

An Investigation of Teachers' Attitudes Between School and Home Based Family Intervention Models Utilized by Public School Teachers in the People's Republic of China

Wei Gu and Thomas D. Yawkey

Teachers' attitudes toward family intervention are of great import on ways of increasing student achievement and cooperative interactions between teachers and family. Despite expanding school growth, there is very little research in China that examines teachers' attitudes toward family intervention.

In this study, 159 kindergarten teachers in China demonstrated their attitudes towards family intervention by completing a research survey which included 35 items. The results showed that Chinese kindergarten teachers had positive attitudes towards both school-based and home-based family intervention but their attitudes towards school-based family intervention were less positive. Suggestions were made to help Chinese teachers to view school-based family intervention in a more positive way.

The relationship between family and school, as addressed by Swap (1993), can be summarized into four models: (1) protective model, (2) school to home transition model, (3) curriculum enrichment model, and (4) partnership model. Briefly, protective model is defined as the separation of parents' and educators' functions to reduce conflict between parents and educators. School to home transition model is viewed as to enlist parents in supporting objectives of the school. In the curriculum enrichment model, school's curriculum is expanded by incorporating families' contributions. Finally, in the partnership model, parents and educators work together to accomplish a common mission. Decker and Decker (2003) pointed out that Swap's four models of parent-school relationships reflect a continuum of increasing parent involvement.

By following these four models, families can demonstrate different types of intervention and involvement in child education: that is, school-based intervention and home-based intervention. According to Muller and Kerbow (1993), school-based intervention refers to family's participation in children's education within school settings or through interaction with school personnel, such as parent-teacher conference, communicating with school personnel during home visits, and volunteering at school. Swap (1993)'s curriculum enrichment model and partnership model may fit in this school-based perspective.

In contrast, home-based intervention means family's participation in children's education within home settings. This includes, but is not limited to: conversation about school between parents and child, parents' reading to child, parents' helping with homework and parents' engagement in children's extra curricular. Swap (1993)'s protective model and school to home transition model may fit in this home-based perspective.

Research (e.g., Fantuzzo & McWayne, 2002; Scribner, Young, & Pedroza, 1999; McNeal 1999) shows a clear and positive relationship between the outcomes for children and family intervention, both school-based

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and home-based intervention. Meanwhile, as Swap (1993) suggested, the more families get involved in school, the better teachers and families can work together to accomplish a common mission, generally, for all children in school to achieve success. Research (e.g., Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997) also demonstrates that teachers' attitudes toward family intervention play a key role in family's willingness and extent of participation in child education. Teachers' positive attitudes toward family intervention are potentially very influential in family's decision about involvement in their children's education (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). Meanwhile, teachers' negative perceptions about family intervention may inhibit home-school linkage (Lazar & Slostad, 1999).

Lazar and Slostad (1999) also argued that teachers' attitudes toward family intervention could be shaped by culture and history. As Gu (2006) summarized, family intervention in China has distinctive characteristics due to certain culture and historical background. Chinese families tend to withdraw from school-based family intervention because of several reasons: (1) China's long tradition of high respect for teachers; (2) China's highly centralized educational system; (3) the common unfamiliarity of Chinese people with school operation; and (4) the traditional government official selection procedure in ancient China. Although Chinese families usually do not understand fully school operations and school-based interventions, most of them maintain a strong authority on their children in home setting. This phenomenon originates in traditional Confucian doctrines of collectivism and filial piety.

As a developing country which is embarking on popularizing advanced and research based childhood education programs, China, in recent years, has increasingly emphasized the importance of family intervention and key roles that teachers play in actualizing the intervention. However, since childhood education is still a new and

developing area in China, little research has been conducted to examine Chinese teachers' attitudes, especially the possible difference in their attitudes toward school-based and home-based family intervention.

The purpose of this study is to find out whether there is any difference in teachers' attitudes toward school-based family intervention and home-based intervention in China's public schools. A sample of 159 kindergarten teachers from 16 public kindergartens in China participated in this study. By completing a survey including 35 questions, these teachers showed their attitudes toward school-based and home-based family intervention, respectively. Paired t-test analyses were conducted to determine whether there are any differences in Chinese teachers' attitudes toward school-based and home-based interventions.

Method

Participants

A total of 159 kindergarten teachers in 16 public schools in the City of Nanjing, China participated in this study. After obtaining permission from principals of the 16 schools, 186 surveys were submitted to the schools and principals helped to distribute the surveys to their teachers. Finally 172 teachers returned the surveys. Excluding eight incomplete surveys and five surveys with certain answer patterns which demonstrated obvious carelessness, the principal investigator collected 159 completed and valid surveys. The survey return rate was 85.5%. According to educational psychology researchers (e.g., Shaughnessy & Zechmeister, 1990; Punch, 2003), a return rate of 85.5% in survey responses is very positive and high.

