

Family Foreign Language Education Planning Research in China: Key Issues and Future Directions

Hao Xu

National Research Centre for Foreign Language Education, Beijing Foreign Studies University, Beijing, PR China

*Corresponding author: xuhaokent@bfsu.edu.cn

Article information	
Abstract	This positioning paper maps the landscape of family foreign language education planning (FFLEP) research in China, framing key issues and future directions within the broader context of language acquisition planning studies. FFLEP is conceptualized as a dynamic process where families actively engage in planning and implementing foreign language education for their members. The paper identifies the key elements characterizing FFLEP and delves into the multifaceted role of the family in this endeavor. By situating FFLEP within the intersecting domains of language education and language policy and planning, the paper contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of this emerging field and sets the agenda for future research.
Keywords	family foreign language education planning (FFLEP), language policy, language planning, language education, parents
APA citation:	Xu, H. Family foreign language education planning research in China: Key issues and future directions. <i>PASAA</i> , 70, 1–29.

1. Introduction

In recent years, family language policy and planning (FLPP) has emerged as a distinct field of study at the intersection of language policy and planning (LPP) and language education (Curdt-Christiansen, 2018). This growing area of inquiry

has garnered increasing attention within the broader field of applied linguistics, reflecting its relevance and importance in understanding language use and learning within familial contexts. Within China, there has been a surge in research examining various aspects of FLPP, particularly as they relate to children's foreign language learning (Xu et al., 2024). This focus on foreign language education, especially English, is a distinguishing feature of the Chinese research landscape when compared to international studies in this area. While there are commonalities in the insights gained from both Chinese and international research, the unique emphasis on foreign language education in China underscores the need for a nuanced understanding of the local research landscape. Against this backdrop, it becomes imperative to define and delineate the contours of FLPP research in China. By mapping out the key issues, trends, and characteristics of this research, we can gain a clearer understanding of its current status and identify potential directions for future inquiry. This, in turn, will facilitate more targeted and impactful studies that can contribute to the advancement of both theoretical and practical knowledge in the field of FLPP, particularly as it pertains to the Chinese context.

In defining and delineating the landscape of family foreign language education planning (FFLEP) research in China, it is crucial to begin by exploring how this field reflects the acquisition planning that forms its foundation. Acquisition planning, a core component of LPP, is concerned with the learning and teaching of languages (Lo Bianco, 2010), making it integral to understanding FFLEP practices. By examining how FFLEP in China aligns with or diverges from global trends in acquisition planning, we can gain valuable insights into the unique characteristics and challenges of this growing field. Furthermore, in order to truly comprehend the complexities of FFLEP, it is essential to focus on the role of the family as a social unit. Families, with their distinct features and characteristics, serve as the basic lens through which we observe and interpret FFLEP ideologies and practices. By unpacking the familial influences on language learning decisions, we can develop a deeper understanding of the motivations, challenges, and opportunities that shape FFLEP in China. Within this framework, we aim to identify

and categorize the key issues in FFLEP research in China. These issues span multiple dimensions, including perspectives, methodologies, theorization, and applications. By systematically addressing these areas, we hope to identify potential areas for further exploration into FFLEP in China.

This paper is intended as a positioning article, which differs from conventional empirical or theoretical studies by mapping and defining the landscape of a research area rather than conducting new primary data collection or testing specific hypotheses. The primary function of this positioning paper is to frame FFLEP within China by identifying key issues, delineating current trends, and suggesting future directions within the broader context of language acquisition planning studies. Positioning papers serve an essential role in the academic discourse by highlighting gaps and proposing agendas that drive future inquiry. In this work, FFLEP as a distinct and dynamic process embedded within the intersections of language education and policy is examined, thus providing a foundational understanding and setting the stage for subsequent empirical studies. Each section of this paper contributes to this positioning by conceptualizing FFLEP, exploring its multifaceted roles and challenges, and offering a roadmap for future research endeavors. This approach allows for a more comprehensive understanding of FFLEP in China and highlights the necessity of situating this emerging field within the larger landscape of applied linguistics.

2. Acquisition Planning in Family Foreign Language Education

This section delves into the intricacies of FFLEP, exploring how it reflects and should conform to acquisition planning. Acknowledging that FFLEP itself can be viewed as a form of acquisition planning, this section emphasizes the proactive and strategic nature of such planning as well as its interconnectedness with other components of language planning such as corpus planning and status planning. From there, it proceeds to illuminate the distinctive features of FFLEP from an acquisition planning perspective, shedding light on the unique elements that characterize this particular component of language education planning. By

examining FFLEP through the lens of acquisition planning, this section aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the complexities involved in acquisition planning within the family unit.

2.1 FFLEP as a Form of Acquisition Planning

Acquisition planning refers to the strategic process of designing and implementing programs and policies aimed at facilitating language learning and development (Lo Bianco, 2010). It involves identifying language learning goals, determining the most effective means of achieving these goals, and allocating resources accordingly. Key features of acquisition planning include its focus on learner needs and outcomes, emphasis on practical application and real-world use of the target language, and integration of various learning modalities and technologies.

