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An analysis of parental involvement during Zoom-mediated heritage language instruction

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Linguistic diversity has been increasing rapidly in Australian and New Zealand societies, and according to the most recent census (ABS, 2022) more than one in five Australian households speak a language other than English. Fostering bilingualism is important at all levels of education because it plays a crucial role in identity development (Caldas, 2006) and enhances academic performance (Han, 2012; Lindholm-Leary, 2016; Yurtsever et al., 2023). The home environment is obviously crucial for bilingual development (Mak et al., 2023) but broader community engagement is also needed. With heritage language communities often distributed broadly across contexts such as Australia and New Zealand, technology mediated language learning approaches (e.g., Zoom) hold strong potential in systematic efforts to promote bilingualism. A key element of effective online education is the quality of involvement of stakeholders, and in the case of online heritage language education involving young learners, parental involvement is crucial (El Nokali et al., 2010; Yang et al., 2023). To date, however, the involvement of parents in online heritage language education has not been adequately researched.

The current research analyzes the parental involvement of six parent-child dyads during six Zoom-mediated lessons of Farsi as a heritage language. The aim of the research is to systematically describe the way parents interact with their children during these Zoom-mediated lessons and to establish a preliminary taxonomy of these behaviors. Such taxonomies can then be applied as a reference point for longer-term efforts to enhance parent involvement in online heritage language learning programs.

The primary data source was the recorded screen videos of six parent-child dyads for six 45-minute online Farsi lessons. Learners' work samples and parent interviews were also collected as additional data sources. The qualitative study employed various techniques to ensure rigor and reliability such as constant comparison, coding schemes and thematic analysis. These techniques helped researchers to identify recurring categories of parental involvement evident during the entirety of the online lessons.

Analysis entailed enumeration and description of the type, frequency and duration of the various parental involvement behaviors that were evident in the videos. Behaviors included binary types, such as physical presence or absence and on-screen facial presence or absence. A range of more complex verbal and nonverbal behaviors were also salient in the data: nodding, gesturing, gaze orientation, screen pointing, reorienting learning materials and devices and so on. Different parents demonstrated varied levels of interaction with three main stakeholders: the facilitator, other parents and the learners. Differences in behaviors evident among the parents enabled a categorization of those who exhibited low, moderate or high levels of involvement with the online lessons.

Through analysis of the results and the literature we suggest a preliminary taxonomy of parent involvement behaviors that occurred during online language learning. This model provides a useful reference point for future research, at all levels of education, that seeks to understand the dynamics of stakeholder involvement in complex online learning environments.

Keywords: Parental involvement, heritage language, online learning, COVID-19 impacts

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