

## **Korean Home Learning Environment and Parent Characteristics Influencing Children's Expressive and Receptive Language Abilities**

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### **Abstract**

*This study analyzed data derived from 'The Panel Study on Korean Children' implemented by the Korea Institute of Child Care & Education (KICCE). Two scales, EC-HOME and REVT were used to investigate specific types of home environments and parent characteristics beneficial in the facilitation of children's receptive and expressive language development. The Step-wise Multiple Regression Analysis identified four variables (Responsiveness, Physical Environment, Father Education, and Mother Habitation) that made a significant contribution to children's receptive language development, and six different variables (Mother Education, Academic Stimulation, and Physical Environment, Acceptance, Mother's Current Job Status, and Communicative Stimulation) for expressive language development. This study found that home learning environment is a more significant factor for children's receptive and expressive language development than parent demographic characteristics with the exception of the education level of parents, current job status of the mother, and habitation status of the mother.*

**Key Words:** Home Environment, Parent Characteristics, Preschool Children, Receptive Expressive Language Development, and Korean Children.

### **1. Introduction**

The important role that home learning environment plays in the development of language and literacy skills has been recognized for years in many studies.

These studies confirm that parent participation and home environment are powerful resources for enhancing the language development of young children (Arnold & Whitehurst, 1994; Bonci, 2008; Clark, 2007; Clark & Hawkins, 2010; Cole, 2011; Fletcher, Cross, Tanney, Schneider, & Finch, 2008; Kim & Jung, 2013; Mottram & McCoy, 2010; Payne, Whitehurst, & Angell, 1994; Sénéchal & Le Fevre, 2002; Teale, 1982; Rowe, 1991). Additionally, researchers attest that parental involvement in children's literacy practices, such as interactive reading, communication, and joint engagements are even more important for language development and reading achievement than parent demographic characteristics, such as SES and family size (Baker & Scher, 2002; Bottema-Beutel, Yoder, Hochman, & Watson, 2014; Flouri & Buchanan, 2004; Lim, 2014; Pan, Rowe, Singer, & Snow, 2005).

Similarly, Mullis, Mullis, Cornille, Ritchson, & Sullender (2004) shows that the earlier parents become involved in their children's literacy practices, the more profound the results and longer lasting the effects. A longitudinal study conducted by Hood, Conlon, and Andrews (2008) found that parent-child reading and teaching of letters, words, and name writing, were correlated with letter-word identification, reading, and spelling rates. Other significant predictors of children's receptive language gain is parent verbal responsiveness and parent-child engagement (Haebig, McDuffie, & Weismer, 2013). In addition, parent and child's speech behaviors during spontaneous interactions are important, and even play a role in the development of children's linguistic and cognitive skills (Goldin-Meadow, Levine, Hedges, Huttenlocher, Raudenbush, & Small, 2014). Furthermore, parent participation in book reading is a significant predictor of children's vocabulary, story and print concepts, and general emergent literacy skills, above and beyond the influence of demographic variables (Bracken & Fischel, 2008; DesJardin, Doll, Stika, Eisenberg, Johnson, Ganguly, & Henning, 2014; Kotaman, 2008; Reese, Sparks, & Leyva, 2010).

In this paper, we used the existing Korean national database to investigate the types of stimulating home environment and parent characteristics that are most beneficial for Korean preschool children's expressive and receptive language development. Through our study, parents and educators in the international community will understand the types of these variables that have the most optimal effects on preschool children in Korea. This study will also help Korean parents to understand the impact of home environment on children's language development. Parents will therefore be able to provide an appropriate and optimally beneficial home learning environment during their children's early years; the most important and rapid period for language development.

