

**THE RELATIONSHIP OF PARENTAL BELIEFS
AND PRESCHOOLERS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS
HOME-BASED ENGLISH LANGUAGE
LEARNING IN CHINA**

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AND PRESCHOOLERS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS
HOME-BASED ENGLISH LANGUAGE
LEARNING IN CHINA**

by

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**HUBUNGAN ANTARA KEPERCAYAAN IBU BAPA DAN SIKAP
KANAK-KANAK PRASEKOLAH
TERHADAP PEMBELAJARAN BAHASA INGGERIS BERSIFAT HOME-
BASED DI CHINA**

ABSTRAK

Dalam beberapa tahun kebelakangan ini, terdapat peningkatan minat terhadap pembelajaran Bahasa Inggeris di China. Ibu bapa di China menghantar anak-anak prasekolah mereka ke institusi bahasa lebih awal untuk mempelajari Bahasa Inggeris. Walau bagaimanapun, dengan perubahan dasar terkini di China yang menghadkan pengajaran Bahasa Inggeris di luar rumah untuk kanak-kanak prasekolah, masih belum jelas bagaimana ibu bapa di China akan melengkapinya pembelajaran Bahasa Inggeris anak-anak mereka di rumah. Menggunakan Model Literasi Rumah, kajian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji pengaruh kepercayaan ibu bapa terhadap sikap pembelajaran Bahasa Inggeris kanak-kanak prasekolah melalui pelbagai persekitaran pembelajaran di rumah. Reka bentuk kaedah campuran digunakan, dengan 405 ibu bapa kanak-kanak prasekolah berusia 3 hingga 6 tahun menyelesaikan soal selidik dalam talian, diikuti dengan temubual bersama lapan kanak-kanak prasekolah. Fasa kuantitatif mendapati bahawa kepercayaan ibu bapa memberi pengaruh yang signifikan terhadap pembelajaran Bahasa Inggeris formal dan tidak formal, serta ketersediaan sumber pembelajaran Bahasa Inggeris. Selain itu, persekitaran literasi rumah memberi impak positif terhadap sikap kognitif, afektif, dan tingkah laku kanak-kanak terhadap Bahasa Inggeris. Dalam fasa kualitatif, penemuan menunjukkan bahawa kanak-kanak prasekolah lebih gemar kaedah pembelajaran interaktif dan menarik seperti bermain peranan dan muzik, yang menghasilkan tindak

balas emosi yang positif. Sebaliknya, aktiviti yang kaku dan berulang menyebabkan rasa kecewa dan sikap negatif. Kajian ini menyimpulkan dengan cadangan untuk ibu bapa dan pembuat dasar bagi meningkatkan persekitaran pembelajaran Bahasa Inggeris di rumah dan menyokong kanak-kanak prasekolah dalam mempelajari Bahasa Inggeris dengan lebih baik.

**THE RELATIONSHIP OF
PARENTAL BELIEFS AND PRESCHOOLERS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS
HOME-BASED ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING IN CHINA**

ABSTRACT

In recent years, there has been a growing enthusiasm for English learning in China. Chinese parents are sending their preschool-aged children to language institutions early to learn English. However, with the recent policy changes in China restricting English language instruction from being held outside of the home for preschoolers, it remains to be seen how eager Chinese parents supplement their preschool children's English learning at home. Using the Home Literacy Model, this study aims to examine the influence of parental beliefs on preschoolers' English learning attitudes through various home learning environments. A mixed-method design was employed, with 405 parents of preschoolers aged 3 to 6 completing an online questionnaire, followed by interviews with eight preschool-aged children. The quantitative phase found that parental beliefs significantly influenced both formal and informal English learning, as well as the availability of English learning resources. Additionally, the home literacy environment positively impacted preschoolers' cognitive, affective, and behavioral attitudes towards English. In the qualitative phase, the findings highlighted that preschoolers preferred interactive and engaging methods such as role-play and music, which elicited positive emotional responses. Conversely, rigid, repetitive activities led to frustration and negative attitudes. The study concludes with recommendations for parents and policymakers

to enhance home-based English learning environments and better support preschool-aged children in learning English.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Over the past decades, English has become increasingly popular and influential in entrance exams worldwide (Butler, 2014; Garcia, 2015). As a preferred foreign language in China, English has been a focus of education policy, with the goal of popularising English courses in primary grades in the last two decades (Butler, 2015a). In major cities like Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou, citizens find it necessary to learn a foreign language to participate in international exchanges (Lai et al., 2022). Consequently, English training agencies have proliferated, promoting the idea of “helping your children win at the starting line” (Hu, 2021). As a result, more Chinese parents are seeking early learning opportunities for their preschool-aged children.

