

The Education Bureau

**Consultancy Study on
Communication between Schools and Parents**

Final Report

**Submitted by
Policy 21 Limited**

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Study on
Communication between Schools and Parents
Policy 21 Limited for The Education Bureau, 2018
Executive Summary

1. Introduction

Background

- 1.1 Over the past years, the government and schools have paid more attention and encouragement to home-school communication to facilitate home-school co-operation. The Committee on Home-School Co-operation (“CHSC”) was set up in 1993 and aims at promoting home-school co-operation. Currently, all government and aided schools have set up a Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) which enhances the connection between schools and parents.
- 1.2 The success of home-school co-operation depends on the effective communication between schools and parents. Government leadership and respective policies also help. However, the heavy workload of teachers may hinder the home-school communication. It is also hard to achieve effective home-school communication without active participation by parents.
- 1.3 Hence, the CHSC wishes to understand the matters more deeply. A study of communication between schools and parents was conducted in order to identify good practices and recommend ways to improve communication with parents.

Objectives of the Study

- 1.4 The objective of the Consultancy Study (the Study) is to provide a comprehensive assessment on the effects of communication between schools and parents. It is expected that, upon completion of the Study, the findings of the Final Report should include information and analysis of the following items:
 - 1.4.1 An overview of the current position of communication between schools and parents;
 - 1.4.2 Identification of factors and measures which affect schools’ effective communications with parents, in particular hard-to-reach parents and difficult parents;
 - 1.4.3 Identification of good practices on spreading messages of positive parenting to parents, especially hard-to-reach parents and difficult parents;
 - 1.4.4 Identification of good practices in encouraging hard-to-reach parents and difficult parents to communicate with schools;
 - 1.4.5 Identification of good practices in collecting views and opinions from parents, especially hard-to-reach parents and difficult parents;
 - 1.4.6 Identification of good practices on handling communication problems between schools and parents;

1.4.7 Ways recommended to improve effective and efficient communication between schools and parents with a view to enhance comprehensive care for children.

2. Methodology

- 2.1 *Literature review* on similar or comparable studies previously conducted in Hong Kong and 9 countries/cities, including 4 Asian countries/cities (namely Macau, Mainland China, Singapore, Taiwan) where parents’ attitudes towards education of their children are similar to those in Hong Kong and 5 Western countries (namely Australia, Finland, UK, Estonia and USA) where the governments in these countries/cities are similar to Hong Kong, work hard to promote home-school communication and co-operation.
- 2.2 *School survey* on a representative sample of principals, teachers and parents, during the period from end-September 2017 to end-March 2018. A total of 168 schools, including 78 primary schools, 70 secondary schools and 20 special schools were enumerated covering 364 principals, 1,082 teachers and 11,993 parents.
- 2.3 *Collection of views* through 79 *focus groups discussions and in-depth interviews* of school principals and teachers, chairpersons or committee members of PTAs/Federations of PTAs (FPTAs), school social workers, social workers or other staff of integrated children and youth centers and family services centers, employers or representatives of employers’ associations and professional bodies, representatives of organizations dedicated to parent education, “hard-to-reach” parents, “difficult” parents and other parents. A total of 159 stakeholders were covered, as follows:

Primary schools	Principals	5
	Teachers	10
	Social workers	4
Secondary schools	Principals	9
	Teachers	11
	Social workers	8
Special schools	Principals	3
	Teachers	5
	Social workers	3
Other stakeholders		27
Hard-to-reach parents		70
Difficult parents		4
Total		159

3. Study findings

Objective 1: An overview of the current position of communication between schools and parents

3.1 Opinions on communication between schools and parents

Home-school communication is considered important

3.1.1 Home-school communication was considered important by schools. Principals and teachers believed that better home-school communication could result in the improvement of students' academic results and emotional well-being. Fewer teachers than principals welcomed parents' involvement. Quite a lot of teachers considered that parents should only be notified or should not participate in matters related to school policy. Parents also considered home-school communication important. They believed better home-school co-operation could have positive impact on the growth of children as they could understand children's life and development at school and for teachers to understand student's behaviour at home through home-school communication.

It is a must for home-school co-operation

3.1.2 Parents and teachers should co-operate to educate children through home-school communication. It was believed that children's academic performance and moral development would be improved when parents and teachers could co-operate.

3.2 Modes of communication between schools and parents

Wide use of traditional communication methods

3.2.1 The majority of teachers had occasionally or frequently used written communication such as student handbook and school notices, phone contact and face-to-face communication say Parent's Days and individual meetings for communication with parents.

3.2.2 The majority of parents communicated with schools via written communication such as checking school notices and student handbook. Nevertheless, face-to-face communication such as individual meetings with teachers was highly preferred by parents.

Increasing use of technology to facilitate communication

3.2.3 Not many teachers made use of technology such as SMS, tablet/smart-phone applications, email, online platform (intranet) in communicating with parents. Some teachers used WhatsApp to disseminate school news, considering it as an efficient tool. Some of them used tablet/smartphone applications to announce school information and inform parents of their children's school performance.

- 3.2.4 Fewer parents used technology to enhance communication with schools. They mainly used technology to facilitate communication with other parents. Few of them used WhatsApp Groups for communication with schools.

Home visit was beneficial to understanding students' needs but was not common yet

- 3.2.5 Very few teachers conducted home visits due to limitation of time, despite its high effectiveness in understanding of students' situation and needs as perceived by some schools, NGOs and professionals.
- 3.2.6 Principals and teachers in special schools agreed that home visits could help school understand student's situation outside the school including family situation, daily life, and relationship with parents. It could also help parents understand more about the school's attitude and expectations on home-school communication and co-operation.
- 3.2.7 As teachers were busy, schools had difficulties arranging home visits. Schools were also concerned about teacher's safety. Similarly, some parents were busy at work or did not reside in Hong Kong, making it difficult for teachers to visit them.

3.3 Content and purpose of communication between school and parents

Major concern on students' performance and development

- 3.3.1 The main issue discussed in home-school communication was students' performance and development, according to teachers and parents. School affairs were one of the common issues raised by principals in home-school communication.

3.4 Participation in home-school activities

Home-school activities held in promoting home-school communication and co-operation

- 3.4.1 A wide range of activities were held by schools/PTAs to enhance home-school communication, including BBQ, parent-child tours, Parents' Day, interest courses and talks. However, they less frequently held the activities which involved longer period of participation by parents or activities related to school policy.

Low parents' participation in specific home-school activities

- 3.4.2 Parents' participation rate was very low for activities related to school policy and those required longer period of participation, despite relatively high importance perceived by parents to these activities. This would be due to the limitation of time. The participation rate of parents was also low for repetitive activities without new elements being added.

3.5 Difficulties encountered in communication between school and parents

- 3.5.1 Lack of time was the main barrier hindering effective home-school communication. Both schools and parents lacked time to sustain effective communication.
- 3.5.2 Teachers in general were of the view that they lacked professional knowledge and skills to deal with complaints by parents on students' study attitude, mental or emotional problems and homework of students. Language could also be an obstacle to parents of non-Chinese speaking students. There was a lack of channels at schools to reach out to parents in needs such as hard-to-reach parents and difficult parents.
- 3.5.3 Similarly, parents in general were of the view that they also lacked skills and time to communicate with schools. Some parents were unwilling to communicate or had difficulties communicating calmly with schools.

3.6 Other salient findings

Responding to parents' requests promptly/Promptness in responding to matters

- 3.6.1 Better home school co-operation could help resolve potential conflicts between schools and parents, especially those with SEN children. Case studies show that different approaches used to handle parents' opinions led to different outcomes. As an example of successful cases, the school followed up the opinions of a parent with a dyslexia child promptly, referring the case to university professionals. The parent also realized the need for parental involvement and avoided imposing his views on the school's arrangement.

School's positive attitude is important in home-school communication

- 3.6.2 School's attitude was critical, especially in dealing with hard-to-reach parents. Case studies show that negative attitude exhibited by schools deterred parents from communicating with schools.

Home-school communication should consider both students' learning outcome and learning process

- 3.6.3 The most common communication between parents and schools was on informing parents their children's learning outcomes, rather than on their education and whole-person development.

Objective 2: Identification of factors and measures which affect schools' effective communications with parents, in particular hard-to-reach parents and difficult parents

3.7 Factors affecting effective communication between schools and parents

School-related

- 3.7.1 *School policy.* School policy such as the level of importance attached to home-school communication and transparency of school policy would affect effective communication between schools and parents.
- 3.7.2 *Perception and Attitudes.* The attitudes of school heads and teachers, including their willingness and initiatives to listen and communicate with parents and the school's attitude in handling of parents' requests would determine the outcomes of home-school communication.
- 3.7.3 *Time and energy.* Fatigue from teaching and lack of time hindered teachers from communicating with parents, organizing home-school activities and actively encouraging parents to join the school activities.
- 3.7.4 *Manner of communication.* The manner in which schools communicated with parents had effect on home-school relationship. For example, contents, wordings and skills.
- 3.7.5 *Usage of communication channels.* Communication channels used by schools would affect the dissemination of school information to parents. Many parents could not obtain information related to children's school life from schools as the channels of communication used by schools were not effective such as intranet and email.
- 3.7.6 *Nature of the school activities.* If the activities could meet the needs of parents and be beneficial to students' development, parents would be more willing to participate in the school activities, such as S.3 talks about elective subjects, talks related to public exam result released, S6 graduation ceremony etc.

