Perception of Chinese Parents Toward School and Family Collaboration

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Abstract

Research has indicated that parents play a significant role in promoting school and family collaborative activities. However, empirical studies on parental engagement in school and family collaboration in China are scarce. This study investigates how Chinese parents perceived the school and family collaborative activities initiated by elementary school staff. Out of 300 parents in elementary schools in Wu Xing District, Huzhou, Zhejiang Province, China, 135 agreed to participate in this study to indicate their perceptions of school and family collaboration. A mainly quantitative approach was employed in this study of school and family collaboration. An open-ended question was added to the end of the quantitative questionnaire to offer the parents the opportunity to express themselves freely with no restriction. The findings of this study indicated that Chinese parents were in favor of school and family collaboration and were willing to work with teachers to foster better communication. However, they needed guidance and initiations from teachers and school administrators. It is concluded that parents could be more involved in creating a comprehensive school and family collaboration plan to help with children's development. This study comes in timely in response to the Chinese Central Government's call for promoting school and family relationship to enhance student learning.

Key Words: Chinese families, parent perceptions, school–family collaboration, parental involvement, China, family collaboration, teachers, communication

Introduction

This study was designed to examine the Chinese parents' perceptions toward their efficacy, willingness, administrative support, relationship with teachers, parent association, and barriers to and planning for school and family collaboration in elementary schools. Research has continuously disclosed that collaboration between school and family could help improve student achievement (Brough & Irvin, 2001; Fan, 2001; Fan & Chen, 2001). Parents will need to be convinced that despite all the difficulties involved in this collaborative effort, it is worthwhile to pursue this school and family collaboration. In this collaboration, parents will be invited to work with teachers and administrators for a comprehensive plan to help children both in school and at home. Therefore, it is important to examine how parents perceive this school and family relationship. This study comes in timely to respond to the Chinese Central Government's continuous urges the improvement of school and family relationships (Chinese Department of Education, 2012; State Council of the People's Republic of China, 2001, 2004).

Research Setting

This study was conducted in Wu Xing District, Huzhou City, Zhejiang Province, China. The district with a population of 590,000 is located within the Huzhou City, rich in historical and cultural heritage. The education system of the district, with 7 high schools, 11 middle schools, and 23 elementary schools, is supported with strong commitment from the city and provincial governments and the agricultural and industrial communities. Wu Xing District was chosen for the research site because of its representation of a well-developed district within a medium size city in the heart of China. Additionally, one of the researcher's work location within the Huzhou City provided the convenience of research collaboration. This study is focused on examining parents' perceptions of school and family collaboration at the elementary school level. The researchers intend to pursue the same type of study at the secondary school level in the future.

As described by one of the researchers who has worked in Wu Xing District for over 10 years, school staff in Wu Xing District have worked continuously to involve parents in various school and family collaborative activities. They have established goals to improve school and parent relationships. Some schools have parent associations organized by parents voluntarily as a network to connect with other parents (teachers and school administrators are not official members of the associations; however, the associations usually hold their meetings in schools and teachers and administrators are often invited to attend to

discuss student learning and discipline issues). School messages to parents are delivered either by printed notes carried home by students or by direct email communications. For emergency matters, teachers usually call the parents on the phone. "School Open Day" offers parents an opportunity once every semester to freely drop in to meet with teachers and observe how their children learn in school. Parents care very much about their children's learning at school and are very respectful of the teachers. However, most parents do not take the initiative to connect with the schools unless their children encounter learning or behavioral problems the parent cannot resolve alone. Parents consider teaching children to learn as the teachers' major responsibility. Many parents are not aware that school and family collaboration could enhance children's learning.

Review of Related Literature

Involving Parents in Educating Their Children

Epstein (2002) identified six types of parental involvement in educating their children: (1) parenting knowledge and skills; (2) communicating between home and school; (3) volunteering at school and in the community; (4) supporting student learning at home; (5) involvement in decision-making and advocacy; (6) collaborating with the community. These types of parental involvement have provided schools with a clear path to proceed with the advancement of school and family collaboration.

Parents, regardless of their income levels or ethnic background, value the quality of education of their children (Lareau, 1990). Rice (2017) also discovered that parental literacy level was associated with their school activity involvement and their children's academic activities at home. Research has consistently supported that parental concern and involvement in their children's learning plays an important role in promoting the academic success of their children (Swap, 1993). Increased parent and teacher collaboration could help improve student academic performance (Brough & Irvin, 2001; Mahmoud, 2018). Epstein and Sheldon (2002) also found that close parent–teacher collaboration could result in improved student school attendance. Hoover-Dempsey (1997) identified three constructs that impact parents being involved in their children's education: parents' beliefs about what they are supposed to do in their children's education; parents' beliefs that through their involvement they can exert positive influence on their children's educational outcomes; and parents' perceptions that the child and school want them to be involved. In fact, school policies and teacher practices could determine whether parents participate in their children's education (Epstein, 1990).

