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Parental involvement in online education during Covid-19 lockdown: a netnographic case study of Chinese language teaching in the UK

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Abstract: This paper reports on a study of Chinese parents' involvement in their children's heritage language (HL) development during the COVID-19 lockdowns in the UK. Involving seven transnational families, we examined the roles parents played during the online learning sessions and the factors shaping their involvement. Employing a netnographic approach, this study incorporates online classroom observations, semi-structured and focus group interviews with parents, and analysis of their Instagram posts. The study underscores the critical role of parental involvement (PI) in enhancing children's HL education, offering insights into distinct parental roles, including as emotional supporters, co-educators, teaching assistants, and technical supporters. The study introduces a three-dimensional PI model within the framework of family language policy (FLP), enhancing our understanding of FLP by concretely manifesting what, how and why parents get involved in their children's HL development. This study contributes to the discourse on PI and FLP, shedding light on the evolving roles of parents and the complexity of their involvement during the unique circumstances of the pandemic.

Keywords: parental involvement; family language policy; online Chinese language education; Chinese heritage language; COVID-19 lockdown

摘要: 本文是一项网络民族志研究,通过对七个跨国家庭的调研,探讨了华人家长在帮助子女进行在线学习传承语(即汉语)的过程中所扮演的角色,以及影响家长参与的因素。本文聚焦新冠疫情封锁期间在英的跨国家庭,通过在线课堂观察、

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半结构化访谈、焦点小组访谈以及对家长 Instagram 上帖子的分析,明确;了家长参与在子女传承语言教育中的关键作用。研究表明在子女进行线上传承语言学习的过程中,家长扮演着四个类别的角色,即情感支持者、共同教育者、教学助手和技术支持者。本文基于现有的家庭语言政策框架,结合深入的数据分析与阐释,提出了家长参与的三维模型,在拓宽对家庭语言政策理解的同时,具体展现了家长在子女传承语言发展中的参与方式及背后的原因。本研究拓展了有关家长参与及家庭语言政策现有的研究维度,细致探讨了在特殊的新冠疫情期间,家长在子女传承语言学习过程中的角色演变及复杂性。

关键词: 家长参与; 家庭语言政策; 在线汉语语言教育; 汉语传承语; 新冠疫情封锁

1 Introduction

The importance of parental involvement (PI) in children's education became evident when all educational activities went online during the COVID-19 lockdown (Ribeiro et al. 2021). In the context of family language policy (FLP), PI is directly manifested through parents' conscious investment in creating linguistic conditions for their children to develop the heritage language (HL), and more specifically, through their deliberate engagement in their children's language learning and literacy development (Curdt-Christiansen and Huang 2020). While research into FLP has flourished in recent years, ranging from studying why parents make certain decisions on their children's HL development (e.g., Curdt-Christiansen 2016; Lanza and Lexander 2019) to trying to understand how they facilitate home language practices (e.g., Curdt-Christiansen and Lanza 2018; Said and Zhu 2019), the conceptualisation and concrete manifestations of PI remain unclear in the realm of FLP.

As Hardach (2020) reports, children from transnational families spent more time with their parents during the lockdowns, potentially leading to increased exposure to their HLs. It is vital to understand whether the new context gave rise to any new patterns of PI or new roles for parents in their children's heritage language learning (HLL), and whether such changes led to any modifications of FLP and the role of HL in family relations. In this study, we conceptualise PI as parents' active participation and engagement in their children's HL development at home. Our study aims to extend the existing knowledge about transnational parents' involvement in their children's HLL in online settings, we specifically develop a PI model that complements the FLP model, allowing for a more comprehensive understanding of the intrinsic reasons that drive or hinder PI in children's HLL. To understand the factors that influence PI, we unravel the complex, subtle, and intricately interwoven aspects of PI in FLP by asking the following research questions:

- 1) What roles do parents play in children's HLL in the online setting?
- 2) What are the factors influencing parental involvement in children's online HLL?

By examining the specific roles of parents and the push or pull factors that influence PI, we aim to uncover the multifaceted ways in which parents contribute to their children's HL development and thereby advance the current understanding of the complex dynamics of PI.

2 HL development: family language policy and parental involvement in children's HL maintenance

Parental involvement has been widely studied in the field of general education, and its significance in facilitating children's academic development has been well established (Durišić and Bunijevac 2017). Scholars in this field have approached PI from various perspectives. Jeynes (2007), for example, emphasises that PI is not limited to specific actions or behaviours (e.g., helping with homework), but encompasses various aspects such as parental style, expectations, communication about school, household rules, and participation in school activities. Epstein (2018) highlights the shared responsibility of parents, educators, and others in children's education. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) acknowledge the significance of sociocultural reasons while also paying attention to the psychological reasons as important aspects of PI. These theoretical observations comprehensively address both the sociocultural influences and psychological dimensions of PI, serving as the foundation for our conceptualisation of PI in this study.

Factors that drive/push or hinder/pull PI have been thoroughly examined (Murphey 1992; Ardel and Eccles 2001). Hoover-Dempsey and her colleagues (2005) discuss three constructs that significantly impact PI. Firstly, parents' motivational beliefs that encompass two belief systems: role construction for involvement, which refers to parents' beliefs about their roles in their children's education, and sense of efficacy, which refers to parents' belief in their capability to help their child succeed in school. Secondly, invitations to involvement from others, including schools, children, and teachers, play a crucial role in influencing PI. Lastly, parents' life contexts, such as the family's socioeconomic status, parents' self-perceived skills, knowledge, time, and energy, and family culture also shape the level of their involvement. These factors often intertwine, either propelling or hindering parents' active participation in their children's learning.

