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What Empowers Ethnic Minority Parents to Change towards Supporting Their Children's Learning of Chinese in a Hong Kong Home-School-Community Project?

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Abstract

Recent literature has emphasized the importance of parental involvement of immigrant families in supporting their children's education and learning advancement. Support from parents spiritually and in terms of familial resources is important in helping their children to overcome cultural differences and learning demands. However, few studies systematically explore how the parents can be empowered in the first place to provide such support. This paper attempts to fill this research gap with findings from Hong Kong, a place where such empowerment to migrants and ethnic minority parents has been badly needed. The learning of Chinese is a great challenge for these parents and their children for life, career and education. Yet, these parents often feel little hope that they can support their children in going over the language hurdle. Chinese scripts are non-phonetic, and Chinese speech is tonal. Few of the parents are themselves literate in Chinese. In view of this, parental empowerment has been taken as one focus in a five-year collaborative project "C-for-Chinese@JC" based on a home-school-community model. In-depth interviews were conducted with twenty ethnic minority parents upon open invitation in 2020. Six types of emergent parent changes were identified through their participation in program activities. Based on an analysis of the critical incidents associated with the changes, two critical aspects were identified in the parental empowerment process, which include: 1) Parents' seeing their children making improvements in their Chinese learning; 2) Parents' seeing themselves being able to play a part in the activities related to the learning and expanding their own community social networks. The paper concludes with suggestions for future research on parental empowerment and change, including the need of synergetic inputs from NGOs, schools and universities under the home-school-community (h-s-c) model.

1. Introduction

Recent research shows that home-school-community (h-s-c) collaboration has been essential for a person to grow up with academic, emotional, and social success (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Pomerantz, Moorman, & Litwack, 2007). Apart from school-based parental involvement, the importance of parental involvement within immigrant families in supporting and enhancing children's education and learning has also been emphasized. Support of parents in the utilization of familial resources becomes important for better learning of second-generation children. Parental participation in activities relating to their children appears to counterbalance the language challenges to children's learning and essential living that are posed by their ethnic origins. However, few studies systematically explore the importance of parent change and its yet unfolded driving force for educational success by children of ethnic minorities in a multicultural society. The five-year collaborative project "C-for-Chinese@JC" ("the project" thereafter) presents a holistic support model of collaboration in enhancing ethnic minority kindergarteners' learning of Chinese and social integration. This paper attempts to fill this research gap further to the recent dissemination of the project's results. In addition to identifying the emergent changes in parents through their participation in various program activities, we examine the key factors of driving change in parents in the process.

2. Literature Review

Parent involvement, with regard to supporting their children learning, remains as one of the main concerns in the field of education. Such involvement has been defined as parents' interaction with both school and child for the benefit of the child's education success (Hill et al., 2004), as the more effort parents put in their children's learning, the more benefits there are to the children's academic achievement (Cotton & Wikelund, 2005). Epstein (1994) identified that the spheres of family, school, and community do not exist as individual spheres but overlap with one another to influence a child's education. She has developed six types of parental involvement, with levels increasing in parental engagement, covering 1) the basic obligations of families, 2) the basic obligations of schools, 3) parents' volunteering or presenting themselves as audiences in activities in school premises, 4) parental involvement in learning activities at home, 5) parents' decision making, parental participation, leadership, and school advocacy, and 6) collaborations and exchanges with the community to achieve mutual understanding. Recent research results of Fantuzzo et al. (2019) revealed that

home-based family involvement emerged as the strongest predictor of child outcomes, and this dimension was associated significantly with children's motivation to learn, attention, task persistence, receptive vocabulary skills, and low conduct problems.

2.1. Parent Involvement in Language and Literature at Home Level

In recent decades, the partnerships between schools and families for promoting children's academic, social, and emotional growth have been highly emphasized (U.S. Department of Education, 1996). Studies have observed literacy achievement in elementary students through interventions designed for students (Morrow & Young, 1997) and interventions with parents as a medium (Sheldon, 2003). In their study conducted with first, second, and third graders considered at risk for academic and social difficulties, Morrow & Young (1997) found that children who received a school-based literacy program and a family literacy program outscored those without receiving the programs in storytelling and rewriting, comprehension, and teachers' ratings of reading and writing abilities as well as interest and frequency of reading. According to Sheldon (2003), schools' partnership programs successfully reached out to parents of elementary students for implementing home-school collaboration. Further statistical analyses showed that effective home-school collaboration was significantly associated with higher percentages of students who scored satisfactory or above. Beckett et al. (2012) explored the notion that it was the increase in parent encouragement and praise and the reduction in criticism and inconsistent discipline which had contributed to improvements not only in relationships and behavior but also in reading in their study involving children aged 5 - 7 from two disadvantaged areas in England.

