

Institutional Practices and Attitude of Parents on Family–School Engagement through the Lens of a Chinese Preschool



Pei Xiaodong

Emilio Aguinaldo College, Manila, Philippines

ABSTRACT: The study explores the relationship between institutional practices and parents' attitudes towards family-school engagement in a Chinese pre-school institution. The research, conducted at a Kindergarten school in Beijing, China, focuses on the unique challenges and opportunities of urban settings, including commuting, working parents, and a diverse population. A sample of 160 parents and guardians was used. The results showed a non-significant positive correlation between school administrators' practices and parents' attitudes towards family-school engagement, suggesting that while specific aspects of school practices may impact certain dimensions of parental attitudes, the overall synergy between school practices and parental attitudes is not strongly evident.

KEYWORDS: institutional practices, attitude of parents, family–school engagement, Chinese preschool

INTRODUCTION

Early childhood education plays a vital role in a child's development, emphasizing the acquisition of knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Parental participation also fosters a sense of community within the school and encourages a positive school culture. Schools that actively engage parents in their children's education often see higher attendance rates and a decrease in disciplinary issues. Thus, family-school partnerships are crucial in education, teaching. These partnerships can be aided within school premises with family guidance, making a strong partnership essential, especially during a child's formative years.

Parents play a crucial role in enhancing their children's educational opportunities by actively promoting their interests and maintaining regular contact with their teacher. This helps reinforce classroom teachings and fosters a nurturing atmosphere that fosters strong family-school engagement. Regular support from parents can contribute to a better academic journey and a more successful academic journey. (Clelland, 2013)

The Chinese educational system places a strong emphasis on Confucian values such as respect for authority, diligence, and obedience. This brings out the unique their cultural and pedagogical context. It is therefore important to take a closer look on how family-school engagements transpire in this locale considering the fast-changing era. Therefore, preschool education in China one of the many ways to view the issue of family-school engagement in the context of culture and pedagogical perspective.

Family-school interaction is a collaborative effort between schools and families to support students in their academic journey. It involves a commitment to create a harmonious partnership, recognizing shared interests and responsibility for children. The ultimate goal is to engage, guide, motivate, and energize each student to produce their own success. Studies show that strong partnerships lead to better academic performance, better homework completion, self-regulation, social skills, better behavior, higher attendance rates, and positive interactions with peers and adults. Chinese culture values learning and self-improvement, leading to a diversity in approaches to engage with children's education. Teachers often invite parents to meetings to promote family participation. (Education Hub, 2019; Yamamoto et al. 2022)

Parents play a crucial role in their child's education, ensuring their interests are pushed forward towards a successful academic journey. Regular contact with teachers and home assistance can reinforce classroom teachings and foster a nurturing atmosphere. To enhance early childhood education programs, creating a family-friendly environment and providing comprehensive training to instructors are essential. However, this approach requires continuous research and expert evaluation. In China, educational institutions emphasize the importance of strong connections between families and classrooms. Educators have improved communication skills to inform parents, and six forms of parental engagement are identified: knowledge and skills development, communication between home and school, volunteering, decision-making, advocacy, and community collaboration. (Suardi and Samad, 2021; Shu, 2020)

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The study of Gagnelius (2016) proved that Chinese families understand the meaning of family-school engagement in a different context. Thus, providing support for their child's education at home through helping with homework and emphasizing the importance of education. It was also determined that there are language and cultural barriers that could impact the level of family engagement and communication between teachers and Chinese families.

The researcher is motivated in understanding the pedagogical context of the selected preschool in China and how this influences family-school relationships. By examining the attitudes and practices of both parents and educators, the researcher can gain a more comprehensive understanding on the factors that contribute to effective family-school engagement. In addition, the researcher seeks to improve education and find ways to improve family-school ties. The study may shed light on early childhood education in particular among Chinese preschool parents and teachers.

Research Question

1. What are practices of the school administrators on family-school engagement in terms of: 2.1. Communication; 2.2. Cooperation; 2.3. Parental-teacher relationship; 2.4. School decision-making?
2. What is the attitude of the parents on family-school engagement in terms of: 3.1. School engagement; 3.2. School performance; 3.3. Relationship-building; 3.4. Collective Collaborative Effort; and 3.5. Shared Values and Beliefs?
3. Is there a significant relationship between practices of the school administrators and attitude of the parents on family-school engagement?

