

# Home Visitor Practices: Supporting Language Content For At-risk Children

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## Rationale

Language acquisition is a crucial part of development in the early years of children's lives (Owen, 2008). Acquisition of children's language skills is shown to correlate with development and outcomes in the areas of social-emotional, cognitive, and literacy (Clarke-Stewart, 1973; Hart & Risley, 1995; Tamis-LeMonda, Bornstein, & Baumwell, 2001; Tomasello & Farrar, 1986), all of which are areas considered to be precursors for future academic achievement.

Key determinant accounting for variations in how children develop their language skills is the socioeconomic status (SES) of their family (Fernald, Marchman, & Weisleder, 2013; Hart & Risley, 1995; Hirsh-Pasek et al, 2015). Parents play a critical role in the development of children's language skill acquisition (Hart & Risley, 1995), thus they have the potential to influence the breadth of the "language gap."

Numerous studies provide evidence suggesting when parents implement learned strategies during interactions with their children, there is positive impact on children's communication (Alpert & Kaiser, 1992; Brown & Woods, 2015; Delaney & Kaiser, 2002; Woods, et al., 2004).

Majority of studies focus on teaching parents strategies to facilitate language with children demonstrating a delay in communication. There is minimal focus on how early language experiences of children living in poverty are affected by parent-implemented interventions in naturalistic settings (Leffel & Suskind, 2013). Given the positive results of parent-implemented strategies for facilitating language with children presenting delayed language development, the strategies currently being utilized in naturalistic settings (e.g. family homes) with children at-risk for delayed language acquisition due to living in poverty should be considered.

## Purpose

The purpose of this study was to examine the extent home visits in an early learning program for at-risk children support language related content within the context of the home visit and investigate frequency of language facilitation strategies used by parents and home visitors during home visits. The study sought to answer the following research questions:

- To what extent do home visitor and parents use responsive language strategies in their interactions with young, at-risk children during home visits?
- How does child's age influence parent and home visitor use of responsive language strategies?
- To what extent do home visitors facilitate parent-child interactions during home visits related to general content?
- To what extent do home visitors facilitate parent-child interactions related to responsive language strategies?
- How does family poverty status influence parent and home visitor use of responsive language strategies?
- What is the relationship between home visitor skills in facilitating parent-child interactions and skills in facilitating parent-child interactions related to responsive language strategies?

## Methods

### Participants:

- Thirty-two children who met at least one of the early learning program's qualifying risk factors (poverty, born prematurely, English is not the primary language spoken in the home, parents who are younger than 20, parents who have not completed high school), their parents, and home visitors.
- Children: 22 female, 10 male; age range 1-39 months, Mean age: 19.9 months
- Majority of families (75%) fell below federally defined poverty levels

### Measures:

- Home Visit Observation Rating Scales- Adapted and Extended to Excellence (**HOVRS-A+ v2.1**; Roggman et al., 2014). Scale is rated on a **1=needs training** and **7=excellent** gradient. For study purposes, the *facilitation of parent-child interactions* subscale was utilized.
- Facilitation of Language Observation Rating Scale for Home Visits (**FLORS-HV**; Miller, 2015). Scale is rated on a **1=never** and **5=frequently** gradient.

### Data Collection:

- Thirty-two video-recorded observations of home visits
- Video recordings coded using the **HOVRS-A+ v2.1** and **FLORS-HV**