In studying Chinese schools, Shu, Jiang, Xu, and Chan (2014) claimed that teachers and school administrators could involve parents in student community experiences. This proved to be helpful in advancing school and family collaboration. Chen and Li (2003) also found that combining school education and home education together could enhance children's learning. This combination of school and home education was also supported by Huang (2001) and Mo (2002) who encouraged parents to work with teachers to oversee the children's homework assignments. Xu (2010) claimed that school and family collaboration could facilitate school improvement. Parents could provide helpful feedback to teachers of how their children learn at home (Fan, 2001; Fan & Chen, 2001).

Parental Perceptions of School Education

Parents complimented the school effort in promoting school and family collaboration in the areas of school culture, home–school communication, class instruction, and organization (Meier & Lemmer, 2015). They also credited the teachers and the school administrators for their professionalism and care of their children by taking alternate initiatives (Chadwick, 2015). At the same time, some parents also expressed concerns over the teachers' academic, social, and emotional evaluation of their children (Chadwick, 2015). Parents would like to receive more timely reports of their children's performance in school (Meier & Lemmer, 2015).

Parents in China have high expectations of the teachers to offer the top of the class education for their children (Wang, 2013; Wang & Shi, 1997). Many parents have asked the schools to provide the most updated technology programs and equipment to facilitate children's learning (Wang, 2018; Wang & Shi, 1997). However, in Wang's 2013 study, parents also expected the school to prioritize student moral education along with the preparation of their academic skills.

Issues in School and Family Collaboration

Parents agreed that school-sponsored community activities could create an inviting and educational environment for student learning (Overstreet et al., 2005; Sanders et al., 1999). However, parents were concerned with the timing of the teacher–parent meetings. They suggested that the schedule for such meetings needed to accommodate parents' work hours to encourage better attendance (Smith, 2016). Teachers must keep in mind that poor parental involvement could become a barrier to educating children in school because they lack sufficient information on the children's family background (Voltz, 1998). In China, it was found that school domination of school and family

collaborative projects and school-created matters of formality could discourage parental participation (Ding & Chen, 2013; Lin, 2013; Peng & Guo, 2001).

Educators have worked hard to establish effective communication to keep parents informed of what is happening in school (Ding & Chen, 2013; Ekvall & Arvonen, 1994; Folske-Starlin, 2017; Ginnett, & Curphy, 2002; Hoy & Miskel, 2005; Hughes et al., 2002). School administrators and teachers have identified communication skills and channels that would help maintain better communication (Lucas, 1985). Laho (2019) claimed that the use of modern technology like internet devices could be one of the most convenient means of parent and teacher communication. Meanwhile, Moller et al. (2005) stressed that schools needed to alternate their communication strategies with parents to suit different social and educational settings. Charter schools have been assumed to have fewer involvement barriers for minority and low-income parents, but the study of Smith et al. (2011) found that parent involvement remained a significant challenge in charter schools. Smith (2016) also agreed that the close relationship between parents and teachers was credited to the use of multiple channels of communication among them. Conflicting expectations for school activities between parents and teachers could make communications between them difficult (Guo, 2010). Guo's (2010) study suggested the school move beyond cultural differences to understand actual parent–teacher interactions.

Through the establishment of trust, teachers and parents could become partners in the education enterprise. Chinese educators found that direct, face-to-face meetings between teachers and parents proved to be very effective in tightening the school and family relationship (Jiang & Chan, 1990). They also disclosed that a "parent spokesman" system with community representatives worked very well in making suggestions for school improvement (Kristoffersson et al., 2013).

Education for Parents

Many states in the United States have policies established to mandate schools to involve parents in early literacy education, school safety, and dropout prevention programs (Zinth, 2005). Li (2006) studied the perception of American Chinese immigrant parents on their involvement in the children's education. There were consistencies and discrepancies in the parents' perceived involvement in their children's learning. These findings argue for more effort to build stronger school–home communication and collaboration.

In China, Hou (2007) argued that the low standard of parental knowledge of education was the cause of difficulties in school and family collaboration. Thus, Liu (2019) has strongly encouraged schools in provoking efforts to educate parents so that they can be more ready to work with the teachers.

Parental Perceptions of School and Family Collaboration

The study of Dolores De La Sierra (2001) found that most parents had positive perceptions of school and family collaboration and that these positive perceptions correlated with better student academic grades. However, other studies (Anicame et al., 2018; Herrell, 2011; Lawson, 2003) have found parents held unfavorable perceptions of school and family collaboration when they were compared with the teachers' perceptions.

In Chinese schools, Lau (2013) investigated the parents' perceptions of school and family collaboration. She found that parents became more academic-focused in their involvement of working with children at home. Parents were dissatisfied with the infrequent home–school communication and the lack of opportunities for active involvement in school. A follow-up study by Tao, Lau, and Yiu (2019) reviewed parental perceptions of school and family collaboration efforts before and after children transitioned to primary schools. Results of the study indicated that, after the transition to primary school, mothers needed to increase their involvement in homework supervision, had less time to read with children, and had no time to guide children's social and interpersonal relationships. Mothers were strongly dissatisfied with the unexpected decrease in parent–school communication.

