



Critical Literature Review

English Learning and Family Language Policy in China: A Critical Literature Review

YUE MA, Werklund School of Education, University of Calgary

ABSTRACT. In this critical review of literature, I focus on English education in China and research on family language policy (FLP) with a view to informing research on FLP in China. I discuss the significant role of English in China, the promotion of English education and school English learning, as well as family language policy regarding English learning practices in China. I have found few studies of family English learning, and thus little consideration of the roles of grandparents, siblings, and children themselves in FLP in China. The purpose of this literature review is to explore Spolsky's (2004) language policy framework and the FLP framework developed by King, Fogle and Logan-Terry (2008) as relevant for the study of home English learning in China. In addition, I analyze different research methods that have been in FLP studies and draw conclusions for research that includes the perspectives and actions of parents, grandparents, and other family members of young children in Chinese families, including those with diverse backgrounds.

RÉSUMÉ. Dans cette recension critique des écrits, je me concentre sur l'enseignement de l'anglais en Chine et sur la recherche sur la politique linguistique familiale (FLP) dans le but d'informer la recherche sur la FLP en Chine. Je discute du rôle important de l'anglais en Chine, de la promotion de l'enseignement de l'anglais et de l'apprentissage de l'anglais à l'école, ainsi que de la FLP relative aux pratiques d'apprentissage de l'anglais en Chine. J'ai trouvé peu d'études sur l'apprentissage de l'anglais en famille, et donc peu de prise en compte des rôles des grands-parents, des frères et sœurs et des enfants eux-mêmes dans la FLP en Chine. L'objectif de cette recension des écrits est d'explorer la politique linguistique de Spolsky (2004) et la FLP développée par King, Fogle et Logan-Terry (2008) dans le cadre de l'étude de l'apprentissage de l'anglais en famille en Chine. En outre, j'analyse les différentes méthodes de recherche qui ont été utilisées dans les études traitant de la FLP et je tire des conclusions pour la recherche intégrant les perspectives et les actions des parents, des grands-parents et d'autres membres de la famille des jeunes enfants dans les familles chinoises, y compris ceux qui ont des origines diverses.

Keywords: *English in China, family English learning, family language policy.*



INTRODUCTION

In the past two decades, English has gained unprecedented importance in China (Ruan & Leung, 2012), driving millions of Chinese people to learn English (Bolton & Graddol, 2012). The high status associated with English in China means English is perceived as a door to wealth, resources, and social positions. For instance, China's attempt for more competitiveness in economic globalization (Guo & Beckett, 2012), its updated curriculum standards (Chao, Xue, & Xu, 2014; Zou & Zhang, 2011), China's national building and modernization (Qi, 2016; Gil & Adamson, 2011), and the value placed on class mobility, further education, employment, promotion, and overseas travel and training (Gao, 2009; Gil & Adamson, 2011; Chao et al., 2014) can all be associated with a push towards English language learning. However, although many parents believe that English provides linguistic capital for their children (Chao et al., 2014), previous research on English learning in China has mainly focused on the school as the main domain of English education (Qi, 2016; Butler & Le, 2018), while less research has focused on the role of families in supporting English language learning in China (Chao et al., 2014).

The research that has looked at the role of families has focused on the influence of parents' socioeconomic status (SES) on students' learning motivation (Butler, 2015), SES background and parental beliefs in English learning (Butler & Le, 2018), parental strategies that support the English vocabulary learning for secondary school pupils (Gao, 2012), parents' financial support of English education (Sun & Pattnaik, 2013), and the choice of English programs in elite schools of parents in Shanghai (Zou & Zhang, 2011). Although these studies have highlighted parental factors, they have all focused on parents' support of school learning, and not on the family as a domain of its own for language learning. This is a significant gap for two reasons. First, given the role of English in many aspects of daily life in China, there is a case to be made for understanding how English functions in domains of Chinese people's daily lives other than the classroom (Bolton & Graddol, 2012), such as in the context of families (Curdt-Christiansen & Wang, 2018). This is a unique context where many non-native English-speaking parents are making efforts to raise bilingual children in China. Second, there is a growing expectation in China that children should start learning English before formal schooling (Bolton & Graddol, 2012; Qi, 2016), which also draws attention to the need to understand and recognize the family as a domain for English language learning. This is not only true in urban areas but also in rural areas. Even though families in remote areas may not have the same access to English resources as the urban families, they might still be eager to help in their children's English competence. Many Chinese parents seek every means to help their children master a near-first-language English competence (Li, 2020), which reflects a belief in the "earlier, the better" approach to language learning (Chen, Zhao, Ruitter, Zhou & Huang, 2020; Sun, 2013). In China, this belief may be linked to the unsuccessful English learning experience of Chinese parents in middle and high school, leading them to refer to their English as "dumb English" (in Chinese 哑巴英语), and them not wanting their children to have the same experience (Liu & Lin, 2019; Yu & Ruan, 2012).