II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This investigation employed descriptive-correlational research, which combined fact-finding with interpretation. The distribution of questionnaires was employed to collect data about the current state of affairs. It also involved processing data to test hypotheses and answer questions about the subject of the study's current status. In this study, the researcher used questionnaires to gather data from the participants on their school practices and parents' attitudes towards family-school engagement. The collected data was analyzed through statistical methods to identify the relationships between variables and test the research hypotheses. The correlational design was used to investigate the relationship between the practices of the school administrators and the attitudes of parents towards family-school engagement. Three (3) experts in the field of education were chosen to serve as validators of the instrument. The consistency of the statements was ensured by subjecting the survey questionnaire to test-retest measures. The research reported the Cronbach Alpha value of .974, which fell within the range of acceptability.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. The overall mean of the practices of school administrators in family-school engagement is 3.002, indicating that, on average, these practices are considered "Evident." This suggests that school administrators actively engage in practices that promote family-school engagement across these four categories. Among the categories, Cooperation stands out with the highest overall mean of 3.123, ranking first among the categories. This category reflects the school's strong emphasis on collaboration between parents and teachers in addressing student academic and behavioral concerns, as well as providing support to parents.

School Decision-Making follows closely with an overall mean of 3.060, ranking second among the categories. This category highlights the school's commitment to involving parents in decision-making processes and considering parental perspectives in school decisions.

Communication, while still considered "Evident" with an overall mean of 2.835, ranks fourth among the categories. This indicates that while communication practices are positive, there is room for improvement in this area, particularly in providing timely and relevant information to parents and evaluating the effectiveness of communication strategies. Parent-Teacher Relationship falls in between with an overall mean of 2.993, ranking third among the categories. This category emphasizes the importance of fostering positive relationships between parents and teachers, where strengths are evident in some areas but improvements can be made in training and support. In summary, the practices of school administrators in family-school engagement are generally positive, as indicated by the "Evident" interpretations across all four categories. While there are areas of strength, such as cooperation and school decision-making, there are also opportunities for improvement, particularly in communication and further enhancing parent-teacher relationships. These findings underscore the significance of ongoing efforts to engage parents and promote collaboration between schools and families to support students' academic and overall development.

Cabardo (2016) advises that schools use numerous methods to involve parents in their children's education. This is essential for parent involvement in their children's education. Parents who teach curriculum topics get kids more involved in school. Start each term by inviting parents to participate. This helps administrators understand the child's background and lets parents choose a class, form, or grade. Parents may control their child's preschool and primary school experience by knowing this. Parents' experiences may increase school enrollment. Thus, school-based management involves stakeholder participation in school activities.

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Henderson et al. (2013) proposed four models of family-school engagement. The first model emphasizes the importance of establishing a trusting and respectful partnership between families and schools. The second model promotes two-way communication between families and schools, which is essential to ensure that families are informed and involved in their children's education. The third model focuses on supporting student learning and success by providing families with resources to help their children acquire both academic and non-academic skills. The final model aims to empower families and communities by involving them in decision-making and advocacy for their children's education.

2. The collective results from these indicators highlight a predominantly positive attitude among parents regarding family-school engagement. The overall mean score of 3.162 firmly places parents' attitudes within the "Positive Attitude" range. This finding underscores the overall optimism and receptiveness of parents towards actively engaging with schools to support their child's education.

When examining the individual indicators, it is evident that parents exhibit positive attitudes across multiple facets of family-school engagement. The highest-ranked indicator, "School engagement," with a weighted mean of 3.267, signifies that parents believe in the positive impact of their involvement in school activities on their child's education. This result emphasizes the importance parents place on active engagement in their child's educational journey.

Furthermore, parents express strong positive attitudes in the dimensions of "Collective Collaborative Effort" and "School performance," with weighted mean scores of 3.182 and 3.177, respectively. These rankings highlight parents' willingness to collaborate with schools, provide feedback, and support initiatives aimed at enhancing the educational experience for all students. Moreover, they maintain a belief in their ability to positively influence their child's academic performance.

In terms of "Relationship-building," parents maintain a positive attitude, as indicated by a weighted mean of 3.098. This demonstrates their commitment to building positive relationships with teachers and working collaboratively to address concerns regarding their child's education.

While parents express overwhelmingly positive attitudes, it is notable that the indicator "Shared Values and Beliefs" ranks slightly lower, with a weighted mean of 3.086. This indicates that parents, while generally positive, may have a slightly less strong belief in the direct impact of shared values and beliefs on their child's education. However, it is important to emphasize that this indicator still falls within the "Positive Attitude" range.

