According to the United Nations (2014), 3.2 percent of the world population – 232 million people – were international migrants in 2013. English-speaking countries US, UK, Canada and Australia are within the top ten migrant receiving countries. Asians and Latinos are the two largest migrant groups to these countries (Blau, McKenzie, & Rasul, 2007; Wong, 2000). The primary focus of this review is on children from Asia-Pacific contexts, but it also considers the broader research literature investigating children from Latino background for the purpose of informing future research. Despite large-scale Asian and Latino migration into English-speaking countries, research on these populations has just begun (Cheah & Leung, 2011). To date, most research with immigrant children has focused on their academic performance, but research on immigrant children’s development of social competence is limited (Halle et al., 2014; Marks, Patton, & Coll, 2010; Sam, 2006). Having a good understanding of immigrant children’s development of social competence is not only theoretically interesting but valuable for educational practices since it provides educators with valuable information which will impact on learning. However, advancement in theory and practice is constrained because prior studies either under-sampled immigrant children or prevented them from full participation due to lack of...
available assessment instruments (Halle et al., 2014).

Social competence is defined as abilities that enable children to achieve personal goals in social interactions while at the same time maintaining positive relationships with others (Rose-Krasnor, 1997). It is a key skill as children need to manage social situations by learning from past experiences and applying the experiences to new contexts, build positive relationships with peers, and feel good about themselves (Blair, Denham, Kochanoff, & Whipple, 2004; Semrud-Clikeman, 2007; Wentzel, 1999). Higher social competence levels in children are predictive of school readiness and early academic success as children can quickly adjust to classroom routines (Denham, 2006; Galindo & Fuller, 2010). Conversely, lower social competence levels may compromise children’s mental and physical health, peer relationship and school achievement (Rose-Krasnor, 1997; Semrud-Clikeman, 2007).

Social competence plays an important role for children from immigrant backgrounds because it is closely related to these children’s social adjustment in new environments (Chen & Tse, 2010; von Grünigen, Kochenderfer-Ladd, Perren, & Alsaker, 2012). Children of immigrant backgrounds often “face unique challenges when negotiating relationships within a new peer group that leave them vulnerable to peer rejection and other problems relating to classmates” (von Grünigen et al., 2012, p. 197). At the same time, they display their ethnically related strengths (e.g., self-control in Chinese culture) in social interactions (Chen & Tse, 2010). Given ever-increasing immigrant populations in English-speaking countries (United Nations, 2014), understanding unique challenges and strengths of social competence development of immigrant children should be an important undertaking at the contemporary era.

Although many factors, such as parenting practices, family socioeconomic status, and child temperament, affect social competence of immigrant children (Leyva, Berrocal, & Nolivos, 2014; Liew, Castillo, Chang, & Chang, 2011; Raviv, Kessenich, & Morrison, 2004), there are strong theoretical grounds for the association between language and social competence (see Theoretical backgrounds below). The aim of this review is to explore prior studies that investigated how social competence was associated with the host language (i.e., English) skills and heritage languages skills among children aged from birth to 12 years from Asian and Latino immigrant families. Asian immigrants mainly represent those from China, India, Japan, Korea, the Philippines, Vietnam, Thailand, Laos and Cambodia, and Latino immigrants represent people from Mexico, Cuba, Puerto Rico, South or Central America, and other Latino cultures regardless of nation (Cheah & Leung, 2011). Although Asian and Latino families differ to a large extent, such as Asians are more likely to be well-educated and skilled migrants while Latino immigrants are more educationally and economically disadvantaged (Zhang, Hong, Takeuchi, & Mossakowski, 2012), the two ethnic groups also have many similarities: a) they make up the two largest international migration groups; b) they move to the developed countries for better economic opportunities and better education for their children; and c) they share values, beliefs and norms with a more collectivist orientation (De-Feyer & Winsler, 2009; Han & Huang, 2010; Le & Stockdale, 2005; McDonald et al., 2005; Pumariega, Rothe, & Pumariega, 2005).