Parents play a significant role, not only in supporting children's education in general, but also in developing their language proficiency, including HLL (Liao and Huang 2020). Studies on FLP have demonstrated the importance of PI in children's HLL. FLP is defined as a deliberate attempt to foster particular language-use patterns

and literacy practices within families and among family members. It encompasses language ideology, language practices, and language management within family domains (Curdt-Christiansen 2009; Spolsky 2009). Parents are not only responsible for providing linguistic conditions and opportunities for meaningful family communications and emotional connections, but they also shape their children's language beliefs and practices (Curdt-Christiansen and Iwaniec 2022). It is through PI and the implementation of intentional language policies that children can develop their HL skills and maintain a strong connection to their cultural and linguistic roots. Therefore, recognising and promoting the role of parents in fostering HLL is crucial for the successful transmission of HLLs across generations in transnational families.

FLP scholars have found that PI is manifested in parents' perceptions, language practices and management of HLL (e.g., Liang 2018; Liang and Shin 2021). Liang (2018) reviewed 17 recent studies from the US and Canada on the perceptions and practices of migrant parents concerning their children's HLL. Three themes were generated: parental perceptions, parental practices, and the challenges faced by the parents; these themes show that PI is pervasive in every component of the FLP system, from beliefs to actual practices, and directly impacts children's HL outcomes. To be more specific, parents are key to a successful FLP, i.e., one that effectively transmits the HL (Seppik and Zabrodskaja 2022). Parental beliefs about children's ability have informed FLPs and led to parental expectations for their children's bilingual development (Curdt-Christiansen 2016; Nakamura 2019). Resonating with the notion of "impact beliefs" (De Houwer 1999), parents can claim authority over their children's language learning and make explicit and deliberate efforts to be or not to be involved in their children's HLL (Spolsky 2009). Various empirical studies have demonstrated the significant influence of parents' impact beliefs (e.g., Bezcioglu-Goktolga and Yağmur 2018; Pérez Báez 2013).

Daily home language practices may also influence children's language development. Curdt-Christiansen's (2013, 2016) studies of Singaporean bilingual families illustrate that parents' day-to-day language inputs can have a lasting impact on children's interactional patterns. Through real-life practices, different types of FLP, either highly planned or unreflective or *laissez-faire*, can influence children's HL outcomes.

Reviewing FLP studies, we found that unlike PI in general education, although PI is ubiquitous in the framework of FLP, the conceptualisation and concrete manifestations of PI are obscured by its lack of a clear definition. These empirical studies, although acknowledging the importance of PI within the FLP model, have given little attention to why parents choose to be involved, how they select specific forms of involvement, and how these forms of PI make a difference in their children's HLL. Because of these research gaps and drawing on existing understanding of PI in general education, we define PI as the proactive and engaged participation of parents in their children's HL development within the home environment, which can shed

light on the sociocultural influences and psychological factors underlying PI in this specific domain.

3 Parental involvement in children's online learning

The outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic profoundly impacted the educational landscape, rendering traditional offline schooling unfeasible and disrupting established ways of teaching and learning. Online education, previously considered an alternative pathway (Lockee 2021), assumed a primary role as it replaced offline education during the lockdowns. PI in education has traditionally been classified as either school-based or home-based (Chee and Ullah 2019). School-based PI encompasses activities such as volunteering, communication with teachers, and participation in parent–teacher associations. In this context, parents have limited agency to shape curriculum and teaching content, assuming a peripheral role within the school system. Home-based involvement, on the other hand, involves assisting children with homework and assignments as well as creating a supportive learning environment (Epstein et al. 2009). Even so, parents' influence on educational objectives remains relatively restricted, whereas, in the online learning context, the demarcation between these two categories has become blurred, leading to a redefined role for parents. Parents are no longer mere 'assistants' or 'volunteers' within the educational framework (Epstein 2018); instead, some may assume a substitute position for teachers within the virtual school environment, assuming greater responsibility for their children's education (Puspita 2021).

Studies on PI in students' online learning have sprung up due to the pandemic (Daniela et al. 2021; Kasi et al. 2021). Daniela and her colleagues examined parents' perspectives on the distance learning process and identified the challenges they faced. Mothers, for example, were found to take on the major responsibility of providing support for and being involved in children's home-schooling (Daniela et al. 2021). In a study by Kasi et al. 2021, parents were found to believe that their involvement was of importance in promoting their children's educational achievement in the distance learning process. Their involvement included not only helping children with assignments and supervising their homework, but also keeping an eye on children's time-management and submission of assignments on time. Novianti and Garzia (2020) shed light on PI in children's online learning in Indonesia during the pandemic. Their findings revealed that most of the parents were actively engaged in their children's online learning by providing learning facilities, supervising learning activities at home, and identifying learning difficulties. Some parents,

however, encountered challenges and obstacles in the process. These include explaining the learning material to their children and balancing work, household chores, and the children's learning needs. These studies highlight the importance of PI in facilitating children's online learning during the pandemic. Parents play a crucial role in providing support, guidance, and resources to ensure the success and well-being of their children in the remote learning environment.