To this end, Chinese parents employ various strategies, including bilingual classes, English immersion settings, and digital-based learning tools, to introduce their children to English before formal schooling begins (Gong, 2021; Goriot et al., 2018; Li, 2018; Li, 2021). However, research indicates that preschoolers’ motivation declines and anxiety increases after a certain period of learning English (Butler, 2017; Hu & Mcgeown, 2020). To address concerns about academic pressure, experts in China suggest reducing the incorporation of English into core subjects and instead, treating it as a specialized subject or personal interest (Zhang, 2021). However, private English lessons are costly, making English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education an elitist privilege (Butler, 2015a; Chen et al., 2022). As a result, China

has implemented a new policy to address the concerns about inappropriate academic rigor for preschoolers and the growing inequality in access to EFL education.

In 2021, the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China implemented a new policy prohibiting kindergartens and out-of-school language instructional classes from teaching elementary school-level content to preschoolers (MoE of China, 2021). Consequently, many parents have turned to home learning alternatives to circumvent these restrictions. However, since most parents in China lack professional training in English teaching (Butler & Le, 2018), it remains uncertain what types of home English literacy environments are prevalent at home at this stage.

Considering the strong interest of many Chinese parents in early English education for their preschool-aged children, it is imperative for preschoolers to cultivate a positive attitude towards learning English. This is essential to ensure their effective adaptation to the target language in daily life (Choi et al., 2020a; Ma, 2020) and for long-term English language development (Huang, 2015; Lai et al., 2022). According to Baker (1992), language learning attitude encompasses learners' perseverance in language acquisition, reflecting their emotional engagement.

Gardner (1985a) emphasizes that preschoolers' attitudes towards learning a foreign language play a critical role in determining their successful language acquisition. Language learning attitude represents a state of readiness, involving preschoolers' behavioral and internal responses to foreign language learning and its proof environment (Asmali, 2017). It includes their positive or negative inclinations towards EFL (Li & Zou, 2009; Qu, 2014). According to Heng and Karpudewan (2015), attitudes encompass three essential dimensions: affective, cognitive, and behavioral. These dimensions shape one's sentiments and approach towards learning.

Therefore, it is crucial for educators to assess preschoolers' comprehensive attitudes towards English learning.

According to Ajzen (2005), attitude is not fixed and can change. This suggests that preschoolers' attitudes can be influenced by their learning activities (Choi et al., 2022b; Xia, 2023) and environment (Lai et al., 2022). In China, there are concerns about the negative impact of early English instruction on preschoolers' attitudes, especially regarding certain home literacy environments (HLE) (Butler, 2015a). However, limited research exists on how different types of HLE influence young children's attitudes towards learning English (Forey et al., 2016).

Factors such as parental beliefs (PB) have been reported to influence the home literacy environments, which, in turn affects preschoolers' attitudes towards English learning (Choi et al., 2020b; Xia, 2023). Given the recent policy changes and the limitations restricting institutionalised English language teaching, this study aims to capture the home English literacy environment of young children to better support parents in their educational efforts. Specifically, this study investigates how Chinese PB influences preschoolers' attitudes towards English learning through the mediation of HLE in the light of the new policy.

1.2 Background of the Study

English language learning has long been a priority for Chinese parents, who view it as a vital investment in their children's future success (Dulay & Burt, 2010; Gong, 2021; Goriot et al., 2018; Letts, 2011; Li, 2018; Li, 2021). This belief has persisted for decades (Gu, 2015; Zhang, 2003), with parents increasingly seeking to introduce English education at an early age. A survey conducted by the British Council found that 97% of Chinese parents consider English essential for their

children's future success (British Council, 2013). Additionally, Chinese students represent the largest group of international students in English-speaking countries like the United States, Canada, and Australia (Institute of International Education, 2021), further highlighting the importance of English in China's educational landscape.

