

**Effects of Socioeconomic Status on English Language Learners' Success in School**

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**Abstract**

This research paper focuses on the effects of socioeconomic status on English language learners' overall success in school. The aspects of success discussed in this paper pertain to academics, social-emotional learning, and home practices, beliefs, and environments. Most English language learner students come from low socioeconomic status households and enter school with little to no English proficiency. This puts them at a much higher risk of developing academic struggles because of the need for more resources and opportunities, on top of acquiring a new language. They are also more likely to develop emotional and behavioral problems because of internalized behaviors such as anxiety and isolation because of home stressors, a new language, discrimination, and inequities in school. Five major themes emerged while doing this research: reading proficiency, language development, home practices, social-emotional learning, and success in math. Three guiding questions that led to the research for this paper are discussed throughout the paper and are explicitly answered in the discussion of findings.

*Keywords:* English language learners, socioeconomic status, academic achievement, social-emotional learning, home practices

### **Effects of Socioeconomic Status on English Language Learner's Success in School**

This paper focused on English language learners (ELLs), also known as multilingual learners (MLs), and how their socioeconomic status (SES) can affect their success in school. For this research, ELL or ML students referred to students receiving educational instruction in a language they are not yet proficient in. Most of the research focused on students in the United States learning English, but there will also be research from other countries. Most ELL students are Hispanic/Latino, and their home language is Spanish. Socioeconomic status is used to describe a family's financial situation. Parents' education, job type, and income are considered, and then SES is categorized by low, medium, and high. Low SES means the family has less access to financial, educational, social, and health resources. Majority of ELL students come from low SES households and therefore have to overcome more challenges in their time in the education system than their monolingual English-speaking peers and their peers from higher SES households. ELL students have to learn a new language, are more likely to have fewer resources and opportunities to help them with their education and may have more outside stressors affecting their ability to be successful in school.

#### **Context**

Students who learn English as a second language and come from low SES households happens globally as English is becoming an international language and is being taught in schools as a main subject, and economic disparity happens worldwide (Butler & Le, 2018). ELL students from all over the world may have to face more challenges in their success in school because of the disadvantages coming from a low SES household has on education. The paper focused on this problem within the United States (US) but also considered issues surrounding this topic globally. The US has a fast-growing population of ELL students, in which every school will have

an increase in these students each year. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2023), in the fall of 2020, 5 million ELL students attended public schools in the United States, about 10.4% of the student population. Around 81% of public schools educate at least one ELL student, but most ELL students attend high-poverty schools. About 20% of schools educate 75% of the ELL students in the US. Of those ELL students, about 37% come from low SES households, and 54% come from parents with little to no education (Quintero & Hansen, 2021). ELL students are the fastest growing population in the US public educational system, and all school staff need to be equipped with the knowledge and resources to help ELL students be successful in schools.

### **Importance**

The problem of SES impacting ELL student success is essential because I am an ELL teacher in a small, rural school district with a high-poverty student population. I have a caseload of 45 ELL students in grades K-8, and most live in poverty. These children have many outside stressors that can affect their ability to reach their full potential to succeed in school. Research shows that students from low SES households are at a more significant academic disadvantage than their peers from higher SES backgrounds because of the lack of resources and opportunities. I wanted to research the same issue but add the ELL factor because I work with ELL students from low SES households and want to know how to serve them best to ensure they get the education they deserve.

To acquire the knowledge of the relationship between SES and ELL student success is important for my students because I am the teacher working with them on their English development every year until they demonstrate proficiency. As their teacher, I need to fully understand how their life outside of school can affect their ability to be successful. I am also the

advocate for their general education and need to be sure I can provide other teachers with strategies and interventions to help our students succeed in all parts of the school. As a whole school, we need to not look at ELL students as being disadvantaged but look at them with an asset-based point of view, consider the outside factors of their life that could hinder them, and find ways to overcome those factors.

The community benefits by having these students graduating high school as well-educated and multilingual individuals who will enter the community workforce, attend college, and be a part of a functioning society. These students can help better their families, which then betters the community. These students could break the generational wealth cycle, and they will no longer live in poverty and may be able to help their families get out of poverty.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this research was to gain a better understanding of the relationship between SES and the success of ELL students in school. A better understanding of the relationship between SES and ELL students' overall success in school would help me transform my teaching so I can better support these students. I can bring the knowledge I acquired from this to my colleagues so they can better understand the students we work with and how they can also best support them. This research provided me with insight into best practices, interventions, and strategies to serve ELL students from low SES households.

### **Focal Questions**

- How does SES affect ELL students' academic success?
- How does SES affect ELL students' social-emotional learning and success?
- How does an ELL's family's views and beliefs on education impact students' success in schools?

### **Literature Review**

The literature review examined the effects of socioeconomic status (SES) on (English Language Learners) ELL's success in school. The research focused on the success in schools of low SES ELL students compared to different groups of their peers. These groups are ELLs with a higher SES and monolingual English-speaking students with low and high SES. It is also important to note that not all ELL students live in poverty. 37% of ELL students come from low SES households, so this literature review only represents those ELL students (Quintero & Hansen, 2021). This project looked at the literature about ELLs' success in all educational features and provided themes and subsections to highlight certain aspects of students' success. The first theme examined was the reading proficiency of ELL students analyzed through SES. Then I looked at students' language development impacted by SES. Next, I analyzed the home practices of ELL students influenced by SES. Then looked into ELL students' social-emotional success through the lens of SES, and finally, I examined the relationship between ELL students, success in math, and SES.

### **Reading Proficiency**

Reading proficiency is one of the critical skills needed for students to be successful in school because it is the basis of all subjects. It is defined as students being able to read on grade level, which is determined by their ability to meet state reading standards. In grades kindergarten through second, students learn to read, and when third-grade hits, instruction has shifted to reading to learn. If students cannot successfully read independently by that time, they endure more significant struggles than their peers to learn the content of all subjects. ELL students are at a greater risk for reading deficits because they enter schools not knowing the predominant language of instruction and tend to come from lower SES households; this then has the potential

to set their reading proficiency back behind their monolingual peers because they enter school at a disadvantage and then, in turn, lowers their overall academic success in school.

There are five studies in this section that are examined. Each study analyzed socioeconomic status's effects on ELL students' reading proficiency. I also looked at two stages within reading proficiency: early and late emerging reading difficulties and linguistic code abilities. Early emerging reading difficulties is students who have trouble with letter names and sound recognition, decoding, and listening and speaking skills. Late emerging difficulties are issues that only appear in later grades, such as trouble with comprehension.

### ***Early and Late Emerging Reading Difficulties***

Early emerging reading difficulties appear in students in grades K-2, and late-emerging reading difficulties show in grades three and above. They pertain to where students are in the process of their reading development. In grades, K-2, students work on basic reading skills such as letter names, sounds, and decoding. In grades three and above, they are working on comprehension and vocabulary. ELLs are more likely to develop these reading difficulties as they are not familiar with the language of instruction. ELL students from low SES backgrounds are disadvantaged because they have had less exposure and opportunities to interact with the target language.

Reading proficiency gaps begin in kindergarten and can be greater for students with sociodemographic disadvantages such as being an ELL or coming from a low SES household. A district-wide literacy-intensive curriculum for all kindergarten through fifth-grade students was implemented at a school to examine early and late-emerging reading difficulties by D'Angiulli et al. (2004). The goal of the curriculum was to provide students with a literacy-rich environment, and there were three main points to the program. The first point was an activity emphasizing

sound-symbol relationships and collaborative journal writing using invented spelling. The second was six reading components: guided reading, shared reading, reading/writing connection, home reading program, independent reading, and reading aloud to respond. Lastly, there was instruction for twelve different reading strategies. All elements were given to students in classroom-based, small groups where the teachers had students practice phonological processing and different parts of oral language; this happened three times a week in 20-minute sessions for kindergarten and four times a week for all the grades after. With all the information from this study, the researchers looked at the relationship between SES and word-reading skills to determine if there were similarities between ELL and native English-speaking students (D'Angiulli et al., 2004). The results of this study showed that the relationship between reading skills and SES began in kindergarten. It was found that native English-speaking students' word reading achievement increased with SES, but the ELL student's results were more complex. There were three relationships within the same data set for the ELL students. The first was a group of kindergarten ELL students with high word-reading scores regardless of their SES. Another group had high word-reading skills and a higher SES. The final group had a strong association between SES and word-reading success. This showed significant differences in achievement scores for opposite ends of the SES spectrum for ELL students (D'Angiulli et al., 2004). Once the ELL students hit first grade, their scores became more similar to their monolingual peers regardless of SES, and that pattern continued into the upper elementary grades.

Kieffer (2010) states that it is expected for low SES ELL students to have early emerging reading deficits, but generally, by third grade, they become proficient in reading. Once they are proficient readers, the subsequent struggle is acquiring vocabulary and higher-order skills that

affect reading comprehension. Kieffer (2010) used longitudinal data from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study- Kindergarten (ECLS-K) Cohort and examined early and late emerging reading deficits for ELL and monolingual students regarding their SES. Discrete-time survival analysis was used to measure the probabilities for ELLs and monolinguals for the emergence of reading difficulties during third, fifth, and eighth grade (developmental periods). Results showed that ELL and monolingual students had reading deficits in upper elementary and middle school. However, ELL students were at a much higher risk than their monolingual peers for newly emerging difficulties at each developmental period. With the factor of SES being added, students from low-income households were at an even higher risk of developing difficulties during each developmental period. However, it showed the strongest correlation between early and late emerging difficulties. With that said, ELL students with a low SES background were at high risk for developing deficits in all developmental periods but were more likely to develop deficits before third grade than to develop those late-emerging reading difficulties. Their higher SES monolingual peers were at low risk in all developmental periods but slightly higher risk for deficits that emerge in sixth and eighth grade (Kieffer, 2010).