Acquisition planning is closely related to other components of language planning, such as corpus planning and status planning (Lo Bianco, 2010). Corpus planning involves the development and standardization of the linguistic elements of a language, including its vocabulary, grammar, and orthography. Status planning, on the other hand, concerns the social and political status of a language within a given community or society. Acquisition planning, as the strategic design and implementation of language learning programs and policies, is inherently linked to both corpus planning and status planning. Corpus planning lays the linguistic foundation for acquisition planning, and ensures that learners have access to a consistent and comprehensive linguistic resource, enabling effective communication and facilitating the acquisition process. Similarly, status planning has a profound impact on acquisition planning. It often influences which language or languages are prioritized as target languages for learning. Status planning also affects the allocation of resources for language acquisition, as policies and legislation can either promote or hinder the availability of funding, educational materials, and learning opportunities. The interconnectedness of these planning efforts underscores the importance of a holistic approach to language planning.

Corpus planning, status planning, and acquisition planning must work in harmony in order to ensure that learners have access to high-quality language education programs and resources. By understanding and leveraging the relationships among these planning components, language planners can more effectively promote language vitality, diversity, and acquisition within their communities.

Thus, adopting a holistic approach to language planning, where acquisition planning is integrated with corpus planning and status planning, has profound implications for research and practice in FFLEP. Most importantly, it emphasizes the interconnectedness of different components of language planning. This ensures that research in FFLEP is comprehensive and takes into account the diverse needs and goals of learners, educators, policymakers, and community members. The holistic approach underscores the importance of considering the broader social, political, and cultural contexts in which language learning and development occur. This awareness prompts researchers and practitioners to examine how factors such as language policies, societal attitudes towards language learning, and the availability of resources influence the effectiveness of language education programs. The holistic approach also encourages innovation and experimentation in FFLEP research and practice. By recognizing the interdependence of acquisition planning, corpus planning, and status planning, researchers and practitioners are challenged to develop integrated strategies that simultaneously address linguistic, educational, and societal goals. This holistic orientation fosters the development of more effective and sustainable language education programs that are responsive to the dynamic needs of learners and communities.

To illustrate the interconnectedness of different components of language planning within the context of FFLEP, we can consider the example regarding a family's decision for their children to learn a language other than English (LOTE) as a mandatory school subject. This decision does not occur in isolation; rather, it is influenced by and interconnected with various factors. For instance, the parents'

choice might be shaped by the perceived status of the LOTE within the community or country, which in turn reflects how that language is valued and positioned in the larger societal discourse. This status can be manifested in public policies, educational curricula, or even cultural attitudes towards the language. Additionally, the interconnectedness of language planning components is evident in how the family's decision intersects with the school's language education program. The school might have specific requirements or recommendations regarding which LOTE to offer, based on factors such as teacher availability, educational resources, or the school's overall language education philosophy. These requirements, in turn, might influence the parents' choice or vice versa. Furthermore, the interconnectedness extends to the learners themselves. The children's interests, aptitudes, and learning styles might also play a role in the decision-making process. For instance, if a child has a strong interest in a particular culture or region associated with the LOTE, this might influence the parents to choose that language. As can be seen, the interconnectedness of different components of language planning is exemplified in this scenario by the interplay of various factors such as community perceptions, school requirements, and learner interests. These factors are not considered separately but rather as parts of a larger, interconnected system that shapes language education decisions and outcomes.

In the Chinese context, for instance, the decision for students to learn a LOTE as their first foreign language, particularly when mandated as a school subject, is deeply intertwined with broader educational policies and societal expectations (Yongyan Zheng, personal communication). Decisions around FFLEP are influenced by a complex interplay of policy, societal expectations, and individual motivations. For instance, while some families might initially plan for their children to learn a LOTE, such as Japanese or French, as a means of broadening cultural horizons or enhancing future opportunities, the increasing difficulty level of LOTE exams in the college entrance examination (Gaokao) can significantly alter these plans. As the Gaokao plays a pivotal role in determining students' educational trajectories, the perceived challenge and high stakes

associated with LOTE testing can lead families to reconsider their initial language choices. This shift illustrates how FFLEP in China is not merely about personal or familial preferences but is dynamically shaped by external educational policies and evolving societal attitudes towards language learning. The interconnections between these components underscore the complexity of FFLEP in China, highlighting a need for further investigation into how family decisions are continuously renegotiated in response to changing educational landscapes and pressures. By examining these dynamics, researchers can better understand the unique characteristics of FFLEP in China, contributing valuable insights into how families navigate the multifaceted challenges of foreign language education within a high-stakes testing environment.

In conclusion, it is evident that the interconnectedness of language planning components is a fundamental feature of acquisition planning, and by extension, of FFLEP. This interconnectedness underscores the importance of adopting a holistic approach when examining FFLEP, as the various components are all intricately linked and mutually influential.

2.2 Key Elements Characterising FFLEP

In this subsection, we will delve into the key elements that characterize FFLEP. Specifically, we will explore (1) standards and content, which refer to the guidelines and materials that shape language learning within the family context; (2) process and methods, encompassing the approaches and techniques employed to facilitate effective language acquisition; (3) assessment and feedback, which involve evaluating the learner's progress and providing constructive input for improvement; and (4) investment and gain, pertaining to the resources committed to language education and the expected outcomes or benefits.

