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Fan Jiang
University of Windsor

George Zhou
University of Windsor, gzhou@uwindsor.ca

Zuo Chen Zhang
University of Windsor

Clinton Beckford
University of Windsor

Lan Zhong
University of Windsor

See next page for additional authors

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Authors

Fan Jiang, George Zhou, Zuo Chen Zhang, Clinton Beckford, Lan Zhong, and Fan Jiang

Chinese Immigrant Parents' Communication with School Teachers

La communication de parents immigrés chinois avec les professeurs des écoles

Fan Jiang, University of Windsor
George Zhou, University of Windsor
Zuochen Zhang, University of Windsor
Clinton Beckford, University of Windsor
Lan Zhong, University of Windsor

Abstract

Parent-teacher communication has great influence on children's school performance. Using Walker et al.'s model of parent involvement as a theoretical framework, this study investigated Chinese immigrant parents' communication experience with teachers and the psychological factors that influenced such communication. The study collected data through survey and revealed that Chinese immigrant parents recognized their responsibility to maintain regular communication with school teachers and believed that such communication could bring beneficial outcomes to their children's education. The study found that Chinese immigrant parents had more frequent communication with teachers than those recorded in previous literatures. Among the five psychological factors, communication self-efficacy seems to have the strongest relation with parents' communication behaviors.

Résumé

La communication entre parents et professeurs exerce une grande influence sur la performance scolaire des enfants. En partant du modèle de participation de Walker et al., cette étude examine d'une part la façon dont les parents immigrés chinois communiquent avec les professeurs de leurs enfants et d'autre part, elle examine les facteurs qui influencent cette communication. Les données recueillies proviennent de questionnaires et montrent que les parents immigrés chinois reconnaissent non seulement leur responsabilité de maintenir une communication régulière avec les professeurs de leurs enfants mais aussi que cette communication peut avoir des résultats positifs pour l'éducation de ces derniers. Cette étude montre que les parents immigrés chinois ont plus de communication avec les professeurs que ne le montrent les résultats d'autres études similaires. La perception d'efficacité personnelle, un des cinq facteurs psychologiques, semble avoir la plus haute relation avec les attitudes de communication des parents.

Introduction

Parental involvement has been an increasingly important topic in the field of education, given its significant influence on students' academic performance and positive school behaviors (Fan, 2001). A growing body of evidence has emerged suggesting that greater parental involvement can result in beneficial outcomes such as higher grade point averages, better performances in reading and mathematics, reduced grade retentions, and lower student dropout rates (Li,

2007; McKenna & Willms, 1998). This positive influence of parental involvement is believed to be applicable to all students in spite of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds and grade levels (Kim, 2002; Jaynes, 2003; Yan & Lin, 2005).

In recent years, there has been a dramatic increase of immigrants from mainland China in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2008). Unlike Asian immigrants prior to the 1980s who settled in urban enclaves such as Chinatown and had little financial and human capital, recent Chinese immigrants often come with resources (Guo & DeVoretz, 2006). The emergence of a growing number of middle-class Chinese immigrants with financial capital, professional skills, and educational credentials suggests a need for more studies on Chinese immigrants.

Although a number of studies have been reported on Chinese immigrant parents' involvement in their children's education, most of them only focus on examining home-based activities (e.g. Li, 2007) with a few exceptions on school-based involvement (e.g. Dyson, 2001; Zhong & Zhou, 2011). As an integral part of school involvement, it is believed that effective home and school communication is crucial in creating shared goals, avoiding misunderstanding between parents and teachers, and guiding parents' involvement activities at home. According to Eberly, Joshi, and Konzal (2007), children are raised within the overlapping of micro (families and schools), meso (the relationship between families and schools), and macro systems (cultural notions of development). Open communication between the mesolinks must be secured if children are to grow and learn (Epstein, 2001). However, researchers (Schmidt, 1994; Voltz, 1994) find that effective communication between school and immigrant parents is often difficult to achieve. Studies on Chinese immigrant families find that Chinese parents are passive in initiating communication with school and teachers (Wang, 2008), and are often dissatisfied with the effectiveness of programs designed to bridge home-school communication (Guo & Mohan, 2008).

Zhong and Zhou (2011) have recently reported that factors such as the lack of English proficiency, working for time-demanding jobs, cultural differences, and unfamiliarity with the Canadian education system are causing difficulties for Chinese immigrant parents' active school involvement. It is our belief that these factors influence Chinese parents' communication with school teachers as well. Since there are little quantitative data available concerning Chinese immigrant parents' communication experience, this study aims at discovering the general patterns of Chinese immigrant parents' communication, and exploring how their communication experiences are influenced by various contextual and psychological factors.

