

Current issues in English language teaching and learning among young learners in East Asia

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China

Keen interest in teaching English to children

Large selection of materials
for young learners



Various materials for
parents of young learners



Seoul, Korea

Testing, testing,.....

Achievement tests for
young learners



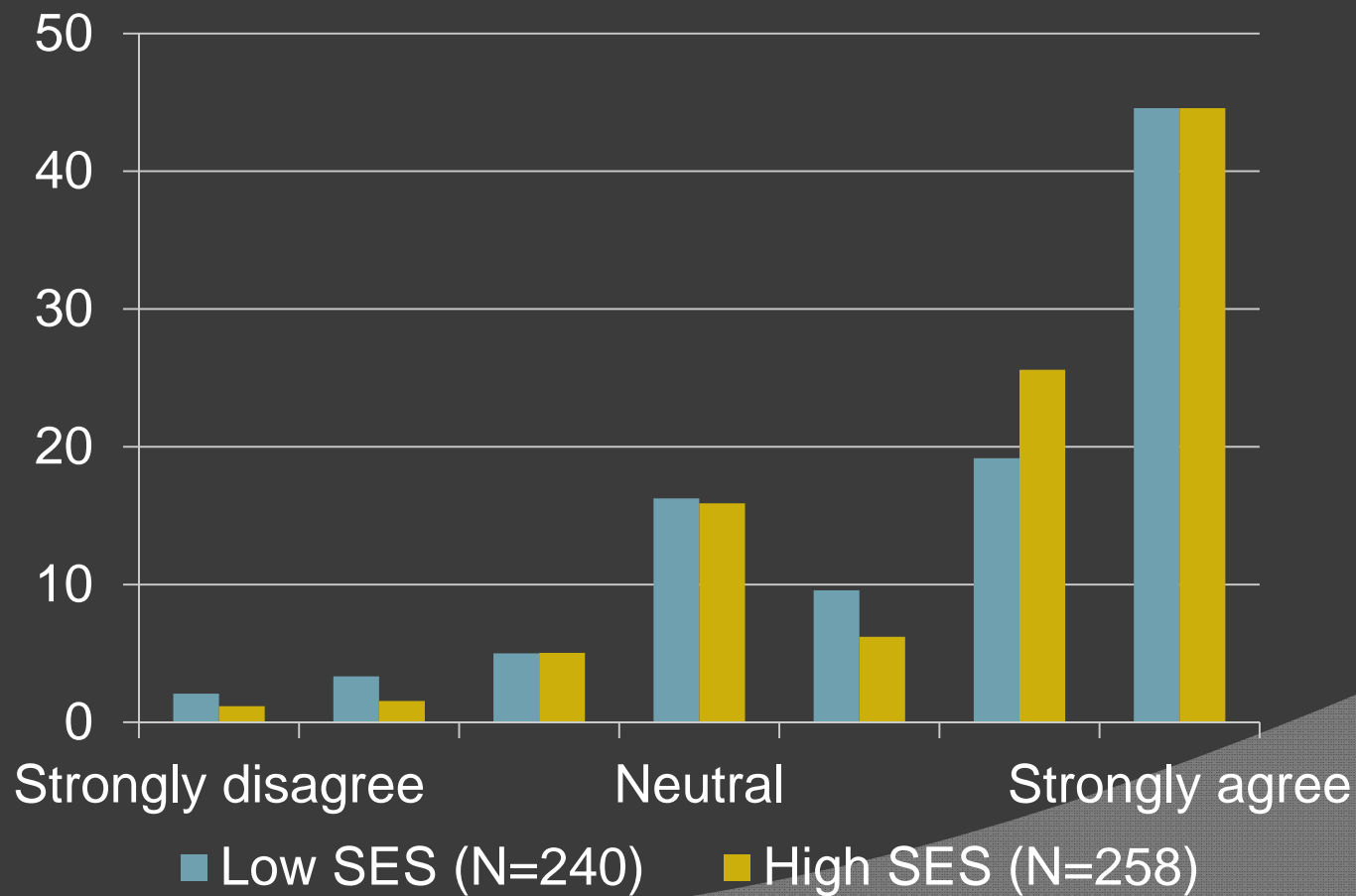
Preparing for TOEFL???

Korea



Source: Chosun.Com (Retrieved June 27,
2008, from
<http://www.chosun.com/national/news/200502/200502010333.html>)

Parental responses to the statement “I have no problem if my child will be able to speak English better than our home language(s)” by SES (China)



Butler (2014)

“Enjoy English, Enjoy life”



Changzhou, China

“English is more than just a school subject; it permeates into many aspects of social life” (Zou & Zhang, 2011, p. 191)

Issues regarding Foreign Language at Elementary Schools (FLES)

We should start with
phonics instruction



The younger
the better?



English should be
taught through the
medium of English
only



FLES

Math should
be taught in
English?



Early foreign language
instruction has a negative
influence on young learners'
first language development



Today's talk focuses on...

- ◎ Today's talk focuses on:
 - The effect of early foreign language learning
 - Instructional models in FLES
 - Growing gaps in achievement

1. The effect of early foreign language learning

Does “the younger the better” apply to FLES?

The critical period hypothesis (CPH)

- A prediction: that there is a certain period in development during which language learning takes place naturally
- After the period, no chance to attain “native-like proficiency”?