These elements are chosen because they encapsulate the essential aspects of FFLEP from the perspective of acquisition planning. Standards and content set the foundation for language learning, ensuring that it aligns with the family's goals

and values. Process and methods are crucial for implementing effective language instruction tailored to the learner’s needs and abilities. Assessment and feedback provide a mechanism for monitoring progress and adjusting the learning plan as necessary. Investment and gain recognize that language education requires a commitment of resources, including time, money, and effort, and that this investment should yield tangible benefits for the learner and the family. By addressing these key elements, we can gain a comprehensive understanding of FFLEP and how it aligns with the broader goals of language acquisition planning.

2.2.1 Standards and Content

In the context of FFLEP, “standards” refer to the ultimate or long-term objectives that a family sets for their children’s foreign language learning. These objectives are not merely aspirational but are validated as being both valuable and achievable. Similar to the standards stipulated by education authorities for school curricula, they serve as guidelines to ensure that the language education provided within and beyond the family aligns with broader educational goals. However, it is important to note that the standards in FFLEP differ from those in traditional education settings in several key ways. First, they are often implicitly conceived or unconsciously held, meaning that they are not always explicitly written out or formally published. Instead, they evolve organically as the family progresses in their understanding and pursuit of certain goals. This fluidity allows for flexibility and adaptability, enabling the standards to change and transform dynamically in response to the family’s needs and the children’s developing abilities.

Such standards cannot be examined in the same way as those that are overly prescriptive and rigid. Instead, they should be viewed as living documents that are constantly being revisited, revised, and refined. This approach recognizes that language learning is a complex and multifaceted process that requires ongoing negotiation and collaboration among family

members. When examining standards in the context of FFLEP, it is crucial to adopt a temporal perspective that captures their dynamic nature (Wu & Forbes, 2023). This means shifting the focus from a structural viewpoint, which tends to emphasise fixed objectives and rigid frameworks, to one that appreciates the fluctuations and transformations inherent in the process of language learning within the family context. From a temporal dimension, standards in FFLEP should be understood as evolving over time, adapting to the changing needs, abilities, and interests of the learners. This fluidity is not a sign of weakness or lack of direction but rather reflects the responsiveness and flexibility required for effective language education. As such, fluctuations in standards should be seen as opportunities for growth and development, rather than deviations from a predefined path. Underlying these apparent changes, however, are relatively stable principles and ideologies that provide a foundation for the evolving standards. These principles may include a commitment to fostering cultural understanding, promoting communication skills, encouraging intellectual curiosity, and achieving concrete educational milestones such as passing exams (Shan & Xu, 2024). While the specific manifestations of these principles may vary over time, their enduring presence ensures that the standards remain grounded in a set of core values that guide the family's language education journey. Thus, by adopting a temporal perspective, researchers can gain a more nuanced understanding of the standards within FFLEP, appreciating both the necessity for flexibility to adapt to evolving learner needs and the significance of maintaining a coherent educational philosophy. This delicate balance between adaptability and stability is crucial for fostering a profound and fulfilling language learning experience within the family context.

“Content,” on the other hand, refers to the substantive knowledge, skills, and information that learners are expected to acquire. This includes vocabulary, grammar rules, cultural knowledge, communication skills, and

any other materials or concepts essential for achieving proficiency in the target language or languages.

When it comes to language education, including that situated in the family, content and standards are inextricably linked. Standards serve as the guiding principles for what learners should know and be able to do, while content provides the means to achieve those standards. It is therefore crucial to approach the research of content not as a standalone entity but in close relation to the prevailing standards. By doing so, researchers can ensure that the content they are examining is relevant, up-to-date, and aligned with the current educational goals. This alignment is essential for several reasons. First, in terms of relevance, content that is closely aligned with standards is more likely to be relevant to learners' needs and interests. When learners engage with relevant content, they are more motivated and likely to achieve better learning outcomes. Second, as to effectiveness, standards-aligned content is designed to meet specific learning objectives, making it more effective in helping learners achieve those objectives. Third, with regard to adaptability, as standards change, content that is closely tied to them can be easily updated or modified to reflect those changes. This adaptability ensures that learners are always exposed to the most current and relevant information. In summary, researching content in isolation from the evolving standards misses the mark. In order to truly understand and evaluate the effectiveness of language learning content, it must be examined in the context of the prevailing standards and the dynamic nature of language education.

A relevant example illustrating the evolving standards and content within FFLEP in the Chinese context is the recent implementation of new English textbooks in elementary and junior high schools beginning in September 2024. These textbooks, introduced from grade 3 onwards, are aligned with the updated national curriculum standards and are reportedly

more challenging than the previous versions that were used for over a decade. However, a notable issue arose with grade 7 students (i.e., the first year of junior high school), who encountered the new, more difficult textbooks without having the foundational instruction provided by the new textbooks in grades 3-6. This abrupt transition left many students feeling overwhelmed by the increased difficulty, which in turn influenced how families adapted their language education planning. In response to this sudden transition, many parents found themselves unprepared and overwhelmed by the challenges that their children faced. Initially, families did not anticipate such a significant gap between the old and new textbooks, nor the difficulties that would arise from this abrupt change. As a result, parents' responses varied, reflecting a dynamic shift in their FFLEP standards. Some parents actively sought additional resources, such as private tutoring or supplementary materials, to help their children bridge the gap and catch up with the new curriculum, while other parents chose to alter their original aspirations for their children's English learning, and recalibrate their goals, shifting from high performance and advancement to a more manageable objective. This scenario underscores the fluidity and adaptability of standards within FFLEP, illustrating how families continuously negotiate and realign their educational goals in response to unexpected changes.