The term English language learners (ELLs) is used in this review to represent immigrant children and children of immigrants. Though children of immigrants are born and raised in host countries, many choose to speak heritage languages at home and have little exposure to English in their community contexts (Clarke, 2009; Soltero-Gonzalez, 2009). While acknowledging heterogeneity within ELLs such as different heritage languages they speak and different ethnic groups they belong to, it is also possible to identify common features which support advance in theory and policy direction. It is the common features that are the focus of this review.

This review includes studies with participants aged from birth to 12 years. Though the nature of
age effects on the acquisition of a second language is controversial, there are studies indicating that ELLs who are exposed to English at a younger age, i.e., before adolescence, tend to have some English learning advantages, such as a better pronunciation if exposed to natural learning contexts (Brown, 2007; Jia & Aaronson, 2003). Biological processes that support cognitive, behavioural and affective development before adolescence are also likely to be different from those after adolescence (Steinberg, 2005). Moreover, 12 years is generally when children transition from primary school to secondary school, and the school environment can be a particularly important determinant of changes in behaviours (Coombes, Jones, Page, & Cooper, 2014).

Theoretical backgrounds

Language is an essential tool needed to gain mastery over behaviour, cognition and emotion and a fundamental means children use to conduct social interactions with the outside world, others and self (Vygotsky, 1978). Outwardly language is directed in the form of collaborative dialogue to regulate and transform social activities of other individuals, and inwardly it is directed in the form of private speech (speech for the self) to regulate one’s own mental activities. Children’s early language development establishes a foundation of behavioural competence and social skills at older ages (Hebert-Myers, Guttentag, Swank, Smith, & Landry, 2006).

According to the language socialization theory, language mediates not only communications but also the learning of behavioural norms and social practices (Duff, 2007). Language is a major medium in child development of social competence and cultural knowledge. The process of learning language is indeed a process of establishing child’s own ethnic identity and developing a sense of positive self-image and social belonging (Ochs & Schieffelin, 2011).

Relationships between language and social competence is not linear but complex. According to Eisenberg, Sadovsky, and Spinrad (2005), language can directly affect social competence and emotion understanding, which in turn affects emotion regulation abilities. Language can also indirectly affect social competence through emotion regulation abilities. Hebert-Myers et al. (2006) make a similar statement: the factors that can have significant impacts on social competence include abilities to regulate negative emotions, the abilities to sustain attention, and adequate language skills. These complex relationships mean that the direct effect of language and its potential interaction with emotion regulation abilities and attention management need to be considered when examining relationships between language and social competence.

Method

Search terms

In order to conduct a comprehensive review with all possible peer reviewed studies investigating ELLs’ social competence, combinations of search descriptors were developed with an immigrant descriptor (immigrant OR migrant), AND a child descriptor (child), AND a language descriptor (language OR English) AND a social competence descriptor (social competence OR social skills OR social functioning OR adjust OR behavior OR behaviour OR mental). Multisearch was used to retrieve all possible peer review studies. Our university library uses the Multisearch engine to retrieve information from 250 common databases including PsycINFO, ERIC, JSTOR, Sociological Abstracts, and Scopus.

Inclusion and exclusion criteria

A set of inclusion and exclusion criteria were developed to select peer reviewed studies. Studies were included if they 1) focused on children aged from birth to 12 years; 2) were published from 1994 to 2014; and 3) researched on children from Asian and/or Latino backgrounds in English-speaking countries.
studies were excluded if they 1) had a specific focus on atypically developing children having language disorders and clinical behavioural problems; 2) compared social competence difference between ELLs and native English-speaking children without apparent reference to host and/or heritage language skills. That is, the studies did not employ any instruments to measure language use/proficiency, and 3) were case studies. The case studies were excluded not because we disagreed with this research method but because we were more interested in the relationships between the constructs. The strength of case studies, however, is in-depth understanding of interested phenomena rather than identifying relationships between constructs (Barone, 2004).

