

Enhancing Early English Exposure for Rural Left-Behind Children: Integrating Home-Kindergarten Collaboration and Learning Qualities Development

Abstract

This study investigates the challenges faced by rural left-behind children in gaining early English exposure and examines the potential of home-kindergarten collaboration to address these issues. Conducted in three villages, a rural area in Guangxi Province characterized by an underdeveloped agricultural economy, limited educational resources, and a high proportion of left-behind children due to parents migrating to urban areas for work, the study employs in-depth interviews with 15 left-behind children, 15 parents (or guardians), and 10 rural kindergarten teachers. With the implementation of the national Rural Revitalization Strategy and strong support for rural education, the economy and education in these villages have developed rapidly. Against the backdrop of high-quality education development, these kindergartens have reformed their teaching philosophies, aiming to help children gain exposure to English and improve the disadvantaged position of rural children in English learning. However, the findings reveal several key barriers, including insufficient caregiver support, inadequate educational resources, and weak communication between families and kindergartens. While kindergartens play a crucial role in introducing children to English through engaging activities such as songs, games, and storytelling, the lack of family involvement significantly limits the long-term effectiveness of these efforts. The study further emphasizes the importance of fostering essential learning qualities—such as curiosity, persistence, and engagement—as foundational elements for improving early English learning outcomes. To address these challenges, the study proposes context-sensitive strategies, including caregiver training programs, simplified take-home activities, and structured teacher-caregiver communication, to strengthen home-kindergarten collaboration. By addressing research gaps in rural early childhood education and the unique needs of left-behind children, this study provides actionable insights for enhancing early English exposure, cultivating positive learning qualities, and promoting educational equity in underprivileged contexts.

Keywords: Early English exposure; Rural education; Left-behind children; Home-kindergarten collaboration; Learning qualities; Educational equity

Introduction

The education of rural left-behind children has become a critical issue in the context of global educational equity, particularly in developing countries like China. Left-behind children, whose parents migrate to urban areas for work, face unique challenges in their academic and developmental progress due to a lack of parental involvement, limited educational resources, and inadequate learning environments. Among these challenges, early English exposure stands out as a significant barrier, as it requires consistent engagement, access to appropriate resources, and age-appropriate guidance—factors often absent in rural settings. Early English exposure has been recognized as a foundational step in developing language and literacy skills, laying the groundwork for academic success and future opportunities in a globalized world. However, rural left-behind children in China face significant

disadvantages in this area, lagging behind their urban peers in terms of access to stimulating learning environments and early language development opportunities. This disparity is rooted in systemic inequalities, including socio-economic disadvantages, insufficient kindergarten resources, and a lack of family support, which collectively hinder their ability to engage with early English learning (Yi et al., 2019; Gao et al., 2021). Addressing these challenges requires a deeper understanding of the factors influencing early English exposure and the potential for home-kindergarten collaboration to bridge the gap. Furthermore, fostering learning qualities—such as curiosity, persistence, and engagement—is essential for supporting children’s ability to overcome these barriers and achieve long-term success in language acquisition and overall development.

Research highlights that rural left-behind children face multiple barriers to early English exposure. These include limited interest in English, insufficient access to age-appropriate resources, and unsupportive home and kindergarten environments. Many of these children are cared for by grandparents or relatives with low educational attainment, who are often unable to provide adequate academic support or create a stimulating language-rich environment (Li et al., 2021; Ma et al., 2021). The absence of parents, compounded by the socio-economic disadvantages of rural areas, creates a significant gap in children’s early language development compared to their urban peers. Furthermore, rural kindergartens often lack qualified teachers specializing in early English education and appropriate teaching materials, and large class sizes limit opportunities for personalized instruction (Wang et al., 2020). Teaching methods in rural kindergartens frequently rely on rote learning rather than interactive and playful approaches, which are essential for fostering interest, engagement, and the development of positive learning qualities in early language acquisition (Chen et al., 2018). These systemic issues leave kindergartens unable to fully address the needs of left-behind children, further exacerbating the disparity in early English development between rural and urban children.