Research on parental guidance and involvement in their children's online HLL is still limited, particularly when compared to the extensive examination of parents' roles and contributions in mainstream online education. In the field of online HLL, previous studies have predominantly concentrated on parents' use of digital media to facilitate their children's learning and further the development of their HL. For instance, Said's (2021) study revealed that parents employ technology as a language management tool within the home environment, aiming to transmit the HL by enhancing language practices and creating linguistically rich contexts. Similarly, Hamid and Ali (2022) identified parents' use of polymedia as a means of HL transmission. Although these studies touch upon parents' specific practices in supporting their children's HLL through digital technologies, it is evident that the primary emphasis is on exploring how online spaces and digital technologies serve as learning resources for children to acquire their HL. In contrast, we seek in the present study to explore PI in children's participation in online Chinese language courses and, through in-depth interviews and observations, shed light on the factors and strategies that prompt parents to engage in their children's HLL in online settings.

4 The study

4.1 *Language Link* programme

Language Link is a research-based public engagement project aiming to work with ethnolinguistic communities to develop community languages and enhance the understanding of online HL education during the Covid-19 pandemic. This one-year project was part of a larger research project on Chinese HL schools and HL development. During the lockdowns where face-to-face teaching was not possible, *Language Link* offered tailored 30-min online tutoring sessions once a week for targeted HL learners. These individual sessions were delivered by voluntary Chinese post-graduate students across UK universities to local bi/multilingual children through Zoom and Tencent QQ. The researchers were involved in the programme design, teacher training, and project monitoring. Throughout the project, the research team maintained frequent communication with the participants, from observing online classes to understanding their concerns and the children's attitudes towards Chinese

classes. We acknowledge that our close personal involvement in this programme may lead to assumptions, biases, and preconceptions during collection, interpretation, and analysis of data. To mitigate these influences, two key strategies were employed. Firstly, we implemented the use of inter-coder reliability checks, involving multiple researchers in the data analysis process. Secondly, we regularly engaged in reflective discussions to consciously acknowledge and challenge our own biases and assumptions throughout the research process.

4.2 Participants

The *Language Link* programme was advertised on the researchers' social media platform, and a total of 30 families signed up. Seven mothers¹ and their fourteen children voluntarily participated in this study, which again demonstrates that it was primarily mothers who were responsible for children's home-schooling (Daniela et al. 2021). The profile of the participants is presented in Table 1. All parents, except parent R, were bilinguals. Parent Y was Malaysian Chinese with limited knowledge of Chinese. The remaining adult participants were all Chinese first-language speakers. All seven mothers were involved in two focus group interviews, one conducted in Chinese and the other in English, based on their individual language preferences.

The children were from five to fourteen years old. All children, but one (Nat came to the UK at two), were born outside China. All children were English dominant bilinguals. At home, they rarely initiated conversations in Chinese, and their daily communication was mainly in English.

4.3 Data collection

In this study, we embraced netnography as our primary approach, drawing inspiration from Kozinets's insights (2015) into the examination of online life and digital social interactions. As netnographers, we delved into the intricate tapestry of online life, employing qualitative tools such as online observations and interviews to collect data. Online observations allowed us to record lived experience of PI (Curdt-Christiansen 2020) whereas interviews enabled us to understand the

¹ The fathers of Lin, Joy and Luo, and Nat and Mag occasionally participated in their children's online learning courses. Additionally, Joy's father took part in one of the focus group interviews. However, fathers expressed their preference not to be included in this study, confirming that their wives played a decisive role in their children's online HLL. Consequently, only data from mothers were included.

Table 1: Participants' profile.

Mother ^a						Child			Language at home	
Name	Age	Educational background	Occupation	Language	Name	Age	Gender	First language	Birthplace	Language at home
L	30s	Bachelor	Housewife	L1: Chinese Fluent English	Lin	8	F	English	UK	English
H	40s	Master	Housewife	L1: Chinese Fluent English	Ad Eri	11 8	F F	English English	Australia UK	Mainly English
Y	30s	Bachelor	Doctor	L1: Malay Fluent English	Joy Luo	8 5	F M	English English	Malaysia. Arrive UK at 3. Malaysia. Arrive UK at 5 months.	English only
Q	40s	Master	Accountant	L1: Chinese Fluent English	Emi Dan	11 9	F M	English English	UK UK	Mainly English
D	40s	Bachelor	Self-employed	L1: Chinese Fluent English	Nat Mag	14 10	F F	English English	China. Came to UK at 2. UK	Mainly Chinese
R	30s	Bachelor	Artist	English	Li Ru	8 8	F M	English English	UK UK	English only
J	40s	Career training	Nurse	L1: Chinese Fluent English	Ali Alex Arthur	11 9 6	M M M	English English English	UK UK UK	Mainly English

^aOnly mothers participated in this study.

perceptions of parents and children regarding their online engagement in CHL (Gibson and Zhu 2016).