Early and late-emerging reading difficulties were examined in a separate paper by Kieffer (2011), following ELL students' growth in reading proficiency across the primary and upper elementary grades and middle school. Nine years of longitudinal data were collected from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study- Kindergarten (ECLS-K) to look at students' trajectories of reading growth in grades K-1, 1-3, and 3-8. Three groups of students were identified for this study. One was ELL students fluent in English when entering kindergarten, another was ELL students with limited English proficiency, and the last was native English-speaking students. SES was also examined to determine if there was a correlation between that and these different

groups of students reading proficiencies over time. The findings from this study proposed that the effects of initial English proficiency and SES on ELLs' second-language reading achievement were significant but also changed considerably throughout development (Kieffer, 2011). With that said, there were three different findings to understand the reading development of ELL students. The first was that English reading trajectories of ELL students who enter kindergarten with limited English proficiency were significantly lower than the national average of native English speakers through eighth grade. Although they have slightly faster rates of growth than their monolingual peers, they still stayed about two years of growth behind up until eighth grade. ELL students who enter kindergarten fluent in English have trajectories that catch up quickly with the national average of their monolingual peers and stay at that national average through eighth grade (Kieffer, 2011). Then when SES is accounted for, the effect of early English proficiency decreases significantly over time. ELL students with limited English proficiency showed early reading success levels that were much lower than their monolingual peers from the same SES backgrounds but grew quicker than those peers and intersected with them by eighth grade (Kieffer, 2011).

Another way reading difficulties in ELL and monolingual students was examined was by looking at the different types of instruction they received and how that impacted the acquisition of reading skills. It was important to take into consideration that students who speak multiple languages have different skills than monolingual students and so it should not necessarily be looked at as a deficit in skill. It was necessary to think about how developmental differences could be seen as deficits that need to be improved or differences that could be welcomed (Hoff, 2013). With that in mind it was helpful to consider the language of instruction which can either be used to improve the language deficits or celebrate the differences. Howard et al. (2014)

looked at three groups of students that received different modes of instruction. The first group was ELL students in kindergarten who attended schools where English was the primary source of instruction. The next group was third graders who were enrolled in dual language programs, which means students attended schools that gave instruction 50% in English and 50% in Spanish, or 90% in English and 10% in Spanish. The last group was fifth-grade students who attended schools that used the Success for All model. At these schools, students were instructed only in English, others in Spanish, and then English was incorporated after second grade. The three studies gave an in-depth look at the different educational settings that ELL students were put in to increase the usefulness of the findings. The Woodcock Language Proficiency Battery-Revised assessment was used in all of the studies; this used picture vocabulary, measure of oral language proficiency, letter-word identification, and a measure of reading accuracy. The comprehension component was only given to third and fifth-grade students. The findings for the kindergarten students showed that SES and English and Spanish vocabulary knowledge were considerable predictors in English word reading. For third-grade students, Spanish and English vocabulary knowledge was a great predictor of word reading, and SES was a significant predictor of English comprehension skills (Howard et al., 2014). For fifth-grade students, SES was no longer a predictor for students' word reading or comprehension skills.

Literacy skills can differ greatly between English-speaking monolingual students and ELL students because of the many challenges ELL students face in and outside of school. Bonifacci et al. (2019) looked to compare literacy skills with these two groups of students while taking into account SES. There were three groups. The first was the bilingual students, the second was the monolingual students from a low/medium SES, and the third was the monolingual students from a high SES. Of these groups, 58 students in second grade resided in Lombardia, Italy.

Monolingual students spoke only Italian, and bilingual students spoke a variation of different languages, including Spanish, Chinese, and Russian (Bonifacci et al., 2019). All students were tested on their reading and comprehension abilities. Spelling was also tested by students having to write a short passage; this showed that bilingual students were just as fluent in reading as their monolingual peers in both the high and low SES groups; this means there is no deficit in reading fluency learning for bilingual students when they are attending a school where the primary language of instruction is not their first language. However, bilingual students had lower spelling scores than their high and low-SES monolingual peers (Bonifacci et al., 2019).

Looking at a different issue around reading proficiency Kahn-Horwitz et al. (2006) explored the linguistic coding differences hypothesis. This hypothesis states that students who struggle with linguistic code in their native language will also struggle with the linguistic code in the target language. Linguistic code refers to the language's phonological/orthographic, syntactic, and semantic aspects; this would mean that students can identify words that rhyme, the number of syllables in a word, write words using the correct letters, put words in the proper order to make sense, and understand the meaning of words in different contexts. There is also the threshold hypothesis that predicts the aspects of bilingualism that could positively influence cognitive growth are not likely to happen until the child has reached a certain proficiency in a second language (Ardasheva et al., 2011). Both hypotheses align with the claim that ELL students who are proficient and literate in their native language will have a much easier time acquiring and becoming proficient in the target language. Students with strong home language skills also have had better academic and socio-emotional growth, and healthier parental relationships (Luo et al., 2021). Kahn-Horwitz et al. (2006) tested these hypotheses by putting ELL students into two groups: strong readers and weak readers, SES was used in this study but

did not affect the grouping of students. Scores of all students were collected on English word reading, letter knowledge, vocabulary, and reading comprehension. Students were also scored in their native language Hebrew, on phonological awareness, morphological processing production, spelling, vocabulary, and word reading (Kahn-Horwitz et al., 2006). The results of these assessments showed that SES only appeared to be a factor in English letter knowledge. It showed that weak English readers from lower SES backgrounds are one year behind in English and Hebrew letter sounds, names, and word and nonsense word reading. In regard to the hypothesis ELL students who performed poorly on Hebrew were weak English readers. Students who scored low on Hebrew word reading and phonological awareness were also weak in the skill of reading comprehension in English (Kahn-Horwitz et al., 2006).

### **Language Development**

Language development is the process by which people understand and communicate language. It begins with the simple parts of language, such as letter sounds, names, and gestures. It moves into decoding words, and next comes vocabulary, reading sentences, and comprehension. Language development is essential for ELL students so they can communicate in the target language and succeed academically and socially in school.

In this section, I discussed six studies that all surround the topic of language development. Of those five studies, two focused on language input, one discussed verbal and nonverbal performance outcomes, and three are about the language environment. All studies examined how SES impacts these different parts of language development and whether or not those impacts affect ELL students more, less, or the same as their monolingual peers.

### ***Language Input***

ELL students need language input and especially comprehensible input in the target language to help them acquire the language. Language input is exposure to the authentic language being used correctly, and input refers to all things heard and read, such as conversations, TV, radio, books, articles, and blogs. ELL students from low SES backgrounds have less exposure to comprehensible input, which can put their language development behind their higher SES and monolingual peers.

Speech development is a big part of language development as it is part of the first steps in forming letter sounds and words. Huang et al. (2018) examined students in Taiwan who started learning English between the ages of two and eleven. They were given three assessments that measured their speech production and SES. All students were given a wordless book called "Frog, Where Are You?" for the speech production task. There were 24 pictures students looked through, and then they recorded themselves retelling the story. All recordings were transcribed and analyzed using the Child Language Data Exchange System. Nine different analyses of the speech samples were based on three theoretical constructs: complexity, accuracy, and fluency. The analyses included speech rate and articulation rate, frequencies of disfluencies, grammatical errors, and percent errors (Huang et al., 2018). After looking at the results, SES showed that students from a higher SES were exposed to English at a younger age and were more likely to have traveled abroad. This meant they had been exposed to more comprehensible English language input and had higher speech production scores. Using the structural hypothesis of language acquisition, it was found that when parents' input is more complex than the child's language output, it can foster growth in child language (Boyce et al., 2013), which demonstrated that when parents have lower education, they are at a disadvantage to stimulate their child's language growth. Students from lower SES households did not have the advantages their peers

had, so they have had less exposure to comprehensible English language input, making their speech production scores lower (Huang et al., 2018).

To examine if SES would predict kindergarten and second grade student's skills in vocabulary, syntax, and narrative structure in the English and Spanish narrative story retells Alt et al. (2016) collected samples from students retelling a story that was read to them. This study focused on if SES had an impact on the student's native language development as well as English. Samples were taken in Spanish and English; directions were given in the language that was being tested. The examiner read a story and then asks the child open-ended questions such as "Can you tell me the story?" With this data five language measures were analyzed: mean length of utterance in words (MLU), number of different words (NDW), narrative scoring scheme (NSS), conjunctions-type (CT), and subordination index (SI). Simple linear regression was used to determine if SES predicted performance on the different language measures (Alt et al., 2016). The English sample of the kindergarten students revealed that SES predicted the results on four out of the five language measurements and second grade students showed a connection between SES on three out of the five language measurements. For the Spanish sample SES did not predict any language measure for either grade level. The biggest differences were for kindergarten where SES affected vocabulary, narrative structure, conjunctions, and morphosyntax. By second grade MLU was not affected by SES, but NDW, NSS, and CT were (Alt et al., 2016).