Literature Review

Psychological Constructs of Parental Involvement

Although many studies have been done investigating the relationship between parental involvement and student outcomes such as academic achievement, little research has been conducted to find out why parents get involved in their children's education in the first place. The theoretical model of parental involvement proposed by Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995, 1997) offers the framework to investigate this question from a psychological perspective. Grounded in a substantive amount of research in the education and psychology fields, this model is claimed as "presenting the 'best guesses' for why parents get involved, what forms their involvement takes, and how their involvement influences students" (Walker, Wilkins, Dallaire, Sandler, & Hoover-Dempsey, 2005, p.86). According to Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler, parents' involvement behaviors and the forms of their involvement are influenced by several psychological and contextual contributors including parents' role construction, parent's sense of efficacy for helping the child, and general invitations for involvement from school and child. Walker et al.'s (2005) work revised the model developed by Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler and further divided these contributors into three categories, namely parents' motivational beliefs, parents' perceptions of invitations for involvement from others, and parents' perceived life context.

Parents' motivational beliefs.

It is hypothesized that parents' involvement decisions are primarily influenced by their beliefs about what they should and can do for their children's education. Walker et al. (2005) identified two constructs for these beliefs: parents' role construction and parents' self-efficacy. Role construction functions as a motivator for parents by helping them imagine and anticipate how they might behave. Parents need to recognize and understand their responsibilities in order to carry out the relevant activities. In other words, if parents view their participation as a requirement for parenting, they will be more likely to be involved. Although parental involvement has been highly valued in North-American education settings, research (Denessen, Bakker, & Gierveld, 2007) found that ethnic minority parents seem to hold the school fully responsible for their children's education, especially when they come from traditional cultures where role divisions are quite clear. Rooted in Bandura's self-efficacy theory (1986, 1997), parents' self-efficacy suggests that parents' involvement is partly influenced "by the outcomes they expect will follow their actions and their appraisal of their

personal abilities” (Walker et al., 2005, p.93). In other words, it would be expected that parents who believe communication is contributing to the academic progress of their children would be more inclined to get contact with teachers. Guided by the concept of self-efficacy, it will be interesting to assess the links between Chinese parents’ communication behaviors and their attitudes toward the effectiveness of such communication.

Parents’ perceptions of invitations from others.

Parents’ perceptions of invitation for involvement from others are also indicators of parents’ decisions. In other words, parents are motivated to be involved if they feel they are welcomed and valued by their children and teachers. Studies found that parents respond to both children’s implicit and explicit needs (Deslandes & Bertrand, 2005). For example, parents may decide to take action when their children constantly ask them to help with homework. They also become more involved when they notice children are experiencing difficulties in their studies. Perceived invitation from children can be both general and specific. General invitation from a child may come in the form of the child’s expressing of willingness to accept parental help and affective response to involvement. Children send specific invitations to parents by explicitly asking them to get involved with their learning activities. Researchers suggest that some children may view parental involvement as intrusive and controlling rather than helpful (Ames, Khoju, & Watkins, 1993). In such cases, parents may stop communicating with teachers since their children don’t appreciate such help or even express disaffection toward this form of involvement. It is also believed that teachers’ demands for involvement, coupled with an inviting school climate, are related significantly to levels of parental involvement. Examples of such invitation include teacher’s creating a welcome atmosphere by decorating the classroom, as well as inviting parents to visit schools and to contact with the teacher regularly. Parents may tend to initiate communication more if they feel the teachers are welcoming and are interested in talking about their children. Particularly, perception of teacher invitation is a crucial factor for Chinese immigrant parents, since they move to Canada from a different country and often self-perceive themselves as second-class citizen or have a feeling of *Ji Ren Li Xia* (living with a host).

Parents’ perceived life context.

In addition to parents’ motivational beliefs and perceived invitation from others, their perceived time, energy, and their knowledge and skills for involvement may also mediate forms of involvement. The time and energy parents have to put into

children's education are influenced by a number of factors such as parents' occupation, employment status and family size. It is reported that time and energy variables are common barriers to parents' involvement (Gettinger & Waters, 1998). And, compared to parents from non-immigrant families, immigrant parents often experience more constraints on their time and energy due to economic pressures. A number of studies of Chinese immigrant parents from lower socioeconomic class (Ji & Koblinsky, 2009; Li, Holloway, Bempechat, & Loh, 2008) have identified limited available time as the main barrier to their involvement. In order to effectively support children in their learning, parents also need to possess the necessary knowledge and skills. For immigrant parents, this requirement not only includes basic education competence such as the ability to read and mathematical skills, but also includes familiarity with Canadian school system. It is reasonable to hypothesize that due to their unfamiliarity with Canadian education settings, Chinese parents will perceive more difficulties in terms of communication with schools.