Results

Altogether 14 studies met the inclusion and exclusion criteria. It is notable one study had a wide age range exceeding 12 years (Chen & Tse, 2010), and it was still reviewed because the majority of the participants in this study met the age criterion. Table 1 lists the main features of these studies. Among them, three (21.4%) focused on children from a particular single country of origin such as China, and 11 studies (78.6%) focused on children from pan-ethnic Asian or Latino background or both. Seven (50%) focused exclusively on preschool children and another seven (50%) focused on school-aged children from kindergarten to grade five. Six (42.9%) had large-scale nationally representative datasets with more than 1,000 participants. Two

Table 1
Main Features of Selected Studies

| Author(s) & year | ethnicity focus | age or grade | sample size | design | reference to country |
|-----------------|----------------|-------------|-------------|--------|----------------------|
| **Preschool children** | | | | | |
| Winsler et al. (2014) | Asian & Latino | 0-5 years | 9250 | longitudinal | EL* & HL* | US |
| Vaughan et al. (2007) | Latino | 9-36 months | 76 | longitudinal | EL & HL | US |
| De-Feyter and Winsler (2009) | Latino | 4 years | 2194 | cross-sectional | EL & HL | US |
| Chang et al. (2007) | Latino | 4-5 years | 345 | cross-sectional | EL & HL | US |
| Oades-Sese et al. (2011) | Latino | 4-5 years | 207 | longitudinal | EL & HL | US |
| Howes et al. (2011) | Latino | Mean 63 months | 801 | cross-sectional | EL & HL | US |
| Luchtel et al. (2010) | Latino | 50-71 months | 1034 | cross-sectional | EL & HL | US |
| **School-aged children** | | | | | |
| Dawson and Williams (2008) | Latino | K-3 | 2,840 | longitudinal | EL | US |
| Spomer and Cowen (2001) | Asian & Latino | Largely K-3 | 469 | cross-sectional | EL | US |
| Han (2010) | Latino | K-5 | 20534 | longitudinal | EL & HL | US |
| Han and Huang (2010) | Asian | K-5 | 12580 | longitudinal | EL & HL | US |
| Chen et al. (2014) | Chinese | 6-9 years | 258 | cross-sectional | EL & HL | US |
| Tannenbaum and Howie (2002) | Chinese | 9-12 years | 40 | cross-sectional | HL | Australia |
| Chen and Tse (2010) | Chinese | mean age 11 years | 356 | cross-sectional | EL & HL | Canada |

*Note: EL = English language, HL = heritage language
(14.2%) had a sample with less than 100 participants. The remaining six (42.9%) had 200-801 participants. Six (42.9%) had a longitudinal design and eight (57.1%) a cross-sectional design. Eleven (78.6%) studies investigated social competence with reference to both host (i.e., English) and heritage languages, two (14.3%) to English only and one (7.1%) to heritage languages only.

**An area of research underdeveloped**

The limited number of studies underlines the fact that research of social competence among ELLs has just emerged. Clearly, there is a need for more research on social development of Asian and Latino ELLs. Inspection of Table 1 also reveals that each of the authors or author groups have contributed only one or two studies in this area. This suggests the examination of ELLs’ social competence with reference to language skills is not a major focus for any of the researchers or research groups. Theoretical and methodological advances are usually made when at least one researcher or researcher group takes a leading role. The absence of such leadership is apparent.