Problems with applying CPH in foreign language context

- ⦿ Inconclusive results
- ⦿ Research conducted in the context of L1 and L2
- ⦿ Little understanding of the relationship between age and foreign language learning
 - Mixed results

Age and foreign language learning: mainly from European studies

- ⦿ For short-term effect
 - In general, later starters advantage
- ⦿ For longer-term effect
 - Many indicated the later starters' advantage
- ⦿ However, some studies showed...
 - discrepancies by domains
 - Younger learners can catch up with older learners after approximately 700 hours of instruction

Age and foreign language learning: Still inconclusive

- Substantial program variation in intensity and quality of instruction
 - Allocated hours of instruction and the intensity of instruction
- Influence from various socio-cultural factors (e.g., English at private institutes)

What we need to know ...

- Information about the conditions for optimizing learning for different age groups
- Analyses of cost-effectiveness
- Pay attention to non-linguistic components such as motivation

2. Instructional methods in FLES

What does it mean to implement “Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)” and “task-based instruction (TBLT)” in East Asia?

CLT/TBLT and other suggested instructional approaches

- ◎ CLT and TBLT have been widely promoted in FLES in East Asia
- ◎ Related approaches:
 - Activity-based instruction
 - Student-centered instruction
 - Teaching English through the medium of English only (TETE)
 - Content-based instruction, etc.

Confusion around CLT/TBLT in East Asia

- Interpretations of CLT as being almost synonymous with the avoidance of grammar instruction or the use of students' L1 (e.g., TETE)
 - How best to introduce grammar instruction to young learners is an unexplored area
 - What matters is **how to use** L1 and TL rather than **the amount of use** of L1 and TL

What is important is..

- ◎ Adopting methods and strategies locally...
- Reinterpretation and adaptation is usually indispensable
- Need to pay close attention to local factors and age

Considering local factors

Student-centered teaching



“Good” classroom management?

in crowded classrooms



Taiwan

Considering age factors

- Pay more attention to affective components in task designs
- Importance of sufficient input (not necessary limited to “comprehensible input”)
- Not push output too much (considering individual differences)
- Extensive reading and story telling
- Use of media, internet, computer-games, etc.

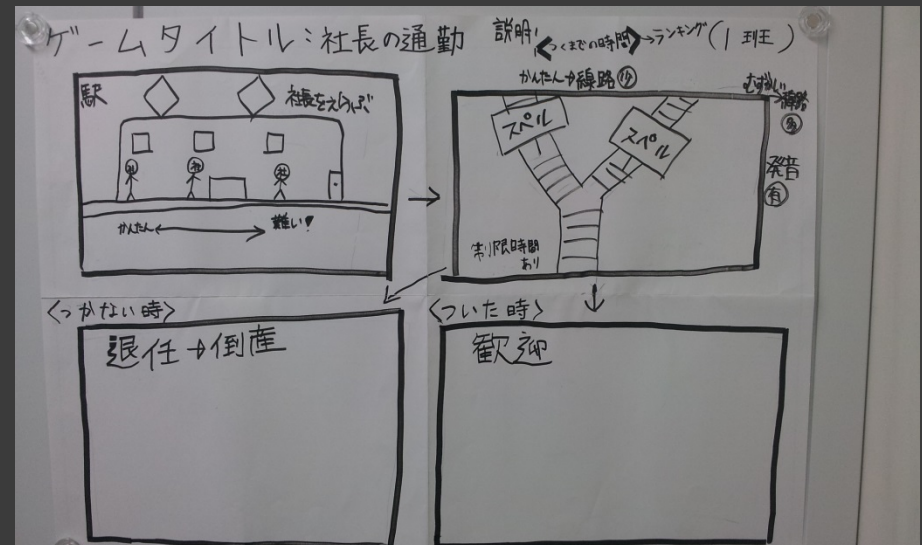


**What are “good activities”
for young learners?**

Japan

Computer-based instructional games (CBIGs)

- We asked 6th graders to design CBIGs for English vocabulary learning in group
- Identify game and learning elements
- Design a game using story-boards in groups
- Making presentations
- Peer- and self-assessment



Game creation and evaluation by other children

3. Growing achievement gaps

Role of socio-economic status (SES)

English for mothers of young learners

Momglish?