Parent-related

- 3.7.7 *Perception and Attitudes.* The parents' perception to their roles in home-school communication and their willingness to listen to and accept advice of teachers would affect the effectiveness of home-school communication.
- 3.7.8 *Socio-economic status.* Parents with lower socio-economic status were less willing to communicate with schools and participate in school activities.
- 3.7.9 *Ability and knowledge.* Parents that were less familiar with the communication methods, especially for electronic methods, would communicate with schools less frequently and less actively.

- 3.7.10 *Language factor.* Non-Chinese speaking parents might have more difficulty in communicating with schools.
- 3.7.11 *Education level.* The education level of parents could influence their level of involvement in school's activities and in their children's education. Parents with lower education level were likely to be less concerned about their children's education.

Factors in connection with hard-to-reach parents

- 3.7.12 *Self-efficacy.* Parents' perceived self-efficacy was one of the factors influencing their willingness to communicate with schools. If parents believed that they were able to help or their participation in school activities could help students' development, they tended to communicate with schools more.
- 3.7.13 *Parent's characters/ personality traits.* Parent's personality traits might affect their willingness to communicate with schools. For example, some parents were relatively introverted and less willing to communicate with schools.
- 3.7.14 *Time and energy.* Lack of time by parents, due to home affair or work, restricted them from participating in school activities, especially for activities that called for longer participation time.
- 3.7.15 *Family structure.* Family structure such as remarriage and stepfamilies had an effect on parental involvement
- 3.7.16 *Residential status.* The residential status affected effective communication between schools and parents. If parents did not reside in Hong Kong, it was hard for schools to maintain communication with them.
- 3.7.17 *Parents' negative experience.* Parents might refrain from communicating with schools because of previous negative communication experience.
- 3.7.18 *Physical and mental health issues.* It was harder for schools to communicate with parents in poor health, for example those with mental health problem.

Factors in connection with difficult parents

- 3.7.19 *Level of trust to school.* These parents generally lacked trust to schools, affecting their communication with schools.
- 3.7.20 *Different values shared with schools.* Schools' and parents' values systems were different and had different views on various issues, adversely affecting their communication with each other. For example, parents tended to consider students' preferences, but the school tended to consider the safety of all students.
- 3.7.21 *Level of understanding to school.* Some parents who had little understanding of schools' policy and affairs were likely to have misunderstanding in their communication with schools.

- 3.7.22 *Parent's characters/personality traits.* Some parents were not willing to listen to teachers' opinions or suggestions, hindering effective communication.
- 3.7.23 *Physical and mental health issues.* Parents suffering from chronic diseases or mental illness might be unable to take care of their children, making it difficult for schools to understand their children's problems at home.

Student-related

- 3.7.24 *Grade level of students.* Some students especially those in senior secondary forms resisted parental involvement, believing that responsibility over matters like homework should be shifted from parents to them.
- 3.7.25 *Learning difficulties and disabilities.* Parents with children with special educational needs might be less willing to communicate with schools.

3.8 Measures improving and facilitating effective communication between schools and parents

- 3.8.1 *Setting up Parent-Teacher Association.* Parent-teacher association could serve as a bridge between parents and schools, encouraging and facilitating parents' participation in school activities.
- 3.8.2 *Using diversified communication channels.* The use of more and diverse communication channels such as home visits and parent support groups could help encourage parental participation in the education of their children, by enhancing effective communication, including relaying messages conducive to positive parenting to parents, especially hard-to-reach parents and difficult parents.
- 3.8.3 *Using technology.* The use of electronic communication technologies such as e-Class, e-APP and WhatsApp could help reach more parents and involve them in the education of their children.
- 3.8.4 *Launching volunteering programmes.* Volunteering programmes provided a platform for parents to meet each other and share parenting experience. These programmes also help build networking through which parents might join hands to participate in school activities.
- 3.8.5 *Organizing home-school activities.* Activities designed specifically for parents on topics related to their needs could serve as the first step in encouraging parents to participate in other school activities.
- 3.8.6 *Involving social workers or other professionals such as psychologists.* Social workers or other professionals such as education counsellors and education psychiatrists might be better placed in communicating with parents, including difficult parents as well as hard-to-reach parents. Schools should not hesitate asking these professionals for help and support.

Objective 3: Identification of good practices on spreading messages of positive parenting to parents, especially hard-to-reach parents and difficult parents

3.9 Good practices on spreading messages of positive parenting to parents

Welcoming parents

- 3.9.1 *Holding Primary 1 Parents' Days* allowed schools to better encourage parents to participate more in school affairs.

Training on appropriate parenting

- 3.9.2 *Organizing parents' talks and workshops* aimed at educating parents about techniques of proper parenting.
- 3.9.3 *Organizing book sharing groups* could help disseminate parenting knowledge and skills among parents.

Supporting parents

- 3.9.4 *Organizing art expression groups* alleviated parents' stress.
- 3.9.5 *Organizing support network groups for parents* allowed parents to share the views on parenting and to support each other.
- 3.9.6 *Establishing parents' resource centers* allowed schools to provide consultation services to parents as and when required.

Promoting good parenting

- 3.9.7 *Holding parent sharing sessions*. Parents of students with special educational needs could share the successful parenting with parents.
- 3.9.8 *Organizing parents' groups / parents' gatherings* provided a chance for parents to interact with other parents, exchange information related to parenting or school affairs and share their experience with each other.

Objective 4: Identification of good practices in encouraging hard-to-reach parents and difficult parents to communicate with schools

3.10 Good practices in encouraging hard-to-reach parents and difficult parents to communicate with schools

Cultivating communication

- 3.10.1 *Holding adaptation courses for parents of Form 1 students* allowed parents to get to know each other and understand more about school policy and school environment.

- 3.10.2 *Organizing Campus Life Experience Activity for parents* provided a chance to parents to experience school life. This allowed parents to understand more about school environment and affairs, communicate more with teachers and their children.
- 3.10.3 *Conducting home visits* allowed teachers to know more about the study environment at home, habits and family life of the students. Teachers could be more aware of changes in the behaviour and performance of students as well.
- 3.10.4 *Launching “Case Worker” programmes* would involve one or two colleagues selected by school and the colleague(s) would be the main contact point for hard-to-reach and difficult parents. This allowed school to communicate with parents in a more effective way.
- 3.10.5 *Launching school caring plans like “Sunshine Phone Calls Program” (陽光電話計劃)* would allow schools to understand more about the students’ situation as well as their family. It could show care from schools to parents and students.

Maintaining effective communication

- 3.10.6 *Launching Parents’ Worlds (家長天地)* provided a chance for parents to communicate and exchange information with other parents and schools.
- 3.10.7 *Organizing tea gatherings* allowed parents and teachers to gather together, share information and offer their opinions to schools.
- 3.10.8 *Launching “Respect Our Teachers Campaign”* allowed parents to express their thanks to teachers and hence helped maintain good home-school communication.
- 3.10.9 *Launching “Tue Station”* allowed parent volunteers to visit the school and prepared lunch for students.
- 3.10.10 *Organizing local visits and overseas tours* provided a chance for parents, teachers and students to discuss the students’ or school affairs.
- 3.10.11 *Organizing cheering activity for Form 6 students* invited parents to help prepare the cheering events.
- 3.10.12 *Implementing Parents-teacher class teaching plans* would allow parents to enter the classroom and assist teachers in class teaching.
- 3.10.13 *Arranging lesson observations* invited parents to attend the class and observe the students’ performance. This allowed parents to understand more about the teachers (class teachers and subject teachers) and students’ performance.
- 3.10.14 *Setting up personal study plans* for students allowed schools and parents to work together for helping students to achieve the target and enhance their personal development. It could better assess the study environment of students.

Supporting communication

- 3.10.15 *Holding territorial parent sharing sessions (全港性的家長分享會) for family caregivers and parents* could provide support to them by sharing useful information.
- 3.10.16 *Establishing e-Class app / e-Class parent tab* would help disseminate school information and students' study situation to parents promptly. Teachers could respond to the questions raised by parents.

Promoting effective communication

- 3.10.17 *Launching Reward Programmes* rewarded parents for participation in school volunteering. The program aimed at encouraging more parents to participate in school activities.

Objective 5: Identification of good practices in collecting views and opinions from parents, especially hard-to-reach parents and difficult parents
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3.11 Good practices in collecting views and opinions from parents

Building channels for gathering views

- 3.11.1 *Establishing "Parents' Voice" sessions* could provide a channel for PTA to convey parents' opinions to school.
- 3.11.2 *Establishing the Lunch Box Committee* allowed parents to participate in school policy-making.
- 3.11.3 *Launching "Class Representative System"* could help convey parents' views to school via their "Class Representatives".

