**Collaborative Involvement in English Language Acquisition among Family Members: An Investigation on Early Grade Children in Cape Coast Private Basic Schools, Ghana**

**ABSTRACT**

English as a medium of instruction is widely regarded as a vital tool for academic success in Ghana. In Cape Coast, where the private schools are known for English-based instruction, many parents with high aspirations for their children’s English proficiency are increasingly drawn to the private basic school sector. The study investigated parents' involvement in the acquisition of the English language by early learners in private basic schools in Cape Coast, Ghana, and its impact on their proficiency in English and their first language (L1). The research employed a descriptive qualitative approach and purposive maximum variation sampling to conduct interviews with 25 parents and 12 teachers from ten private schools. The types of parental support for children's English learning identified in the study included supervision of homework and reading, speaking English during daily routines, offering books and other literacy materials, maintaining contact, and arranging additional tutoring. Increased parental involvement was associated with greater English proficiency, as indicated by improved vocabulary, reading fluency, and increased self-confidence in speaking among students. However, a strong focus on English was reported to dull the children's Fante (L1) competences; they constantly code-switched, had a restricted L1 vocabulary, and viewed Fante as not significant. The research suggests that although parental involvement enriches the early acquisition of English, it should not do so at the expense of L1 maintenance while promoting English literacy skills and not devaluing the children's Fante (L1).

**Keywords:** Parental involvement, English language acquisition, early learners, private schools, bilingualism, Fante-speaking

**INTRODUCTION**

English language proficiency is often regarded as a crucial determinant of academic success and social opportunities in Ghana (Appiah & Ardila, 2021). The Ghana education system designates English as the primary medium of instruction from basic school onwards. Early primary education (up to Basic 3) uses both the child's first language (L1) and English in teaching to promote familiarity and enhance understanding. However, in private schools in urban areas in Ghana, there is often a strong preference for the English language from the kindergarten level and mastery is essential at the lower primary level as they aim to secure pupils' performance in the nationwide Basic Education Certificate Examination (Davis& Agbenyega, 2012; Adu Boahen, 2022). This introduction of English from the onset reflects strong parental demand for early English proficiency in the private basic schools. Studies have shown that parents play a crucial and mediating role in students' achievement in learning English and overall academic outcomes (Al Murshidi et al, 2023; Leopardas & Rosil, 2024; Quijano et al., 2023). English is viewed as a gateway to higher education and socioeconomic opportunities (Gaisey et al., 2025; Pinilla-Portiño, 2018), which is why many parents in urban centres, such as Cape Coast, invest in private schools that promise an English-rich environment.

Studies have shown that children's language development is highly influenced by their environment and parental interactions (Edu et al., 2022; Holzinger et al., 2020; Feldman, 2019). The role of parents in assisting their children's learning persists even after the students start school, reinforcing the importance of consistent and active engagement in their educational journey (Murtiningsih et al., 2024). There is extensive evidence that consistently identifies the components of quality parent–child interaction shown to be associated with better language development (Levickis et al., 2023; Dong et al., 2025). Edu et al. (2022) argue that parental involvement is one of the major factors supporting the development of language skills in childhood, as parents are directly involved in their children's education. Parents provide rich linguistic input and motivation to their children, which complements classroom instruction from teachers. Home practices, such as shared reading, homework help, and supervised use of English-language media by parents, help improve their vocabulary, comprehension, and literacy (Pobbi, 2020; Hemas et al., 2023). Numerous studies have reported a positive correlation between parental engagement and children's language proficiency and literacy outcomes. For example, Hillier (2021) found that parental involvement has a favourable impact on students' accomplishment. Stutzel (2019) also explains that parents' role in literacy influences children's literacy development because their interaction with the parents motivates and encourages their literacy learning. Ghanney (2018) also observed that parents in Ghana with higher literacy levels are more able to assist their young children's learning, which improves the children's performance. Conversely, when parents have limited education or English proficiency often struggle to contribute academic support or other ways to support their wards' education despite placing a high value on their wards education on education (Ghanny, 2018; Tarasawa & Waggoner, 2015).