In this article, I argue for a framework for research on children's English language learning at home that considers the role of parents, grandparents, the children themselves, and other family members.

To this end, I explore family language policy (FLP) as a framework for understanding Chinese children's family English learning. Family language policy is a field of study within language policy studies that focuses on family members' overt and covert language planning of language use within the home context (King, Fogle & Logan-Terry, 2008; Spolsky, 2009). FLP draws on Spolsky's (2004) theory of language policy to investigate three independent yet related components—language ideology, language practice, and language management—to investigate family members' beliefs about language, what they do with language in their daily lives, and their actions to improve language use and outcomes (King *et al.*, 2008).

To situate this critical literature review, I begin by providing a brief overview of the role of English in China, including school English learning and family English learning, both contexts in which parents play significant roles. Following this, I focus on various aspects of family language policy research to argue for family language policy as a lens to understand family English learning in China, a context where research on non-native English-speaking parents raising bilingual children in China is scarce.

THE ROLE OF ENGLISH IN CHINA

The enthusiasm for learning English in China began in the late 1970s, when China started its economic modernization program (Zou & Zhang, 2011), led by former vice Chairman Deng Xiaoping who championed the Four Modernizations: the development of agriculture, industry, national defense, and science and technology. During the 1980s and 1990s, a large number of English interpreters and translators were employed, boosting the popularity of English (Bolton & Graddol, 2012). Since 2001, when China joined the World Trade Organization (WTO), English learning has been pushed by the notion of gaining international recognition (Bolton & Graddol, 2012). Later, Beijing's 2008 Olympic Games and Shanghai's 2010 World Expo attracted a large number of foreign visitors, raising Chinese people's passion for and desire to learn English (Gil & Adamson, 2011), which the government supported by sponsoring English courses to help Chinese people communicate with foreign visitors (Gil & Adamson, 2011).

The number of English learners in China has reached approximately 400 million, accounting for one third of China's total population (Wong, 2019). Although this does not mean that these Chinese are able to speak fluent English, it is an indicator of the integral role that English plays in China. The educational domain has played a significant role in bolstering this status and English is now a core subject in elementary and secondary schools throughout China's national educational system. In the next section, I focus on promotion of English through education.



THE PROMOTION OF ENGLISH THROUGH EDUCATION

Since the 2000s, a series of national language-in-education policies have been developed, which confirm the position of English in education. In 2001, the Ministry of Education issued "Guidelines of Promoting English Language Instruction in Primary Schools" to require English to be taught starting in the third grade (Qi, 2016). This was not only to support students' early learning of English in China (Gao, 2009), but also to ensure Chinese primary school children across China would all have access to formal English education (Chao, Xue, & Xu, 2014). The Guidelines, which were last updated in 2011 (Qi, 2016), mandate 40-minute English lessons three times per week in primary schools. English is one of the three core subjects in exams in primary schools, along with Chinese and mathematics (Qi, 2016). In 2003, a separate curriculum guideline was introduced with a standard for English education in senior high schools in China, followed in 2004 by the curriculum standard for tertiary (post-secondary) English education (Ruan & Leung, 2012). English is also one of the main subjects in China's National University Entrance Qualifying Exam (Bolton & Graddol, 2012).

In addition to the curricular focus on English, Chinese students feel the drive to learn English well as this has become associated with class mobility, educational, employment, and promotion opportunities, and access to overseas travel and training (Gao, 2009; Gil & Adamson, 2011; Chao et al., 2014).