Below, we present the detailed data collection measures:

- (1) Online classroom observations: except the twins Li and Ru, who attended classes together, all children were individually assigned to classes, with or without parental presence depending on their preference. Thus, there were 13 classes in all, each of which was observed three times, with the permission of teachers, parents, and children: once at the beginning of the programme, once in the middle, and once at the conclusion of the programme, resulting in a total of 39 classroom observations. We used an observation scheme to gather four basic pieces of information: parental presence, class set-up, resource provision, and interactions between children (parent) and teacher. In addition, fieldnotes were taken to record the details about what had taken place.
- (2) Parents' focus group interviews: two focus group interviews were conducted lasting 44 and 50 minutes, respectively. The interviews, which were recorded and carried out in English and Chinese, sought to gain information about the parents' decision-making process when participating in HL learning, factors influencing their participation, and their role in children's HL development.
- (3) Semi-structured interviews with children: individual interviews with 14 children were carried out via WhatsApp or telephone. Each interview lasted around 20 min, depending on the children's willingness. The interview questions focused mainly on children's attitudes towards parent's presence in online CHL. These interviews were not recorded, as requested by some children and their parents, but notes were taken.
- (4) Parents' social media posts, e.g., Instagram posts about the language class and their reflections, were collected.

4.4 Ethics

Data collection was conducted online, and informed consent and participant identity protection were applied. Consent was obtained from children and adult participants and the right to withdraw was explained before researchers joined the online classes. Recorded interviews and screenshots of the teaching were also shared for approval. All data from the children were collected with the knowledge or assistance of parents. Pseudonyms and other necessary measures were taken to protect the participants' privacy.

4.5 Data analysis

The analysis of the observational data involved cross-referencing the observation scheme to determine the frequency of each parent's presence and their activities during classes. Interview data underwent transcription and initial coding with focus on concepts related to HLL and PI. This coding process was conducted individually by each researcher and was followed by a comprehensive comparison and review within the research team. Subsequently, all researchers engaged in collaborative discussions to ensure a rigorous analysis.

From these analyses, two main categories emerged: the roles of PI in online HL education and the factors that influence the PI process. Within the roles category, four patterns of PI were identified through open coding, combined with observational data: emotional supporters, co-educators, teaching assistants, and technical supporters. We further delved into the factors that influence and shape the PI process. From the narratives of both parents and children, three recurring themes were identified: parental responsibility, children's attitudes, and life circumstances.

Parents' social media posts were carefully examined to support and elaborate on the data obtained from observations and interviews, collectively forming a comprehensive understanding of the PI in their children's CHLL. In what follows, we present findings based on these themes.

5 Findings

In this section, we present the parents' narratives with the support of other data to understand parental roles and their motivations of (dis)involvement in their children's HL education.

5.1 Roles of parents

The parents were all involved in their children's HLL, despite differences in their strategies and varying degrees of involvement. Four main types of PI emerged: parents as emotional supporters, as co-educators, as teaching assistants, and as technical supporters. Table 2 summarises the roles parents played during our observations. Parents commonly provided emotional support, especially if their children were young. Notably, not all parents acted as co-educators; Mrs. R expressed reluctance to engage in the instructional practices of teachers, citing her non-Chinese-speaking background and her perception of having limited authority in this educational context. All parents served as teaching assistants, aiding teachers before,

Table 2: Summary of parent role playing and children's attitudes towards PI.

Parent	Child (age)	Roles of parents				Children's attitudes towards PI
		Emotional supporter	Co-educator	Teaching assistant	Technical supporter	
L	Lin (8)	3	2	3	3	Positive
H	Ad (11)	1	2	3	3	Positive
	Eri (8)	3	2	3	3	Positive
Y	Joy (8)	3	3	2	3	Positive
	Luo (5)	3	3	2	3	Positive
Q	Emi (11)	1	2	2	3	Positive
	Dan (9)	3	2	2	3	Positive
D	Nat (14)	1	2	3	3	Negative
	Mag (10)	2	1	3	3	Negative
R	Li (8)	3	/	3	3	Positive
	Ru (8)	3	/	3	3	Positive
J	Ali (11)	1	2	1	3	Negative
	Alex (9)	2	2	2	1	Negative
	Arthur (6)	3	3	2	1	Negative

during, and after online sessions. Additionally, all parents assumed the role of technical supporters, although in the case of Mrs. J, her eldest child, Ali, occasionally assisted with the technical setup and tested microphone and camera. A comprehensive analysis pertaining to these four roles is given in the subsequent sections.

5.1.1 Parents as emotional supporters

The role of parents as emotional supporters emphasises their meeting the children's emotional needs. Six parents in this study accompanied their children during the classes. Mrs. L acknowledged the tender age of her child:

Excerpt 1:

At present, I follow the class, because, first of all, she is young, only seven years old, she was a bit shy in the beginning, I accompanied her...the key point is to encourage her to speak up, and let her know mom is here, if you really don't know the answer, you could ask your mom for help. (Mrs. L interview, 27/01/2021)

The children's age appears to be the primary reason for parents' direct involvement in the classes. Similar to Mrs. L, Mrs. Q and Y also accompanied their children during the classes because of the children's young age (5–8 years old). Our observational data showed that Mrs. Y took all the classes together with her children with the

purpose of creating a relaxing and ‘safe’ environment for the children, although she had very limited HL proficiency.

