

Bilingual Experience and Child Wellbeing: A Cause-and-Effect Framework

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Introduction

Background

Existing studies have demonstrated that bilingual environmental factors facilitating dual language development can have a **concomitant** influence on social-emotional wellbeing (SEWB; De Houwer, 2015, 2020; Halle, 2014; Sun, 2019, 2022; Sun et al., 2021).

1) Cause of a (Harmonious) Bilingual Experience

Higher **parental proficiency** was associated with more frequent home language and literacy involvement (e.g., Baker, 2014). The speech of native or highly proficient non-native speakers is more beneficial to children's lexical and grammatical development (Paradis 2011; Place & Hoff, 2016).

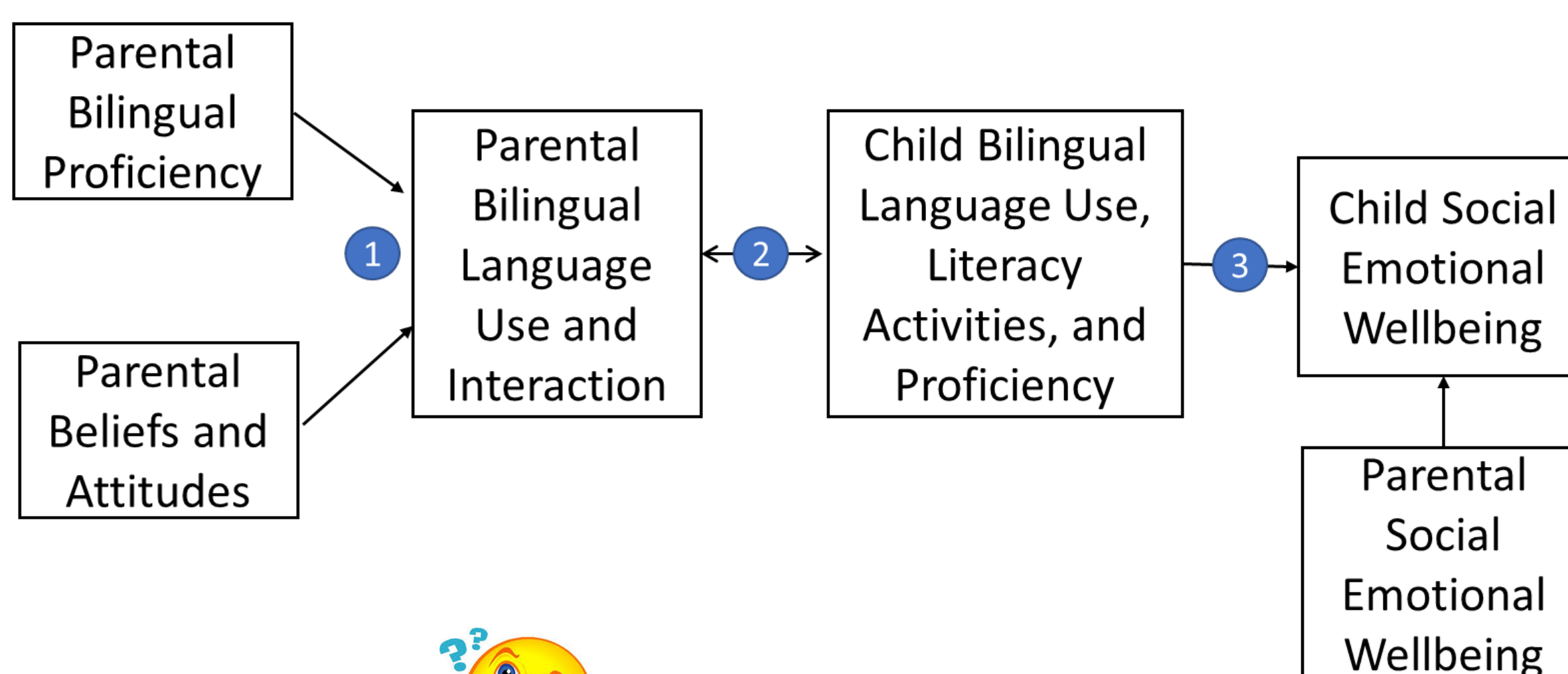
Parents harbor a wide variety of **beliefs and attitudes**, and these beliefs and attitudes in turn affect parental Bilingual Language Use and Interaction (De Houwer, 2011; Surrain, 2021):

2) Effects of a (Harmonious) Bilingual Experience

Children's early language and literacy environment has been found to affect their social-emotional and behavioral competencies (Han, 2010).

