



Learning the Rules: Chinese Immigrant Parents' Involvement During Their Children's Transition to Kindergarten

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Abstract

This study examines Chinese immigrant parents' educational involvement beliefs and practices during their children's transition to kindergarten in the United States. Interviews were conducted with 10 Chinese immigrant parents in an area with a small Chinese population and limited ethnic resources. Three main themes emerged. First, limited English proficiency and inadequate knowledge of the American educational system are barriers to parental involvement. Specifically, although parents acknowledged the importance of family-school partnerships, they were not confident interacting with teachers or local parents. Parents expressed concerns that their limited English skills would adversely impact their children's academic and mental development. Additionally, parents explained reasons for having high educational expectations for their children, given the unequal educational opportunities for immigrant students. Second, Chinese immigrant parents endeavored to understand the American educational system, and they adjusted their beliefs and practices by comparing American and Chinese schools and volunteering in the school. Third, Chinese immigrant parents navigated ethnic resources by building a collaborative ethnic community and creating parent support groups on social media. This study highlights that although immigrant background restricted Chinese immigrant parents' educational involvement, they were keenly aware of the importance of parental involvement in supporting their children's kindergarten transition and actively adjusted their educational involvement beliefs and practices.

Keywords Kindergarten transition · Chinese immigrant parents · Educational involvement · Qualitative · Family-school partnership · Ethnic community

Introduction

Kindergarten is the start of formal schooling in the United States (US). The transition to kindergarten is accompanied by new cognitive, social, emotional, and behavioral tasks, and it is a milestone for children and families (Sawyer et al., 2022). A smooth transition provides a pivotal foundation for children's positive development, fostering knowledge,

good habits, and interest in learning (Hughes et al., 2018). In contrast, an ineffective transition increases stress for families and children and hinders children's social-emotional and academic development (Jiang et al., 2021). Parental involvement is essential for children's academic and behavioral readiness skills during the transition (Barger et al., 2019; Sawyer et al., 2022). In the US, one in every four children lives in an immigrant family with at least one foreign-born parent (Urban Institute, 2019). While the transition to kindergarten is an opportune time to build a collaborative family-school partnership, it presents unique challenges for immigrant parents from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds, making their children particularly vulnerable (Ansari & Crosnoe, 2018; Antony-Newman, 2019).

There have been several studies on Chinese immigrant parental involvement at the late elementary, middle, and high school levels (Anicama et al., 2018; Curtis et al., 2021; Ji & Koblinsky, 2009; Zhang, 2021). However, few studies have focused on Chinese immigrant parental involvement

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during the transition to kindergarten (Sawyer et al., 2022). Previous studies have found that Chinese immigrant parents of preschool and kindergarten children seldom participate in school activities due to language and cultural barriers (Bodovski & Durham, 2010; Huntsinger & Jose, 2009). However, little research has investigated how Chinese immigrant parents interpret and tackle their challenges. Additionally, research conducted in areas with a small number of Chinese is scarce. To address these research gaps, this qualitative interview study examines the barriers Chinese immigrant parents encounter and how they tackle them to support their children during the transition to kindergarten. This study was conducted in an area with a small Chinese population to understand how Chinese immigrant parents navigate ethnic resources that allow them to build upon their existing community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) and expand their capital in the US context.

Theoretical Framework

Pierre Bourdieu's (1986) theory of cultural capital guides this study to understand what shapes the ways Chinese immigrant parents support their children as they transition into kindergarten. Cultural capital exists in three forms, the embodied state, the objectified state, and the institutionalized state (Bourdieu, 1986). The embodied state includes dispositions of the mind and body, such as language, knowledge, and education. The objectified state includes cultural goods such as books, pictures, dictionaries, and instruments. The institutionalized state is cultural capital in the form of recognition from an institution, such as an educational qualification. As defined by Bourdieu (1986), all forms of cultural capital are accessible only to individuals who hold the code to decipher them. The embodied state can include linguistic capital, as it can be inherited and acquired over time and influences one's dispositions (Bourdieu, 1991). One possesses power when their language is viewed as legitimate (Bourdieu, 1991). A person's embodied capital is often shaped by their family, schools, and society. Cultural capital has been applied to study immigrant parents' involvement in diverse social and cultural contexts (Antony–Newman, 2019; Kim et al., 2018; Tan et al., 2020; Zhou & Kim, 2006).