The role of the home environment in shaping children’s early language development has been widely documented. Studies have shown that early home reading activities, caregiver engagement, and family investment are critical for fostering language and literacy skills (Chen et al., 2018; Gao et al., 2021). However, in rural areas, the home environment is often characterized by limited resources and low caregiver literacy levels, which hinder children’s early English exposure (Guo et al., 2021). For left-behind children, the situation is even more challenging, as their caregivers—often elderly grandparents—may lack the knowledge or capacity to support their education. This lack of involvement not only affects children’s language development but also limits their motivation, interest, and the cultivation of essential learning qualities, such as persistence and self-regulation, which are foundational for academic success (Li et al., 2021). Kindergartens, on the other hand, face their own limitations, including resource constraints, insufficient teacher training in early English education, and a lack of mechanisms for engaging families in the educational process (Wang et al., 2020). These challenges highlight the need for a collaborative approach that bridges the gap between home and kindergarten to support rural left-behind children more effectively.

Home-kindergarten collaboration has been identified as a key factor in improving young children’s language development, particularly in early literacy and second-language acquisition. Effective collaboration between families and kindergartens can create a supportive learning environment that fosters children’s early language skills, positive learning qualities, and overall development (Blandin,

2017; Iyengar, 2021). However, in rural areas, the potential for home-kindergarten collaboration remains largely untapped. Communication between families and kindergartens is often infrequent or superficial, with limited mechanisms for meaningful cooperation. Caregivers of left-behind children, many of whom are elderly or lack formal education, often feel disconnected from the kindergarten system and are unable to actively participate in their children's early learning (Guo et al., 2021). Kindergartens, meanwhile, struggle to engage families in meaningful ways due to resource constraints and the lack of targeted strategies for fostering collaboration (Zhang & Perkins, 2023). This disconnect between home and kindergarten further limits the support available to left-behind children in their journey of early English exposure.

Despite these challenges, there is significant potential for home-kindergarten collaboration to improve early English learning outcomes for rural left-behind children. Research suggests that interventions such as caregiver training programs, take-home language activities, and kindergarten-led family engagement strategies can have a positive impact on children's early language development, motivation, and learning qualities (Emmers et al., 2021; Zheng et al., 2022). By addressing the barriers to collaboration—such as low caregiver literacy, inadequate communication channels, and cultural norms that discourage family involvement—kindergartens and families can work together to create a more supportive learning environment. However, existing interventions often fail to account for the unique socio-economic and cultural contexts of rural areas, where traditional models of home-kindergarten collaboration may not be feasible. This study seeks to explore these possibilities by identifying the current challenges, roles, and limitations of families and kindergartens, and developing practical strategies for fostering effective home-kindergarten collaboration in rural settings. Additionally, it emphasizes the importance of cultivating children's learning qualities as a crucial component of improving early English exposure and supporting their long-term educational success.

Research Questions

To address the challenges faced by rural left-behind children in early English exposure and explore the potential for home-kindergarten collaboration, this study is guided by the following research questions:

What are the primary difficulties faced by rural left-behind children in early English exposure at the kindergarten level, particularly in developing their learning qualities, such as curiosity, persistence, and engagement?

What are the roles and current conditions of families and kindergartens in supporting rural left-behind children's early English learning and fostering positive learning qualities?

How can home-kindergarten collaboration effectively enhance the early English learning experiences and learning qualities of rural left-behind children?

By addressing these questions, this study aims to fill the gaps in existing research and provide actionable insights for improving the early English learning outcomes of rural left-behind children. It emphasizes the importance of cultivating learning qualities as a critical foundation for language acquisition and overall educational success. This research contributes to the growing body of literature on rural education and highlights the significance of home-kindergarten collaboration as a strategy for

addressing educational inequalities. Ultimately, it seeks to develop practical, evidence-based solutions that can be implemented by policymakers, educators, and families to support left-behind children in their early language development journey, while fostering the learning qualities necessary for their long-term growth and success.

Literature Review

The role of home and school environments in shaping children's early language development has been widely studied, with growing emphasis on home-school collaboration as a means to improve educational equity. Recent research highlights the importance of parental involvement, early learning environments, and school-based interventions in fostering language, cognitive development, and learning qualities, such as curiosity, persistence, and engagement. These learning qualities are critical for children's long-term academic success and are particularly important in early language acquisition. However, significant gaps remain in understanding how these factors apply to rural left-behind children and the mechanisms of home-kindergarten collaboration in underprivileged contexts, particularly in the area of early English exposure. Table 1 summarizes key studies, their findings, and the research gaps they leave unaddressed.