It is necessary to mention that, although the theoretical model of parental involvement proposed by Walker et al. can be used as an instrumental framework to assess the links between parents' psychological characteristics and involvement behaviors, this model was originally designed to examine parents' general involvement in children's education. The current study, however, is focused on one aspect of these activities, the communication between the parent and teacher. As a result, the original scale was revised to suit the current research topic.

Home-School Communication

Parental involvement processes are greatly influenced by teachers' communication practices with them. When well-structured, such communication "can impart information to help parents become more knowledgeable about children's learning activities, aware of their positive qualities and progress, and informed about how they, as parents, might help their child learn" (Ames et al., 1993, p.3). Healthy home and school communication should also be frequent, bidirectional and on-going. It should serve the purpose of establishing meaningful connections between school teachers and parents (Epstein, 1991). Current research suggests that not only does home-school communication happen infrequently in today's education settings, but also its quality is not satisfactory. For example, many parents have reported dissatisfaction with the content of home and school communication due to the lack of classroom-related instructional information and the lack of information about a child's academic progress/weaknesses (Epstein, 2001; Guo & Mohan, 2008; Klein, 2008; Wang,

2008). Chinese immigrant parents' communication experience is more complicated than those from non-immigrant families due to their linguistic and cultural background and the change of life context. Literature examining this topic unveils the following communication patterns of Chinese immigrants.

First, Chinese parents communicate with school teachers infrequently. Studies suggest that many Chinese immigrant parents' contacts with schools are limited to yearly conferences (Klein, 2008). In a study conducted with urban Chinese immigrant families, it was found that less than a half of the parents (35%) had attended a parent-teacher conference where they can discuss children's school progress. This is a considerably lower rate compared to the rate in a nationally representative sample in the U.S. (Ji & Koblinsky, 2009). Second, Chinese immigrant parents are passive in initiating communication with schools. Wang's (2008) study examines Chinese parents' use of family-school relations as social capital. Her findings suggest that compared to parents in China who vigorously seek the opportunity to communicate and interact with teachers, Chinese immigrant parents adopted a passive role in initiating contacts with school and teachers. The author argued that structural factors contributing to this phenomenon included time constraints, language, and cultural barriers, while the deeper reason laid in Chinese parents' misperception of American education system. They view American schools as egalitarian and competition free, and thus attribute less value to parent-teacher relationships in their children's success. The author also argued that American educators "would be surprised by these parents' naivety and idealization of American schools" (p.119). Third, in terms of the method of communication, Chinese immigrant parents used in-person communication most often, and they expressed a preference for this kind of communication. Dyson's (2001) study finds that one third of her participating Chinese parents choose in-person contact alone as the most preferred method to communicate with schools. Some others use in-person contact combined with other means such as written notes and telephone calls. Although another third of these parents didn't indicate any preferences, the findings show that none desired newsletters as the only way of home-school communication. Lai and Ishiyama (2004) find that despite the fact that Chinese parents view teachers as authority figures, they still want to develop close and harmonious interpersonal relationships with them. Findings suggest Chinese parents prefer to communicate in informal settings, where teachers conversed in friendly manner and the atmosphere is warm and welcoming.

For the purpose of this study, we have operationalized home-school communication as parent-teacher meetings, casual conversations happened on the hallway, written notes, phone calls or emails between home and school, and

school events such as “family fun nights” and “parent nights.” Such communication can be initiated by either parent or teacher, and can be both brief and detailed in nature. However, the communication should be “child-centered” (Rimm-Kaufman & Zhang, 2005, p.289), meaning its content should be relevant to a specific child. As a result, communication which is aimed to inform parents about general school events such as newsletters will not fit into the criteria.

Methodology

The study was conducted in Windsor, Ontario, the fourth most diverse city in Canada. Since 1991, the largest number of immigrants in the Windsor area from an individual region is from China (Statistics Canada, 2008). This makes the city of Windsor as one of ideal locations to conduct research on Chinese immigrants. Using survey and interviews, the research team investigated the communication experiences of both Chinese immigrant parents and teachers. However, this article only reports the findings from the parent survey.

Survey Instrument

Three aspects of information were collected through this survey: participants' demographic information, communication experience with school teachers, and psychological factors which influence such communications. Participants' demographic information includes gender, family income, years being in Canada/USA, etc. Parents' experience communicating with school teachers is examined by finding out the ways in which parents get contact with teachers, the frequency they communicate with teachers, the role they played in initiating the communication (active and passive), the major content of their communication, and their satisfaction with and expectations about the communication. Five constructs were used in the survey to measure psychological factors impacting parents' communication behaviors with school teachers. They were adapted from the instrument Walker et al. (Walker et al., 2005) used, plus some extra questions designed by the researchers in order to address the characteristics of study participants. These five constructs were parents' role construction, self-efficacy, perception of invitation from teachers, perception of invitation from children, and perceived life context.