The extent to which Chinese immigrant parents understand American school requirements during the transition to kindergarten depends on their linguistic competence, school experiences, acquisition of American cultural values, and knowledge about the American educational system (Lamont & Lareau, 1988; Hoover–Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). Although limited English proficiency (linguistic capital) and lack of tacit knowledge about American schools have the potential to impede their involvement, they may actively accumulate such knowledge and build the necessary cultural capital to support their children. It is also

important to acknowledge that despite the context-specific nature of cultural capital, Chinese immigrant parents bring their existing community's cultural wealth to the US—their educational and work experiences, connections with their homelands, and ethnic resources (Yosso, 2005). Although such a community's cultural wealth may not reflect the “cultural capital” of the dominant culture or be unrecognized by American schools or society, it comprises unique resources and strengths among Chinese immigrant families.

Parental Involvement

Immigrant Parents

Parental involvement refers to parental beliefs and practices that support children's education (Epstein, 1995; Tan et al., 2020). It plays a vital role in children's academic, social, and emotional adjustment during the transition to kindergarten (Barger et al., 2019). Parental involvement has been considered especially beneficial for children from immigrant families (Hughes et al., 2018). Although immigrant parents are eager to build a reciprocal partnership with the school, they often encounter structural barriers due to limited experiences with the American educational system (Antony–Newman, 2019; Conus & Fahrni, 2019). Studies have shown that Korean and Latinx immigrant parents with limited English skills and knowledge of the American educational system have low self-efficacy to support their children's education, are not actively involved in school, and do not consider themselves equal partners with teachers in the school (Kim et al., 2018; Park, 2020; Langenkamp, 2019).

Parental involvement also happens beyond school walls (Epstein, 1995; Tan et al., 2020). Immigrant parents are more engaged in children's education in the private sphere as they leverage their existing cultural capital. Their cultural capital includes their educational and work experiences and connections with their ethnic resources (Bempechat et al., 2018; Soutullo et al., 2016). Research suggests that Latinx immigrant parents hold high educational expectations and use their personal and educational struggles to motivate children to achieve academic success (Langenkamp, 2019). Korean immigrant parents support their young children's education at home and in the community, coordinating children's daily schedules and organizing Korean parent groups to exchange school information (Lim, 2012; Park, 2020).

Chinese Immigrant Parents

Studies have suggested that Chinese immigrant parents of young children seldom communicate with teachers, volunteer in school, or serve on school committees (Bodovski & Durham, 2010; Huntsinger & Jose, 2009; Ji & Koblinsky, 2009). The misconception of teachers that Chinese parents

are unresponsive to school-initiated activities or not caring about children’s schooling stems from Chinese immigrant parents’ limited English skills and lack of knowledge about American schools (Soutullo et al., 2016; Anicama et al., 2018; Curtis et al., 2021; Turney & Kao, 2009). While American schools highlight school-family partnerships, there are clear role divisions for teachers and parents in Chinese schools (Chan, 2017; Li & Sun, 2019). Chinese parents usually do not attend school without an explicit teacher’s invitation out of their respect for a teacher’s authority (Zhang, 2021). Drawing on their own school experiences in China, immigrant parents may have limited knowledge or cultural capital about American schools and may find it hard to decipher school requirements during their children’s transition to kindergarten (Chan, 2017; Li & Sun, 2019).

While often viewed as “invisible” in school, Chinese immigrant parents believe it is their duty to discipline and educate their children early on at home (Yamamoto et al., 2016). They are engaged in helping with homework, assigning supplementary learning materials, limiting leisure time, and expressing high educational expectations (Bodovski & Durham, 2010; Huntsinger & Jose, 2009; Zhang, 2021). An interview study found that Chinese immigrant parents reacted strongly to their children’s failure of efforts, and some even punished their children for poor achievement (Bempechat et al., 2018). Another interview study by Chan (2017) illustrated that Chinese immigrant parents applied their existing cultural capital to compare two educational systems. Parents perceived the Chinese method of teaching as more academically effective than the curiosity-based learning in New Zealand schools, and thus they provided supplemental learning materials for their children (Chan, 2017).

