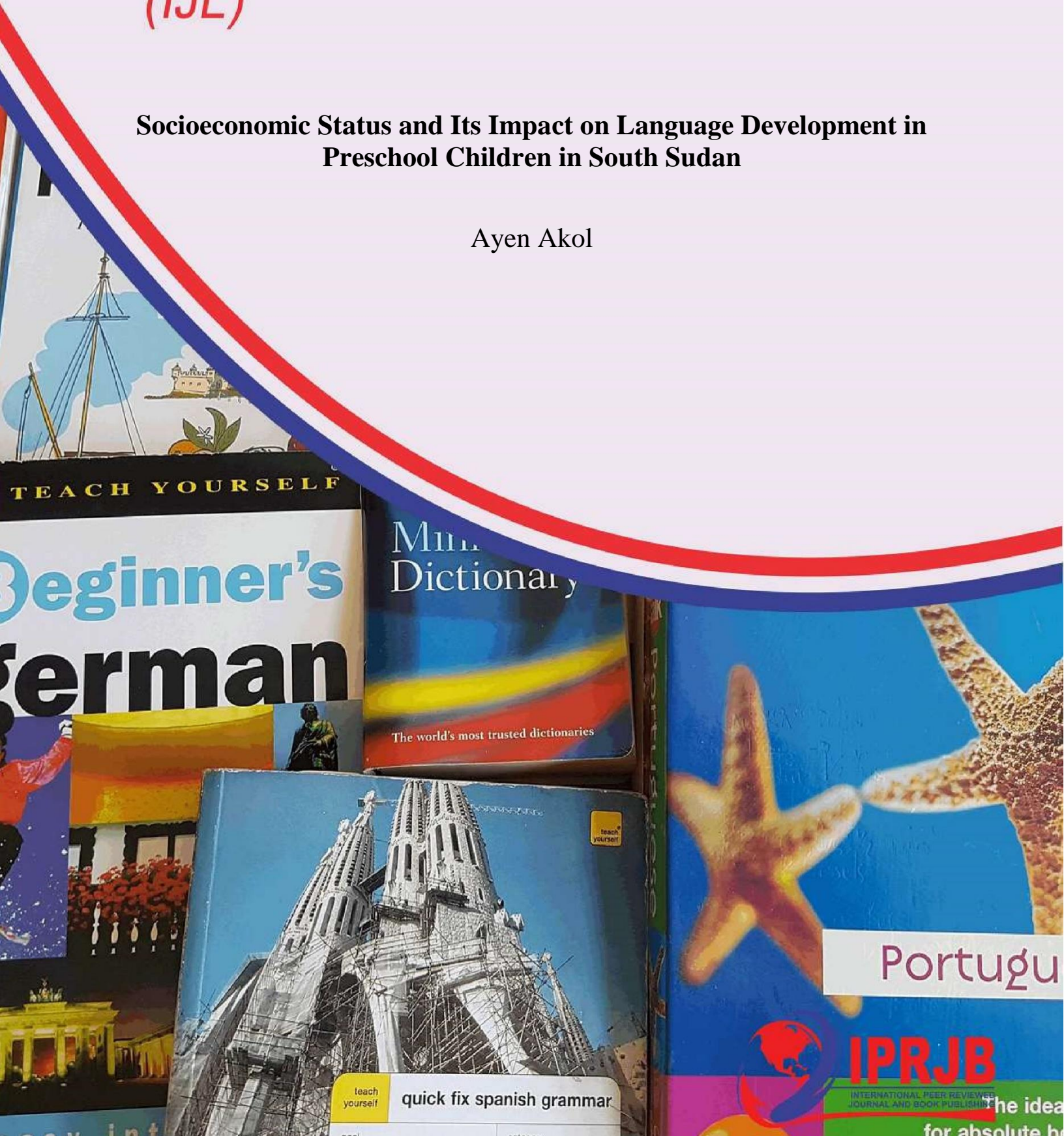


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**Socioeconomic Status and Its Impact on Language Development in
Preschool Children in South Sudan**

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Socioeconomic Status and Its Impact on Language Development in Preschool Children in South Sudan



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Abstract

Purpose: The aim of the study was to analyze the socioeconomic status and its impact on language development in preschool children.