Establishing channels for sharing opinions

- 3.11.4 *Holding discussion forums* allowed school to present and discuss the school affairs with parents.
- 3.11.5 *Organizing Open Groups* would involve parents as well as teachers or principals. The group allowed parents to discuss and express their opinions freely.

Making use of external tools for gathering views

- 3.11.6 *Adopting Padlet* could provide an e-platform for users to write, post pictures, upload documents and recordings in order to share their views with others. It could be used for opinions sharing.

Enhancing the collection of views

3.11.7 *Organizing tea gatherings* which did not involve any teachers would allow parents to express their opinions freely.

3.11.8 *Allowing “Walk-in” conversations* could allow walk-in parents to communicate with schools and promote open campus.

Objective 6: Identification of good practices on handling communication problems between schools and parents

3.12 Good practices on handling communication problems between schools and parents

Supporting the proper handling of communication problems

3.12.1 *Providing courses or trainings* for young teachers could enhance their communication skills.

3.12.2 *Implementing dual class-teacher system* could provide teachers more time in taking care of students and communicating with parents.

Objective 7: Recommend ways to improve effective and efficient communication between schools and parents with a view to enhancing comprehensive care for children.

3.13 Recommend ways to improve effective and efficient communication between schools and parents

The government and its agencies

3.13.1 *Educating the community.* Several stakeholders indicated that most people might not be ready to be a parent. Hence, it is important for the community to better understand home-school co-operation. The government could do more in public education in order to promote home-school communication and co-operation.

3.13.2 *Providing information and support to teachers.* The government could provide schools and teachers with reference materials on better communication in order to help them deal with communication problems.

3.13.3 *Promoting family-friendly policies to employers.* The government could promote family-friendly policies to companies conducive to better home-school communication

3.13.4 *Providing support to teachers to release their time to communicate with parents.* Time is a major concern. The government could provide more resources to schools to create more time and space for teachers or invite more parents to take up some of the tasks related to home-school communication, such as networking.

Employers

3.13.5 *Employers arranging flexible work.* Companies could give leave to their employees to deal with children's problems at school.

Schools

3.13.6 *Making the best use of technology.* Schools should be encouraged to better use electronic channels in communicating with parents, such as e-Class APP.

3.13.7 *Adjusting the design of school activities.* School is suggested to hold some activities that suit the need of hard-to-reach parents and their children. It should allow more flexibility of time and venue for home-school activities, such as organizing activities in different timeslots and venues that would be more convenient to parents, in particular hard-to-reach parents.

3.13.8 *Establishing parents groups.* Similar to the Parent Support Groups in Singapore, schools in Hong Kong could help parents establish parents groups for spreading information and collecting opinions.

3.13.9 *Enhancing the role of children to be the facilitator.* Schools could engage students to communicate more with parents and teachers and participate in home-school activities.

3.13.10 *Collaborating with social workers.* With new government support for school social work services in kindergartens and schools, it is hoped that the schools can work through PTAs, teachers and social workers to step up their support to students and parents in the transition stages.

3.13.11 *Providing more support for students with hard-to-reach parents.* It is hoped that teachers can co-operate with social workers to step up needed communications with such parents and develop more sensitive support to these students.

Federations of Parent-Teacher Associations (FPTAs) or Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs)

3.13.12 *Strengthening the role of FPTAs/PTAs.* FPTAs / PTAs could hold more activities that match parents' needs, such as workshops on behaviour management and parents' emotional management, and interest courses. They could also try to arrange the venue of activities in the nearby district.

3.13.13 *Offering platforms for sharing of opinions.* FPTAs / PTAs could set up a platform such as seminars or forums which could allow relevant stakeholders to share their views on home-school communication.

Parents

3.13.14 *Learning the role of parents in school affairs.* It is important for parents to understand their role in school affairs. Apart from participating more in school

activities, parents are encouraged to express their opinions to school proactively and not to rely on school to initiate communication with them.

4. Observations and recommendations

- 4.1 Effective communication between schools and parents are important and beneficial, as evidenced from the findings presented above, despite challenges being faced by both schools and parents, it is gratifying to note that all schools have implemented numerous measures and devoted staff resources to maintain and promote effective communication with parents. These measures include for example, organizing PTA activities, volunteering programmes, parents' network and home visits, adopting information technology to facilitate parents as far as possible. As discussed above, a number of good practices have been identified which could be shared among schools.
- 4.2 It is also worth noting that similar practices in promoting effective communication between schools and parents are also adopted in other places reviewed. In *the Parent-Teacher-Home Visit Project (PTHVP) in the USA*, for instance, teachers and other school staff visit families with the goal of building trust and respect between home and school. In *the UK*, home visits are followed up by invitations to 'drop-in' events which aim at engaging hard-to-reach parents. In *Mainland China*, there are *general visits* (普訪), *follow-up visits* (隨訪) and *regular visits* (定期訪問). These visits are targeting specific students and families to help them to solve practical problems and to promote a better parent-teacher networking.
- 4.3 Despite substantial efforts put into promoting effective communication between schools and parents, measures adopted by schools in Hong Kong tend to be less comprehensive. Taking the parents groups as an example, in Singapore, the Parents Support Groups have taken up the role to spread information, collect views and set up interest groups. In Taiwan, parents groups have developed at both school, grade and class level.
- 4.4 The Study has successfully identified a number of good practices which could be adopted to most schools in Hong Kong. It has identified measures used by schools to enhance the effectiveness of communication between schools and parents. Good practices adopted in other countries have also been discussed above. These practices could serve as useful reference to schools. It is suggested that considerations could be given to further promote such good practices.
- 4.5 CHSC plays an important and pivotal role in promoting home-school co-operation. Problems being faced by schools and parents in maintaining effective communication are expected to continually evolve with time, as relationship between parents and their children becomes increasingly complex and multi-faceted, affected by say an increase in single-parenthood and absentee parents who are fully occupied by their job duties and do not contribute much to the development of their children. Schools have to rise to challenges posed by parents having difficulties in communicating with schools. On the other hand, schools have to take advantage of the emerging and proliferation of new

technologies to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of schools' efforts in reaching out to parents. The current Study has identified some good practices that make ample use of technology.

- 4.6 It is suggested that CHSC should conduct more research regularly, especially on hard-to-reach and difficult parents, to re-examine current practices as well as explore the wider adoption of new ones that are conducive to effective communication between schools and parents, making references to practices in other places as well.
- 4.7 In addition, the report to be released in 2019 by the Task Force on Home-school Co-operation and Parent Education set up under the Education Commission in 2017 might also provide more insights. In the community level, the CHSC could take the lead to raise awareness of the public to the importance of home school co-operation by providing more related education to them.

5. *Limitations*

- 5.1 There are four main limitations found for the Study.
 - 5.1.1 Schools and NGOs were the main channels to identify hard-to-reach and difficult parents but the effort could still not meet the target sample size, showing some parents were really hard to be accessed. This lack of success raises concern over the reality that some school children are going through very challenging family situations when their parents are not very accessible. This warrants attention beyond the concern of not meeting the target sample size.
 - 5.1.2 Private schools (though mainly schools adopting non-local curriculum) are also not very ready in lining up in-depth interviews and focus group discussions.
 - 5.1.3 No attempt has been made in contrasting practices of schools facing more or fewer challenges in communication with parents, as no information is available to facilitate say classifying schools into different categories and cross-tabulating the survey findings for different categories. For example, no information is available to the Consulting team to identify schools of different bandings which reflects the academic performance of students, and the proportion of NCS or SEN students. Admittedly, such analysis is likely to be controversial though potentially useful.
 - 5.1.4 It is found that some school stakeholders like school social workers are playing an active role in home-school communication. The opinions from them were mainly collected in the form of qualitative information, as originally the designed target respondents of the school survey were principals, teachers and parents. This reflects the limitation of the current Study and suggestion for future research to study the role of these supporting staff.

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I. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

1.1.1 The Committee on Home-School Co-operation (CHSC) was set up in February 1993, following a recommendation of the Education Commission Report No. 5: The Teaching Profession.¹ The CHSC, with members comprising professionals, parents and school principals, plus the secretariat support from the Education Bureau (EDB), aimed at promoting home-school co-operation.

1.1.2 Through the strenuous efforts of the CHSC in the past 20 years, there has been great progress in home-school co-operation in Hong Kong. At present, all government and aided primary and secondary schools have formed their own Parent-Teacher Associations which serve as a bridge between the school and parents.

1.1.3 As observed, the success of home-school co-operation hinges very much on good and effective communication between schools and parents. The CHSC wishes to understand the home-school co-operation in greater depth and, most importantly, to identify good practices in the co-operation and recommend ways to improve communication with parents, through this full-scale and in-depth Consultancy Study.