Engagement within ethnic communities is a unique type of parental involvement among Chinese immigrant parents (Zhang, 2021; Zhou & Kim, 2006). In large metropolitan

cities where Chinese are highly concentrated, parents participate in activities in their native languages held by ethnic and social services organizations on academic advising and school selection (Zhang, 2021; Zhou & Kim, 2006). Although more and more Asian newcomers settle in suburban areas (Park, 2020), little is known about how Chinese immigrant parents in areas with a small Chinese population navigate ethnic resources to support their children during the transition to kindergarten.

The Present Study

The aim of this study is to provide a better understanding of the ways in which immigration experiences shape Chinese immigrants’ beliefs and practices related to parental involvement during their children’s transition to kindergarten while living in a small Chinese immigrant community in the US. Two research questions were asked: (1) What barriers do Chinese immigrant parents encounter to their involvement during their children’s kindergarten transition? (2) How do Chinese immigrant parents tackle these barriers to support their children’s transition to kindergarten?

Method

Participants

This study included interviews with ten Chinese immigrant parents (see Table 1). They immigrated from different provinces in China and resided in a small Pennsylvania metropolitan area. They reported a length of residency in the US between 6.5 and 22 years ($M = 12.85$, $SD = 5.65$). Their educational attainment ranged from high school attendance to holding a doctoral degree. Half of the parents did not attend school in the US. Among those who had American

Table 1 Participant demographic information

Participant pseudonym	Gender	Years in the US	Education in China	Education in the US	Number of children in the household	Focus child age	Focus child gender	Focus child grade
Bryan	Male	6.5	Master	N/A	2	5	Male	Kindergarten
Jackie	Female	11	Some high school	N/A	1	3.5	Female	Preschool
Jiayuan	Female	8	College	Ph.D.	1	4.5	Female	Preschool
Leah	Female	10	Master	Some graduate school	2	6	Male	First grade
Long	Male	22	Master	N/A	2	5	Female	Kindergarten
Wang	Female	19	Master	Master	1	6.5	Male	First grade
Wendy	Female	10	Master	N/A	1	3	Male	Preschool
Xinying	Female	19	High school	College	2	4	Female	Preschool
Yan	Female	7	Master	N/A	1	5	Female	Kindergarten
Young	Female	16	Master	Master	1	6	Female	Preschool

educational experience, all attended higher education, not having any personal experience with the transition to kindergarten. Six parents had one child, and four had multiple children.

Each household only participated once in the study, with only one parent participating in the study. Thus, the fathers and mothers in this study were from different families. Four parents answered the interview questions based on a son, and six answered the questions based on a daughter. Children were between 3 and 6.5 ($M=4.85$, $SD=1.13$) years old. One child was biracial (Chinese Latino), and the other nine were ethnically Chinese. All children lived in intact families. Five children attended preschool, three attended kindergarten, and two attended first grade. Two parents spoke mainly English with their children at home, and eight parents spoke Chinese at home.

Procedure

Using convenience sampling, Chinese immigrant parents of children going through or who had gone through the kindergarten transition (preschool, kindergarten, and first grade) were recruited from a weekend Chinese school, local restaurants, and a university in the Lehigh Valley area in Pennsylvania. Lehigh Valley is about 60 miles from Philadelphia and 100 miles from New York City. Asians only comprise approximately 3% of the total population in the area (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020). Chinese only make up about 0.5% of the total population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018). This study was approved by the researchers' university institutional review board. Informed consent was obtained from all participants.

The research team developed the interview protocol. Parents participated in two semi-structured interviews on two separate occasions. The first interview included questions about the family's background, a child's academic experiences, and parental perception of the transition to kindergarten. The second interview further examined parental beliefs

and practices during the transition, such as perceived parental barriers, concerns, and educational expectations, as well as strategies and practices they used to tackle these barriers. Parents were interviewed in their preferred language and location. One interview was in English, and nine were in Chinese. Each interview lasted approximately 60 to 90 min. After the second interview, participants were given a \$50 gift card as a token of appreciation for their time.