Blandin (2017) emphasized the role of home-school collaboration in narrowing academic achievement gaps but focused on Christian education in developed countries, leaving a gap in understanding its application to rural, underprivileged settings and early childhood education. Similarly, Crampton and Hall (2017) highlighted the importance of early home environments in shaping language and literacy skills but did not explore how these early advantages or disadvantages translate into second-language learning, particularly in rural or resource-constrained contexts. Chen et al. (2018) demonstrated the effectiveness of school-based interventions in improving vocabulary development but did not address the role of families in sustaining these gains, underscoring the need to examine the interplay between home and school environments in early English exposure and the cultivation of learning qualities.

Studies such as Yi et al. (2019) and Wang et al. (2020) emphasized the importance of both home and school environments in fostering literacy but did not explore how these environments could be integrated to maximize their impact in early childhood education. Similarly, Gao et al. (2021) and Guo et al. (2021) highlighted the critical role of supportive home environments but acknowledged that many rural families lack the resources or knowledge to create such conditions, pointing to the need for targeted interventions to bridge the gap between home and kindergarten. Emmers et al. (2021) further noted barriers to parental engagement, such as low literacy levels and socio-economic constraints, which limit the scalability of caregiver training programs in rural areas.

Other studies, such as Iyengar (2021), explored the potential of digital tools to enhance home-school collaboration but noted that rural areas often lack the infrastructure to implement such solutions. Li et al. (2021) and Ma et al. (2021) identified socio-economic constraints and limited parental literacy as significant barriers to creating supportive home learning environments but did not explore how kindergartens could compensate for these limitations. Zheng et al. (2022) and Zhang and Perkins (2023) emphasized the importance of structured reading activities and community-based approaches in early childhood education but did not address the specific challenges faced by left-behind children or the role of home-kindergarten collaboration in fostering early English exposure and learning qualities.

Table 1: Summary of Literature Review

Author(s) and Year	Research Methods	Research Results	Research Gaps
Blandin (2017)	Theoretical analysis	Home-school collaboration narrows the academic achievement gap.	Focused on native language education in developed countries; lacks application to rural, underprivileged contexts and early childhood.
Crampton & Hall (2017)	Quantitative study	Early home environments shape language and literacy skills.	Did not explore second-language learning or rural contexts.
Chen et al. (2018)	Randomized controlled trial	School-based interventions improve vocabulary development.	Did not address the role of families in sustaining gains or fostering learning qualities.
Yi et al. (2019)	Quantitative study	Access to resources improves early literacy habits.	Gains limited by lack of parental involvement in rural areas.
Wang et al. (2020)	Quantitative study	Both home and school environments are critical for literacy development.	Did not explore integration of home and school environments in early childhood education.
Emmers et al. (2021)	Systematic review and meta-analysis	Caregiver training improves cognitive and language development.	Barriers to parental engagement limit scalability, particularly in rural areas.
Gao et al. (2021)	Quantitative study	Supportive home reading environments foster literacy skills.	Many rural families lack resources or knowledge to create such environments.
Guo et al. (2021)	Quantitative study	Home and school environments influence childhood development.	Did not explore integration of home and kindergarten environments.
Iyengar (2021)	Theoretical analysis	Digital tools can enhance home-school collaboration.	Rural areas lack infrastructure for digital solutions.
Li et al. (2021)	Mixed-methods analysis	Socio-economic constraints hinder caregiver investment in	Did not explore how kindergartens could compensate for these

Author(s) and Year	Research Methods	Research Results	Research Gaps
		early language learning.	limitations.
Ma et al. (2021)	Quantitative study	Rich home language environments improve early language skills.	Many rural families lack resources to provide such environments.
Zheng et al. (2022)	Quantitative study	Picture book reading improves language skills in preschoolers.	Focused on early childhood; lacks application to second-language learning or home-kindergarten collaboration.
Zhang & Perkins (2023)	Theoretical analysis	Community-based approaches empower families in education.	Did not address challenges specific to left-behind children or early English exposure.

As summarized in Table 1, while existing research underscores the importance of home and school environments in shaping early language development, it leaves significant gaps in understanding how these environments can be integrated to support rural left-behind children in early English exposure. Furthermore, the role of learning qualities, such as curiosity, persistence, and engagement, in overcoming these challenges has been largely overlooked. This study addresses these gaps by focusing on the unique challenges faced by left-behind children in early English learning and exploring practical strategies for fostering home-kindergarten collaboration in rural, underprivileged contexts. By doing so, it contributes to advancing knowledge in this field and provides actionable insights for improving educational equity, cultivating positive learning qualities, and enhancing early language learning opportunities for left-behind children.