The emphasis on English education in China has led to substantial investments from the government, educators, and families across all levels of schooling. In 2001, the Ministry of Education made English a compulsory subject for elementary school students starting from Grade 3, reducing the hours allocated for Chinese lessons and adding English instruction (MoE of China, 2001). While public schools are restricted from teaching English before Grade 3, private institutions have progressively introduced English to preschool-aged children.

This drive for early English education is not a recent development. As far back as 2003, Zhang reported that 90% of Chinese parents wanted their children to learn English early, with many enrolling preschoolers in English classes. This trend has resulted in a flourishing market of private English language schools and tutoring services across China. Parents are willing to invest substantial resources in providing their preschool-aged children with English education (Xinhua News, 2018). According to Sun et al. (2016), approximately 210 million young EFL learners are currently enrolled in English classes at over 50,000 private institutes throughout mainland China. Research by Yang (2017) shows that 85% of kindergartens in Xi'an have introduced English learning activities, and a study in Shanghai indicated that 94% of preschoolers attended private English lessons outside school, with English comprising 70% of those classes (Hu, 2021).

1.2.1 Government Policies and Regulations on English Language Learning

In recent years, however, the Chinese government has implemented significant policy changes that restrict English language learning for preschool-aged children. The Ministry of Education (MoE) issued regulations prohibiting preschoolers from engaging in subject-based education, including English, before they reach primary school. This policy, outlined in the circular “Further Reducing the Burden of Homework and off-campus Instruction for Students in Compulsory Education” (MoE of China, 2021), aims to reduce academic pressure on young children and ensure their well-being by limiting extracurricular academic activities. As a direct consequence of these regulations, 125 private language institutions in the researcher’s hometown, Zhengzhou, were shut down (Sina Survey, 2022).

This policy shift has had a profound impact on parents' approach to their children's English education. With institutionalized language instruction now restricted, many parents have turned to home-based learning as a viable alternative. Home learning activities offer flexibility and privacy, allowing parents to continue their children’s English education without violating government regulations. Despite these restrictions, the demand for English education remains high, with parents continuing to seek out ways to supplement their children’s learning in the home environment.

1.2.2 Impact on Parents and Preschool Children

The new policy has created both opportunities and challenges for parents and preschool-aged children. On one hand, the shift to home-based learning allows for more control over the content and structure of learning activities, potentially

fostering a more personalized and flexible educational experience. On the other hand, the lack of formal guidance and resources may lead to inconsistencies in the quality of education that children receive at home. This shift places greater responsibility on parents to design effective learning environments and manage their children's educational progress.

Given the significant role parents play in shaping the home learning environment, their beliefs and attitudes about education are likely to influence how English is taught at home. Parental involvement, including the strategies and resources they use to support their children's learning, directly impacts children's attitudes towards English language learning and their overall acquisition of the language.

This study aims to explore how Chinese parents, in response to the recent policy changes, navigate home-based English learning for preschoolers and how parental beliefs influence the design of these home learning environments, ultimately impacting children's attitudes toward English language learning.

1.3 Statement of the Problems

In China, the importance of early childhood English learning has become increasingly emphasized due to the belief that proficiency in English is a gateway to future academic and professional success (Gu, 2015; Li, 2018). The significance of early English education is evident in the widespread preference among Chinese parents to introduce their children to English at an early age. This belief is reflected in both the rapid expansion of private language institutions and the high demand for English instruction among preschool children (Xinhua News, 2018). According to the British Council (2013), 97% of Chinese parents regard English as essential for

their children's future success, with a significant portion of these parents enrolling their children in English programs before the child reaches primary school age. The home literacy environment (HLE) plays a vital role in supporting this early language learning, and it is shaped primarily by the parental beliefs that drive educational decisions in the household.

While much has been discussed regarding the importance of parental beliefs in general education, the influence of parental beliefs (PB) on the home literacy environment (HLE), particularly in the context of English language learning for preschool-aged children, has not been sufficiently explored in the Chinese context. The existing literature acknowledges that parental beliefs about education—whether they regard the importance of early learning or how a child should engage with educational content—are foundational to shaping the learning environment at home (Sénéchal & LeFevre, 2002). In China, where English education is considered a cornerstone for future academic achievement, these beliefs often lead parents to invest significant resources to create a conducive learning environment for their children. Parental decisions about the nature of the home learning environment—whether it includes formal lessons, informal exposure, or the provision of learning materials—are directly influenced by their beliefs about the value of early English education (Li, 2018).