In the Ghanaian Education setting, private schools are prevalent at the basic level. Private primary schools constitute a third of the schools in basic education and typically show better educational performance than the public sector as judged by standardized tests (UNICEF Innocenti & UNICEF Ghana, 2023; Nsiah-Peprah, 2004). In Cape Coast, where the private schools are known for English-based instruction, we see parents with high English aspirations for their children being drawn into the private basic school sector. With parents who pay fees to these schools, there is often an investment in the child's development, and the parents are more likely to be engaged in learning activities at home. However, limited studies have been conducted to explore how parents are involved in their children's English learning at an early age in the context of private schools. Questions remain regarding the forms of parental engagement that are most prevalent or most effective with pupils' English language proficiency. Finally, there is a debate surrounding the effect of early exposure to English on a child's L1: Does robust early English acquisition support the first language, or put it in danger? (Dako & Quarcoo, 2017; Anani, 2019; Ahadzie et al., 2015). This study also fills in these gaps by exploring (1) the forms of parental involvement in early years' English language learning in the context of private basic schools; (2) the relationship between parental involvement and the proficiency of young learners in English; (3) the impact of English language acquisition on pupils' first language development.

**THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

Epstein's Theory of Overlapping Spheres of Influence was developed by Joyce Epstein in the late 1980s. The theory helps to explain parental involvement in their children's English language Acquisition in private schools. Epstein contends that children learn best when the most significant aspects of their lives, family, school, and community truly collaborate (Epstein et al., 2025). To implement this idea, there are six ways to engage parents: parenting- parenting support for learning, communicating- stay in touch with school, volunteering- involvement in school activities and events, learning at home- assist with homework or make it enjoyable, decision-making- govern the school or join parent teacher club, working with the community-connect families to community resources for help with learning (Li et al., 2024). According to [Epstein](https://www.mdpi.com/2076-0760/14/8/475#B18-socsci-14-00475) ([2010](https://www.mdpi.com/2076-0760/14/8/475#B18-socsci-14-00475)), in the framework, each component of the external structure of the overlapping spheres can both act and interact with others, and these actions impact students’ learning and their development (Mocho et al., 2025). This framework has emerged as one of the most significant frameworks for engaging families in schools. It emphasizes that the kinds of involvement take many forms, all of which help students achieve academic success.

One of the strengths of Epstein's approach is its recognition of multiple levels of involvement from home support to decision-making at the school, prompting schools to involve all families in some way (Li et al., 2024). The model emphasizes communication and collaboration as key aspects of parental involvement, aligning with previous studies on the performance of students when parents and teachers work together (Donkor, 2010). By offering precise designations, it makes it easier for researchers and educators to systematically evaluate how parents contribute to a child's learning environment. One drawback of Epstein's theory is that it assumes that all families can participate in 'all six' involvement forms. Aspects such as parents' work schedules, educational levels, and cultural expectations may limit their ability to volunteer at school or assist with academic work at home. For instance, disparities between teachers' and families' understanding of "involvement" may result in misunderstandings and ineffective partnerships; a study reported that teachers perceive involvement as home-based tasks assistance, whereas parents might want more voice in school decision, such discrepancies diminish the impacts of partnerships (Kalaycı & Ergül, 2020).

Despite these challenges, the theory remains highly relevant to the study. It provides us with a means to observe and organize the many types of parental involvement that occur in private early-years classrooms in Cape Coast. Parents may fit activities like reading at home, talking to teachers, or parents volunteering or giving learning materials into Epstein's typology. The hypothesis also supports studies that suggest students whose parents are more involved tend to perform better in school (Donkor, 2010). Finally, Epstein's approach does not directly address bilingualism, but it focuses on a supportive home learning environment applicable to multilingual situations. A good collaboration between home and school might motivate parents to help their child learn English in ways that both honour and include their native language. For example, parents could help their child study L1 at home while the school focuses on English. The framework enables us to examine how parental participation in private schools affects early English language learning and provides a means to consider any changes that occur in the children's L1 development.

**Aim of the study**

The study aims to investigate parents' involvement in the acquisition of the English language by early learners in private basic schools in Cape Coast, Ghana, and its impact on their proficiency in English and their first language.

**Research Questions**

* What forms of parental involvement do parents in private basic schools use to support their children's English language learning in the early years (KG1 to Basic 3)?
* How is parental involvement related to young learners' proficiency in English?
* What effect do early English language acquisition have on pupils' first language (Fante)?

**METHODS**

**Study design**

The study adopts a descriptive qualitative design situated within an interpretivist paradigm. A descriptive research design is a type of non-experimental research methodology focused on systematically describing the characteristics, behaviours, attitudes, or phenomena of a specific population or situation without manipulating variables or establishing cause-and-effect relationships (Leavy, 2017; Gapira et al., 2020). This design enables an in-depth exploration of how parents and teachers in different private schools conceptualise and enact parental involvement in children's first language (L1) acquisition during the early educational stage, as well as its effects on language development.