Data Analysis

Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. All participants were given pseudonyms. Deductive and inductive coding methods were applied to analyze the interview data using NVivo 12 (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). A general draft codebook was developed for deductive coding based on existing literature about Chinese immigrant parental involvement (see Table 2). For example, with the top-down approach, parental involvement was categorized into three spheres: school, home, and community. Because little is known about Chinese immigrant parental involvement during the transition to kindergarten in areas with limited ethnic resources, inductive in vivo coding was used to explore themes not covered in previous literature (Saldaña, 2021). The bottom-up approach helped to add new codes and revise existing codes in the codebook.

Researcher Positionality

It is essential to acknowledge researcher positionality (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). To improve the fidelity of the study, our research team varied by age, ethnicity, immigration generation, and region of residency. Among the four researchers, one is a US-born second-generation Chinese-American parent, one is a first-generation Indian-American immigrant parent, and two are foreign-born Chinese immigrants. All four researchers have extensive experience working with Chinese immigrant families in the US.

Table 2 Codebook of parental involvement

Code		Example
Home-based	Barriers	Limited English proficiency; limited social and cultural knowledge; inadequate understanding of the American educational system
	Involvement	Held educational expectations for children; assigned supplementary homework; bought educational materials from China
School-based	Barriers	Teachers did not understand children's needs; children faced competition and unfair educational policy; schools did not provide adequate language support
	Involvement	Compared American and Chinese schools; volunteered in school; attended parent-teacher conferences; participated in school activities
Community-based	Barriers	Limited Chinese population; lacked a sense of belonging
	Involvement	Attended Chinese language school; built ethnic communities; interacted with other Chinese families; used technology

Results

Three main themes emerged in the present study about how Chinese immigrants understood and described how they supported their children's transition to kindergarten. First, the parents reflected on their experiences as an immigrant and provided a deep understanding of what it meant to be an immigrant in the US. Second, they shared how as an immigrant, they adapted to their ways of thinking and knowing in the American context and schools. Third, they discussed how they navigated ethnic resources.

Being an Immigrant

Chinese immigrant parents in the study strongly believed that being an immigrant shaped how they were involved in their children's kindergarten transition. They raised concerns about their limited proficiency in English and that of their children, discussed how their inadequate understanding of American society and schools was related to their sense of isolation, and shed light on why they held high educational expectations for their children.

Limited English Proficiency

Linguistic competence is an integral part of cultural capital. Chinese immigrant parents learned the importance of interacting with teachers and other parents during the transition to kindergarten. However, they felt judged because of their limited English proficiency, including those who attended graduate school in the US. Parents felt their limited English proficiency shaped their societal position and interactions with others. Wendy, who received her master's degree in the US, shared that her communication with teachers was greatly restricted by her capacity to speak English, and she preferred written communication. Xinying, who attended an American college, echoed that she was afraid of making mistakes in front of other parents, and thus she preferred listening to their conversations over participating. None of the parents participated in school decision-making, which requires advanced communication skills and knowledge of how the school system functions.

Parents expressed concerns that the combination of their children's limited English proficiency and teachers' insufficient understanding of Chinese children would impact their children's learning and development. Yan, a mother of a 5-year-old daughter, addressed a local teacher's inexperience with the home language environment of Chinese immigrant families,

The teacher told me that she had some behavioral concerns for my daughter. She said that my daughter is

quite talkative at school. I think that it is because my child wants to use English. We don't use it at home. The teacher didn't expect that some kids wouldn't speak English at home. She had expected that we would speak English to our kids, at least some. But we actually do not.

Wendy was worried that her son's limited English proficiency impaired the teacher-child interactions as well as her son's mental health,

My son repeatedly tells me he does not want to go to school. When I pick my son up from school, a few Chinese children play together. The teacher is always holding a White child and reading stories to that child. The teacher never holds any Chinese children because their English is insufficient to understand stories. I am concerned that my son's language issue impacts his personality and may leave some mental trauma.

Wendy was concerned that, living in a predominantly White area, her son might realize that he was different from his peers if treated differently by his teacher. Other Chinese parents also believed that teachers could not support Chinese children effectively because they did not understand their language needs. A form of English language supports many parents engaged in was assigning supplementary English reading, hoping that this practice would improve their children's English proficiency to help them academically and socially.