2.2. Parent Involvement at Community Level

Since language barriers and cultural values may prevent parents from being involved in their children's education, Grant & Ray (2016) have stated that to effectively support parent involvement, it is important for schools to have partnership with community agencies that are familiar with or are already working with specific populations. Following the Type 6 parental involvement (Epstein, 1994) mentioned above, extending school and parental participation at the community level is the right direction to enhancing students' learning, especially among ethnic minority groups. As stated by Smith & colleagues (1997), community support may influence the ways that parents, children, and school personnel feel about education in general as well as parental involvement. Adding a component of community to the home-school partnership recognizes the resources available within the community that could benefit children and families in the educational process. In the situation in Hong Kong, NCS families are usually partitioned from the Chinese community, hence the NCS parents and children are exposed to an environment which is less favourable to the learning of Chi-

nese. Therefore, this project has tried to extend students' after-school learning experience by setting up a language learning center and planning a holistic learning program for NCS children to bridge their in-school and after-school learning experiences.

2.3. Home-School-Community Partnership

The Research and Policy Committee of the Committee for Economic Development (1987) stated that children's education should target the whole child and intervention strategies be implemented in the context of school, family, and community. In his study conducted with kindergarteners, first and second grade students, Jones (2018) tested the impact of a family-school-community partnership intervention on early literacy achievement. By receiving one school-year-long school-based literacy tutoring and volunteer-supported family engagement home activities as well as an afterschool community programme which connected literacy to everyday experiences, students obtained higher reading achievement when compared to those who did not receive the same literacy intervention at the end of the school term. Further, the literacy intervention contributed by the three parties was successfully integrated into each school that participated in the study. Nevertheless, little is known if a literacy intervention program model that leverages school, family, and community resources will prove successful in learning a non-native language. The project presents a holistic support model of collaboration in enhancing ethnic minority kindergarteners' learning Chinese and social integration. NCS parents at family level have limited proficiency in Chinese language. This creates difficulties in their communication with schools (Tse et al., 2021a, 2021b, 2021c), and also in their monitoring of children's learning progress (Tse et al., 2020a, 2020b). Therefore, helping parents to learn Chinese language is essential to make the NCS families, both parents and children, to be more adapted to the education system in Hong Kong. The project programs facilitating different levels of parental involvement have been advocated, such as assisting families to fulfil their basic obligations (parent workshops and support groups to educate NCS parents with basic information of the Hong Kong education system); involving parents in their children's school learning ("parent-led home activities" and "parent Chinese class"), and involving parents in school and community premises (e.g., invite parents to share their cultural experiences with students).

The significance of parental involvement to children's learning, as reviewed by the literature above, has also been a great concern of the policy-makers (Committee on Home-School Co-operation, 2014; Task Force on Home School Co-Operation and Parent Education, 2019). Then the next question is whether parents are able or ready to be involved and contribute. Recent research indicates that parents also have to undergo changes in order to bring change to or support changes in their children (Pang & Go, 2015; Go, 2013). Hence there is a need to look further into the kind of parent changes that has taken place, what have brought those changes, and what the pivotal points are to attend to if one

wishes to bring about changes of parents such more effectively.

3. The Current Study

This study was carried out to address two main research questions: 1) What are the major changes emerging from parents through their participation in various program activities? 2) What are the key factors driving change in parents in the process? It focuses on ethnic minority parents' participation in project intervention program activities and the types of parent changes empowered under the support of the H-S-C collaborative model. The paper concludes with suggestions for future research on possible dimensions of parent empowerment and changes involved in a larger scope, including not only NGO- or school-based dimensions but also the synergies generated with inputs from NGOs, schools and universities under the home-school-community (h-s-c) model.