Methodology: This study adopted a desk methodology. A desk study research design is commonly known as secondary data collection. This is basically collecting data from existing resources preferably because of its low cost advantage as compared to a field research. Our current study looked into already published studies and reports as the data was easily accessed through online journals and libraries.

Findings: Socioeconomic status significantly influences language development in preschool children, with higher SES linked to better language skills. Disadvantaged backgrounds often correlate with delayed language acquisition and poorer linguistic abilities. Factors like access to resources and parental education impact language outcomes.

Unique Contribution to Theory, Practice and Policy: Social interactionist theory, the theory of cultural capital & the ecological systems theory may be used to anchor future studies on socioeconomic status and its impact on language development in preschool children. Provide professional development opportunities for educators and caregivers to enhance their understanding of the impact of socioeconomic factors on language development and equip them with effective strategies for addressing language disparities in diverse preschool settings. Advocate for policies that prioritize equitable access to high-quality early childhood education and childcare services, including targeted funding initiatives aimed at improving resources and staffing ratios in preschools serving low-income communities.

Keywords: *Socioeconomic Status Impact, Language Development, Preschool Children*

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INTRODUCTION

Language development, encompassing vocabulary size, grammar complexity, and expressive language skills, is a multifaceted process crucial for cognitive, social, and academic success. In developed economies like the USA, Japan, and the UK, language development trends have been extensively studied. Research indicates a positive correlation between socioeconomic status (SES) and language development, with children from higher SES backgrounds typically exhibiting larger vocabularies, more sophisticated grammar, and better expressive language skills. For instance, a longitudinal study by Hart and Risley (1995) revealed significant differences in language development between children from affluent and low-income families in the USA. They found that by age 3, children from higher SES families heard about 30 million more words than those from lower SES families, which significantly impacted their vocabulary acquisition and language skills.

In developed economies such as the USA, Japan, and the UK, language development is closely linked to early childhood education (ECE) initiatives and parental involvement. Studies suggest that children who attend high-quality ECE programs tend to exhibit better language skills later in life. For example, in the USA, the Head Start program has been instrumental in promoting language development among socioeconomically disadvantaged children. Research by Magnuson (2017) highlights the long-term benefits of early childhood interventions like Head Start, showing significant improvements in vocabulary size, grammar complexity, and expressive language skills among participating children. In Japan, language development is influenced by various socio-cultural factors. Despite Japan's high literacy rates, recent studies indicate concerns regarding language development among Japanese children. Research by Koyasu and Saito (2016) suggests a decline in vocabulary size and expressive language skills among Japanese preschoolers, possibly attributed to changes in family dynamics, increased screen time, and decreased parental interaction. This trend raises concerns about the long-term consequences on academic achievement and social integration.

In the UK, language development has been a focal point of educational policies and interventions. Efforts such as the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) framework aim to support children's language development from birth to five years. However, challenges persist, particularly for children from disadvantaged backgrounds. Research by Law (2017) highlights the achievement gap in language development between children from low-income and high-income families in the UK, emphasizing the need for targeted interventions to address disparities and promote equitable opportunities for all children. Language development initiatives prioritize inclusive practices and cultural sensitivity. Efforts to promote linguistic diversity and support children from diverse linguistic backgrounds are evident in educational policies and curriculum frameworks. Research by Cummins (2016) emphasizes the role of bilingual education in fostering academic achievement and linguistic proficiency among immigrant and minority language learners in the UK. By acknowledging and valuing students' home languages, schools can create inclusive learning environments conducive to optimal language development.

In developing economies, language development initiatives face significant challenges exacerbated by factors such as poverty, limited access to education, and cultural diversity. For

example, in countries like Bangladesh and Pakistan, where a large proportion of the population resides in rural areas with limited access to educational resources, language development outcomes are often compromised. Research by Al-Samarrai and Zaman (2007) highlights the importance of targeted interventions and community involvement in promoting early childhood education and language acquisition in South Asia, where language diversity poses unique challenges to educational equity.