Lau, Li, and Rao (2011) studied the relationship between Chinese parents' involvement in education and their children's readiness for school. The findings showed that parental involvement was highly correlated with children's readiness for school. Chinese parents' home-based involvement was found to be higher than their school-based involvement. The findings of Lau et al.'s study were also supported by Xia et al. (2019) who claimed that parents' home-based, school-based, and home–school conferencing involvement were all positively related to children's school readiness. Home-based involvement showed a stronger relationship to children's school readiness than the other two types of parental involvement.

Yu (2014) compared parents' and school principals' perceptions of school and family collaboration in Shanghai. The findings of the study indicated that profound differences existed in the parents' and the school principals' views on the format and the contents of school and family collaboration. School principals rated their own effort toward school and family collaboration highly, particularly in covering many areas of parental concerns. However, parents complained that schools did not do enough in communicating with them and that discussions during the parent and teacher meetings were superficial.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine how Chinese parents perceive school–family collaborative efforts initiated by elementary schools. Parents could play a significant role in fostering this school and family relationship. The findings of this study could shed new light on how schools and families could work closely together for the overall developmental success of the children.

Research Questions

The following research questions were developed to guide the process of this study:

Major research question:

- How do Chinese parents perceive the school and family collaboration efforts of their elementary schools?

Sub-questions:

- How do Chinese parents perceive school and family collaboration in the following areas of elementary schools?
    1. Adequacy of school administrative support
    2. Parental contribution to the school–family collaboration
    3. Parents' relationship with teachers
    4. Parent association at school
    5. Barriers to school–family collaboration
    6. Essentials in planning for school–family collaboration

Significance of the Study

In the early 1980's, the Beijing Institute of Educational Administration (1981) started to urge school-parent communication as a powerful means to help child development. In subsequent years, the Chinese government has taken follow-up measures to require schools to demonstrate their effort in working on school and family collaboration. In 2001, the State Council of the People's Republic of China asked the schools to work with parents to help set up a home environment for children's learning. In 2004, the State Council called for schools to develop some kinds of parent schools or workshops to prepare parents to help their children with their homework. In recent years, the Chinese Department of Education (2012) has directed the schools to employ effective strategies in support of sustainable school and family relationships. Schools in China have been working toward achieving the goals of the repeated calls of the Central Government for improved school and family relationships. This study to investigate the Chinese parents' perceptions on school and family

collaboration comes at a time when calls for school and family collaboration are keen. The findings of this study will display the parents' perception toward school and family collaboration and will help school administrators and teachers to refocus their efforts in working with parents. Additionally, most of the current literature on school and family collaboration in China have either taken a theoretical or a practical approach. Empirical studies on parents' perceptions of school and family collaboration in China are scarce. Therefore, this study meets the research needs of the topic and helps to fill a missing link in the academic field.

Research Methodology

Design

A mainly quantitative approach was employed in this study of school and family collaboration. An open-ended question was added to the end of the quantitative questionnaire to offer the parents the opportunity to express themselves freely with no restriction. According to Wiersma and Jurs (2005), this methodology is structured in such a way to have an overall review of the perceptions of the research participants and at the same time allow the participants to discuss more of their perceptions in detail beyond the limitation of the quantitative survey items. This particular design is entitled by Morse (1991) as sequential explanatory design which is typically used to explain and interpret quantitative results by collecting and analyzing follow-up qualitative data.

Research Participants

This study is focused on examining the parental perceptions of school and family collaboration at the elementary school level. Twenty out of the 23 elementary schools of Wu Xing District agreed to participate in the study. All the parents from the 20 elementary schools of Wu Xing District were identified as the population of the study. Through a simple randomization method, 300 parents from the 20 schools (15 from each school) were selected and invited to participate in this study. Invitation letters with survey questionnaires were manually and electronically delivered to the 300 parents. Out of the 300 parents invited, 135 parents (45%) accepted the invitation and returned the survey questionnaire.

In parental status, most of the participants (63%) were mothers, and 37% of the participants were fathers. An analysis of the parents' education background information indicated that, of all the participating parents, 8.9% of them were holding graduate degrees, 32.6% of them were holding bachelors degrees, 14.8% of them had a four-year college education, 31.9% graduated

from two-year junior colleges, and 11.8% of them completed high school education. In occupation, most of the parents were either business/service owners (40%) or professionals (23%). In monthly family income, most of the parents belonged to the mid-level income categories: 44.4% of them had their monthly salary ranging from Yuan Renminbi (RMB) $4,001 to $8,000, and 27.4% of them from RMB $8,001 to $12,000 (see Table 1).

The data about parental demographics were reviewed by the panel of judges who helped to review the data collection instrument. They are teachers and parents from the Wu Xing District actively involved in school and family collaborative activities. They confirmed that the participants of the study were representative of the characteristics of parents of Wu Xing District. They provided demographic data of the Wu Xing District as follows: Approximately 80% of adults have received college education. Half of the families have earned a mid-level income between RMB $5,000 and RMB $7,500. About 10% of adults are government servants, 40% are professionals and workers, and 35% are private business owners.