4. Methodology

4.1. Participants

The paper is based on a multiple-case study which involves twenty ethnic minority parents participating in the project. Individual in-depth interviews were conducted in 2020 upon an open invitation sent through the two NGOs as project partners. In-depth interviews were conducted with twenty ethnic minority parents in 2020 upon an open invitation sent through the two non-governmental organizations in the project. A deeper look is taken to explore different types of parent changes and what elements have essentially influenced the changing process. The interviews with parents were conducted in English and, upon request, also in languages of the participating parents' ethnicities by three interviewers who know the related minority languages: Urdu or Hindi. The interviewers have been well briefed about the aims of the interviews and received training from one of the researchers in conducting the semi-structured interviews for parents. Among twenty participants, most of them are mothers with only one participant being father. Thirteen parent interviews were conducted mainly in English. Two interviews were conducted with the help of English, Cantonese and ethnic minority languages. The remaining five parents do not know both Cantonese and English and hence their interviews were conducted in their native language. To cater for the diverse language needs of the participants, each interview was carried out by one interviewer who knows English and another one who knows the ethnicity language of the interviewee. Data were initially transcribed into English by the interviewers. All selected quotes of verbal protocols were from the audio datasets of parent interviews transcribed in English as a type of powerful multiple-source research evidences of the project. The categories of parent change and the process of change are constructed through continuous discussion among three main researchers until consent was finally reached to ensure the reliability of the study. Findings of the study contributed as part of the qualitative components of the holistic project research. Pilot analy-

sis was first done on three parents, followed by in-depth analysis of the other seventeen parent cases.

4.2. Results and Analysis

Parent changes were identified based on an in-depth analysis of the twenty participating ethnic minority parent interview data, with focuses on parent reflection on their project participation on how the parents and their children were supported, based on their *experiences of dealing with difficulties encountered*. The findings summarize the experiences and reflections of the parents on new knowledge gained, thoughts and insights generated from their enactments in the program activities. Each individual parent's considerations and action-taking illustrate that the process of parent change and growth occurs naturally. These findings contribute to the overall mechanisms of the h-s-c collaborative model implementation, which are valuable to be further researched. *Six types of emergent parent changes* were identified through their participation in program activities. Moreover, *two key empowering forces* in changing parents in the process include: 1) The *child's Chinese language* particularly in Cantonese in daily interaction and child's happier mood observed by parents; 2) *Parental participation in activities* relating to Chinese language learning and that empowers parents through building social networks in communities for personal development.

5. Six Types of Change in Parents Identified

The following are the six types of change identified in the parents' supporting their young children: 1) Parents becoming secure when being supported (during the settling-in or when facing future uncertainties in different aspects of living); 2) Parents becoming able to use and more willing to learn Chinese language (to interact with the locals in daily life, e.g. in wet markets); 3) Parents taking a new parental role concerning children's education (with increasing understanding and inspiration on learning Chinese); 4) Parents gaining efficacy in supporting children's learning (with their realizing the importance of education planning); 5) Parents learning and making progress, together with children in learning, well-being and social connection (developing to be a self-learner); and 6) Parents gaining openness to expand their own community networks (with increasing awareness in different cultures and interest in knowing others in communities).

5.1. Parents Becoming Secured When Being Supported

(*during the settling-in or when facing future uncertainties in different aspects of living*).

In coping with the language barrier, the parent found her learning of the use of google translation, writing stroke, learning tools such as flash cards (in both English and Chinese versions), and some other translation service gained from the center has been helpful especially when she taught her own child. She frankly

shared her worry of *being non-Chinese people's in-competitiveness* as compared to Chinese locals in Hong Kong.

CS06-7 (Types of change 1, 2, 3, 6…)

- "My biggest concern is that being a non-Chinese, it is difficult to tackle with local people. Because it is hard to communicate. We don't know how to read and write the Chinese language. So I feel that because of the lack of Chinese language proficiency, we might lag behind the local community." To her, it is a barrier to communicate with the locals as she cannot use English language in some places, e.g. wet market where she usually goes, she has to use Chinese. So she normally use simple Chinese words. And she further added, "if I do not know how to communicate, I use gestures or signs to make them understand."

The parent found that she has settled well and does not have any problem in general. However, she raised the concern of the lack of support for the ethnic minorities when there are *uncertainties* in the society such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

CS06-7 (Types of change 1, 2, 3, 6)

- "Well, I do not have any problem in general. Just that we have been short of masks these days because of the COVID-19."