**Dimensions indexing social competence**

Social competence in the 14 studies was mainly indexed by four dimensions: externalizing behaviours, internalizing behaviours, social skills and relationships with others (i.e., peers, teachers, and parents). Externalizing behaviours are characterized by under-control of negative emotions (i.e., sadness, fear and disappointment) and displayed as aggression, hyperactivity and rule-breaking (Eisenberg, Fabes, Guthrie, & Reiser, 2000). Internalizing behaviours are featured by

| Author(s) & year                  | Preschool children | School-aged children |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------|---------------------|
| Winsler et al. (2014)             | √                  |                     |
| Vaughan et al. (2007)             | √                  |                     |
| De-Feyter and Winsler (2009)      | √                  |                     |
| Chang et al. (2007)               | √                  |                     |
| Oades-Sese et al. (2011)          | √                  |                     |
| Howes et al. (2011)*              | √                  |                     |
| Luchtel et al. (2010)             | √                  |                     |
| Dawson and Williams (2008)        | √                  |                     |
| Spomer and Cowen (2001)           | √                  |                     |
| Han (2010)                        | √                  |                     |
| Han and Huang (2010)              | √                  |                     |
| Chen et al. (2014)                | √                  |                     |
| Tannenbaum and Howie (2002)       | √                  |                     |
| Chen and Tse (2010)               | √                  |                     |

*Note. This study measured teacher-child relationship but took this as a predicting variable of ELL’s social competence rather than as an outcome variable as predicted by language levels.*
over-control of negative emotions and displayed as anxiety, depression, and social withdrawal. Social skills mainly incorporate interpersonal skills, autonomy, assertiveness, frustration tolerance, engagement in pretend play and self-worth. Table 2 presents the dimensions of social competence each study contains. It is notable not all the studies used the terms of externalizing behaviours, internalizing behaviours, social skills, and relationships with others, but we categorized into the four dimensions based on the authors’ descriptions of their social competence measures. It also needs to be noted that other indicators such as cognitive competence and physical competence which the selected studies investigated but are not the focus of this review are not listed in Table 2.

Findings across studies

There are two sections in this part: relationship between English levels and social competence and relationship between heritage language levels and social competence. In each section, we first present the findings across the selected studies and then discuss the findings mainly in terms of consistence the studies have reached and recommendations future research should consider. At the end of this part, we discuss the divergent results of associations of English and heritage languages with social competence.

English levels and social competence

Of 13 studies examining the relationship between English levels and externalizing behaviours (see Tables 1 and 2), five found a negative association, four found a positive association, and four found no association (Chang et al., 2007; Chen & Tse, 2010; Howes et al., 2011; Vaughan et al., 2007). Of the 12 studies examining the relationship between English levels and internalizing behaviours, eight found a negative association, two found a positive association and two did not report significant associations (Chang et al., 2007; Dawson & Williams, 2008). Of the 11 studies examining relationship between English levels and social skills, eight studies found a positive association and three found no association (Chang et al., 2007; Luchtel, Hughes, Laze, Bruna, & Peterson, 2010; Vaughan et al., 2007). Three studies investigated relationships with others with reference to English. Two studies found positive relationships and one study did not report significant associations (Chang et al., 2007). Table 3 presents details of the findings of these studies.