However, there is a notable gap in understanding how these parental beliefs specifically shape the home literacy environment in the case of preschool children. While parental involvement in education is well-documented, the way in which parental beliefs translate into concrete actions—such as the allocation of resources for English learning or the choice of learning strategies—has not been fully investigated in the context of preschool-aged children. Previous studies have

primarily focused on older students or broader educational systems, rather than the nuanced relationship between parental attitudes and the learning environment at this critical stage (Lai et al., 2022). This lack of focus on preschoolers, who are at a formative stage of language acquisition, leaves a gap in understanding how early English language exposure within the home affects their attitudes and subsequent language learning outcomes.

The home literacy environment (HLE) is a crucial factor in shaping children's attitudes towards learning a second language. As children are exposed to English in their daily lives, the resources available in the home—such as English-language books, media, and parental interaction—significantly influence their cognitive, affective, and behavioral responses to learning English (Sénéchal, 2006). Parental beliefs, therefore, are pivotal in determining the resources parents provide and the type of learning interactions they engage in with their children. Research has shown that the more supportive and resource-rich the home learning environment, the more likely preschoolers are to develop positive attitudes toward learning English, which in turn affects their language acquisition and academic success (Lai et al., 2022). However, despite the growing interest in home-based language learning, there is limited research that critically examines the relationship between parental beliefs, the structure of the home literacy environment, and children's attitudes in the specific context of preschool English learning in China.

In China, where there has been a significant investment in private English education for preschoolers, the relationship between parental beliefs, home literacy environment, and preschoolers' attitudes towards English learning has become even more complex. The government's policy prohibiting institutionalized English learning for children under the age of 6 (MoE of China, 2021) has raised concerns

about how parents, who have long valued early English education, will adjust their strategies in response to these restrictions. This policy shift has created a unique situation, where the role of the home literacy environment has become even more crucial. With institutionalized English instruction now restricted, many parents are increasingly turning to home-based learning to fill the void, but the structure and effectiveness of these home learning environments are largely unexplored. How parents' beliefs about the importance of English learning influence their decisions to create or modify home literacy environments in response to policy changes remains a critical gap in the literature.

The attitudes of preschool children towards English learning are another area that requires deeper exploration. Research shows that children's attitudes—whether they enjoy learning English, feel confident in using the language, or are motivated to engage with it—are significant predictors of language learning success (Lai et al., 2022). However, the extent to which these attitudes are shaped by the home literacy environment and the parental beliefs that inform it is not well understood, particularly in China's current educational context. While parental involvement has been shown to positively influence children's language outcomes, how the home literacy environment, shaped by parental beliefs, affects preschoolers' attitudes toward learning English in the face of government regulations is still an open question. This gap is crucial because understanding how home-based learning environments impact preschoolers' attitudes can offer valuable insights into how best to support early language acquisition in the absence of institutionalized education.

In summary, there is a critical need to investigate how parental beliefs, the home literacy environment, and preschoolers' attitudes towards English learning are interconnected, particularly in the context of China's recent policy shifts regarding

institutionalized English education. By addressing this gap, this study will contribute to a better understanding of how parental beliefs shape the home literacy environment and ultimately influence preschoolers' attitudes towards English language learning. The findings will offer valuable insights for parents, educators, and policymakers on how to effectively support English language learning in the home context, especially in light of recent regulatory changes.

1.4 Research Objectives

1. To investigate the relationship between parental beliefs and home literacy environment (formal English learning, informal English learning and English learning resource).
2. To explore the relationship between home literacy environment (formal English learning, informal English learning and English learning resource) and preschoolers' English learning attitudes (affective, cognitive, behavioral).
3. To examine whether home literacy environment (formal English learning, informal English learning and English learning resource) mediates the relationship between parental beliefs and preschoolers' English learning attitude (affective, cognitive and behavioral).
4. To analyse the attitudes of preschoolers towards specific home literacy environment.

1.5 Research Questions

Based on the objectives mentioned earlier, this study attempts to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: What is the relationship between parental beliefs about English language learning and the home literacy environment, including formal and informal English learning practices and the availability of English learning resources?