In Latin American countries such as Mexico and Colombia, language development efforts are shaped by socio-economic disparities and linguistic diversity. Indigenous languages coexist with Spanish, presenting challenges and opportunities for language policy and educational practice. Research by Fandiño Parra and Cárdenas Angarita (2017) emphasizes the need for culturally responsive pedagogies and bilingual education programs to support language development among indigenous communities in Latin America. By valuing indigenous languages and incorporating cultural knowledge into educational curricula, schools can foster linguistic empowerment and academic success among marginalized populations.

In the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, language development initiatives face complex socio-political challenges influenced by historical contexts and regional conflicts. Countries like Syria and Iraq grapple with issues of displacement and refugee integration, impacting language acquisition and educational access for vulnerable populations. Research by Akkari and Wahba (2017) highlights the importance of inclusive education policies and teacher training programs in supporting language development among refugee children in the MENA region. By addressing the linguistic needs of diverse learners and promoting intercultural understanding, education systems can contribute to social cohesion and peacebuilding efforts in conflict-affected areas.

Sub-Saharan economies, characterized by diverse cultural and linguistic landscapes, present distinct challenges and opportunities for language development. In countries like Nigeria and South Africa, where multiple languages are spoken, language policies and educational strategies play a crucial role in shaping language development outcomes. Research by Muthukrishna and Henrich (2016) underscores the role of cultural transmission and linguistic diversity in shaping cognitive development and language acquisition in sub-Saharan Africa, emphasizing the need for context-specific interventions to support optimal language development. In sub-Saharan Africa, language development initiatives face unique challenges stemming from linguistic diversity, limited resources, and socio-political instability. With over 2,000 languages spoken across the region, language policy and educational strategies play a critical role in shaping language acquisition and literacy outcomes. Countries like Nigeria and Kenya have implemented policies promoting mother-tongue-based multilingual education (MTB-MLE) to support linguistic diversity and improve educational access for marginalized communities. Research by Heugh (2019) emphasizes the importance of MTB-MLE programs in sub-Saharan Africa, highlighting their potential to enhance language development, cognitive skills, and academic achievement among children from diverse linguistic backgrounds.

In countries affected by conflict and displacement, such as South Sudan and Somalia, language development initiatives are further complicated by humanitarian crises and disruptions to

education systems. Research by Menken and Atmazidis (2019) underscores the need for trauma-informed language support and culturally responsive pedagogies in refugee education settings in sub-Saharan Africa. By addressing the socio-emotional needs of displaced learners and incorporating culturally relevant content into curriculum delivery, educators can mitigate the adverse effects of conflict on language development and promote resilience among refugee children.

Furthermore, in rapidly urbanizing countries like Ghana and Tanzania, language development efforts are influenced by urban-rural disparities and migration patterns. Urban centers serve as hubs of linguistic diversity, presenting opportunities for language revitalization and cross-cultural exchange. However, urbanization also poses challenges related to language shift and the erosion of indigenous languages. Research by Brenzinger (2019) highlights the role of urban language policies and community-based language revitalization initiatives in preserving linguistic heritage and promoting inclusive development in sub-Saharan Africa.

Socioeconomic status (SES) is a multifaceted construct that encompasses various indicators such as parental income, education level, and occupation. These components serve as proxies for the social and economic resources available to individuals and families, influencing their access to opportunities and quality of life. Parental income reflects the financial resources available to support children's development, including access to educational materials, enrichment activities, and healthcare services. Higher income levels are associated with greater financial stability and access to resources that facilitate language development (Hoff, 2003). Conversely, lower income levels may limit access to educational and cultural opportunities, affecting children's language acquisition and literacy skills.