### ***Verbal and Nonverbal Performance Outcomes***

Verbal communication is the use of language in both written and spoken terms. People use body language and gestures to convey the meaning of their communication. Nonverbal communication is the way people communicate with one another without the use of actual

words. In this section, students' nonverbal spatial reasoning was measured, which is the ability to mentally move and rotate images and three-dimensional shapes in one's mind.

The different bilingual experiences of ELL students can affect verbal and nonverbal performance outcomes. Bialystok and Shorbagi (2021) research differs from others discussed in this literature review because no students in a low SES household participated; only students in an upper or middle SES participated. Results still showed the differences between students in high SES and low SES households and how that affected their language development. The two groups were made up of children around the age of six years old. They were assessed using the Raven's Progressive Matrices, Verbal Fluency, Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test, and the Simon Picture Task (Bialystok & Shorbagi, 2021). The Raven's Progressive Matrices is a standardized test that measures students' nonverbal spatial reasoning. Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test assesses students' English receptive vocabulary. The Verbal Fluency had semantic and phonological fluency tests with two trials for each child. The Simon Picture Task was used to show the association between the target's spatial location and the response key. The results of Raven's Progressive matrices show that all students scored the same no matter their SES, which means all the students have relatively similar nonverbal intelligence (Bialystok & Shorbagi, 2021). For the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test, students who had a higher SES background and were lower in the bilingualism area scored higher than their lower SES bilingual peers. The Verbal Fluency test also showed that it is highly influenced by SES, as the students from high SES backgrounds scored better than their lower SES peers. Students with a higher SES also scored higher on executive functioning. Students from the middle SES range had standard vocabulary scores, which reflected their semantic fluency skills (Bialystok & Shorbagi, 2021).

### *Language Environment*

Language environment allows students to have different experiences and interactions with the target language, which helps them better acquire that language. A space that is designed and set up to provide students with the necessary stimulus needed to develop language skills effectively is a rich language environment. This would mean that students can access books, comprehensible input, and many different examples of written language surrounding them. Students from low SES backgrounds do not have the richest language environment or access to the same experiences as students from a higher SES, which can slow their language development.

The language learning process is a child's ability to make meaning of a new language with the surrounding environment. Luo's et al. (2021) research examined a child's language learning process using two different approaches; fast mapping and syntactic bootstrapping. Fast mapping is how children learn and use new words with very little exposure. Syntactic bootstrapping lets children use syntactic structures to make meaning of words. Language learning processing used experience-independent and experience-dependent instruments; this means that the language learning process is much less dependent on the experience aspect so that students can acquire a new language with fewer experiences with the new language (Luo et al., 2021). Children aged three to five were assessed using the Quick Interactive Language Screener: English and Spanish. The results of this test showed that students from a higher SES background did better at learning a new language than their lower SES peers. Children from low SES backgrounds were less exposed to novel language items, so they needed help inferring the meaning of those novel words. The study also showed that low SES ELL students were already a year behind their peers by age three, and the gap continued throughout preschool (Luo et al., 2021).

Educational bilingualism and family SES are two environmental factors contributing to the English as a second language outcome of elementary students in Germany. Trebits et al. (2021) examined the connection between early immersion education, SES, and students' cognitive gains in the target language to see the effects of second language acquisition. In grades three and four, students were tested on their working memory, metalinguistic skills, and nonverbal intelligence. They were from a regular monolingual (German) and bilingual (German and English) elementary school. They were tested once at the end of third grade and then again at the end of fourth grade. The difference between the two schools is the exposure to English. At the monolingual school, students had two 45-minute sessions of English a week, and the bilingual school had English instruction for 76.7% of the day (Trebits et al., 2021). Receptive tasks were used to measure English receptive vocabulary and grammar with the British Vocabulary Scale III and the Early Language and Intercultural Acquisition Studies Grammar Tests. The cognitive tasks measured were working memory, letter-number sequencing, backward digit span, and forward digit span using the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children. Phonological awareness was examined using subtests of the German Reading and Writing Competencies Test for Primary School. These assessments showed that students in the bilingual immersion school scored higher than their monolingual school peers regardless of their SES on all components except for nonverbal intelligence (Trebits et al., 2021). The delivery of instruction can affect the language development of students learning a new language. Whether the instruction is in English only or Spanish and English ELL students' acquisition can differ drastically. SES can also affect how well students do with certain types of language instruction. To help determine if language development is affected by different instructional programs, Lindholm-Leary (2012) had students in kindergarten through second grade participate in a study

that examined how bilingual and English-only programs affected students from low SES households. All children had Spanish as their first language and were identified as ELL when they entered kindergarten. All students attended a preschool or an elementary school that promoted language and literacy in either English or English and Spanish. They used a model called Sobrato Early Academic Literacy (SEAL) that focused on Spanish-speaking students who entered kindergarten with little to no English proficiency. The students in the study who attended this program were assessed in both English and Spanish using the Desired Results Developmental Profile, Language Assessment Scale, and the California English Language Development Test. Based on these assessments, Spanish-speaking students from low SES households enter preschool with low English and Spanish proficiency levels (Lindholm-Leary, 2012). However, about 25% of students had higher Spanish proficiency, less than 50% had limited proficiency, and about 33% had little to no Spanish proficiency. The language of instruction was also essential to take into account. The students instructed in English in preschool entered kindergarten with higher Spanish proficiency than those instructed in both languages in preschool. Those students' English proficiency continues to increase in kindergarten and first grade, so bilingual Spanish-speaking students need early education in English. Although, the language of instruction only stayed consistent throughout kindergarten and first grade. The students in bilingual preschool started kindergarten lower than their English-only preschool peers. However, these students made more significant gains in Spanish throughout kindergarten and first grade, and their peers lost their Spanish (Lindholm-Leary, 2012).

### **Home Practices**

Home practices are activities in the students' homes that help promote literacy development. Activities can include reading, writing, and just overall exposure to literacy in the

house. A student's home literacy environment can include the physical environment, the texts and print that are present, and the social environment, where siblings and parents interact with text and one another. It can also include the parents' characteristics, beliefs, and socialization practices. This section examined four studies with the common theme of home practices. Within that theme, I looked at two subsections: shared book reading with one study and home literacy environment with three studies.

### ***Shared Book Reading***

In the United States, schools work with a large population of linguistically diverse students who often struggle to form English literacy skills as quickly as their monolingual peers. The interactions children have with their environment and the people within it heavily influence their development in their early life (Goodrich et al., 2021). Shen & Del Tufo (2022) aimed to determine if parent-child shared book reading gave multilingual learner students the same advantages of literacy development as it did to their monolingual peers. The impacts of parent-child shared book reading on students' emergent literacy and SES were also investigated. To determine the children's emergent literacy skills, the parents were asked five yes or no questions. The questions asked were, "Can this child recognize the letters of the alphabet?", "Can this child write their first name, even if some letters are backward?", "Does this child ever read or pretend to read story books on their own?", "Does this child actually read the words written in the book, or do they look at the book and pretend to read?" The last question was, "Can this child identify the colors red, blue, yellow, and green by name?". Then they measured the frequency of the parent-child shared book reading using two questions, those being "How many times have you or someone in your family read to this child in the past week?" and "About how many minutes on each of those times did someone in your family read to the child?". After all the data had been

collected and analyzed, it was concluded that parent-child shared book reading was positively associated with ELL students' emergent literacy. The relationship is much more robust in children ages two to four than in children ages four to six. The parent-child shared book reading also demonstrated the relationship between SES and ELL's early literacy skills. Higher SES families were more likely to participate in child-shared book reading, developing multilingual learners' literacy abilities (Shen & Del Tufo, 2022).

### *Home Literacy Environment*

The home literacy environment of a student involves the attitudes, resources, and practices used throughout the home that promote children's literacy development (Shi, 2013). A home literacy environment also includes activities children see in their homes and their parents engage in. It is the family's beliefs about literacy, the parent's education level, the family's SES, the number of books at home, and the daily social life activities. Students who do not reach proficiency by first grade are more likely to have parents with less education than the students' parents who are proficient by first grade. Students with well-educated mothers learn their target language vocabulary much quicker than their peers who have less educated mothers (Kim et al., 2014). The home literacy environment exposes children to language and when there are two or more languages used in the home children are getting their reading and literacy activities distributed across those multiple languages (Goodrich et al., 2013). For some students these literacy activities can be balanced in the languages used or it can be only one. In this literature, Shi (2013) focuses on the linguistic, visual, and audio parts of literacy behavior, not the gestural and spatial "modes of meaning in literacy activities." This research showed that parents could have a positive outlook on language learning but might have low expectations, which causes them to make little effort to expand their child's language abilities. Parents also get messages

from schools saying that their students might be having a more challenging time in school because of the use of their native language at home, so parents will try only to have their children work on the target language at home. Parents have difficulty helping their children maintain their native language while simultaneously trying to support them in acquiring the new target language. Families may also see a deficit in intellectual challenges from school, which can be a lack of knowledge of what goes on in school, giving them a lousy outlook on their children's education. A challenge for parents was introducing students to a new identity while keeping their existing identity. If this challenge is not met, then students resist learning. It is also crucial for students to have access to engaging literacy materials, and many ELL and low SES households might not have that. The last point this research made was that parents welcome only specific strategies for language acquisition from educators, which can limit the experiences they give their children at home. A home literacy environment shapes ELL students' literacy skills through their parents' negative or positive language attitudes. Families from a low SES tend to have more negative views (Shi, 2013).