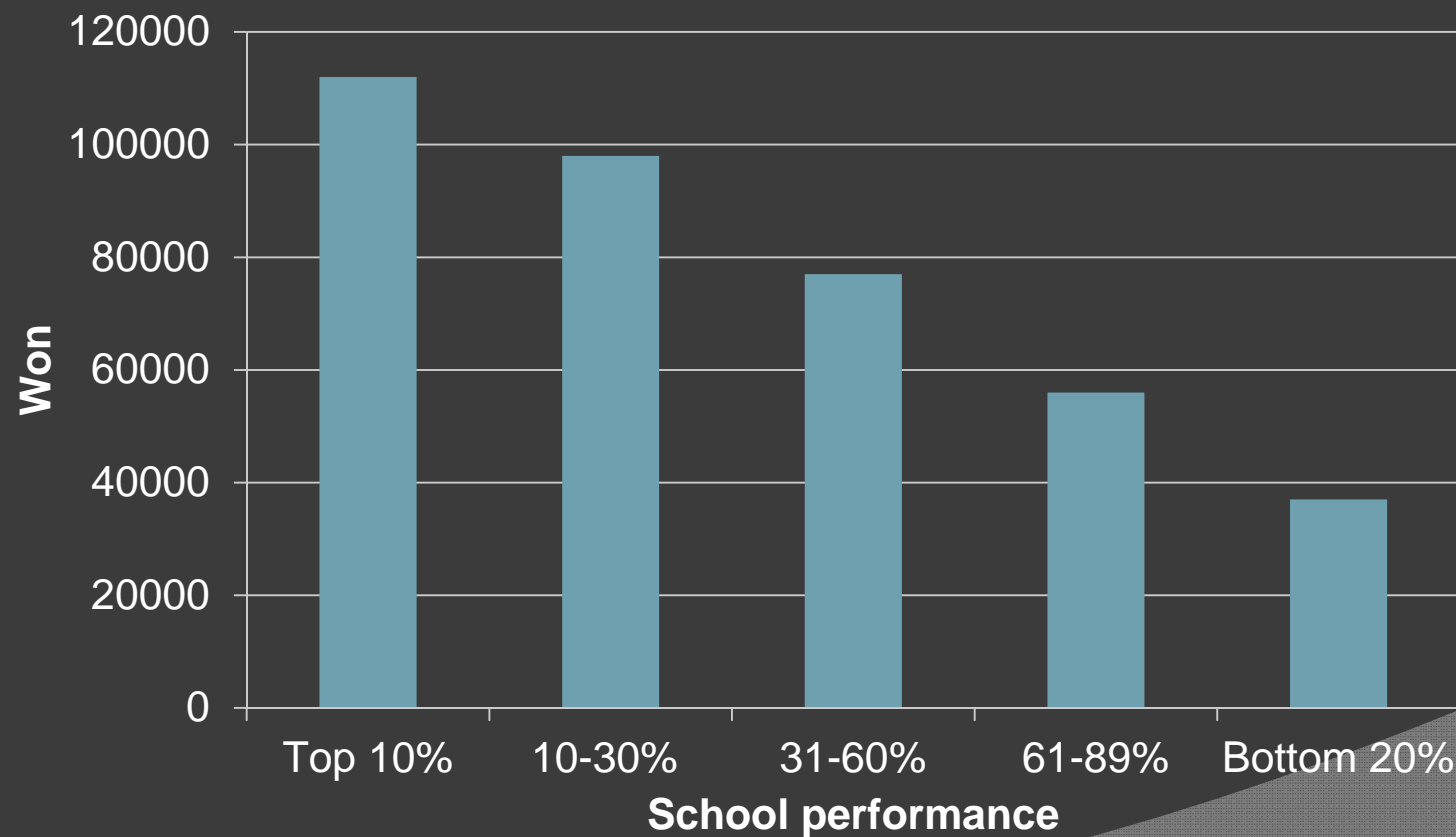
Mom's English for children
who study abroad?



Seoul, Korea

Private Education: Average monthly expenditures per student by school performance

English only, all grade levels



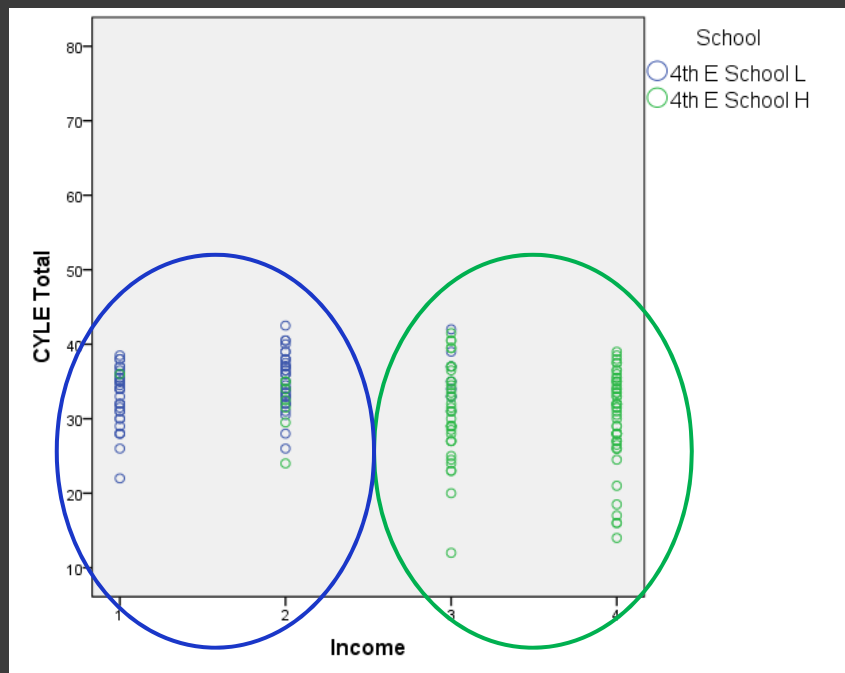
Statistics Korea 2010

Achievement gaps by SES

- Korea: Extensive reading: The effect was bigger in wealthier area (Kim, 2013, a meta-analysis)
- China: SES effects appeared early in the speaking domain than the listening/reading domains (Butler, 2013)

