligns with the theoretical base of this study. Findings reiterate Vygotsky's [6] theory of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), where children's learning is scaffolded

through interaction with more knowledgeable peers or adults, supported by appropriate tools.

Findings also indicate that English was framed not merely as an academic subject, but as a life skill necessary for success in higher education and the global workforce. Hence, they see themselves playing a greater role.

> *" I regard myself co-educator in language learning and I particularly realized this in the aftermath of the pandemic" (Parent, Urban, 15)*
>
> *" I want my child to be good at English from young itself because all materials which are good are in English. If he doesn't know English, how to become smart?" (Parent, Urban, 19)*

As the foundation of the findings of this study lies in parental agency, parents in this study consistently expressed the belief that English proficiency functions as a gateway to both academic achievement and future employability in a globalized economy, echoing national policy emphasis on English as a tool for competitiveness [38,39]. Similar findings have been reported in a similar developing country, Hong Kong [40], where parents' aspirations for their children's bilingual competency strongly shape home learning practices.

In this study, this agency was evident in parents' proactive search for resources and strategies; however, it was not without constraints.

Theme 2: Strategies and Resources Used to Support Home-Based English Language Learning

Based on findings, parents used a blend of traditional, digital, and interactive strategies to help preschoolers acquire English. **Table 3** illustrates further details on the strategies and resources used.

Table 3. Strategies and resources used by parents.

Strategy	Percentage (%)/ Parents [n]	Common Resources/Tools	Example in Practice
Storytelling & Reading Aloud	90/18	Picture books, storybooks, e-books, puppets	Parent reads The Very Hungry Caterpillar and points to each fruit as they say the word.
Songs, Rhymes, and Chants	80/16	Nursery rhymes, YouTube songs, CDs, apps like Spotify Kids	Singing "Twinkle Twinkle Little Star" while doing hand motions.
Daily Conversations in English	75/15	Everyday settings (mealtime, playtime, shopping)	Saying: "Let's wash hands," or "What do you want to eat?" during daily activities.
Repetition and Routines	75/15	Repeated phrases, flashcards, routine-based vocabulary	Saying "Good morning" and "Good night" daily in English.
Play-based Learning	70/14	Card-based or Digital Flashcards, puzzles, role-play costumes, toys	Playing "shopkeeper and customer" in English.
Digital Learning Tools	70/14	Apps (ABCmouse, Lingokids, Duolingo Kids), educational cartoons	Using an app to match letters with words (e.g., A–Apple).
Art and Crafts Activities	65/13	Crayons, coloring books, stickers	Parent asks: "Can you color the red apple?"
Peer Interaction	50/10	Playgroups, preschool settings, community activities	Play-dates where children communicate in English.

Based on findings, the highest strategy used was storytelling and reading aloud (90%) and parents agreed that this strategy exposed children to new vocabulary, sentence structures, and sounds in a natural and enjoyable way. In addition, songs and rhymes were also emphasized (80%) and most parents commended this strategy makes learning language memorable through rhythm and repetition, which supports pronunciation.

Both daily conversations (70%) and repetition and routines (70%) were acknowledged as well. Parents believe that this strategy helped children retain language by linking words to daily habits and integrating English into real-life contexts, helping children understand functional language.

Both play-based learning and direct digital learning tools were placed at the fourth tier. Although parents generally agreed that these strategies ensure that their children practise English in a relaxed, enjoyable environment, thus reducing anxiety and building confidence, many had concerns, especially when they were busy and were not able to monitor or scaffold directly with technology use at home.

"Although I agree with technology assisted learning, it is okay when I am with the child, but the minute I get busy I cant monitor much and am worried if my 6 year old uses for too long or for non educational videos" (Parent, Urban, 16)

" I want my child to be smart in English and I know many technology and app can be used to teach with better outcomes. But I sometimes think my child just likes technology and not other methods and when I am not monitoring they watch too much cartoons for long hours." (Parent, Semi-urban, 8)

Theme 3: Strategic Use of Digital Tools

A notable pattern observed was parents' reliance on digital platforms such as e-flashcard, e-board games, YouTube Kids, ABCmouse, Duolingo, Lingokids, IXL Learning, and interactive e-books. These tools were often perceived as more engaging for young children than traditional methods. Parents praised features such as animation, gamification, and interactivity. **Table 4** summarizes the most frequently used digital tools and parents' perceptions of their effectiveness.

Table 4. Commonly Used Digital Tools and Perceived Effectiveness.