How six-year-olds use language, their reading input, and vocabulary in their native language and target language in the home can predict the success of students transitioning to formal education. Prevo et al. (2014) examined these different aspects in a study that focused on students who spoke Turkish as their first language, Dutch as their second language and are located in the Netherlands. Collecting information about these children's home literacy environments was vital to help them transition to formal schooling. This research looked at how SES and vocabulary in both Turkish and Dutch are mediated by reading input in either language (Prevo et al., 2014). The mother and child had a two-hour home visit that entailed an interview with the mother, testing the child, and video observation. Reading input data was collected using

a questionnaire to determine how many books were in the home, if there were TV and computers, how often the parents read to their child, and if they read in Turkish, Dutch, or both. Dutch vocabulary was measured using the Expressive One-Word Picture Vocabulary Test, and Turkish vocabulary was measured using the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test. The results from this research show that, on average, the moms spoke more Dutch than Turkish to their kids, and they received much more reading input in Dutch because of their moms, and they had more Dutch books available to them than Turkish. SES also showed a positive relationship with Dutch reading, availability of Dutch books, and Dutch expressive vocabulary scores. There was also a positive relationship between SES, the frequency with which mothers read to their children, and the number of books in the house (Prevoo et al., 2014). This meant that families with a higher SES spoke more Dutch to their children, they provided more reading input in Dutch, and the child had a higher Dutch vocabulary. So, families with a lower SES spoke more Turkish at home and read more Turkish books, making these students less prepared for the transition to formal education as they are not as proficient in the primary language of instruction (Prevoo et al., 2014).

Reading beliefs are a part of the home literacy environment. They can mediate the relationship between SES, maternal education, and children's English general expressive and receptive vocabulary outcomes. When parents have strong beliefs about quality education home literacy practices increase. Home practices show that elementary students have better language and literacy skills when they are done frequently (Wood et al., 2014). Gonzalez et al. (2016) looked at Mexican American students and families to see if their reading beliefs and SES influenced students' expressive and receptive vocabulary. The participants in this study were Mexican American preschoolers who came from meager SES backgrounds and were bilingual.

Parents were given 44 questions to complete for a Parent Reading Belief Inventory (PRBI). Questions surrounded parents' beliefs on literacy and literacy practices in their homes. They were also given a Familia Inventory that assessed their home literacy environment; this addressed aspects of the home literacy environment such as extended family, work and play, library usage, parent modeling, practical reading, shared reading, support of the school, TV usage, verbal interactions, and writing at home. The Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test was used to measure students' English receptive vocabulary, and the Expressive Vocabulary Test Second Edition was used to measure students' English expressive vocabulary (Gonzalez et al., 2016). Structural equation modeling examined the relationship between SES, home literacy environment, and children's vocabulary outcomes. Results showed that 51.1% of mothers read to their children in Spanish, 36.7% read to their children in Spanish and English, and 12.2% read to their children in English only. About 66.3% of families read to their children less than twice a week, and 72.6% said they had fewer than ten books in their homes. Results also showed that higher family SES was associated with higher PRBI scores and related to higher home literacy environment scores. Home literacy environments and books available to families were positive predictors of children's reading frequency, predicting their receptive vocabulary. The study showed maternal education and SES significantly influence reading beliefs and home literacy environments (Gonzalez et al., 2016).

### **Social Emotional Learning**

Social emotional learning (SEL) refers to the process of developing interpersonal skills that are essential for school, work, and life success. There are five pillars to SEL: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making. Students need to have a good relationship with all five of these pillars in order to truly be

successful in school. When students do not know how to control themselves or their emotions it leads to less engagement in academics. When students are in tune with the five pillars it leads to greater academic success and better relationships with the people around them.

In this section I discussed four studies that all surround the topic of social emotional learning with ELL students. Some of these studies do not mention SES, though it was not talked about, hypotheses can be made about a connection to ELLs and SEL. I discussed how SES could be a factor within the research at the end of each study for those that did not examine it.

Research has shown that there is a relationship with lower social emotional skills to lower academic achievement with ELL students. Individual factors such as poverty, discrimination, and outside stressors greatly impact ELL students which could be the cause of lower SEL skills. (Niehaus et al., 2017). A study was done by Niehaus et al. (2017) to determine if socio-emotional well-being mediated the relationship with language proficiency and academic success. When thinking about the situation ELL students are in it was essential to recognize that the process of learning a new language could lead to social and emotional difficulties. ELL students can feel isolated because they do not speak English well and have high levels of anxiety about doing work in a language they are not proficient in. For this study data was collected from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Survey-Kindergarten of 21,000 students when they were in kindergarten, first, third, fifth, and eighth grade. The ELL students involved were Spanish speaking and from Asian Language backgrounds. The three major findings from this data were that increased socioemotional problems lead to poorer academic performance from both Spanish and Asian language ELLs. The second finding was that self-reports of socioemotional well-being differed from teacher reports. Spanish speaking ELL students reported they had more social and emotional difficulties than their English monolingual peers. Whereas teachers reported that

Spanish speaking ELL students had less social and emotional issues than their English monolingual peers. Asian language ELLs self-reported the same as English monolingual peers, but again teachers reported Asian language ELLs as having less social and behavioral difficulties (Niehaus et al., 2017). The difference in reports could be drawn from earlier statements of ELL students having more anxiety and feeling isolated so they see themselves as having more problems. Students who live in low SES households have more daily life stressors that can cause internalized behaviors such as depression and anxiety. SES could play a part in an ELL student's social emotional success because of the added pressures of life outside of learning a new language.

Students who are bilingual show a great abundance of cognitive advantages especially in the space of inhibitory/executive control. There is a preposition that ELL students who have high functioning social skills, good attachment with parents, behavioral control, and cognitive ability are the ones who are more likely to become bilingual. Winsler et al. (2014) examined different family designs and child level correlates of attainment of English proficiency with Spanish speaking ELL students living in poverty. There was a hypothesis that children four years old who have good emotional skills would be better at acquiring their second language, have higher levels of initiative, self-control, and attachment and lower levels of behavioral concerns. The data supported this hypothesis. Students' social skills and behavior problems were associated with their English performance at four years old. Students who became emergent bilinguals had better initiative, attachment, and self-control and fewer behavior problems (Winsler et al., 2014).

Young children are in a crucial developmental period where they should be learning SEL skills in order to be successful later in life. These skills need to be practiced in group settings, so the classroom is a perfect place for this. Second Step is a SEL curriculum that has a Spanish

version, Segundo Paso, that can be implemented in the classroom. Clinton et al. (2014) wanted to see if the Segundo Paso was effective in teaching young Guatemalan students social-emotional concepts and skills. To examine if SES played a factor in learning SEL skills Segundo Paso was implemented at a private school (high SES students) and public school (low SES students). Segundo Paso has three units which are empathy, emotion management, and problem resolution. Lessons were taught weekly to students only in Spanish. Even though both groups got the same curriculum and instruction, students from the higher SES showed much greater gains in their skills than students from low SES backgrounds. Students from low SES households also improved their knowledge and skills, but not to the extent of their higher SES peers. This could lead to students in high SES households needing more intensive SEL programs (Clinton et al., 2014). Although these students were not identified as ELL in this study because of the language and Country it took place in, the data can be applied to emergent bilinguals in the US. Students new to the US or the English language who live in low SES households will need more SEL interventions than their higher SES peers.

ELL students are at a much higher risk for having internalized and externalized behaviors than their English monolingual peers due to the social inequities they experience, the lack of quality education, difficulties of acquiring a new language, discrimination, and poor social-emotional and academic supports (Murrieta & Eklund, 2021). It is important there is a universal screener available to identify ELL students for needing extra SEL support to provide them the services necessary for their social-emotional success. SES has also proven to be a factor in students' social-emotional success because they normally have less access to social and economic resources which causes distress. Murrieta & Eklund (2021) wanted to examine the relationship between ELL status and emotional behavior risk with ELL and non-ELL students.

Data was collected for grades K-8 at an elementary school in Arizona where 98% of students receive free or reduced lunch. Using the Arizona English Language Assessment (AZELLA) ELL students were put into different classifications based on their English proficiency demonstrated: Initial Fluent English Proficient (IFEP) which means they were ELLs but demonstrated proficiency on the AZELLA and have exited ELL services, and ELL which means students who did not score proficient. Emotional behavior risks (EBR) was assessed with the Behavioral and Emotional Screening System- Teacher Form (BESS). This is a rating scale that assessed adaptive skills, externalizing problems, internalizing problems, and school problems. Results from this showed that 1.2% of IFEP, 22.2% of ELL, and 69.1% of English only students scored at risk for emotional and behavioral problems. This data shows that there is no connection between EBR and ELL students as non-ELL students scored significantly higher. Since 98% of students receive free or reduced lunch it can be said that almost all the students in this study were from a low SES household (Murrieta & Eklund, 2021). There were 395 students total, 294 were non-ELL and 78 were ELL. Based on the percentages from the BESS 203 non-ELL students were at risk and 17 ELL, making a total of 220 students at risk for behavior issues. This means about 56% of the student population at this school are at risk of emotional behavior problems. This is a very large number of students and demonstrates that SES could be the biggest factor in EBR.