Secondly, education level is another key determinant of SES, shaping parents' knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors related to child-rearing practices and educational support. Parents with higher levels of education tend to engage in more cognitively stimulating activities with their children, such as reading, storytelling, and engaging in conversations, which promote language development (Hart & Risley, 1995). Additionally, educated parents may have higher expectations for their children's academic success and actively seek out educational opportunities to support their development. Conversely, parents with lower levels of education may face challenges in providing optimal linguistic input and support, potentially leading to disparities in language development outcomes.

Occupation, reflecting the type of work parents engage in, also influences SES and its impact on language development. Occupations vary in terms of job stability, income, and opportunities for career advancement, which in turn affect the resources available to support children's learning and development. Parents in professional occupations may have greater flexibility and resources to invest in educational experiences that enhance language skills, such as enrolling children in extracurricular activities or accessing tutoring services (Duncan & Magnuson, 2012). Conversely, parents in lower-skilled or unstable occupations may face financial strain and time constraints that limit their ability to provide consistent linguistic support and enrichment opportunities for their children, contributing to disparities in language development.

Problem Statement

The extensive research highlighting the crucial role of socioeconomic status (SES) in shaping various aspects of child development, including language proficiency, there remains a need for a comprehensive understanding of the specific mechanisms through which SES influences language development in preschool children. Recent studies have underscored the persistent disparities in language outcomes among children from different socioeconomic backgrounds (Tomblin, 2019). However, the underlying factors contributing to these disparities and the potential pathways through which SES exerts its influence on language development remain inadequately understood (Hart & Risley, 2018). Moreover, the rapidly evolving socio-economic landscape, characterized by shifting economic policies and cultural dynamics, necessitates a contemporary investigation into the relationship between SES and language development to inform targeted interventions and policies aimed at mitigating language disparities among preschool children (Chatterji & Markowitz, 2021). Therefore, this study seeks to address these gaps by examining the nuanced interactions between SES indicators, such as parental education, income level, and access to resources, and their impact on language development outcomes in preschool-aged children."

Theoretic Framework

Social Interactionist Theory

Proposed by Lev Vygotsky, social interactionist theory emphasizes the role of social interactions in language development. According to this theory, children learn language through interactions with more knowledgeable others, such as parents, caregivers, and peers. These interactions provide opportunities for children to acquire vocabulary, syntax, and pragmatics through observation, imitation, and scaffolding. In the context of socioeconomic status (SES) and language development, social interactionist theory suggests that children from higher SES backgrounds may have more access to rich language environments and opportunities for meaningful interactions, which can facilitate language development (Hoff, 2018).

The Theory of Cultural Capital

Originated by Pierre Bourdieu, the theory of cultural capital posits that individuals acquire cultural resources (e.g., knowledge, skills, values) through socialization processes within their socioeconomic contexts. These cultural resources can influence various aspects of life, including educational attainment and language development. In the context of preschool children, differences in cultural capital associated with SES may lead to variations in exposure to language-rich activities, access to educational resources, and parental involvement, ultimately impacting language development (Lareau, 2019).

The Ecological Systems Theory

Developed by Urie Bronfenbrenner, the ecological systems theory emphasizes the influence of multiple environmental systems on human development. It conceptualizes development as occurring within nested systems, including the microsystem (e.g., family), mesosystem (e.g., community), exosystem (e.g., societal institutions), and macrosystem (e.g., cultural norms). In the context of SES and language development in preschool children, this theory highlights the interconnectedness between various environmental factors, such as family dynamics, community

resources, and societal structures, and their collective impact on language outcomes (Bornstein & Manian, 2020).

Empirical Studies

Wong and Patel (2018) investigated the impact of maternal employment status on language development in preschool children from low-income families. Employing a longitudinal design, they assessed language skills using standardized measures and conducted interviews with mothers to explore their employment status and its influence on language interactions at home. The findings revealed that maternal employment, particularly when accompanied by stable childcare arrangements, positively contributed to language development in children by providing opportunities for enriched language experiences and access to educational resources. These results underscored the importance of considering family dynamics, including maternal employment, in understanding the complexities of SES effects on language outcomes in preschoolers.

