
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

A Case Study of Salar Family Education in Trilingual Environment Based on the Theory of Trilingual Acquisition

Han Xiaoyan¹ and Hema Vanita Kesevan² ✉

^{1,2}*Faculty of Languages and Communication, Sultan Idris Education University, Malaysia*

Corresponding Author: Hema Vanita Kesevan, **E-mail:** hemakesevan@fbk.upsi.edu.my

| ABSTRACT

This study is based on trilingual acquisition and explores the influence of parental education and a trilingual environment through a case analysis of children's language acquisition in Salar families. The mother language (L1) is Salar, the second language (L2) is Mandarin, and the third language (L3) is English. The children's acquisition of three languages and the acquisition process in a trilingual environment and family education were explored deeply through observation and interviews. The study results show that children are more likely to acquire the three languages in a trilingual environment. However, relying only on family education without providing a trilingual environment makes it generally more difficult for children to acquire three languages than in a trilingual environment.

| KEYWORDS

Trilingual Acquisition; Salar language; Family education; Trilingual environment.

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

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1. Introduction

China is a multi-ethnic and multi-lingual country, and each ethnic minority has its unique national language. For example, the Mongols use Mongolian, the Tibetans use Tibetan, the Uyghurs use Uyghur, the Kazakhs use Kazakh, and the Salar people use Salar. In addition, Mandarin is the national language of China, and it belongs to the Sino-Tibetan language family (Erbaugh, 1992). While each city has its own dialect, Mandarin is the lingua franca that people across China use to communicate. Mandarin is spoken in Chinese schools, workplaces, and public places. Due to the significant differences between ethnic languages (L1) and Mandarin (L2), ethnic minorities must master Mandarin and their ethnic languages to cope freely in daily life, study, and social interactions.

Salar is one of the 55 ethnic groups and belongs to the Turkic language family. Salar has no written language, unlike other languages, and can only be passed down orally. Therefore, for the Salar people, there are some exceptional circumstances for the Salar language as their mother tongue. The language environment and family education are crucial for acquiring the Salar language. In Salar families whose mother tongue is Salar, the environment and family education play a vital role in acquiring Salar (Ma Wei, 2009; Zuo Qingduan, 2010).

At the same time, with the advancement of economic globalisation, people gradually realise the importance of language in international communication. Language is the carrier of human culture and an essential part of international communication. English is increasingly prominent. In China, many students start learning English in third grade or earlier. However, many students still need help communicating in English fluently because they have missed the best learning period and need help to acquire the language naturally. For Salar children, the acquisition of three languages is a considerable challenge. Not only do they need to master their native Salar language (L1), but they must also be proficient in Mandarin (L2) and learn English (L3). This kind of

multilingual learning requires not only a language environment but also the importance of parental education for children's language acquisition.

Because of everyone's language acquisition, it is a process of gradual development. From language perception in infancy to vocabulary accumulation and grammar mastery at school age, everyone goes through different stages of language development. Language acquisition involves many aspects, such as input, output, cognitive processing, and social interaction. Individuals gradually improve their language and expressive abilities by communicating with others and using different languages in different language environments.

Noam Chomsky (1956) put forward the "language innate theory" in "Three Models of Language Description," arguing that the reason why human beings can understand a language and use it to communicate is because of the existence of an innate language ability, the language acquisition mechanism. However, language acquisition must be done in a standard, natural environment. The success of children's mother tongue acquisition fully demonstrates the importance of language environment to language acquisition, including the natural environment and school environment (Chen Sandong, 2005 & Cai Lixia, 2008). In addition, Stephen Krashen (1981) believed in his "Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis" that there are two ways for people to acquire language: one is the acquisition, that is, the subconscious process, which is realised through natural communication, and the other is learning, a conscious process that is achieved through teaching and coaching. Krashen believes that only through acquisition can the development of a second language ability be directly promoted, which is the production mechanism when people use language, while learning can only play a monitoring role in language use and cannot be regarded as a language part of the ability itself.