### **1.1 Research Needs and Objectives**

While many studies are available that support the importance of both home learning environment and parent demographic factors for language development, the specific types of Korean home environments and parent demographic characteristics that are closely related to Korean children's expressive and receptive language are not well-known. Korean parents hold a traditional belief that they are responsible for teaching language and basic literacy skills to their children, and many assume the more stimulating environment they provide, the better their children will be in language development (Lee, 2004). They tend to pressure their children to memorize vocabulary words, often using inappropriate levels of materials and developmentally inappropriate approaches which can be counterproductive. Lee, Park, and Kim (2000) observed, Korean parents use worksheets ("*hakseupjee*") to introduce the Korean orthographic system to their children as early as age three. Parents use these worksheets to explain Korean phonemes and orthographic correspondences, and to teach word recognition skills to their preschool age children. Many Korean parents are uninformed as to the optimal home learning environment they should provide and the specific roles they should play in supporting their children's language development.

Furthermore, the impact of home environment on child development has been analyzed often in the United States in large Panel Studies, such as the Study of Early Child Care and Youth Development, the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, and the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development Study of Early Child Care. However, few large panel studies focusing on the influence of home environment on preschoolers' language development in Korea have been conducted or published internationally. Many of the studies conducted in Korea recently concerning the influence of home and parent factors on children's language development include relatively small sample groups from just one city or rural area. In a recent Korean study however, Song (2012) used panel data to analyze the vocabulary development of 734 toddlers who attend day care centers.

Song found that children whose receptive vocabulary development is above average interacted with adults and peers and read books more frequently.

Although Song's study did look at children's vocabulary development, it was focused primarily on the influence of toddlers' personal characteristics and daily activities rather than their home and parent variables. It is therefore imperative to identify the specific parental support, home learning environments, and parental demographic characteristics that are most influential and significant to preschool children's receptive and expressive language development prior to formal schooling. As there is little known about the specific variables influencing Korean preschool children's language development based on large panel data, our study aims to determine the home environments and parent characteristics most closely related to preschoolers' receptive and expressive language.

## **2. Research Methods**

### **2.1 Subjects**

The subjects are 1,754 parents and their preschool age children participating in "The Panel Study on Korean Children" implemented by the Institute of Child Care & Education (KICCE). The number of subjects participating from each of the five metropolitan cities are: 809 in Seoul, 299 in Pusan, 210 in Dae Gu, 243 in Dae Jeon, and 193 in Guang Ju. The children's demographic characteristics are as follows: 903 were boys and 851 were girls ranging from 35 to 42 months in age; 46.5% were the first born child, 42.2% second born, 10.2% third born, and 1.1% fourth child or beyond. Most participating parents (99.7%) are Korean; 82.6% of mothers and 77.1% of fathers are 30 to 39 years of age; less than 0.3% is multicultural families. The average monthly household income of participating parents is about \$4,900. Regarding job status, 98.5% of fathers and 40% of mothers are employed, 99.3% of those who completed their home environment measures were mothers and 0.7% were are fathers, grandparents, or relatives. Also, 99% of the participants are first time married families, and 99.6% of mothers and 96.5% of fathers live with their children. Urban residents comprise 78.9% of the participants, while 20.9% are rural dwellers. The percentage of mothers with a 3 or 4 year college degree is 64.4% and 5.1% have an advanced degree, while 62.9% of fathers have a 3 or 4 year college degree and 10.4% have an advanced degree.

### **2.2 Measurements**

Quantitative data from two sources-HOMES (Early Childhood-Home Observation for Measurement of the Environment) and REVT (Receptive and Expressive Vocabulary Test) were used in this study.

**EC-HOME.** This inventory is designed to measure the quality and extent of learning stimulation available to a child in the home environment that promote children's language development in daily routines. It includes a total of 55 observations and interview items organized into eight subscales. Home environment items are scored simply as 1='yes' or 0='no' so that subjective judgment is avoided as to the measure of quality. The score for each item shows the extent to which an educational learning environment is present at home. Thus, higher scores indicate a more positive home educational learning environment (Caldwell & Bradley, 2003). The Korean translated version of the EC-HOME has been considered suitable to be used in Korean cultural context, and several researchers (Kim & Jo; 2002; Lee & Jang, 1982; Jang, 1984) have tested its reliability and validity. Kim and Kwak (2007) reported that the EC-HOME has sufficient internal reliability. Cronbach's alpha for EC-HOME is 0.80 and the test-retest reliability ranges from 0.76 to 0.97.

