

How Can Collaborative Partnership between Schools and Ethnic Minority Parents Affect Student Achievement in Hong Kong Context



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Abstract

Parent-school collaboration is always one of the core contents of today's educational issues. Efficient collaborative partnership between schools and parents helps improve student achievement to a certain extent. Ethnic minority students can easily be found in different types of schools in today's Hong Kong, who are regarded as a special group of people mainly come from Southeast Asia. Because of the language barriers and sense of belonging and any other related problems, families from ethnic minorities need more supports from the government, schools and teachers to help with their children's learning achievements. Through illustrating the current situation of cooperation between Hong Kong schools and ethnic minority parents, this essay aims to discover what affect home-school collaboration from the policy level, school-based management level and parental level respectively, and explore the current partnerships between ethnic minority families and schools in Hong Kong context to further analyze the factors influence ethnic minority students' achievement.

Keywords

Parent-school collaboration, ethnic minority, student achievement, Hong Kong

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background and Significant

In Hong Kong, the term 'ethnic minority' normally refers to the 'groups from non-Chinese ethnicities' (Bhowmik, M., Kennedy, K., & Hue, M., 2018). According to Census and Statistics Department 2016, 92.0% of the population (6.75 million) are of Chinese ethnicity. The nationalities of the remaining resident population are dominated by Filipino, Indonesian and Whites, accounting for 31.5%, 26.2% and 10.0% of the non-Chinese population, respectively. In addition, there are 32.3% of the Nepalese population and 35.8% of the Pakistani population born in Hong Kong. From the latest statistics provided by the Education Bureau, there are 14,076 ethnic minority students studying at primary and secondary levels in the public schools in 2016, mainly coming from Indonesian, Filipino, Nepalese, Indian, Pakistani, and Thai.

The number of minority students has been increasing as a result of the growing immigration in Hong Kong. And the educational needs of them still an urgent problem for the government and schools to solve (School Education Statistics Section, Education Bureau, 2016). Up until now, the government has introduced to the policy on anti-discrimination and other policies context such as the application of the “no loser” principle also give supports to ethnic minority students’ learning.

How can schools and teachers affect ethnic minority students’ achievements and help them to gain satisfactory learning outcomes? In my view, effective collaboration between schools and parents can promote student achievement which refers to academic performance and learning skills such as critical thinking, communication skills, cooperation skills and problem-solving skills. Relevant research shows that collaboration between schools and families is required to provide strategical support for students to help them progress academically, emotionally and socially (Epstein, 2011). Parental involvement is better to be considered as collaborative partnership between schools and minority parents that helps child growth. (Helen G. Leddy, 2018). Thus, the living conditions especially educational status of minority students are hot issues that deserve social attention.

1.2 Objectives of Essay

This essay is to solve the following two main questions:

- 1) What affect the cooperation between minority parents and schools in Hong Kong context?
- 2) How can the current situation of home-school collaboration in Hong Kong affect ethnic minority students’ achievement?

2. Literature review

2.1 The challenges in education faced by minority families

An increasing number of articles (e.g. Bhowmik, Kennedy, & Hue 2018; Hue, Kennedy, & Kerry 2014) have reported the issues and challenges that ethnic minority families are facing in the Hong Kong education context, such as student admissions, student assessment, parental involvement, resource and policy supports toward multicultural education.

The first main obstacle to minority families is parental involvement. It has further been illustrated that many minority parents might feel ignored, unwelcomed and even isolated in the school (Leddy, 2018). And teachers also tend to believe that students fail in school mostly because of the characteristic defects of their families (LaRocque, Kleiman, & Darling, 2011). According to some studies on immigrant parents' living conditions, most of them may also have to work for long hours each day, some of them even hold multiple jobs. Their busy work time and other family affairs always conflict with the school activities and events, which obstructs them to the parental involvement in school. In addition to their time limit, the language barriers and opportunities to learn English or Chinese is also a big problem for efficient parental involvement (Lasky & Karge, 2011). These parents mostly are not born in Hong Kong and unfamiliar with Chinese even English. Maybe they have a high passion of children’s education, they can hardly help their children’s learning or communicate with teachers efficient. However, Lasky and Karge (2011) also suggested that immigrant parents typically believe that education for their children is important and also place a high value on it, yet this might not be enough to generate meaningful parental involvement.