Early Childhood English Education

Early childhood education is for children between the ages of three to six (Yu & Ruan, 2012), and this is a popular avenue for English education in China, for a number of reasons (Yu & Ruan, 2012). First, since English is now a part of the social environments of Chinese children (e.g., environmental print, movies, TV shows), children themselves are curious to know more about English. Second, many Chinese parents believe their children can avoid the negative and painful English learning experience they had by learning English at a young age (Yu & Ruan, 2012). Third, studies are highlighting the benefits of learning English at an early age in terms of motivation. For example, Strong and Zhao (2001) found that an English immersion program in a Chinese kindergarten created a relaxing learning environment and increased children's motivation to learn English. Similarly, Jin et al. (2016) discovered that children who study English in kindergarten are generally engaged and active in learning English. In a recent study, Chen, Zhao, Ruitter, Zhou and Huang (2020) found that early childhood English learning had a positive effect on children's English and Chinese language performances in their subsequent primary school learning.

Primary English Education

As mentioned above, since 2001, there has been in place an English language curriculum for primary education, which serves children between 6 and 12 years old. Wu (2012) conducted two survey studies focused on the implementation of the primary English curriculum in China



and found that the goal to develop the students as a whole person through teaching English communication and the four basic skills, as well as an awareness of culture, has led to a rapid development of English textbooks and teaching materials. Schools and families in remote areas may not be able to afford the supplementary materials (Chen & Wang, 2012), whereas urban students are more exposed to English in their daily lives and their parents may find more English teachers and English classes, thus more opportunities to practice English. As a result, urban students often have better English competencies than rural students.

Secondary English Education

Secondary English education includes compulsory high school English education (Grade 7-9) and senior high school English education (Grade 10-12). The main goals of senior high school English education are to develop the four language skills and to enable students' affective development and cultural awareness (Chen & Wang, 2012). Chen and Wang identified several positive changes in terms of teaching practices and teacher beliefs with respect to the curriculum reform in 2003. First, the reform requires that teachers be familiar with learner-centered teaching, student teaching autonomy, and new learning strategies. Second, they found that more teachers hold a belief about the development of students' overall competence rather than knowledge transmission. Third, they found that many teachers participate in public lessons and demonstration lessons, as well as join action research plans to improve their teaching. Nevertheless, one big obstacle for the reform is the college entrance examination, which makes it difficult to put the theory of the curriculum reform into practice.

While there is clearly a lot of emphasis on English language learning in the school system, families too play an important supporting role for their children's English learning in all three levels of school.

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN ENGLISH LEARNING

Many Chinese parents are actively involved in supporting their children's English learning in schools (Chao *et al.*, 2014; Curdt-Christiansen & Wang, 2018). For example, Gao (2012) investigated a variety of parental strategies in supporting the English vocabulary learning of a group of elite secondary school students in Beijing. By conducting surveys and interviews with the students, the researchers found that parents were positioned as critical agents in their children's learning, using social support strategies, discursive support strategies, and material support strategies to improve their children's English learning. With these strategies, parents provided social opportunities for them to widen their English engagement and supported their children's motivation to improve their English, complementing the in-class education they were receiving.

Wei (2011) conducted a survey of 199 BE parents and 196 non-BE parents to examine parental attitudes towards Chinese-English bilingual education (BE) in primary and secondary schools. He found that 78 percent of non-BE parents (those who did not send their children to BE school)



and over 85 percent of BE parents (those who sent their children to BE school) held positive attitudes towards BE. This was due to three factors: parents' demands for their children's English proficiency, their dissatisfaction with the traditional English teaching approach in school English learning, and their trust that BE will improve their children's English proficiency. Overall, this shows a positive attitude towards bilingual education, which suggests that parents can, and often do, play an important role by being involved in their children's English learning.

Sun (2013) interviewed 10 Chinese parents to examine their beliefs, strategies, and challenges in supporting their children's English education and found that the parents provided financial support, assisted their children's school English learning, and acted as English learning tutors for their children. The parents expressed the same belief that English learning should start as early as possible, through family learning or other English learning resources, instead of solely relying on school learning. They expressed negative views toward English school teaching in China, as they felt it had failed to provide a high enough quality English learning environment to meet students' needs or boost their motivation to learn.