Research Methods

This study employs in-depth interviews as the primary research method to explore the challenges faced by rural left-behind children in early English exposure and the potential for home-kindergarten collaboration to address these issues, with a particular focus on fostering positive learning qualities such as curiosity, persistence, and engagement. In-depth interviews are widely recognized as an effective qualitative research method for gaining deep insights into participants' experiences, perspectives, and social contexts (Creswell, 2013; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). A total of 40 participants were interviewed, including 15 left-behind children (6 years old), 15 parents (or guardians), and 10 rural kindergarten teachers. The children were selected from kindergartens, ensuring a balance of gender and varying levels of English performance (categorized as excellent, average, and poor). Parents or guardians were chosen to represent different types of guardianship arrangements, including grandparent guardianship, relative guardianship, and single-parent guardianship, reflecting the diverse caregiving structures common in rural areas. The teachers were selected based on their experience teaching English or language-related activities in rural kindergartens, with a range of teaching experience and professional titles. This diverse participant pool ensured the study captured a wide

range of perspectives and experiences, providing a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities in rural early childhood education, including the cultivation of learning qualities necessary for long-term academic success.

The interviews were semi-structured, allowing for flexibility and depth while maintaining consistency across key topics. This approach enabled participants to express their thoughts freely while ensuring that core themes were covered. The content of the interviews varied according to the participant group. For 6-year-old children, the interviews focused on their interest in learning English, their learning environment, their perceptions of support from parents and teachers, and their development of learning qualities such as curiosity and persistence. For parents or guardians, the interviews explored their understanding of English learning, levels of involvement, types of support provided to children, communication with kindergartens, and their role in fostering learning qualities. For teachers, the interviews examined their teaching methods, the current state of home-kindergarten communication, their perceptions of home-kindergarten collaboration mechanisms, and strategies for cultivating children's learning qualities alongside language skills. Each interview lasted approximately 15 to 30 minutes for children and 30 to 60 minutes for adults and was conducted in a one-on-one format to create a comfortable environment for participants to share their experiences openly. All interviews were audio-recorded with the participants' consent and later transcribed for analysis. The primary objective of the interviews was to uncover the unique challenges faced by rural left-behind children in early English exposure, the limitations of parental and kindergarten support, and the potential for collaborative mechanisms to improve outcomes, particularly in fostering both language skills and essential learning qualities. By gathering insights from children, parents, and teachers, the study aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the current state of home-kindergarten collaboration and identify strategies for enhancing support for left-behind children's English learning and learning qualities.

This study was conducted in three rural areas of Guangxi Province, referred to as Villages A, B, and C, which are representative of many developing regions in China. These villages are predominantly agricultural communities, with most households relying on farming and small-scale labor as their primary sources of income. A significant social characteristic across all three villages is the high proportion of left-behind children, who account for approximately 40-50% of the total child population. This is due to many parents migrating to urban areas for work, leaving their children in the care of grandparents or other relatives. Village A has a population of approximately 30,000, while Villages B and C have populations of around 20,000 and 15,000, respectively. Against the backdrop of high-quality education development, these kindergartens have reformed their teaching philosophies, aiming to help children gain exposure to English and improve the disadvantaged position of rural children in English learning. Village A has two kindergartens serving the local community, with an additional two located in nearby areas. Villages B and C face similar conditions, with two kindergartens in each village and another two in nearby towns. However, these kindergartens still face challenges, such as a shortage of well-trained teachers, limited teaching resources, and facilities that require further development. English education, in particular, is constrained by a lack of specialized teachers and appropriate resources, such as storybooks, audio-visual aids, and interactive learning tools. Despite these challenges, kindergartens in these villages actively introduce English through activities such as songs, games, and storytelling, providing children with valuable early exposure to the language.

Nevertheless, the lack of family involvement and limited caregiver support often restrict the long-term effectiveness of these efforts. Given these socio-educational conditions, Villages A, B, and C provide an ideal context for studying the challenges of early English exposure in rural areas. They also offer valuable opportunities to explore the potential for home-kindergarten collaboration to enhance early childhood education outcomes. By focusing on these three villages, this study aims to provide actionable insights into improving early English exposure, fostering positive learning experiences, and promoting educational equity in similar developing regions.