5.2. Parents Becoming Able to Use and More Willing to Learn Chinese Language

(*to interact with the locals in daily life*, e.g. in wet markets).

Based on the parents' daily living experience, they found that some people around them can speak English while some others only speak Cantonese. In dealing with this difficulty in communicating with others in Chinese, they gained improvement in their daily spoken Chinese (Cantonese).

CS09 (Types of change 2, 4)

- "Before I didn't know anything. Now, I can communicate in basic Cantonese when going to market.
- "I enjoyed the Chinese learning classes the most… they were helpful in helping us learn Chinese."

The parent {CS08} (Types of change 2, 3, 4, 5 & 6) works in a restaurant shared her experiences and wishes.

CS08 (Types of change 2, 3, 4, 5 & 6)

- "So, we needed to learn some basic things in order to communicate with them such as names of food. So, *even our Chinese is poor, we can still interact with them*. It helped them to understand what we are asking and what we are looking for."
- "I know the basic Chinese. But I wish I could communicate fluently so that I can easily interact with them."
- "They (The program staff) taught us about google translate, and other three applications. It helped us a lot. Miss Wing taught us very nicely, now we are

able to use them without any help."

5.3. Parents Taking a New Parental Role Concerning Children's Education

(*with increasing understanding and inspiration on learning Chinese*).

The parent gained knowledge about learning Chinese language and was getting ready to help with the child's learning.

CS08 (Types of change 2, 3, 4, 5 & 6)

- "Because we, non-Chinese speakers, don't know anything about Chinese language and we can't help our children to learn. We are totally blank about it. So all the programs aim at teaching our children Cantonese language and improve it… The parent session is also very useful as it teaches us how to help our children."

- "My biggest concern before was how can I help my child to learn Chinese. I am thankful to C for Chinese. Because of them, I learned how to help my child to learn. Now, I am pretty sure that I can also help my child."

The mother likes learning through play and appreciated that the activities organized related to Chinese learning themes that her child learned at school.

CS06-7 (Types of change 3, 4, 5 & 6)

- "They also had some sports activities, it was like learning through play. They had activities related to Chinese learning themes which I think was great. I think I really enjoy that activity too."

- "It is better to have some mix groups classes. For example, having different age groups mix together for some activities such as outings or educational trips. I believe that older children play a role in learning, and they can guide the younger children. I think it is okay to have children of same age in one class; however, I think for outings or visits, if we mix children of different ages, they can have more interaction among each other. They can learn to take care of the younger children and learn from each other and help one another."

- "I just want to mention that this project helped us a lot and it helped us to learn more about the local community. It has made a good foundation for non-Chinese speaking children to learn Chinese language. I think that they planned it in a way that it is easier to understand and made it look like Chinese is not that hard to learn. I believe that despite of any ethnicity, if we get such support from school or any centers, we can also learn Chinese. I think C for Chinese has done it in a great way."

The parent would teach her child about some basic Chinese words related to food which is, however, limited as she pointed out.

CS08 (Types of change 2, 3, see also 4, 5 & 6)

- "I can't teach him (her son) other things like transportation, or how to behave [when being] people. By speaking with [the program] staff, it gave him a chance to learn about those things."

5.4. Parents Gaining Efficacy in Supporting Children's Learning

(*with their realizing the importance of education planning*).

Apart from learning Chinese language in Chinese classes in school, parents were also supported with the knowledge and skills of helping their own children's learning at home as well.

CS09 (Types of change 2, 4, 5)

- Teachers from the center also used to come to our home and teach my child. They gave us some Q cards for learning Chinese. It had some information about cars. So, I think it was easy for me to help my child with those Q cards [PLH program]."

The parent regarded 'primary one transition program' as particularly helpful and useful to her. As further indicated, her son was her first child and she did not know anything about Hong Kong's education system.

CS08 (Types of change 2, 3, 4, 5 & 6)

- "I [parent] learned about the learning system and what I [she] should be looking at when I [she] look for the school for my [her] children's learning."
- "I was actually very worried about my child's primary school before taking this program, and therefore I am [she was] very thankful to C for Chinese [the project]."

The parent thought the individual support to 'primary 1 transition' was most helpful.