RQ2: What is the relationship between the home literacy environment—comprising formal and informal English learning practices and English learning resources—and preschoolers' attitudes toward English learning, specifically in affective, cognitive, and behavioral aspects?

RQ3: Does the home literacy environment mediate the relationship between parental beliefs and preschoolers' attitudes toward English learning, across affective, cognitive, and behavioral aspects?

RQ4: What are the attitudes of Chinese preschoolers towards different home literacy environment?

1.6 Research Hypothesis

In response to the research questions presented above, this study has put forward the following hypotheses (H).

H₁- H₃ pertain to RQ 1:

H₁: There is a positive relationship between parental beliefs and formal English learning.

H₂: There is a positive relationship between parental beliefs and informal English learning.

H₃: There is a positive relationship between parental beliefs and the English learning resources.

H₄ - H₁₂ pertain to RQ 2:

H₄: Formal English learning has a positive relationship on preschoolers' English learning affective attitudes.

H₅: Formal English learning has a positive relationship on preschoolers' English learning cognitive attitudes.

H₆: Formal English learning has a positive relationship on preschoolers' English learning behavioral attitudes.

H₇: Informal English learning has a positive relationship on preschoolers' English learning affective attitudes.

H₈: Informal English learning has a positive relationship preschoolers' English learning cognitive attitude.

H₉: Informal English learning has a positive relationship preschoolers' English learning behavioral attitude.

H₁₀: English learning resource has a positive relationship on preschoolers' English learning affective attitudes.

H₁₁: English learning resource has a positive relationship on preschoolers' English learning cognitive attitudes.

H₁₂: English learning resource has a positive relationship on preschoolers' English learning behavioral attitudes.

H₁₃ - H₂₁ pertain to RQ 3:

H₁₃: Formal English learning mediates the relationship between parental beliefs and preschoolers' English learning affective attitudes.

H₁₄: Formal English learning mediates the relationship between parental beliefs and preschoolers' English learning cognitive attitudes.

H₁₅: Formal English learning mediates the relationship between parental beliefs and preschoolers' English learning behavioral attitudes.

H₁₆: Informal English learning mediates the relationship between parental beliefs and preschoolers' English learning affective attitudes.

H₁₇: Informal English learning mediates the relationship between parental beliefs and preschoolers' English learning cognitive attitudes.

H₁₈: Informal English learning mediates the relationship between parental beliefs and preschoolers' English learning behavioral attitudes.

H₁₉: English learning resource mediates the relationship between parental beliefs and preschoolers' English learning affective attitudes.

H₂₀: English learning resource mediates the relationship between parental beliefs and preschoolers' English learning cognitive attitudes.

H₂₁: English learning resource mediates the relationship between parental beliefs and preschoolers' English learning behavioral attitudes.

1.7 Significance of the Study

This study holds significant value for both academic research and practical applications in early childhood education, particularly in the context of English language learning. By examining the relationship between parental beliefs, home literacy environments, and preschoolers' attitudes towards English learning, this study contributes to filling a critical gap in the literature on early language

acquisition in China. Existing research has largely focused on formal schooling contexts or older children, overlooking the formative years of preschoolers where language acquisition begins. This study, therefore, brings much-needed attention to the home literacy environment, a factor that plays a pivotal role in shaping young learners' experiences with English.

Firstly, by focusing on home-based English language learning, this study addresses a gap in the literature, which has primarily concentrated on school-based English learning. It provides valuable insights into the effects of home-based learning on preschoolers' attitudes and motivation towards language acquisition.

Secondly, the study explores how different types of HLE are influenced by PB about preschoolers' English language learning. The findings help educators and policymakers develop more effective strategies for supporting children's language development in home-based learning environments.

Thirdly, the study captures the perspectives of preschoolers themselves, which are often overlooked in favor of adult perspectives. Understanding preschoolers' experiences and attitudes about home-based English language learning informs the development of educational policies and programs tailored to their needs and preferences.

Fourthly, the findings inform the development of effective educational policies and programs that support home-based English language learning for preschoolers under China's new policy prohibiting institution-based learning. These results help policymakers and educators understand the factors that influencing preschool-age children's motivation and attitudes towards language learning and design interventions that address their unique needs.