The development of **social-emotional and behavioral skills** in children is crucial (Winsler et al., 2014), as it:

- Helps children adapt to new environment
- Scaffolds the coping skills for daily challenges
- Provides more opportunities for peer acceptance and greater expression of language abilities



Questions



The goal is to explore the associations between parental bilingual proficiency, perception, and use, as well as children's bilingual experience and social-emotional and behavioural skills.

1. Would parental bilingual proficiency and perception influence parental bilingual language use?
2. Would parental bilingual language use influence children's bilingual experience and proficiency?
3. Which aspects of bilingual language experience are significantly correlated to children's social-emotional and behavioral skills, after controlling for parental wellbeing?

Method

Participants

123 K1 children (4-5 years old)

- 61 girls and 62 boys
- Mother's education (M = Polytechnic diploma or equivalent)
- Family income (M= US\$7908-8267 per month)

Instruments

Parental Questionnaires

Parental questionnaires on parental English-Mandarin proficiency, home language use, literacy environment, and parental bilingual attitudes and beliefs.

e.g., **Attitude towards English:** *Speaking English gives me a positive social face in society.*

Attitude towards Mandarin: *I am happy when I speak to my child in my Mother Tongue.*

Attitude towards Bilingualism: *Bilingualism is the basic need of our community.*

Language Belief: *I can help my child to be active bilingual by observing other parents' practices.*

Global View: *English is much preferred globally as my Mother Tongue.*

Bilingual receptive vocabulary & Other assessments

- Bilingual Language Assessment Battery (Rickard Liow, Sze & Lee, 2013), a receptive picture vocabulary task
- The Ravens Coloured Progressive Matrices test (Raven & Rust, 2004)

Socio-emotional outcome variables

- Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ; Goodman, 1997) comprises 25 items to identify behavioral problems in children aged 3 to 16.
- 5 subscales with 5 items each: (1) **emotional symptoms**, (2) **conduct problems**, (3) **hyperactivity or inattention**, (4) **peer-relationship problems**, and (5) **prosocial behavior**.
- Each item was rated on a 0 (not true) to 2 (certainly true) scale, and the sum score of each subscale ranges from 0 to 10, with higher scores indicating increased behaviour **difficulties** (scale 1-4) or better **prosocial skills** (scale 5).

Data analysis

- The postulated relationships were assessed using backward regressions and path models, to evaluate multiple causal and correlational assumptions.

Results

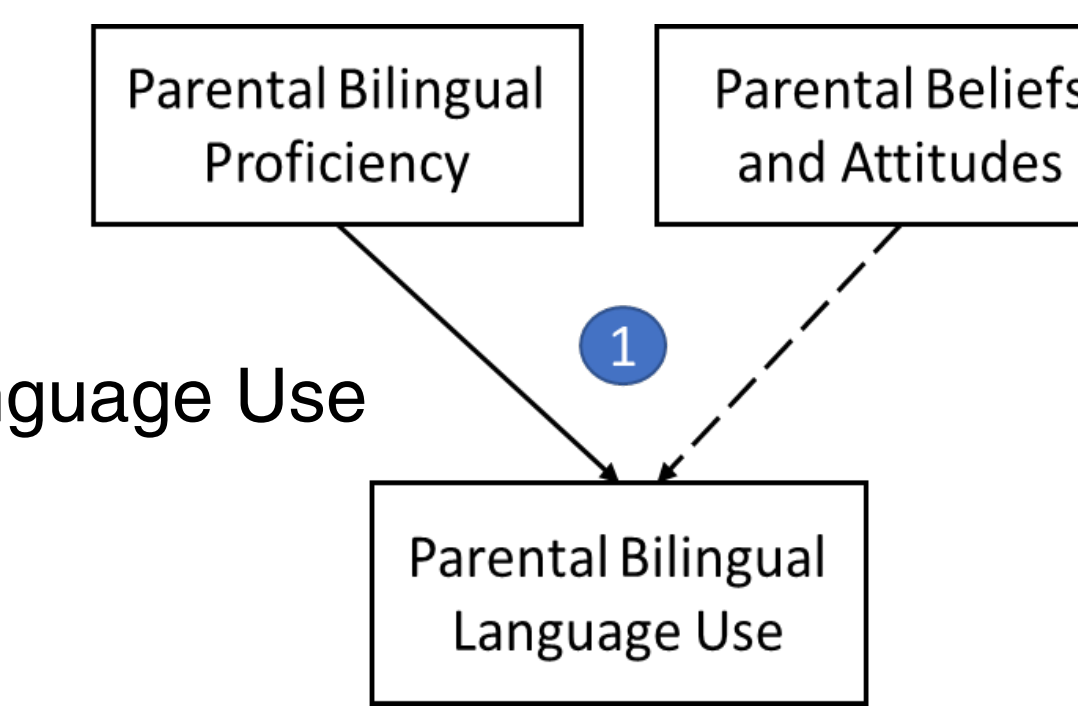
Parental Language Proficiency, Bilingual Perception, and Language Use