Income and English listening and reading

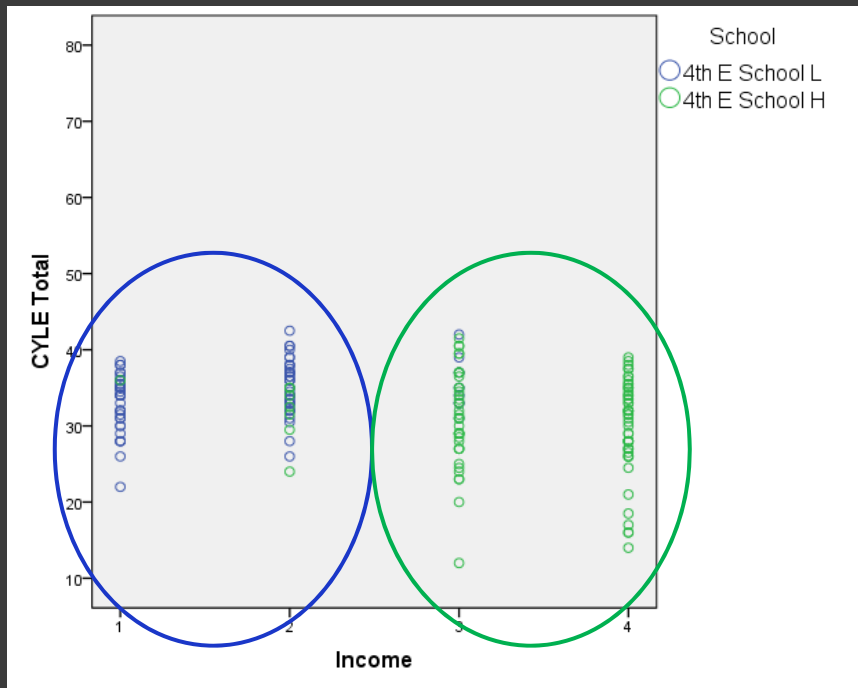
4th graders



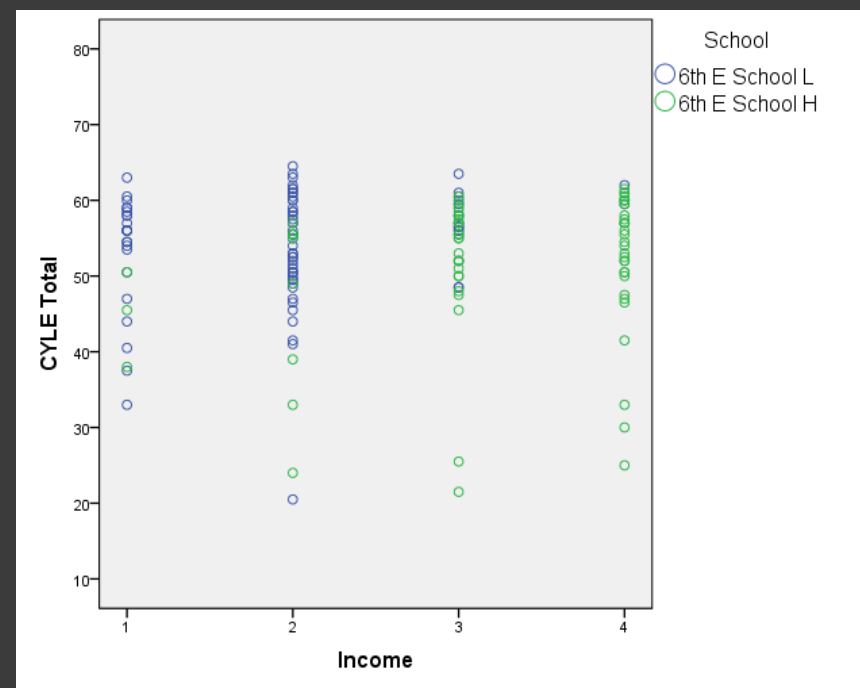
Household annual income
1 = Less than 30,000 yuan
2 = 30,000 to 70,000
3 = 70,000 to 150,000
4 = More than 150,000

Income and English listening and reading

4th graders



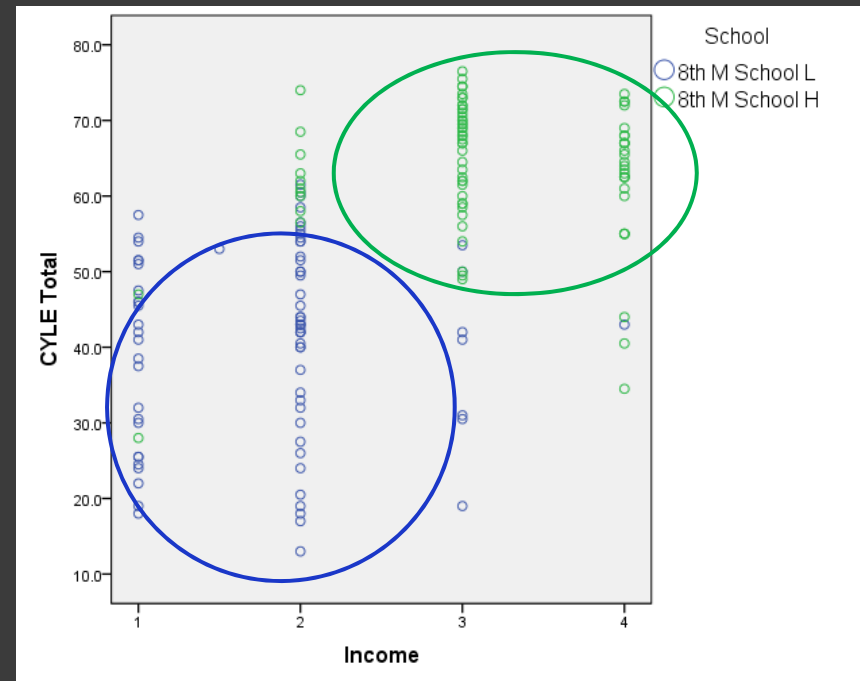
6th graders



Household annual income
1 = Less than 30,000 yuan
2 = 30,000 to 70,000
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4 = More than 150,000