Lastly, the study's focus on preschoolers, parental involvement, and language acquisition makes it highly relevant to the field of early childhood education. The findings inform best practices for early language learning and contribute to a broader understanding of how to support preschoolers' development and educational success in home-based learning environments.

1.8 Definition of Key Terms

The operational definitions of the key terms used in this study are provided in this section for clarity and understanding.

1.8.1 Parental Beliefs (PB)

Parental beliefs (PB) refer to the attitudes, values, and perceptions that parents or primary caregivers hold regarding various aspects of their children's education, specifically in relation to early childhood English learning (Zhang & Lau, 2022). These beliefs encompass both cognitive and emotional dimensions, reflecting how parents perceive the importance of English education, the expected outcomes, and the role they play in supporting their child's learning (Feng 2016). Parental beliefs are not just about whether parents see English learning as beneficial, but also about how they prioritize it compared to other educational or developmental needs (Choi et al., 2020; Lai et al., 2022).

Research has shown that parental beliefs significantly shape the nature of children's learning environments and directly influence the learning behaviors and attitudes of preschoolers (Zhang & Lau, 2022). Parental beliefs are crucial in determining the resources provided at home, including the time and effort parents

invest in language learning activities (Feng 2016), such as reading English books, engaging in English-language media, or enrolling children in formal or informal English lessons. These beliefs also impact how parents view their role in their children's language acquisition, whether as active participants or passive supporters.

The operational definition of parental beliefs in this study refers to the subjective perceptions and values held by parents regarding the importance of English language learning for their children, the benefits of early exposure to English, and the value of parental involvement in supporting English education.

1.8.2 Preschoolers' Attitude

Preschoolers' attitudes towards English learning encompass to a preschoolers' predisposition or inclination to react in a particular way towards an object, situation, or value, marked by corresponding feelings and emotions about their experiences and perceptions of EFL learning (Mangal & Mangal, 2013). This includes their preferences, engagement levels, motivation, encountered challenges, and aspirations regarding English language learning manifested in either cognitive, affective, and behavioral forms (Wenden, 1991). These attitudes are shaped by the home learning environment, parental involvement, and the social reinforcement they receive in their early interactions with English. The cognitive form involves beliefs or perceptions about objects or situations linked to the attitude. Affective form relates to emotions and feelings, reflecting preferences or aversions towards an object. The behavioral form prompts learners to undertake certain learning behaviors.

In this study, preschoolers' attitudes will be operationalized as a combination of affective, cognitive, and behavioral. The affective refers to preschoolers' emotional responses to English learning, such as enjoyment or interest in English

activities. The cognitive includes their beliefs and thoughts about English learning, such as their perceived ability to learn the language. Finally, the behavioral measures the extent to which preschoolers engage in English learning activities, including the time they spend on such activities and their willingness to participate in them. Preschoolers' attitudes will be measured through child-friendly surveys and observations, using tools adapted to their developmental stage, including parent reports on their child's emotional and behavioral engagement with English.

1.8.3 Home Literacy Environment (HLE)

Home Literacy Environment (HLE) is defined as a to the physical and social setting at home that supports a child's literacy development, including both formal, informal learning activities and Literacy Resources (Choi et al., 2020b; Xia, 2023). It includes activities such as shared reading, teaching print-related skills, singing songs and rhymes, storytelling, and watching educational television programs that parents and children partake in together (Frijters et al., 2000; Wood, 2002). Additionally, it also includes the availability of learning materials in the home (Sénéchal et al., 1998). Research has consistently shown that a rich home literacy environment contributes to better language acquisition, as children are exposed to language through various forms of engagement, often guided by their parents' involvement (Sun et al., 2024).

In operational terms, the home literacy environment in this study is defined as the resources and activities available at home that facilitate children's English language learning. This includes the availability of English books, media, and learning materials, as well as parental involvement in activities such as storytelling,

watching English-language TV shows, and engaging in educational games. The quality of the home literacy environment will be assessed through both parental self-report and observational measures, which will capture the types of resources available and the frequency of interactions related to English learning.