Table 1. Demographics of Parents

	# of Parents	Percentage
Fathers	50	37.0
Mothers	85	63.0
Education Levels of Parents		
High School	16	11.8
Junior College (2 year)	43	31.9
4 Year College	20	14.8
Bachelor	44	32.6
Graduate School	12	8.9
Parents' Occupation		
Professionals	31	23.0
Workers/Farmers	23	17.0
Government Public Servants	12	8.9
Business/Service Owners	54	40.0
Unemployed	5	3.7
Others	10	7.4
Parents' Monthly Family Income (In RMB)		
$4,000 or under	18	13.4
$4,001 to $ 8,000	60	44.4
$8,001 to $12,000	37	27.4
$12,001 to $16,000	13	9.6
$16,001 or above	7	5.2

Survey Instrument

The survey instrument in this study was researcher self-designed with reference to current literature. The main themes of the instrument were structured upon Epstein's (2002) six types of parental involvement in educating children as indicated above. Other referenced literature includes parental expectations (Wang, 2013), school and family collaboration development (Ding & Chen, 2013), and parental involvement (Folske-Starlin, 2017; Laho, 2019).

The instrument consists of 33 items with a participant's demographics section plus the main sections on parent efficacy, administrative support, parent willingness, understanding of teacher–parent relationship, parent association, barriers to school–family collaboration, and planning for school–family collaboration. To accommodate the nature of the survey questions, for the first 13 items, a Likert scale was used to solicit parents' responses, whereas multiple checking of choices was allowed for the rest of the 12 items. An open-ended question was included after the quantitative items to solicit any additional comments of the parents. A panel of judges including 10 teachers and 10 parents was established to review the adequacy of the instrument being used in this study. The 10 teachers and the 10 parents were recommended by their school principals to have been active in school and family collaborative activities. The parents and teachers who served on the panel of judges did not participate in the study. The panel of judges critiqued the proposed survey instrument in terms of content, language, and format with comments and recommendations for improvement. Most of the panel's comments and recommendations were focused on the use of language and the format. The panel of judges agreed that the contents of the survey items in the instrument were appropriate. The instrument was then revised accordingly to accommodate the panels' recommendations for improvement. The revised instrument was then pilot tested with 30 parents with the data analyzed by Cronbach's Alpha for internal consistency. Only sections with Likert scales were tested. The analysis yielded an overall alpha level of .84 which is an indication of acceptable reliability. The alpha coefficients of Sections B, C, D, and E were .87, .79, .89, and .81 respectively. The original instrument used in the survey was written in Chinese language. For the purpose of reporting this study to English language readers, the instrument was translated from Chinese language to English language and can be found in the Appendix.

Data Analyses

Three hundred survey forms, 15 from each elementary school, were delivered to the sampled parents, and 135 survey questionnaires (45%) were returned. Descriptive statistics of frequencies, means, and standard deviations

were used to analyze the quantitative data to indicate the parents' directions of responses. For qualitative data collected from parents' written responses in the open-ended question in the survey, content analysis method was used to detect common themes and patterns from research participants. Content analysis is a way that allows researchers to make presumptions based on specific information gained from various forms of data (Shaughnessy et. al., 2006). The researchers first tabulated the data and coded them by sequence of the research participants. The coded data were then classified into categories per foci of the research. Emerging themes and consistent patterns of the parents' categories of responses were systematically examined and analyzed to determine if they could add to or help explain and interpret the quantitative findings.

Findings

The report of the findings of this study will follow the order of the themes of the research questions.

Parents' General Perceptions of the School and Family Collaboration Efforts of the Schools

Six items were included in this section of the survey to solicit the parents' general perceptions of the school and family collaboration. The items that were rated high include: (1) *Students will grow up healthily as a result of school–family collaboration* (mean = 4.10); (2) *I am interested in participating in school and family collaborative activities* (mean = 4.27). The other four items were also rated above average scoring, ranging from 3.75 to 3.87. The overall average of the parents' responses on these six items was 3.91, which is above average (see Table 2).

Table 2. Parents' General Perceptions of School and Family Collaboration

Survey Items	Mean (1-5 Likert Scale)
* Students will grow up healthily as a result of school–family collaboration.	4.10
* School and parent collaboration at this time is built on mutual respect.	3.75
* School and parent collaboration activities in school are very satisfactory.	3.87
* I am interested in participating in school and family collaborative activities.	4.27
* Schedules of school–family activities are reasonable.	3.73
* School–family collaboration activities are very innovative.	3.73
Overall Rating	3.91

Parents' Perceptions of School and Family Collaboration in Specific Areas

School Administrative Support

Three items were included in this section of the survey to solicit the parents' response to the school administrative support of school and family collaboration. All three items were rated above average by the parents. *School administrators are working hard to involve parents in school activities* was rated the highest (mean = 4.02). *School provides parent training opportunities to work with teachers* and *School administrators organize school and family activities with parental support* were both rated high with means of 3.91 and 3.88, respectively. The overall parent rating of this section was 3.94, indicating that parents recognized the administrative support for the development of school and family collaboration (see Table 3).