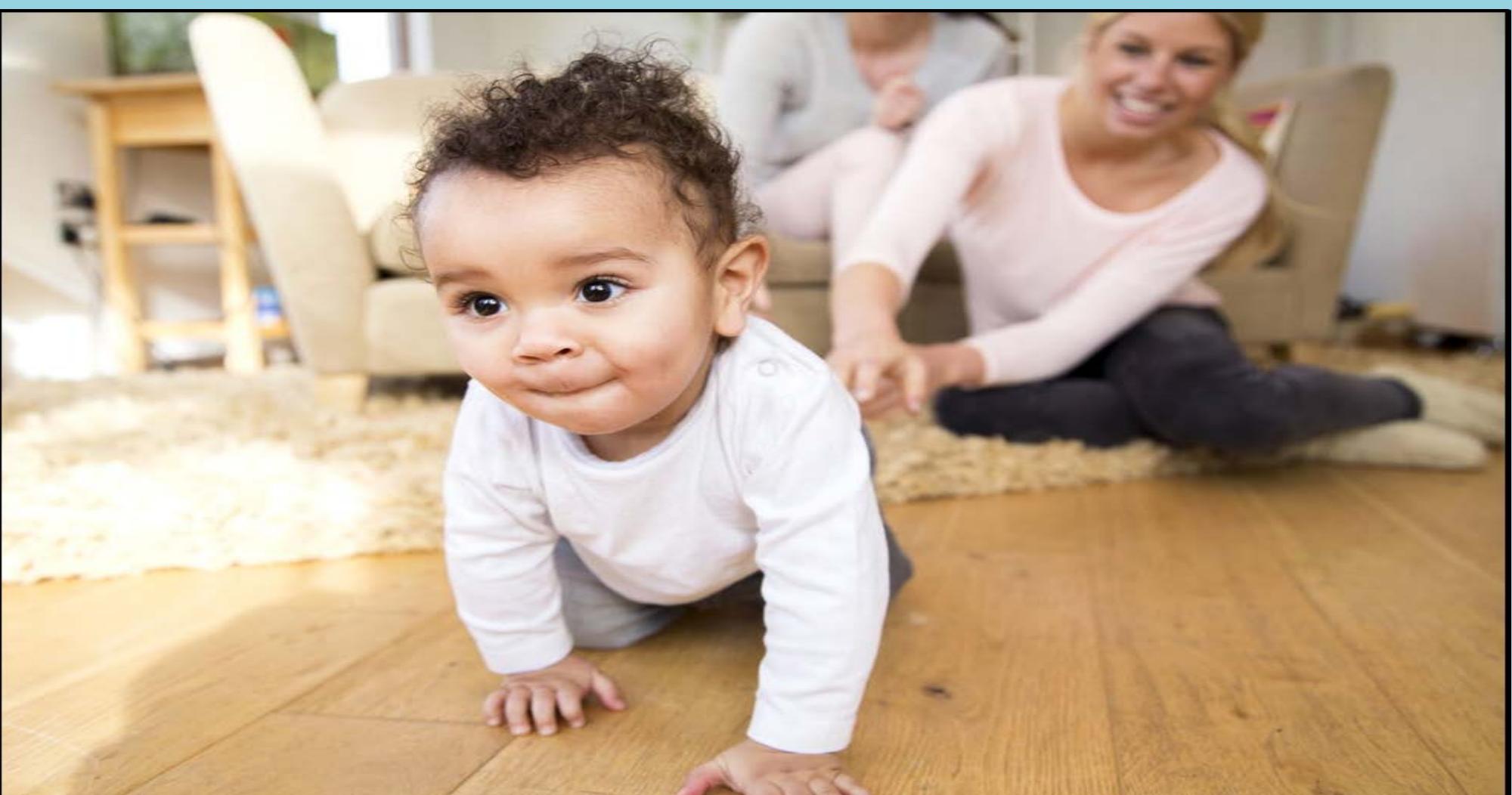
### Analysis:

- Descriptive analyses to determine frequency of strategy use
- Simple linear regression to examine relationship between variables

## Findings

### Key Language Strategies Measured by FLORS-HV

- Appropriate Modeling** measures matching language to child's level by labeling, commenting, and describing
- Repeating/Recasting/Expanding** looks for the adult to imitate and extend child communication and provide correct grammatical form
- Balanced turn taking** includes providing pause time and engaging in back and forth exchanges with the child
- Following the Child's Lead** measures the adult reading and following the child's cues by focusing on and talking about child interests
- Linguistic Mapping/Interpreting** looks for the adult to interpret the child's cues/messages and assign words to the message the child is sending