2.2.2 Process and Methods

In the context of FFLEP, the term “process” refers to a dynamic and complex interplay between the family's planning process and the learner's individual learning process. This interplay is not limited to either the family's actions or the learner's efforts alone but rather encompasses the constant interaction and adaptation that occurs between them. As the family sets goals, identifies resources, and creates a plan for language learning, the learner's progress, needs, and interests continually inform and adjust this process. The second term, “methods,” naturally extends from this

understanding of process. It refers to the strategies, techniques, and approaches employed by both the family and the learner in pursuit of effective language learning (Spolsky, 2012). These methods encompass not only traditional educational practices but also innovative and tailored techniques that are responsive to the unique circumstances and goals of the family and learner. The dual focus on both planning and learning methods reflects the holistic and dynamic nature of FFLEP, distinguishing it from more conventional approaches to educational or language learning studies.

Based on the features of the element of process and methods as depicted above, research into this aspect of FFLEP should adopt a multi-faceted and dynamic approach. When it comes to formulating research questions for the element of process and methods of FFLEP, it is desirable to focus on questions that seek to unpack the complexity of the systems involved. Here are some examples of research questions that target a deeper understanding of the process taking place and the methods employed within this intricate framework:

- How do families and learners jointly negotiate and establish language learning goals within the FFLEP process, and how do these goals evolve over time?
- What are the specific strategies and techniques that families employ to support their children’s language learning, and how do these methods interact with the learner’s own approaches to learning?
- How do external factors such as cultural background, socioeconomic status, and access to resources influence the planning process and the choice of learning methods within FFLEP?
- What are the challenges and barriers that families and learners encounter in implementing their FFLEP, and how do they adapt their process and methods to overcome these challenges?

- How can the effectiveness of different planning and learning methods within FFLEP be measured and evaluated, and what are the key indicators of success in this context?

By posing such questions, researchers can gain valuable insights into the dynamic and multifaceted nature of FFLEP, which in turn can inform the development of more effective support strategies and interventions for families engaged in language learning planning.

2.2.3 Assessment and Feedback

Assessment and feedback, as an element of FFLEP, share fundamental ontological characteristics with their counterparts in school education. Both contexts involve the systematic evaluation of learning progress and the provision of information that can guide future learning (Chong & Isaacs, 2023). Assessment refers to the process of collecting and analyzing data about the learner’s language skills, knowledge, and attitudes, while feedback refers to the communication of this information to the learner and other stakeholders in a way that facilitates improvement.

However, from an epistemological perspective, assessment and feedback in FFLEP differ significantly from traditional models. In school settings, assessment and feedback are typically confined to teachers and students within a structured educational environment. In contrast, FFLEP encompasses a much broader range of participants and stakeholders, including family members, but also potentially extending to third-party experts, mentors, and community resources. This expanded scope is particularly relevant when considering that parents or guardians may not possess the necessary assessment and feedback literacy to effectively engage in these processes (Pu & Xu, 2023). In such cases, it becomes necessary to entrust third parties—such as language coaches, educational consultants, or online platforms—with the task of providing assessment and

feedback. These third parties bring specialized knowledge and skills that can complement the family's own resources and enhance the overall effectiveness of the FFLEP process.

Thus, while assessment and feedback in FFLEP share ontological commonalities with their school-based counterparts, they differ epistemologically in terms of the diversity of participants and the potential need for third-party involvement. This underscores the importance of a flexible and inclusive approach to assessment and feedback in FFLEP that recognizes the unique needs and circumstances of each family and learner.

A relevant example of assessment and feedback within FFLEP in China involves the implicit evaluations embedded in family discourse. Parents often discuss and comment on others' foreign language learning experiences, such as the achievements of a neighbour's child or a relative's success due to language skills. These conversations, though informal, serve as indirect feedback for children, providing them with benchmarks for self-comparison. Such discussions set implicit standards and expectations, influencing how children assess their own progress. This type of feedback, not tied to formal assessments, reflects the unique epistemological characteristics of FFLEP, where evaluations are woven into everyday interactions. It highlights the influence of family attitudes and casual comments on a child's language learning journey, demonstrating the need for flexible feedback approaches that account for the familial context in FFLEP in China.

2.2.4 Investment and Gain

When approaching the concepts of investment and gain, as an element of FFLEP, from the perspective of acquisition planning, it is important to recognize that these terms encompass both tangible and intangible resources. In a macro context, investment typically refers to the

allocation of financial capital, time, and effort towards achieving a specific goal (Norton, 2000), while gain represents the returns or benefits accrued as a result of those investments.

However, at the micro level of FFLEP, the meanings of investment and gain undergo significant modification. Within this context, investment refers not only to financial expenditures but also to the intangible investments of time, energy, and emotional support that families make in their children's language learning (Higgins, 2018). These investments can include purchasing educational materials, enrolling children in language classes or camps, and providing a supportive home environment conducive to language practice and cultural immersion (Iwaniec & Curdt-Christiansen, 2020). Similarly, the concept of gain in FFLEP expands beyond mere financial returns to encompass a broader range of benefits. These can include improvements in the child's language proficiency and communication skills, enhanced cognitive abilities such as problem-solving and critical thinking, increased cultural awareness and understanding, and even improved career prospects in a globalized world (Xu et al., 2024).