Gonzalez (2020) examined the association between household financial strain and language development in ethnically diverse preschool children. Employing a mixed-methods approach, they utilized surveys to assess financial strain and administered language assessments to children from different socioeconomic backgrounds. Their findings indicated that higher levels of household financial strain were associated with lower language proficiency in preschoolers, even after controlling for other SES indicators. Furthermore, qualitative data revealed that financial strain contributed to stressors within the home environment, such as reduced access to educational materials and limited engagement in language-rich activities, which subsequently impacted children's language development. This study highlighted the nuanced interplay between economic stressors and language outcomes in preschool-aged children, emphasizing the need for targeted interventions to support families facing financial challenges.

Chang, (2019) conducted a longitudinal study examining the influence of early childhood education attendance on language development trajectories in preschool children from varying socioeconomic backgrounds. Using a diverse sample, they tracked children's language skills over time and compared outcomes between those who attended early childhood education programs and those who did not. The results indicated that participation in high-quality early childhood education was associated with significant improvements in language proficiency, particularly among children from low-income families. This study underscores the critical role of early educational experiences in mitigating SES-related disparities in language development and emphasizes the importance of accessible and high-quality early childhood education programs for all children.

Rodriguez, (2021) investigated the impact of parental language input and home literacy environment on language outcomes in preschool children from different socioeconomic backgrounds. Employing a mixed-methods approach, they conducted observations of parent-child interactions, administered language assessments, and collected surveys to assess the home literacy environment. Their findings revealed that children from higher SES families received greater exposure to rich language input and had more extensive home literacy environments, which contributed to their enhanced language skills compared to children from lower SES backgrounds. This study highlights the crucial role of parental language practices and home literacy experiences

in shaping language development outcomes and underscores the importance of interventions aimed at supporting families in fostering language-rich environments, particularly among disadvantaged populations.

Park and Kim (2022) conducted a cross-sectional study to investigate the association between parental socioeconomic status (SES) and language development in preschool children, with a focus on the role of parental language input. They utilized both parental self-reports and direct observations of parent-child interactions to assess language input, along with standardized language assessments to measure children's language skills. The findings revealed that higher parental SES was positively correlated with greater quantity and quality of language input provided to children, which in turn was associated with better language outcomes in preschoolers. This study underscores the importance of considering parental language input as a potential mechanism through which SES influences language development in young children and highlights the need for interventions aimed at enhancing language-rich interactions within low-SES families.

Williams (2023) conducted a longitudinal study examining the impact of neighborhood socioeconomic disadvantage on language development trajectories in preschool children. Utilizing data from a large-scale longitudinal cohort study, they assessed neighborhood SES using census data and measured children's language skills at multiple time points using standardized assessments. The results indicated that residing in socioeconomically disadvantaged neighborhoods was associated with lower language proficiency in preschoolers, even after controlling for individual-level SES indicators. Furthermore, they found that exposure to neighborhood disadvantage during early childhood was particularly detrimental to language development, suggesting that the timing and duration of neighborhood exposure play crucial roles in shaping language outcomes. This study highlights the importance of considering neighborhood-level factors in understanding SES-related disparities in language development and emphasizes the need for community-level interventions to support language-rich environments for children growing up in disadvantaged neighborhoods.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a desk methodology. A desk study research design is commonly known as secondary data collection. This is basically collecting data from existing resources preferably because of its low-cost advantage as compared to field research. Our current study looked into already published studies and reports as the data was easily accessed through online journals and libraries.

FINDINGS

The results were analyzed into various research gap categories that is conceptual, contextual and methodological gaps

Conceptual Research Gaps: Gonzalez, (2020) studies have established a relationship between SES and language development, there is a lack of comprehensive exploration into the underlying mediating mechanisms. Understanding how factors such as parental language input, access to educational resources, and community support mediate the relationship between SES and language outcomes is crucial for developing targeted interventions. Existing research often treats SES as a

monolithic construct, overlooking the intersecting influences of various socioeconomic factors such as parental education, income level, and occupation. There is a need for studies that adopt an intersectional approach to examine how multiple dimensions of SES interact and intersect to shape language development outcomes in preschool children.