### What does facilitation of parent-child interactions encompass?

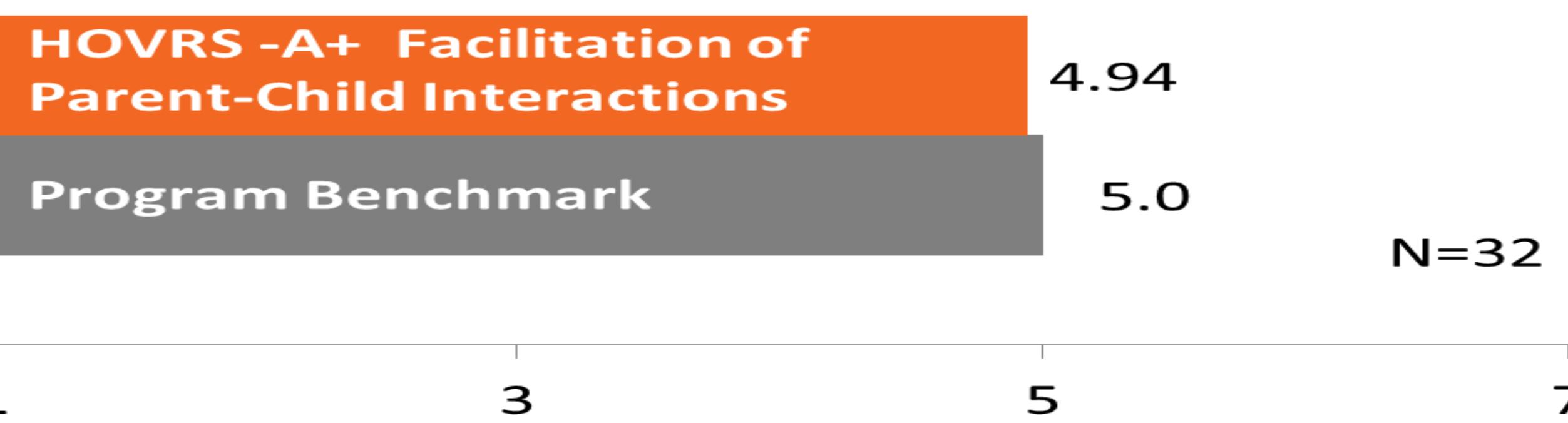
#### Eliciting developmentally supportive interactions through:

- Commenting, suggesting, providing feedback, and asking reflective questions to build and extend interactions
- Providing encouragement and reinforcement related to observed parent-child interactions
- Linking observed interactions and activities to child development