It is important to note that the nature and extent of these investments and gains can vary considerably depending on the family's specific circumstances, goals, and resources. Moreover, the realization of gains is often not immediate but rather accrues over time as the child progresses in their language learning journey. In summary, while the concepts of investment and gain share similarities at a macro level, their meanings become more nuanced and personalized when applied to the micro level of FFLEP.

An illustrative example of investment and gain in FFLEP is seen in Xu et al.'s (2024) study of middle-class parents in Shanghai, who perceive multilingual competence as valuable cultural capital. For these parents,

investing in their children's foreign language education is not just about academic success but about acquiring social benefits that can enhance future opportunities. This drives them to commit resources such as time, money, and emotional support towards language learning. The study identified three distinct perceptions among parents: the extra-point view, where language skills are seen as an immediate advantage; the immediate deficiency view, where lacking these skills is viewed as a current disadvantage; and the prospective deficiency view, which considers the absence of multilingual competence as a future drawback. These perspectives highlight how parents align their investments with the broader, long-term gains they anticipate, reflecting the complex nature of investment and gain within FFLEP.

3. The Role of the Family in Foreign Language Education Planning

In FFLEP, the role of the family emerges as a pivotal factor that warrants special attention. This is because the family unit, with its unique dynamics and resources, plays a fundamental role in shaping the language learning trajectory of its members, particularly children (Curdt-Christiansen & Gao, 2021). Within the context of FFLEP, families are not just passive recipients of educational policies and programs; they are active participants in the planning and implementation of language learning strategies. Their engagement ranges from selecting appropriate learning materials and resources to creating immersive language-learning environments at home. Furthermore, families serve as the primary source of emotional and motivational support for learners, which is crucial for sustained and meaningful progress in language development (Curdt-Christiansen & Wang, 2018).

In FFLEP, the family plays a multifaceted role that can be conceptualized in three distinct ways: as a social unit, as a community, and as a field. These three distinct conceptualizations reflect varying perspectives on the role of family in society and language acquisition. As a social unit, the family is seen as an agent of society, operating within broader social structures and norms (Giddens, 1984).

This etic perspective emphasizes the family's external functions and how it contributes to the larger societal goals of language education. When viewed as a community, the focus shifts to an emic perspective, where the family is considered a unique cultural and social environment in its own right. Within this framework, the family's internal dynamics, values, and practices take centre stage, shaping the way in which language is learned and used within the household. Conceptualizing the family as a field combines both etic and emic perspectives, acknowledging that the family operates within broader social contexts while also maintaining its own distinct cultural and social practices (Bourdieu, 1977). This integrated view recognizes the interplay between external societal influences and internal family dynamics in shaping language learning outcomes. In this section, we will explore the critical issues that emerge under the three distinct perspectives of the family unit in FFLEP.

3.1 The family as a Social Unit

From a sociological perspective, a social unit can be defined as a group of individuals that share common values, norms, and goals, and that are bound together by social relationships (Brankovic et al., 2014). In this sense, the family is a fundamental social unit, serving as a “particle” of society. As a basic building block of social organization, the family reflects and reproduces the broader cultural and structural features of the society in which it is embedded.

Adopting such an etic perspective in relation to FFLEP, researchers need to be particularly attentive to the family's social properties and functions as they relate to other units of society. This involves examining how families are influenced by and contribute to the larger social, cultural, and economic forces at play. For instance, social class, ethnic background, and community resources can all shape the family's approach to foreign language education. By understanding the family as a social unit, researchers can gain insights into the ways in which families negotiate and respond to these broader societal factors, thereby informing more effective and culturally sensitive language education policies and practices.

When researchers approach the family as a social unit from an etic perspective, they often focus on how broader social factors influence family dynamics and, in turn, how these dynamics shape individual and collective behavior. Two illustrative examples of such research are studies that examine how parents from different social classes view foreign language learning and how parents' educational planning is influenced by dominant social discourse. In the first example, researchers might explore how parents' social class backgrounds inform their attitudes and expectations towards foreign language learning. They might find, for instance, that parents from higher social classes tend to prioritize language learning as a means of cultural capital accumulation (Xu et al., 2024), viewing it as a necessary skill for future career prospects. Conversely, parents from lower social classes might view language learning as less critical, focusing instead on more immediate educational and economic needs. Such findings highlight the ways in which social class, as a property of the family as a social unit, shapes not only parents' beliefs but also their children's educational trajectories. In the second example, researchers might investigate how dominant social discourse regarding the family influences parents' educational planning. They might analyze how societal expectations of what constitutes a "good" parent or a "successful" family impact parents' decisions about their children's education. For instance, if a society values early bilingualism, parents might feel pressure to enrol their children in foreign language programs at a young age. Alternatively, if a society emphasizes the importance of family time and relaxation, parents might prioritize these values over rigorous academic pursuits. Such research reveals how external social factors can penetrate the family unit and influence parents' decisions in ways that may not always align with their personal beliefs or goals.

3.2 The family as a Community

From a community of practice perspective, a community can be defined as a group of individuals that engage in joint activities and share a common repertoire of resources, including routines, symbols, and language (Liu & Xu, 2013). Within this framework, the family emerges as a distinct system with clearly defined

boundaries, comprising interactive members that have a sense of ownership and belonging. The family as a community is not just a collection of individuals but a dynamic system where members negotiate meanings, roles, and responsibilities through their daily interactions.

