

NIE23068 – Navigating through Singapore’s Education System as an Immigrant Parent

Presented by Tammy Eng Jing Rou

Supervised by Asst Prof Yang Peidong, Co-supervisor by Chow Lee Tat

INTRODUCTION

- Existing research has been done on immigrant parents’ responses (expectations and parenting styles) during the process of their child schooling in Singapore’s education system (Zhou & Wang 2019).
- This study aims to breakdown the process of schooling, from the initial pre-admission to enrolment into Singapore’s education system. It provides a more accurate representation of immigrant parents’ trajectory and demographic diversity upon migration into Singapore.

RQs: *What are some problems faced by immigrant parents while helping their child navigate through Singapore’s Education System? How do immigrant parents react accordingly?*

METHODOLOGY

- Participants:** Study had interviewed a total of 61 participants (Chinese=31, Filipino=11, Indian=14, Indonesian=3, Others=4).
- Profile of participants:** Foreign-born couple, with children enrolled in mainstream Singapore schools during the stages of Primary to Post-secondary
- Qualitative Procedure:** Two sessions of semi-structured, one-on-one interviews were carried out for participants in their preferred language. All interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed and translated (if necessary) to English.
- Analysis:** Thematic analysis was carried out. Transcripts were organised through the coding process, generating pre-set and emergent codes → Common themes were established and classified into the findings below.

FINDINGS

Problems faced by Immigrant Parents

1. Lack of Information and Experiences in SG’s system

Immigrant Parents’ Information Seeking Behaviour characterized as such:

Reliance on super-app from native country (Chinese Immigrant Parents):

- WeChat as the main concentration of parental support groups, facilitating the exchange of lived experiences with similar background
- Parenting resources and success parenting experiences are publicly shared online

Word-of-Mouth

- Colleagues and neighbours as primary sources of information → Proximity & Frequency as key factors in shaping social circle
- Directed by those familiar with Singapore’s education system, or by locals with children of similar ages

Internalisation of Information

Evaluation of Information gathered:

- Different children have different personalities, and immigrant parents will have to determine a suitable pathway for their child



“I don’t take what they share as a standard.”

– WHF (mother of one)

2. Uncertainty in obtaining Entry into Local Schools

Immigrant parents’ efforts to increase possibility of admission:

Conversion of Citizenship

- Persistent application over the years for Citizenship or Permanent Residence (PR) for better education opportunities and lower financial spendings in the long run



“If we get a (Singapore) citizenship, that opens up more opportunities for her.”

– MS (PR, mother of a 7 year-old child)

Types of

Information obtained

Volunteering for local admissions:

- Signing up to volunteer at the desirable primary school for their child to gain an advantage over other applicants
- Limited volunteering opportunities for immigrant parents and the flexibility of immigrant parents’ schedule

Alternative Pathway:

- Foreigner Quota limits the number of immigrant children accepted into local schools
- Immigrant child to prepare and take admission tests for foreign students to qualify for entry into local schools

3. Academic & Emotional Support for Immigrant Child

Immigrant parents’ influences on child’s education outcomes:

Parental Involvement:

- Willingness in investing time and effort to guide and accompany their child through the education journey
- Extent of involvement depends on Immigrant Parents’ ability to help their child with academics

Intervention through Tuition:

- Likelihood of enrolment in tuition increases with the increased complexity of subjects and/or the nearing of National Examinations
- Non-Chinese Immigrants are more likely to send their child for mother-tongue lessons than Chinese Immigrants

Educator’s role

Transparency of Communication:

- Parent Teacher Meetings to understand child’s holistic development and progress in schools
- Reduced interactions between teachers and parents given that the child progresses through the education system

CONCLUSION

- Difficulty **gathering and understanding information** about the local education system.
 - Internalisation of unfamiliar, complex system from varying sources, where immigrant parents attempt to guide their child’s education processes based on research done rather than experiences.
- Difficulty in **enrolling their children into local schools** due to fixed quotas.
 - While some immigrant parents focus on increasing chances through citizenry and volunteering, a handful enrolls their child into admission tests that has more certainty.
- Upon admission into a local school, immigrant parents **takes on the primary role of a parent.**
 - Intervention and involvement from the intention of being parents. The background of immigrant parents determine the extent and type of help their child can receive.

DISCUSSION

Future Research can be done on:

- What are some solutions for immigrant parents to navigate through the education system easier?
- How can teachers in Singapore provide more support to immigrant parents and children to ease their transition?

Reference:

Zhou, Min and Jun Wang. 2019. “Challenges and Strategies for Promoting Children’s Education: A Comparative Analysis of Chinese Immigrant Parenting in the United States and Singapore.” *Genealogy* 3(2):20.