Table 3. Parents' Perceptions of Administrative Support of School and Family Collaboration

Survey Items	Mean (1-5 Likert Scale)
* School administrators are working hard to involve parents in school activities.	4.02
* School provides teacher training opportunities to work with parents.	3.91
* School administrators organize school and family activities with parental support.	3.88
Overall Rating	3.94

Parental Contribution to School and Family Collaboration

This section of the survey includes four items intending to examine the parents' contributions to the school–family collaboration through their expression of willingness to participate in the collaborative effort. Parents' responses to all the four items were above average indicating the parents' enthusiasm in participating in the school and family collaboration. The overall average of all four items in this section was 3.90. The item with the highest rating (mean = 4.10) was *I will participate in school-sponsored planning activities to help promote school–family collaboration*. The comparatively lower rated item was *I will share with teachers my constructive ideas in parent association meetings* (mean = 3.61; see Table 4).

Table 4. Teachers' Perceptions of Their Contributions to School and Family Collaboration

Survey Items	Mean (1-5 Likert Scale)
* I will support school and family collaboration functions with fiscal and material resources.	3.98
* I will participate in school-sponsored workshops to help promote school and family collaboration.	4.10
* I will learn all the skills needed to communicate with teachers.	3.93
* I will share with teachers my constructive ideas in parent association meetings.	3.61
Overall Rating	3.90

Parental Perception of Their Relationship with Teachers

This section of the survey includes five items with a 3-point Likert scale aimed at investigating how Chinese parents understand their relationship with teachers. The parents rated all the five items to be above average with an overall average rating of 2.37. The highest rated item was *When you see learning or behavioral problems with your child, do you contact the teacher, wait, or handle the problems yourself?* (mean = 2.66). The lowest rated item was *How frequently do you contact the teachers in an average school semester?* (mean = 1.90). In general, the parents expressed their intention and desire to understand more of their relationship with teachers to be able to offer appropriate assistance to the students (see Table 5). For additional information, the item *When you see learning or behavioral problems with your child, do you contact the teacher, wait, or handle the problems yourself?* was also analyzed by how many parents checked each of the three options. Of parents answering, 90 checked "*handle the problems yourself,"* 42 parents checked "*wait to contact the teacher when the problems get more serious,*" and only 3 parents checked "*contact the teacher immediately and solve the problems together.*"

Parental Perception of the Parent Association at School

In their responses regarding parent associations in school, the parents indicated that 30.46% of the schools had a parent association established and in operation. However, when they were asked if they took initiative to contact teachers in the association, most of them (54.83%) responded that they did not take the initiative. Approximately 27.42% of the parents indicated that they did not know how to properly contact the teachers (see Table 6).

Parents perceived that their representatives in the parent association could reflect the parents' wishes to the school (26.74%) and suggest better school and family communication (50%). They thought of the major functions of the

parent association as (1) to help parents better understand the school programs and operation (28.92%), and (2) to reflect the points of view of the parents to foster school and family collaboration (34.94%; see Table 6).

Table 5. Parents' Perceptions of Their Relationship With Teachers

Survey Items					Mean (1-3 Likert Scale)
* How frequently do the teachers contact you in an average school semester?					2.07
* How frequently do you contact the teachers in an average school semester?					1.90
* When you see learning or behavioral problems with your child, do you contact the teacher, wait, or handle it yourself?					2.66
* In teacher and parent collaborative activities, are you fairly treated?					2.72
* In teacher–parent collaborative activities, who will take the initiative to collaborate, the teacher, the parent, or both?					2.51
Overall Rating					2.37
Additional Option Analysis of: *When you see learning or behavioral problems with your child, do you contact the teacher, wait, or handle it yourself?*					
3	contact the teacher immediately and solve the problems together	42	wait to contact the teacher when the problems get more serious	90	handle the problems yourself

Table 6. Parents' Perceptions of Parent Association

Survey Items	*N*	Percentage
Is there a parent association in your school?		
*Yes	39	30.46
*No	89	69.54
Do you communicate with members of the parent association?		
*Yes	11	17.74
*No	34	54.83
*Don't know how to	17	27.42
Parent representatives should do the following (Check all that apply):		
*Deliver the parents' voices	23	26.74
*Suggest better teacher–parent communication	43	50.00
*Present successful teacher–parent collaborations to other parents	11	12.80
*Participate in school development planning	9	10.47
The functions of the parent association are (Check all that apply):		
* Help all parents to have a better understanding of the school	24	28.92
* Reflect the parents' opinions to the school	29	34.94
* Help organize school family activities	18	21.68
* Motivate parent resources to support the school	10	12.05
* Allow parents participate in school planning	2	2.41

Parental Perception of Barriers to School and Family Collaboration

Unsupportive situations could create barriers to school and family collaboration. Parents evaluated these barriers and summarized the main causes of these barriers to be (1) parents getting too busy in daily life (59.02%); (2) school lack of management and evaluation system (13.17%); and (3) parents not actively participating (9.75%). The parents identified their preferences on problematic issues of school and family collaboration to include (1) parents allow their children to choose their ways (51.91%); and (2) parents follow the teachers' directions (42.75%; see Table 7).