Butler (2015) explored how parents' socioeconomic status (SES) influenced secondary students' motivation to learn English in China. Parents had significant but different influences on their children's motivation, depending on their SES and the children's grade level. Parents with higher SES were able to adjust their behaviors in accordance with their children's development; those with lower SES, in contrast, were more likely to display more behaviors that deterred their children's motivation. For the children of parents with a higher SES, their motivation increased as their grade level increased because their parents were able to provide them with more opportunities to practice English out of school. This highlights the importance of taking into account parents' SES in studies of family language policy.

Zou and Zhang (2011) conducted a mixed-methods study to investigate how families' social, cultural, and economic background influenced secondary English learners' performance in Shanghai. They compared quantitative data from questionnaires to student English proficiency tests and conducted telephone interviews with the students and teachers. They concluded that the parents' economic and educational backgrounds positively affected children's English learning outcomes. On the one hand, good economic conditions enabled them to pay for better English resources outside schools, which can be quite expensive. In addition, parents with stronger educational backgrounds well-educated parents tended to choose better English programs and even teach the children English at home from an early age. The study showed that parents' involvement is very important in children's English language learning. It would be interesting in future FLP studies to investigate strategies parents with lower SES and educational backgrounds might use to support their children's English learning.

What these studies tell us is that, in the Chinese context, parents' strategies, attitudes, SES, and educational background have an influence on their children's English learning at school. Effective English learning is not only taking place within classroom settings, but also in the home, which highlights the need to consider parental involvement in the domain of the family to gain a better understanding of English learning in China (Butler & Le, 2018). This brings me



to exploring family language policy (FLP) as a framework for research on English learning in China.

FAMILY LANGUAGE POLICY

Family language policy (FLP) refers to the study of family members' explicit and overt language planning of language use within home context (King *et al.*, 2008). FLP provides a framework for understanding interactions between children, their parents, and other family members with regards to child language development (De Houwer, 1999). It reflects parental language ideologies and beliefs, which are situated in societal ideologies and beliefs about languages (King, Fogle & Logan-Terry, 2008). Drawing on Spolky's (2004) framework of language policy, FLP integrates family language beliefs or ideologies (the thinking and attitudes about language of family members), family language practices (the actual behavior of language within families), and family language management (family members' effort to modify or influence the language practice by different intervention, planning, and strategies).

Traditionally, there are three interconnected, but distinct subfields of language policy: status planning that concerns the language functions, corpus planning that considers the language forms, and acquisition planning that deals with the language teaching and learning (Cooper, 1989; Kloss, 1969). In FLP, these often occur simultaneously (King, Fogle & Logan-Terry, 2008). For instance, for status planning in FLP, parents or other family members might decide whether and when to use English or Mandarin with their children; for corpus planning, they have to decide which variety of Chinese to use, or what literacy activities can be taken in English; for acquisition planning, they must also decide how and when to teach English, or whether it should be taught formally or informally.

At present, most FLP studies have focused on either bilingual or multilingual development and heritage language maintenance. In China, the FLP context would be more similar to a bilingualism/ multilingualism context; however, FLP research that has focused on heritage language maintenance can also provide insight into the methodologies, theoretical frameworks, and findings of the research. Therefore, I review the literature in these two areas.

FLP for Bilingual and Multilingual Development

A common approach to FLP is the "one parent one language" (OPOL) approach. Research has found that while this may be a commonly stated approach, in practice, there is wide variation. For example, De Houwer and Bornstein (2016) conducted a longitudinal study to explore 31 bilingual mothers' language choices in child-directed speech in Belgium. The mothers completed language use questionnaires when the children were 5 months, 20 months, and 53 months old. At each age, verbal interactions between mothers and children were also videotaped. From the results of questionnaires, most mothers reported that they constantly used the same single language with their children. However, data from the video found that when the children were 20 months old, half of the mothers who claimed that they spoke the same language for most of



the time were actually using the other language occasionally. When the children were 53 months old, most of the 21 mothers whose full data were available used the same single language again as in their reports (18 using Dutch and 6 using French). The findings indicated that it was difficult to stick strictly to an OPOL. This study also emphasizes the importance of using combined methods to account for gaps between stated FLP beliefs (interviews) and actual FLP practices (home observations, audio/video recordings, etc.).