### What is the quality of home visitor facilitation of parent-child interactions? (HOVRS-A+)

**Quality of home visitor facilitation of parent-child interactions is moderately high.**

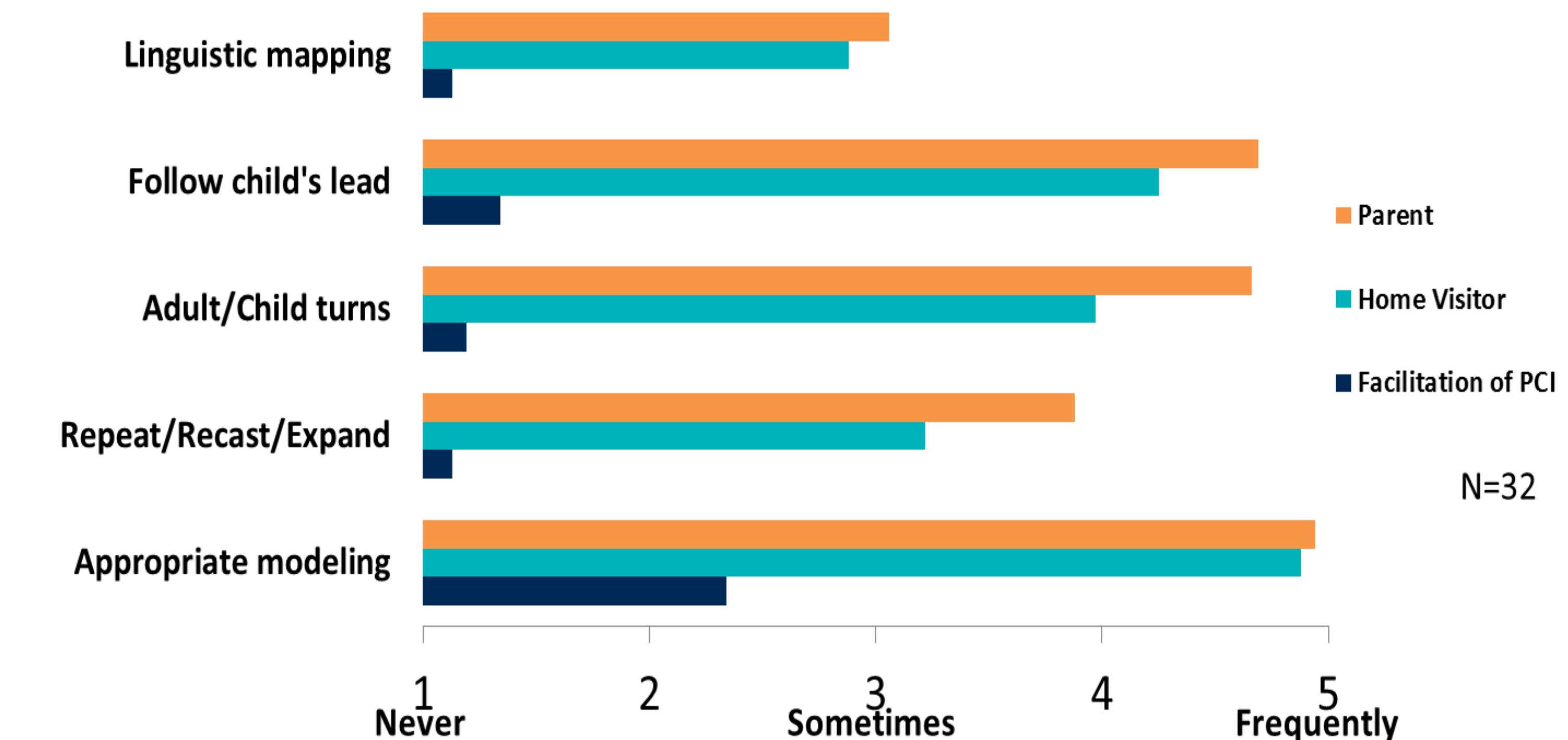
Overall average facilitation practice fell slightly below the program benchmark.



## To what extent do parents and home visitors use key language strategies?

Parents and home visitors use responsive language strategies with children during home visits.

Home visitor facilitation of parent-child interactions related to language content is an area for growth.



## What is the relationship between facilitation of parent-child interactions measured by HOVRS-A+ and FLORS-HV?

As the quality of home visitor facilitation of parent-child interactions (HOVRS-A+) increased, frequency of facilitation of interactions related to responsive language strategies (FLORS-HV) increased.  
 $F(1,30)=6.13, p=.019, R^2=.170$

## How does child's age influence strategy use?

As child age increased, parent use of specific responsive language strategies increased.  
 $Repeat/Recast/Expand: F(1,30)=24.18, p=.001, R^2=.446$   
 $Balanced Turn Taking: F(1,30)=7.37, p=.011, R^2=.197$

As child age increased, home visitor use of specific responsive language strategies increased.  
 $Repeat/Recast/Expand: F(1,30)=30.65, p=.001, R^2=.505$   
 $Balanced Turn Taking: F(1,30)=17.95, p=.001, R^2=.374$   
 $Overall Use of Strategies: F(1,30)=9.35, p=.005, R^2=.238$

## How does family poverty status influence parent use of strategies?

Parent overall strategy use was negatively correlated with poverty level.  
 $Overall Use of Strategies: r=-.355, p=.046$

## Discussion

- Study supports previous research showing parents living in poverty use responsive language strategies less frequently with their children.
- Home visitors demonstrate moderately high facilitation of parent-child interactions for general content; however, minimal facilitation of parent-child interactions related to language occurs within the context of home visits for children at-risk.
- Home visitors and parents use responsive language strategies more frequently with older children.

## Implications

- Strengthen home visitor knowledge of language development and responsive language facilitation strategies for young children, including infants and toddlers.
- Future research should consider exploring quality of responsive language strategies used by parents and home visitors.