### **Success in Math**

Schools in the United States have a heavy focus of instruction on math and reading. These are the two biggest subjects that are worked on daily and are the only subjects tested in standardized testing until fifth grade. Math has a lot of academic language and vocabulary that ELL students might have never been exposed to in English or their native language. In first grade students begin to be introduced to math story problems. They have to read stories and prompts to

figure out the numbers they need to work with and the function. They also have to begin answering these math problems with words making vocabulary, reading, and writing big components of math. This makes math another struggle for ELL students that they have to overcome to be successful in school.

I analyzed three studies in this section. Each study focused on the relationship between ELL students and their success in math. For this section SES is not mentioned in some of the studies, so I hypothesized how SES could be a factor in the success of ELL students developing their math skills.

Sociodemographic disadvantages affect students success in school because of the added challenges they bring upon students. Singh (2012) looked into how these sociodemographics determined the success of fifth, eighth, and tenth graders by using their third-grade math performance and school factors (such as a high poverty school) in Hawaii. Hawaii used the Hawaii State Assessment (HSA) that determined proficiency in subjects. ELL status was not significant for fifth grade. When the data was examined for ELL students in eighth grade the HSA showed that all ELL students would score higher than their monolingual peers by 4.86 points, and in tenth grade the data shows the same as the eighth graders, but the ELL students scored 7.06 points higher than their monolingual peers (Singh, 2012). As for the SES factor, third grade HSA scores showed that in fifth grade a low SES student would score 5.43 points lower than their high SES peers, in eighth grade low SES students scored 3.52 points lower, and in tenth grade 4.49 points lower than their higher SES peers (Singh, 2012). The findings for the high ELL scores in math in Hawaii do not fall in line with the low reading scores from previous studies mentioned. Singh (2012) predicts this is because the majority of ELL students in Hawaii are of Eastern Asian Heritage and come to the country with a strong basis of math in their native

language. Since SES and ELL are looked at separately in this study, with the information of the ELL population being Eastern Asian and having strong math skills already entering Hawaii it could be said that ELL and SES would have no correlation on the success of students' math scores.

Difficulties in math appear in children before they even enter school and will continue to grow disparate overtime if no interventions are put in place (Roberts & Bryant, 2011). Students who live in low SES households are more likely to be the ones entering school with larger deficits in math because of a lack of opportunity for literacy and math exposure. Roberts and Bryant (2011) looked at five different research questions, but only focused on two: to what extent does primary language moderate the relationship of readiness and achievement? And to what extent does the interaction of SES and primary language moderate mathematics achievement trajectories? The Early Childhood Longitudinal Survey- Kindergarten (ECLS-K) cohort of 1998 was used to collect data. The data was available for the students up until they were in fifth grade. This assessment used five content strands to measure math achievement: number sense, properties, and operations; measurement; geometry and spatial sense; data analysis, statistics and probability; and patterns, algebra, and functions. SES was measured when students were in Kindergarten using parental education, job type, and household income. The results found that primary language is not as important as SES when it came to math achievement. SES was most correlated with math readiness entering kindergarten (Robert & Bryant, 2011). Since SES and ELL are two separate groups, I hypothesized that ELL students from lower SES households will struggle more with math because they will not only have the disadvantages of lack of opportunity from living in poverty but will also have the struggle of

learning and understanding a new language. It will be difficult for low SES ELL students to acquire English and math concepts they are unfamiliar with simultaneously.

In the 2007-2008 school year Hispanic students made up 20.4% of the US public school education student population and 11.3% of those students were ELL. This means that the majority of schools are having to educate ELL students and one of the bigger concerns that comes with that is teaching them math (Valle et al., 2013). Data has shown there is a math achievement gap between White English-speaking students and Hispanic students. Hispanic students scored more than 20 points below their white counterparts in math consistently. Valle et al. (2013) conducted a study to find effective instructional practices with White non-Hispanic non-ELL students, Hispanic non-ELLs and Hispanic ELLs. Data used for this research was pulled from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Survey-Kindergarten and teachers were asked questions about their instructional approaches. Teachers spent the most time doing teacher-directed whole group instruction and the least amount of time was child directed activities. Overall, it was found that students' learning opportunities are limited due to classroom instruction. Whole group instruction is not effective for ELL students because they need more attention. Textbooks were being used a lot and have proven to hinder students' mathematical performance. The use of computers was shown to improve students' math skills, increase engagement, and improve problem solving skills (Valle et al., 2013). This study did not mention SES, but with Roberts and Bryant (2011) stating low SES students come into school behind in math skills, it can be hypothesized that ELL students from low SES households would benefit and have increased math achievement with the effective instructional strategies such as computer use, visual representations, and teacher directed small groups.

## **Conclusion**

Most ELL students come from low SES households, which can hinder their success in school and cause them to underperform compared to their monolingual or higher SES peers because they lack the same resources and opportunities (Howard et al., 2014). ELL students have less exposure to the target language, so they will start school at a disadvantage because they cannot understand the instruction. ELL students from low-income families will also have different home literacy environments than their peers, which significantly determines their literacy abilities (Shi, 2013). Studies by Gonzalez et al. (2016) and Prevoo et al. (2014) show that families from low SES backgrounds read less to their children, about twice a week, only have about ten books at home, and have opposing views on literacy and school.

ELL students were at a disadvantage in reading proficiency in the primary grades because of the development of their language skills. They scored lower on early emergent literacy skills than their monolingual peers (D'Angiulli et al., 2004). This started in kindergarten, and ELL students lagged behind their peers in these early emergent skills until about third grade. Once third grade hits, that is where late emerging literacy deficits show. This is when ELL students catch up to their monolingual peers in early emergent literacy skills but need more vocabulary skills (Kieffer, 2010). Third grade is where monolingual students started to show early emergent literacy deficits, while the ELL students made progress. Then by the time fifth grade hits, all students scored about the same in all areas of literacy regardless of their SES (Kieffer, 2010). So as ELL students get older, they have more exposure to the target language and they become even with their monolingual peers, and SES no longer seems to be a significant predictor of their literacy skills.

Mathematics and SEL success looked different than the rest of the themes due to the fact there was not a lot of mention on the relationship between the two and SES. Based on many of

the SEL studies it can be said that ELL students have many more stressors in their life that can cause them to be at higher risk of social-emotional problems (Murrieta & Eklund, 2021; Winsler et al., 2014; Niehaus et al., 2017). For math, ELL students have to acquire a new set of vocabulary words and skills that they might have never been exposed to. Math also has a lot of word problems so the struggles in reading proficiency lead into math. SES is a big factor for reading proficiency so that could be the underlying cause for the lack of success in math from ELLs.

### **Action Plan**

The research I have looked at has focused on the effects socioeconomic status has had on English Language Learners (ELL) overall success in school. ELL students have a greater struggle to be successful in school than their English-speaking monolingual peers. The majority of ELL students come from low SES households and the language of instruction is one they are not familiar with. The number of ELL students that make up the population of students in public schools is growing every year. Schools and staff need to be well equipped with the knowledge, tools, and resources to work with ELL students and they need to understand how these students' low SES backgrounds can affect their overall success in school.

Throughout the literature I found and focused on five major themes: reading proficiency, language development, home practices, social-emotional learning, and success in math. These five themes were all centered around ELL and English monolingual speaking students comparing and contrasting how SES plays a role within each theme. This action plan discussed how the school I work at addressed the problem of ELL students' success in school, how the school does or does not support them, and aspects that could be improved. In order to get a better picture of

my school I gave the student demographics and some background information on how my school relates to the problem at hand.

I work at a small, rural, K-8 school district in Washington State as the district's ELL teacher. I referred to this district as the Puget Sound School District. The district is made up of one elementary school and one middle school. The total population of students at the elementary school is 500. Of those 500 students 72.6% are white, 17.4% are Hispanic/Latino, 59.6% come from low-income families, and 5.8% are ELL (OSPI, 2023). As for the middle school, the total student population is 233. 69.5% of those students are white, 18.5% are Hispanic/Latino, 59.7% come from low-income families, and 5.6% are ELL (OSPI, 2023). I work with a total of 45 ELL students in this district and all of them come from low-income families. 5 of the families are McKinney-Vento, meaning they are homeless. The action tables discussed below will include these five themes showing recommendations for schools and staff that the research has suggested, what the school I work at does in relation to what the research says, and my own recommendations.

### **Reading Proficiency**

This first theme, reading proficiency is the most prominent theme of all throughout the literature because reading is one of the biggest factors of academic achievement in school. Students who come from a low SES background developed a gap in their reading skills as early as kindergarten and the gap continued to grow without the correct support and interventions they need (D'Anguilli et al., 2004). In this table below I discussed what the research suggests schools should do in order to close the reading achievement gap, what the Puget Sound School District does, and what I recommend.