Table 1. Maternal Bilingual Proficiency in Maternal Language Use

	B	SE	β	t	p
(Constant)	4.39	0.59		7.48	0
Maternal English Proficiency	0.24	0.08	0.24	2.86	0.005
Maternal Mandarin Proficiency	-0.49	0.09	-0.45	-5.51	0

Table 2. Paternal Bilingual Proficiency in Paternal Language Use

	B	SE	β	t	p
(Constant)	3.84	0.53		7.22	0.00
Paternal English Proficiency	0.39	0.08	0.36	4.61	0.00
Paternal Mandarin Proficiency	-0.49	0.08	-0.46	-5.87	0.00



Parental Language Use & Child Bilingual Experience

Parental & Child Bilingual Language Use:

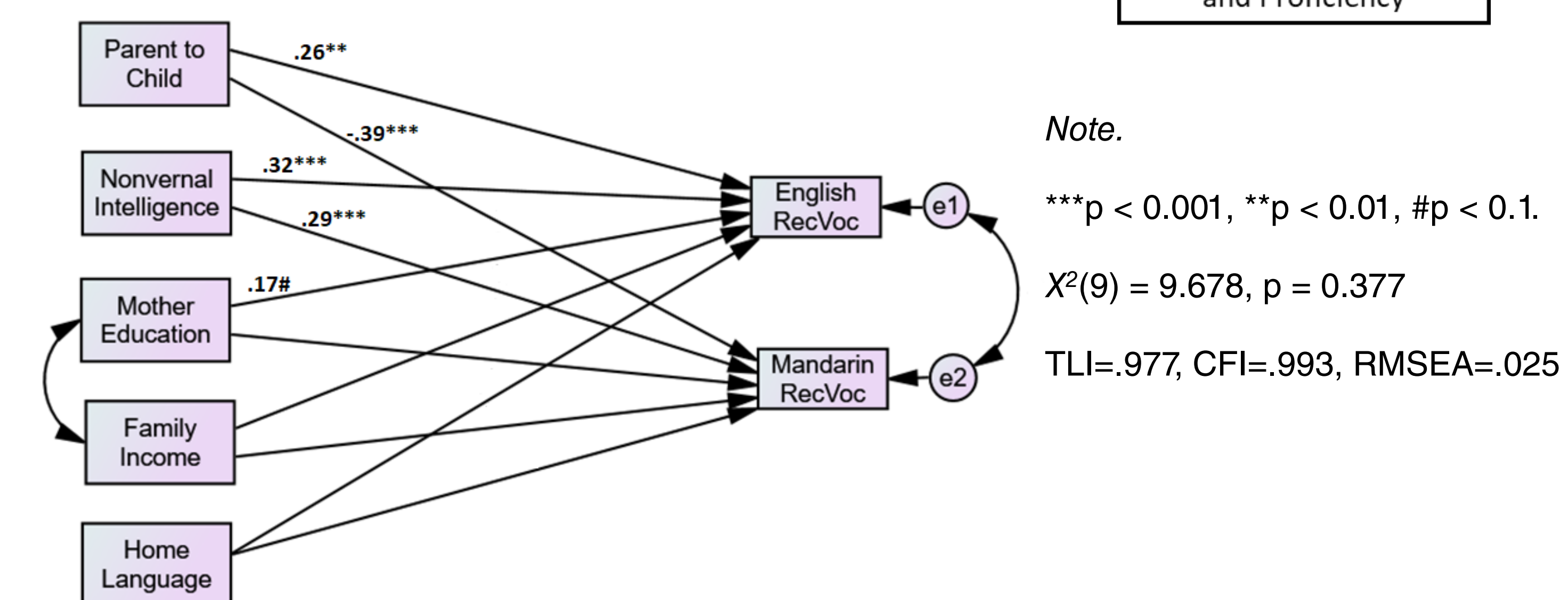
- Mother & Child (N=111): $r = .771^{**}$
- Father & Child (N=109): $r = .775^{**}$