The survey was anonymous and in Chinese. It consisted of 38 questions in total and required approximately 15 minutes to complete. Before the final version of the survey was administered, the draft questionnaire was reviewed by a couple of faculty who have extensive experiences in researching sojourn experiences in Canada. The survey was also piloted with several Chinese parents.

Survey Administration

The survey was distributed to Chinese immigrant parents in different occasions. With assistance from the local Chinese association, the survey was distributed to Chinese parents who attended the Moon Festival gala the association hosted. The local Chinese church also helped researchers administer the survey to those Chinese parents who came to its Sunday service. In addition, researchers also reached Chinese parents by visiting the weekend Chinese language classes organized by the local school board and Chinese association. Parents who came to drop off or pick up their children were approached for completing the survey.

Data Analysis

In total, 183 surveys were collected. An initial screening process was adopted to take out 16 surveys that left too many questions unanswered. Data were then entered into SPSS. In the process of entering the data, a numerical code for each close-ended answer was assigned. Both descriptive and inferential analyses were conducted to interpret the data using this software. Thus, frequency tables for each question item were generated. The mean, mode, median and standard deviation were calculated for each interval scale. Inferential statistics were also generated through popular statistical approaches such as ANOVA and t-tests to analyze the connections between various factors and parents' communication experience.

Results

Demographic Information

Approximately 70% survey participants were female and 25% were male. In addition, 5% participants chose "prefer not to answer" the question regarding gender. With regard to their years residing in Canada/the U.S., around 42% participants had been living in North America for more than 10 years, 35% for 5 to 10 years, 19% between 2 to 5 years, and only 4% living in North America for less than 2 years. Among those who responded to the question "the total household annual income before tax," about 22% had a total household annual income that was above \$100,000, 50% of the respondents' total household annual incomes fell in the range between \$40,000 and \$100,000, and the rest 28% families had annual income that was less than \$40,000. In regards to their employment status, 32% were not employed at the time of data collection, 1% were self-employed, 54% worked full time, and 13% worked part time. Approximately 55% of participants had a long term contract and 12% worked temperately. The survey also collected information about spouse's work status. Approximately 23% of spouses were not employed at the time of data collection,

66% worked full time vs. 11% part, and 63% had a long term contract vs. 14% temperate. Approximately 8% of families, neither parent worked. In regard to their school age children, 65% of participants' first children were in kindergarten or elementary school (grades k-8) and 35% were in secondary school (grades 9-12). 32% of participants had a second child with 96% in grades k-8 and 4% in secondary school. Approximately 7% of participants had a 3rd child and all were in grades K-8.

Communication Experiences

Parent-teacher meeting attendance

Approximately 47% participating parents indicated that they attended all of the parent-teacher meetings which were scheduled by schools, together with or without their spouse. Around 14% participants reported that they attended these meetings with their spouse all the time. About 39% of the participations responded that they sometimes attended these meetings, with or without their spouse. The percentage of parents who responded that they had never attended a parent-teacher meeting was 14%. Among them, half indicated that their spouse were taking care of this matter, and the other half indicated that their spouse did not attend these meetings either. That is to say, among the 7% of the surveyed families, neither parent had ever attended a parent-teacher meeting. In this group, none of the families had a total household annual income that was above \$80,000. Approximately 40% of the respondents' total household annual income fell in the range between \$40,000 and \$80,000, and the rest 60% families had annual income that was less than \$40,000. Compared with the whole participant group, this family group with neither parent attending a parent-teacher meeting had much lower family income.

Concerns at the parent-teacher meeting

The biggest concern held by participants who attended parent-teacher meetings scheduled by school (n=145) was to get the teacher's comments on their child. Around 71% parents indicated that they wanted to "listen to teachers' comments on their child" at these meetings. About 58% participants wanted to use this opportunity to "get their questions answered," and less than half of the participants (47%) cared about "making sense of the report card" during these meetings. A small part of the participants (6%) responded that they had concerns other than the above three options. These concerns were "the development of child's social skills," "how their children get along with other children at school," "in what aspects their children needed to and could be improved," and "in what

aspects they can help their children to make improvement.” Some participating parents reported that they were also interested in talking about and making sense of the curriculum, textbook, and teaching methods used by schools.