**Study Area**

The study area was Cape Coast in the Central Region of Ghana. In 2019, the metropolis had 48 private basic schools (kindergarten to JHS establishment) within the city, which had about 190,000 inhabitants (CCMA, 2019). These private schools cater to a broad socioeconomic spectrum, ranging from low-fee community schools to long-established faith-based institutions, allowing diverse households to choose English-medium early education. The metropolis provides a unique bilingual environment where children typically acquire Fante or other Akan dialects at home while encountering formal English instruction from crèche onwards. The Cape Coast chapter of the Ghana National Association of Private Schools (GNAPS) coordinates and advocates for the sector, actively organising professional development and inter-school events to support its members. This study, therefore, focuses on this compact yet diverse network of private basic schools, whose varied ownership structures, fee tiers, and language policies offer an ideal context for examining how parental involvement shapes first-language support during the foundational years.

**Population**

The study population consisted of parents (mothers, fathers, and primary guardians) and teachers of children in kindergarten 1 to primary 3 in private basic schools in Cape Coast. These participants were selected because they are responsible for guiding the children at the key stages in language development and acquisition. These individuals are well-suited to provide answers to questions relevant to the study's objectives.

**Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria**

For this study, we included parents over 18 years old whose children have been continuously enrolled in KG1. Teachers were eligible if they had over two years of experience in early years teaching at the school and were directly involved in L1 activities. All participants were required to agree to participate voluntarily. Conversely, we excluded parents whose children were admitted after Primary 1 or who did not reside with their children. Newly appointed teachers with less than two years of experience were also excluded, as were teachers working exclusively at the upper primary or JHS level.

**Sampling Method**

We obtained a comprehensive list of 48 registered private basic schools in Cape Coast from the Ghana Education Service and the local chapter of the Ghana National Association of Private Schools (GNAPS) in Cape Coast. Using purposeful maximum-variation sampling (Benoot et al., 2016), which allows for comparing vast differences within a small sample, we then selected ten schools. We ensured that these schools varied by fee level, location, and ownership, specifically choosing four low-fee, three mid-fee, and three high-fee schools, as fee structures significantly influence school resources and parent demographics in the study area. We also included two schools from Fante-speaking suburbs and two from mixed-language areas to reflect Cape Coast's bilingual environment. To secure willing and informative participants, we specifically chose schools with active parent–teacher associations and those that permitted us to undertake the study. We limited our selection to ten schools, as 4–10 cases provide sufficient contrast without unduly extending fieldwork and analysis time (Yin, 2018). This strategy enabled us to reach 25 parents and 12 teachers. Recruitment ceased when new interviews were found to generate no further insights, a point consistent with sample-saturation studies, which indicate saturation near 20–30 interviews (Hennink et al., 2017; Weller et al., 2018).

**Data Collection Instrument and Procedure**

An interview guide was used to gather information from the parents and teachers in the study. The interview guides were explicitly designed to collect in-depth qualitative data from parents and teachers regarding their perspectives on parental involvement in first language acquisition. The guide featured an introduction that stated the study's purpose, ensured confidentiality, and obtained consent for the study and recording. Questions were structured into thematic sections covering the forms of parental involvement that contribute to English Language Acquisition (ELA), the relationship between parental involvement and the pupil's proficiency in English Language, and the impact on the native language (Fante). The open-ended nature of the questions allowed for rich, detailed responses, capturing diverse experiences and insights relevant to the study's objectives. Before data collection, the instrument was piloted in three private basic schools in Elmina to help refine it. Four teachers and parents were used in the pilot study. The instrument was also reviewed to ensure that the constructs accurately measured what they were intended to measure. During the data collection process, consent was obtained from the school authorities, the teachers, and the parents. The interview was conducted at a convenient location, as requested by the participants, to ensure their comfort and well-being. The interview lasted between 40 and 60 minutes per participant.

**Data Analysis**

The data gathered from the interviews underwent thematic analysis to identify patterns, recurring ideas, and key insights regarding parental involvement in first language acquisition. The process began with transcribing all audio recordings verbatim, followed by thorough familiarisation with the data. The recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim, and where participants spoke in Fante, transcripts underwent a back-translation procedure: an independent translator first rendered Fante utterances into English, and a second translator then re-translated these English versions back into Fante to verify semantic fidelity. Initial codes were generated from the raw data in NVivo 14. After the initial coding, the analysis began by comparing the code list, addressing discrepancies, and refining the boundaries of the themes. Finally, all themes and quotes from the participants were reviewed in a member-checking exercise to confirm that the interpretations accurately represent the responses of the parents and teachers.