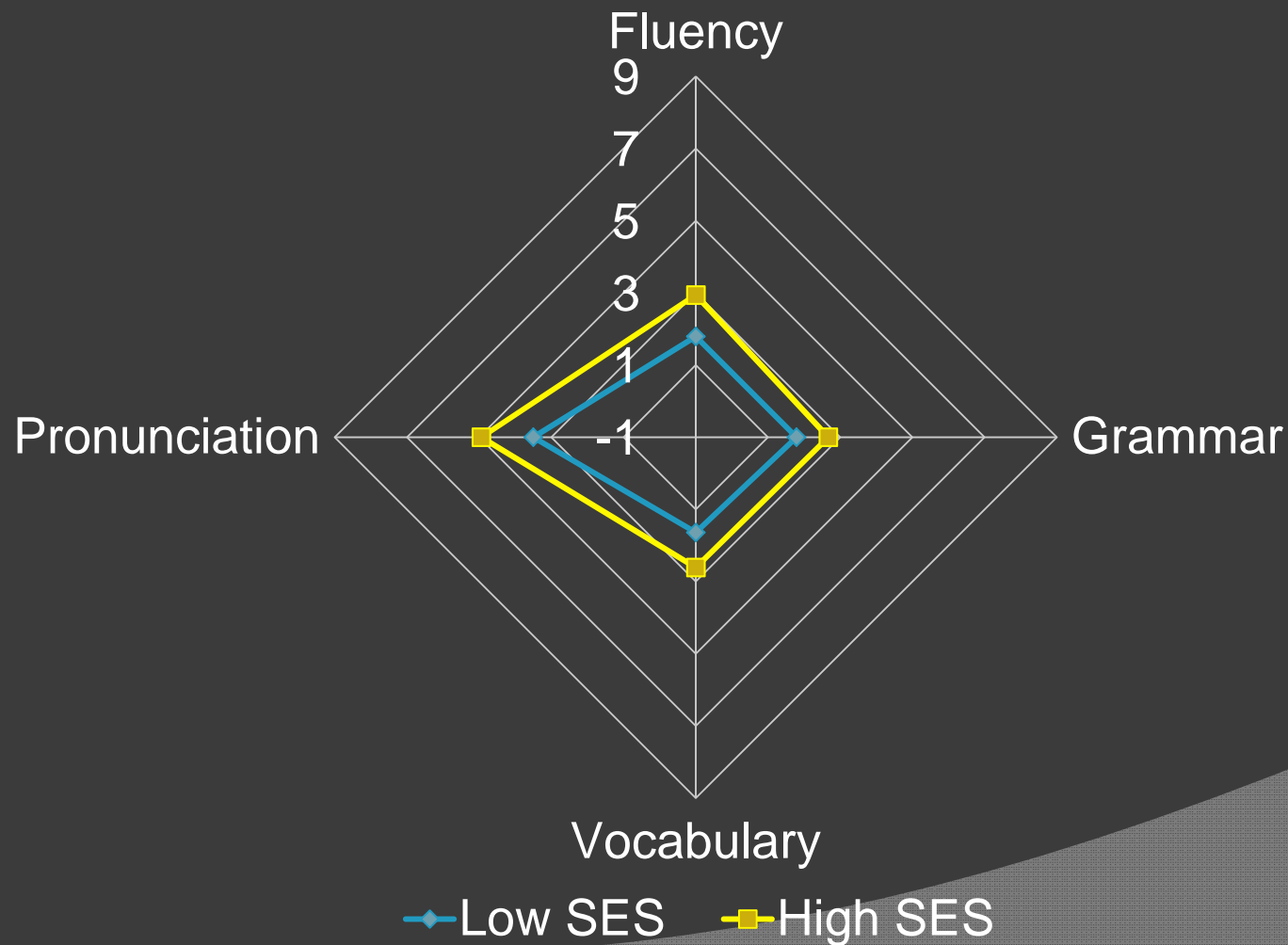
Income and English listening and reading