1.2 Objectives

1.2.1 The objective of the Consultancy Study on Communication between Schools and Parents (the Study) is to provide a comprehensive assessment on the effects of communication between schools and parents. The Study aims to:

- a) Provide an overview of the current position of communication between schools and parents;
- b) Identify the factors and measures which affect the school's effective communication with parents, in particular hard-to-reach parents and difficult parents²;
- c) Identify the good practices on spreading messages of positive parenting to parents, especially hard-to-reach parents and difficult parents;
- d) Identify the good practices in encouraging hard-to-reach parents and difficult parents to communicate with the schools;
- e) Identify the good practices in collecting views and opinions from parents, especially hard-to-reach parents and difficult parents;

¹ Education Commission. (1992). Education Commission Report No. 5: The Teaching Profession. Hong Kong: Government. Printer.

² The definition of hard-to-reach parent and difficult parent is based on the findings from focus group discussions, in-depth interviews and case studies.

- f) Identify the good practices in handling communication problems between schools and parents; and
- g) Recommend ways to improve effective and efficient communication between schools and parents with a view to enhance comprehensive care for children.

1.3 Organization of the report

1.3.1 In this report of the Study, Chapter One will cover the background and purposes of the Study. Chapter Two will cover the literature review and Chapter Three will cover and discuss the research methodology used. The key findings identified in the survey and data analysis will be presented in Chapter Four, whereas the factors, measures and good practices identified in the Study will be presented in Chapter Five. The observations, conclusions and recommendations will be presented in the last Chapter Six.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Overview

- 2.1.1 The conceptualization of home-school communication has been studied by researchers for many years, and different models describing the interaction between parents and the school have been developed. For example, Bastiani (1989)³ conceptualizes the practices of home-school relationship in the United Kingdom (UK) and proposes the communication model which emphasizes the provision of appropriate opportunities for communication and contact between schools and parents, and the involvement of parents, with a view to developing effective home-school communication and co-operation.
- 2.1.2 Parent involvement was defined by Epstein (1991)⁴ as parents' communication with the school, or by Van Wyk and Lemmer (2009)⁵ as parents' participation in home and school activities. Epstein's model provides a framework for six different types of parent involvement at school, namely parent participation at school, communication, volunteering, learning at home, active decision-making and collaboration with the community. The model indicates the importance of effective forms of school-to-home and home-to-school communication and emphasizes the importance of two-way communication in home-school partnerships. Argle (1991)⁶ and Shen, et al. (1994)⁷ had also studied the models of one-way communication and two-way communication between schools and parents.
- 2.1.3 Jooste (2011)⁸ defined communication as the process of exchanging information, which can influence and be influenced by interaction with others. Home-school communication often involves one-way communication, whereby teachers share information and ideas, and parents passively receive them (Olsen & Fuller, 2003).⁹ In this regard, Van Wyk and Lemmer (2009)¹⁰ described the process of communication as one where a person starts a conversation while another receives the messages.
- 2.1.4 The significance of communication between schools and parents has been emphasized in various theories and frameworks (Albright & Weissberg, 2010).¹¹ Growing evidence suggests that strong home-school linkages can help

³ Bastiani, J. (1989). *Working with Parents: A Whole School Approach*. Windsor: NFER-Nelson.

⁴ Epstein, J. L. (1991). "Effects on student achievement of teachers' practices of parent involvement", in S. B. Silvern (ed.), *Advances in Reading/Language Research: A Research Annual*, Vol. 5. *Literacy through Family, Community, and School Interaction*, pp. 261–276. New York: Elsevier Science/JAI Press.

⁵ Van Wyk, N., & Lemmer, E. (2009). *Organizing Parent Involvement in SA Schools*. Cape Town: Juta and Company Ltd.

⁶ Argle, M. (1991). *Cooperation – The Basis of Sociability*. London: Routledge.

⁷ Shen, S. M., Pang, I. W., Tsoi, S. Y. S., Yip, P. S. F., & Yung, K. K. (1994). *Home School Co-operation Research Report*. Hong Kong: Committee on Home-School Co-operation, Education Department.

⁸ Jooste, E. (2011). *The Role of Communication in Strengthening Parent-teacher Relationships in Primary Schools*. Master's degree thesis, University of South Africa Pretoria, South Africa.

⁹ Olsen, G., & Fuller, M. L. (2003). *Home-school Relations. Working Successfully with Parents*. Boston: Pearson.

¹⁰ Van Wyk, N., & Lemmer, E. (2009), op. cit.

¹¹ Albright, M. L., & Weissberg, R. P. (2010). "School-family partnerships to promote social and emotional learning", in S. L. Christenson, & A. L. Reschly (eds.), *Handbook of School-family Partnerships*, pp. 246–265. New York: Routledge.

contribute to the enhancement of school effectiveness and children's education interests (Epstein, 1986).¹² As observed, the success of home-school communication hinges very much on good and effective communication between parents, teachers and principals. Home-school communication, as a means, would inevitably lead to home-school co-operation in the end. In a broader context, home-school communication is part and parcel of home-school co-operation. As communication increases, more parents would be more involved and closer home-school relationships would be established as a result. Therefore, parent-teacher communication can be viewed as the cause and effect of parent involvement (Halsey, 2005).¹³ Shen, et al. (1994)¹⁴ also suggested that parent involvement has to include parents' participating in parenting programmes, assisting school operations, involvement in parent organizations, consultation on setting major school policies and taking part in school management.

- 2.1.5 The emphasis of home-school communication and co-operation has become prevalent worldwide. In this Chapter, the review will cover 9 countries/cities and their relevant enrichments to the Hong Kong's practice will be cited as appropriate. Hopefully, through the review, good practices which are relevant and could serve as useful references to Hong Kong can be identified after taking into account quantitative and qualitative information obtained in the Study.

2.2 Purpose and content of communication

- 2.2.1 Epstein (2010)¹⁵ identified communication as one of the six types of parent involvement practices that are critical in developing a partnership between parents and the school. Ho, Hung and Chen (2013)¹⁶ stated that home-school communication can be viewed as the process of exchanging information to create consensus, fulfil stakeholders' needs and achieve learning goals. Apart from that, Powell's (1969)¹⁷ five levels of communication can be used to present the relationship between parents and teachers by analysing the purpose and content of communication.

- 2.2.2 Based on the findings of Kraft and Rogers (2015),¹⁸ teachers who communicate with parents are mainly sending messages to parents on students' passing rate and school attendance. Some may discuss typically about school activities or school events. They may also make announcements, talk about school changes, explain routines, provide information about the school staff and capture reminders. Even though parents may prefer information about their children's ongoing development, teachers would typically focus on information about the skills. The same study further demonstrated that teachers are more likely to

¹² Epstein. (1986). Parents' reactions to teacher practices of parent involvement. *The Elementary School Journal*, 86(3), 277-294.

¹³ Halsey, P. A. (2005). "Parent involvement in junior high schools: A failure to communicate". *American Secondary Education*, 34(1), pp. 57-69.

¹⁴ 沈雪明、龐憶華、蔡黎悅心、葉兆輝及容家駒 (1994)。《家庭與學校合作研究報告》。香港：政府印務局。

¹⁵ Epstein, J. L. (2010). "School/family/community partnerships: Caring for the children we share". *Phi Delta Kappan*, 76(9), pp. 701-712.

¹⁶ Ho, L. H., Hung, C. L., & Chen, H. C. (2013). "Using theoretical models to examine the acceptance behavior of mobile phone messaging to enhance parent-teacher interactions". *Computers & Education*, 61, pp. 105-114.

¹⁷ Powell, J. (1969). *Why Am I Afraid To Tell You Who I Am?* Chicago: Argus-Communications.

¹⁸ Kraft, M. A., & Rogers, T. (2015). "The underutilized potential of teach-to-parents communication: Evidence from a field experiment". *Economics of Education Review*, 47, pp. 49-63.

mention children's behaviour in a positive context, and provide information on missing assignments, students' studying habits and a broad range of topics on their performance. However, information about school policies, reform and programmes seems not very common in the communication between schools and parents.

Mainland China

2.2.3 According to Zhao's study (2007),¹⁹ the purpose of parents in communicating and collaborating with the school was mainly to know more about their children's learning outcomes (34.7%), and seldom on school administration such as providing advice on school and class management (6%). It was also discovered that class teachers would be active in communicating with parents only when there were problems encountered by their children. This should not be regarded as an effective communication: schools generally lacked an effective communication mechanism, and the role of parents was seen as an audience and supporter rather than an advisor or decision maker.

Macau

2.2.4 According to Ho (2009),²⁰ the content of communication between schools and parents was seldom for parents to express their opinions to the school. Only 4.4% of the content were on setting school goals, setting school curriculum (3.7%), school staffing (1.6%), student affairs (5.6%), parent affairs (13.7%), and evaluating the school quality (18.8%).