The frequency of communication with teachers (excluding the school-scheduled parent-teacher meetings)

In response to the question “How often did you communicate with your children’s teachers for each school year excluding the school-scheduled parent-teacher meetings?” more than half of the participants (59%) reported that they communicated with teachers, but less than once a month on average. This number is followed by those who reported that they never communicated with teachers other than parent-teacher meetings (27%). The rest of participating parents communicated with school teachers more regularly. About 8% participants indicated that they communicated with teacher once a month. The percentage of participants who communicated with teachers a few times a month is 4%. Approximately 2% participants indicated that they contacted children’s teachers at least once a week. In sum, 73% participating parents contacted their children’s teachers other than parent-teacher meetings.

Parents’ roles in initiating communication

This question was designed to find out whether Chinese parents were active or passive in communicating with children’s teachers. Responses showed that among those parents who had contacts with teachers other than parent-teacher meetings (n=123), approximately 66% had initiated a meeting. If taking parents who responded that they had never communicated with teachers other than school-scheduled meetings into account, the overall rate of participants who had initiated a meeting with teachers dropped to 50%.

The content of communication (excluding parent-teacher meetings)

About 94% parents who communicated with teachers other than school-scheduled parent-teacher meetings responded to the question investigating the content of their communication. The responses showed that academic-related issues were a concern for 75% parents. Children’s behavioral issues were identified by 68% parents. In addition, half of the respondents talked about children’s relationships with other students in these communications. Other topics addressed in these communications include “children’s social activities,” “parenting responsibilities,” and “educational plans for students with special needs.”

Chi-square tests were conducted between the variable *communication frequency* and each of the three variables measuring the content of communication, including *academic-related issues*, *behavior issues*, and *relationship with other students*. Based on the response distribution to the question about communication frequency, the five scale originally used to measure participants' communication frequency was congregated into three categories. These categories are (a) "never communicate with teachers," (b) "communicate with teachers, but less than once a month on average," and (c) "communicate once a month and more (combining the original "Once a month;" "A few times a month;" "Every week and more.>"). The tests revealed no significant results between participants' *communication frequency* and their concern of *academic-related issues*. No significant result was found either between *communication frequency* and *content of communication in relationship with other students*. However, the statistic [$\chi^2(2, N=150)=10.80, p<0.05$, Cramer's $V=0.27$] showed that there was a significant relationship between the *communication frequency* and *content of communication about behavior issues*. It appeared that those participants who talked about children's behavior problems tended to have more frequent communications with teachers.

Methods used in communicating with teachers

The participants were asked "in which method(s) do you communicate with the teachers?" The data indicated that meeting teachers in person was adopted by 75% of the respondents. The second most popular way to communicate with teachers among participants was writing. About 40% respondents of this question communicated with teachers by writing letters, notes, messages and etc. Approximately 25% participants reported that they used telephone to communicate with teachers, and around 3% participants reported that they used emails.

Satisfaction with the communication

Participants' satisfaction level was measured using a six-point Likert-type scale with 1= strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=disagree just a little, 4=agree just a little, 5=agree, and 6=strongly agree. Approximately 60% of participants reported to be satisfied with the overall quality of their communication with teachers (combining "agree" and "strongly agree"); 67% felt comfortable to communicate with teachers; only 14% thought that teachers had knowledge about Chinese culture; and 51% agreed or strongly agreed that teachers understood their concerns about children (See Table 1).

Table 1. Parents' Satisfaction with Parent-teacher Communication

Questions	1	2	3	4	5	6
I was satisfied with the overall quality of the communication with my child's teacher	0	2	7	31	50	10
I felt comfortable to communicate with my child's teacher	0	2	7	23	52	16
My child's teacher has knowledge of my culture	10	23	25	28	11	3
My child's teacher understands my concerns about my child	1	3	11	33	42	10

Note: 1= strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=disagree a little, 4=agree a little, 5=agree, 6=strongly agree

Expectations for the communication

Approximately 63% of participants hoped that they could have better influence on school activities through communication with teachers; 70% hoped that teachers had better knowledge of Chinese culture; 76% hoped that teachers understood their concerns better (See Table 2).

Table 2. Parents' Expectations about Parent-teacher Communication

Questions	1	2	3	4	5	6
I hope that I can have better influence on school activities through communication with my child's teacher	1	5	6	25	40	23
I hope that my child's teacher has better knowledge of my culture	1	1	10	18	39	31
I hope that my child's teacher understands my concerns better	0	1	5	18	40	36

Psychological Constructs of Chinese Immigrant Parents

Five psychological constructs that were believed to mediate parents' communication behaviors were measured in the survey. For each construct, participating parents were asked to rate on a six-point Likert-type scale to indicate their extent of agreement with 2-5 statements.