Emotional supporter is one of the most frequently identified roles in online learning. Research has shown that when schooling goes online, communication between teachers and students can present challenges as the platform and the opportunities for understanding each other are limited because body language and paralinguistic clues as well as immediate and spontaneous interactions are no longer possible (Selvaraj et al. 2021). In this case, children may feel a strong sense of detachment and unreality. Providing children with a secure and comfortable learning environment was therefore a priority.

5.1.2 Parents as co-educators

Our data showed a new pattern of PI where parents played the role of co-educators during lockdowns. This role refers to parents actively engaging in the process of lesson design and teaching planning, taking on some of the educational responsibilities otherwise typically held by teachers. The focus group interview illustrated that parents have their own ideas, plans and approaches when it comes to children’s HLL. A firm belief in the importance of CHL motivated parents to become actively involved through the programme. They helped the teachers with their lesson design and teaching planning by providing advice and materials based on their evaluation of the children’s interests and HL proficiency. For example, Mrs. Y knew clearly what she wanted her children to achieve:

Excerpt 2:

My main aim for my children to learn Mandarin is not for them to score well academically...when they travel, when they go back to Malaysia, they can speak to our parents in Mandarin, conversational. (Mrs. Y interview, 27/01/2021)

Mrs. Y’s expectations of the learning outcome were for her children to use HL in real-life situations and to communicate with their grandparents. To her, becoming a language user is more important than academic achievements. Therefore, her advice to the teacher focused more on the entertaining and practical aspects of HLL; for instance, she suggested that the teacher should play scavenger hunt to motivate and engage the children in learning. To consolidate what the children had learnt in the online class, she designed games by herself. LEGO maze (cf. Figure 1) was an example she posted on Instagram:

This ‘Giving Directions’ game was designed to help children identify and learn the Chinese characters of directions (i.e., 上 up, 下 down, 左 left, 右 right). The children were asked to speak aloud and give the little monster directions to reach the



Figure 1: LEGO maze.

flag. Mrs. Y creatively combined her children’s interest (in LEGO) and the content of the HL classes to pedagogically engage her children in learning.

Mrs. Y’s active involvement aligns with Little’s (2019) study where parents used technology-based games to develop heritage language literacy. Acting as a co-

educator, she was ‘edutaining’ her children. Such language-game-based learning can “potentially enable children to bridge the gap between ‘language learner’ and ‘player’, helping them to advance along the continuum of language ability” (Whitton 2014: 228).

The newly emerged pattern of PI as co-educator was a unique result of the lockdowns when all teaching activities became overt and observable. The lockdowns provided parents with a possibility to be actively involved in their children’s learning and exert more agency by using their experience and knowledge to either co-work with the teachers to explore the appropriate methods and resources or design their own curriculum-based activities. In offline schooling, parents have little opportunity to be involved as co-educators. Situated in a peripheral position, PI tends to include participation in school activities, attending meetings with teachers or being a member of a committee, all of them PI forms that are not directly connected to learning and can hardly affect children’s academic achievements and learning outcomes (Emerson et al. 2012).

5.1.3 Parents as teaching assistants

The role of teaching assistants, unlike that of co-educators, requires a closer partnership with the teachers. While teachers remain the main instructors, parents assist teachers in various ways to ensure smooth teaching, such as translating English into Chinese, helping with ‘classroom’ management, supervising homework, and more. When triangulating our observational data with the interviews, we found that some parents translated the teachers’ instructions from Chinese to English, even though the teachers could speak English. As Mrs. Q recalled:

Excerpt 3:

Sometimes I need to translate, for example, the teacher has always been using Chinese, if the child knows the teacher can speak English, he may speak English to the teacher, which is not good. (Mrs. Q interview, 27/01/2021)

The excerpt indicates that the parent and the teacher reached a tacit agreement on language use during the online classes: the teacher pretended to speak little English, and the parent cooperatively translated the teacher’s instructions in Chinese into English. This strategy of avoidance partly resonates with Purkarthofer and Steien’s (2019) study of multilingual parents in Norway where parents pretended not to understand Norwegian in order to create a HL only home environment for their children. Similarly, the parent and the teacher in our study collaborated to implement a similar strategy, creating a Chinese-dominated environment exposing the child to as much Chinese as possible. Such a strategy further implies that the parent–

teacher collaboration was crucial (Epstein 2018) to ensure the children's development in the HL.

Being teaching assistant was also reflected in the parents' helping-out with 'classroom' management to ensure that the class ran smoothly. Mrs. R, a mother of twins, offered her view:

Excerpt 4:

I've been sitting next to them, and I've found sometimes they would look at me and you know, so I have to be a bit careful, not to be a distraction, so I've been sitting further away in the room, so if one of them gets a bit too enthusiastic or starts to play on the computer when they are meant to keep still and concentrate on the class. (Mrs. R interview, 27/01/2021)

It was observed that Mrs. R had been involved in the HL classes throughout the programme. Unlike Mrs. L (in Excerpt 1), Mrs. R appeared to be uncertain about her presence. She was concerned that her presence could be a distraction. Acting as a teaching assistant, she kept an eye on the class's progress, showing up to maintain order when needed but avoided interfering in the teaching. Her concerns and acts created a space for her children to deal with learning difficulties by themselves, thus encouraging independent learning (Vaughan and Schoeffel 2020).