Cultural Barriers and Sense of Isolation

Chinese immigrant parents did not feel confident helping their children with schoolwork. Cultural knowledge is an example of embodied cultural capital. They reported a lack of cultural knowledge to help their children with schoolwork. Xinying, like many other parents, shared, "My children have to depend on themselves." Long, a father of two children, who had been in the US for 22 years, explained that as a first-generation immigrant, he could not help his children with some school subjects because his knowledge was limited,

As a first-generation Chinese immigrant, it's hard for us to help our children with American history and culture. I barely know anything about the US. Compared to other American kids, my children are weak in these areas.

Limited cultural capital also hindered Chinese immigrant parents' ability to build reciprocal relationships with teachers and other parents. Many parents reflected on their feelings of isolation due to cultural barriers. Leah, a mother of two children, shared that her limited knowledge about

American culture had substantive impacts on her integration and made her feel like “a guest” in the land where she had lived for a decade,

Although I’ve lived here for 10 years, I still feel something that separates me from this society. I work here, and there are many kind-hearted people around me. But I always feel like a guest. Maybe the language could be a barrier, but I find it hard to build deep trust with people here. What they are talking about does not interest me. I first thought it was just the language problem, but later I discovered that I don’t share the same interest with them.

Despite the lack of shared interests, many parents tried to remain in conversations with local parents. They feared that if they withdrew from the conversations, their children would lose the opportunity to interact with local children and miss out on an essential source of information for their children’s schooling.

High Educational Expectations

Chinese immigrant parents explained how their immigrant backgrounds, with limited linguistic ability and knowledge of the US context, shaped their perceptions of their children’s future success in the US. Xinying pointed out that her children would never be able to compete with other American children because her family could not provide the same language and cultural support as other families do. She further explained that her children had to compete with other Asian children,

Competition among Asians is fierce. Americans can do whatever they want. However, many Chinese children put so much effort into studying. We must compete for limited spots in good schools because school admission is based on a racial ratio.

Many parents emphasized that success in American schools as an immigrant required more effort than a non-immigrant. Some parents discussed that because of limited social networks, education was the primary way for their children’s upward mobility. They held high educational expectations and were willing to sacrifice to support their children’s schooling. Yan shared,

As immigrants, we have no one to count on, and we can only count on ourselves. We would make every effort to let our kid learn whatever she wants. Wasting time is definitely prohibited. You have spent your money and time just hoping for a better future for your kid, even as a stepping-stone to success would be good.

Yan highlighted the reality of immigrant parents: they have limited support and connections in the US. Moreover,

Yan showed how immigrant parents put much effort into supporting their children so they can have a better future.

Many parents shared that although they experienced downward mobility due to limited cultural capital and social networks, immigration to the US provided their children with an opportunity to attend a better educational system. Leah shared that she decided to stay in the US because her child enjoyed school here,

For those who have immigrated here, the longer you live here, the less you know about this country, and the less safe you would feel. Also, the economy in America is not so promising, while China’s economy is developing rapidly. So, there are many struggles. But our kids are enjoying life here. Every day, I would compare the two countries, consider resources, and think about which country is better for my kids. But so far, I still believe life here would be better for them.

Adapting and Growing Understanding of American Schools

Chinese immigrant parents in the study shared that the transition to kindergarten was a time for them and their children to adapt their ways of interacting with schools. They believed their children had to adapt to a more structured learning environment, learn more academic knowledge, become more independent, and develop more social skills. As parents, they shared how they adapted their beliefs and practices. However, they did not know how to be involved. Yan succinctly said, “I did not grow up here, and I am not familiar with the school system here.” To overcome the limitations, Chinese immigrant parents acquired the understanding by comparing American and Chinese schools and observing American classrooms.

Comparing American and Chinese Schools

Chinese immigrant parents compared the American educational system to their experiences with Chinese schools to understand American schools. Long discussed the differences between local American parents and Chinese parents in school practices and how he had made genuine efforts to adapt to American schools by imitating American parents,

Unlike Chinese parents, American parents think school activities are significant. Taking children’s singing performances as an example, we usually think it’s just for us to go, listen, and tell our kids that they have done a good job. But American parents will bring flowers, which is a greater encouragement. I think this is one of the shortcomings as an immigrant. But we will take our time and try to narrow the gap. At least I will dress more formally, even though I may not bring flowers.