### **Table 1**

*Reading Proficiency*

What the research says...	What my school does...	What I recommend...
<p>Schools should use didactic strategies such as implementation of listening skills and reinforcing phoneme-grapheme correspondence to help level the linguistic playing field with comprehension and spelling skills (Bonifacci et al., 2020; Lindholm-Leary, 2012).</p>	<p>Teachers in the primary grades have a heavy focus on phonics. They first teach the letter names and sounds, blending sounds and stretching words out to identify each sound and how many there are. From there, they begin to teach students to read consonant-vowel-consonant words fluently. Students continue to build on these foundational skills to further develop their fluency, comprehension and spelling.</p>	<p>All teachers need in depth training on the science of reading and how to teach phonics appropriately to students of all ages. Teachers should start instruction with the foundational skills in phonics- letter names and sounds, blending and decoding, then introducing new concepts that keep building on one another.</p>
<p>Comprehensive literacy intensive instructional programs are integrated in all grades to reduce the negative impacts of low SES on word-reading development (D'Angiulli et al., 2004; Bialystok, 2021).</p>	<p>Puget Sound School District has three reading interventionist teachers that use a literacy intensive program with small groups made up of tier 2 and 3 students to focus on their literacy needs.</p>	<p>General education teachers receive training on the literacy intensive instructional program to implement into small groups within their classroom and so they can have the skills and resources to help their students with the mainstream curriculum.</p>

<p>Effective teaching strategies are built on methods that are used with native English speaking students, but are modified to ensure ELL students can access the instruction being delivered in English (Kieffer, 2011; Trebits et al., 2021).</p>	<p>Teachers use the mainstream curriculum and add in supports, accommodations, and modifications to make the work and assignments accessible to ELL students.</p>	<p>Teachers use the Assessing Comprehension and Communication in English State-to-State for ELLs (ACCESS) standards and “can do” descriptors to help modify assignments. Teachers need to be trained on the standards, can do descriptors, and how to correctly modify assignments and curriculum for ELL students.</p>
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**Language Development**

Language development is very important because this is the process in which students acquire the ability to process speech and communicate. When students are not able to understand the instruction, assignments, and curriculum because of low language development it makes it extremely difficult for them to achieve academic success. ELL students also all have different bi/multilingual experiences, and these experiences shape their process of making meaning out of a new language (Bialystok & Shorbagi, 2021; Luo et al., 2021). In the language development table, I discussed the findings from the research that suggest ways to improve students' language development, what my school does, and what I recommend.

**Table 2**

*Language Development*

<p>What the research says...</p>	<p>What my school does...</p>	<p>What I recommend...</p>
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<p>Immersion programs provide highly intensive and daily contact with the second language in different academic and social settings (Trebits et al., 2021; Lindholm-Leary, 2012; Huang et al., 2018).</p>	<p>Puget Sound School District provides instruction to ELL students using the immersion model. English is the main language of instruction while Spanish is used as a scaffold.</p>	<p>Students are fully immersed in English and translation of assignments and curriculum into Spanish are used as a support and modification for students who need it.</p>
<p>Students who are proficient in their home language will acquire English proficiency quicker than those students who are not proficient in their native language. Translanguaging can help students become proficient in native and target languages. (Lindholm-Leary, 2012; Huang, 2018; Khan-Horwitz, 2006).</p>	<p>Puget Sound School District uses English as its main and only language of instruction, but translanguaging is encouraged and accepted for students.</p>	<p>Students receive instruction in English, but are allowed and encouraged to use translanguaging. Teachers should use students' home languages to support the content being more accessible.</p>
<p>More resources such as free books and media should be provided to low SES ELL students (Huang, 2018; Bialystok, 2021).</p>	<p>Puget Sound School District has a reading program called “Book in a Bag”. Students take home a book at their level in English every night to practice reading.</p>	<p>Receive more funding for a reading incentive program in which students earn free books that they get to keep. As well as asking for book donations from around the community.</p>

### Home Practices

Home practices refers to activities within the homes of students pertaining to academics and language and how those are or are not benefiting them in school. A lot of students need help and support outside of school in order to be successful. Creating a literacy rich home environment can benefit students in many ways and can push them toward being proficient

readers and keep them from developing early emerging reading difficulties. If there are parents who do not understand or value education, then the home is not a place where the child will get that extra help and exposure. Home practices are also daily normal activities that children see their family members and other people in the home partaking in (Shi, 2013). In table 3 I discussed the findings from the research on how home practices can help literacy development, what my school does to encourage literacy at home, and what I recommend.

**Table 3***Home Practices*

What the research says...	What my school does...	What I recommend...
When students have more books available to them at home their reading frequency increases (Gonzalez et al., 2016; Prevoo et al., 2013; Shen & Del Tufo, 2022).	Puget Sound School District has a reading program called “Book in a Bag”. Students get to take home a new book to read every day.	The school receives more funding so students can get free books to keep at home to create their own library that they can pull books from whenever they want. Apply for grants.
Students who identify with their ethnic background have higher language proficiency than their peers who do not identify with their ethnic background (Prevoo et al., 2013; Shi, 2013).	The Puget Sound School District creates safe classroom environments where all students are seen in their learning.	Teachers get training on culturally responsive teaching and incorporate all students' cultures and backgrounds into their classrooms and celebrate those cultures, backgrounds, and differences.

<p>Students need books readily available to them in both English and their native language in both their homes and school (Gonzalez et al., 2016; Shen &amp; Del Tufo, 2022; Shi, 2013).</p>	<p>There is a library where students can check out books at any time. There are a few books in Spanish.</p>	<p>Puget Sound School District needs funding to buy more culturally responsive books and books that are in Spanish, Mam, and Q’anjob’al to be representative of the ELL population. Apply to multilingual literacy grants.</p>
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**Social Emotional Learning**

Social emotional learning is the process of developing interpersonal skills that are vital for success in school, work, and life. There are five pillars to social emotional learning: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. Students work to master skills in all of these five areas to reduce emotional and behavior conflicts and to be successful in life. ELL students are at a higher risk of developing emotional behavior risks because of internalized behaviors (Murrieta & Eklund, 2021). I discussed what the research says, what my school does, and recommendations for SEL.

**Table 4**

*Social Emotional Learning*

What the research says...	What my school does...	What I recommend...
<p>Schools should have a social emotional curriculum for tier 1 students so everyone gets the support they need (Winsler et al., 2014; Niehaus et al., 2017)</p>	<p>The curriculum “Character Strong” is used for daily SEL instruction.</p>	<p>All students receive tier 1 support in SEL, tier 2 students receive small group SEL instruction, and tier 3 students receive intensive SEL support from a specialist.</p>

<p>Safe environments need to be created all throughout the school so students feel supported and are willing to engage and take more risks in the target language (Winsler et al., 2014; Niehaus et al., 2017).</p>	<p>All teachers use culturally responsive teaching to create a classroom where all students feel safe and accepted. Expectations are clearly stated and taught for all parts of the school to promote safety in all areas.</p>	<p>Teachers use culturally responsive teaching to create a space that all students feel welcomed in. Small groups are formed to create more comfortability with students and staff to practice their SEL skills.</p>
<p>There needs to be multiple sources of data in order to collect accurate information on students' social emotional learning skills (Winsler et al., 2014; Niehaus et al., 2017)</p>	<p>FastBridge is the assessment tool used to gather data on students' SEL skills. There is input from the teacher and the student.</p>	<p>Collect the general education teachers input, the students input, all other teachers and staff that interact and work with the student daily, and parent input to get accurate data on a students SEL skills.</p>

**Success in Math**

Math is one of the key subjects that is focused on in school. When kindergarten students enter school, and they are behind in math the gap will grow bigger each year if no intervention is done. ELL students are at a high risk for developing deficits in math due to the lack of knowledge they have on the academic language and vocabulary (Roberts & Bryant, 2011). Teachers need to be sure they are using effective teaching strategies to expand students' knowledge on math concepts. In this table I discussed] what the research says about math success, what my school does, and what I recommend.

**Table 5**

*Success in Math*

<p>What the research says...</p>	<p>What my school does...</p>	<p>What I recommend...</p>
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<p>Effective teaching strategies need to be used to ensure ELL students' learning opportunities are not limited due to classroom instruction (Valle et al., 2013; Roberts &amp; Bryant, 2011).</p>	<p>Chromebooks are used with the online component of the math curriculum where students participate in interactive lessons and games to keep them engaged.</p>	<p>Teachers need to use a variety of different teaching strategies to reach all the different learners that are proven to be effective. Ex: technology use, visuals, and small groups.</p>
<p>Math difficulties appear in students before they even enter school. Early intervention is needed to prevent farthing the achievement gap (Roberts &amp; Bryant, 2011; Valle et al., 2013)</p>	<p>Intervention math groups are done daily for 30 minutes. Students are screened on their math skills and the lowest in each grade level receive intensive math instruction from the math specialist.</p>	<p>Intervention math groups start in kindergarten and continue throughout all grades to close the achievement gap.</p>
<p>Whole group instruction for math is ineffective for ELL students because they need one on one attention to fully develop understanding of the math concepts (Valle et al., 2013; Roberts &amp; Bryant, 2011)</p>	<p>Teachers do both whole group and small group math instruction. Working one on one with a student is rare due to time constraints and classroom management.</p>	<p>A mix of whole group, small group, and one on one instruction is used. Teacher starts with the whole group, checks for understanding, moves to a small group for those who need more help. ELL students receive one on one instruction if necessary.</p>

## Conclusion

In this section we looked at a series of recommendations around my school district and the support of ELL students in their overall success in school. In this next section I will go more in depth of the findings from the literature review. I am going to return to my focal and guiding questions for this paper and answer them using the research examined thus far.