**REVT.** To measure Korean preschool children's language ability, the REVT, one of the most widely used scales for measuring children's and adults' language development was used (Kim, Hong, Kim, Jang, & Lee, 2009). The REVT is an individually administered standardized pictorial test composed of one REVT-R (Receptive) and one REVT-E (Expressive) subtest. Hong, Kim, & Kim (2009) developed the REVT to measure receptive and expressive language capability of Korean children, age 2 and older. The test-retest reliability is reported to be relatively high for each of the scales: 0.86 for the REVT-E and 0.82 for the REVT-R. The split-half reliability is quite high and reported to be 0.94 for the REVT-E and 0.88 for the REVT-R.

### **2.3 Data Collection and Analysis**

The data was from the existing database derived from 'The Panel Study on Korean Children' implemented by the KICCE, administered under the Office of the Prime Minister. Trained researchers visited homes personally to observe the home environment, conduct parent interviews, and collect results for the EC-HOME Inventory.

This was done at times when children were awake so that the interaction between the child and the primary caregiver could be observed. The data was analyzed using the subjects' home environment and parents' demographic characteristics as predictor variables and children's language development as criterion variable. It was exported to SPSS version 21 for Pearson Product-Moment Correlations and Stepwise Multiple Regression Analysis.

### 3. Results

#### 3.1 Descriptive Statistics of REVT & EC-HOME

Table 1 shows the mean score and standard deviation of children's receptive ( $M=33.13$ ,  $SD=15.77$ ) and expressive ( $M=27.79$ ,  $SD=13.71$ ) vocabulary tests. The results of the descriptive statistics for EC-HOME show that there is little variability in the frequency of each item included in all subscales of the home and parent variables.

**Table 1: Mean and S.D. of REVT and EC-HOME**

| Measures | Scales                               | Mean (M) | Std. Deviation (SD) | N    |
|----------|--------------------------------------|----------|---------------------|------|
| REVT     | Receptive Vocabulary Test Raw Score  | 33.13    | 15.77               | 1753 |
|          | Expressive Vocabulary Test Raw Score | 29.79    | 13.714              | 1753 |
| EC-HOME  | Learning Material                    | 8.96     | 1.237               | 1753 |
|          | Communicative Stimulation            | 6.42     | 0.883               | 1753 |
|          | Physical Environment                 | 6.66     | 0.885               | 1753 |
|          | Responsively                         | 6.55     | 0.985               | 1753 |
|          | Academic Stimulation                 | 4.56     | 0.899               | 1753 |
|          | Variety                              | 7.63     | 1.371               | 1753 |
|          | Acceptance                           | 3.44     | 0.719               | 1753 |
|          | Imitative Learning                   | 4.23     | 0.866               | 1753 |

**Learning Materials.** Over 80% of the participating parents provide more than 9 out of 11 appropriate play and learning materials. They provide appropriate toys and play with their child to teach colors and sizes, and promote cognitive development.

**Communicative Stimulation.** A majority (97%) of families made more than 5 out of 7 overt attempts to encourage language development at home. Almost two third of families (59%) indicated that they provide all 7 kinds of stimulating language environments included in the measurement.

**Physical Environment.** Korean families believe their home is clean and safe, and that their child has access to suitable clothing, nutritious food, and an outdoor play environment free of hazards. Over 92% of the families responded that they have more than 6 out of 7 optimal home environment characteristics, and over 80% of families indicated that their home environment meets all 7 criteria included in the measurement.

**Responsivity.** When asked about the responsiveness of the parent to the child during play and verbal interactions, a high percentage of parents indicated that they adequately respond to their child and show affection such as hugging or kissing their child. A majority (89%) believe that they are responsive and attentive to more than 6 out of 7 of their child's needs and requests.

**Academic Stimulation.** Parent involvement in and encouragement of the child's intellectual development was high. Over 90% of the parents claim that they are involved in more than 4 out of 5 child intellectual development and academic learning activities, such as learning colors, numbers, vocabulary, and nursery rhymes.