Taiwan

2.2.5 Cheung (2006)²¹ indicated that parents in Taiwan were more active in school meetings (98%), school development and planning (45.9%), Student Appeals and Review Committee (41.3%) and the selection of school textbooks (primary schools 50.5%, secondary schools 22.6%). On the other hand, only 20% of them participated in the Teacher Evaluation Committee to express their opinions on teaching and the planning of the school curriculum.

2.2.6 For the areas involving school's decision-making, there had been low parental involvement (in the Greater China region as well), which may be related to the Confucian cultural tradition of Chinese (e.g., respecting the school and never challenging the school authority). However, Epstein (1996)²² indicated that students and parents, could, for example, benefit from being informed and being invited to share their opinions about the school curriculum and the requirements of different subjects, as well as the school policies and school progress. Ellis, Lock, and Lummis (2015)²³ also suggested that an open, regular and two-way communication would be conducive to a positive parent-teacher communication.

¹⁹ 赵澜波 (2007)。《对建立家长教师协会的认识》，原文发表于《教育科学研究》，2007 年第 7 期 (http://www.cycs.org/kycg/jtjyyj/201504/t20150423_65443.html)

²⁰ Ho, E. S. C. (2009). "Home-school collaboration in two Chinese societies: Hong Kong and Macao", in R. Deslandes (ed.), *International Perspectives on Contexts, Communities and Evaluated Innovative Practices*, Chap. 3. London: Routledge.

²¹ 張再明。2006。深化家校合作：台灣的發展情況 - 家庭與學校合作事宜委員會。

²² Epstein, J. L. (1996). "Advances in family, community, and school partnership". *New Schools, New Communities*, 123(3), pp. 5-13.

²³ Ellis, M., Lock, G., & Lummis, G. (2015). "Parent-teacher interactions: Engaging with parents and carers".

The United States of America (USA)

- 2.2.7 The development of home-school communication in the USA is one of the most mature models in the world, and has been involved in both congressional legislatures and state legislatures. For example, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) requires schools to involve parents of both public and private school students in the development, implementation, and annual review of school programmes.²⁴
- 2.2.8 In the current Study on home-school communication in Hong Kong, school principals, teachers and parents were asked about the nature and purpose of their communication, including the discussions on the types of activities organized by the school for parents' involvement.

2.3 Modes of communication

One-way communication

- 2.3.1 A variety of methods are used to develop a successful partnership between the school and families. The one-way communication strategies typically originate from teachers and are directed to parents. The most common mode of contact between parents and teachers is by means of written communication in the form of newsletters (Olsen & Fuller, 2003).²⁵ A message from the school to parents often indicates an initial contact from the school's side (Couchenour & Chrisman, 2011),²⁶ followed by regular newsletters providing information on school events. Though the school often communicates information to parents through notebooks and newsletters, some parents still find it hard to comprehend fully what is being communicated. However, many parents are of the view that this mode of communication is meaningful, while others find it boring (Olsen & Fuller, 2003)²⁷.

Macau

- 2.3.2 Ho (2009)²⁸ found that the type of home-school communication in Macau followed the traditional manner, e.g., through written communication and parent-teacher meetings. Most schools informed parents about their school activities through newsletter, once a week or at a less frequent interval. Students' performance at school was reported to their parents through test results a couple of times in each semester and regular parent-teacher meeting in every semester. The information flow went in one direction, from the educators or teachers to parents, and there was not much interaction between the school and parents. Also, there was often a long time lag in the flow of information from the school to parents, and at less frequent intervals.

Australian Journal of Teacher Education, 40(5), p. 9.

²⁴ Department of Education, State of New Jersey. *Title I*. (<http://www.state.nj.us/education/title1/program/parent/>)

²⁵ Olsen, G., & Fuller, M. L. (2003), op. cit.

²⁶ Couchenour, D., & Chrisman, K. (2011). *Families, Schools, and Communities: Together for Young Children*, 4th ed. New York: Thomson.

²⁷ Olsen, G., & Fuller, M. L. (2003), op. cit.

²⁸ Ho, E. S. C. (2009), op. cit.

Two-way communication

- 2.3.3 According to Epstein (2011),²⁹ communication between parents and teachers is important to both parties for sharing information about the students' academic progress and other school-related matters. Sharing information through such ways as conferences and phone calls may be considered as better options, as this would provide an opportunity for all the individuals involved to take part in a two-way communication process. In this way, both parents and teachers have an opportunity to ask questions, provide comments and take part in other interactions (Epstein, 2011).³⁰ The two-way communication strategies furthermore imply the possibility of misconceptions being clarified and limited communication being noticed (Couchennour & Chrisman, 2011).³¹
- 2.3.4 Communication by means of telephone calls is a convened channel for communication between parents and school teachers (Couchennour & Chrisman, 2011).³² According to Van Wyk and Lemmer (2009),³³ this form of communication is appreciated when factual information (such as verifying a postal address) needs to be replied. Furthermore, telephone calls or text messages are fast ways of communication, and of sharing or obtaining information (Van Wyk & Lemmer, 2009).³⁴ Other forms of communication that may be used to share information and communicate with parents including parent bulletin boards, home visits and communication with parents' groups. Addressing groups of parents has become useful to many schools as parents are provided with the opportunity to feel they are being heard and have taken control (Olsen & Fuller, 2003).³⁵
- 2.3.5 Face-to-face communication is another common mode of communication. Coucheoue & Chrisman (2011)³⁶ indicated that communication in person is another strategy that may be employed by the school to promote interaction between parents and teachers. Planned or unplanned meetings may provide both parents and teachers with the opportunity to share information calmly and confidently. Cox-Petersen (2011)³⁷ emphasized that this indicates respect to all participants. In addition, the parents who need to be spoken to may not necessarily attend such meetings (Olsen & Fuller, 2003)³⁸ but on-going communication throughout the year will promote parent involvement (Weiss, 2015)³⁹.

Singapore

²⁹ Epstein, J. L. (2011). *School, Family and Community Partnerships: Preparing Educators and Improving Schools*, 2nd ed. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Couchennour, D., & Chrisman, K. (2011), op. cit.

³² Ibid.

³³ Van Wyk, N., & Lemmer, E. (2009). Op. cit.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Olsen, G., & Fuller, M. L. (2003), op. cit.

³⁶ Couchennour, D., & Chrisman, K. (2011), op. cit.

³⁷ Cox-Peterson, A. (2011). *Educational Partnerships: Connecting Schools, Families and the Community*. London: Sage Publications.

³⁸ Olsen, G., & Fuller, M. L. (2003), op. cit.

³⁹ Weiss, H. B. (2015). "Reimagining the Parent-Teacher Conference". *Harvard Family Research Project News*.

- 2.3.6 Since 1998, more than two-thirds of Singapore's 376 schools have set up either a PTA or Parent Support Group (PSG), compared to only 60 before that year (COMPASS, 2001).⁴⁰ Prior to that, home-school collaboration had been a tradition only within the more established mission or government-aided schools (Davie, 1999)⁴¹ and the mainstream schools lacked the formal structures to involve parents and the parent community in schools. In 2001, the number of parents groups shot up to 156. In 2002, there were 220 parents' groups formed. By 2003 there were 272 groups, about three out of each four schools had such a set-up.⁴²

The United States of America

- 2.3.7 The National Parent-Teacher Association (National PTA), which was founded more than 100 years ago, is a network of more than 4 million families, students, teachers, administrators, and business and community leaders who are devoted to the educational success of children and the promotion of family engagement in schools.⁴³ In the USA, parents can participate in school education through the PTAs, the Boards of Education/School Boards, or Parent Advisory Committees. According to Engstrom (1966),⁴⁴ individual members in a community can participate in school affairs and sports activities through formal organizations, informal organizations, formal individual participations and informal individual participations.

Communication through technology

- 2.3.8 In recent years, educators have used various technologies to communicate with parents in innovative and time-efficient ways. Integrating technology has helped schools to communicate quickly to a broad parent community (Ramirez, 2001).⁴⁵ Technology also holds the promise to allow teachers have communication opportunities not limited by school hours or location (Brewer & Kallick, 1996).⁴⁶ Internet technology is the most recent tool used by schools to communicate to a parent community. Increasingly, school websites are used to convey a broad range of school information. Students often become involved with both the technology and the content of the websites and may work together with teachers to create and maintain the sites. Teachers trained to use the school website can provide updates regarding homework assignments, test schedules, resource links, etc., which can be easily accessed by parents. In fact, the use of the Internet can serve as an "interactive tool for individualizing homework and supporting the involvement of families in the homework process" (Salend, Duhaney, Anderson & Gottschalk, 2004).⁴⁷

⁴⁰ Community and Parents in Support of Schools (COMPASS). (2001). *Survey on Home-School-Community Collaborative Practices*. Singapore: Ministry of Education.

⁴¹ Davie, S. (1999). "Council to boost school ties meet". *The Straits Times*, 16 January 1999, H47.

⁴² *The Straits Times* (20 September 2003). "What to get your child ahead? Get involved".