**RESULTS**

The primary goal of the current study was to uncover the forms of parental involvement that contribute to English language acquisition among pupils in private basic schools in Cape Coast. Secondary goals include understanding the relationship between parental involvement and pupil proficiency. Results related to each of these research questions are described in more detail in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Summary of themes and key observations

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Major theme (research focus)** | **key observation** |
| Forms of parental involvement in early-years English language acquisition (ELA) | * Supervising homework & reading aloud at home
 |
| * Deliberately speaking English at home.
 |
| * Providing books, flashcards, literacy apps (home literacy environment).
 |
| * Active school engagement (PTA, classroom volunteering, teacher consultations).
 |
| * Hiring private tutors / involving older siblings in English support.
 |
| Relationship between parental involvement and pupil proficiency in English | * Daily reading supervision is linked to higher vocabulary, pronunciation, and fluency
 |
| * Regular home use of English helps build oral confidence and improve class participation.
 |
| * Access to literacy resources broadens vocabulary and comprehension.
 |
| * Close parent-teacher communication helps target specific weaknesses.
 |
| * Extra tutoring and older-sibling support accelerate reading and spelling progress.
 |
| Impact of strong ELA on pupils' first language (Fante-L1) | * Reduced L1 fluency / frequent code-switching to English
 |
| * English perceived as higher status; L1 seen as ‘less important’
 |
| * Limited L1 vocabulary and grammatical interference from English
 |
| * Communication gaps with older relatives who use only L1
 |
| * Emotional and cultural ties retained: pupils still use Fante in songs, nicknames, and festivals
 |

**Forms of Parental Involvement in ELA in Private Schools**

Results from the current study suggest that parents engage in ELA with early learners in private schools in Cape Coast in various ways. As shown in Table 1, six forms of parental involvement in ELA among KG1 to Basic 3 pupils in Cape Coast private schools are observed: supervising homework and reading aloud, English spoken at home, provision of materials and resources, school engagement, hiring tutors, and home literacy environment. The most frequently reported form of parental involvement was supervising homework and reading aloud to children at home (31/37, 84% of participants).

"Every night, I make my son read his homework aloud, then I listen and correct him. Even if I am tired, I still sit by him. He knows mummy will always ask him to spell some words before bed." (Parent, mid-fee school)

"We do *reading time* together right after supper. Sometimes I let my daughter read from the English textbook, and sometimes from a storybook. Even when I am busy, I tell her to record herself reading, and we listen together." (Parent, high-fee school)

"In class, you can see the difference: children whose parents read with them come ready to pronounce new words. They are fluent and speak English faster compared to the students whose parents do not read with them." (Teacher, Basic 3, high-fee school)

Another common form involved parents deliberately speaking English at home to reinforce language use (21/37; 57% of participants).

When we are at home with our children, we force ourselves to use English for simple tasks, such as "pass me the remote" or "close the door." My daughter corrects me sometimes, and we laugh, but it helps both of us. (Parent, low-fee school).

Parents who try to speak English at home with their kids, even if they mix it with Fante, usually have kids who are less shy about speaking in class. (Teacher, KG2, Mid-fee school).

In our family, weekday conversations are mainly in English; on weekends, we relax by speaking only Fante. It is a house rule to build the children's confidence. (Parent, high-fee school)

Many participants also described providing books, flashcards, and educational apps to create a home literacy environment for their children (18/37; 49% of participants).

I buy storybooks, especially those with big, colourful pictures. After reading, I asked her to retell the story in English. (Parent, mid-fee school)

Parents sometimes donate books to our classroom library or ask me which phonics materials to buy at home. Those resources make a huge difference. (Teacher, KG1, mid-fee school)

We even subscribe to a reading app that makes English fun with games and quizzes. It keeps him excited to learn. (Parent, high-fee school)

A smaller number of parents were found to actively engage in school activities (through PTA meetings and teacher consultation) and with the teachers to find ways to help their children (17/37; 46 % of participants).