Table 7. Parents' Perceptions of Barriers to School and Family Collaboration

Survey Items	*N*	Percentage
In case of conflicts in school family collaboration, I will		
* Insist on my own opinion	7	5.34
* Follow the teacher's opinion	56	42.75
* Let the child decide	68	51.91
Problematic issues in school–family activities:		
* Parents are not actively involved	20	9.75
* Parents are not capable to get involved	14	6.83
* Parents do not have time to participate	121	59.20
* Parents do not have confidence to participate	17	8.29
* Schools do not have a management and evaluation system	27	13.17
* School principals do not accept	3	1.46
* Teachers do not accept	3	1.46

Parental Perception of Essentials in Planning for School and Family Collaboration

Most of the Chinese parents perceived the most significant factors leading to the success of school and family collaboration were (1) parents have time to participate (29.47%); (2) parents are willing to participate (18.25%); and (3) parents believe that school–family collaboration could help their children (27.2%). In planning for school and family collaboration, parents perceived that Chinese teachers preferred to communicate with parents by using telephones (39.6%) and by taking advantage of parents participating in school activities (27.2%). In the collaboration approach, parents would like to start with teacher initiation (38.81%) or both teacher and parent initiation (44.78%). In their contact with teachers, parents were prepared to mainly discuss their children's learning process (41.54%) and their behaviors and psychological development (34.56%). When asked how they would plan to participate in school and family collaboration activities, most parents indicated that they tended to stay in touch with teachers through telephone (20.90%) and internet devices (20.15%; see Table 8).

Table 8. Parents' Perception of School and Family Collaboration Planning

Survey Items	*N*	Percentage
The factors of successful school–family collaboration are:		
* Parents are willing to participate	52	18.25
* Parents have time to participate	84	29.47
* Parents have the knowledge and skills	18	6.32
* Parents believe that school–family collaboration could help their child	77	27.02
* A system is set up to facilitate parent participation	13	4.56
* School principals encourage	7	2.45
* Teachers encourage	15	5.26
* Students support	19	6.67
Teacher and parent communication should take the following approach:		
* Parents take initiative to contact teachers	5	3.73
* Both teachers and parents take initiative to contact each other	60	44.78
* Teachers take initiative to contact parents	52	38.81
* No one take any initiative to contact each other	17	12.69
Topics for discussion with teachers:		
* Parental help to the child	11	4.04
* Student academic performance	113	44.79
* Student behaviors and mindset	94	34.56
* Student character and relationship with others	54	19.85
Parents' preferences to participate in school–family collaboration activities:		
* Parent association	66	16.42
* Parent schools	10	2.49
* School open day	33	8.21
* School website	9	2.24
* Teacher, parent, and child interaction	29	7.21
* Parent gatherings	1	0.25
* Parents in committees	2	0.50
* Teacher home visits	24	5.97
* Parents come to school	54	13.43
* Phone communication	84	20.90
* School–home communication list	7	1.74
* Emails	2	0.50
* Wechat, QQ (communication apps)	81	20.15

Other Parent Responses

An open-ended question was made available in the survey instrument for parents to freely present their suggestions beyond the limitation of the survey questions. Out of 135 parents, 64 expressed additional opinions on school and

family collaboration. Their suggestions to improve the school and family collaboration are summarized below.

First, the parents felt that the activities of the school and family collaboration needed to be enhanced by offering more opportunities for teachers and parents to interact. Some of the representative sayings are cited in the following quotations:

> I would like to know more about my child's learning situation at school.
>
> Teachers need to keep me informed immediately on what is happening to my child at school.
>
> Teachers need to know how their students learn at home. Parents want to know how their children learn and behave at school. More frequent collaboration, the better.

Second, the parents suggested the school establish some kind of platform or channel through which parents and teachers could better communicate. Their representative expressions are cited in the following:

> I like the school open day. It is a good time that I can meet with teachers to personally talk about my child's study and behavior at school.
>
> Teachers can let me know sooner about my child's learning difficulties and misbehaviors at school. We can help the child better. We need some way for quick contact.

Other parent suggestions included increasing student activities in school in which parents can participate. Some parents also recommended that teacher–parent meetings could be divided by type of student issues that could draw the attention of certain groups of parents. The scheduling of the teacher and parent interactive activities was also a concern. Parents strongly urged that the school should arrange for activity times to be more suitable to parents, such as over the weekends. The major responses of the parents to the open-ended question on school and parent collaboration are summarized in Table 9.

Table 9. Qualitative Parent Responses by Theme and Frequency

Major Parents' Responses by Theme	Frequency of Occurrence
Collaboration activities need to include more opportunities for teachers and parents to interact.	48
Establishment of teacher–parent communication platform.	43
Invitation to parents to participate in student activities.	35
Parents meeting with teachers by type of special student issue.	31
Scheduling parent and teacher meeting times to be more convenient to parents.	36

Discussion

The findings of this study are not surprising. While parents agreed that teacher and parent collaboration activities need to be increased, they also brought up unique ideas deserving discussion in this section.

The findings from the qualitative data analysis indicate that they are in agreement with the findings from the quantitative data analysis. Parents requested more opportunities to interact with the teachers and to participate in school events and activities to foster school and family collaboration. They suggested that the school consider a more convenient schedule of school functions that they could attend. The parents also recommended alternative ways of improved communication between the school and family. Many parents proposed a novel idea for group meetings with teachers by type of student issues to draw special groups of parents to attend. The qualitative findings have helped elaborate the quantitative findings by spelling out specific examples of possible actions that could be taken by schools and families.