CS06-7 (Types of change 3, 4, 5 & 6)

- "The program really helped us to find a good kindergarten for children. I had no knowledge about the process and the center helped us with the process. They guide us in such a way that it was very easy to understand everything and after their guidance, I knew what I wanted for my child."
- "Until now, I know that C for Chinese [the project] will be guiding us halfway through primary. In future, if you have more programs for primary, I think I will definitely join."

Apart from the above, parents also joined many activities including story-telling at the center (volunteering), choirs/singing classes to learn Cantonese, visits to universities, Chinese learning. Among all, the favourite part was when she did the story-telling section in the center.

CS06-7 (Types of change 3, 4, 5 & 6)

- "I enjoy that program a lot because I too got the opportunity to do something in the center for other children."

5.5. Parents Learning and Making Progress, Together with Children, in Learning, Well-Being and Social Connection

(*developing to be a self-learner*).

CS09 (Types of change 2, 5)

- "It is very helpful for parents and children. They organize classes for us to learn Chinese. I think they are doing good."

- "The center planned an outing for <u>us</u>… They took us to Disneyland… They also planned a visit to Kowloon park for <u>all children and their parents</u>… <u>it helps me and my child</u>… it did help practice [our speaking skills]."

A new environment was constructed by h-s-c collaborative activities to actively engage parents' learning and personal development. For instance, the mother got an opportunity in sharing her own culture while participating in a cultural exchange program with her child, knowing cultures of other ethnicities and learning together with enjoyment.

CS08 (Types of change 2, 3, 4, 5 & 6)

- "Three years ago, <u>we</u> participated in a cultural sharing program. It was also really nice as we got to learn more about different cultures such as Pakistani culture, Indian culture, and I was able to share about <u>my culture</u> as well."
- "When I teach my child, it has been very helpful. I also got the chance to learn them <u>with</u> my child."

And improvement in children's Chinese proficiency and confidence in learning the language was clearly observed by the parent.

CS06-7 (Types of change 3, 4, 5 & 6)

- "I have experienced a lot of changes in my child from K1 to K3. We learned a lot of things from the center from the very beginning (K1). Before we did not have any knowledge of any word; however, she [the child] improved her Chinese a lot. I think she is more confident in learning Chinese."

5.6. Parents Gaining Openness to Expand Their Own Community Networks

(*with increasing awareness in different cultures and interest in knowing others in communities*).

5.6.1. Parent's Perspective on Parents Themselves

This working mother would teach her child about some basic Chinese words related to food, which is however, limited, as she points out.

CS08 (Types of change 2, 3, 4, 5 & 6)

- "I can't teach him (her son) other things like transportation, or how to behave [when being] people. By speaking with [the program] staff, it gave him a chance to learn about those things."

And she thought the programs were beneficial and encouraging in terms of helping children to gain the *sense of connectedness* to their senior family members and children's growth and development especially when children cannot visit their grandparents [who are not in Hong Kong].

CS08 (Types of change 2, 3, 4, 5 & 6)

- "So the visit to the elderly center was very beneficial as it helped my children to connect with them."
- "The visit to airport was very beneficial too because it encouraged my child and boost his interest about policeman and fireman. He said he wanted to be a policeman when he grows up. So, it was really encouraging."

- "I think you are (the project staff) doing well. Keep it up. And help other parents as well."

5.6.2. Parent's Perspective on Child's Learning and Growth, and Social Integration

CS08 (Types of change 2, 3, 4, 5 & 6)

- "He knows a lot of words now. He has also improved his Chinese a lot. He is able to introduce himself in Cantonese. I think he has gain confidence."
- "… there is this guy at the park. Both my son and him likes to share toys with each other. So, there is some interaction with each other. I could see that they were accepting each other… sometimes, he will try to talk in English with them. If they do not understand, they would share their toys with each other. I think they are connected with the body language at the moment. I do not know about future. Maybe he will be able to speak in Chinese with them."

CS06-7 (Types of change 3, 4, 5 & 6)

- "… well, the school she goes to have majority of non-Chinese children. But she has only 1 girl who is local. My daughter tells me that with other children, she talks in English. However, she communicates with the local child in Chinese. So, I think that if she has more local friends, she will speak more Chinese. But until now, she does not have any other local friends."

Data analysis results above indicate that the parents have benefitted in many ways by their participation in activities. Some parents participated at the earlier stage of the project and had more experience in different programs than others who joined in later years. These parents have different experiences in the process of change under respective family contexts. Hence, it is important to understand deeper how parent changes have been driven because core elements composed in the changing process are important for bringing about and sustaining desired changes in parents of diversity.