The second main problem of minority families is the low achievement and academic performance of their children. It is still undeniable that ethnic minority students often harder to gain a high position of job. Bhowmik (2014) demonstrated that many ethnic minority adolescents were ‘out of school’ in the age-group from pre-primary to post-secondary. Some of them drop out because of the poor grades and any other reasons. There are so many past literatures have highlighted the teaching of Chinese as a key area of concern, however the real reasons behind the drop-out phenomenon has always been overlooked and this is the real key to solve the problem.

2.2 Factors affecting ethnic minority students’ achievement

From the policy perspective, over the past decade, the Hong Kong government have introduced a series of policies focusing on supporting ethnic minority families. It can simply be divided into two categories: policy on anti-discrimination and policy on the creation of “no loser” classrooms. The first and most influential policy is the Race Discrimination Ordinance (RDO). At that time, participants deeply involved in making this policy have been relevant politicians or advocacy. One of the most important feature of Hong Kong’s educational reform since 2000 has been the advocacy and implementation of the “no loser” principle. The “no loser” principle has illustrated and regulated that all students will benefit from education of all levels and stages (Hue, Leung, & Kennedy, 2015). However, there are still

many problems in the specific implementation of this policy in schools. And there almost no further examination for this special group of students and also almost no reaction from the school towards this issue (Bhowmik, Kennedy & Hue, 2018).

From the school-based management perspective, since it has become a major direction of education reform, schools gained greater autonomy and authority to run themselves, including curriculum design, professional development, leadership styles and parental involvement. How to support their ethnic minority students adapting to the new school environment is a problem that school leaders should consider. The Chinese language education for students whose first language are not Chinese has become the primary issue for schools to manage (Bhowmik, Kennedy & Hue, 2018). The Education Bureau (EDB) has insisted that it should be appropriate to set the standard Chinese curriculum with suitable school-based adaptations. Based on the “Supplementary guide to the Chinese language curriculum for non-Chinese-speaking (NCS) students” (EDB, 2008), schools are required to equip their teachers with the teaching skills and patience to teach ethnic minority students and help them academically.

From the parental perspective, family education, counseling and the home-school interaction are affecting the learning outcomes of ethnic minority students. Parents play an irreplaceable role in cultivating and shaping their child’s bi-cultural socialization. Ethnic minority students are citizens with two identities who are facing two different cultures: the ethnic society and the settlement society. From one side, parents need to help their children better adapt to the settlement society. From the other side, they bear the responsibility of ensuring the survival of their heritage culture in the next generation and integrate these two kinds of culture properly (Hughes et al., 2006). Moreover, it is also essential for parents to actively and closely communicate with the school and teachers. These are challenges for immigrant families.

2.3 Models of Parental Involvement

Collaborative involvement infers that the processes of education are congruent with the families’ cultures and values and parents should be kept knowledgeable, informed and encouraged to participate in their children’s education in school (Robinson, 2017). Based on the Hoover-Dempsey model, parent behavior has been described as the following three main categories:

Psychological motivators: This aspect highlights that parents’ beliefs and actions towards involvement, including how parents think about their roles in their children’s education. Some researches have shown that parents’ expectations and ideas of involvement are closely related to ethnicity and race (Biddle, 1986). And if parents regard that they can have a positive impact on student achievement, they are more possible to do a good job in parental involvement (Bandura, 1977).

Contextual motivators: This part involves direct requests on behalf of students and teachers for parents to participate and are a predictor of parental involvement and enhance partnership relations (Lavenda, 2011). This aspect refers that teachers’ specific invitations are the strongest indicators of parental involvement in school and are strongly encouraged.

Life-context variables: This part involves parents’ resources, knowledge, time and skills (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). Parents maybe do not have enough or sophisticated skills or knowledge, but the development of a community-based, bilingual, ground-up parental involvement programs can encourage the sense of belonging within the school.

In addition, the Epstein model of parental involvement (Lasky & Karge, 2011) has such description:

1. Parenting is important for supporting learning at home.
2. Communication is essential between home and school.
3. Volunteering is an important aspect that includes recruiting and training parents to work in schools.
4. Training parents to create learning environments at home and assist children with homework.
5. Involving parents in decision-making in school governance, such as the PTA.