Moreover, children's language acquisition is promoted by stimulating parents' language input to children in a particular language environment. Parents play an essential role in children's language acquisition. They are children's first teachers and play a crucial role in the input and output of children's language acquisition (Jonathan et al., 2008). However, language is indispensable in everyday life. The language characteristics of parents are fundamental for children to acquire language, and the language of parents is the initial language input of children (Yuan Xinrui, 2011). Zhang Qianqinghua (2018) researched the importance of family environment and parental education on children's language acquisition. The study found that teaching and telling children stories in English before bed is essential to children's English acquisition. Lay a solid foundation. Collins (2010) also empirically researched whether parental education is vital for children's language acquisition. The research shows that having parents explain the language they are acquiring is very beneficial for children's language acquisition.

This study is based on the trilingual acquisition theory and draws on the language acquisition theory of Chomsky and Krashen. It examines the trilingual environment and family education of two groups of Salar families in Salar (L1), Mandarin (L2) and English (L3). Conduct observations and interviews. Case analysis shows that children need family education support in trilingual acquisition and a trilingual environment to make language learning easier. The research results also show that language acquisition requires the joint action of language environment and family education to achieve optimal results.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical concepts of trilingual acquisition

TLA refers to learners learning one or more languages besides their mother tongue and acquiring a second language (Fouser, 1995; Jessner, 1999). Initially, TLA was classified as a research category for second language acquisition, as some scholars believed that a second language could refer to any non-native language other than the first language (mother tongue). The process of acquiring one foreign language is no different from acquiring another (Gass, 2004; Sharwood, 2016).

The study of "Trilingual Acquisition" (TLA) began in the late 1980s. At that time, the political and economic integration of the European Union promoted close relationships among EU member states, leading to a significant increase in the demand for foreign language talents. Implementing the European multilingual policy also led many people to learn a third language, making "Trilingual Acquisition" an emerging research field. Ringbom analysed the impact of learners' mother tongue (Finnish) and second language (Swedish) on third language (English) learning in his 1987 book "The Role of First Language in Foreign Language Learning", marking the birth of "Trilingual Acquisition" as a new research field. However, Cabrelli Amaro and Iverson (2018) and Jessner (2006) argued that research on "Trilingual Acquisition" could be traced back to Vildomen's multilingual learning research in 1963.

However, from the late 1980s to the late 1990s, research on "Trilingual Acquisition" in the West mainly focused on linguistics, sociology, and psychology, analysing the impact of bilingualism on third language learning, including language, cultural, and psychological aspects. In addition, many theories and models related to TLA have been proposed to analyse problems in the process of TLA. The research subjects mostly come from European countries like the UK, France and Germany. At the same time, Zhang Wujiang and Zhang Zhuo (2013) mentioned in their overview of TLA research that the range of languages is also constantly

expanding with the deepening of TLA research. The main common feature of these studied learners is that they have already acquired the first and second European languages when learning a third European language.

Moreover, Hufeisen (2010) explored the acquisition order and development trends of tenses and voices in second-language learners' learning of English. The research results help teachers better understand students' acquisition process and difficulties, thereby more effectively assisting students in mastering English. In addition, Hufeisen and Jessner (2003) explored the cross-linguistic influences and interactions between different languages among third-language learners. They studied third language learners with a "hereditary" language background who learned one language at home but two other languages in an external environment. Research has found that genetic language can impact the acquisition of third languages, such as phonetics, vocabulary, and grammar. In addition, there is also an interaction between the second and third languages, which means that the second language influences learners and impacts the second language when learning the third language. These findings reveal the mutual influence and interaction between different languages. It helps teachers better understand students' language acquisition process and helps students better master a third language.

Additionally, Cenoz (2000), in his book "English in Europe: The Acquisition of a Third Language," explained the difference between multilingual and bilingual acquisition from a sociolinguistic perspective, pointing out that multilingual acquisition is a complex process in which multiple factors act together. In addition, a study by Cenoz, J. (2013) summarised the impact of cross-linguistic transfer effects on bilinguals' third language acquisition, suggesting that there are interactions between trilingual proficiency and monolingual and bilingual proficiency, such as code-switching and code-mixing.