When approaching the family as a community in the context of FFLEP, researchers adopt an emic perspective, focusing on the internal dynamics and interactions within the family unit. This perspective emphasizes the need for researchers to be attentive to the ways in which family members communicate, collaborate, and negotiate meanings and roles within their community. It also highlights the importance of understanding the relative status of family members, as this can influence power dynamics and decision-making processes within the family (Curdt-Christiansen & Lanza, 2018). By exploring these aspects, researchers can gain deeper insights into the unique ways in which families function as communities of practice, thereby informing more nuanced and contextually sensitive approaches to language education planning.

When researchers approach the family as a community from an emic perspective, they delve into the intricate dynamics and interactions within the family unit. One illustrative example of such research can be a study that examines how parents use their power to impose their plans and aspirations on their children, as well as how children respond to and sometimes resist this imposition. This type of research sheds light on the complex negotiation processes that take place within the family as a community, revealing the subtle power struggles and dynamics at play. Another example of research that takes the family as a community from an emic perspective can be a study that focuses on how parents and children collaborate in setting goals and making plans, particularly paying attention to the interactive dynamics that unfold through discourse and conversation. Such research goes beyond simply observing behavior and instead seeks to understand the underlying meanings, intentions, and motivations behind family members' actions and interactions. By exploring these processes within the

family as a community, researchers can gain a deeper understanding of how families function and how different family members contribute to and influence the overall dynamics of the community.

3.3 The family as a Field

According to Bourdieu's theoretical framework, the concept of "field" refers to a structured social space where agents engage in struggles for power and resources (Bourdieu, 1977), influenced by their habitus—the embodied dispositions and schemas acquired through socialization (Dai et al., 2020). Within this perspective, the family emerges as a critical field for the development of habitus, as it is within the familial context that individuals first learn to navigate social norms, values, and expectations. The family as a field is not just a physical space but a socially constructed one, shaped by power relations, cultural capital, and the historical trajectories of its members.

When applying this etic-emic combined perspective to FFLEP, researchers must be attentive to both the internal ecologies within families and the external ecologies that influence them. This includes examining the cultural and historical factors that shape family dynamics, as well as the ways in which learners develop within this context. Importantly, researchers need to consider how learners' development aligns with or diverges from planned educational paths, recognizing that habitus does not always develop as intended within the familial field. By exploring these complexities, researchers can gain a more nuanced understanding of the role of the family as a field in language education planning, acknowledging the agency of family members and the dynamic nature of habitus formation.

4. Key Issues in FLLEP Research

In this section, we aim to put forward suggestions for future research in the area of FFLEP. In order to achieve this, we will look into four critical aspects of research: perspectives, methodologies, theorization, and applications. By examining these aspects, we hope to highlight key issues and challenges that

researchers need to consider when approaching FFLEP, as well as to identify potential areas for further exploration and development.

4.1 Perspectives

First, we discuss the importance of adopting diverse perspectives in FFLEP research. This includes considering both etic and emic viewpoints, as well as acknowledging the role of culture, context, and power relations in shaping family language education practices. A more inclusive and holistic understanding of FFLEP requires researchers, particularly those in Asian contexts such as China, to move beyond traditional, Western-centric frameworks and embrace a more global and cross-cultural perspective.

Adopting multiple perspectives in FFLEP research also means approaching the topic from different angles that consider both cognitive and behavioral dimensions. For instance, a cognitive perspective might explore how families process and make sense of language learning, while a behavioral one observes actual language practices within the family unit. These perspectives are not mutually exclusive; rather, they complement each other, offering a more comprehensive understanding of the complexities involved in FFLEP.

For instance, in the Chinese context, where English is primarily learned as a foreign language, the effects of teaching phonics to young children are likely to differ significantly from those observed in Western settings. To explore this phenomenon, a hypothetical research project could focus on the beliefs and practices of Chinese parents regarding phonics instruction. This study would aim to capture both the cognitive aspects (parents' understanding, attitudes, and expectations) and the behavioral aspects (the actual teaching strategies and interactions employed). By adopting a mixed-methods approach, combining surveys with interviews and observations, researchers could gain a nuanced understanding of how Chinese parents conceptualize phonics learning and how they operationalize these beliefs in their daily practices. Such an investigation

would not only enhance our understanding of the unique challenges and opportunities presented by the Chinese language learning context but also contribute to the development of more culturally responsive and effective phonics instruction materials and methods.

Future research in FFLEP should thus explore how cultural values, social norms, and power dynamics within Chinese families shape parental attitudes and practices towards foreign language education. Key questions may include: how do parents' cognitive and behavioral strategies evolve over time, and how do they differ from those observed in Western contexts? What are the impacts of phonics instruction compared to other methods, and how do parents' perceptions influence their educational choices? Additionally, examining the integration of emic and etic perspectives can provide a more refined understanding of FFLEP, highlighting the need for culturally responsive approaches that accommodate both cognitive and behavioral dimensions. Cross-cultural comparisons can further illuminate unique challenges and opportunities, offering insights into how diverse family contexts navigate the complexities of foreign language learning.