**Imitative Learning.** Over 84% of the parents demonstrate more than 4 out of 5 desirable behaviors and boundaries in the caregiver-child relationship. They show desirable behaviors, such as expressing negative feelings without severe emotional reaction, controlling anger, and using TV judiciously.

**Variety.** Over 82% of the parents provide more than 7 out of 9 kinds of daily learning activities for both indoors and outdoors.

These include the child playing a toy or real musical instrument, going to a market and selecting food or items that he or she likes, visiting a museum within a year, and being taken on an outing by a family member at least every other week.

**Acceptance.** Concerning discipline, when they observe sub-optimal behavior, a majority of parents (98%) indicate they avoid scolding, yelling, and restricting physically.

### 3.2 Correlations between Predictor Variables and Criterion Variables

The matrix of The Pearson Product-Moment Correlations analysis is presented in Table 2. The correlations of all predictor variables with the two criterion variables shown were generally moderate.

**Table 2: Result of Correlations Analysis**

| Predictor Variables       | Expressive Vocabulary | Receptive Vocabulary |
|---------------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|
| Time Spending with Child  | -.005                 | .013                 |
| Mother Job Type           | -.021                 | -.005                |
| Mother Current Job Status | -.127**               | -.025                |
| Household Income          | .062                  | -.021                |
| Mother's Job Satisfaction | .051                  | .001                 |
| Mother Marriage Status    | -.005                 | .022                 |
| Mother Habitation         | -.011                 | -.050*               |
| Mother Age                | .033                  | .014                 |
| Mother Education          | .181**                | .063**               |
| Mother Nationality        | .013                  | .032                 |
| Father Habitation         | -.024                 | -.015                |
| Father Age                | -.003                 | -.015                |
| Father Education          | .157**                | .070**               |
| Father Nationality        | -.008                 | -.004                |
| Father Job                | .008                  | -.004                |
| Expressive Test Scores    | 1                     | .518**               |
| Receptive Test Scores     | .518**                | 1                    |
| Learning Material         | .134**                | .070**               |
| Communicative Stimulation | .149**                | .029                 |
| Physical Environment      | .117**                | .076**               |
| Responsivity              | .104**                | .101**               |
| Academic Stimulation      | .153**                | .070**               |
| Variety                   | .110**                | .095**               |
| Acceptance                | .108**                | .026                 |
| Imitative Learning        | .061*                 | .078**               |

The result of correlation analysis indicates that job status of Korean mothers was negatively and significantly related to the expressive language ability of young children in this study. Children of working mothers tend to have higher expressive language test scores than those of mothers who are homemakers. Interestingly, mothers' habitation status was negatively and significantly related to receptive language ability. Children living with their mother tend to be exposed more to language, thus tend to receive higher receptive language scores. Although the strength of the relationships among the variables was very low, both mother's and father's higher education level were significantly related with children's higher scores in both expressive and receptive language.

The correlation analysis result shows several variables that were related with neither children's' receptive nor expressive language ability; time spent with the child on the weekends, mother's job type, mother's job satisfaction, mother's marriage status, household income, father/mother nationality, father's habitation, father's age, and father's job. However, all eight subscales of home environment (learning materials, communicative stimulation, physical environment, responsively, academic stimulation, imitative learning, variety, and acceptance) were significantly associated with the scores in expressive or receptive language test.

### 3.3 The Results of Multiple Regression Analysis

The Step-wise Multiple Regression Analysis identifies several predictor variables that made a significant contribution to explaining the variance associated with the criterion variable. The summary shown in Table 3 and Table 4 indicate the percent of variance explained by the predictors of preschool children's receptive and expressive vocabulary score.