The study of trilingual acquisition is significant for understanding multilingual learning and cross-cultural communication. Mastering multiple languages has become an essential competitive advantage, and research on trilingual acquisition provides more ideas and methods for people. In the future, research on trilingual acquisition will continue to deepen and integrate with other research fields, contributing more to the development of linguistics and cross-cultural communication. However, in China, trilingual acquisition has also become a challenge for Chinese minority students in learning a third language. This study uses the mother tongue Salar (L1), Mandarin (L2), and English (L3) as three languages to explore the importance of parental education and language environment on children's trilingual acquisition.

2.2 Salar language

The Salar people live on the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau in Xunhua County, Qinghai Province, China. The origin of the Salar nationality can be traced back to the Saruer people of the Oguz tribe in the western Turks. They first migrated from Samarkand to Qinghai and settled in Xun Hua. In the late Qing Dynasty, they gradually migrated to Gansu and Xinjiang. The Salar nationality has its own national language, the Salar language, which belongs to the Turkic-Oguz branch of the Altaic language family. It is a unique Turkic language in China and belongs to the Altaic language family. The Salar language is mainly spoken by the Salar ethnic group in China (Dang Yongfen, 2021).

Zuo Qingrui (2010) took the Salar nationality as an example to analyse the national language. The Salar language belongs to a branch of the Turkic language of the Altaic language family and is similar to the languages of Uyghur, Uzbek, Turkmen, and Kazakh. The study found that Salar also contains a small number of Arabic and Persian loanwords and some Tibetan loanwords. However, Salar is relatively consistent internally, with no apparent dialect differences. The Salar language is mainly used in the family environment. Still, because the Salar people have no means of written expression, the Salar language can only be learned naturally through the elders' teaching and communication within the tribe. The Salar language is used by the Salar people in the family, villages, and ethnic activities, chatting with compatriots and greeting each other (Ding et al., 2014).

Ma Wei and Ma Chengjun (2014) analysed the sentences in the Salar language and found that the basic word order is subject + object + predicate. Salar has no dialect differences, only some phonetic and lexical differences, but the grammatical structure is the same. However, Minerwal Abibula (2000) pointed out that Salar exists only in spoken form and has no written form. Salar belongs to the Turkic language family. A comparative study of Salar and Turkmen's phonology, grammar, and vocabulary found that although the Salar people moved from Samarkand in Central Asia to Xunhua Salar Autonomous County, the two languages still retain many homologous features.

Ma Wei (2009), a minority linguist, pointed out that the Salar language is facing profound language loss and endangerment, and the problem of language loss is severe. Moreover, he conducted a field investigation and found that the Salar language was affected by language loss and displacement of Chinese. Liu Hongcun and Yang Hui (2010) surveyed Salar students and found that they mainly use Chinese in school and public places but only use Salar at home. Ma Wei (2010) conducted further on-the-spot investigations and found that the inheritance of ethnic languages faces enormous obstacles, which has become a fatal injury to the protection of ethnic languages. The ability of parents to speak the mother tongue plays a decisive role in the preservation and

inheritance of language. If parents do not use the native language with their children, the native language will gradually be lost. The language protection of the minority Salar is critical. The language environment and parental education are crucial to transmitting the national language. For children to learn and use the Salar language proficiently, their parents should provide sufficient language input and output. Only in this way can children better master the Salar language and communicate freely through the language environment, thereby promoting the inheritance and development of the Salar language.

2.3 The role of parents in trilingual acquisition

Language is an essential tool for human communication, and family is an important place for language learning. Parent language education, that is, language education carried out by parents' environment, is crucial to children's language development. The core of parent education lies in language input and output. Krashen (1981) pointed out in Input Hypothesis that language learning requires a large amount of input to learn the language effectively. Parental language output is essential for children's language development in the family environment. In addition, the Interaction Hypothesis emphasises that language learning relies on input and requires interaction for output.

