

NIE23229 - Immigrant parents and Mother Tongue Language education in Singapore's bilingual system

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INTRODUCTION

30%

Singapore has been a melting pot of cultures and nationalities. In 2023, the immigrant population in Singapore numbered about 1.77 million, constituting approximately 30 percent of the country's total population of around 5.92 million (Singapore Department of Statistics, 2023).

Given Singapore's diverse population, it is essential to understand how immigrant parents from various countries perceive and engage with Singapore's bilingual education system.

Singapore's bilingual education:

The Bilingual Policy has been the cornerstone of Singapore's education system since 1959 (Lee & Phua, 2020). It emphasizes students' proficiency in both the English language, and in their respective official mother tongues.

While students of Chinese, Malay, and Indian ethnicities study their respective mother tongues, those whose mother tongue is NOT among the official languages can choose to study any of them or opt for a foreign or Asian language under Mother Tongue In-Lieu (Ministry of Education Singapore, n.d.).

Goal of this study: Exploring immigrant parents' perceptions and involvement in Mother Tongue Language (MTL) education within Singapore's bilingual system, aiming to understand how they navigate the bilingual education system.

METHODOLOGY

The data used in this paper was collected from an ongoing qualitative study conducted by NTU-NIE, exploring how immigrant parents influence children's education in Singapore.

Participants: 20 (10 Chinese, 10 Non-Chinese)

Criteria:

- Both parents being foreign-born, regardless of their residential statuses. (*Participants with Malaysian backgrounds were not included in the study due to their cultural proximity to Singapore.*)
- Having children enrolled in mainstream Singapore schools, excluding international and specialized schools, between the Primary to Post-Secondary stages of their education career.

Data collection methods:

- Online Survey: Used to collect descriptive demographics on the participants before conducting interviews.
- In-depth Semi-Structured Interviews: Conducted one-on-one, mostly over two sessions, in the participants' preferred language (either Mandarin or English).

FINDINGS

Finding 1:



6 out of 10 Chinese immigrant parents mentioned about bilingualism as an advantage of migrating to Singapore for education.



0 out of 10 Non-Chinese immigrant parents mentioned about bilingualism as an advantage of migrating to Singapore for education.

Finding 2: Factors Influencing Immigrant Parents' Choice of MTL for Their Children

1. Career Prospects

Chinese Language (CL) is often favored among various options as immigrant parents believe proficiency in CL enhances their children's competitiveness in the professional realm, particularly given the growing influence of the Chinese economy.

2. Cultural Connection

Some intentionally choose a specific mother tongue to strengthen their children's ties to their home culture, nurturing a deep understanding of their heritage.

3. Social Integration

Certain parents prefer a specific mother tongue to help their children integrate into Singapore, emphasizing linguistic assimilation, with a preference often towards the CL.

4. Alleviating Learning Burden

Immigrant parents seeking to ease their children's learning burden often choose the Mother Tongue in-lieu option over official mother tongue languages.

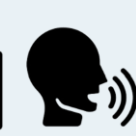
Finding 3: Most Chinese immigrant parents find MTL education manageable for their children, while many non-Chinese immigrant parents perceive it as challenging.

Finding 4: Actions taken to enhance children's MTL learning

Extra Classes



Home Activities



Temporary Residence in Home Country



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