**Table 3: Summary of Multiple Regression Result for Receptive Language Ability**

| Model | R                 | R Square | Change Statistics |          |     |      |               |
|-------|-------------------|----------|-------------------|----------|-----|------|---------------|
|       |                   |          | R Square Change   | F Change | df1 | df2  | Sig. F Change |
| 1     | .098 <sup>a</sup> | .010     | .010              | 16.887   | 1   | 1751 | .001          |
| 2     | .117 <sup>b</sup> | .014     | .004              | 7.470    | 1   | 1750 | .006          |
| 3     | .127 <sup>c</sup> | .016     | .002              | 4.423    | 1   | 1749 | .036          |
| 4     | .136 <sup>d</sup> | .019     | .002              | 4.217    | 1   | 1748 | .040          |

The results revealed that four variables (Parent Responsivity, Physical Environment, Father's Education, and Mother's Habitation Status) are statistically significant contributing predictors of receptive language development. Parent responsivity is the best predictor, though explained only 1% of the variance. The addition of 3 more variables, Physical Environment, Father Education, and Mother Habitation increased the predictive power of the equation slightly from 1 % to 1.9%. All four predictors explained only 1.9% of the variance.

**Table 4: Summary of Multiple Regression Results for Expressive Language Ability**

| Model | R                 | R Square | Change Statistics |          |     |      |               |
|-------|-------------------|----------|-------------------|----------|-----|------|---------------|
|       |                   |          | R Square Change   | F Change | df1 | df2  | Sig. F Change |
| 1     | .179 <sup>a</sup> | .032     | .032              | 57.873   | 1   | 1751 | .001          |
| 2     | .221 <sup>b</sup> | .049     | .017              | 30.852   | 1   | 1750 | .001          |
| 3     | .234 <sup>c</sup> | .055     | .006              | 11.342   | 1   | 1749 | .001          |
| 4     | .246 <sup>d</sup> | .060     | .005              | 10.066   | 1   | 1748 | .002          |
| 5     | .251 <sup>e</sup> | .063     | .003              | 5.211    | 1   | 1747 | .023          |
| 6     | .256 <sup>f</sup> | .066     | .003              | 5.011    | 1   | 1746 | .025          |

Table 4 illuminates the most significant home environment for preschool children's expressive language ability. The results revealed six variables (Mother's Education, Academic Stimulation, Physical Environment, Acceptance, Mother's Current Job Status, and Communicative Stimulation), that are significantly related to children's expressive language development. The six predictor's explained 6.3% of the variance. Korean mother's education level is the best predictor and explained 3.1% of the variance. The first three variables, Mother Education, Academic Stimulation, and Physical Environment, explained 5.3% of the variance of the children's expressive vocabulary test score. The addition of 3 variables, Acceptance, Mother's Current Job Status, and Communicative Stimulation, increased the predictive power of the equation from 5.3% to 6.3%.

## 4. Discussion

### 4.1 Variables Influencing Receptive Language Ability

Regarding children's receptive language development, parent responsivity was the best predictor although it explained only 1% of the variance. We speculate that such low predictive value of home and parent variables is attributed to the low variability in the frequency of each item included in all subscales of the REVT and EC-HOME. Since most parents in this study adequately responded and were attentive to the child's focus of attention, it did not add high predictive power. Even so, the parents' responsiveness is a significant predictor of children's receptive language gain, which supports Haebig, McDuffie, and Weismer's conclusion (2013). Responsive parents contribute to parent-child verbal interaction through responding to questions and opinions, assisting in accomplishing a task, supporting positive emotions, accepting individual differences, and fostering independence.

Most parents also remarked that they provide and occupy optimal safe and stable homes which include suitable clothing and nutritious food. This result validates the finding of Oh's (2013) study that a stable and predictable home environment and meeting children's basic physiological needs had the greatest effect on Korean children's receptive and expressive language ability. This finding alerts parents to the importance of raising children in a safe, well-organized, and well-structured home with their mothers who adequately respond to their needs. These children tend to acquire better receptive and expressive language ability.

It is interesting to report that mother's habitation was another significant predictor. In fact, almost all mothers (99.6%) in the study reside with their children. Such a small variation among subjects regarding mothers' habitation makes it difficult to draw an implication about the impact of habitation status of the mother on language development. As implied in the high rate (60%) of stay-at-home mothers among the participants, their presence is vital for preschool children's language development. Although our study did not identify household income as a contributing factor to children's receptive language development, father's education level, often closely related to family income, was.