5.1.4 Parents as technical supporters

Parents also play a role as technical supporters in the online HL programme. In order to ensure smooth online language learning for their children, parents provided assistance on the technical level, such as helping children log in to the online meeting platform, adjusting the camera and ensuring that the microphone worked well. Unlike offline schooling in which parents rarely have opportunities to be physically involved, the online settings often required direct parental involvement, providing technical support for their children, especially with issues such as internet disconnection, earphone/headphone malfunction, and screen-share failure, which disrupted the teaching. In the study, the majority of parents were observed to take on this role. For instance, Mrs. D routinely arranged the video setup for her children. Similarly, Mrs. Y shared her approach, stating, "what I usually do is I go and set up the laptop for them, probably five minutes before there is a class starting, so at least they are prepared mentally." At this juncture, Mrs. Y not only configured the devices but also consciously and proactively assisted her children in transitioning into the online learning mode, laying the foundation for a smooth start to the formal class. From this perspective, parents served both as technical supporters and educational assistants (Mrs. Y interview, 27/01/2021).

A similar role has been identified in Palviainen's research (2020) on spatial and embodied practices in mediated multilingual family life. Our study illustrates that when parents act as technical supporters, they facilitate the interaction and emotional connection between children and teachers through digital communication technology. Without parents' prompt technical assistance, online HLL could face obstacles, potentially impeding the interaction between children and teachers. In essence, the role of parents as technical supporters forms the cornerstone for a seamless execution of online HLL.

5.2 Factors influencing parental involvement

The various roles of parents reflect the different factors that influence PI and embody their concerns, beliefs and practices when involved in children's HLL. In this section, the factors influencing their PI decisions are discussed.

5.2.1 "I have the responsibility to reconnect the link"

All parents felt a strong responsibility to provide opportunities for their children to maintain a connection to their home country, culturally, linguistically, and emotionally. Mrs. H said she was about to give up on her children's CHLL, and this language programme was her last attempt. She confessed:

Excerpt 5:

My root is still (there), like I said, I felt guilty, because my kids can't communicate with my mom, no further communication...I want to say our root is actually still there, we don't say it verbally, but culturally and mentally, as a mother, I still want to reconnect the link. (Mrs. H interview, 01/27/2021)

Excerpt 5 reveals two key factors motivating parents to get involved in their children's HLL: the emotional factor and the identity factor. The emotional factor primarily concerns the role HL plays in the relationship between the generations within a family (Curdt-Christiansen and Huang 2020). Mrs. H expressed a sense of guilt for the disconnected communication between her children and her mother because of the children's inability to use HL. Researchers (Curdt-Christiansen and Huang 2020; De Houwer 2020) argue that HL is a necessary conduit for maintaining harmonious relationships between family members, and that losing HL can cause emotional disconnection between intergenerational family members. Mrs. J and Q also expressed regrets about their children's inability to communicate with their grandparents in Chinese, further highlighting the emotional disconnection. This was

also discussed by Curdt-Christiansen (2016) who argued that the sense of regret for not passing the HL to the young generation was connected to the hierarchical ranking of HLs. Parents in this study consistently reported that their children had limited opportunities to speak CHL in school because Chinese was a minority language and not widely recognised as a modern language in the UK educational context. When accessible language resources are scarce, parents perceive the responsibility of transmitting the HL to lie with the home.

In addition to the emotional factor, the identity factor also serves as a significant motivator for parents' involvement in their children's HLL. Mrs. H, for example, equated the preservation of the CHL with the preservation of cultural identity and "reconnecting the link" to her home country. Despite living away from her home country, she strongly identified herself as a part of it and feels a responsibility to provide her children with opportunities to recognise the crucial role of HL in shaping their identity. Similarly, Mrs. J emphasised the importance of the identity factor. She used her vacations to take her children back to their home country, intentionally creating an environment that fosters the use of the CHL, enabling her children to naturally develop a connection to the language and construct their Chinese identity. The prevalence of the identity factor as a motivation for PI in HLL aligns with existing literature on FLP and migration studies. Parents firmly believed that HL represented their cultural heritage and played a vital role in the development of their ethnic identity (Curdt-Christiansen 2009, 2016; Liang 2018; Little 2019).

In FLP studies, parents' perceptions of their responsibilities in HL development are framed as parental impact beliefs (Curdt-Christiansen 2009; Said and Zhu 2019). Such impact beliefs are directly related to internal factors of identity and emotion in the FLP model (Curdt-Christiansen and Huang 2020). These factors were identified during the process of PI in children's HL development as illustrated in the cases of Mrs. H and J. Parents' perceptions of HL as the emotional ties and identity markers were highlighted in their narratives.

5.2.2 Child: welcoming or resisting?

Children's attitudes appear to be a key factor influencing parents' decision on their (non)involvement in children's HLL. More than half of the children expressed a wish to be accompanied by their parents. Parents who received positive feedback from their children were more motivated to get involved. Based on our observational data and interview data with the children (Table 2), parents were consistently present throughout the programme if welcomed by their children. For instance, Mrs. L, Q, Y and R were observed providing support and assistance (e.g., translating teachers' words into English, giving hints to children when they answered teachers' questions) to their children during the classes. In contrast, Mrs. J, D and H offered more indirect

support, as they did not directly participate in the class activities. However, they remained present, keeping a watchful eye on their children's learning, and creating a comfortable and secure environment. This approach allowed the children to take ownership of their learning activities. The decision of involvement appears to be significantly related to children's attitudes. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) pointed out more than twenty years ago that invitation by children is one of the fundamental constructs affecting PI.