1.8.3 (a) Formal Literacy Environment

The formal literacy environment refers activities that emphasize aspects of written language, such as direct instruction by adults in print-related skills, including letter names and sounds, or pointing out specific letters within texts (Sénéchal & LeFevre 2002). These activities are designed to enhance children's literacy by teaching specific aspects of the written language, including letter names, letter sounds, and the understanding of written symbols. The formal literacy environment typically includes organized learning sessions where adults engage with children in activities like letter recognition, phonics instruction, word reading, and writing tasks (Sénéchal 2006). This could involve activities such as reading aloud with the child, engaging in phonics games, writing practice, or using educational materials like flashcards or workbooks focused on letter recognition and reading skills. The adult's role in these activities is crucial, as it involves direct instruction and active teaching of language skills.

The operational definition of the formal literacy environment in this study includes both the structured literacy practices provided by parents or caregivers (such as the teaching of letter names and sounds, reading comprehension exercises, and writing practice) and the educational tools used (e.g., books, flashcards, worksheets, or other print-based resources). This environment will be assessed through parental

self-reports, focusing on the frequency and nature of structured literacy activities that parents engage in with their preschool-aged children. Additionally, observations of parental interactions during literacy-related activities can offer insight into the quality and consistency of these formal learning practices.

1.8.3 (b) Informal Literacy Environment

The informal literacy environment refers to the less structured, everyday activities that emphasize the meaning and significance of written language (Sénéchal & LeFevre 2002). This environment encourages children to engage with text in more natural, interactive, and meaningful contexts, where the focus is on understanding stories, exploring content, and fostering a love for reading rather than mastering specific skills like letter recognition or phonics (Sénéchal 2006). These activities might include reading picture books, telling stories, discussing books in a conversational manner, or engaging in writing for personal purposes (such as writing letters, drawing pictures with labels, or writing shopping lists). Unlike the formal literacy environment, the focus here is less on teaching the mechanics of reading and more on promoting an appreciation for the story, content, and meaning conveyed through written text.

The operational definition of the informal literacy environment in this study includes parent-child interactions that focus on the narrative, emotional, and thematic aspects of reading. This could involve parents and children engaging in shared reading sessions, where the child is encouraged to interact with the text by asking questions, making predictions, or discussing the characters and plot. The environment also includes activities where writing is used informally, such as

drawing and labeling, or reading storybooks that focus on illustrations and content comprehension rather than specific reading skills. These interactions will be measured through parental self-reports on the frequency and nature of informal reading and writing activities at home, as well as through observational data capturing the quality of engagement during these activities.

1.8.3 (c) Literacy Resources

Literacy resources refer to a wide range of tools, materials, and sources that support and enhance the development of literacy skills, including reading, writing, speaking, and comprehension abilities (Lai et al., 2022; Xia, 2023). These resources play a crucial role in creating a rich learning environment, where children can interact with various forms of text and engage in diverse language-related activities (Chen et al., 2022). Literacy resources encompass both physical materials, such as books and educational games, and digital tools, such as educational apps or multimedia content that promote language development (Zheng & Zhou, 2022).

In this study, literacy resources are operational defined as the materials and tools available to children within the home environment that are specifically used to facilitate the development of literacy skills. These resources may include printed materials like storybooks, flashcards, and worksheets, interactive media such as educational videos, digital learning apps, and writing materials like pens, notebooks, and whiteboards. The resources can also extend to social tools, such as adult support in the form of shared reading, discussions, and collaborative writing activities that help children engage with language in meaningful ways.

1.8.4 English as a Foreign Language (EFL)

“English as a Foreign Language (EFL)” denotes the learning of English by Chinese preschoolers, for whom English is not their native language nor the primary medium of daily communication (Freudenstein, 1979; Marckwardt, 1965). EFL learning encompasses acquiring language skills and competencies in English aimed at developing proficiency in both understanding and using the language effectively. The engagement with English extends beyond academic settings, incorporating activities such as listening to songs, broadcasts, and dialogues in movies, thereby contributing to both entertainment and the comprehension of English-language content. The learners’ exposure to English is generally limited and confined to designated learning contexts rather than serving as the main conduit for everyday communication (Oxford, 2001).

The operational definition of EFL in this study refers to the set of learning activities and educational experiences aimed at developing basic skills in English for preschool children. This includes exposure to oral language skills such as listening and speaking, reading skills for recognizing letters, words, and simple texts, and writing skills for engaging in basic writing tasks.