I think we should try to fit ourselves into American society.

In his description, Long described how he was growing in the ways he thought about encouraging his children and expanding his embodied capital.

While living in the US, Chinese immigrant parents shared how they had learned to adjust their interactions with teachers and school staff. Many parents expressed concerns about their children's ability to get along with their peers. Jiayuan, a mother of a preschool daughter, reported her way of dealing with bullying in school,

“One child threw a pen at my daughter and scratched her hands. I need to figure out whether this happened accidentally. If I think that her teacher did not handle it well, I will talk to the teacher. I need to do this inspection first. But I might treat it in another way if it happens in China. Here I will argue for it. I want to ask questions clearly, such as why my child got hurt and why the school didn't interfere.”

When school bullying occurs in China, parents tend to ignore it or only communicate with their children at home. However, American schools take bullying more seriously. Schools and parents often work together to address such incidents. Several parents in the study recognized that they needed to change their practices, took a more active role, and brought any potential bullying incidents to the attention of the school.

Volunteering to Learn About American Schools

Chinese immigrant parents expressed their enthusiasm for learning more about American schools through volunteering. Yan stated, “Through school volunteer work, I can learn something about how schools work here and how they arrange activities. Volunteering at school is like the feeling of moving from the audience to the back of the curtain.” Similarly, Leah shared, “We haven't been taught the purpose of school volunteering, and there are so many things that we don't know. If you want to know about your kids, you must observe and feel by yourself.” Leah explained that observing classrooms helped her better understand what school was like for her children in an American school environment. Unlike previous studies showing that Chinese immigrant parents rarely volunteer in school (Ji & Koblinsky, 2009; Li, 2006), the parents in the present study highlighted that as immigrants, they were unfamiliar with the schools, and thus they purposefully volunteered in school to gain more information about their children's learning environments and school requirements. They considered school volunteering a vital way to show their care for children's education, observe their school performance, and interact with teachers.

Cultural Capital Brought by Chinese Immigrant Parents

With limited cultural capital and social support in the US, Chinese immigrant parents in the study acknowledged the importance of building an ethnic coalition that brought Chinese immigrant parents together. They believed this was a way to access and share resources embedded in their immigrant backgrounds and create a pool of “funds of knowledge” (Moll et al., 1992).

Utilizing Chinese Educational Practices and Academic Resources

Chinese immigrant parents used Chinese educational beliefs and practices to help their children build a solid foundation for future academic success. Many parents were concerned that their children were “not learning enough in school.” They preferred a combination of the American way of play-based learning and the Chinese way of knowledge-based learning. So, their children were encouraged to explore their interests while gaining knowledge and skills. Wang, a mother of a 6.5-year-old son, explained that she applied a Chinese way of practice to consolidate what her child had learned in school,

I think American education is not strict. Teachers introduce ideas, but they would never force kids to practice. Practice is more like the Chinese way of learning. I would ask my son to practice numbers at home every week. I don't want too much education at home, but I want him to understand what teachers have said with my help at home.

Additionally, parents utilized Chinese resources to assist their children with preparation for kindergarten. Some parents reported using Chinese math materials for home teaching. Jiayuan bought math workbooks from China because she could not find such materials in the US. Jackie, a mother of a 3.5-year-old daughter, reported using a Chinese nine-by-nine multiplication table to help her daughter memorize multiplication facts.

Building an Ethnic Community

The ethnic community serves as a hub for social interactions among Chinese immigrants with limited cultural capital and social networks in the US (Zhang & Kong, 2022). Chinese immigrant parents in an area with a small Chinese population had limited ethnic resources. To address the challenge, they actively created a collaborative ethnic community based on a local weekend Chinese language school where they built a sense of belonging and support for both parents and children and a place for gathering information to navigate

American schools and society. Parents discussed the benefits of having an ethnic community for children's learning. Xinying recalled her difficulties in supporting her children's education before she came to the Chinese language school, "I used to depend solely on teachers for information and resources. If it did not work out, we only had ourselves." Leah shared, "I would ask around in the Chinese language school. When I heard that someone was learning something, I would do my research. So, my son won't fall behind." Wang also considered the Chinese weekend school a place where parents interacted with each other to share information about children's schooling.