8th graders

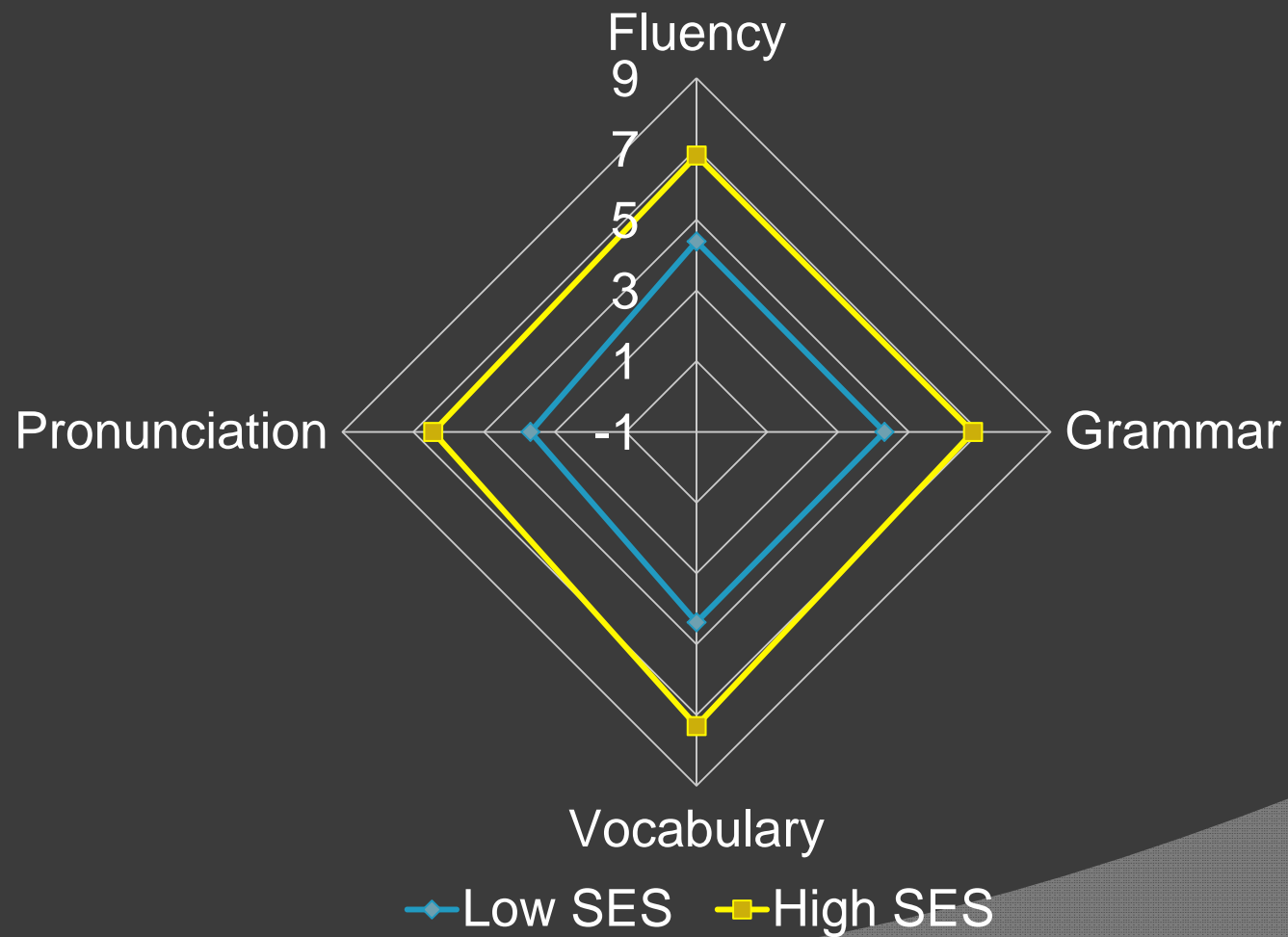


Household annual income
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Speaking (4th graders)



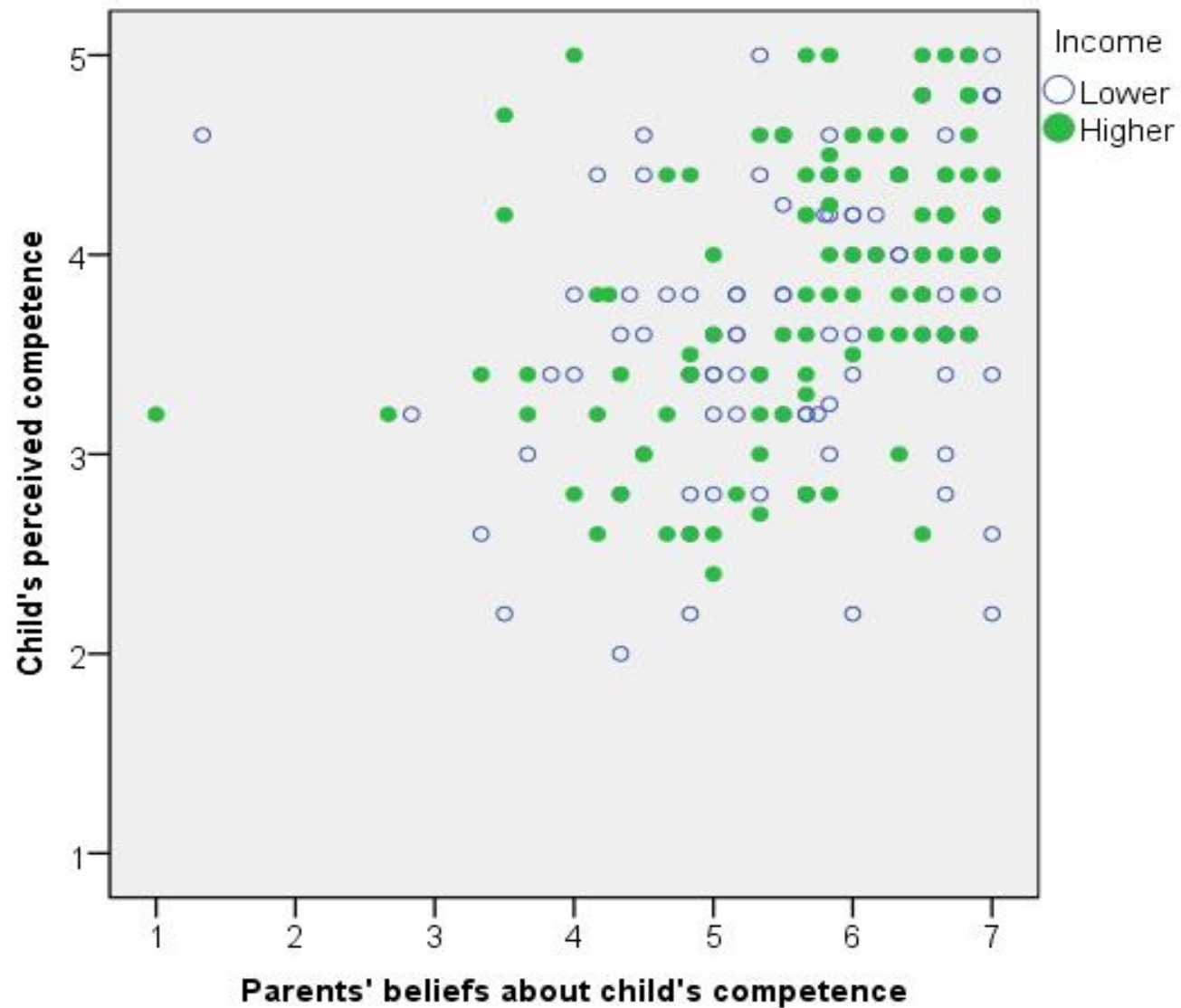
Speaking (8th graders)