Descriptive analysis results

Participants' response distribution is reported in Table 3. The mean of each construct was calculated by pooling the responses to all statements used to measure this construct (Table 4). It should be noted that in order to make the scales for all questions measuring psychological factors consistent, the scale for the question "the lack of knowledge about Canadian culture often makes me feel intimidated to communicate with the teacher" was reversed. The highest mean value (4.89) was calculated for the construct *role construction*, which indicates that a majority of participants (75%) believed that communication with the teacher was their responsibility of parenting. A mean value of 4.51 was calculated for the construct *communication self-efficacy*. Participating Chinese parents had relatively low mean scores on their perception of invitation from children and perceived life context.

Table 3: Response Distribution for the Statements about Psychological Constructs

Role construction	1	2	3	4	5	6
I believe it is my responsibility to communicate with my child's teacher regularly.	2	1	5	17	41	34
I believe it is my responsibility to support decisions made by the teacher	3	1	6	34	42	14
I believe parent-teacher communication can make the school better.	2	1	6	16	40	35
I believe it is my responsibility to stay on top of things at school	1	1	2	18	38	40
I believe it is my responsibility to make the school better	1	1	4	26	41	27
Self-efficacy						
My communication with teacher can make a difference in my child's school performance.	1	3	4	22	38	32
I know effective ways to contact my child's teacher.	2	2	10	28	38	20
I know how to communicate effectively with my child's teacher.	1	2	11	33	41	12
My English is good enough to communicate with the teacher clearly	2	3	9	27	43	16

The lack of knowledge about Canadian culture often makes me feel intimidated to communicate with the teacher	21	21	18	21	15	4
Perception of invitation from teachers						
My child's teacher is interested in my culture	11	14	24	28	18	5
My child's teacher encouraged me to communicate with him or her	5	5	13	29	37	11
I felt my child's teacher welcomes me to communicate with him or her about my child	3	5	14	26	43	9
My child's teacher is interested and cooperative when we discuss my child together	3	4	7	31	41	14
My child's teacher invited me to help out at the school	10	13	19	27	23	8
Perception of invitation from children						
My child asked me to talk with his or her teacher	12	15	24	25	18	6
My child asked me to help out at the school	9	7	22	24	25	13
Perceived life context						
I know about Canadian school system	3	7	21	36	29	4
I have enough time and energy to communicate effectively with my child's teacher	4	6	29	30	23	8

Table 4: Mean of Psychological Constructs

Psychological Construct	Mean	Standard Deviation
Role construction	4.89	0.81
Self-efficacy	4.51	0.76
Perceptions of invitation from teachers	3.99	1.01
Perceptions of invitation from children	3.62	1.30
Perceived life context	3.89	0.96

Inferential analysis results

One way ANOVA tests were firstly conducted to compare the ratings on the five psychological constructs among participants grouped by their frequency of attending parent-teacher meetings. The variable measuring participants' frequency of attending meetings was clustered from the original seven categories into three categories, namely (a) "never attend meetings" (combining "Never. My spouse did not attend either;" "Never, but my spouse did attend some of these meeting;" and "Never, but my spouse looked after all these meetings"), (b) "sometimes attend meetings," and (c) "always attend meetings" (combining "All the time, but my spouse did not go to any of the meetings;" "All the time. My spouse did attend some of the meetings with me;" and "All the time. My spouse was with me every time."). For each psychological construct, a new variable was generated by summing up a participant's ratings on all the items used to measure that construct. The test results, $F(2,148)=6.729$, $p<0.002$, and follow-up group comparisons using Tukey's HSD test, showed that statistically significant mean differences for the construct *role construction* existed between the following groups: participants who have never attended a meeting ($M=21.63$, $SD=5.28$) and those who sometimes attended such meetings ($M=24.32$, $SD=3.86$); participants who have never attended a meeting ($M=21.63$, $SD=5.28$) and those who always attended such meetings ($M=25.30$, $SD=3.44$). Participants who attended meetings demonstrated a stronger belief in their role construct than those who had never attended any meetings.

Significant results were also found between the groups who had never attended a parent-teacher meeting ($M=20.25$, $SD=4.20$) and those who always attended such meetings ($M=23.32$, $SD=3.57$) on the construct *self-efficacy*, $F(2,144) = 5.564$, $p<0.005$. Significant difference was revealed between these two groups on the construct *perceived life context* as well by the test results $F(2,152) = 4.142$, $p<0.018$ ($M=7.0$, $SD=2.98$ vs. $M=8.19$, $SD=1.96$). Parents who always attended such meetings scored significantly higher than those who had never attended such meetings on these two constructs. No significant results were found among the three groups on the constructs *perception of invitation from teachers* and *perception of invitation from children*.