Parents further emphasized that the Chinese language school not only exposed their children to Chinese heritage language and cultural values but also provided them with opportunities to form a sense of belonging through interacting with other Chinese families. Long explained that the Chinese language school reduced his children's sense of loneliness,

If my kids find it hard to fit in with American kids, it's not a bad idea to get closer to the Chinese community. I think this could be the reason why many other Chinese parents are also taking their kids here. It's not only because of the teaching content that we choose the Chinese language school but also because my children can play with other Chinese kids. Thus, they won't feel lonely.

Benefiting from Technology

Chinese immigrant parents created a WeChat (a Chinese online messaging platform) parent chatting group so their interactions could go beyond the weekend Chinese language school. They used the chat group to discuss children's educational programs, school selection, kindergarten registration, and enrichment activities. Leah described how she benefited from being a member of the chat group,

Thanks to WeChat, we have a parent chatting group of over 100 members, in which moms help each other. Many people share information in the group, and they will organize activities for kids. You see, Chinese people always put their kids' education first. I feel like a hundred responses to a single call.

Xinying shared that she was also a member of another WeChat parent group where she found reading lists for her daughters,

Our friends in the Chinese language school shared a WeChat group link with me. The group manager runs a bilingual preschool in Boston, and he is experienced in early education. He shared reading lists for students from pre-K to 5th grade. They were like encyclope-

dias. I didn't even know pre-K and kindergarten students already had reading lists. My children's teachers never provide any lists for us. These reading lists make a huge difference in my children's reading.

Chinese immigrant parents used technology to bridge the distance between them and learn about American education and society. This helped parents feel more confident as they prepared their children to transition to kindergarten.

Discussion

This study aims to understand Chinese immigrant parental involvement beliefs and practices during children's transition to kindergarten. Interviews with 10 Chinese immigrant parents illustrated that parental involvement was shaped by their cultural capital, which was influenced by immigration status, experiences with schools, transnational connections, and community context. Although limited cultural capital, including limited English proficiency and knowledge of the American educational system, hindered parental involvement, they actively adjusted their educational beliefs and practices by comparing American and Chinese schools and volunteering in schools. They adapted their cultural capital accumulated in the Chinese educational system to forms of cultural capital appropriate in American schools. They also utilized ethnic resources to support children's kindergarten transition.

Barriers to Parental Educational Involvement

Chinese immigrant parents in the present study acknowledged the importance of parental involvement during children's kindergarten transition. However, limited cultural capital in a new society, minimal English proficiency skills, and unfamiliarity with the American educational system impeded their involvement (Anicama et al., 2018; Bodovski & Durham, 2010; Curtis et al., 2021). Not learning English as a native language or having personal experiences with early American education resulted in their hesitancy to interact with teachers and local parents and assist their children with schoolwork (Li & Sun, 2019).

The parents in the present study shared how limited cultural capital restricted their integration into American society and led to a sense of isolation for themselves and their children. They expressed their concerns that growing up in a Chinese-speaking household would hurt children's language skills and social and emotional development because local teachers lacked sufficient cultural competence to address the language needs of their children. Teachers in the predominantly White school districts did not recognize how speaking a different home language other than English impacted

children's school adjustment. Thus, they failed to fulfill children's language learning and mental health needs. As a result, the responsibility of improving children's English was placed on parents struggling with English.

Previous studies suggest that Chinese immigrant parents hold high educational expectations for their children (Bodovski & Durham, 2010). The present study further explains why they have high educational expectations, even for young children. Chinese immigrant parents are aware of their limited cultural capital and the structural restrictions immigrant children face in the US. Hence, parents feel their children need to be more diligent in learning than children from non-immigrant families. Additionally, the study found that providing more educational opportunities for children was one of the main reasons for immigration, demonstrating that Chinese immigrant parents put children's educational needs before their own (Ji & Koblinsky, 2009).