Discussion of findings of English levels and social competence

Based on the numbers of studies finding positive, negative and non-significant associations, a conservative conclusion is that English levels are positively associated with social skills, in particular that higher levels of English are associated with higher levels of social interactions with peers and teachers. Nevertheless it is still unclear how English levels are associated with externalizing, internalizing behaviours and relationships with others. It is difficult to explain why these studies obtained inconsistent results. Differences in participant characteristics may be a reason. The participants across the 13 studies varied in terms of ethnicity (i.e., single versus mixed ethnicities), immigrant status (i.e., first, second, and non-immigrants), and years of residence in host countries. Some studies took native English-speaking children as control groups without controlling confounding factors such as socioeconomic status (Han, 2010; Han & Huang, 2010; Luchtel et al., 2010). The effects of these factors may be mixed up with English levels on social competence ratings and future research should try to disentangle these confounding factors. Moreover, apart from Chen and Tse (2010), Chen et al. (2014) and Winsler et al. (2014), most studies did not examine difference among ELLs within a single ethnicity (i.e., Chinese and Mexico). It is important to do this because ethnicity can also be a factor affecting developmental trajectory of ELLs who are even from the same region such as Asia (Beiser et al., 2010).
| Positive relationships | Negative relationships |
|-----------------------|------------------------|
| ELLs had              | ELLs with lower/the lowest levels of English had |
| 1. lower levels of teacher-rated classroom conduct and acting-out problems than those who spoke English native-likely or fluently (Han, 2010; Luchtel et al., 2010; Spomer & Cowen, 2001); and 2. fewer parent-rated externalizing behaviours than children who were from immigrant backgrounds but spoke English at home (Winsler et al., 2014). | 1. higher levels of externalizing behaviours in grade three when their English skills were limited at school entry (Dawson & Williams, 2008) 2. more behavioural concerns in second generation (born in US) when compared with first generation counterparts (born overseas) (De-Feyter & Winsler, 2009); 3. the fastest increasing rate of teacher-reported externalizing behaviours from kindergarten to grade five when compared with peers whose English was native-like and fluent (Han & Huang, 2010); 4. the highest levels of teachers reported peer play disruption (i.e., being aggressive, antisocial and disturbing ongoing activities) when compared with peers whose English was native-like and fluent (Oades-Sese et al., 2011); and 5. higher levels of externalizing behaviours when parenting practices were characterized by low warmth and high control (Chen et al., 2014); |
| Positive relationships | Negative relationships |
| ELLs displayed fewer behavioural concerns than peers who only spoke English (Luchtel et al., 2010; Winsler et al., 2014). | ELLs with lower/the lowest levels of English had |
| 1. higher levels of teacher- or parent-rated cautiousness, shyness, anxiety, and loneliness (Chen & Tse, 2010; Howes et al., 2011; Spomer & Cowen, 2001). 2. more behavioural concerns when they were second generation compared with first generation (De-Feyter & Winsler, 2009). 3. the fastest increasing rate of teacher-reported internalizing behaviours from kindergarten to grade five compared with their peers whose English was native-like and fluent (Han, 2010; Han & Huang, 2010). 4. the highest levels of withdrawal at play when compared with peers whose English was native-like and fluent and whose heritage language skills were at higher levels (Oades-Sese et al., 2011); and 5. higher levels of teacher- and parent-reported internalizing behaviours when parenting practices were characterized by high control but low warmth (Chen et al., 2014); |
| Positive relationships | Negative relationships |
| ELLs with lower/the lowest levels of English skills had | ELLs with lower levels of English had |
| 1. fewer socio-emotional protective factors in second generation than in first generation (De-Feyter & Winsler, 2009); 2. the lowest level of teacher-rated interpersonal and self-control skills through kindergarten to grade five when compared with peers whose English was native-like and fluent (Han, 2010); 3. lower levels of social interactions and less pretend play at preschools (Howes et al., 2011; Oades-Sese et al., 2011); 4. lower level of teacher-reported assertiveness, interpersonal skills and parent-rated engagement with mothers (Spomer & Cowen, 2001; Winsler et al., 2014); and 5. lower levels of self-worth, peer-rated social interactions (e.g., sociability and cooperation), and teacher and parent reported social competence at schools when they also used less English media use and had fewer associations with native English-speaking friends (Chen et al., 2014; Chen & Tse, 2010). | 1. less positive peer relationship (Chen & Tse, 2010); and 2. less positive teacher-child relationships than English-speaking peers (Luchtel et al., 2010). |
Another reason for the inconsistent findings may be varied measures used to measure English proficiency. Among the 13 studies, five used (standardised) language tests (Chang et al., 2007; Dawson & Williams, 2008; De-Feyter & Winsler, 2009; Howes et al., 2011; Oades-Sese, Esquivel, Kaliski, & Maniatis, 2011), two used Likert scale questionnaires (Chen et al., 2014; Chen & Tse, 2010), and the rest used language status (i.e., ELLs and non-ELLs) or teacher- or parent-report of classroom or home language use (i.e., English or heritage languages). Using language status or home or classroom language use may be inadequate because it only provided a rough assessment of English. It is still unknown what each ELL’s English proficiency was within a particular group (i.e., speaking heritage language at home) and how English proficiency was associated with social competence within that group. Future research should consider a direct assessment of English proficiency of all participants with a language test, which can be easily carried out by researchers and educators, and then compare their social competence ratings against their English scores.