In an online parenting forum, Piller and Gerber (2018) investigated Australian parents' discussions regarding their desires for their children to be bilingual and the challenges of bilingual parenting. Fifteen original posts and 266 responses regarding bilingual parenting that were posted over a seven-year period were collected for analysis. The researchers found that although parents believed bilingualism to be an asset for children, they felt it was hard for them to conduct effective bilingual parenting. While the parents showed a strong preference for OPOL from childbirth, this was difficult to implement consistently in practice because the fathers spent much less time with the children than the mothers. The parents also worried that early childhood bilingualism would negatively influence their children's English learning and later school success, even though they were aware of the benefits of bilingualism. Considering this, the researchers suggested that families alone might not be an ideal place to advocate for bilingualism; instead, institutions (especially schools) should also advocate the status of bilingualism.

Schwartz, Moin, Leikin, and Breikopf (2010) conducted a questionnaire study to investigate the choices of 111 Russian immigrant parents in Israel of either monolingual or Russian-Hebrew bilingual kindergarten (daycare) for their children. Three factors contributed significantly to parents' kindergarten choice: parents' Russian cultural identification and the number of children in the family. The parents who identified more with Russian culture and had fewer children chose bilingual kindergarten. Families with older children who frequently used the majority language (Hebrew) at home might be more likely to choose monolingual Hebrew kindergarten. It can be concluded that FLP is influenced by both subjective and objective factors.

Slavkov (2017) conducted a survey in Ontario of parents of 170 school-aged children who are growing up with two or more languages. The survey focused on parents' perceptions on how their FLP and school language choice impacted their children's bilingualism and multilingualism. The findings showed that children's bilingualism is affected by the choice of the language spoken between parents, as well as the choice of the language used in child-parent interactions. Slavkov found that anglophone or francophone families might speak one language at home and send their children to schools offering immersion of the other language. Altogether, the author found out five language practice modes of FLP, rather than simple OPOL. For heritage-language families, they may use the heritage language at home, enrol their child in French instruction at school, and have their children learn English through contact with people and friends who speak English.

In summary, these studies suggest that while parents in bilingual or multilingual contexts tend to be in favor of bilingualism, they might have certain concerns and misunderstandings related to bilingualism and how to foster bilingual competence in their children. This may influence their



language choices. These studies also demonstrate the interplay between the three components of FLP (practice, management, and ideology) and highlight the importance of studying FLP. These would be important to understand how parents/family members raise bilingual children in China.

FLP for Heritage Language Maintenance

FLP has also been an important lens in research on heritage language maintenance. While English in China is not a heritage language, this literature can shed light on contexts where the home language is not the same as the dominant societal language.

Smith-Christmas, Bergroth, and Bezioglu-Goktolga (2019) comparing the experiences of parents in three families who had a positive attitude towards minority language FLP to explore the notion of success in FLP. The three families were in distinct contexts: Turkish in the Netherlands in an immigrant context, Swedish in Finland, which is an officially bilingual state, and Gaelic in Scotland in an indigenous minority language context. Through their analysis, which took into consideration the interaction among ideologies, practice, and management, the researchers challenged the view of interpreting success in FLP as child language outcome alone. Instead, this study emphasized that success in FLP should be interpreted through an understanding of the complex intersections between personal and societal identities. They pointed out the importance of looking into parental challenges (e.g., emotional connection, cultural barrier, sociopolitical identities), such as in FLP. This is relevant to any FLP research in the Chinese context as well.

Kang (2015) conducted a survey study to examine the FLPs of Korean parents in the United States. The aim was to investigate how demographic variables interact with the three components of FLP (language practice, management, and ideology) in terms of heritage language maintenance. It would be worth noting that this study draws conclusions related to the three components of FLP based on parents' stated FLP (what they said they did), not their actual practices (what they actually did). The survey of 480 parents showed that, in general, child gender, age of English exposure, and parental attitudes strongly predicted child's oral and literacy skills in the heritage language (Korean), which were indicated on a 5-point scale rating by the parents. Specifically, length of settlement and the language parents choose to speak to the child were closely related to oral skills, whereas parents' language management strategies (e.g., how many books in Korean are at home; how much time is allowed in Korean or English TV; whether sending their children to Korean-language school, etc.) were better predictors of strengths in literacy skills. It should be noted that parents' stated FLPs and ratings of their children's language abilities might not be consistent with the actual FLP practices and children's actual language abilities. This highlights for me the importance of FLP research using diverse research methods, such as parent-child audio recordings, home observation, and standard language tests in addition to surveys or interviews.