Our interpretation is that children whose fathers have higher education levels tend to be exposed to a more advanced level of language input, and receive direct home language instruction. Our finding is similar to that of Choi and Sung (2010) who found that father's high academic level and white-collar occupation were positive variables that influence children's language intelligence and vocabulary scores. Children, whose fathers are small business merchants or blue-collar technicians with less education, scored lower in language intelligence and vocabulary areas than their counterparts. The interpretation that seems reasonable is that fathers with less education work longer hours in blue-collar jobs, and therefore have fewer opportunities to talk with their children. Thus, it appears that children whose fathers have less education tend to receive less language input; this in turn affects their receptive language development.

#### ***4.2 Variables Influencing Expressive Language Ability***

While we anticipated that the education level of both mother and father would be another common factor explaining expressive language development, we found maternal education level to be most significant. Umek, Kranjc, Fekonja, and Bajc (2006) and Han (2006) concur that maternal education level is the most important predictor of children's language and literacy competence. Highly educated mothers tend to have a more positive attitude and higher level of interest in their children's literacy development. Thus, children whose mothers have a lower education level will benefit significantly more from entering high quality preschools earlier than children living with highly educated mothers. The idea being that this compensates for what is lacking at home and these children will be exposed to an equally stimulating and rich language environment at preschool where they can interact with educated teachers, instead of their mothers who have a low education level.

This study revealed that children have better expressive language skills when they experience academic stimulation, such as direct reading instruction, nursery rhymes, and academic vocabulary. It is astonishing to report that providing academic language stimulation is a more important variable than communicative stimulation, given the research that young children typically develop language and understand the rules of language from being exposed to a stimulating communicative language environment (De Jong & Leseman, 2001; Schwartz & Leonard, 1984). We speculate that although simply speaking to children, which exposes them to natural conversation in everyday life is important (Oh, 2013; Jung & Yoon, 2014), Korean parents' use of academic language contributes to expressive language development. This phenomenon reflects the social norm for Korean parents who deliberately provide a structured and direct instruction of academic language; teaching colors, numbers, and spatial concepts such as up, down, in, out, small, and large to their children. This view is supported by Snow (2014) who asserted that the amount and type of language input parents provide to language learning children is important to language development. According to Snow, children will benefit most from home learning that is intended to expose them to academic language - language particularly valued in school and related to success in reading and writing.

Similarly, Lee (2013) concluded that reading books, and divergent interaction with parents during reading, were most effective for both receptive and expressive language development. In a similar study, Karrass and Braungart-Rieker (2005) found that there was a statistically significant effect from shared book reading on children's expressive language, but Bracken and Fischel (2008) and Kotaman's (2008) reported that parent-child book reading significantly affected an emergence of children's receptive language.

As long as parents use appropriate levels of books to engage children in reading and language interaction, parents can influence children's language development, interest in literacy, and learning in general (Blue-Banning, Summers, Frankland, Nelson & Beegle, 2004; Cheon, 2010; Dexter & Stacks, 2014; Jo, 2013; Galda, Gullinan, and Strickland, 1993; Gest, Freeman, Domitrovich, & Welsh, 2004; Morrow & Strickland, 1989; Pillinger&Wood, 2014). This study also found that parents' acceptance is a critical variable. These parents are more likely nurturing parents who allow their children to express themselves freely (Lee, 2014). Parents' acceptance and affectionate attitude positively affects children's expressive language development. Conclusively, our study confirmed preceding studies' results that accepting and supportive parents who create a non-hostile home environment, show a non-restrictive attitude toward children, and encourage their children to think autonomously and express their needs and ideas, and promote positive language interactions, have a positive influence on language development (Cha, 1997; Gim, Park, Jang , Yi ,& Choi, 2007; Meng, 2015). Further, our study found the mother's current employment status to be a predictor of children's expressive language. This contradicts Kim's (2012) study which concluded that mothers' employment status has no impact. We observed that children of working mothers tend to have higher expressive language test scores than children of mothers who are homemakers in Korea. This can be explained logically as Korean mothers who are employed had significantly higher education levels, mentioned above as the most critical factor for children's language ability. Also, children of working mothers interact more with people outside of their own family which gives them more opportunities to express themselves. It is logical that working mothers have a wider network of people they interact with and to whom their children are exposed, thus, they are more likely to have children with better expressive language skills.