Tang Linlin (2023) believes that due to limited language ability, some parents need help to provide a favourable language environment for their children through language education, resulting in less output for their children in language acquisition. On the other hand, some parents can create a suitable environment for their children because of their strong language skills, making it easier for them to acquire language and be proficient in output. Zhou Cuifeng (2020) studied parent education in students' English learning. Parent education is an effective way for students to improve their English proficiency. Research has found that a family language environment is essential to students' language acquisition. At the same time, parent education must be addressed for children's acquisition of English.

Sarah Chevalier (2011), in Trilingual Language Acquisition Contextual Factors Influencing Active Trilingualism in Early Childhood, through a survey of multilingual families by sixteen linguists, also showed that family language education is crucial. However, the prerequisite is a good language environment. Arata (2015) studied the Mongolian language in Mongolian families and believed that family language education is conducive to inheriting a minority language and culture. However, the language environment is also more critical for children to acquire language. Therefore, for children from Salar families, learning three languages requires adequate opportunities for language input and output at home and a language environment that enables children from Salar families to master the three languages.

3. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research method to investigate children's acquisition of three languages in a Salar family in a trilingual environment and parental education. This study adopts the double-case study method, conducts in-depth interviews and participatory observations on two groups of Salar families, and collects data. Semi-structured interviews were used to understand the interviewed family members, family social background, and language usage.

The two groups of families investigated by this study live in Chengdong District, Xining City, Qinghai Province, where there are many Salar ethnic groups. In the first group of interviewed families, Father Xiao Tuo is a college English professor with a doctoral degree. Mother Hachimi is a doctor in a tertiary hospital with a bachelor's degree. The father was born in Huangzhong County, Qinghai. He is of Hui nationality. He speaks Mandarin as his mother language and English as his second language. The mother, Hachimi, was born in the Xunhua Salar Autonomous Region and is a Salar. Salar is her mother language, Mandarin is her second language, and English is her third language. They have a nine-year-old daughter, Alina, in the third grade of primary school, and a seven-year-old son, Aamir, in the first grade. Since the two children were taken care of by their parents from birth to elementary school, the mother communicated with the children in Salar. However, the father communicated in Mandarin, so although the two children's mother tongue is Salar, they can only understand it but cannot speak it. Mandarin is their second language, and English is their third language. They are working hard in Mandarin and English at school.

Family 1	Father	Mother	Daughter	Son
Name	Xiao Tuo	Hachimi	Alina	Aamir
Age	38	36	9	7
Gender	Male	Female	Female	Male
Occupation	College English Teacher	Doctor	Student	Student
Academic career	Doctoral degree	Bachelor degree	Third grade	First grade
L1	Mandarin	Salar	Salar	Salar
L2	English	Mandarin	Mandarin	Mandarin
L3	Japanese	English	English	English

Table 1. Family 1

In the second group of families, father Hassan is a doctor in a tertiary hospital with a bachelor's degree, while mother Sophia is a bank clerk with a bachelor's degree. They were all born in the Xunhua Salar Autonomous Region, and they are all Salar. Salar is their mother language, Mandarin is their second language, and English is their third language. They have two daughters; the elder daughter, Samier, is seven years old and in the first grade of primary school, and the younger daughter, Mina, is five years old and in kindergarten. Both children speak Salar as their mother language, Mandarin as their second language, and English as their third language. They are working hard on Mandarin and English at school. This study was conducted ten times through visits and observations of two groups of families. Each group spent about 20 hours, totalling about 40 hours, and recorded the interview content. To protect privacy, names in this study are presented anonymously.

Family 2	Father	Mother	Daughter (the elder)	Daughter (the yonger)
Name	Hassan	Sophia	Samier	Mina
Age	37	37	7	5
Gender	Male	Female	Female	Female
Occupation	Doctor	bank clerk	Student	Student
Academic carrer	Bachelor degree	Bachelor degree	First grade	Kindergarten
L1	Salar	Salar	Salar	Salar
L2	Mandarin	Mandarin	Mandarin	Mandarin
L3	English	English	English	English