⁴³ National Parent Teacher Association. "National PTA history". Retrieved on 4 August 2016 from: <http://www.pta.org/about/content.cfm?ItemNumber=3465&navItemNumber=4581>

⁴⁴ Engström L.-M. (1996). "Sweden", in P. De Knop, L. M. Engström, B. Skirstad B, et al. (eds.), *Worldwide Trends in Youth Sport*, pp. 231-243. Champaign, Illinois: Human Kinetics publication.

⁴⁵ Ramirez, F. (2001). "Technology and parent involvement". *Clearing House*, 75(1), pp. 30-31.

⁴⁶ Brewer, W. R., & Kallick, B. (1996). "Technology's promise for reporting student learning", in *Communicating Student Learning: 1996 ASCD Yearbook*, pp. 178-187. Alexandria, Virginia: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

⁴⁷ Salend, S. J., Duhaney, D., Anderson, D. J., & Gottschalk, C. (2004). "Using the internet to improve homework communication and completion". *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 36(3), pp. 64-73.

Estonia

- 2.3.9 The fast development of information technology has created an opportunity for all parties connected with schools to interact through various media, take active part in information exchange, and communicate at a personal as well as an institutional level. Nearly all technological opportunities have been created in Estonia for extensive and efficient digital communication between schools and parents. For instance, students, teachers and parents have made very active use of the specific online educational information environment called the “e-School” that provides up-to-date study-related information (e.g., timetables, lesson descriptions, home assignments, study resources, grades and absences, etc.). This environment has helped bring the students, their families, schools, and school supervisors together into a connected learning community.⁴⁸ The e-School service was launched in Estonia in 2002. It has been the most often used e-service by parents and schools. In 2010, it covered 70% of the schools, 95% of the Estonian students and 30% of the population who used e-School on a monthly basis.⁴⁹
- 2.3.10 According to Thompson, Mazer and Grady (2015),⁵⁰ parent-teacher communication has evolved due to new technologies. The rapid development of technology is said to have caused, perforce, e-communication as opposed to traditional forms of communication (Ho, Hung & Chen, 2013).⁵¹ Parents seemingly prefer to communicate regularly with teachers by means of emails, text messages or through social media (Thompson, Mazer & Grady, 2015)⁵². As the Internet continues to become more popular, more parents and teachers are inclined to communicate through emails, text messages or social media (Couchenour & Chrisman, 2011)⁵³.

Mainland China

- 2.3.11 In Mainland China, technology-enhanced media is a means of communication with parents in many schools.⁵⁴ For example, the Parents’ Hotline (家長熱線) is one of the channels adopted for maintaining communication and networking between parents and the school. The Internet Plus (互聯網+) has been established to develop online learning by and listening to parents (家長微課). WeChat groups have been introduced to engage hard-to-reach parents and develop close communication between parents and education specialists (建立「微信群」, 家長們足不出戶就可以與專家對話).
- 2.3.12 These findings would provide insight into some of the areas of research by identifying the modes that improve communication between schools and parents, which may in turn, improve parents’ involvement.

⁴⁸ See: <http://www.gemalto.com/govt/inspired/estonia>

⁴⁹ See footnote 46.

⁵⁰ Thompson, B. C., Mazer, J. P., & Grady, E. F. (2015). “The changing nature of parent-teacher communication: Mode selection in the smartphone era”. *Communication Education*, 64(2), pp. 187–207.

⁵¹ Ho, L. H., Hung, C. L., & Chen, H. C. (2013), op. cit.

⁵² Thompson, B. C., Mazer, J. P., & Grady, E. F. (2015), op. cit.

⁵³ Couchenour, D., & Chrisman, K. (2011), op. cit.

⁵⁴ For example, 第一文库网 (www.wenku1.com) and 中国教育新闻网 (<http://www.jyb.cn>).

2.4 Perceptions and attitudes

- 2.4.1 Some researchers have focused on perceived and cognitive perspectives, such as the perceptions and attitudes of different stakeholders towards home-school communication. For instance, Dor and Rucker-Naidu (2012)⁵⁵ stated that teachers in both the United States and Israeli mainly defined parents' involvement through voluntarism, seemed to be in favour of parents' involvement, and tended to be empowered by it. However, ambivalence was expressed more among the Israeli teachers, who mentioned more reservations, tensions, and challenges.

Mainland China

- 2.4.2 It was noted in a study⁵⁶ that only 2% of the parents believed that home-school collaboration was beneficial to their children's education. About 80% of the parents also indicated that the function of home-school collaboration was to solve problems in teaching their children. Nearly 48% of the parents said they had not actively participated in school affairs and were of the view that the purpose of home-school communication was to listen to and assist teachers' and the school's arrangement. On the other hand, the contents of communication between schools and parents were mainly on students' learning performance, moral behaviour, teaching method, but less on discussing students' interpersonal relationship and emotional health, as well as the capacity of students' development.
- 2.4.3 Dor (2012)⁵⁷ also discovered that there were differences in the attitudes of teachers and school counsellors towards parents' involvement in school. According to Dor, teachers and counsellors believed in the importance of parents' involvement in school, but each group saw different benefits and professional reinforcement derived from their interactions with parents. The teachers expressed more personal difficulties in dealing with some parents than the counsellors, who referred to the challenges mostly from an ethical-professional perspective.
- 2.4.4 To overview the current home-school communication in Hong Kong, the exploration of expectations and views of schools, teachers and parents on home-school communication is required.

2.5 Factors

- 2.5.1 There are numerous barriers that prevent the establishment of effective communication between schools and parents. These barriers can generally be categorized as physical, technical, psychological, and social and organizational (Sabuncuoglu & Gumus, 2008).⁵⁸ Hoover-Dempsey, Walker, Jones and Reed

⁵⁵ Dor, Asnat, & Rucker-Naidu, T. Brooke. (2012). "Teachers' attitudes toward parents' involvement in school: Comparing teachers in the USA and Israel". *Issues in Educational Research*, 22(3), pp. 246–262.

⁵⁶ See 《家校合作的途径 (类型 or 模式)》 (<http://www.wenku1.com/news/014325C8ECB7CC6E.html>).

⁵⁷ Dor, Asnat (2012). "Parents' involvement in school: Attitudes of teachers and school counsellors". *US-China Education Review*, B11, pp. 921–935.

⁵⁸ Sabuncuoglu, Z., & Gumus, M. (2008). *Orgutlerde iletisim (Communication in Organizations)*. Ankara, Turkey: Arikan Publishing.

(2002)⁵⁹ categorized communication barriers in schools as either school-related or parent-related. School-related obstacles are described as the inability to provide communication support, the lack of system knowledge, and failure to develop alternative strategies. Parent-related obstacles are described as family status, pragmatic concerns (e.g., non-flexibility of parents' work hours, etc.) and psychological barriers (e.g., negative experiences about schools, etc.).

- 2.5.2 Parents and school teachers usually report the lack of time as the most important communication barrier. However, studies have revealed that the lack of planning towards establishing co-operation and lack of developing a mutual understanding are the most important communication barriers (Ozmen, Akuzum, Zincirli & Selcuk, 2016).⁶⁰ In addition, previous negative experiences, religious and cultural differences, transportation problems, and the incompetence and inefficiency of school members may affect school-parent relations negatively (NSPRA, 2006).⁶¹
- 2.5.3 Another concern that affects the effective involvement of parents as noted by researchers is the students themselves. The study by Hornby and Lafaele (2010)⁶² asserted that the age of children determined the involvement of parents in the education process. In addition, Griffin and Galassi (2010)⁶³ also pointed out that some students felt that their parents lacked the knowledge and skills utilized by the school staff, and they doubted the abilities of their parents. This might affect their parents' perceptions of and views about communication with the school.

The United States of America

- 2.5.4 One study shows⁶⁴ that both teachers and families have barriers hindering the communication with each other. For teachers and school staff, the barriers can be the lack of teachers' time, teachers' misperceptions of parents' abilities, the reasons for contact, and the methods of communication. On the other hand, parents also have communication barriers to teachers and school staff: the lack of English proficiency, low literacy level in the native language, lack of technology knowledge, logistical barriers and lack of resources, and the understanding to drive home learning opportunities.⁶⁵

Macau

⁵⁹ Hoover-Dempsey, K. V., Walker, J. M. T., Jones, K. P., & Reed, R. P. (2002). "Teachers involving parents (TIP): An in-service teacher education program for enhancing parental involvement". *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 18(7), 843–867.

⁶⁰ Ozmen, F., Akuzum, C., Zincirli, M., & Selcuk, G. (2016). "The communication barriers between teachers and parents in primary schools". *Eurasian Journal of Educational Research*, 66, pp. 26–46.

⁶¹ National School Public Relations Association. (NSPRA). (2006). *How Strong Communication Contributes to Student and School Success: Parent and Family Involvement*. Maryland: NSPRA. Available at: http://nspra.org/files/docs/Strong_Communication_Students_School_Success.pdf

⁶² Hornby, G., & Lafaele, R. (2011). "Barriers to parental involvement in education: An exploratory mode". *Educational Review*, 63(1), pp. 37–52.