Learning New Rules and Navigating Resources

Previous studies have primarily focused on the barriers to Chinese immigrant parental involvement (Bodovski & Durham, 2010; Ji & Koblinsky, 2009; Li, 2006; Li & Sun, 2019). In contrast, the present study underscores how parents adjusted their beliefs and practices to the norms of a new society and leveraged their experiences with the Chinese educational system as cultural assets. The parents in the present study acknowledged their shortcomings as an immigrant. They considered the transition to kindergarten a time of change for their children and themselves. Coming from a different cultural context where parents respect teachers by not interfering with school matters (Chan, 2017), parents had to negotiate between their personal experiences with Chinese schools and the new rules of American schools. Modeling after the observed practices of local parents demonstrates their genuine effort to fit into American schools. Questioning teachers about bullying illustrates that they realized they could be equal partners with teachers rather than merely deferring to teachers on their children's well-rounded learning experience.

It is worth noting that whereas previous studies suggest that Chinese immigrant parents seldom volunteer in school (Huntsinger & Jose, 2009; Ji & Koblinsky, 2009; Li, 2006), the parents in the present study not only looked for opportunities to volunteer but acknowledged how volunteering contributed to their knowledge of American schools and their sense of engagement. Parental volunteering demonstrates their care for children's education and eagerness to help teachers in classrooms. It motivates teachers to gain more awareness of the needs of parents and children and promotes a reciprocal family-school collaboration (Conus & Fahrni, 2019).

The present study reveals the intangible benefits of ethnic resources in supporting Chinese immigrant parents' involvement during the transition to kindergarten. This study elucidates that parents leverage their existing cultural capital and utilize Chinese materials to boost their children's learning at home. When faced with limited ethnic resources in the local community, they can establish an ethnic community through a local Chinese weekend school, which serves as a locus of the social network. Formerly unrelated parents built social ties in the school, eased their sense of isolation, and helped them navigate American schools collectively (Zhang, 2021). Furthermore, the ethnic community is not only physical but also virtual. The use of social media plays a crucial role in helping parents adapt to the American educational system. Families build online community networks that bring a sense of belonging and collaboration, transcending geographical boundaries.

Limitations

This study should be considered in the context of several limitations. First, socioeconomic status is a critical factor for parental involvement among immigrant families (Yamamoto et al., 2016). In the present study, except for one parent, all parents graduated from college, and five parents received higher education in the US. Although it is consistent with the fact that Asian–American families settling in suburban areas are predominantly middle to upper-middle class (Park, 2020), the parents in the present study may be distinct from low-income parents who are more linguistically and culturally isolated and encounter more economic difficulties in devoting educational resources to support their children's kindergarten transition. Second, Chinese immigrants are a heterogeneous group from different countries and regions with different linguistic, cultural, and educational experiences prior to immigration. However, all parents in the present study came from China. Thus, they are not representative of Chinese immigrant parents from other places.

Implications

Despite the limitations, this study has several implications. Educators can acquire knowledge of Chinese immigrant parents' challenges in navigating the school system. Thus, they will be informed to provide more explicit and specific information about the transition and parental involvement. This study provides evidence of parental commitment to engage at home, school, and community. Educators can gain an in-depth understanding of how Chinese immigrant parents can be a valuable resource to enhance children's teaching and learning experiences. This study also demonstrates a need for professional development for teachers to develop culturally responsive and reciprocal relationships with parents.

School administrators can be informed about the importance of building a support system for Chinese immigrant parents to address their challenges while encouraging them to share their cultural knowledge and skills to enrich the school community.

Conclusion

Being an immigrant parent requires navigating a new and different set of norms and cultural values as they raise their children. By examining parents' interpretations of their involvement from an immigrant perspective, the present study contributes to an in-depth understanding of Chinese immigrant parents' challenges and commitments during children's transition to kindergarten. It underscores that although limited cultural capital restricts their involvement, Chinese immigrant parents know the importance of children's kindergarten transition. They genuinely adjust their beliefs and practices, negotiate the differences between American and Chinese educational systems, and navigate ethnic resources to support their children during kindergarten.

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Declarations

Conflict of interest The authors have no conflict of interest. This manuscript has not been published previously and it is not under consideration for publication elsewhere.

Ethical Approval The authors have complied with the APA ethical principles regarding research with human participants in the conduct of the research presented in this manuscript. Informed consent was obtained from all participants.

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