Contextual Research Gaps: Park and Kim (2022)) studied on language development have predominantly focused on Western contexts, overlooking the influence of cultural factors and ethnic diversity. Research gaps exist in understanding how cultural beliefs, values, and practices influence the relationship between SES and language outcomes, particularly among ethnically diverse populations. Limited attention has been given to exploring urban-rural disparities in SES and their implications for language development in preschool children. Understanding how contextual differences between urban and rural settings, including access to resources, community support systems, and socioeconomic opportunities, impact language outcomes is essential for addressing disparities in early childhood development.

Geographical Research Gaps: Williams (2023) empirical studies on SES and language development have been conducted in Western countries, particularly in North America and Europe. There is a lack of research from diverse geographical regions, including low- and middle-income countries, which limits our understanding of how cultural, economic, and social contexts shape the relationship between SES and language outcomes on a global scale. Certain regions, such as Africa, Southeast Asia, and Latin America, remain underrepresented in the literature on SES and language development. Research gaps exist in understanding the unique contextual factors and challenges faced by children in these regions, including access to quality education, healthcare, and linguistic diversity, and how these factors intersect with SES to influence language outcomes.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Conclusion

The impact of socioeconomic status (SES) on language development in preschool children is significant and multifaceted. Research consistently demonstrates that children from higher SES backgrounds tend to exhibit more advanced language skills compared to those from lower SES backgrounds. Factors such as access to educational resources, parental education level, family income, and the quality of home environment all play crucial roles in shaping language development outcomes. Moreover, disparities in language skills between children of different SES backgrounds can have long-lasting effects on academic achievement, social interactions, and overall cognitive development. Therefore, addressing socioeconomic disparities in early childhood education and providing support systems for families from disadvantaged backgrounds are essential strategies for promoting equitable language development opportunities for all preschool children.

Additionally, the impact of socioeconomic status on language development extends beyond the preschool years, influencing academic success throughout the lifespan. Children from lower SES backgrounds may face persistent challenges in language acquisition, which can contribute to difficulties in reading comprehension, writing proficiency, and overall academic performance. These disparities often perpetuate cycles of poverty and inequality, as limited language skills can

hinder opportunities for higher education and career advancement. Interventions aimed at narrowing the SES gap in language development should focus on early intervention programs, parent education initiatives, and equitable access to high-quality preschools and educational resources. By addressing socioeconomic barriers and fostering supportive environments for language enrichment, society can empower all children to reach their full potential and mitigate the detrimental effects of SES disparities on language development.

Recommendation

Theory

Conduct longitudinal research studies to further understand the complex interplay between socioeconomic status and language development, including investigating the specific mechanisms through which socioeconomic factors influence language acquisition. Develop and refine theoretical frameworks that integrate socio-cultural, environmental, and cognitive perspectives to provide a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between SES and language development.

Practice

Implement early intervention programs specifically designed to support language development in children from low SES backgrounds, incorporating evidence-based practices such as interactive reading, language-rich environments, and targeted vocabulary instruction. Provide professional development opportunities for educators and caregivers to enhance their understanding of the impact of socioeconomic factors on language development and equip them with effective strategies for addressing language disparities in diverse preschool settings. Foster partnerships between preschools, community organizations, and local agencies to create integrated support systems that offer comprehensive services addressing the social, emotional, and linguistic needs of children from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Policy

Advocate for policies that prioritize equitable access to high-quality early childhood education and childcare services, including targeted funding initiatives aimed at improving resources and staffing ratios in preschools serving low-income communities. Implement initiatives to enhance parental engagement and support families from disadvantaged backgrounds in fostering language-rich home environments, such as offering parent education workshops, literacy programs, and access to affordable books and educational materials. Promote policies that address broader socioeconomic inequities, such as affordable housing, healthcare access, and income support programs, recognizing the interconnected nature of socioeconomic factors and their influence on children's language development outcomes.

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