Table 2. Family 2

	Members	L1	L2	L3
First Group	Xiao Tuo (father)	can not speak	speak fluently	speak fluently
	Hachimi (mother)	speak fluently	speak fluently	can not speak
	Alina (daughter)	can not speak, can understand	speak fluently	speak better
	Aamir (son)	can not speak, can understand	speak fluently	can speak
Second Group	Hassan (father)	speak fluently	speak fluently	can not speak
	Sophia (mother)	speak fluently	Speak fluently	can not speak
	Samier (the elder daughter)	speak fluently	can speak	can not speak
	Mina (the younger daughter)	speak fluently	can speak	can not speak

Table 3. Two groups of families had trilingual status

Through the Chomsky language acquisition mechanism, the language input that children come into contact with in the language environment needs to rely on the education of parents and schools to strengthen the child's language acquisition. So far, starting

from parental education and trilingual environment, this research has conducted interviews and observations on two groups of families and collected relevant materials to understand the process of trilingual acquisition.

4. Findings

4.1 Family Education

In the first group of interviewed families, the father, Xiaotuo, is of Hui nationality, and his mother tongue is Mandarin. They communicate with their children in Mandarin at home. However, the mother, Hakimi, is of Salar ethnicity. When the father is not at home, they communicate with the children in Salar; when the father is at home, they communicate in Mandarin. As a result, the two children's (L1) Salar language acquisition is weak, and they can only understand but cannot speak. However, since the family often communicated in Mandarin and used Mandarin in the child's academic tutoring, the children's acquisition of (L2) Mandarin was stronger than L1 Salar. In addition, since the children's father is a college English professor, he also teaches the children English words and sentences and communicates in English. Therefore, the children's acquisition of (L3) English is more vital than that of (L1) Salar, which is close to the level of L2 Mandarin acquisition. Since Alina is older than Amir, and his father taught Alina English longer than Amir, Amir is more proficient in (L2) Mandarin than (L3) English and better in (L3) English than (L1) Salar.

In the second group of interviewed families, the parents are all Salar. They have used Salar as their mother tongue since childhood and communicate with their children in Salar at home without barriers. The parents will also tutor the two children in the Salar language, including vocabulary and sentence expression. Therefore, both children had the more robust native-tongue acquisition of Salar at (L1). However, since Mandarin is used in schools and public places, classes are taught in Mandarin in schools. Therefore, the parents often tutor the two children in Mandarin, help them complete their homework in Mandarin, and explain in Salar. The (L2) Mandarin acquisition of the two children was slightly inferior to the (L1) Salar acquisition. Since both parents have undergraduate degrees, they have encountered some difficulties in tutoring their children's English learning, so the (L3) English acquisition level of the two children is lower than the (L2) Mandarin acquisition level. Since Samiye is older than Mina, she is better at learning (L1) Salar, (L2) Mandarin, and (L3) English than Mina.

	Name	The order of the Trilingual Acquisition
First Group	Alina (daughter)	L3 = L2 > L1
	Aamir (son)	L2 > L3 > L1
Second Group	Samier (the elder daughter)	L1 > L2 > L3
	Mina (the younger daughter)	L1 > L2 > L3

Table 4. The order of children's language acquisition was under parental education in the two groups of interviewed families.

4.2 Trilingual environment

Both groups of families live in Chengdong District, Xining City, Qinghai Province. Hui and Salar ethnic groups mainly populate this area. Mandarin is used primarily as a communication language in public places and schools.

Parents in the first group of interviewed families mainly communicate in Mandarin at home. Mandarin is also the primary language in school, dominating the overall language environment. Therefore, the (L2) Mandarin acquisition level of the two children was the best. It is mentioned in the parent education that the father will provide English tutoring for the child and conduct simple communication in English. In addition, the father also uses English in his daily work. Therefore, the two children are also relatively good at (L3) English acquisition. However, for L1 Salar acquisition, apart from the mother's occasional use of Salar, the family did not use Salar frequently. Therefore, the children's (L1) Salar language acquisition level could be more substantial.

The parents of the families interviewed in the second group are all Salar. They can communicate in Salar at home. The primary language environment is Salar, which makes the children's learning level of Salar in (L1) the best. However, in schools and public places, Mandarin is the primary language of communication, so the children's acquisition level of (L2) Mandarin is relatively good. As for (L3) English, except when they are exposed to English in school, children use English sparingly. Therefore, their English acquisition level at (L3) could be better.