## Discussion

The main focus of this project has been to examine the effects of socioeconomic status (SES) on English language learners' (ELL) overall success in school. The literature review provided insight into the effects of SES and what districts and staff can do to help mitigate those problems, if any. I asked three main questions to help determine how and why SES might affect ELL students. Those questions were "How does SES affect ELL students' academic success?", "How does SES affect ELL students' social-emotional learning and success?" and "How does a family's views and beliefs on education impact students' success in school?"

Five significant themes emerged when answering the questions: reading proficiency, language development, home practices, social-emotional learning, and mathematics success. Throughout the literature, it was found that SES has adverse effects on all of the aspects the three main questions focus on. In the primary grades, ELL students from low SES backgrounds had more trouble with reading proficiency, social-emotional skills, and language development. They also did not have a strong presence of literacy and education within their household which lowered their academic success compared to their higher SES and monolingual peers.

My site, Puget Sound School District also showed these findings in the literature as accurate. ELL students at this small, rural school show lower reading proficiency and language development scores. Although, there has been no data to show that ELL students from low SES households at Puget Sound School District struggle with social-emotional skills. Their families also do not model or practice academic work or language within their homes making their home language and literacy environments weak.

In the next section I returned to my rationale questions and attempted to answer them as well as an extra analysis on future trends of SES on ELL students success. I then examined

future implications for teachers and administrators, future implications of research, and limitations of the project.

### **Discussion of Findings**

I discussed my answers to the three rationale questions that were used to guide this research paper. The three questions provided insight on: the impacts of SES on ELL academic success, the effects of SES on ELL student's SEL, and the effects of families beliefs and views on ELL student's education.

#### ***SES Impacts on Academic Success***

The first question was, "How does SES affect ELL students' academic success?" The prominent finding for the question pertained to ELL students' reading proficiency, early and late emerging reading difficulties, math success, and language input. According to D'Angiulli et al. (2004) and Kieffer (2010), ELL and low SES students are at a higher risk for early emergent reading difficulties. This puts students who are both ELL and from a low SES background at an even greater risk for early emergent reading difficulties.

A literacy-intensive program was implemented in the D'Angiulli et al. (2004) study, where students were provided small group instruction inside their classroom with a literacy-rich environment to attempt to mitigate the effects of low SES backgrounds for ELL students. It was done in all grades, kinder through fifth, four times a week with 20-minute sessions. Results from this curriculum showed that in kindergarten the relationship between word reading skills and SES began; ELL students from very low SES households had very low word-reading scores.

Based on the research all schools without a literacy intensive curriculum continue the expansion of the reading proficiency gap between ELL and non-ELL students. At Puget Sound School District Kindergarten students enter school with a much smaller vocabulary and less

phonological awareness. This starts these students way behind their monolingual peers and although they make progress throughout the year, it is not enough to fully catch up to their peers.

After students become fluent, proficient readers, the next skills to master are comprehension and vocabulary. This typically starts around the time of third grade. Kieffer (2010) found that this is the biggest hurdle for students in the upper elementary grades to master, and thus puts ELLs at a higher risk of developing newly emerging late reading difficulties. A separate study by Kieffer (2011) also looked at early and late emerging reading difficulties. It was found that students who enter Kindergarten with limited English proficiency and low SES backgrounds have faster growth rates than their monolingual peers, but consistently stay below them until eighth grade.

As the research states, ELL students make great gains because of the big gap they need to catch up on and at some point, their scores become the same as non-ELL students with no effects of SES. Puget Sound School District has a lot of long-term ELL students because they continue to struggle with reading and writing. Majority of ELL students can read fluently, but they lack the academic language and vocabulary that they need to thrive in the upper elementary and secondary grades. Since most of the ELL students live in poverty and based on the research it could be said that SES plays a part in the struggle for these students to acquire new vocabulary and academic language.

Writing is the last skill of the four domains (reading, listening, speaking, and writing) that ELL students master. Along with early and late emerging reading difficulties, there is also the skill of writing that falls in line with literacy. According to Bonifacci et al. (2019), bilingual students, no matter their SES, had lower writing scores than their monolingual peers.

At Puget Sound School District, students' writing scores are the lowest due to spelling and sentence structure. This is because students are learning multiple languages simultaneously and will mix up the letter sounds (for example, Spanish-speaking students will mix up the letters 'i' and 'e'), write sentences with words out of order, will not write a complete sentence, and will miss connecting words and articles such as “the”, “is”, “and”. This can be linked to SES because the parents of the students at Puget Sound do not read or write in any language. This gives ELL students the lack of help and exposure with this skill at home and they enter school already far behind in this skill.

The last finding on reading proficiency was the language program of instruction. Howard et al. (2014) states that students in dual language programs have a more excellent vocabulary in both English and Spanish and therefore have the potential to be bi/multi-literate if they continue their schooling in a dual language program. The lack of resources available to create dual language programs is setting ELL students up to have lower scores in reading, math, and science. This is also creating a much higher dropout rate for Hispanic students when compared to their White peers (Jimerson et al., 2013).

All ELL students at Puget Sound School District receive English immersion instruction no matter their language proficiency levels. 100% of their instruction is in English in general education classrooms with English speaking monolingual peers. All ELL students are in a small pull-out group based on their English proficiency levels where they receive English language development services. Puget Sound School District does not have the necessary means to support a Dual Language program at this time.

Another effect on students' academic performance is their language development. Language development is how people process and communicate with language. The significant

findings were language input, verbal and nonverbal performance outcomes, and language environment.

Students from higher SES households are exposed to English earlier in their lives and start their language development process sooner than lower SES peers who have not been exposed to English (Huang et al., 2018). This is due to higher SES students having more opportunities, such as traveling abroad to English speaking countries and getting that early exposure. Their parents are also more likely to be educated and familiar with English and are able to expose and help their children learn English from the start of life.

Puget Sound School District uses the immersion model, so all students are exposed to English in Kindergarten no matter what and can start building their comprehensible input skills. ELL students who do come in with exposure to English are because of their older siblings who have become proficient in English and use that as their main language at home and with friends. Students who come in with little to no English proficiency are from low SES households where the older siblings are still struggling to learn the language as well.

Non-verbal communication is just as important as verbal communication in order for students to be successful in school and life. Bialystok and Shorbagi (2021) used Raven's Progressive matrices to show six-year-old students' use of nonverbal communication. This is a non-verbal assessment used to measure students' intelligence and reasoning to show their non-verbal skills. The assessment showed that all students scored the same in this area, meaning that SES does not affect a student's nonverbal communication skills.

Puget Sound School District uses Guided Language Acquisition Design strategies to encourage total physical response from students. This allows students to demonstrate their

learning by using their nonverbal communication skills. So, at this school ELL student's non-verbal skills are equal to their non-ELL peers.

The last finding pertaining to academics was success in math. Difficulties in math appeared before children even enter school in kindergarten. When deficits are not addressed and intervention is not put in place from the start, the success gap in math continues to grow each year (Roberts & Bryant, 2011). Valle et al. (2011) found that White non-ELL students continually scored higher in math than their ELL peers.

ELL students in Hawaii were consistently scoring higher than their monolingual peers on the state math assessment (Singh, 2012). It was also found that students from low SES households scored lower than their higher SES peers on the state math assessments. The results of this study showed that the majority of ELL students in Hawaii are from Eastern Asian countries and came to Hawaii with an already strong concept of math in their home languages. Revealing a difference in the “type” of ELL students and how success in school can be different within subgroups of ELL students.

At Puget Sound School District there are only Spanish-speaking ELL students from Mexico or Central America, with the exception of one student from Korea. The research states that ELL students with Asian language backgrounds come to the US well equipped with math skills in their native language so they are able to perform well even in English. This theory cannot be tested at Puget Sound due to the limited demographics.

### ***Effects of SES on ELL Students SEL***

The next question that helped guide this research was, "How does SES affect ELL students' social-emotional learning and success?" The research showed that a student's social skills and behavioral issues were associated with a student's English proficiency (Winsler et al.,

2014). Students who continued to acquire English and were labeled "emergent bilingual" showed more robust initial initiative, attachment, and self-control and fewer behavioral problems than peers who made little to no progress in acquiring English. Willingness to communicate, self-confidence, lack of anxiety, outgoingness, and motivation are all characteristics related to second language acquisition. SES does not play a role in an ELL student's social-emotional success. Social-emotional success is an individualist data point. ELL students who are shyer will have a more challenging time acquiring the target language because they are unwilling to take risks and participate in the language (Winsler et al., 2014). In contrast, more outgoing students are more willing to practice the second language and therefore develop English quicker.

Most ELL students have high stressors affecting their home life, such as poverty, making school much more difficult (Niehaus et al., 2017). ELL students also may feel higher anxiety levels than their English-monolingual peers because of the stress of learning a new language. They also feel more disconnected from their peers because they speak a different language. ELL students with low social and emotional well-being scores also have low academic and language proficiency scores. SES is not mentioned as a factor for this, but it could be because students from low SES households struggle with academic achievement.

ELL students who attend the Puget Sound School District are assessed three times a year for social and emotional risks. At each point of assessment there have been no ELL students that have stuck out as being at risk for emotional and behavioral problems. ELL students will score higher than their monolingual peers and often demonstrate higher social emotional skills than others.