3. Analytical discussion

3.1 Main problems in collaboration between schools and minority parents

The first main problem is insufficient communication between parents and schools. In Hong Kong, many minority students come from low-income families, which means that these parents might be low-educated or have low academic qualifications. Thus, the insufficient communication cause by parents’ low awareness of involvement in their child’s education. It is best for schools to mobilize parental involvement through providing some special attention and help. And another aspect is the irrational school structure. A social news for 2016 has reported that a Pakistani mother complained that she had not received her child’s academic transcript for two years. And when she asked to meet with the principal, she was rejected by the school staff using “the principal is very busy” as reason. As a school that accepts minority students, it should provide sufficient opportunities for cooperation with ethnic minority parents.

Another main problem is schools and educators might not perceive that ethnic minority families possess valuable experiences or knowledge that is worth sharing within the school, which is essential for a healthy and sustainable relationship between schools and families. From the school perspective, teachers and school leaders are better to learn how to make full use of different parent resources for student education. Perhaps some ethnic minority families are at a disadvantage in society, their experiences are also valuable in creating a real multicultural campus.

3.2 The influence of home-school cooperation on students' learning skills

How can we improve our children's different kinds of learning skills? Based on some past research, students' learning skills has strong link with the curriculum design and teaching methods. Building up the contact between the course and parents should be considered by schools to deal with the problem that parents can do nothing or know nothing about their children's learning. Parents' participation in the curriculum settings can help students improve their learning abilities to a certain extent. Actually, family education did play an important role in cultivating students' communication skills, critical thinking, cooperation skills and problem solving skills. Schools can improve parents' awareness and ability to educate their children through some parental education programs and lectures. One thing to reiterate is "student achievement" this term not only meant academic performance, it also includes different kinds of abilities under the trend of holistic education.

3.3 Ideas for enhancing parental involvement

As mentioned above, student achievement has strong link with parental involvement, thus optimizing the mode of cooperation between home and school is one thing school can do to improve ethnic minority students' learning achievements.

At the policy level, the Education Bureau (EDB) needs to ensure the implementation of additional funding for schools admitting non-Chinese speaking students. In order to meet the different learning progress and needs of non-Chinese speaking students, school need enough funds to hire additional staff and hold some professional development programs. In addition, although the Hong Kong government has abolished the designated school since 2013, there still insufficient support services for minority parents. The government is expected to set relevant rules for schools to provide learning support or services for minority students in the school materials so that parents can get more comprehensive information when they choose schools.

At the school level, schools are expected to provide ethnic minority students a better educational environment through relevant professional development to manage cultural diversity in the campus environment and classroom. For schools that admit ethnic minority students, they are required to not only cater for the learning needs of these students, but also provide necessary supports to ethnic minority families. Since most parents of non-Chinese speaking students do not speak Chinese, schools need to hire translators to better promote home-school cooperation. In addition, the school also needs to provide parental education activities such as some lectures and inclusive activities for ethnic minority parents.

At the parent level, ethnic minority parents do not mean that they are passive in their children's achievements. They can spontaneously organize and join some associations for ethnic minority parents and actively participate in relevant parental education lectures or workshops to strengthen communication with other parents and enhance their participation in their child's education. It is also suggested that paying attention to the difficulties that their children are encountering in learning regularly and asking the school and the teacher for help when facing trouble are good for parental involvement and healthy collaborative partnership between schools and ethnic minority parents.

4. Conclusion

Hong Kong as a multicultural city with a large amount of immigrants from all over the world, the issue of international education has been receiving great attention from all walks of the society. The existence of ethnic minority groups is a major feature of today's Hong Kong. Over the years, the government has also introduced and implemented several policies to give supports to ethnic minorities in education and other aspects. As non-Chinese speaking ethnic minorities, they are encountering many difficulties in their educational opportunities and outcomes, reflecting in the fact that it is often more difficult for them to get high academic performance in schools or enter to an ideal school or even get a high position of jobs. These can be integrated as student achievement, which includes different kinds of learning skills such as communication skills, critical thinking, cooperation skills and problem solving skills. Improving learning achievement of ethnic minority students needs joint efforts of the government, schools and parents. The poor collaborative partnership between schools and ethnic minority parents might due to the low achievement of students. Because of the insufficient supports provided by the government and schools, ethnic minority parents are facing a lot of difficulties

in home-school collaboration. In addition, those parents sometimes lack awareness and abilities to help their children and communicate with teachers efficiently. All of these might affect to achievement of ethnic minority students. And to deal with these problems, we need to focus from three levels: the policy level, the school level and the parent level. This is not something that can be done overnight. It requires continuous efforts in all parts of the Hong Kong society.

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