4.2 Methodologies

Next, we explore methodologies that can be used to effectively investigate FFLEP. This involves a discussion of the need for different frameworks as we approach different subject matters. Given the diverse nature of subject matters and subjects being observed—including the family unit, parents, and children—it is imperative to adopt different frameworks tailored to each context. For instance, when exploring the role of the family in language learning, an ethnographic approach may be suitable to capture the nuances of family interactions and dynamics. On the other hand, when focusing on parents' beliefs and practices, a mixed-methods approach combining surveys, interviews, and observations could provide a more comprehensive understanding. Furthermore, when studying children's language acquisition within the family context, longitudinal studies or experimental designs may be necessary to track developmental changes over time.

In a word, a flexible and adaptive research design is key to unpacking the complexities of FFLEP.

There is also a growing need for methodological innovation. For instance, traditional approaches, while valuable, may not always be suitable for engaging with younger children or capturing the unique dynamics of language learning within the family context. Specifically, when conducting interviews with very young children, traditional question-and-answer formats may prove challenging due to the children's limited cognitive and linguistic abilities. In such cases, innovative techniques such as play-based interviews or the use of visual aids can be explored in order to facilitate more meaningful interactions and ensure richer data collection (DeCosta et al., 2023). By embracing methodological innovation, researchers can not only enhance the quality and depth of their findings but also contribute to the development of more inclusive and child-centered approaches in FFLEP research.

In order to effectively investigate FFLEP, future research should adopt flexible and adaptive methodologies tailored to the diverse contexts of the family unit, parents, and children. Ethnographic approaches may be suitable for capturing the nuances of family interactions, while mixed-methods designs combining surveys, interviews, and observations can provide a comprehensive understanding of parents' beliefs and practices. To study children's language acquisition, longitudinal or experimental designs are essential to track developmental changes over time. Additionally, there is a growing need for methodological innovation, such as play-based interviews and visual aids, to engage younger children and to capture the unique dynamics of language learning within the family. By embracing innovative and context-sensitive methods, researchers can enhance the depth and inclusivity of FFLEP research, ensuring that it effectively addresses the complexities of family language education.

4.3 Theorization

It is through the lens of theory that we can make sense of the complex phenomena associated with language learning within the family context. However, the question arises: what kind of theories do we really need in FFLEP? Theories, much like languages, take on various forms, and these forms reflect different orientations. Some theories focus on broad, universal principles, while others delve into the specifics of a particular context. In FFLEP research, it is crucial to recognize that a one-size-fits-all approach is inadequate. Instead, we need a plurality of theories that can address the multifaceted nature of language learning within the family unit. To this end, four types of theories that may be compatible with key questions in FFLEP research are proposed:

- General theory: This type of theory outlines the common regularities observed across different families and contexts. It provides a broad framework for understanding the universal principles that underlie language learning within the family.
- Model-based theory: This approach describes patterns of change or development over time. By identifying key variables and their interactions, model-based theories can help us predict and explain how language learning progresses within the family context.
- Contextual theory: Recognizing that every family and context is unique, contextual theories derive their insights from the enriched contextuality of a particular situation. They emphasize the importance of understanding the specific cultural, social, and historical factors that shape language learning within the family.
- Narrative theory: Narrative theories adopt a storytelling approach to capture the complexity and dynamism of family negotiations and engagements around language learning. By telling the stories of individual families, narrative theories bring to light the lived experiences and subjective realities that often remain hidden in more traditional research frameworks.

In conclusion, theorization in FFLEP research requires a diverse array of theories that can address the multifaceted nature of language learning within the family context. In order to understand the complex phenomena of language learning within the family context in FFLEP research, it is essential to employ a diverse array of theories rather than a one-size-fits-all approach. General theories provide a broad framework by outlining common regularities across families, while model-based theories describe patterns of change and development over time, helping to predict and explain language learning progression. Contextual theories emphasize the uniqueness of each family by considering the specific cultural, social, and historical factors that shape language learning, and narrative theories use storytelling to capture the dynamic and lived experiences of families in a way that traditional frameworks might miss. By integrating these varied theoretical approaches, FFLEP research can more effectively address the multifaceted and nuanced nature of family language education.

4.4 Applications

Finally, the practical applications of FFLEP research should be discussed. This involves considering how research findings can be translated into practical recommendations for families, educators, and policymakers. The potential for FFLEP research should also be discussed in order to inform the development of new educational programs and interventions that are designed to support family language learning and planning. By exploring these applications, we aim to demonstrate the real-world relevance and impact of FFLEP research.

As can be seen, the practical applications of FFLEP research are vast and diverse, spanning multiple domains where it can have a tangible and meaningful impact on real life. Three such areas stand out as particularly significant:

- Policy advice to governments: FFLEP research can inform policymakers at the government level, providing evidence-based insights into the best practices and most effective strategies for promoting foreign language learning within families. By understanding the challenges and opportunities faced by parents

and children alike, policymakers can craft more targeted and relevant policies that support family language education efforts.

- Education and empowerment of parents: Another crucial application of FFLEP research lies in its potential to educate and empower parents. Through the dissemination of research findings and practical tips, parents can be equipped with the knowledge and skills necessary to plan and implement effective foreign language education strategies within their own homes. This not only enhances parents' planning literacy but also empowers them to take an active role in their children's language learning journey.
- Development of specific products for foreign language education: FFLEP research can also contribute to the development of specific products tailored for foreign language education, particularly those intended to be used within the home environment. This could include textbooks, courses, and other educational resources designed to complement and enhance family-based language learning efforts. By leveraging the insights gained from FFLEP research, these products can be made more relevant, engaging, and effective for learners of all ages and backgrounds.