Digital Tool	Frequency of Mention	Reported Benefits	Reported Challenges
YouTube Kids	High	Visual engagement, easy access, wide content	Screen time concerns, ads interruptions
Duolingo (Kids)	Moderate	Gamified, child-friendly interface	Limited local/cultural context
Lingokids	Moderate	Interactive, structured lessons	Subscription costs
Interactive E-books	High	Reading practice, audio support for pronunciation	Limited offline access
Digital Flash Cards	High	Excitement to learn	Refusal to use actual cards, screen time worry
ABCmouse	Moderate	Gamified, child-friendly interface	Subscription costs; Limited local/cultural context, screen time concern
IXL Learning	Moderate	Interesting, gamification, visual engagement	Subscription costs; Limited local/cultural context, less interested in physical learning

Parents frequently highlighted how children were more responsive when English was presented through animated stories and songs. As one mother explained:

"When my son listens to songs on YouTube or repeats after the cartoon characters, he picks up words faster than when I read from a book." (Parent, Semi-urban, 3)

Interestingly, although parents from both urban and semi-urban settings demonstrated strong motivation to support their children's English language learning, notable differences emerged in how this support was enacted. Parents from the city areas generally had greater access to digital assets and had a high level of confidence in selecting technology-integrated learning platforms. Parents also indicated their frequency of having weekly discussions on the digital technologies they use with their teachers.

"I usually talk to teachers about the apps I use and get further guidance if it tallies with the subject they learn." (Parent, Urban, 20)

These parents were more likely to combine digital platforms with guided interaction, reflecting a more intentional scaffolding approach aligned with their children's learning needs, aligning with the theory of MKO [6].

On the other hand, parents from semi-urban areas depended more on traditional methods of storytelling, repetition and daily conversational routines. Although effective for sustained English exposure, in the early years, parents admitted concerns over pedagogical accuracy and progression. Their access to curated digital resources was restricted mainly due to financial costs and limited access.

"I am sometimes concerned also as I don't have the means to but technology related learning apps. I just teach based on what I know. But sometimes when I go to the malls and see other kids using Tablets to learn,

I feel a little down because technology can provide so much more and so much newer." (Parent, Semi-urban, 8)

However, both urban and semi-urban (70%) parents have conveyed concerns related to digital use, citing cost as one of the highest issue, followed by screen time, limited local culture. and children's refusal to use physical materials post using digital platforms.

Based on the findings in Theme 2 and Theme 3 above, it is evident that the increasing reliance on digital platforms positions technology as the default mediator of language learning at home. While Malaysian parents report digital tools as engaging and convenient, concerns about screen dependency and cultural misalignment parallel findings from Australia [11]. which noted that parents valued digital literacy tools but struggled to balance screen time with traditional literacy practices.

In addition to concerns raised regarding screen dependency, the absence of culturally contextualized materials was found to be troubling to many parents, echoing [41] caution about over-reliance on culturally displaced generic digital platforms.

Findings also related matters on cost and sustainability which parallels [42] study in China, which reported that digital learning provided continuity at home but widened equity gaps between digitally fluent and less resourced families.

Theme 4: Challenges of Consistency and Confidence

Despite their motivation, parents reported difficulties in sustaining consistent teaching practices, often citing work schedules, fatigue, and limited proficiency in English. A large number of parents (75%) expressed anxiety about their own linguistic limitations, fearing they might model incorrect grammar or pronunciation.

"Sometimes I am not sure about my own English, so I just let the app teach her. I worry that I might confuse her if I say something wrong." (Parent, Urban, 11)

Others reported lack of time due to work commitments (50%), wear and tear of digital infrastructure (40%), financial sustainability (55%) and children's attention span (40%). **Figure 4** below illustrates the most frequently cited barriers to effective home-based English teaching.

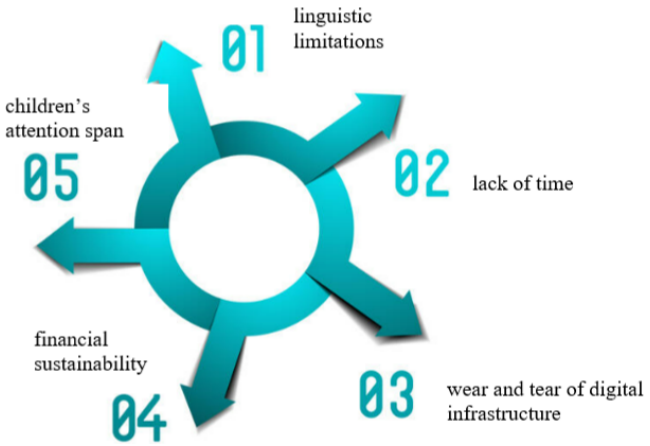

Figure 4. Reported Barriers in Home-Based English Language Teaching.