The parents in this study perceived that the teachers and the school administrators worked hard to foster school and family collaboration activities, and they invited parents to participate in school functions. The parents also felt that initiation of the school and family communication network could start from either teachers or parents or both. This is similar to the findings of Overstreet et al. (2005) and Sanders et al. (1999) indicating that parents saw school-sponsored community activities to be inviting.

Parents also indicated they would like to have more collaborative activities between parents and teachers. However, many parents did not take the initiative to contact the teachers because they did not know the appropriate way to start. Most parents preferred to handle learning and behavioral problems by themselves first before contacting the teachers. This finding reflects the reality of the parental situation in China. Schools could offer more opportunities such as parent learning workshops to better prepare parents to work with teachers. This is in line with the recommendations of Li (2006), Liu (2019), and Zinth (2005).

The parents' responses indicated that only about one-third of the schools in the study had a parent association established. The availability of a parent association can provide an alternative channel for school and family communication. School administrators and teachers need to consider working toward the establishment of their parent associations as a way of parental contact and getting the parents involved. The findings of this study showed that parents were willing to work with teachers in many directions to enhance school and family collaboration activities, including participating in school development

planning via the parent association. This is in line with the findings of Kristoffersson et al.'s study (2013) that a "parent spokesman" system with community representatives helped school improvement.

The findings of this study indicated that parents were not satisfied with the current school and family communications (Lau, 2013; Tao et al., 2019). They were ready to work with the teachers and school administrators to improve school and family collaboration. Many alternative suggestions for communications were made to allow available time for teachers and parents. These findings reflect the same as those of Laho (2019), Lucas (1985), Mollar et al. (2005), and Smith (2016) who declared that school administrators and teachers needed to create innovative strategies to work with parents constructively.

The findings of this study have provided evidence of how average parents in China perceive the school and family collaborative effort initiated by teachers and school administrators. Many Chinese parents would prefer attempting to handle their children's learning problems by themselves first before approaching the teachers. Moreover, Chinese parents, though respectful to teachers, are more reserved in their attitude toward working with the teachers.

Finally, the participating parents in this study recognized that the school and family can work together for the benefits of the child's development. Studies of Brough and Irvin (2001), Fan (2001), Fan and Chen (2001), Mahmoud (2018), and Voltz (1998) also produced similar findings that an enhanced school and family relationship was associated with student academic performance. Positive parental involvement in education was highly correlated with children's school readiness (Lau et al., 2011; Xia et al., 2020). The findings of this study show that parents were willing and ready to work with teachers in many ways to enhance school and family collaboration activities.

Throughout the many findings of this study, a common thread of communication emerges to tie them together. Increased school and family communication can break the barriers in school and family relationships. It can be achieved by the organization of a parent association, provision of accommodating school and family meetings, the increase of parent participating activities, and school initiative to work with parents to help their children at home. Increased opportunities for communication will help both the school and family to value the collaborative effort.

Implications

The State Council of the People's Republic of China (2001) asked for schools to help parents create a positive learning environment at home. More specifically, the State Council (2004) also called for schools to establish par-

ent schools to better prepare parents to work with their children at home. The findings of this study have delivered a strong message that parents in China recognize the importance of building a strong school and family collaboration for the continuous development of their children. Parents indicated that they did not contact the schools often simply because they did not know the proper way to do it without embarrassment. Therefore, schools need to take more initiative to invite communication and to work with parents to get them involved with school activities. As Hoover-Dempsey (1997) proposed, schools need to understand why parents get involved with their children's education. The three constructs she identified included knowing what parents are supposed to do in their children's education, understanding that parents' involvement could positively influence their children's educational outcomes, and parents' perceptions that the child and school want them to be involved. Schools need to seriously consider Hoover-Dempsey's constructs in working with parents.

Schools need to start developing a plan to improve school and family relationships. The plan could include a component of parent schools as recommended by the State Council to prepare parents to become more involved in school and family functions. Schools could begin offering parent workshops to help parents in working with teachers and their children at home. Parents can be invited to participate in planning for school and family collaboration. Epstein's six types of parental involvement (2002) can be used as a framework to start the planning of school and family collaboration. School administrators and teachers could plan, with parents' input, school and family collaboration activities based upon each of these six types to get more parents involved. Each type of parental involvement is an indication of the focus of planning development.

Conclusion

The findings of data analyses for this study indicated that surveyed parents recognized the significance of school–family collaboration to help children's growth. They also understood that school administrators and teachers were working hard to develop better school and family communication. They were willing to help set up better channels of communication. However, they needed the school to help them learn how to do it. They also suggested that schools need to schedule collaborative activity times to better accommodate the busy working hours of the parents. The findings of this study reflected the parents' wishes to willingly work with teachers and school administrators to develop a comprehensive school and family collaboration plan with the goal of improving the children's academic performance and social and emotional behaviors. The Chinese Department of Education has been calling the schools for years

to demonstrate their effort in inviting parental participation in the education of their children. The contributions of this study provide strong evidence of the need to urge the school administrators and the teachers to play a leading role in developing a school and family collaboration plan. Parents in this study have expressed openly that they are ready to cooperate with the school staff for children's success.