Note. $^{**}p < .01$

Paternal Bilingual Language Use & Literacy Activity:

- Parental Language & Reading in English (N=109): $r = .239^*$

Parental Bilingual Language Use & Child Proficiency:



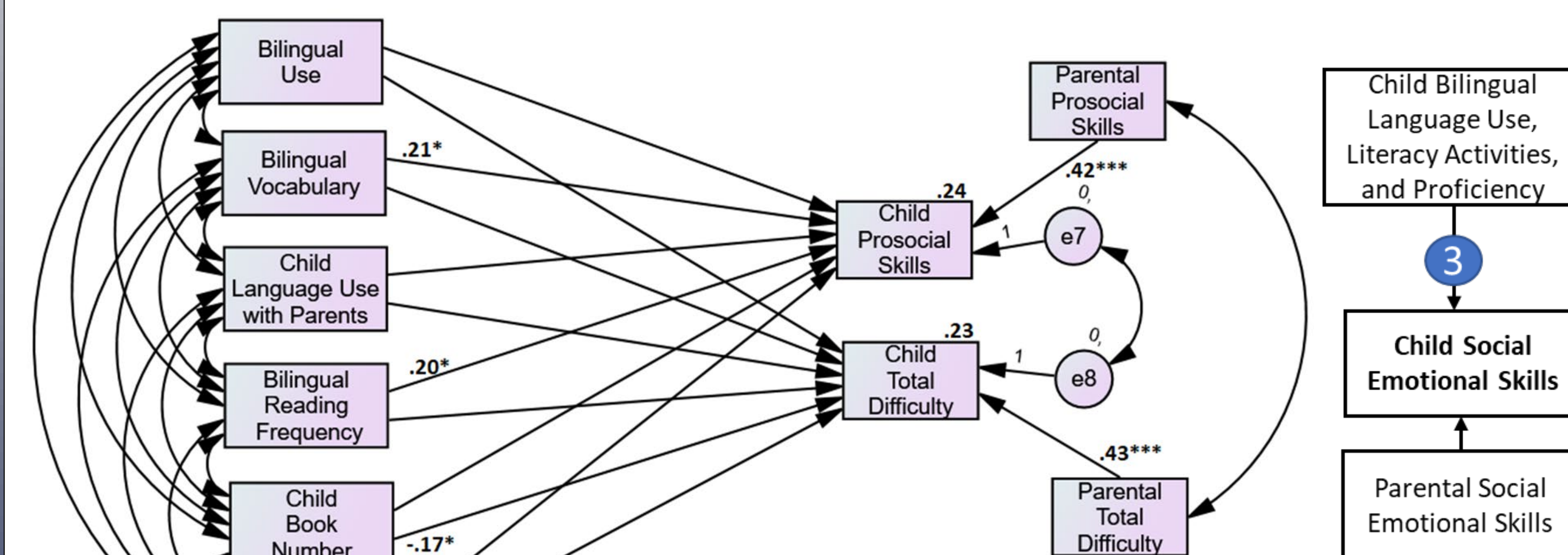
Note.

$^{***}p < 0.001$, $^{**}p < 0.01$, $\#p < 0.1$.

$\chi^2(9) = 9.678$, $p = 0.377$

TLI=.977, CFI=.993, RMSEA=.025

Child Bilingual Experience & Social Emotional Skills



Note. $^{***}p < 0.001$, $^*p < 0.05$. $\chi^2(14) = 18.71$, $p = 0.176$, TLI=.907, CFI=.976, RMSEA=.053

Conclusions

- ❖ The flow chart of the conceptual framework has been generally supported by the English-Mandarin bilingual data.
- ❖ Parental bilingual proficiency has been found to significantly affect their language use in a particular language. The insignificance of bilingual attitude and belief may be a result of the general positive perception towards bilingual policy in Singapore.
- ❖ Parental language use has been found to influence children's language use, literacy activity, as well as receptive vocabulary sizes in dual languages.
- ❖ Children's bilingual experience has been found to influence their own social-emotional and behavioural skills, after controlling for the impact of parental social-emotional and behavioural skills. Specifically, better societal language skills and more frequent bilingual reading are found to promote children's prosocial skills, while more children's books predicts lower children's total difficulty level.

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