To ensure the inclusion of diverse perspectives, the demographic details of the participants were carefully analyzed and are presented in Table 2, which provides an overview of their gender, age, guardianship type, English performance levels, and other relevant characteristics. For example, among the left-behind children, there was an even distribution of gender (8 male and 7 female), and their English performance was categorized into excellent (4 children), average (6 children), and poor (5 children). The study also considered the children’s learning qualities, noting differences in curiosity, persistence, and engagement across performance levels. Among parents, most were grandparents (10 out of 15), and their education levels were predominantly low, with 8 having completed only primary school or below. Teachers were selected from both village and township kindergartens, representing a range of class sizes, teaching experience, and professional titles. This demographic diversity provided a robust foundation for analyzing the complex interplay between home and kindergarten environments in rural education, while also examining how these environments influence the development of children’s learning qualities and early English exposure.

Table 2: Participants’ Demographic Information

Category	Distribution	Left-Behind Children	Parents (or Guardians)	Teachers
Gender	Male	8	5	4
	Female	7	10	6
Age	6 years old	15	-	-
	Below 40 years old	-	3	2
	40-60 years old	-	9	5
	Above 60 years old	-	3	3
Guardian Type	Grandparent Guardianship	10	10	-
	Relative Guardianship	3	3	-
	Single Parent Guardianship	2	2	-

Category	Distribution	Left-Behind Children	Parents (or Guardians)	Teachers
English Performance	Excellent (Top 30%)	4	-	-
	Average (Middle 40%)	6	-	-
	Poor (Bottom 30%)	5	-	-
Teaching Experience	Less than 5 years	-	-	3
	5-10 years	-	-	4
	More than 10 years	-	-	3
Education Level	Primary School or Below	-	8	-
	Middle School	-	5	-
	High School or Above	-	2	-
	Associate Degree	-	-	4
	Bachelor's Degree	-	-	6
Occupation	Farmer	-	10	-
	Temporary Worker	-	3	-
	Unemployed	-	2	-
Title	Junior Title	-	-	5
	Intermediate Title	-	-	4
	Senior Title	-	-	1
Residence	Village	12	-	-
	Township	3	-	-
School Type	Village Kindergarten	-	-	6

Category	Distribution	Left-Behind Children	Parents (or Guardians)	Teachers
	Township Central Kindergarten	-	-	4
Communication Frequency	Frequent (Once a Month or More)	-	3	-
	Occasional (1-2 Times Per Semester)	-	7	-
	Rare (Almost Never)	-	5	-
Class Size	Less than 30 Students	-	-	3
	30-50 Students	-	-	5
	More than 50 Students	-	-	2

By integrating these diverse perspectives, the study not only captures the unique challenges faced by left-behind children but also offers actionable insights into how home-kindergarten collaboration can be strengthened to enhance both English learning outcomes and the development of essential learning qualities in rural, underprivileged contexts. The detailed demographic breakdown in Table 2 provides a nuanced understanding of the participants' backgrounds, including variations in caregiving arrangements, educational levels, and children's English performance and learning qualities. This comprehensive approach ensures a more thorough and reliable analysis of the findings, enabling the study to identify targeted strategies that address the specific needs of left-behind children while fostering educational equity and long-term academic success.

Data Analysis

The data collected through in-depth interviews were analyzed using qualitative methods to identify key themes and patterns related to the challenges faced by rural left-behind children in learning English and the potential for home-kindergarten collaboration to address these challenges. The analysis also emphasized the development of learning qualities, such as curiosity, persistence, and engagement, as critical components of effective early language learning. All interviews were transcribed verbatim and analyzed through a rigorous three-step coding process: open coding to identify recurring ideas and concepts, axial coding to group related ideas into broader categories, and selective coding to refine these into core themes that provide a deeper understanding of the data.

Thematic analysis revealed four main themes: (1) the learning needs and challenges of left-behind

children, (2) the limitations of parental support, (3) the difficulties kindergarten teachers face in fostering home-kindergarten collaboration, and (4) the potential benefits of integrated support mechanisms. Children's narratives highlighted struggles with maintaining interest in English, low engagement in learning activities, and the lack of a conducive and stimulating learning environment at home. Parents expressed feelings of inadequacy, citing a lack of confidence, knowledge, and resources to assist with early English learning. Many guardians, particularly grandparents, struggled to provide consistent support due to their limited literacy levels and unfamiliarity with language learning strategies. Kindergarten teachers emphasized the challenges of engaging parents and guardians, particularly those with low education levels or limited time, and the need for structured, practical collaboration mechanisms to bridge the gap between home and school environments.