Similarly, Kaveh (2017) examined the FLP of a group of second-generation Iranian families living in the Northeast United States in relation to their children's Persian heritage language maintenance. Both online surveys and interviews (n=10) were used to explore how FLP influences children's Persian maintenance of heritage language community is dispersed. The parents reported that their children's Persian development was dependent not only on parents' language ideology, practices (reported), and management, but also on a variety of other factors. For instance, all parents were sure that they would speak Persian to the children after the children were born, but this determination changed in accordance with the child's dual language development, the motivation to speak Persian, and the influence of peers, close relatives and friends, and visits to a Persian-speaking community, and the wider sociopolitical environment. This study emphasizes the importance of taking into account factors beyond the family in FLP research.

In the context of Chinese learning, Li and Sun (2017) conducted a case study of four Chinese-Canadian immigrant families to explore their FLP in terms of supporting their children's Chinese. All the parents held positive attitudes toward their children's bilingual learning and showed that their FLPs were constantly changing in accordance with children's language abilities and external environments. For instance, although all the families used Chinese as the sole family language, each family developed very different types of FLPs due to different community, parental, and child agency factors. For instance, parents of one family changed their Mandarin only home language practice to English only because they wanted their son to master English. As a result, the researchers developed a continuum development model of Chinese families' FLP to recognize that these change over time and in response to internal and external factors.

Surrain (2018) examined Spanish-speaking mothers' perceptions of bilingualism and how these influence their FLPs with their preschoolers' Spanish heritage language development in the United States. Through n-depth interviews w (n = 14), Surrain found that all the mothers put high value in Spanish maintenance, but their language practices and management were quite different. While some mothers had a Spanish-only-at-home policy, others spoke both Spanish and English at home and used more flexible strategies (e.g., repeating children's English in Spanish, asking children to use Spanish to explain what they said in English) to promote child's active Spanish use. What was common to all the participants was that their FLP efforts were hindered by social pressure to learn English and limited awareness of dual language programs or where they could find such information. What this study highlights is that parents' intentions for heritage language maintenance may be threatened or weakened due to various constraints, such as low-income jobs, uncertain legal status, and inadequate majority language skills. Once again, this emphasizes the interplay between the 3 components of FLP and the importance of using multiple methods to draw conclusions about FLPs.

Some researchers have turned their attention to the role of other family members in FLP. This is highly relevant to FLP in China, for it is a tradition in China for the grandparents to live with and take care of their grandchildren (Liu & Lin, 2019). Smith-Christmas's (2014) ethnographic study examined the role of extended family members in the FLP of a bilingual Gaelic-English family in Scotland. This included the children's grandmother, uncles, and aunts and how they



influenced the child's language development and attitude towards each language. The mother and the paternal grandmother facilitated a strongly Gaelic-centered FLP. Meanwhile, other family members' occasional participated in this Gaelic-centered FLP, but the children maintained English as their peer language. In a different context, Crump (2017) conducted a case study to investigate Japanese-Canadian children's perspectives on their multilingualism (English, Japanese, and for some, French) in three families in Montreal. In the three families, the mothers were Japanese, and the fathers were Caucasian Anglophones. Through multiple methods of engaging in research in young children (e.g., play, drawing, storytelling) the young children expressed ideologies of languages as distinct entities, which did not always align with their language practices, which were much more fluid, depending on the social environments and their parents' intended FLPs. This study also demonstrates that parents' perspectives alone cannot provide a full understanding of a family language policy in practice. The children, too, have an important role in shaping how language is used in the home and in different social domains.

Similarly, Revis (2019) explored children's role in shaping parents' FLPs, with a focus on Ethiopian and Colombian refugee families (14 Ethiopian caregivers and 8 of children, and 15 Columbian caregivers and 9 of the children) in New Zealand. The children influenced their parents' language practices in many ways. For instance, the children commented on their parents' language proficiency, continued to use English which was different from their parents' language, interpreted for their parents, and they even correct their parents' English or taught English (the majority language) to their parents. Revis pointed out that as the children were adapting to English-speaking schools, some were resisting their parents' language management and home language rules (e.g., refusing speaking home language, insisting speaking English, and making metalinguistic comments). This study implies that parents should understand child agency in FLP, as well as challenges it brings to raising bilingual children.