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Appendix. A Survey of Parent Perceptions on School–Family Collaboration

Section A: Parent Demographic Information

1. What is your relationship with the child?
___Father ___ Mother ___Other (Please specify)_____

2. What is your highest level of education?
___ High School _____ Junior College ____ Four-Year College
___ Bachelors Degree ____ Graduate Degree

3. What is your present occupation?
___Teaching, Medical Field, Technology _____ Worker, Farmer ___ Government Servant
___Business, Self-ownership _____ Unemployed

4. What is your family approximate monthly income level (in RMB)?
___ $4000 and below ___ $4001 – $8000 ___ $8001 – $12000
___ $12001 – $16000 ___ $16001 and above

In the following sections (B, C, and D), for each question, choose from ONE of the following 5 ratings:

☐ Strongly Disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Slightly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Strongly Agree
[Note: in the original survey, the above Likert choices appeared below each question]

Section B: Parent Efficacy

1. Students will grow up healthily as a result of school–family collaboration.
2. School and parent collaboration at this time is built on mutual respect
3. School and parent collaboration activities in school are very satisfactory.
4. I am interested in participating in school and family collaborative activities.
5. Schedules of school–family activities are reasonable.
6. School–family collaboration activities are very innovative.

Section C: Administration Support

1. School administrators are working hard to involve parents in school activities.
2. School provides parent training opportunities to work with teachers.
3. School administrators organize school and family activities with parental support.

Section D: Willingness to Contribute to School and Family Collaboration

1. I will support school and family collaborative functions with fiscal and material resources.
2. I will participate in school-sponsored planning activities to help promote school–family collaboration.
3. I will learn in school workshops all the skills needed to communicate with teachers.
4. I will share with teachers my constructive ideas in parent association meetings.

Choose your most appropriate answer(s) in the following sections:

Section E: Relationship with Teachers

1. How frequently do the teachers contact you in an average school semester?

☐ Frequent (8 or more times) ☐ Occasional (4 to 7 times) ☐ Seldom (2 to 3 times)

2. How frequently do you contact the teachers in an average school semester?

☐ Frequent (8 or more times) ☐ Occasional (4 to 7 times) ☐ Seldom (2 to 3 times)

3. When you see learning or behavioral problems with your child, do you

☐ contact the teacher immediately and solve the problems together ☐ wait to contact the teacher when the problems get more serious ☐ handle the problems yourself

4. In teacher and parent collaborative activities, are you fairly treated?

☐ Fair ☐ No opinion ☐ Unfair

5. In teacher and parent collaborative activities, who will take the initiative to collaborate?

☐ The teacher ☐ The parent ☐ Both teacher and parent

Section F: Parent Association

1. Is there a parent association in your child's school

☐ Yes ☐ No

2. Do you communicate with members of the parent association?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Don't know how

3. Parent representatives should do the following (Check all that apply):

☐ Deliver the parents' voices ☐ Suggest better teacher and parent communication ☐ Present successful teacher–parent collaborations to other parents ☐ Participate in school development planning

4. Currently, the functions of the parent association are (Check all that apply):

☐ Help parents understand the school better ☐ Reflect the parents' improvement suggestions to the school. ☐ Help organize school–family activities. ☐ Motivate parents to support the school with resources ☐ Allow parents to participate in school planning

Section G: Barriers to Collaboration (Check all that apply)

1. In case of conflicts in school–family collaboration, I will

☐ Insist on my own opinion ☐ Follow the teachers' opinions ☐ Let the child decide ☐ Others

2. The problematic issues in school–family activities are:

☐ Parents are not actively involved ☐ Parents are not capable to get involved ☐ Parents do not have time to participate ☐ Parents do not have confidence in participation ☐ Parents do not have the referent knowledge

☐ School principals do not accept ☐ Teachers do not accept ☐ Schools have no management & evaluation system ☐ Others

Section H: Planning for School–Family Collaboration

1. Factors of successful school–family collaboration include:

☐ Parents willing to participate ☐ Parents have time to participate ☐ Parents have the needed knowledge and skills ☐ Parents believe that school–family collaboration could help the child ☐ A system is set up to facilitate parent participation

☐ School principals encourage ☐ Teachers encourage ☐ Student support ☐ Others

2. Teacher and parent communication should take place in the following format:

☐ Parents take initiative to contact teachers ☐ Both teachers and parents take initiative to communicate ☐ Teachers take initiative to contact parents ☐ No one takes any initiative to communicate

3. I usually discuss with teachers the following aspects of my child:

☐ Parental help to the child ☐ Academic performance ☐ Child behaviors and mindset ☐ Child character and relationship with others ☐ Other

4. I participate in the school–family collaboration effort in the following ways:

☐ Parent association ☐ Parent schools ☐ School open day ☐ School website ☐ Teacher, parent, and child interaction

☐ Parent gatherings ☐ Parents in committees ☐ Teacher home visits ☐ Parents come to school ☐ Phone communication

☐ School–home communication chart ☐ E-mails ☐ Wechat, QQ ☐ Others

5. Do you have any recommendations for better school–family collaboration?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

END OF SURVEY