I always attend PTA meetings and afterwards I ask the teacher: 'Which area is my child struggling with?' Then I focus on that at home. (Parent, mid-fee school)

We have a few parents who volunteer to read stories in the classroom on Fridays. Children love it, and it encourages a reading culture. (Teacher, Basic 2, high-fee school)

I joined the literacy volunteer group. It helps me learn because sometimes the teachers coach us on how to help our kids at home. (Parent, mid-fee school)

Finally, a few participants from higher-fee schools described hiring private tutors or involving older siblings in teaching English at home to their kids (8/37; 22 % of participants).

After school, we have a tutor who comes twice a week to help with reading and spelling. It is expensive but worth it. (Parent, high-fee school)

Some parents cannot help directly due to work, so they enlist an older sibling to listen while the younger child reads aloud. (Teacher, KG1, high-fee school)

My child's elder brother helps him pronounce difficult words at home. It makes my child's homework less stressful. (Parent, mid-fee school)

**Relationship between parental involvement and Pupil proficiency in English Language**

The most frequently reported observation among participants was that pupils whose parents actively supervised homework and engaged them in daily reading showed noticeably higher proficiency in vocabulary, pronunciation, and reading fluency (28/37; 76 % of participants).

The children whose parents read with them every night come to class ready to answer confidently. Their reading speed and pronunciation are typically ahead of those of their classmates. (Teacher, Basic 3, high-fee school)

I have seen real progress since I started making my son read aloud to me. Before, he would mumble and skip words, but now he can read whole paragraphs without stopping. (Parent, mid-fee school)

At spelling bees and reading competitions, it is often the same children whose parents make time for reading practice at home who excel. (Teacher, Basic 2, low-fee school)

Several participants also reported that regular use of English at home made them more confident in speaking and more willing to participate in class discussions (19/37; 51% of participants).

Even if parents are not fluent, the effort to speak English at home helps children stop seeing English as something that belongs only in school. (Teacher, KG1, mid-fee school).

Since we started speaking more English at home, my daughter no longer hesitates to raise her hand in class. She used to be shy, but now she volunteers answers. (Parent, low-fee school)

Parents who consciously use English at home build their child's confidence. You see it during oral English activities they are less likely to fear making mistakes. (Teacher, KG2, high-fee school)

Some parents and teachers reported that providing books, flashcards, and educational resources helps children develop richer vocabulary and better comprehension skills in class (15/37; 41% of participants).

You can tell which pupils have access to books at home by comparing them to those who do not have books at home. The students who have access to books at home use words we have not even taught yet. (Teacher, Basic 3, high-fee school)

Buying storybooks helped my son. Now, when he writes sentences, they are longer and use words we never taught him directly. (Parent, mid-fee school)

Even something as simple as labelling household items in English helps build familiarity, so the child does not stumble over basic words in class. (Teacher, KG1, low-fee school)

A group of participants reported that close communication with teachers, facilitated through PTA meetings and WhatsApp, helped them identify their children's weaknesses and support them effectively to improve specific areas of weakness (12/37; 32% of participants).

When parents ask us where their child struggles, and then follow up at home, those pupils usually catch up faster than those whose parents never ask. (Teacher, Basic 2, mid-fee school)

After every PTA meeting, I review the teacher's comments and help my child revise those areas that need improvement. It shows in his test scores. (Parent, mid-fee school)

Finally, a small number of parents from higher-fee schools described how hiring private tutors or involving older siblings directly strengthened their child's proficiency in reading and spelling (7/37; 19 % of participants).

Our tutor focuses on pronunciation and spelling games, which makes my daughter more accurate and faster when reading aloud in class. (Parent, high-fee school)

Children who receive extra help outside of school typically progress from an average to a top group in reading levels within one to two terms. (Teacher, KG2, high-fee school)

I noticed when my older son started coaching his little brother, his reading speed improved, and now he enjoys books instead of fearing them. (Parent, mid-fee school)

**Impact of ELA on the L1 of students in private Schools in Cape Coast**

The most frequently reported observation among teachers and parents was that pupils who spoke English more frequently (both at home and school) sometimes showed reduced fluency or confidence in speaking their L1 (Fante) (23/37; 62 % of participants).

Some children struggle to find the right Fante words when they talk to other people in their community. They mix English into almost every sentence. (Teacher, Basic 2, mid-fee school)

My daughter used to speak Fante freely, but now she stops to think, or she adds English words like 'because' or 'then'. Sometimes the grandparents tease her that she has forgotten her language. (Parent, high-fee school)

When I ask pupils to tell a story in Fante, many start confidently but quickly switch to English words when they cannot remember the Fante term. (Teacher, KG2, low-fee school)

Several participants described how the dominance of English in private schools, especially high-fee ones, leads pupils to perceive their L1 as less prestigious or 'less important' (16/37; 43% of participants).