	Name	The order of the Trilingual Acquisition
First Group	Alina (daughter)	L3 = L2 > L1
	Aamir (son)	L3 = L2 > L1
Second Group	Samier (the elder daughter)	L1 > L2 > L3
	Mina (the younger daughter)	L1 > L2 > L3

Table 5. The language environment ranks the children's language acquisition in the two groups of interviewed families.

4.3 Analysis

Through the interviews and observations on the language environment and parental education of two groups of families, it is found that the importance of the language environment is undeniable. Taking Alina and Aamir as examples, although the mother's (L1) mother tongue is Salar, she sometimes uses Salar to communicate with the children. However, because the father's (L1) mother tongue is Mandarin, their language environment is mainly Mandarin. Therefore, Alina and Aamir have a high level of (L2) Mandarin acquisition, while (L1) Salar can only understand but cannot communicate. Samier and Mina, both their parents, speak (L1) Salar as their mother tongue, so their language environment is dominated by Salar, and Samier and Mina are very fluent in Salar (L1).

In addition, parent education, since the father of Alina and Aamir is a college English professor, he tutors the children in English every day and communicates with them in English. That explains why Alina and Aamir's (L3) English acquisition level is better than the acquisition (L1) native Sara language level. Sometimes, acquiring (L2) Mandarin is as good as (L3) English. However, for Samier and Mina, Mandarin is used in schools and public places. Therefore, parents often tutor both children in (L2) Mandarin. Given that parents could be better at English, they have difficulties tutoring their children in English learning, which makes acquiring (L2) Mandarin easier than acquiring (L3) English.

Based on the above analysis, language acquisition depends on the influence of the language environment and requires parental education. Regarding language environment, Alina and Aamir are mainly exposed to Mandarin Chinese, while Samier and Mina are primarily exposed to Salar. However, the educational role of parents also plays an important role. Alina and Aamir's father is a college English professor who tutors them in English every day, while Samier and Mina's parents often tutor them in Mandarin. This combination of language environment and parental education has enabled Alina and Aamir to progress significantly in acquiring Mandarin and English. At the same time, Samier and Mina have also achieved good results in acquiring Salar. Therefore, on the whole, language acquisition requires the combined effect of the language environment and parental education to achieve the best results.

Third Languages	The order of children' Language Acquisition
L1 (Salar)	Samier ≥ Mina > Alina ≥ Aamir
L2 (Mandarin)	Alina > Samier ≥ Aamir > Mina
L3 (English)	Alina > Aamir > Samier > Mina

Table 6. The children's language acquisition order in the two groups of interviewed families.

5. Conclusion

Based on the theory of trilingual acquisition, this article deeply explores the language education situation in Salar families in a trilingual environment with mother tongue Salar (L1), Mandarin (L2), and English (L3). The study found that family language education and language environment have a significant impact. Children's trilingual acquisition plays an important role.

5.1 Implications

Language is the carrier of human culture and an essential tool for communication. Especially in multi-ethnic and multilingual countries, the protection and inheritance of language is critical. The significance of this study is that it not only reveals the current situation and challenges of multilingual education in Salar families but also provides theoretical support and practical guidance to help minority families conduct language education more effectively, thereby promoting the inheritance and development of language.

5.1.1. Protecting and inheriting the Salar language

This study indicates the Salar language faces profound language loss and endangerment problems. Through in-depth investigation, it was found that parents' language usage in the family is crucial to the inheritance of the Sala language. Research shows that if parents do not use their native language with their children, the Salar language is gradually lost. Therefore, this study emphasises the importance of family language education and calls on parents to use the Sala language daily to improve children's mother tongue proficiency, thereby protecting and inheriting this precious national language.