Through joint efforts with parents in the *Language Link* programme, many children have become more engaged learners. Ad in Family 2, for example, no longer refused her mother's help and even accepted her authority in HL despite her preference to take the classes on her own. She admitted "*I am used to mum speaking English with me, but it's okay for her speaking Chinese. Mum can correct my mistakes in Chinese. I sort of want mum to help me more.*" (Interview with Ad, 17/08/2021). Erin, her younger sister, sent an invitation straightforward by asking Mrs. H to sit by her side during the classes and asking her to be involved in their HLL at home. She proffered "*I hope mum can speak Chinese at home more often. Mummy is also teaching us Chinese at home and she is pretty good. I hope she can continue teaching us.*" (Interview with Erin, 17/08/2021). The positive responses from children encouraged parents like Mrs. H to offer their HL knowledge with confidence, creating positive reactions in both children and parents.

5.2.3 To live a life or to have a heritage language?

While many parents were deeply concerned about their children's HL development, they also implied that their life circumstances posed difficulties for their active involvement. As a result, commitments to becoming involved in HLL had been de-prioritised. Mrs. H shared her story:

Excerpt 6

I didn't want to give up (HL). Because the child, the environment, all sorts of aspects made her not speak...so at the beginning I didn't pay attention to Chinese, I just wanted her to be able to speak, speak English in school...she lives here, (being able to speak English) at least won't create a greater language barrier. (Mrs. H interview, 01/27/2021)

Mrs. H initially wished to expose her child to CHL, but she noticed that her child encountered difficulties in speaking. In response, she faced a difficult decision to abandon the CHL to avoid the 'greater language barrier' for her child not being able to speak English properly in school. Her primary concern was to ensure her child's proficiency in English, considering it vital for their daily life in the UK. Mrs. J's apprehension about her child's English development has resulted in an FLP that is

not conducive to bilingual development. This is not uncommon among migrant parents as they often worry that speaking two languages would delay children's language development (Curdt-Christiansen and Morgia 2018). In Mrs. J's case, the belief that sacrificing the HL was necessary discouraged her from actively participating in her children's HL development. The real-world challenges and decisions parents face regarding their children's language acquisition are often guided by practical considerations and the best interests of their children (Curdt-Christiansen et al. 2023). Making decisions about whether to expose children to CHL environments and become actively involved in their HLL is never straightforward, as life difficulties and real-world struggles can invariably complicate this decision-making process. Difficulties in life had also conditioned Mrs. H's involvement as she stressed:

Excerpt 8:

There are so many problems in life...When everything hits you, there is nothing you can do, you cannot speak English and then Chinese. This is something that my family in China can't relate to, they wouldn't understand that life here (in the UK) is so hard. (Mrs. H interview, 01/27/2021)

Mrs. J and H were not the only ones who seemed to separate HLL involvement from living a life. Although the lockdowns have enabled children from transnational families to spend more times with their parents (Hardach 2020), this does not mean children were engaged in more HLL. Mrs. L, for instance, acknowledged that she was overburdened with home schooling, household duties and childcare, which prevented her from engaging her children in literacy activities such as writing Chinese characters and reading stories. She acknowledged that the only way she could expose children to Chinese was through conversation. This finding points to the importance of implicit language planning/socialisation at home when limited opportunities for literacy events and practices are available (Curdt-Christiansen and Huang 2020). The

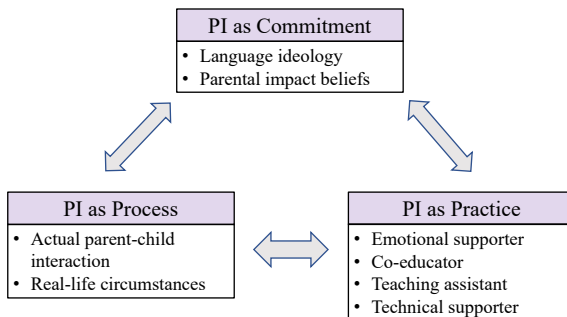


Figure 2: PI model of online HL education.

finding also shows that parents may be highly motivated to involve themselves in their children's education, but busy commitments and responsibilities in life, such as during the lockdowns, could consume their energy thus preventing them even from what they considered as simplified PI.

6 Discussion

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to an increased level of interaction between parents and their children, thereby creating, to a certain extent, more opportunities for children to be exposed to HL environments. However, this heightened exposure has also given rise to a range of associated challenges and issues. Our study indicates that PI, during the lockdowns, took on different dimensions and different forms through the multiple roles parents played, underlined by complex motivations. The results of the study provides new insights into the intricate dynamics of PI in HLL (cf. Figure 2). To help us understand this dynamic, we conceptualise PI in this research into three dimensions: PI as commitment, PI as process, and PI as practice. These dimensions interact with each other, can progressively build upon each other, and cycle back and forth. This model illustrates how PI is understood and pays particular attention to the key actors in FLP: the parents. It demonstrates not only how parents involve themselves but also why they choose to (dis)involve themselves in their children's HLL.