Instrument

The instrument utilized in this study was a self-designed survey which contained 35 questions. The survey was divided into three parts. These parts were: (1) Demographic Information; (2) Attitudes toward School-Based

Family Intervention; and (3) Attitudes toward Home-Based Family Intervention. Each part is explained as below.

Part one was to ask participants to answer five questions about their demographic background: age, highest degree, number of years engaging in kindergarten teaching, number of children in his/her classroom and number of professional organization membership he/she holds.

Part two was composed of 15 questions with Likert-type scale. This part addressed three types of school-based family intervention models: parent-teacher conferences, communicating with school personnel during home visits, and volunteering at school (Muller & Kerbow, 1993). 15 statements with Likert-type scale were designed to determine participants' attitudes toward school-based family intervention. The Likert-type scale ranged from 4 (strongly agree), 3 (agree), 2 (disagree), to 1 (strongly disagree). Part three comprised 15 questions also with Likert-type scale. This part addressed four types of home-based family intervention models: conversation about school between parents and child, parents' reading to child, parents' helping with homework and parents' engagement in child's extra curricular (Muller & Kerbow, 1993). 15 statements with Likert-type scale were designed to determine participants' attitudes toward home-based family intervention. The Likert-type scale ranged from 4 (strongly agree), 3 (agree), 2 (disagree), to 1 (strongly disagree).

The survey was first designed in English and was then translated into Mandarin Chinese for the convenience for participants, who were Chinese teachers. The translation was verified by an experienced Chinese ESL teacher using back translation methodology (Brislin, 1970) to identify points of divergence. In addition, two bilingual Chinese kindergarten teachers were asked to identify any misleading or imprecise wording or expression in the survey. Four instances of misleading or imprecise wording were noted

and these problems in expression were solved by the principal investigator deciding which interpretation best fit the spirit of this research paradigm.

Pilot Study

Thirty Chinese kindergarten teachers from five kindergartens in Nanjing, China were selected in a pilot study. The 30 teachers did not participate in the final data collection. The Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient for this pilot study was .89. According to Nunnally (1978), a reliability coefficient of .7 or higher was considered acceptable.

Data Collection

The principal investigator first contacted the principals of the 16 kindergartens, explaining survey procedure and obtaining permissions. An on-site visit was then arranged for the principal investigator to deliver the survey packages to the 16 kindergartens. Kindergarten principals helped to distribute the survey package to their teachers. Each package contained: (1) an invitation letter for survey participation; (2) an informed consent form; and, (3) a copy of survey questionnaire in Mandarin Chinese. Teachers were told that the survey was anonymous.

One week after the first on-site visit, the principal investigator visited again the 16 kindergartens to collect the completed surveys. For those teachers who were absent or did not complete the survey on that day, the principal investigator made a phone call to them the next week to reschedule another survey pickup time.

Analyses and Results

The collected data was treated by descriptive statistics and paired t-test to address the research question. The results of the study are explained as below.

Demographic Background of Participants

Table 1 demonstrates the age, highest degree, number of years engaging in kinder-

garten teaching, number of children in his/her classroom and number of professional organization membership of the participants.

Table 1 indicates that: (1) more than half of the participants (51.6%) ranged in age between 20-30 years old; (2) the majority of participants (59.7%) held a community college diploma; (3) participants had an average of 11.76 years engaging in kindergarten teaching; (4) participants had an average of 32 children in their classes; and (5) most participants (59.7%) did not have any professional organization membership.

Teachers' Attitudes toward School-Based Family Intervention

In the second part of the survey, participants were asked to respond to 15 statements to determine their attitudes toward school-based family intervention. Table 2 provides

a summary of participants' responses.

Among the 15 statements, odd number items are positively worded and even number items are negatively worded. For odd number statements, participants' higher number choices denoted more positive attitudes toward school-based family intervention. For even number statements, participants' higher number choices denoted more negative attitudes toward school-family intervention. Thus, when the data were analyzed with statistical software, teachers' choices in even number items were reversely recoded for consistency.

After recoding, the mean of teachers' choices for each statement ranged from 2.85 to 3.28, with an overall mean of 3.02 for all of the 15 statements. This suggested that most participants' attitudes toward school-based family intervention were positive.

Table 2

Table 1
Demographic Background of Participants (n=159)

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Teachers' Attitudes Toward School-Based Family Intervention (n=159)
Teachers' Attitudes toward Home-Based Family Intervention

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In the third part of the survey, participants were asked to respond to 15 statements to determine their attitudes toward home-based family intervention. Table 3 summarizes these participants' responses.

The 15 statements in the third part are also positively and negatively worded. Same as the 15 statements in part two of the survey, teachers' choices in even number statements in part three were reversely recoded for consistency.

After recoding, the mean of teachers' choices for each statement ranged from 2.57 to 3.52, with an overall mean of 3.12 for all of the 15 statements. This suggested that most participants' attitudes toward home-based family intervention were positive.