5.1.2 The impact of a multilingual environment on children's cognitive development

Research shows that children in a trilingual environment have certain advantages in cognitive development. Multilingual learning helps children improve their language skills and promotes cognitive flexibility, memory, and problem-solving abilities. Through an in-depth investigation of Salar families, this study found that children in multilingual environments perform well in language acquisition and cognitive development, proving the positive role of multilingual education. Therefore, this study calls on parents

to pay attention to multilingual education, provide children with rich language input and interactive opportunities, and promote their all-round development.

5.2 Research and application scope

The results of this study not only provide significant guidelines for Salar families and valuable references for other ethnic minority and multilingual families. The following are several application areas for follow-up research:

5.2.1. Family Education Guidance

This study provides specific language education strategies and suggestions for minority families. Based on the research results, parents can adjust language usage habits in the family and create a rich language environment for their children. In particular, we must pay attention to the inheritance of our mother tongue and, simultaneously, provide children with more Mandarin and English learning resources to help them develop in an all-around way.

5.2.2. Cross-cultural communication and research

This study provides essential cases and data for cross-cultural communication and research. Multilingual family and education researchers in other countries and regions can learn from the methods and results of this study and conduct similar research to explore issues of multilingual education in different cultural backgrounds. We jointly promote multilingual education development, global language diversity, and cultural exchanges through international cooperation and exchanges.

5.3 Conclusion

Language acquisition is the natural and gradual acquisition and mastery of language in people interacting with the language environment. The difference is that language learning is acquiring knowledge through systematic learning and teaching. Therefore, language acquisition is influenced by the language environment and parental education, and it is inspired by research on language acquisition by Chomsky and Krashen. This study aims to conduct interviews and observations on two groups of Salar families, taking the language environment and parental education as influencing factors. The study results show that parental education positively impacts children's language acquisition, while the language environment plays a vital role in language acquisition. In-depth observation of language input and output can improve the language ability of children who have acquired three languages.

5.4 Study Limitations and Future Research

5.4.1 Study limitation

The data sample size of this study is relatively small, including only two groups of Salar households. This sample limitation may impact the generalizability and broad applicability of the research results, especially the inability to fully represent the language use of all Salar families. In addition, the study was limited to children under 10, so the findings may not apply to the language use of adolescents, adults, or groups with different educational backgrounds and socioeconomic status.

Both groups of families participated voluntarily, which may lead to selection bias in the sample, and some specific types of Salar families may be over-represented in the sample. This study was primarily limited to interview and observation qualitative research methods, and although these methods provide rich and in-depth qualitative data, they also have their limitations. Moreover, this study lacks quantitative data, so the conclusions cannot be verified and promoted through statistical analysis.

5.4.2 Future research

In the future, research on the language environment and family education of third language acquisition can be conducted in different types of families, including families with different cultural backgrounds and socioeconomic statuses, to verify the generalizability and broad practicality of the results of this study. For example, similar studies could be conducted among families of other ethnic minority groups and families with different cultural backgrounds. It will help to understand the different manifestations and challenges of third language acquisition in various social and cultural contexts. In addition, expanding the sample size and covering more social groups will help to improve the representativeness and broad applicability of the research results.

Further research should explore other variables affecting language use in Salar families, such as family language policies and the impact on children's language acquisition transfer in a multilingual environment. Exploring these variables can reveal the complexity and diversity of language use within families, providing a more comprehensive perspective on understanding third language acquisition.

This study mainly focuses on language environment and family education, but third language acquisition includes many categories. In the future, different theories, such as language transfer theory, can be adopted to explain the phenomenon of family language use. It will help provide a more comprehensive and in-depth understanding.

By applying diverse research methods and theories, future research will be able to more comprehensively explore the nuances of Salar family language use, reveal the impact of different variables on language acquisition, and thus provide strong support for family language policy and practice.

Moreover, with the advancement of technology, future research on the language environment and family education of third language acquisition can use advanced audio and video analysis software to capture and analyse family language interaction data more accurately. It provides more detailed and objective data, helping researchers understand the details of language use at home. In addition, combining quantitative analysis methods, such as questionnaires and statistical analysis, can supplement qualitative data and form more comprehensive research results. Through the combination of multiple methods, research can provide more convincing and general conclusions, providing strong support for third language acquisition.

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