⁶³ Griffin, D., & Galassi, L. (2010). "Parent perceptions of barriers to academic success in a rural middle". *Professional School Counseling*, 14(1), pp. 87–100.

⁶⁴ Project Appleseed. (2018). "Benefits & barriers to family involvement in education". Retrieved on 13 August 2018 from: <http://www.projectappleseed.org/barriers>

⁶⁵ Parent Engagement Committee, Michigan Department of Education. (2011). *Collaborating for Success" Parent Engagement Toolkit*. Available at: http://www.michigan.gov/documents/mde/4a_Final_Toolkit_without_bookmarks_370151_7.pdf

2.5.5 In a study conducted by van Schalkwyk (2011)⁶⁶ on family-school relationships in Macau, it was found that there were three levels of relationships between parents and the school, namely, at the personal level, interpersonal level and ideological level. At the personal level, the focus was on parents' perceptions of the importance of education, e.g., parents regarded the education of their children as very important and perceived that the holistic development of their children was also important. At the interpersonal level, parents perceived their relationship with the educational system as both satisfactory and dissatisfactory. For example, parents perceived that the lack of teacher-parent interaction stemmed from the lack of time and opportunity to engage fully in school-organized activities. On the other hand, at the ideological level, there might be ways which could help influence the positioning of parents in relation to the school. It was believed that the key issue was related to the Chinese concept of "face".

2.6 Theoretical framework

2.6.1 From a theoretical perspective, it may be observed that home-school communication often takes place first at the lowest level of communication between schools and parents, which is just simple communication, and then gradually moves up to the highest level of home-school communication and co-operation. It is noted that the home-school relationship actually is consisted of both cognitive (attitudes and perceptions) communication and interaction (participating, volunteering and decision making, etc.), and both are directly related to the success of home-school communication. In addition, to study the theoretical framework of home-school communication, overseas practical experience could serve as a useful reference for Hong Kong.

2.6.2 In this Study, Epstein's (1995) model⁶⁷ which was used as the theoretical framework, had provided a basis for the understanding of the dynamic relationship between family and school. It explained communication was a means to promote more interaction between parents and the school and allowed the possibility of improving the relationship. According to Epstein (2011)⁶⁸, the degree of the relationship (in particular the content of communication and the type of involvement) depends on three forces, namely time, the experience of the school, and the experience of families. Apart from that, previous literature also shows that the factors related to school, family and children may also affect the effectiveness of communication.

⁶⁶ van Schalkwyk, Gertina J. (2011). "Saving face: Hierarchical positioning in family-school relationships in Macao". *International Journal for School-Based Family Counseling*, III, August 2011.

⁶⁷ Epstein, J. L. (2010), op. cit.

⁶⁸ Epstein, J. L. (2011), op. cit.

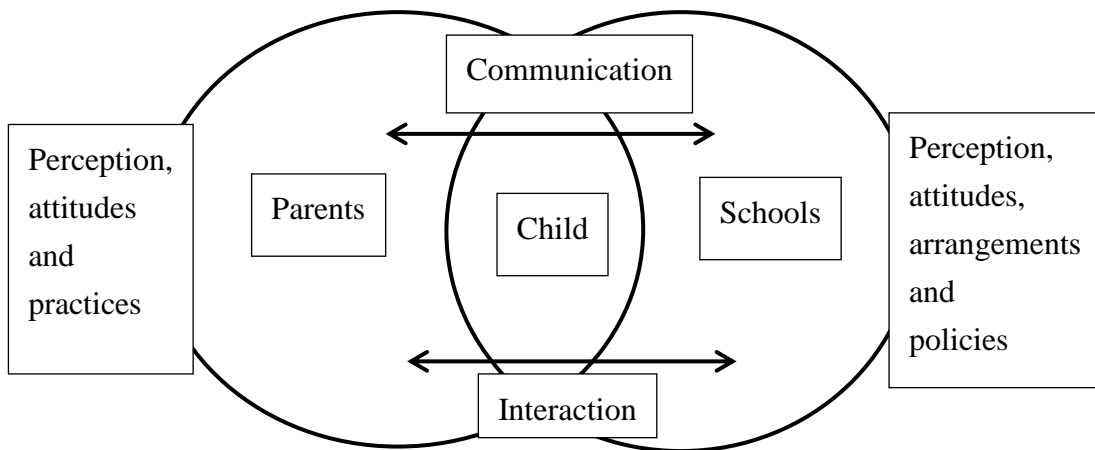


Figure 1: Overlapping spheres of influence of the family and the school (adopted from Epstein (1995 & 2011) and Ellis (2017)).⁶⁹

- 2.6.3 From the vertical perspectives of home-school communication and co-operation, the ideas of Powell (1969)⁷⁰ and Kraft and Rogers (2015)⁷¹ could help to understand how the content of communication and interaction would reflect the level of involvement and closeness of the relationship, e.g., issues of students and parents about school affairs reflecting the relationship between principals, teachers and parents.
- 2.6.4 Nevertheless, in the light of the literatures reviewed, it seems that there are differences between Asian and Western societies (Zhao, et al., 2011),⁷² in particular in the mode and purpose of communication. For a cosmopolitan and international city like Hong Kong, with parents being brought up and educated in different cultural contexts, there is no reason why Hong Kong cannot adopt the good practices in different cultural and school contexts. To identify the good practices and pave the way forward, it will thus be necessary to review the practices of home-school communication in different school contexts, making reference to the lessons learnt from taking on board the models and practices in home-school communication in different cultural contexts.

⁶⁹ Ellis, Bronwyn Wendy. (2017). *How Teachers and Parents Perceive Parent-teacher Communication in Resource-constrained Primary School Settings*. MEd dissertation, University of Pretoria. Available at: https://repository.up.ac.za/bitstream/handle/2263/62915/Ellis_Teachers_2017.pdf?sequence=1

⁷⁰ Powell, J. (1969), op. cit.

⁷¹ Kraft, M. A., & Rogers, T. (2015), op. cit.

⁷² Zhao, Y., et al. (eds.) (2011). *Handbook of Asian Education: A Cultural Perspective*. London: Routledge.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research design

3.1.1 Based on the review of relevant literature, overseas experiences and theoretical frameworks, the Study was designed to address the research objective stated. Therefore, the mixed-method and multi-informant research approaches were utilized to generate data that were significant and relevant to the research objective. The table below shows the overall process of the Study:

↓	Stage 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To conduct a literature review of similar or comparable studies previously conducted in Hong Kong and a review of overseas experiences.
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Conceptualize the research design. ▪ Formulate the multi-method data collection plan.
	Stage 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To conduct a representative territory-wide survey to map out the current situation of communication between the school stakeholders (including principals, teachers and school social workers) and parents in the schools covered by the Study.
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Data analysis and interpretation. ▪ Identification of hard-to-reach parents and difficult parents.
	Stage 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To conduct case studies, focus group discussions, and consultative interviews with the stakeholders (including principals, teachers, school social workers, parents, etc.).
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Content analysis and interpretation. ▪ Comparison with existing literature. ▪ Identification of factors and measures. ▪ Conclusions and recommendations.

Figure 2: Overview of the research process.

3.1.2 Particularly, the Study did not directly assess factors that influence the communication between schools and parents. However, questions regarding the principals', teachers' and parents' reasons to (or not to) communicate with each other, and the reasons to (or not to) be involved in school activities were raised during the focus group discussions and in-depth interviews, while the background characteristics were also included in the statistical analysis to explore the possible impact of these factors on the modes of communication.

3.2 Quantitative survey of primary and secondary schools

3.2.1 *Sample design*

Methods of data collection

3.2.1.1 The self-administered questionnaire was adopted in the survey for collecting information from schools, teachers and parents. Through the use of a proper survey and questionnaire design, and with proper follow-ups by telephone reminders as well as field visits if required to ensure the response rate is sufficiently high to produce reliable estimates, a self-administered questionnaire survey is considered the appropriate method of data collection.

3.2.1.2 As regards the survey of parents, given that schools are likely to be reluctant to disclose the addresses and telephone numbers of the parents, the only feasible approach is to conduct the survey through schools, using a self-administered questionnaire. Experience with surveys of parents conducted by Policy 21 has indicated that this approach, with proper follow ups on non-response, is feasible and would produce an acceptable response rate.

Survey coverage, sample design and sample size

3.2.1.3 For the survey, a random sample of a sufficiently large number of stakeholders is required in order to obtain a representative view of the stakeholders. Having a scientific and objective method of selecting the stakeholders for the survey is important to ensure that the data obtained are unbiased and representative. With sampling, it is not necessary to completely cover all primary and secondary schools, as this would cause unnecessary workload on the principals, teachers and parents.

3.2.1.4 Furthermore, parents' communication with the schools and their perceived needs for doing so, would change as their children progress from Secondary 1 to Secondary 6. The learning needs of the students and their stage of development to adulthood and hence their parent-child relationship would also undergo inevitable changes as the children grow. Thus, it is essential that the parents to be enumerated in the survey should cover the parents of students in different grades.