Narrative analysis provided deeper insights into the emotional and social dimensions of these challenges. For example, children expressed feelings of frustration and disengagement when they struggled with English learning tasks, which often stemmed from a lack of support or positive reinforcement at home. Parents and guardians frequently expressed guilt or helplessness over their perceived inability to support their children's education, while teachers voiced frustrations about the lack of time, resources, and effective communication channels to facilitate meaningful collaboration with families. These narratives underscored the emotional toll of the challenges faced by all stakeholders and highlighted the need for interventions that address both practical and emotional barriers to early English learning.

Comparative analysis further explored differences across guardianship types (e.g., grandparent guardianship, relative guardianship, and single-parent guardianship) and kindergarten settings. The analysis revealed key factors influencing the effectiveness of home-kindergarten collaboration, such as the availability of educational resources, the education levels of guardians, and the frequency and quality of communication between families and kindergartens. For instance, children under grandparent guardianship often faced greater challenges due to the limited ability of their caregivers to engage with English learning activities, while kindergartens with better-trained teachers and more resources were more successful in fostering children's interest and learning qualities.

This multi-layered analysis provided a comprehensive understanding of the current state of English learning and home-kindergarten collaboration in rural contexts. The findings highlight the need for tailored strategies to address the unique challenges faced by children, guardians, and teachers in rural kindergartens. Specifically, the study emphasizes the importance of creating structured support mechanisms that integrate home and kindergarten efforts, while also fostering children's learning qualities such as curiosity, persistence, and engagement. These insights offer valuable guidance for developing practical, evidence-based interventions to improve early English learning outcomes for left-behind children and promote educational equity in rural, underprivileged settings.

Results

The results of this study, based on in-depth interviews with rural left-behind children (6 years old), their parents (or guardians), and rural kindergarten teachers, revealed several key findings related to the challenges of early English exposure, the roles and limitations of families and kindergartens, and the potential for home-kindergarten collaboration to improve learning outcomes. A critical focus of the

findings was the role of learning qualities—such as curiosity, persistence, and engagement—in shaping children’s early English learning experiences and the barriers preventing their development in rural, underprivileged contexts. Table 3 presents selected quotes from participants that illustrate these findings and provide deeper insights into the challenges and opportunities for improving early English learning in rural areas.

One of the most significant findings was the challenges left-behind children face in early English learning, including limited access to engaging resources, a lack of stimulating activities, and insufficient support at home. Many children expressed that while they enjoyed singing English songs or playing games in class, they lacked similar opportunities at home, which hindered their ability to retain what they had learned and cultivate positive learning qualities like curiosity and persistence. For example, one child shared that they enjoyed singing songs in English at school but did not have access to similar activities at home. Another child explained that their grandmother, who was their primary caregiver, did not know how to teach them English, leaving them to watch TV instead. These responses highlight the lack of engaging and age-appropriate English learning opportunities outside the kindergarten environment and the absence of environments that nurture curiosity and active engagement. Without consistent stimulation and reinforcement, children’s interest in English wanes, and their ability to develop persistence in language learning is significantly hindered. Some children also noted the lack of English-related materials at home, such as books or visual aids, which further limited their ability to practice and engage with the language outside of school.

Families, particularly grandparents who often act as primary caregivers, face significant limitations in supporting early English learning and fostering positive learning qualities. While parents and guardians acknowledged the importance of English, many felt unprepared to assist due to their own lack of knowledge, low literacy levels, or limited time. For instance, one grandparent explained that they understood the importance of English but did not know any English themselves and could only encourage the child to listen to the teacher. Similarly, a single father working in a nearby town shared that he wanted his child to learn English but did not have the time to teach them and instead allowed the child to watch cartoons or play with toys. Parents also reported minimal communication with kindergarten teachers, often citing embarrassment or a lack of understanding of how to support their child’s early English learning. One parent admitted that they did not know how to talk to the teacher about English because they felt they lacked the knowledge to ask questions. Grandparents, in particular, expressed frustration over their inability to assist, with one grandparent sharing that they wanted to help but did not know where to start or how to pronounce English letters. Another grandparent noted that they tried to help with homework but could not understand the teacher’s instructions, leading to frustration and missed opportunities to reinforce learning at home.