Parental anxieties about being English competent also highlight the necessity of capacity development targeted specifically for them. The highest obstacle (75%) indicated by **Figure 2** is in accord with worldwide research demonstrating that parents' language anxieties can prevent them from participating in children's second language acquisition [20]. This is also in agreement with Abdullah Kamal et al. [22] and Singh and Nagarajah [12] from Malaysia, who found bilingual development in the family to be limited by parents' self-doubt of their own English use. Internationally, Jiang and Lau [21] found converging trends in Hong Kong and Mainland China, where parents

had high aspirations but were limited by language differences and low pedagogic ability. In addition, meta-analysis confirms that parental involvement is generally positive, but whether it is constructive or not, depends on the confidence and self-efficacy of parents to teach [19].

Besides enhancing linguistic anxieties, the inconsistency of parental involvement was further enhanced by outside family stress factors such as work-life balance and socio-economic stress. As observed by Desforges and Abouchaar [43] the escalation of family stress and time poverty enhances parents' constraints in maintaining home learning routines. In the majority of cases, the use of digital resources or learning apps by parents as a compensatory strategy also reflected an exhibition of differential access to good internet and digital resources [3]. Struggling with holding children's attention and balancing multiple obligations typically led to uneven or fragmented learning outcomes that defied the impact of parental intervention over time [44,45].

Thus, structured interventions such as workshops, school-based training and online literacy modules can strengthen parents' confidence to overcome their vulnerabilities while simultaneously affirming home–school partnerships [3, 18]. Moreover, providing community-based support groups along with bilingual resources can also further affirm parental confidence and render home engagement more frequent [46]. Parent education through culturally and linguistically responsive programs can therefore make early English language development more inclusive as a basis.

Theme 5: Coping Strategies

Parents described two main coping strategies to mitigate challenges. Collaboration with school teachers and forming informal parent networks were common answers across all interviews. For example, several parents reported exchanging recommended apps and resources via WhatsApp groups.

> *"We have a parent group where we share links to English stories and worksheets. It helps because not all of us know which resources are good." (Parent, Urban, 20)*
>
> *"The parent group which was originally created by school is where parents get to share links to English apps and this ensures it is safe." (Parent, Semi-urban, 5)*

Some parents also employed blended approaches, combining digital resources with traditional activities like storytelling, picture books, and role-playing with the assistance of their child's teachers.

> *"I try to stay connected with my child's teacher so that I can get additional printed materials to go along with the apps I use." (Parent, Semi-urban, 2)*

The majority however reported seeking the partnership of school and teachers in selecting materials to teach at home, making them feel more confident of the materials and the correct approach to use.

> *"For me, every Friday, I show the teacher what I plan to do when I pick my child from school. And the teacher also gives me additional materials or strategies to teach at home. This way, I know I can never be wrong." (Parent, Urban, 17)*
>
> *"For my child', I have asked the school teacher personally to provide me weekly exercises to do so that I can match with the digital apps I use." (Parent, Urban, 20)*

The coping strategies identified in this study that include peer networking, blended learning and informal resource sharing between teachers and parents demonstrate parents' resilience and adaptability. These findings mirror Singh and Nagarajah's [12] Malaysian study, which highlighted that parents rely on informal peer groups, school and online communities to sustain language support post-pandemic. Similarly, Tamis-LeMonda et al. [20] in the U.S. found that collaborative practices between parents and among school community predicted children's later academic success. Thus, formalizing such grassroots strategies into structured community programmes could mitigate parental isolation, enhance collective knowledge, and create sustainable ecosystems of support.

On the whole, the above findings and discussion align with both local and global research in underlining that parental involvement in early language education is a powerful yet fragile resource, one that thrives when supported

by systemic investment in parent training, culturally sensitive digital resources, and collaborative community networks. The findings provide clear empirical support for Vygotsky's concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which conceptualises learning as occurring in the space between what children can achieve independently and what they can accomplish with guided support. Parents' use of strategies such as guided storytelling, repetition within daily routines, and assisted engagement with digital tools reflects deliberate attempts to scaffold children's English language learning within this developmental zone. For instance, parents frequently described modelling pronunciation, prompting verbal responses, and gradually reducing assistance as children became more confident, an instructional pattern widely recognised as effective scaffolding within the ZPD [4,47].