The relationship between language skills and social competence is unlikely to be linear. Future research needs considering other factors, such as emotion regulation, which may interact with language skills in predicting social competence. Limited English may lead to negative emotions such as fear and sadness, but if ELLs can regulate negative emotions effectively, they may still adjust well in schools. In contrast, if ELLs have poor emotion regulation abilities, even though they speak English well, they may still exhibit behavioural problems. In other words, abilities to regulate emotions may change the relationship between English skills and social competence and such abilities should be examined in future research.

Heritage language levels and social competence

Twelve studies (see Table 1) investigated social competence with reference to heritage language levels, but not all the studies examined heritage languages in the same detailed manner as they did with English. This is possibly

Table 4

| Relationships between Heritage Language Levels and Social Competence |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|
| **Positive relationships**                                    |
| ELLs with lower levels of heritage languages or speaking less heritage languages at school had |
| 1. higher levels of vulnerability and anxiety (Tannenbaum & Howie, 2002) |
| 2. lower teacher-rated interpersonal skills, lower levels of frustration tolerance, and less close relationship with teachers who also spoke heritage languages (Chang et al., 2007); |
| 3. fewer social skills and more problem behaviours compared with those who were first generation and spoke much heritage language (De-Feyter & Winsler, 2009; Luchtel et al., 2010); |
| 4. lower levels of teacher-rated social competence compared with those who spoke heritage language fluently (Oades-Sese et al., 2011); |
| 5. less time in pretend play (Howes et al., 2011); |
| 6. lower levels of parents and teachers reported social competence (Chen et al., 2014); and |
| 7. more problem behaviours during preschool years compared with peers who spoke more heritage languages (Winsler et al., 2014). |
| **Negative relationships**                                    |
| ELLs with higher levels of heritage languages or only speaking heritage languages had |
| 1. lower levels of self-reliance (Tannenbaum & Howie, 2002) |
| 2. more teacher-reported shyness and peer victimization in classroom (Chen & Tse, 2010). |
| 3. more internalizing behaviours and fewer interpersonal and self-control skills than those who spoke English native-like or fluently (Han, 2010; Han & Huang, 2010). |
because heritage languages are less important than English for ELL’s social adjustment. For succinctness, we will discuss the findings at global social competence level instead of at specific dimension level. Of the 12 studies, seven found a positive association, three found a negative association, one found both positive and negative associations (Tannenbaum & Howie, 2002), and one found no association (Vaughan et al., 2007). Table 4 presents details of the findings of these studies.

Two studies need extra illustration because they both found speaking heritage was positively associated with parent-child relationship and family unity. Children’s Chinese language proficiency was positively associated with parental warmth and acceptance (Chen et al., 2014). Chinese language use was associated positively with ELLs’ perception of cohesive and egalitarian family structure but negatively with their perception of hierarchical family structure (Tannenbaum & Howie, 2002). Higher level of Chinese language maintenance was also related to better family member relationship and higher level of loyalties.

**Discussion of findings of heritage language levels and social competence**

Based on the numbers of studies finding positive, negative and both associations, a conservative conclusion may be that speaking heritage languages is conducive to family relationship, though such findings still need more studies to confirm. What is still unclear is how heritage language skills are associated with other dimensions of social competence.