### ***Impact of Family Views and Beliefs on Education***

The last question this research focused on was, "How does a family's views and beliefs on education impact students' success in school?" This question helped bring findings to light that might not have been discovered otherwise about students' success in schools and the reasoning behind why families might have particular views and beliefs on education. At Puget Sound School District, it is very challenging to get ELL families to be engaged and participate in school activities. More than half of the families do not read or write in any language showing little to no education background for themselves, so education is something that they may not be familiar with, especially in the United States.

The concept of parent-child shared book reading was examined to determine if that home practice increased students' literacy success (Shen & Del Tufo, 2022). After interviewing many families and testing students, it was found that students who participated in parent-child shared book reading had higher early literacy skills. It was also noted that families in higher SES households were more likely to participate in this home practice. Prevoo et al. (2014) also discovered that families who were from lower SES backgrounds had few books available to them at home in English and the home language, thus leaving little opportunity for students to get the chance to read at home.

Many ELL families do not have books in their homes at Puget Sound School District. The lack of books in the home available to ELL students contributes to the lower reading scores than their more affluent White peers who do have books available to them.

Understanding families' beliefs, views, and values toward school and education is vital in helping to determine a student's success (Gonzalez et al., 2016; Shi, 2013). If families have a negative outlook on school and education, that will reflect on the student's performance in school. Low SES families tend to have a more negative view on education/school or do not see it

as very important because they do not have their own personal experiences within school. They also may feel disconnected from the school because of the cultural and language differences.

Low SES Families with ELL students may also negatively view the school because they feel their child is losing their native language and only speaking English (Shi, 2013). At Puget Sound School District parents are concerned about the fact that their child does not speak English well. The parents very much so value their children's education and want them to be successful so they want their child to develop their English skills quickly.

### ***Future Trends of SES Impacts on ELL Student Success***

The effects of SES on ELL students' success in schools is a problem that is going to continue to happen in the upcoming years. Education, people's world views, and housing situations are changing rapidly which have the potential to have negative effects on ELL students' success in schools and their families.

All students who come from low SES households have less access to resources than their higher SES peers, such as internet access. As the world of education shifts to a more digital and technology-based place students from low SES households are at a disadvantage because they do not have the means to access the education on a computer, tablet, iPad, or Chromebook from home. Even if the school were to provide technology for the student to bring home, they would not be able to access the majority of the features without the internet. Schools can then choose to provide hot spots to students, but the wifi connections are weak and slow and it is not a guarantee that the hot spot will have service where the home is located.

There is also the issue of a rise of new conservatism. People in the US are getting more comfortable showing their classism, racism and embracing fascism. ELL students and their families may face discrimination in and out of school. Families could have a difficult time with

the intersectionality of racism and classism because of the unequal access and social exclusion from the labor market ELL families have compared to their White counterparts. ELL families are forced into low-income and precarious jobs and unemployment because of the systemic power White people hold within the job market. This leaves no power left for ELL families and they are forced to live in poverty because of Americas systemic racism. As for ELL students, they might have peers in their classroom who express these racist views towards them thus creating unsafe spaces for ELL students within their school. When students do not feel safe at school attendance rates drop and students cannot access the education. This also then effects their social and emotional well-being so there could be an increase of ELL students with emotional and behavior problems because of the internalized behaviors they may be experiencing. Those internalized behaviors could then come out in externalized behaviors and discipline rates of ELL students could rise.

Gentrification is also an issue that ELL students and families will continue to have to overcome. A lot of ELL families reside in more poor urban areas of the US and will continue to be pushed out of these areas due to wealthier people moving in and causing a ripple effect. Housing gets torn down and rebuilt into nicer more expensive homes and then new businesses are attracted into the area. This causes the poor people who inhabited these areas first to be displaced and shoved out to more rural areas. Gentrification causes public schools to be closed/torn down to make room for new businesses because of the decrease in student enrollment. More affluent families that move to gentrification areas tend to enroll their children in private or charter schools. Leaving the neighborhood public schools with less funding, which has majority of ELL and students of color attending; setting those students up for less adequate

education because of the lack of resources available to their school due to funding issues or their schools being shut down.

### **Implications for Future Teachers and Administrators**

Educators and schools must take substantial action steps to ensure that all ELL students receive the education they need and deserve. There needs to be a series of professional developments (PD) that all surround ELL students. These PDs would be beneficial for teachers and administrators so they can get a better understanding of this specific demographic of students. The PDs would allow them the opportunities to not only learn best practices and strategies when working with these students, but compassion as well.

The first PD should be on cultural responsiveness. This PD should be given to all personnel in the district, no matter their job. This would ensure that everyone in the district understands cultural responsiveness and knows how to create safe spaces where all students are accepted and celebrated, whether in the lunchroom, playground, or classroom. To ensure fidelity and follow through a culturally responsive team should be developed to hold the school accountable for implementing these practices.

The next PD should be all about ELL students. It should be about background knowledge of ELL students, statistics, teaching strategies, and having staff experience firsthand how ELL students feel daily by giving a mini lesson in a language none of them understand. This PD brings awareness to the lives and struggles of ELL students and gives staff the tools to help them best. This PD is essential for teachers to learn ELL teaching strategies because, at the growing rate of ELL students, all teachers will soon have at least one ELL student in their class whom they will need to know how to support. ELL strategies will also help and benefit all students and should be implemented regardless of if an ELL is present in the classroom or not.

Reading proficiency was one of the major themes of the literature review because reading is the basis of all content in school. Since ELL students tend to be behind their English monolingual peers, they must get reading interventions to catch them up. Districts should be implementing a school-wide literacy-intensive instructional program to help mediate all factors of causing low reading proficiency. A program like this paired with guided language acquisition design (GLAD) strategies would allow ELLs and other struggling readers to progress and catch up to their peers. This program would also boost student achievement in other content areas because their reading fluency, accuracy, and comprehension skills would increase.

### **Implications for Future Research**

Research on the connection between SES and ELL students specifically is new, so there are many areas of research researchers could dedicate their time to. Multiple subgroups of students could be compared to get accurate data on the connection between SES and ELL students. For example, researchers could do a two-group comparison, one of ELL students from high SES households and the other from low SES households, all with the relatively same English proficiency level. Having this research will give precise data on if ELL students are struggling because of the fact they are ELL or if it is because of their SES.

It would also be helpful to look at two groups of ELL students with the same English proficiency level from low SES backgrounds, with one group performing well academically and the other not. This would allow looking at what curriculum, strategies, and environments are used or done to create successful ELL students.

Examining students in another country who are learning English as a second language and who come from low SES backgrounds as well as that same type of student in the United States would be helpful to see if the environment or native language plays a role in language

acquisition—for example, looking at how students from low SES households learning English in Mexico compare to students from low SES households whose native language is Spanish and are trying to acquire English in the US. This would also be a good comparison for students who speak languages other than Spanish, such as Mandarin, Korean, or Mam, to see if the native language has anything to do with English acquisition.

The intersectionality of boys and girls who are ELL from low SES backgrounds would be beneficial to examine. It would provide insight into if the factors of being ELL or from a low SES household affect boys or girls more or less with their academic achievement, SEL, and language development. This would also help narrow the group down that needs to be looked into more and provide the opportunity to see if specific strategies work for boys that do not work for girls and vice versa. Schools and staff can then look at the trends in data for their ELL students and implement research-based support strategies.

### **Limitations of Project**

For the research of this paper, I focused on studies done between the years 2005-2023. This limited me to 18 years' worth of research and narrowed down the number of available studies on this topic.

Another limitation was all the variations for the term "ELL" and "SES." I used many search terms such as English as a foreign language, multilingual learners, English as a second language, dual language learners, low-income, poverty, economically disadvantaged, and educational level. Having so many different terms for one thing made it so studies were difficult to find. When searching the term "ELL" I missed out on all the articles that refer to those students as multilingual learners, narrowing the available research to me on that topic when there was much more.

Examining the effects of SES on specifically ELL students' success in school is a relatively new concept. Few studies have been done on this topic narrowing the number of studies that could be used. Many studies were done on the relationship of ELL students and academic achievement but made no mention SES. Many studies were also done on SES and academic achievement, but no mention of ELL students. The missing vital information in the studies limited the number of articles available to me to use within this project.

I used studies that did not mention SES and hypothesized myself as to whether there was a connection and why or why not. Those parts of this project may not be fully 100% accurate. The missing SES aspect was mainly for the SEL and success in math themes. I chose to use those articles because they provided good insight on the connection between ELL students and SEL and math.

### **Conclusion**

In this paper I have attempted to outline the research pertaining to the relationship of SES and ELL students and how SES can have an impact on their success in school. In recent years the the number of ELL students in the United States public schools has increased. At some point, every educator will be directly working with at least one ELL student. It is crucial that those working with this vulnerable population are well-equipped with the knowledge, skills, and resources to support them in their success at school. Majority of ELL students are living in low SES households and endure more stressors in their lives due to their unique circumstances. All educators need to understand that all the parts of an ELL student's life outside of the classroom will affect their learning and language development inside the classroom. Not only do staff need to know how to work with these students, but they need to advocate for them, show them compassion, and build relationships to ensure they feel safe so that learning can occur. They are

learning a language new to them, experiencing cultural differences, may face discrimination, and are struggling at home financially which can cause anxiety and worry of potentially losing their home, having to move, or having no access to food.

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