At school, English is the language of instruction, and some children begin to view Fante as a language reserved for use at home or among older people. (Teacher, Basic 3, high-fee school)

My son sometimes laughs at me when I insist, he replies in Fante; he says 'Mummy, speak English' almost as if English is the proper language and Fante is not. (Parent, mid-fee school)

Some parents and teachers reported that strong ELA, while beneficial academically, sometimes led to limited vocabulary or grammatical errors when pupils used L1 (13/37; 35 % of participants).

You will hear them use English sentence structure in Fante, like saying 'Me pɛ sɛ me *do* [I want to do something]' instead of proper Fante phrasing. (Teacher, Basic 2, low-fee school)

My daughter speaks Fante with me, but her sentences are shorter, and she often uses English words, such as 'school bag,' instead of the Fante term. (Parent, low-fee school)

Some students write compositions in Fante that resemble English sentences translated word for word. The grammar is not natural, and it is interesting to read. (Teacher, Basic 3, mid-fee school)

A smaller group observed that this language shift created generational gaps at home, as pupils struggled to converse fully in L1 with older family members (9/37; 24 % of participants).

My father speaks only Fante, and now my son sometimes cannot explain things to him properly without mixing English, which confuses the grandfather. (Parent, high-fee school)

Children visit the village, and relatives complain that they speak 'broken' Fante or do not answer fully in the language. (Teacher, KG1, mid-fee school)

I have seen pupils hesitate when elders ask questions in deep Fante, because they are so used to thinking and responding in English. (Teacher, KG2, low-fee school)

Finally, a few participants stated that even though the pupils speak less Fante, they still maintain emotional ties to their native tongue and use it to express affection or cultural identity during traditional events or with extended family (7/37; 19% of participants).

At home, my daughter says 'Mummy, I love you' in English, but when she is upset or pleased, she bursts into Fante. (Parent, mid-fee school)

During the festive season, students can speak Fante, and some take pride in doing so. However, they still mix English in the sentences that they speak. (Teacher, Basic 2, high-fee school)

It is interesting that some children who speak English both at home and at school sometimes sing in Fante and have local nicknames at home. No matter how much they speak English, the Fante is part of who they are. It cannot easily be forgotten. (Parent, low-fee school)

**DISCUSSION**

The current study aimed to investigate the forms of parental involvement that support English language acquisition (ELA) among young pupils in private basic schools in Cape Coast, Ghana. It also aimed to understand how such involvement is related to children's proficiency in English, and what effect ELA might have on pupils' first language (L1), Fante. Findings from interviews with teachers and parents suggest that parents play a diverse and active role in their children's English learning, and these efforts appear to shape both their English skills and their use of their first language (L1).

**Forms of Parental Involvement and Children's English Language Development**

Parents in this study reported using multiple strategies to help develop their children's English language skills. These were supervising homework, speaking English at home, providing books and learning materials, communicating with teachers, and hiring tutors or using other siblings as mentors. These forms of parental involvement depict components of the home literacy environment. Studies have found a positive association between the home literacy environment and improvements in English language and literacy skills, including vocabulary, phonological awareness, letter knowledge, and word reading (Lau & Richards, 2021; Yeung & King, 2016). Shared reading at home and homework supervision were the most common activities in which parents engaged with their children. Many studies have linked parent-child reading to improved learning skills. For example, Lee and Moussa (2024) found that parents and siblings who read to their children and assist with schoolwork help improve the child's reading abilities. Nkosi (2024) also found that children whose parents regularly read aloud to them, provided books, and took them to the library showed higher reading proficiency than those with less involved parents. These activities increase the child's exposure to language and print, which promotes vocabulary growth, comprehension, and fluency (Nkosi, 2024).

Another common strategy identified was parents deliberately speaking English at home to their children to reinforce the language, even when it is not their primary language. The parents described making household conversations partly in English to help their children become more comfortable with the language. This practice likely improves the child's confidence and oral proficiency in English by providing additional informal practice opportunities. Studies suggest that increased exposure and meaningful use of a language can improve a child's fluency and willingness to communicate (Liberman et al., 2017; Fan, 2022; Ramírez et al., 2020). Teachers in the study noted that children who interact with their parents in English are less shy and more participatory in English discussions, which reduces anxiety and builds competence. However, it is essential to note that the parents did not entirely abandon their home language. Other forms of parental involvement noted included their engagement with the school through PTA meetings, consulting with teachers, and volunteering in class. This aligns with the findings of McNaughton and Vostal (2010), who argued that effective parent-teacher communication is crucial for aligning home and school activities, leading to improved educational outcomes for students. Some parents also join literacy volunteer groups and donate books, which contributes to the broader reading culture of the schools.