One way ANOVA tests were then conducted to compare ratings on the five psychological constructs among participants grouped by their frequency of communication with teachers other than the school-scheduled parent-teacher meetings. Again, the variable measuring the frequency of such communication was clustered from the original five categories to three categories, as mentioned before. Test results and follow-up group comparisons using Tukey's HSD tests

Table 5: One-way ANOVA Analysis of Role Construction by Meeting Attendance

Descriptive Statistics					
Groups		Mean	Standard Deviation	Standard Error	
Never Attend Meetings		21.63	5.28	1.21	
Sometimes Attend Meetings		24.32	3.86	0.49	
Always Attend meetings		25.30	3.44	0.41	
Inferential Statistics					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	202.483	2	101.241	6.729	.002
Within Groups	2226.669	148	15.045		

showed that statistically significant differences of mean scores existed on all of the five constructs between the parents who had never communicated with teachers and those who reported that they communicated with teachers with a frequency less than once a month on average. Parents who had never communicated with teachers scored significantly lower (Table 6).

An independent sample t-test was conducted to find out whether parents who had initiated a communication and those who didn't had had any difference on the five psychological constructs. Because this independent sample t-test compared 5 variables, a Bonferroni adjustment was applied to reduce the possibility of committing a Type 1 error. Thus, a more conservative *p* value of 0.01 was used to compare each variable's significant level. The results, $t(103) = 2.79$ and $p < 0.006$, indicated that those who had initiated a communication with teachers ($M = 23.83$, $SD = 3.33$) scored significantly higher on the construct *Communication self-efficacy* than those who had not ($M = 22.00$, $SD = 2.80$).

Discussion

Speaking of Chinese parents' communication patterns, both conformities and disconformities existed between this study and previous research findings. First, this study found that in-person communication was a preferred communication method of exchanging information with teachers. Results from the survey showed that this method was used by 75% of the participants.

Table 6. F-test Results on the Five Psychological Constructs between Parents Who Had Never Communication with Teachers and Those Who Communicated with Teachers

	Never communicate with teachers		Communicate with teachers, but less than once a month on average		F test results
	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation	
Role construction	22.29	4.86	25.51	2.81	$F(2,148)=10.14, p<0.01.$
Self-efficacy	20.81	4.47	23.43	3.15	$F(2,144)=7.30, p<0.01.$
Perception of invitation from teachers	17.39	4.99	21.00	4.45	$F(2,132) =7.06, p<0.01.$
Perception of invitation from children	6.30	2.56	7.70	2.46	$F (2,148) =4.43, p<0.01$
Perceived life context	7.05	1.86	8.04	1.90	$F (2,152) =4.51, p<0.01$

The second preferred popular method of communication was writing, which was adopted by 40% survey respondents. Few parents used other tools to communicate, such as telephone and email. These findings were consistent with Dyson's study (2001) where it was found that in-person communication was the preferred method of participating Chinese parents to communicate with schools.

Discrepancies with previous studies were found with respect to other aspects of Chinese parents' communication experiences. As far as the frequency of communication was concerned, findings generated from the survey demonstrated that a significant portion of participating Chinese parents had frequent communication with school teachers. First of all, around 93% of the survey participants reported that they and/or their spouses attended at least some of the parent-teacher meetings which were held regularly each school year. Moreover, around 73% survey participants also communicated with teachers in addition to these school-scheduled meetings, while 14% communicated with teachers on a monthly basis. These findings are significantly different from those recorded in previous literature. For example, a study conducted with Chinese

parents living in urban areas in USA found that a low rate of 35% parents had ever attended a parent-teacher meeting (Ji & Koblinsky, 2009). Another study conducted in Canada found that half of the participants, who were recent immigrants, only communicated with teachers once or twice a year (Klein, 2008).

A possible explanation to these different findings was the variation in study participants and research design. These two previous studies interviewed a small size of immigrant parents, 29 and 5 respectively. Findings from such small sizes can be hardly generalized to Chinese immigrant parents in general. In addition, study participants of Ji and Koblinsky (2009) were from low income families with two thirds of the families making less than \$20,000 a year, 24% making between \$20,000 and \$29,999, and only 10% having incomes above \$30,000. Actually, in their sample, more than 86% of the families had both working parents who worked longer hours to make their ends meet. Such tough life context might contribute to their less frequent communication with teachers. We believe that our study findings reflect the reality better since they were concluded based a quantitative research design with a large sample. This makes our study very significant since there is no other such type of research on Chinese immigrant parents available in the literature before. Given the facts that Chinese parents highly value education (Zhong & Zhou, 2011) and they often have a strong belief in their responsibility of communication with teachers as reported above, the high frequency of Chinese immigrant parents' communication with teachers makes much sense.