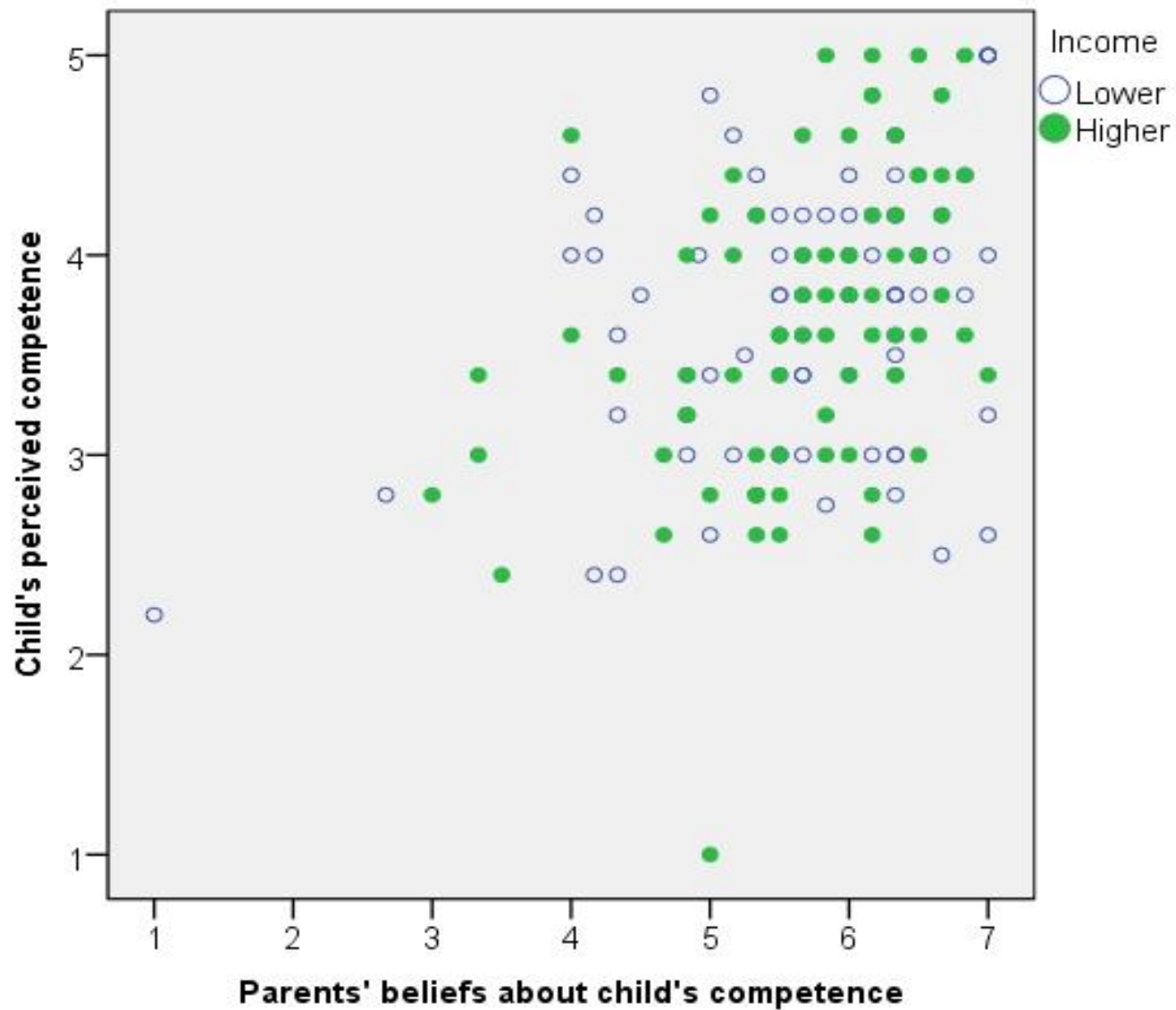
Confidence

- Parental beliefs about their child's abilities and success for acquiring English was a strong predictor across the grade levels.
- A notable SES effect was found between the students' perceived competence in English and their parents' beliefs about their children's competence in English