In summary, the applications of FFLEP research are far-reaching and hold significant potential for real-life impact. By informing policymakers, educating and empowering parents, and contributing to the development of tailored foreign language education products, FFLEP research stands to make a substantial and lasting contribution to the field of language learning and family education.

5. Conclusions

This article has delved into the complexities and nuances of FFLEP research in China, highlighting its significance in the broader context of language acquisition and family education. Through a comprehensive examination of key issues and future directions, the paper has shed light on the multifaceted nature of FFLEP and its role in shaping language learning outcomes within the family unit.

This paper offers innovative contributions to the field of FFLEP research by moving beyond general discussions and introducing specific, culturally nuanced perspectives and methodological approaches tailored to the Chinese context. Unlike conventional studies that often apply Western-centric frameworks, this paper emphasizes the importance of integrating both emic and etic viewpoints, highlighting the unique cultural and social dynamics that shape FFLEP in China. Furthermore, the proposed use of diverse theoretical frameworks, such as contextual and narrative theories, provides a novel way to capture the lived experiences and evolving standards within Chinese families, offering deeper insights into the complexities of FFLEP. By advocating for methodological innovations, this paper challenges traditional research methods and promotes more inclusive, child-centered approaches. These contributions represent significant steps forward in understanding the intricacies of FFLEP and pave the way for more targeted and effective future research, distinguishing this work as a meaningful and innovative addition to the emerging field.

Looking ahead, the future of FFLEP research in China holds promise and poses challenges. On the one hand, there is growing recognition of the importance of family involvement in language learning and a corresponding increase in research attention. On the other hand, there are numerous unresolved issues and unanswered questions that require further exploration and investigation. In conclusion, this article has contributed to the growing body of knowledge on FFLEP research in China by providing a comprehensive overview of key issues and future directions. It is hoped that this work will inspire further research and practice in this critical area of language education and language policy and planning.

6. References

- Bourdieu, P. (1977). *Outline of a theory of practice*. Cambridge University Press.
- Brankovic, J., Kovacevic, M., Maassen, P., Stensaker, B., & Vukasovic, M. (Eds.). (2014). *The re-institutionalization of higher education in the Western*

balkans: The interplay between European ideas, domestic policies, and institutional practices. Peter Lang.

Chong, S. W., & Isaacs, T. (2023). An ecological perspective on classroom-based assessment. *TESOL Quarterly*, 57(4), 1558–1570.

Curdt-Christiansen, X. L. (2018). Family language policy. In J. W. Tollefson & M. Perez-Millans (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of language policy and planning* (pp. 420–441). Oxford University Press.

Curdt-Christiansen, X. L., & Gao, X. (2021). Family language policy and planning in China: The changing landscape. *Current Issues in Language Planning*, 22(4), 353–361.

Curdt-Christiansen, X. L., & Lanza, E. (2018). Language management in multilingual families: Efforts, measures and challenges. *Multilingua*, 37(2), 123–130.

Curdt-Christiansen, X. L., & Wang, W. (2018). Parents as agents of multilingual education: Family language planning in China. *Language, Culture and Curriculum*, 31(3), 235–254.

Dai, K., Lingard, B., & Musofer, R. P. (2020). Mobile Chinese students navigating between fields: (Trans)forming habitus in transnational articulation programmes?. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 52(12), 1329–1340.

DeCosta, P., Skinner, T. C., Sørensen, J. L., Topperzer, M. K., & Grabowski, D. (2023). Narrative and play-based interviewing – a framework for eliciting the perspectives of young children. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 20(3), 337–362.

Giddens, A. (1984). *The constitution of society: Outline of the theory of structuration*. University of California Press.

Higgins, C. (2018). The mesolevel of family language policy. *International Journal of Multilingualism*, 15(3), 306–312.

Iwaniec, J., & Curdt-Christiansen, X. L. (2020). Parents as agents: Engaging children in environmental literacy in China. *Sustainability*, 12(15), 6605.

- Liu, Y., & Xu, Y. (2013). The trajectory of learning in a teacher community of practice: A narrative inquiry of a language teacher's identity in the workplace. *Research Papers in Education, 28*(2), 176–195.
- Lo Bianco, J. (2010). Language policy and planning. In N. H. Hornberger & S. L. McKay (Eds.), *Sociolinguistics and language education* (pp. 143–174). Bristol: Multilingual Matters.
- Norton, B. (2000). *Identity and language learning: Gender, ethnicity and educational change*. Longman.
- Pu, S., & Xu, H. (2023). Equity and teachers' online classroom assessment literacy in China: Insights from parental involvement during the Covid-19 pandemic. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education, 51*(4), 381–394.
- Shan, Z., & Xu, H. (2024). Exploring multilingual awareness development in learners of multiple foreign languages: A social cognitive perspective. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development, 45*(8), 3205–3218.
- Spolsky, B. (2012). Family language policy – the critical domain. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development, 33*(1), 3–11.
- Wu, X., & Forbes, K. (2023). Contextualising the temporal dimension in multilingual identity construction: A longitudinal Q methodological study with Chinese LOTE-learning public high school students. *System, 116*, Article 103090.
- Xu, H., Li, X., & Shan, Z. (2024). Competence in multiple foreign languages as cultural capital in family language policy: Parents' perceptions. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics, 34*(2), 261–275.