Overall, the studies I have reviewed in this section emphasize that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to developing an FLP. For me, this means that FLP research needs to draw on multiple methods to ensure that the interactions between the many factors and actors in an FLP are considered.

RESEARCH ON FAMILY ENGLISH LEARNING IN CHINA

There has been limited research conducted in China on family language learning practices. As Zou and Zhang (2011) noted, while some Chinese parents teach English to their children at home from a very early age, this kind of family English teaching has been explored in a limited number of studies. I focus on these here.

Zhang (2009) interviewed eight children and their parents in Beijing to understand family factors that influenced the children's English learning. It was found that almost all parents in all eight families emphasized the importance of children's English learning, while their strategies and practices were much different. They could be categorised into four types: finance provider



(paying for different kinds of extra-curriculum English programs), exam-oriented (considering English an important subject for academic achievement), not exam-oriented (believing English is not just a subject and children should study English as they wish), and direct teaching (teaching English at home). For the last type, the mothers were all English teachers themselves, which made it easier for them to communicate with their children in English and guide their children's language learning. Through observation, English test scores, and records of academic performance in school, Zhang found that the three mothers focused on different aspects of English teaching, which resulted in differences in their children's English competence: one was better at English listening and reading, one was fluent in daily English conversations, and the other was fluent in both expressive and receptive English abilities.

Huang (2010) conducted an autobiographical study to explain her strategies in teaching English to her son Qiqi at home. Her research approach is an echo of early FLP research, which was done by parent-researchers who studied their own child's language acquisition (e.g., Fantini, 1985; de Houwer, 1990; Döpke, 1992; Lanza, 1997). Huang believed that English should be taught in authentic and meaningful interactions, she made efforts to bring English into her son's life in various contexts for the first six years of his life. She obtained a variety of early English learning materials from the Internet, such as English nursing rhymes, e-version English stories, and English cartoon programs. In public places like shopping malls, restaurants, and airports, she explained the meaning of English signs and English packages to Qiqi. English was the most frequently used communication language between her and Qiqi. After five years of English teaching at home, Qiqi's English competence developed rapidly. Although it was a case of only one autoethnographic study, Huang (2010) presented evidence for successful English teaching at home, though it took tremendous resources and effort.

Liu and Lin (2019) also conducted an autoethnographic study to document their family English teaching to their elder son. They shared their bilingual parenting experiences in policy decision making, the difficulties they encountered, their bilingual parenting strategies, and their self-reflections. Rather than direct instruction, they chose to use English as their sole communication tool. It was not an easy task in China, and they encountered difficulties such as their own lack of English competence, criticisms from family members, and their own doubts about their abilities to succeed. However, their son managed to master both Chinese and English, and performed well at school. This study demonstrates that it is possible to raise a bilingual child in China through careful and persistent English teaching and planning at home. This study is significant in that it is the first one to illustrate Chinese-English bilingual FPL of parents who are both non-native English speakers.

One commonality among these studies was that the parents were all English teachers themselves, which might be one reason for their successful English teaching at home. In Chen's (2019) study which investigated 50 non-professional Chinese parents' family English environment, the findings were different. This was a questionnaire study that examined non-professional Chinese parents' English resource investments and education strategies at home. Although most parents purchased English learning materials, they tended to purchase audio and video materials rather than print books because they were not able to read English books to



their children. It is relevant to note that while most Chinese parents have little difficulty teaching their children simple Chinese words and reading Chinese books, non-professional Chinese parents tend to provide less direct teaching of Chinese at home. Not surprisingly, the participants did very little direct English teaching at home, because they did not have enough time and they were worried about their strong English accent. Chen suggested that schools provide parent education training to help such parents engage in home English teaching. This seems to be an important avenue for more research.

These studies show parents' actions, strategies, and methods in teaching their children English at home, as well as the obstacles that some face. Even in the face of obstacles, some parents make significant efforts to support their children's English learning at home. Liu and Lin's (2019) conducted an autoethnographical study on their own family language policy in English as non-native English speakers to investigate their child's bilingual development learning within their family context in China. They showed that both parents and grandparents had a role in supporting the child's bilingual development: the grandparents provided Chinese input for the child at home, while the parents only spoke English to the child. In a separate study, Gao (2012) interviewed several English-learning secondary school pupils, and some children mentioned that their siblings supported their language learning. For example, one child's brothers and sisters shared her with their own English learning materials, and another child's brothers voluntarily provided him advice on English learning methods.