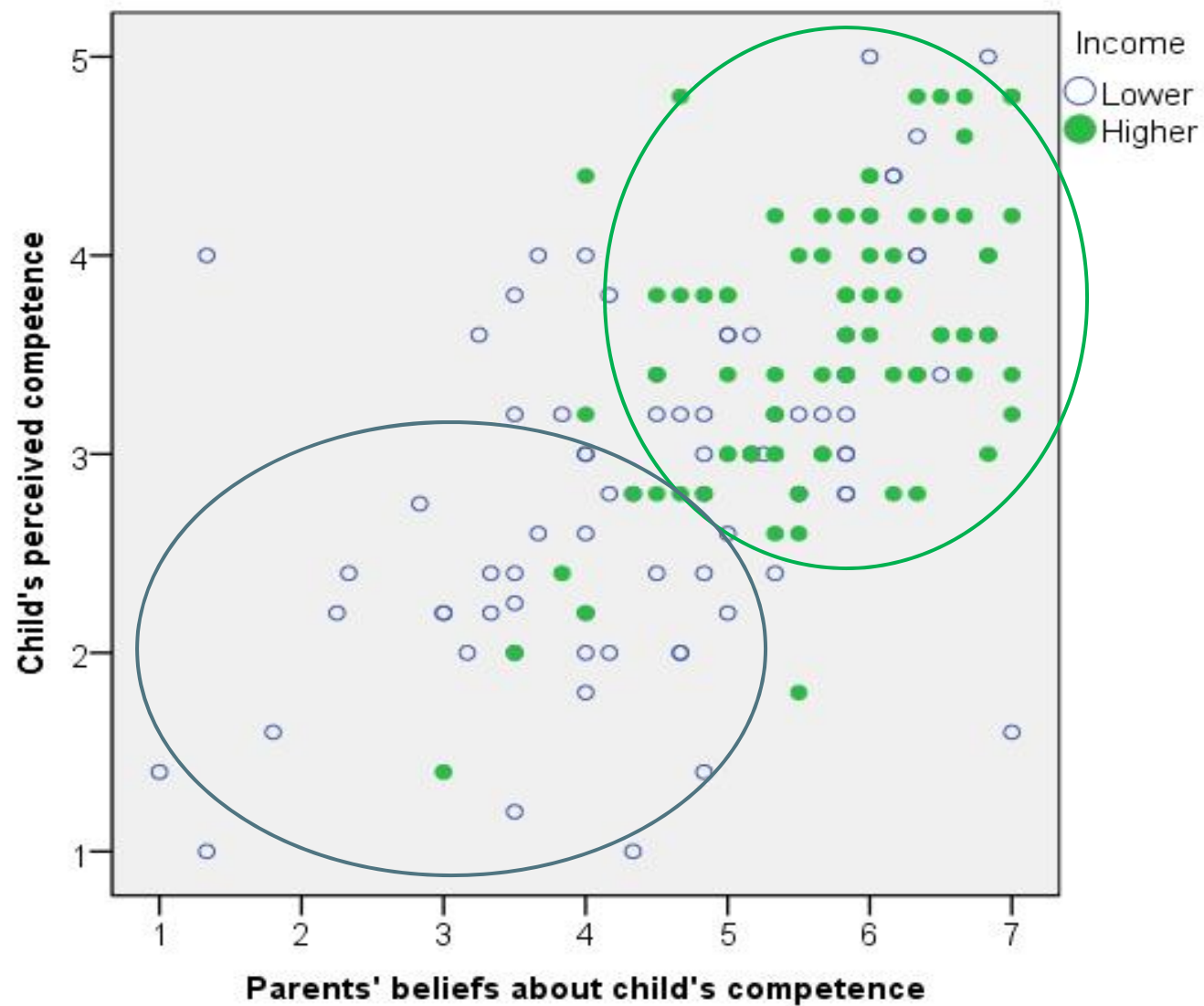
Result 2 Grade 4



Result 2 Grade 6



Result 2 Grade 8



Changzhou's effort to narrow gaps (from 2012)

- (1) a teacher rotation project;
- (2) a free tutoring project;
- (3) changes in high school admission policies
- (4) Curriculum change (at the Jiangsu provincial level)

→ Making it easier

“English should remain just a tool for those who need to use it in China, but it should not be a burden for our students.” (an officer at the Board of Ed.)

“Enjoy English, Enjoy life”



Changzhou, China

Final thoughts

- ◎ Two conflicting attitudes towards English
 - Accepting the premise that English is important for everybody as a powerful lingua franca as well as a major barometer for one's academic achievement → Narrow the gaps in access
 - The new policies that modify the English curriculum and lower the standards of the English-language textbooks → appear to be attempts to reduce the significance of English-language learning by giving schools and teachers more autonomy in deciding their English teaching standards. But school is strongly confounded by SES → contributing widening gaps?

Conclusion

- ④ “The earlier the better” assumption in FL learning is not necessary supported by empirical studies
- ④ Despite the popularity of FLES worldwide, we still have relatively limited information on how best to implement FLES in East Asia
- ④ Research and policies should pay attention to diverse needs of students by regions and SES.

Thank you and enjoy English!



China

For more detail,

- Butler, Y. G. (2013). Parental factors and early English education as a foreign language: A case study in Mainland China. *Research Papers in Education*. doi:10.1080/02671522.2013.776625
- Butler, Y. G. (2014). Parental Factors in Children's Motivation for Learning English: A Case in China. *Research Papers in Education*. doi:10.1080/02671522.2014.891643
- Butler, Y. G. (2014). Socioeconomic disparities and early English education: A case in Changzhou, China. In N. Murray and A. Scarino (Eds.), *Dynamic ecologies: A relational perspective on languages education in the Asia-Pacific region* (pp. 95-115). Dordrecht: Springer.