Difference in Teachers' Attitudes toward School-Based and Home-Based Family Intervention

A paired t-test model was used to examine differences in teachers' attitudes toward school-based and home-based family intervention. In this t-test, the independent variable was the type of family intervention, with school-based and home-based types as its two levels. The dependent variables were participants' attitudes.

Before running the t-test analyses, the skewness value of participants' attitudes toward the two types of family intervention was computed to verify the distribution. The attitudes toward school-based intervention had a skewness value of $-.865$ and the attitude toward home-based intervention had a skewness value of $.006$. The attitudes toward both of the types of family intervention were normally distributed.

Table 4 shows a summary of SPSS results for paired t-test analyses. With a p value of $.000$ (<0.05), the results show there was a statistically significant difference in teachers' attitudes toward school-based and home-based family intervention. In addition, the mean of the paired difference is -1.44 . This suggests that participants had more positive

attitudes toward home-based family intervention than school-based intervention.

Discussion

The descriptive statistics of the survey results imply that kindergarten teachers have positive attitudes toward both school-based and home-based family intervention. Meanwhile, the paired t-test results show that there is a significant difference in teachers' attitudes toward school-based and home-based family intervention. Teachers have more positive attitudes toward home-based family intervention than school-based intervention. The study results above imply that Chinese kindergarten teachers' attitudes toward family intervention were correspondent with the School to Home Transmission Model in the four types of parent-school relationships described by Swap (1993), which enlists parents in supporting objectives of the school.

This withdrawal of Chinese families from school-based family intervention rests with distinctive cultural and historical traditions (Gu, 2006). Having grown up and being educated in this distinctive cultural and historical educational tradition, Chinese teachers also prefer parents to stay at home to get involved in children's education. In addition, Li, Chen and Sun (2002) indicated that many Chinese people believe that teachers, as professionals, know the best way to educate the children. With this perception, some Chinese teachers believed that only school personnel could make appropriate decisions regarding the educational program, decisions which would be beyond the realm of the parents (Banerian, 1991).

Recommendations and Conclusions

Children's development benefit from both school-based and home-based family intervention. Meanwhile, teachers' attitudes play a key role in actualizing the two types of intervention. This study shows that there is a significant difference in Chinese teachers' attitudes toward school-based and home-

Table 3
Teachers' Attitudes Toward School-Based Family Intervention (n=159)

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Table 4
Paired t-test for Teachers' Attitudes toward School-Based and Home-Based Family Intervention (n=159)

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based intervention. Their attitudes toward home-based family intervention are more positive.

Changes need to be made to help Chinese teachers to view school-based family intervention in a more positive way. Several research based recommendations are explained as below.

First, more professional training about the significance of school-based family intervention should be included in teacher educational training programs. According to Hoover-Dempsey, Walker, Jones, and Reed (2002), many pre-service teachers receive little preparation for working with parents before they enter their teaching careers. Since child development is still a new and developing area in China, the importance of parents' direct participation and genuine collaboration with parents is still not well noticed by Chinese educators. In order to help pre-service teachers better realize the crucial role that school-based family intervention plays in children's development, more course-

work, professional development workshops and internship opportunities about working directly with parents should be added into teacher education program.

Second, more time may be allocated by school to allow teachers to work directly with parents. United States Department of Education (1997) provided some strategies for helping teachers to make time to develop school-family partnerships. Chinese schools may adapt to culture and use for reference. For example, the school may assign parent coordinators through parent-teacher conferences to help teachers maintain contact with parents. Also, schools can allow teachers to assign a substitute teacher in the classroom while they arrange some time during school days to conduct home visits. If teachers meet parents after school hours, schools may provide stipends or compensatory time off for them.

Third, parent education programs may be introduced in Chinese public schools. According to Dicamillo (2001), parent in-

volvement programs are very important to schools, children, and parents because they increase shared responsibility, participation, and decision making. More parent education programs in Chinese schools will help to promote parents' participation at school and to establish a more harmonious and constructive relationship between teachers and families.

In conclusion, this study found that in Chinese public schools, there is a significant difference in teachers' attitudes towards school-based and home-based family intervention. Chinese teachers have more positive attitudes toward home-based family intervention than school-based family intervention. That means Chinese teachers prefer parents to stay at home to get involved in children's education. Since children's development benefit from both school-based and home-based family intervention, changes need to be made to promote teachers' positive attitudes toward school-based family intervention.

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Author Note:

These data and write-up contained in this article are re-written from the principal author's Ph.D. thesis given at The Pennsylvania State University, University Park. This thesis title is: *Teachers' Attitudes toward Parental Involvement in Selected Government Kindergartens in China*. The lead writer and researcher in this article has given her permission re-written, and paraphrased statement for the original source. And, Dr. Gu has also granted use of tables based on this copyrighted work. Further questions about this Ph.D. thesis and reprints of other related articles and conference presentations on similar and related topics can be obtained by request from: Dr. Wei Gu, Assistant Professor of Education, Grand Valley State University, Grand Rapids, MI 49501. E-mail: guw@gvsu.edu.

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