1.9 Limitation and Delimitations of the Study

This study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. Firstly, the cross-sectional design of the research restricts the ability to make causal inferences. As data are collected at a single point in time, the study can only identify associations between parental beliefs, home literacy environments, and preschoolers’ attitudes toward English learning, rather than determining the direction

of causality. This limitation means that while the study provides valuable insights into the relationships between these variables, it does not establish a definitive cause-and-effect link. Additionally, the reliance on self-reported data from parents introduces potential biases, such as social desirability bias or overreporting of their involvement in their children's learning. This could impact the accuracy of the responses, as parents might present themselves in a more favorable light rather than providing an accurate reflection of their practices and beliefs. Another limitation lies in the geographic focus of the study. The research was conducted in Zhengzhou, China, which limits the generalizability of the findings to other regions in China or internationally. The educational context in urban areas, such as Zhengzhou, may differ from rural areas or other cities with different resources and cultural practices. Furthermore, the study specifically focuses on preschool-aged children, aged 3 to 6 years, which means the findings may not be applicable to older children or adolescents who may experience different educational and home learning dynamics. Lastly, measuring the attitudes of preschoolers presents a challenge, as young children may not fully articulate their attitudes or preferences. This study's reliance on indirect methods to assess attitudes may not fully capture the complexities of their feelings or engagement with English learning.

Despite these limitations, the study is delimited by several factors that guide its scope. The research specifically examines the relationship between parental beliefs, home literacy environment, and preschoolers' attitudes toward English learning. As such, other potentially influential factors, such as peer influence or socio-economic status, are not considered within the scope of this study. The focus is deliberately placed on the home environment and how parental beliefs shape the resources and opportunities provided to children in their English learning journey. Another

delimitation is the geographic scope of the study, which is limited to Zhengzhou, an urban area in China. This geographic focus allows for a detailed exploration of the attitudes and practices of parents in an urban context, but it may not fully represent rural or less economically developed regions where access to resources may differ. The study also narrows its focus to preschool children between the ages of 3 and 6, recognizing this as a critical period for early language acquisition, but excluding children outside this age range. In addition, the study centers on parental beliefs regarding English learning, intentionally omitting other types of parental beliefs or influences related to broader educational practices or other subjects. Lastly, the study deliberately excludes the influence of policy factors, such as government regulations on English education, in order to focus exclusively on the home literacy environment and parental beliefs as factors affecting preschoolers' attitudes toward English learning.

While the limitations of the study, such as its cross-sectional design, reliance on self-reported data, and geographic focus, should be acknowledged, the delimitations serve to narrow the research scope to provide a focused examination of the relationship between parental beliefs, home literacy environment, and preschoolers' attitudes toward English learning. These boundaries enable a deeper understanding of these factors within a specific context, though further research incorporating broader contexts and longitudinal designs may provide additional insights.

1.10 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study is designed to explore the relationships between parental beliefs, the home literacy environment (comprising formal and

informal English learning activities, and English learning resources), and preschoolers' attitudes toward English learning. This framework aims to elucidate how parental beliefs influence the design of the home literacy environment and, in turn, shape preschoolers' emotional, cognitive, and behavioral responses to English language learning.

At the core of this framework lies the construct of parental beliefs (PB), which reflects parents' attitudes, values, and perceptions regarding early childhood English education and their involvement in the child's language learning process (Choi et al., 2020; Lai et al., 2022). Parental beliefs are assumed to be positive, particularly in the context of the increasing importance placed on English proficiency in China. Parents who hold strong beliefs in the benefits of early English education are more likely to provide their children with both formal and informal English learning opportunities. These beliefs are shaped by the perceived benefits of early childhood English education and the benefits of parental involvement in the child's educational journey (Zhang & Lau, 2022). In this study, parental beliefs serve as the independent variable, shaping the design of the home literacy environment.

The home literacy environment (HLE) is conceptualized as a mediator in the relationship between parental beliefs and preschoolers' attitudes toward English learning. The HLE consists of three main components: formal English learning, informal English learning, and English learning resources. These elements are shaped by the extent to which parents invest in their children's language learning, based on their own beliefs and values. Formal English learning refers to structured activities designed to teach specific language skills, such as phonics, vocabulary, and basic grammar. These activities are typically adult-led, where parents or caregivers engage in intentional teaching practices aimed at developing the child's language