Speaking of the content of communications, Chinese parents in our study talked about a wider range of topics instead of solely focusing on children's academic progress. Survey results indicated that academic related issues were indeed mentioned by the most participants (75%). However, the content of communications covered other aspects of their children's education as well. For example, about 68% and 50% of participating parents also talked about their children's behavioral issues and social relationships respectively. It was also found that parents tended to communicate more when there was a need to talk about children's behavioural issues.

These findings are divergent from the results of some previous research studies which indicated that the content of Chinese parents' communications with teachers were largely limited to academic related issues. For instance, Dyson (2001) found that 17 out of 21 participating Chinese parents in her study only talked about academic activities, which include children's study work, progress, and report card with teachers. Such discrepancy can find an explanation from the study participants again. In Dyson's study, a small sample of 21 participants could not produce a generalizable data for Chinese immigrant population. In

addition, her study participants had a shorter period of residence in Canada compared to the participants in our study. In Dyson's sample, all participants had lived in Canada for less than 10 year at the time data were collected, 86% less than 5 years, and one third less than 2 years. In contrast, our study participants had a relatively longer residence in Canada, which might put them in a better life context and make them feel more comfortable to communicate with main stream teachers.

Another research question examined throughout this study was how Chinese parents' communication was influenced by various psychological factors. Results generated from the data showed that all of the five factors examined were significantly related to parents' communication patterns. That is, parents who communicated with teachers scored significantly higher on all of the five scales than parents who had never communicated with teachers. Inferential statistical analyses showed that parents' perception of self-efficacy was the most determinant factor of their communication patterns. Parents who attended parent-teacher meetings and communicated with teachers beyond these meetings tended to have higher ratings on this construct than those who communicate with teachers less regularly. Statistics also showed that parents who had initiated communication had stronger beliefs in self-efficacy than parents who had never initiated communication.

In our current study, 75% participants agreed with the statement that "I believe it is my responsibility to communicate with my child's teacher regularly;" another 75% agreed that "I believe parent-teacher communication can make the school better;" 78% agreed that "I believe it is my responsibility to stay on top of things at school." In contrast, only 53% of participants agreed that "I know how to communicate effectively with my child's teacher;" 59% agreed that "My English is good enough to communicate with the teacher clearly." This discrepancy suggested that despite many parents believed in the impacts of communication, some of them may still have infrequent communication and/or played passive roles in initiating communication due to various reasons.

Conclusion and Implication

Our study of Chinese immigrant parents in south-western Ontario showed that parents had more frequent communication with teachers than those recorded in previous literature. Surveyed parents recognized their responsibility to maintain regular communication with school teachers, and believed that such communication could bring beneficial outcomes in their children's education. In communication with teachers, Chinese parents wished to get information about children's well-rounded development and performances at school although

academic performance was the most common concern. Despite a high aspiration to maintain regular communication with school, the frequency and quality of parents' communication with teachers have room for improvement. Chinese immigrant parents' communication practices are significantly influenced by the five psychological constructs including role construction about communication with teachers, self-efficacy for such communication, perception of invitation from teachers, perception of invitation from children, and perceived life context.

Findings of this study suggest that several amenities can be implemented to improve Chinese immigrant parents' communication with school teachers. First, teachers should provide adequate information for parents to address their needs of getting to know about their children. Our findings suggest that instead of looking solely at students' academic performances, Chinese parents were also interested in finding out how their children grow socially at school. Second, to better engage and involve immigrant parents' participation at school, it is important for schools to create a welcoming atmosphere and make parents feel that their contribution and involvement are valued and expected by mainstream classroom teachers.

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Fan Jiang recently graduated with a Master's degree from the Faculty of Education, University of Windsor. Her research areas include teaching English as a second language and parental involvement.

George Zhou is an associate professor at the Faculty of Education, University of Windsor. He teaches undergraduate and graduate courses in science education and research methods. His research interests cover science education, teaching science to ESL students, technology and teacher education, parental involvement, comparative and international education.

Zuochen Zhang is an associate professor at the Faculty of Education, University of Windsor. His current research interests include e-learning, ICT integration and international education.

Clinton Beckford is an associate professor at the Faculty of Education, University of Windsor. His research covers geography and environmental education, aboriginal education, international and comparative education, global education, education of marginalized groups- racial minorities, immigrants, refugees and children of war.

Lan Zhong recently graduated with a Doctoral degree from the Faculty of Education, University of Windsor. Her research areas include teaching English as a second language, cultural context of education, and parental involvement.