6. The Process of Parent Change

One may well desire the changed status of parents to last stably, but we know that this stability is impossible with human beings. It is thus valuable to further examine parent changes by researching whether there are core elements involved in effecting different types of changes. This part examines emergent major impacts on parents in aspects of parent knowledge and skills, attitude and emotion and human relations at home and living environments. The change process of parents and its driving force is being investigated, with illustrations on parents' difficulties and concerns unfolded in interview.

6.1. General Phases of Parent Change

Findings suggest there are major impacts on parents who have participated in and gained new learning experiences in the project. There are seven general phases of parent change identified, including: 1) Parent felt secured being supported by timely language and social support; 2) Parent became willing and be-

ing able to speak Cantonese; 3) Parent gained awareness of the importance of supporting children's learning; 4) Parent gained knowledge and skills in supporting children's learning of Chinese; 5) Parent and child participate in activities and learn together with enjoyment; 6) Parent confidence and openness increased in participation; and 7) Parent built up own social network in communities and developed as a hopeful self-learner. Most of these parents have one child or more children and seldom or never participated in these types of early childhood programs before. Parents who lacked support for their elder children recalled on the difficulties they have encountered in the earlier days of arriving Hong Kong and reflected on their experiences, emotions and thoughts. Moreover, these parents comprised of parents who are taking care of all household work, and parents having full-time household duties or beginning to take a new parenthood. Ethnic minority parents and children, to varying extent, have to overcome both living and education difficulties in many aspects. To sum up, various program activities have successful impacts on parents in several areas including parents' learning and development, parent-child communication and relationship, community networking and social life, emotional wellbeing and social integration. Also, it is noteworthy to conclude that the knowledge and insights generated by the study findings would be of great value to ethnic minority parents and adults, especially those who desire to manage life changes well and develop oneself further. *Therefore, tailoring parent programs and initiatives to different groups of parents can be especially important and necessary.*

6.2. The Process of Change

Taken together all above findings, parent change to support Chinese ethnic minority young children is driven by parental empowerment through their participation in activities in a process (Figure 1). As illustrated in the figure, inputs of program activity have made a significant effect on parents and thus empowered parents to gain basic knowledge and skills of Chinese language learning. This has, therefore, helped them not only better adapt the new living but also to be integrated into their new living environment and social life. It is significant to note that, as clearly evidenced in the analysis, parent changes identified above were mainly due to *child changes exhibited in behavior and attitude, which were perceived by the parents* upon reflection, based on parents' daily observation as well as their interaction with the child in outdoor activities and at home. These changes in the child include: child becoming happier, child's Chinese language proficiency enhanced, child becoming more confident in speaking Cantonese, child gaining higher motivation in learning Chinese language, child having more verbal sharing with parent and child's self-confidence increased. Overall, these parents comprised of parents who are taking care of all household work, and parents having full-time household duties or those beginning to take a new parenthood. Findings suggest that program activities can have a significant effect on and thus empower parents to gain knowledge and skills of Chinese language learning as well as motivate parents' self-learning and growth (Pang &

- child's became happier& enjoyed learning
- child's Chinese language proficiency was enhanced
- child became more confident in speaking Cantonese
- child gained higher motivation in learning Chinese Language
- child had more verbal sharing with parent