#### **4.3 Household Income**

Unexpectedly, household income was not significantly associated with either receptive or expressive language development. Our finding repudiates many studies (Brook-Gunn, Klebanov, & Liaw, 1995; Duncan & Brooks-Gunn; 2000; Garrett, Ng'andu, & Ferron, 1994; Kim & Kim, 2011; Rouse & Barrow, 2006; Walkers, Greenwood, Hart, & Carta, 1994; Yeung, Linver, & Brook-Gunn, 2002), which have shown that income is related to parents' level of participation in language development. Similarly, two variables, Learning Materials and Variety in Materials, which are related to household income, made no impact on children's language ability. This, suggests, young children need on-going communicative stimulation and interaction with parents, not just expensive toys and excursions on weekends and family vacations. Children do not require extravagant materials in order to acquire useful language concepts and skills. Regardless of household income, most Korean parents show a high level of participation in education, while other ethnicities have substantial variability, between high and low-income households, in the level of parent verbal responsiveness, activities, materials, events, and conditions that preschool age children are exposed to. Bradley, Corwyn, McAdoo, & Coll (2001, p. 1860) reported that "across all ethnic groups, high income mothers were more likely than low income mothers to speak to their children twice or more or to respond to their children verbally during the visit."

This view is also supported by researchers (Byun, Schofer, & Kim, 2012; Kim, 2008; Kim, 2012) who found that there is a difference in children's language ability depending on the mother's income level. They asserted that family SES level had a positive effect on both parental and children's cultural capital as well as children's language and academic achievement. It is important to note that minority children from low SES multicultural homes with at least one non-Korean parent were significantly lower in all aspects of receptive and expressive language ability than those from the typical low or middle SES Korean home (Park & Chough, 2012; Kim & Kim, 2011). As such, the ethnic minority children are at-risk of delayed language development because in addition to their low SES background, they tend to have a parent who is not fluent in the Korean language, and therefore receive less linguistic stimulation at home during early childhood years; a critical period in learning language. A future study including a large sample of multicultural families is needed to further investigate the degree of communicative and academic stimulation and interaction between non-Korean parents and their children.

#### **5. Conclusion**

Korean parents with preschool age children provide a safe physical home environment and rich communicative and academic learning environment which are important factors for children's language development. They consistently provide language input, often focusing on academic and communicative language, through modeling proper usage, directly teaching words and concepts, accepting their children in a caring manner, and responding to their children's comments and questions.

This study indicates that home learning environment is a more significant factor for children's language development than parent demographic characteristics with the exceptions of the education level of parents, current job status of the mother, and habitation status of the mother. This indicates that what parents actually do to create an optimal home learning environment is much more important than who they are. While this study should not be used to generalize the findings and suggest a new policy for Korea's early childhood education, given the weak relationships between the variables, the study still has practical implication.

Korean parents need to continue providing a positive and stimulating home environment and participating in their children's language development. The implication of this for educators and policy makers is the need of ensuring "no gap" in learning environment and parent factors as these children grow and progress to higher grades. They should find ways to continuously assist parents in creating and maintaining stimulating home environments. Especially, policies are needed that will ensure the reduction of learning disparities that currently exist in disadvantaged children in low income and multicultural families, starting from upper primary grades. One useful suggestion would be to continuously expose disadvantaged children, as they grow older, to the same opportunities and quality stimulating learning environments available to children from more affluent families so that the achievement gap can be reduced and equal education opportunities given to all children.

Although the social and cultural norms are different, the findings of this study should enliven parents in the United States of America and other countries to the importance of a positive and stimulating home environment and their participation in their children's language development. This study may be instructive to parents in that it suggests that the home environment they create and their personal involvement can provide the explicit learning opportunities that promote children's language development.

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