It is difficult to compare the findings across these studies as they had different research foci and used different instruments to collect data. Rather than classifying ELLs into groups with a rough assessment such as home language use and comparing social competence ratings between groups, it is recommended that future research consider measuring all participants’ heritage language proficiency with a language test and then compare all ELLs’ social competence ratings against their heritage language scores. Moreover, compared with studies investigating relationships between English levels and social competence, studies investigating the associations of heritage language proficiency and social competence are fewer in number and narrower in scope. For theoretical advancement and educational implications, more research is needed to uncover the effects heritage languages on ELLs’ social competence development.

**Discussion of divergent results of English and heritage languages**

According to Tables 3 and 4, it appears that English skills are especially beneficial for communications at school and promote social interactions with peers and teachers whereas heritage language skills are particularly helpful for communications at home and develop family relation quality (Chen & Tse, 2010; Howes et al., 2011; Oades-Sese et al., 2011; Tannenbaum & Howie, 2002). Such divergent results indicate that it is important for future research to consider contexts when investigating relationships between language skills and social competence. It may also be important to consider who will rate social competence measures as parents may be more likely to measure from a home context perspective while teachers from a school context perspective. A review of cross-informant correlations of child behaviours reported a mean correlation of 0.27 between parent and teacher ratings (Achenbach, McConaughy, & Howell, 1987). Different raters (parents vs. teachers) from different context perspectives (home vs. school) may also account for the inconsistent findings across the selected studies. Future research should differentiate parents and teachers’ ratings of social competent measures when conducting such kind of studies.

The selected studies did not provide much information about ELLs’ social or ethnic identity development with the process of maintaining heritage languages and learning English. Since language learning is also a process of establishing ethnic identity, which is closely related to formation and development of
behavioural norms and practices (Duff, 2007; Ochs & Schieffelin, 2011), it may be interesting for future research to consider how heritage language helps sustain the original ethnic identity and how host language learning helps establish new ethnic identity. Then it may be interesting to examine how social behaviours and skills transform at home and school contexts due to ethnic identity changes. As such, longitudinal data is preferred as it can more clearly characterize the developmental trajectory.

**Conclusion**

Rapid growth of Asian and Latino population in English-speaking countries highlights the need to understand the particular development of social competence of ELLs so that developmental science is inclusive of this growing population and better educational services can be provided for them. Based on the small set of the peer-reviewed studies, conservative conclusions are that English skills are positively associated with social skills and speaking heritage languages promotes child-parent relationships. Nevertheless, the findings are inconsistent regarding how English levels are associated with externalizing and internalizing behaviours and relationships with others. Neither are the findings consistent regarding how heritage language skills are related to social competence at school and community contexts. The mixed findings may be better clarified if future research can have: a) consistent measures of all possible variables; b) a direct assessment of all ELLs’ English and heritage language proficiency with language tests; and c) investigation of potential interacting factors, such as emotion regulation and academic skills, between English and social competence.

As noted previously, the majority (12 out of 14) of the reviewed studies were conducted in the United States (US) and no studies focusing on preschool children were conducted outside of the US. Research could be advanced by replicating the US studies in other favoured destinations of migrants such as Australia, Canada and United Kingdom to determine whether the main findings extend beyond the US context. It is possible that findings may be attributable to characteristics of US culture or immigrants choosing the US and not relevant to other countries.

Although many questions remain, there is consistency in the findings to suggest at least two implications for educators. First, this review may alert educators to potential difficulties ELLs may face in social competence development if their English skills are not on par with their English speaking peers. Educators may support children in finding alternative paths for the development of social competence that is less dependent on language. For instance, educators can consider training or improving ELLs’ emotion regulation abilities to handle challenging situations. Second, educators need to be aware that speaking heritage languages is helpful for parent-child relationship, which means a complete shift to English language by ELLs may undermine family closeness. It may be beneficial if ELLs are allowed to use their heritage languages with peers and have access to teachers who can also speak their heritage languages in educational contexts.

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