Family-school engagement is based on is grounded in shared agency, mutual respect, and the legitimation of each other's expertise about learning. Regular communication is essential, allowing parents and teachers to share expectations about each other's roles. The need for teachers to adapt their communication to support parents' feelings of being informed and included in their children's learning is highlighted. (Niem & Vainionpää, 2021)

In some parts of China, many families give less importance to the importance of education. This is due to their geographic and economic conditions. Unfortunately, some parents think that academic performance is the only criterion for measuring the quality of education, which lead them ignore the importance of children's social behavior. (Li & Qui, 2017)

Various of forms engagement among Chinese parents occur. Based on the study. Wang et al., (2023) parents engaged in several different types of involvement, including monitoring their child's progress, communicating with teachers, assisting with homework, and engaging in school activities. Communicating with teachers was also a frequently reported form of involvement. This involved parents attending parent-teacher conferences, emailing or calling teachers to discuss their child's progress, and attending school events such as parent-teacher association meetings. Moreover, assisting with homework is another form of involvement reported by many parents. This is done by helping their child with their homework and providing academic support outside of school. Many parents also engaged themselves in school activities, such as volunteering in the classroom or attending school events. This, therefore, connotes positive response for parents.

3. The study examines the relationship between school administrators' practices and parents' attitudes towards family-school engagement. Communication practices have low correlation coefficients with various aspects of parental attitudes, such as school engagement and academic performance. Relationship-building practices have no significant impact on parents' attitudes in this area. Collective collaborative efforts do not significantly affect parents' attitudes. However, a significant correlation exists between shared values and beliefs and parents' attitudes.

The study found that cooperation and relationship-building are effective strategies for enhancing parental attitudes in the context of family-school engagement. Cooperation showed negative correlations with school engagement, performance, and shared values and beliefs, suggesting that when schools actively engage in cooperative practices with parents, it tends to have a positive impact on these aspects of parental attitudes. Relationship-building exhibited a positive correlation with school engagement, indicating that efforts by schools to build positive relationships with parents are associated with more engaged parents. However, collective collaborative effort did not show statistically significant correlations with any of the corresponding parental attitudes.

In parent-teacher relationships, a statistically significant positive correlation was observed with school engagement, indicating that when schools prioritize and nurture positive parent-teacher relationships, there tends to be a slight increase in parental

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engagement. However, this positive association was not statistically significant for school performance, suggesting that the quality of parent-teacher relationships may not strongly impact parents' perceptions of their child's academic performance. Interestingly, the category of relationship-building exhibited a negative correlation with shared values and beliefs, implying that as schools emphasize building positive relationships with parents, there may be some divergence in shared values and beliefs between the two groups.

School decision-making had a non-significant positive correlation with school engagement, suggesting that the extent to which parents are involved in school decision-making processes may not significantly affect their overall engagement with the school. However, a significant positive correlation was observed between school decision-making and school performance, indicating that when parents have a role in school decisions, it is associated with more positive perceptions of their child's academic performance.

Lastly, in terms of shared values and beliefs, there was a statistically significant positive correlation with school decision-making, suggesting that parental involvement in school decision-making may contribute to a greater alignment of values and beliefs between parents and the school community. Overall, the study highlights the complexity of the relationship between school practices and parental attitudes, emphasizing the varying impacts on different aspects of family-school engagement. Educational institutions must equip parents with the necessary knowledge and skills to help their children cope with challenging situations in schools. It is believed that a more comprehensive approach to family engagement that supports student success. This must a more proactive and inclusive framework provide resources and support for families to help them better understand their child's education and how they can be involved. Schools expected to be mindful of the cultural and linguistic diversity of families and ensure that communication and engagement strategies are accessible and inclusive for all. (Woolf, n.d.)

Mapp & Bergman (2019) proposes a framework in guiding school to build a strong partnership with families. It provides guidance and resources for schools to engage families in their children's education. It explains that family engagement has a positive impact on student achievement and well-being, and that schools can take specific steps to foster meaningful partnerships with families. Its major components are: The framework outlines four main components: 1. Welcoming all families into the school community; 2. Communicating effectively; 3. Supporting student success; Connecting to community and expanding opportunities for families.

IV. CONCLUSION

The findings from the examination of both school administrators' practices and parents' attitudes towards family-school engagement provide valuable insights into the dynamics of this crucial relationship. School administrators demonstrate an overall positive engagement in practices promoting collaboration between schools and families, particularly in areas of cooperation and school decision-making. However, there are opportunities for improvement, notably in communication strategies and further enhancing parent-teacher relationships. On the other hand, parents express overwhelmingly positive attitudes towards family-school engagement, emphasizing the importance they place on active involvement in their child's education. While there are slight variations in attitudes across different dimensions, overall, parents exhibit a strong willingness to collaborate with schools and support initiatives aimed at enhancing their child's educational experience. The relationship between school practices and parental attitudes is complex, highlighting the need for ongoing efforts to foster meaningful partnerships between schools and families.

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