As shown in the model, PI as commitment is manifested in parental language ideology and, in particular, in their impact beliefs (De Houwer 1999). This dimension refers to parents' beliefs about the importance of HL and their responsibility for developing children's HLL. As demonstrated in FLP studies (Curdt-Christiansen 2009), parents' language beliefs are shaped by the external socio-cultural-political-linguistic environment. In addition to this, our research supplements these studies by highlighting the personal factors such as parental responsibility, cultural and ethnic identity, and emotional attachment that play a significant role in shaping parents' commitment, as exemplified in Mrs. H's account of her intention to "reconnect the link" in Excerpt 5. These factors can either serve as motivators or deterrents, influencing their level of involvement in their children's HLL.

Although living in the UK, the parents in this study are emotionally, linguistically, and culturally linked to their families in the home country. They feel a degree of guilt for not passing on the HL which is vital for intergenerational communication. Their investment in HLL is also a default measure for the next generation to connect with their ethnic identity (Curdt-Christiansen 2016; Little 2019). This commitment to the HL echoes the fundamental ideology in the work of FLP in which identity and culture are perceived as "a cultural 'loyalty' to the home country" and a symbolic

representation of ethnolinguistic origins “reflecting family roots and heritage” (Curdt-Christiansen and Huang 2020: 177).

As illustrated, PI as commitment can be influenced by a series of factors, such as real-life needs, life difficulties, and emotional affiliation to one’s home country, but the commitment to PI in HLL alone is insufficient as real-life circumstances can be very complex and may present various challenges for their involvement. This leads us to the next dimension of the framework.

PI as a process aligns with Spolsky’s language management component in the FLP model (2009) albeit with essential distinctions. While Spolsky’s model provides a comprehensive perspective on parents’ efforts to shape their children’s HLL, it fails to capture the intricate nuances and details involved in the processes of PI. Our model underscores the moment-to-moment decisions in the process of PI rather than the overarching ideologies suggested in Spolsky’s tripartite framework. While acknowledging the potential impact of broader ideological contexts, we consider PI as process rooted in the parents’ choices in actual parent–child interactions (e.g., children’s reactions towards PI) and the real-life challenges they face. This dimension provides in-depth insights into the daily complexities parents navigate, their decision-making processes, and the practical issues that either support or hinder their involvement in their children’s HLL journey.

PI as practice refers to the actual practices and actions parents take to involve themselves in their children’s HLL in daily life contexts. Unlike the unobservable process dimension, practices are normally observable and have, in general, a positive influence on children’s HLL, as illustrated by the four parental roles in the study.

Among all the roles, those of co-educators and teaching assistants are most worthy of note. They are different from other types of PI in general education, in which parents are often positioned in a peripheral context through either involvement in school activities or home teaching (Chee and Ullah 2019). The role of co-educator, as demonstrated in our study, shows a new pattern of PI where parents are directly involved in curriculum/lesson design and classroom activities.

These observable different roles can exist simultaneously, i.e., be played by one parent all in the same class; this was clearly observed in the online platform. The findings demonstrate that parents adjust their degrees of and approaches to involvement according to various aspects, such as changes in the content of the class, their children’s reactions, the teachers’ feedback and the like. The interweaving of different roles may seem to be a parent’s reaction to an online learning programme, but is a reflection of the interaction between both personal and social factors of FLP based on parent’s life trajectory, past experiences, current life circumstances, and aspirations for the future (Curdt-Christiansen and Huang 2020).

Our proposed model illustrates the interconnectedness of the three dimensions of PI. It demonstrates that a parent’s commitment to HL is influenced by a

combination of internal and external factors, as well as the unique life contexts that parents continually navigate throughout their engagement in PI.

7 Conclusions

This study has investigated PI in children's HLL during the COVID-19 lockdowns. It not only reaffirms the pivotal role and effectiveness of PI in enhancing children's HL education but also advances our understanding of PI within the FLP framework. The advancement stems from a detailed exploration of distinct parental roles, as emotional supporters, as co-educators, as teaching assistants, and as technical supporters. Additionally, this study sheds light on the multifaceted factors that shape PI, including parental responsibility, children's invitations, and life contexts. Through rigorous data analysis, a three-dimensional PI model has emerged, intricately linking participants' beliefs, practices and reflections.

The emerging parental roles, identified in this study, has enabled us to propose a new conceptual framework to understand different dimensions of PI. Our study contributes to the prevailing conceptualisation of PI that has lacked a detailed discussion from parents' perspective within the FLP framework. The three dimensions of PI—PI as commitment, as process, and as practice – provide a line of explanation that shows both its complexity and its subtlety. Developed within the scope of FLP, the PI model pays particular attention to the psychological aspects of PI and the roles parents play in PI. This model not only outlines the specific types of PI but also endeavours to elucidate the motives behind PI.

While PI has been of interest to parents, educators, and scholars for decades, the COVID-19 lockdowns have thrust it into the spotlight. The lockdowns have placed parents and children in a relatively static and closed family environment, in which parents have more time to interact with their children and expose them to an increased density of consistent or inconsistent FLP, thus having a greater impact on the children's HLL. The lockdown conditions have complicated the roles of parents in their children's HLL, necessitating a re-conceptualisation of PI. The new model of PI not only offers a theoretical foundation for us to understand parents' beliefs, struggles and concerns, but also provides possibilities for schools and teachers to take appropriate action and work in partnership with parents.

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