In my review, I have not found many studies that have looked at parental support to home English learning in China, and even fewer that include the role of grandparents or other family members in the Chinese context. This seems to be an important line of inquiry given the place of English in China and because intergenerational families are still common. For this kind of analysis, King and Fogle's (2013) notion of parental agency, or the role and action of parents in shaping language planning for their children, should be expanded to include other members who contribute to and participate in an FLP.

There are two studies exploring parents' FLP in China from different perspectives, which inspired me for future FLP studies in China, as the two were among the first to focus on Chinese parents as non-native English speakers and they both included grandparents as important language agents. Curdt-Christiansen and Wang (2018) explored the family language policies of eight Chinese middle-class parents in terms of their use of Chinese dialects, Mandarin, and English. By interviews, family talk recordings, home observation, and material artefacts, the authors found that parents did not use Chinese dialects with their children, and parental agency of language choices were strongly influenced by their perceived linguistic hierarchy (parents' belief that English and Chinese are superior to dialects). As a result, the parents put high value in English and Mandarin by different means of learning activities and practices, while restricting or forbidding dialect use at home. The authors concluded that the FLP choices of Chinese parents were facilitated by their attitudes towards different languages and their desire to meet the requirements of the public educational system, in which Mandarin and English were highly valued. The study demonstrated FLP is never an isolated policy, but rather integrated with factors outside families.



In Liu and Lin (2019)'s autoethnographical study, they found that parents with English skills can use their English repertoire to assist their children's English learning at home, even though they may not be native English speakers. Some of the strategies they used included discussing their bilingual parenting experiences (e.g., speaking English to the child when living in China, and then speaking Chinese to the child when living in Canada) as they were implementing their FLP, sharing the difficulties they encountered through self-reflections. This study was based on language back-up system theory (Carroll, 1999), holding that children's innate grammar compensates for parents' improper linguistic input and helps to develop language skills beyond parents' abilities. The success of Liu and Lin's approach to FLP in China could provide some encouragement to other parents who are considering bilingual parenting or English speaking at home in China.

DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

In this critical literature review about FLP, I have drawn out some important considerations for future research. First, in addition to investigating FLP of the parents, researchers might include the language ideologies, practices, and management of grandparents and other family members as well. Second, as FLP involves complex interactions between different roles and social influences, different data collection methods are important for ensuring a rigorous analysis, rather than relying on a single method, such as surveys or interviews. Home observations and grandparent-child audio recordings, for instance, might serve as useful data to investigate actual family language practices between the members of a family. Third, more research needs to be done to focus on parents who are not English teachers or who do not have strong English competence themselves. This opens various questions for FLP research in China, which I list here in relation to the three components of FLP:

1. Language ideologies
 - What are Chinese family members' respective ideologies of language and bilingualism?
 - What are some of the social and economic factors that might inform these ideologies?
 - What methods will help a researcher understand language ideologies?
2. Language practices
 - What are the stated and actual language practices of family members in families that are trying to raise their children bilingually?
 - What social and economic factors might be influencing the differences between stated and actual practices of the different family members, including the children?
 - What methodological approaches would provide insights into these questions about language practices?
3. Language management
 - What are Chinese family members' respective stated and actual strategies for children's English-Chinese bilingual learning in China?



- What are the similarities and differences of language strategies among the different family members, if any, and what might be the factors influencing those differences?
- How do family members respond to and cope with obstacles and challenges they may face in raising bilingual children in China?

CONCLUSION

In this article, I have argued that in order to provide a complete picture of FLP in China for English learning, more research focusing on the following questions stated above is needed. In addition, this research should involve parents who are not English teachers themselves and include the perspectives of grandparents or other family members and children themselves. Their roles in the FLP should also be investigated. Last, it would be important to understand the obstacles families may face with supporting English learning at home, as the parents themselves are non-native English speakers. With its multiple components for understanding language policy, FLP serves as a relevant framework for exploring in more depth how Chinese people are responding to the increasing push towards English within the domain of the family.

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