Moreover, parents also provided books, educational materials, hired tutors, and involved other siblings at home as another form of involvement to improve the children's English language skills. Many parents reported buying storybooks or using digital tools to keep their children engaged in English learning beyond the classroom. This finding aligns with studies that demonstrate families with greater economic resources often invest in educational materials and private tutoring to enhance their children's academic performance (Zhang & Xie, 2016; Jansen et al., 2021). Teachers observed that these pupils often moved from average to top reading groups after receiving targeted help from their parents.

**Parental Involvement and English Proficiency**

There was a clear consensus in the results that active parental involvement is correlated with higher English language proficiency among young pupils. The teachers observed that children who had routine reading practice at home demonstrated more advanced vocabulary, better pronunciation, and reading fluency than their peers. Recent literature highlights the importance of not only the frequency but also the quality of parental involvement activities, such as shared book reading, literacy-related conversations, and collaboration with teachers, in improving early reading skills (Kim & White, 2018; Sénéchal & LeFevre, 2002). Through listening to stories and reading aloud, children are exposed to new words and language structures that expand their linguistic repertoire (Sénéchal & LeFevre, 2002). In addition to reading practice, the use of English in daily family interactions was associated with greater oral confidence and increased class participation. The study found that children whose parents encourage English conversation at home were described as less hesitant in speaking and eager to answer questions in English in Class. This is supported by studies that have found active home involvement to be a stronger predictor of academic achievement than family background alone (Froiland et al., 2013; Hill & Tyson, 2009). This scenario is prevalent in many urban cities in Ghana, where many urban middle-class parents believe that early and intensive exposure to English will enhance their children's academic performance, ultimately leading to English assuming a primary language status in many urban homes (Dako & Quarcoo, 2017).

Providing abundant literacy resources at home (books, educational apps, flashcards) also appeared beneficial for children's English development. The study found that parents who provided literacy resources for their children at home had their children develop broader vocabularies and better comprehension. This aligns with the findings of Nag et al. (2024), which demonstrate that the number of children's books at home and the frequency of book-related interactions are correlated with language development. Furthermore, the results revealed that parents who maintained close communication with teachers (through meetings or messaging apps) could effectively target their support to help improve their children's weak areas. Finally, a minority of parents hired private tutors or enlisted older siblings for extra teaching at home. Although the current study did not quantify the effect of tutoring, the participants' responses indicated improved pronunciation and spelling for those children. However, Demir-Lira et al. (2019) note that informal interactions (such as reading with a parent) may be equally or more beneficial for children's vocabulary, reading comprehension, and internal motivation to read at early stages. Tutoring still plays a helpful role, particularly if parents lack time or confidence in their English abilities, but its success likely depends on the quality of the tutor and the child's level of engagement.

**Impacts of English Language Acquisition on the First Language (L1)**

Another key part of the current study was to understand how English language acquisition affects the young pupils' first language (Fante–L1). The most common trend from the study showed that children who spoke English (both at home and in school) sometimes struggled with fluency in Fante. Many teachers and parents have observed signs of subtractive bilingualism, where gaining a second language comes at the expense of the first (Fillmore, 1991; Köpke et al., 2019). Studies confirm that increased use of a dominant second language coupled with reduced use of the native language can lead to the gradual decline of L1 proficiency ([Schmid and Jarvis, 2014](https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/human-neuroscience/articles/10.3389/fnhum.2021.686388/full#B195); [de Leeuw, 2017](https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/human-neuroscience/articles/10.3389/fnhum.2021.686388/full#B45); [Kasparian and Steinhauer, 2017](https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/human-neuroscience/articles/10.3389/fnhum.2021.686388/full#B111); Köpke et al., 2019). In the study, the children commonly code-mixed (inserting English terms into Fante sentences) or struggled to recall specific Fante vocabulary. Dako and Quarcoo (2017) note that English has even begun to replace local languages in some urban Ghanaian homes as parents prioritise English exposure for academic reasons. This social attitude is reflected in our participants' quotes (e.g., a child telling a parent, "Mummy, speak English"), which shows how children internalise the higher status accorded to English.