Kindergarten teachers also reported challenges in promoting early English learning among left-behind children, particularly in engaging families to support learning at home and fostering learning qualities in children. Teachers observed that while grandparents were attentive and caring, they often lacked the confidence or skills to assist with English learning, even in simple ways like practicing songs or games. One teacher explained that grandparents cared deeply about the children but did not know how to help with early English learning and needed guidance on simple activities they could do at home. Teachers also highlighted that left-behind children often lacked motivation or exposure to English outside of

kindergarten, which made it harder to sustain their interest in the language or develop persistence in learning. For example, one teacher noted that children enjoyed English songs and games in class but forgot what they had learned at home due to a lack of reinforcement. Another teacher remarked that while they tried to make lessons fun and interactive, the absence of follow-up at home made it difficult for children to stay engaged. Teachers also emphasized the difficulty of cultivating learning qualities like engagement and persistence in children who lacked consistent reinforcement at home. While some teachers attempted to address these challenges by providing additional resources or simplifying lessons, they noted that these efforts were not always sufficient without parental involvement and a supportive home environment.

Despite these challenges, the study found significant potential for home-kindergarten collaboration to enhance early English learning outcomes and foster positive learning qualities in children. Both parents and teachers recognized the importance of collaboration but identified barriers to its implementation. Parents expressed a willingness to support their children but lacked the knowledge or strategies to do so effectively. For instance, one parent suggested that if teachers could provide simple activities or games, they would be more confident in helping their children. Another parent added that even small tasks, such as teaching them how to say words or sing songs, would make a difference. Teachers echoed this sentiment, emphasizing the need for structured mechanisms to engage families. One teacher suggested organizing more parent-teacher meetings or workshops to show parents how to do simple things like singing English songs or playing word games with their children. Teachers also highlighted the positive impact of even small amounts of parental involvement, noting that when parents showed interest, such as encouraging their child to sing an English song at home, it boosted the child's confidence and motivation. One teacher shared an example of a parent who started reading simple English picture books with their child, which led to noticeable improvements in the child's curiosity and engagement in class. Teachers also suggested providing parents with easy-to-use resources, such as flashcards or audio recordings of songs, to bridge the gap between home and school learning and make it easier for families to participate.

These findings suggest that home-kindergarten collaboration can play a pivotal role in fostering learning qualities such as curiosity, persistence, and engagement by providing children with consistent and meaningful exposure to English in both home and school environments. Structured activities like take-home English games, shared reading practices, or simple instructions for caregivers could help bridge the gap between home and school. Teachers emphasized that even small, guided efforts by families could significantly improve children's motivation and engagement with English learning. By fostering stronger communication and providing parents with simple, actionable strategies, kindergartens can help families create a more stimulating and supportive environment that nurtures children's learning qualities alongside their language skills.

Table 3: Selected Interview Quotes

Theme	Participant Group	Selected Quotes
Challenges in Early English Exposure	Left-Behind Children	"I like singing songs in English, but we don't have many songs or games at home."

Theme	Participant Group	Selected Quotes
		"I want to learn more English, but my grandma doesn't know how to teach me."
		"In school, we have books and pictures, but at home, there's nothing to look at."
		"I want to practice more, but I don't have anyone to help me."
Roles of Families	Parents (or Guardians)	"I know English is important, but I don't know any English myself."
		"I just let him watch cartoons because I don't know how to help him."
		"It's hard to help when I didn't learn English myself."
		"I try to help him with his homework, but I don't understand what the teacher wants us to do."
Challenges for Teachers	Kindergarten Teachers	"Grandparents care about the children, but they don't know how to help."
		"These children enjoy English songs and games in class, but they forget at home."
		"We try to make lessons fun, but without reinforcement at home, it's hard for the children to stay engaged."
		"Sometimes we send home simple worksheets or songs, but the parents don't always know how to use them."
Potential for Collaboration	Parents (or Guardians)	"If the teacher could tell us what to do, like giving us simple activities or games, we could try to help more."
		"Even if it's something small, like teaching us how to say words or sing songs, it would help."
	Kindergarten Teachers	"We need more parent-teacher meetings or workshops to show parents how to do simple things like singing English songs or playing word games with their children."

Theme	Participant Group	Selected Quotes
		"When parents show interest, even just by encouraging their child, it makes a big difference."
		"One parent started reading simple English picture books with their child, and I noticed the child became more curious and engaged in class."
		"If we could send home simple flashcards or audio recordings of songs, parents could use them to help their children practice."