However, the effectiveness of parental scaffolding varied across participants. Parents who actively monitored their children's task complexity with the help of teachers demonstrated better sensitivity to their children's ZPD [3]. In contrast, parents who relied primarily on digital applications and self-designed materials without mediation often relinquished the scaffolding role. Such misalignment commands further study to be taken on to better understand the level of learning gains, as children benefit most when adult guidance is calibrated to their current level of competence [6,11]. These findings suggest that while parents often engage intuitively in ZPD-related practices, their capacity to apply them consistently is shaped by pedagogical confidence, access to guidance, and contextual support.

4. Conclusion

This study illuminates the redefined role of Malaysian parents as successful co-educators in preschool children's acquisition of English. Despite high motivation and clear conception of English as a vital life skill, parents' practices were often undermined by limited linguistic self-confidence, time limitations, and unequal access to high quality digital resources. The reports point to the paradox that parents' aspirations to promote bilingual capability are strong, although their capacity to sustain consistent home practice is patchy. Web-based materials have become both an empowerment factor and a source of frustration, being stimulating content but simultaneously a factor in agitating about screen addiction, cultural dissonance, and expense.

Those coping strategies identified in this study, such as peer collaboration, teacher guidance, and integration of conventional and modern means, attest to parents' adaptability and resilience. In the absence of systematic institutional support, however, these initiatives can continue to be disorganized. This study thus requires comprehensive parent empowerment initiatives including institution-arranged workshops, bilingual learning kits, and computer literacy training to bridge gaps in knowledge, self-efficacy, and access.

Theoretically, findings are consistent with Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, showing that parents can function as the More Knowledgeable Other (MKO) when adequately supported by education systems. Notably, parents who collaborated closely with teachers or peer networks were more likely to align home activities with their child's current instructional level. These parents described seeking confirmation from teachers before introducing new materials, thereby ensuring that home-based learning remained within the child's ZPD. In contrast, parents with limited guidance often relied on trial-and-error approaches, which occasionally resulted in frustration or disengagement when tasks exceeded the child's developmental capacity. Practically, they reinforce the importance of strengthening home–school partnership and creating equitable, culturally sensitive resources for sustaining parents' engagement in their children's learning process of English. This pattern suggests that while Malaysian parents possess strong motivational agency, their ability to identify and operationalise their child's ZPD is largely implicit rather than systematic. The findings highlight a critical need for parent-focused guidance that translates ZPD principles into practical strategies, enabling parents to move from intuitive scaffolding toward more intentional, developmentally responsive home teaching practices.

5. Significance of the Study

This study holds theoretical and practical significance in the field of early childhood language education. Theoretically, it contributes to the body of knowledge on parental involvement and home literacy practices within second language acquisition frameworks. It affirms and extends socio-cultural theories of learning, particularly Vygotsky's (1978) concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), by highlighting how parental scaffolding can influence language development when mediated through appropriate tools and social interaction. Practically, the study of-

fers actionable implications for educators, curriculum developers, and policymakers. By identifying the specific challenges Malaysian parents face and the strategies they find effective, the findings can inform the development of targeted parent training programs, culturally responsive learning resources, and school-home collaboration models. Ultimately, the study reinforces the importance of equipping parents with the tools and confidence to actively support English language learning at home, thereby enhancing children's school readiness, academic performance, and long-term language competence.

Author Contributions

G.K.S.S. is the main author of this study and has contributed rigorous analysing, curation and writing. The following are the author's and co-authors' contributions in specific: Conceptualization, G.K.S.S.; methodology, G.K.S.S.; formal analysis, W.C.D. and V.J.; resources, G.K.S.S.; data curation, G.K.S.S., and M.A.M.H.; writing first draft, G.K.S.S., V.J. and W.C.D.; writing final version, G.K.S.S.; writing for publication, G.K.S.S., W.C.D. and M.A.M.H.; corresponding, G.K.S.S.; first, second and third revisions, F.N.Y.; final corrections for publication, G.K.S.S., W.C.D. and F.N.Y.; resourcing of additional publication funds, F.N.Y. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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Institutional Review Board Statement

Ethical review and approval were waived for this study because the research forms part of an ongoing longitudinal study that had already obtained full ethical clearance from the relevant institutional review board at the initial stage. As the present study involved minimal risk to participants, focused solely on collecting non-sensitive interview data, and did not introduce any new procedures or interventions beyond what was approved in the initial protocol, additional ethical review was deemed unnecessary. Strict confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout the research process in accordance with the ethical guidelines established at the start of the longitudinal project.

Informed Consent Statement

All consent forms were duly obtained and are securely maintained in the study records. Written informed consent was also obtained from the parents for the publication of this paper.

Data Availability Statement

All data are maintained in strict confidence and are the exclusive property of the researcher and the respective parents, with no unauthorized access or dissemination permitted.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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