- parent felt secure being supported by timely language &
- social support
- parent became willing and being able to speak Cantonese
- Parent gained awareness of the importance of supporting children's learning
- parent gained knowledge & skills in supporting children's learning of Chinese
- parent & child participated in activities & learned together with enjoyment
- parent confidence & openness increased in participation
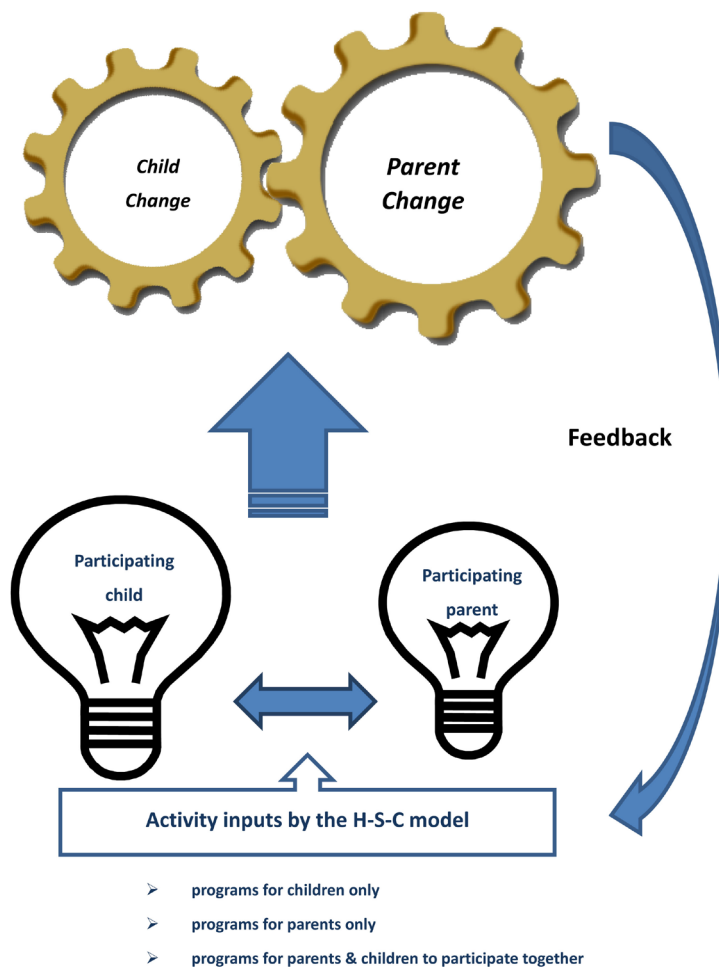- parent built up own social network in communities & developed as a hopeful self-learner

Figure 1. The process of parent change to support Chinese language learning of ethnic minority young children.

Go, 2015; Go, 2013). This, therefore, helps them to settle in better and be integrated into their new living environment and social life.

7. Discussion

The study's findings suggest that there are two key factors driving changes in ethnic minority parents based on their reflection on their participation experiences in program activities. The first is that 1) the parent has observed *the child's improvement in Chinese language*, particularly in Cantonese and happier mood in daily interaction; 2) *Parental participation in activities* relating to Chi-

nese language learning and that empowers parents through building social networks in communities for personal development. Results prove that parental involvement is related to the Chinese language learning of young ethnic minority children, which has long been the most visible and difficult hurdle they have to overcome. This finding, extending from previous work, shows the importance of parental involvement in children's future elementary and high school years. Some parents had higher participation in program activities than others. Echoing the recent observation that the Chinese language proficiency of children whose parents have higher program participation rate improved more than children having parents of no or low participation, parents learned together with their children in activities and enjoyed the learning with appreciation for the support offered by both NGOs and schools (Tse et al., 2021a, 2021b, 2020b; Ng et al., 2020). As evidenced, some parents were less involved in their children's school activities, and data showed the main obstacles as follows: full-time working parent status; time constraints of parent within family schedule; limited activity choices. It is likely that it is more difficult for these parents to find time to participate, because they may be shouldering heavy responsibilities like parenting alone or taking care of elderlies or family members with special needs. Parents' capacity to be involved varies case by case with family complexity. Conflicts that arise due to scheduling priorities and having young children to care for may interfere with their involvement (Lamb-Parker et al., 2001) even regardless of the couple's relationship or ethnicity.

7.1. Language Barrier and Social Integration of the Ethnic Minorities

Insecurity robs ethnic minority parents of the feeling that they are in charge of themselves and of what we may regard as *self-directed* to adapt to a new living environment with unfamiliar cultures and be progressively socially integrated. The challenge of social integration is to re-establish ownership of parents' living—of themselves with efficacy and identity. This would mean feeling able to know what they want to know, doing what they are required for living and interacting with others in communities and gradually integrate into society. It also means that parents would feel being able to build up social networks of friends such as local Chinese neighbours, without staying insured and becoming overwhelmed, feeling worried or powerlessness, despite of linguistically and culturally diversity in Hong Kong. As can be seen, the working parent CS08 (Types 2, 3, 4, 5 & 6) acquired a sense of security that was lacking at the earlier stage of arrival in Hong Kong. Her son and she have already participated for three years at the time of the interview. The parent has undergone several types of parent change as illustrated above, albeit the constraints of the language barrier as reflected in her daily life. She has become more able and is more ready to interact with locals in Chinese. She gradually gained openness to expand her own network for social integration, with increasing awareness towards and interest in knowing cultures of others in communities in the society. Besides being a work-