Discussion

The findings of this study provide significant insights into the challenges faced by rural left-behind children in early English exposure and the potential for home-kindergarten collaboration to address these issues, with a particular emphasis on fostering essential learning qualities such as curiosity, persistence, and engagement. By focusing on the perspectives of 6-year-old children, their parents (or guardians), and kindergarten teachers, this study highlights the unique difficulties in rural, underprivileged contexts and offers practical strategies to strengthen collaboration between families and kindergartens.

This study extends previous research by addressing the specific challenges of fostering early English exposure and learning qualities among left-behind children. While earlier studies, such as Blandin (2017) and Wang et al. (2020), emphasized the importance of home-school collaboration, they primarily focused on developed countries or literacy development at later stages. This study fills a critical gap by exploring how home-kindergarten collaboration can be adapted to rural, resource-constrained settings, where families often lack the knowledge, resources, and confidence to support early English learning. The findings reveal that left-behind children face not only a lack of consistent English exposure but also limited opportunities to develop learning qualities like curiosity and persistence due to the absence of stimulating and supportive home environments. For example, while children enjoyed interactive English activities in kindergartens, this engagement often diminished at home due to the lack of resources and guidance for caregivers.

A key contribution of this study is its focus on integrating efforts between kindergartens and families to foster learning qualities alongside language skills. For instance, teachers emphasized that small, actionable strategies—such as encouraging parents to sing English songs, play word games, or engage in shared reading—could significantly enhance children’s curiosity and persistence in learning English. These findings expand on the work of Gao et al. (2021) and Li et al. (2021), who identified resource and knowledge gaps in rural families but did not explore how kindergartens could actively address these challenges. By providing families with simple tools, such as flashcards, nursery rhymes, or picture books, kindergartens can help create a more stimulating home environment that nurtures

children's learning qualities and reinforces language skills.

This study also highlights the emotional dimensions of learning, particularly the role of motivation and confidence in sustaining children's engagement with English. Teachers noted that children who received encouragement and support at home were more persistent and enthusiastic in class, underscoring the importance of fostering a positive and collaborative relationship between families and kindergartens. However, barriers such as low parental literacy, time constraints, and weak communication channels remain significant challenges. Unlike studies such as Iyengar (2021), which suggested digital tools as a solution, this study found that low-cost, accessible strategies—such as face-to-face workshops, take-home activities, and simplified communication—are more feasible and effective in rural contexts. These strategies not only address the limitations of rural families but also empower them to actively support their children's learning and development of essential learning qualities.

In conclusion, this study highlights the critical role of home-kindergarten collaboration in enhancing early English exposure and fostering essential learning qualities such as curiosity, persistence, and engagement among rural left-behind children. By addressing the unique challenges of resource-constrained families and identifying practical, low-cost strategies like take-home activities and caregiver workshops, the findings demonstrate how kindergartens can bridge gaps in parental support and create cohesive learning environments. These insights provide actionable guidance for improving educational equity and supporting the holistic development of left-behind children in rural areas.

Conclusion and Limitations

This study highlights the significant challenges faced by rural left-behind children in early English exposure, including limited caregiver support, inadequate resources, and weak home-kindergarten collaboration, as well as the difficulty in fostering essential learning qualities such as curiosity, persistence, and engagement. While kindergartens play a critical role in introducing children to English through engaging activities such as songs, games, and storytelling, the lack of family involvement and communication often limits the long-term effectiveness of these efforts and hinders the development of these critical learning qualities. By identifying specific mechanisms, such as caregiver training programs, simplified take-home activities, and structured teacher-caregiver communication, this study provides actionable insights for fostering effective home-kindergarten collaboration in rural, underprivileged contexts. These strategies not only enhance children's English learning outcomes but also nurture their learning qualities, which are foundational for sustained academic success.

However, the study has limitations, including a small sample size limited to a specific rural region, reliance on self-reported data, and a focus on qualitative methods. Future research could expand the sample size, incorporate diverse rural settings, and use quantitative or mixed-method approaches to provide a more comprehensive analysis of the impact of home-kindergarten collaboration on early English learning and the development of learning qualities. Despite these limitations, this study offers valuable insights and practical recommendations for improving early English exposure, fostering essential learning qualities, and promoting educational equity for rural left-behind children.

Consent and Ethics Approval to Participate

This study was approved by the relevant ethics committee, and all participants provided informed consent prior to their participation.

Disclaimer (Artificial intelligence)

The author(s) hereby declare that no generative AI technologies, including but not limited to Large Language Models (e.g., ChatGPT, Copilot) or text-to-image generation tools, were utilized in the writing or editing of this manuscript.

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