Improving one's English skills is a positive outcome, but losing Fante skills is detrimental to both education and culture. Cummins (1999)’s linguistic interdependence hypothesis posits that having a solid foundation in the first language can facilitate the acquisition of a second language. When children study a second language (L2), they tend to prefer using the literacy skills they learned in their first language (L1), such as vocabulary and narrative skills (Cummins, 1979). On the other hand, if L1 development stops in the early years, children may not develop proficiency in either language, which could hinder their cognitive growth (Owu-Ewie, 2006). Owu-Ewie (2006) criticised the transition bilingual policy in Ghana (which switches L1 to English medium after early primary) as being too abrupt and leaving children with neither language fully developed. The findings showed that some students spoke a mix of Fante and English, which could be a sign of this problem. According to the threshold theory, not being proficient in either language can be detrimental to children (Baker, 2001). Therefore, teachers generally support an additive bilingual approach, which means that the mother tongue is encouraged to grow alongside English, rather than being suppressed.

Culturally and socially, the loss of the Fante fluency can create generational rifts and identity challenges. Parents in the study mentioned that their children struggle to communicate with their grandparents and elders in the Fante language. This resonates with the concerns raised by Fillmore (1991), who noted that when children rapidly shift to English and neglect their first language, family communication suffers, and they become alienated from their cultural heritage. The participants in the study noticed similar issues as their relatives did, remarking that the children's Fante was "broken Fante" or that the child defaulted to English in family settings. Such an experience can impact the child's sense of belonging and the transmission of cultural values due to the loss of the first language.

Despite these concerns, some of the children still maintained an emotional connection to their L1 (Fante). As reported by the participants, several pupils would switch to Fante when expressing strong feelings or during cultural events. This indicates that the first language continues to hold personal significance, despite the dominance of English in private schools. The children's use of Fante in songs, affectionate nicknames, and festivals shows that their L1 remains a core part of their identity. It reinforces the idea that language is not only a means of communication but also a carrier of culture and identity. Therefore, even as the English language is pursued in these private schools, it is beneficial for parents, teachers, and schools to incorporate Fante in formal, informal, and cultural activities.

**LIMITATIONS**

The present study has limitations. First, it employed a limited number of participants, which was consistent with many qualitative methods. This, as well as the fact that the analysis was conducted in private basic schools in Cape Coast, constrains the generalizability of the results to public schools and other regions with incongruous socioeconomic and linguistic settings in Ghana. Second, the research focused on depth rather than breadth, employing a descriptive qualitative approach situated within an interpretivist paradigm. This means that the findings were rich but had to be derived from a relatively small sample of 25 teachers and 12 parents from just ten schools.

Additionally, the purposive maximum-variation sampling increased diversity within the fee levels and between locations. However, using self-reported measures obtained through interviews, social desirability bias (with respondents tending to over-report what is viewed favourably and under-report what is perceived unfavourably) has been introduced. Finally, due to the qualitative nature of the study, it is impossible to claim a direct cause-and-effect association between parental involvement and English or Fante abilities; hence, the findings can only be considered suggestive rather than conclusive.

**CONCLUSION**

The study reveals that parental involvement is critical in helping young children succeed in English Language acquisition in private schools in Cape Coast. Parents who read with their children, provide literacy materials, and create an English-rich environment tend to see their children develop stronger English reading and speaking abilities. However, the study revealed a delicate balance in bilingual settings; the mission of focusing on English fluency at the private schools could inadvertently mean that the child's mother tongue (Fante) is suppressed. The recommendation for parents and teachers is working towards a more additive form of bilingualism, where parental involvement strengthens English skills but does not necessarily replace the child's L1. In this way, children who do not speak English or have low proficiency in the language can still benefit academically from learning or developing English, without having to give up the cultural or cognitive advantages that come with first language proficiency. The present study's contributions to this understanding include a more documentary approach that describes what parents do and the consequences of their actions, and it validates long-held suggestions about enabling balanced bilingualism in early childhood language development.

**Ethical Approval and Consent:**

The research team prioritised ethical conduct throughout the study. Parental and teachers' consent was obtained before the research. Before each interview, researchers obtained informed consent from all participants, clearly explaining the study's purpose, procedures, potential benefits, and risks. Participants were assured of confidentiality and anonymity, with no identifying information collected or used in reports. Participation remained voluntary, and individuals had the right to withdraw at any point without penalty. All collected data was securely stored to protect privacy.

**Disclaimer (Artificial intelligence)**

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