ing person like most adults, this mother prioritized her parental role in her best effort and positive learning attitude, even in the unprecedented times of the COVID-19 pandemic, in co-learning with and supporting her children learning persistently while having developed ownership in her self-learning, well-being and social connection. Those behavioural and attitude changes are demonstrated by the parent who has become open to expanding networks, with increasing cultural responsiveness and better use of technology (Baker, Ma, & Gallegos, 2019).

CS08 (Types of change 2, 3, 4, 5 & 6)

- "I will love to join [similar program services in the future]. If I can, I will join all the programs [of the project]. But sometimes, I cannot manage. Because I am working, my helper would help me to go for the programs if I can't manage."
- CS08: "It is affecting but we try to stay positive. We try our best to learn from online classes as much as we can. But sometimes, because of the internet, I was not able to join two classes last month… After the classes, the staff provided us the video of the lesson. So, we could catch up with everyone."

7.2. Parent as Participants in Communities and Parent Development

Apart from the above parent changes, parents have voiced their aspiration on personal learning cultivated through parental participation in the project and have begun to long for better social integration. According to Lave and Wenger's work in 1998, 2002 and 2005, an individual is an active participant in the practices of social communities, and in the construction of his or her identity through these communities, with the main focus—learning as social participation. As we know, most ethnic minority parents have one child or more children and they seldom or never participated in these types of early childhood programs before. Thus, these parents have understandably yet established a local social network or own identity of participants in communities. In response to the observation by Yuen & Leung (2019) that "[c]ompetency in written Chinese and spoken Cantonese is also key in defining their local identity and future success in what is a pragmatic society," this study has discovered that these children and families continuously create their shared identity through not just participation and engagement but also contribution to the practices of their communities. In other words, the motivation of Hong Kong ethnic minorities to become a more central participant in a community of practice in local communities can possibly provide a powerful incentive for their continuous learning. Echoing Lave & Wenger's (1998, 2005) notion that learning is central to human identity, our ethnic minority children will have a desire to develop Chinese language skills if the people they know, respect or admire have the same skills. In short, these children and parents would be more likely to join learning groups or volunteering at school or communities and be happy to be connected with, work and contribute towards becoming a member.

8. Limitations

Parents who took part in the present study may have been more motivated and involved than parents who chose not to participate. This limitation would be expected to somewhat lessen the visibility of other hurdles of parent change beyond what has been revealed in the study. Thus, representative sampling should be the goal of future studies. Furthermore, parent change driven in the process of parental participation is somewhat limited by the scope of home-based dimension. Therefore, future research on possible dimensions of parent change and change mechanisms involved in a larger scope are suggested, pointing to the need for including NGO- or school-based dimensions and also the synergies generated with inputs from NGOs, schools and universities, funding organizations and the government under the home-school-community (h-s-c) model.

9. Conclusion

The study's findings have proved that parents have gone through a process of change during their participation in the project, which focused on supporting early childhood education of ethnic minorities. Acknowledging that there are many difficult issues to address, it appears that these challenges are coming not one by one or in some fixed sequence. Some difficulties are not as easy to go through as others, depending on individual parents' circumstances and family background, and parents' authentic experiences have been fully reflected on. Language barriers reduce the opportunities of ethnic minority parents to engage in school activities and/or community programs to develop parents themselves and build social network with locals. It is important to note that the two key factors identified earlier—the child's improvement in Chinese language and the parental participation in activities are working parallel to effect changes in the parent and the child and to keep running in a loop between both. Hence, reaching out to these parents specifically through the project initiatives could greatly benefit parents who seek to increase their knowledge of Chinese language and most importantly, inspires parents to become motivated to learn and support children's learning with its value recognized. To varying extents, ethnic minority parents and children overcame both living and educational difficulties in many aspects, and they have undergone different change dimensions during the process, which enable them to be socially integrated gradually with continued extended networks and expanded space of living and learning. The contribution of the study will be useful to people, such as teachers, social workers, and members of other communities, who are eager to provide caring and supporting services for ethnic minority parents and families under different personal and family contexts in particular.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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