3.2.1.5 Accordingly, for the surveys of principals, teachers and parents, a two-stage stratified sampling design was adopted. The first stage was a random selection of primary schools, secondary schools and special schools, with the stratification factor being the mode of financing. Systematic sampling was used, such that with the sampling frame sorted by geographical district, the schools sampled would evenly distributed in different districts throughout the territory. As the number of aided schools was much greater than that of government, Direct Subsidy Scheme (DSS) and private schools, disproportionate sampling was also adopted in order to ensure the number of government, DSS and private schools selected in the first stage was not very small.

3.2.1.6 For the second stage, a random sample of the target respondents in the sampled schools was selected. Two different methods of sampling students and parents

were used: (a) schools were first asked for permission to adopt the sampling of students by the “birthday-month” method; (b) for those schools that did not adopt the “birthday-month” method, they were asked to randomly choose one class from each grade.

“Birthday-month” method

- 3.2.1.7 The following sampling procedure was adopted. The procedure took into account the need to keep the sample selection method as simple as possible, causing minimal disturbance to the sampled schools. Furthermore, it was also desirable to reduce the sampling errors by avoiding as far as possible the clustering effect introduced in the second stage.
- 3.2.1.8 About 1/12 (or 8.3%) of the teachers in the sampled schools were asked to complete a questionnaire for teachers. The principals or deputy principals were asked to complete the questionnaire for principals.
- 3.2.1.9 About 1/12 (or 8.3%) of the students in Primary 1–6 and 1/12 (or 8.3%) of the students in Secondary 1–6 in the sampled schools were selected. The method of selection adopted was random selection based on the “birthday-month” method, by choosing the students born in a certain month of the year;
- 3.2.1.10 For the students sampled, their parents were asked to complete a self-administered questionnaire and return the completed questionnaire either through the schools or directly to Policy 21.

Randomly sampled classes from each grade

- 3.2.1.11 In addition, for the schools that did not adopt the “birthday-month” method, the method of the random selection of classes was adopted with a sampling fraction of 20–25%. It should be noted that the samples drawn by the “birthday-month” method and the random selection of classes were both random samples, and different weightings would be applied to the data obtained from these different sampling methods.
- 3.2.1.12 The survey covered a sample of 115 primary schools and 95 secondary schools in the first stage. The number of schools selected in the first stage is summarized below:⁷³

Type of school	Govt.	Aided	Caput	DSS	Other private	Total
Primary Schools						
Total no. of schools	35	445	-	20	40	540
No. of schools sampled	25	60	-	10	20	115
Secondary Schools						
Total no. of schools	31	365	4	60	2	462
No. of schools sampled	15	54	4	20	2	95

⁷³ There had been minor adjustments to the sample size proposed, taking into account the distribution of births in different months.

3.2.1.13 For special schools, 20 special schools were enumerated in the first stage. In the second stage, 100% of their teachers, 1/12 of their students were sampled and their parents were asked to complete the questionnaires for parents. For the special schools that did not adopt the “birthday-month” method, the method of the random selection of classes had been adopted.

3.2.1.14 By the end of March 2018, a total of 168 schools had participated in the survey and returned the completed questionnaires, representing a completion rate of 73.0%. The details are shown in the table below:

Type of school No. of schools completed the survey	Govt.	Aided	Caput	DSS	Other private	Total
Primary Schools	13	52	0	5	8	78
Secondary Schools	15	40	2	11	2	70
Special Schools	–	20	–	–	–	20

3.2.1.15 From these 168 schools, a total of 13,439 respondents had completed the questionnaires, including 364 principals, 1,082 teachers and 11,993 parents. The details are shown in the table below:

Number of respondents Stakeholders	Primary	Secondary	Special	Total
Principals	158	173	33	364
Teachers	486	490	106	1,082
Parents	6,140	5,677	176	11,993
Total	6,784	6,340	315	13,439

3.2.1.16 This report is based on the data obtained from the sample of 13,439 respondents, accounting for about 106% of the target sample size. The data were suitably weighted to reflect the distribution by type of schools for all the respondents as a whole.

3.2.2 *Questionnaire design and the pilot test*

3.2.2.1 Different sets of pre-designed structured questionnaire were used in collecting information from principals, teachers and parents of primary and secondary schools. In finalizing the questionnaires, the EDB had been consulted. The questionnaires were also pre-tested on a sample of stakeholders before implementation.

3.2.2.2 Thus, in designing the questionnaire, care had been taken to avoid leading or loaded questions and “composite” questions, resulting in bias or ambiguous responses. Following the common practice for opinion-type surveys, the questionnaires started with the more general, less threatening and objective

questions, before proceeding to the more specific, more difficult and subjective questions.

3.2.2.3 Moreover, the opinions of the respondents were expected to vary, depending on the external factors like the type of schools, subjects taught, teaching experience, the academic performance of the students, etc. For example, teachers of language subjects might have views different from those of other subjects, and parents of students with above average academic performance might have opinions different from those of students with below average academic performance. Thus, questions on the characteristics of the respondents were also included in the questionnaires.

3.3 In-depth interviews and focus group discussions

3.3.1 *Focus group discussions with parents*

3.3.1.1 Apart from contacting parents through schools and the PTAs/FPTAs, parents were also contacted for views and opinions through focus group discussions held at children and youth centres and family services centres. Conducting focus group discussions is very much different from the face-to-face or telephone interviews and questionnaire surveys. A focus group discussion is not to seek definitive response from individual respondents, following the sequence dictated by the interviewer based on a pre-designed structured or semi-structured questionnaire. Instead, the role of the moderator in a focus group discussion is to encourage respondents' response to a particular topic and to elicit their thinking, attitudes and ideas on the issue. The purpose is not to reach a consensus among the respondents in a focus group, but rather to encourage the respondents to express different points of view.⁷⁴

3.3.1.2 Twelve focus group discussions had been conducted in different districts in Hong Kong, at the schools, integrated children and youth centres or integrated family services centres there.

District	No. of participants
Hong Kong Island	26
Kowloon East	15
Kowloon West	3
NT East	8
NT West	19
Total	71

3.3.2 *In-depth interviews with other stakeholders*

3.3.2.1 Apart from focus group discussions with parents, in-depth interviews or focus group discussions with other key stakeholders had also been conducted. These stakeholders include:

⁷⁴ Vaughan, Sharon, Schumm, J. S., & Sinagub, J. M. (1996). *Focus Group Interviews in Education and Psychology*, p. 5. Thousand Oaks, CA.: Sage Publications.

- a) School principals and teachers;
- b) Chairpersons or committee members of the PTAs/FPTAs;
- c) School social workers;
- d) Social workers or other staff of integrated children and youth centers and family services centers;
- e) Employers or representatives of employers' associations and professional bodies (e.g., Institute of Human Resources Management);
- f) Representatives of organizations dedicated to parent education;
- g) "Hard-to-reach" parents identified by the school survey;
- h) "Difficult" parents referred by the schools.

3.3.2.2 Focus group discussions and interviews had been conducted with a total of 159 stakeholders, as summarized below:

Stakeholder group	Districts/Sectors	No. of responded schools / organizations	No. of respondents
Principals, teachers and social workers of aided/government primary schools	HK Island/Kln E/Kln W/NTE/NTW	4 (schools) ⁷⁵	19
Principals, teachers and social workers of private primary schools	HK Island/Kln/NT	0 (schools)	0
Principals, teachers and social workers of aided/government secondary schools	HK Island/Kln E/Kln W/NTE/NTW	9 (schools) ⁷⁶	28
Principals, teachers and social workers of private secondary schools	HK Island/Kln/NT	0 (schools)	0
Principals, teachers and social workers of special schools	HK Island/Kln/NT	4 (schools) ⁷⁷	11
Chairpersons or committees members of PTAs/FPTAs	HK Island/Kln E/Kln W/NTE/NTW	10 (schools)	10
Social workers or staff of integrated children and youth centres or integrated family services centres	HK Island/Kln E/Kln W/NTE/NTW	5 (centres)	9
Representatives of organizations dedicated to parent education	–	2 (organizations)	4
Representatives of professional bodies or employers' associations or employers	5 different industry sectors	4 (associations)	4
“Hard-to-reach” parents identified by the survey	HK Island/Kln E/Kln W/NTE/NTW	70 ⁷⁸	70
“Difficult” parents referred by the principals and teachers	HK Island/Kln E/Kln W/NTE/NTW	4	4
Total			159

⁷⁵ These 4 schools include 2 aided schools and 2 government-funded schools.

⁷⁶ These 9 schools include 6 aided schools, 2 government-funded schools and 1 school under direct subsidy scheme.

⁷⁷ These 4 schools are all aided schools.

⁷⁸ Information had been gathered through in-depth interviews using a structured questionnaire, with 20 “hard-to-reach” parents in each of the five districts in Hong Kong.

IV. KEY SURVEY FINDINGS

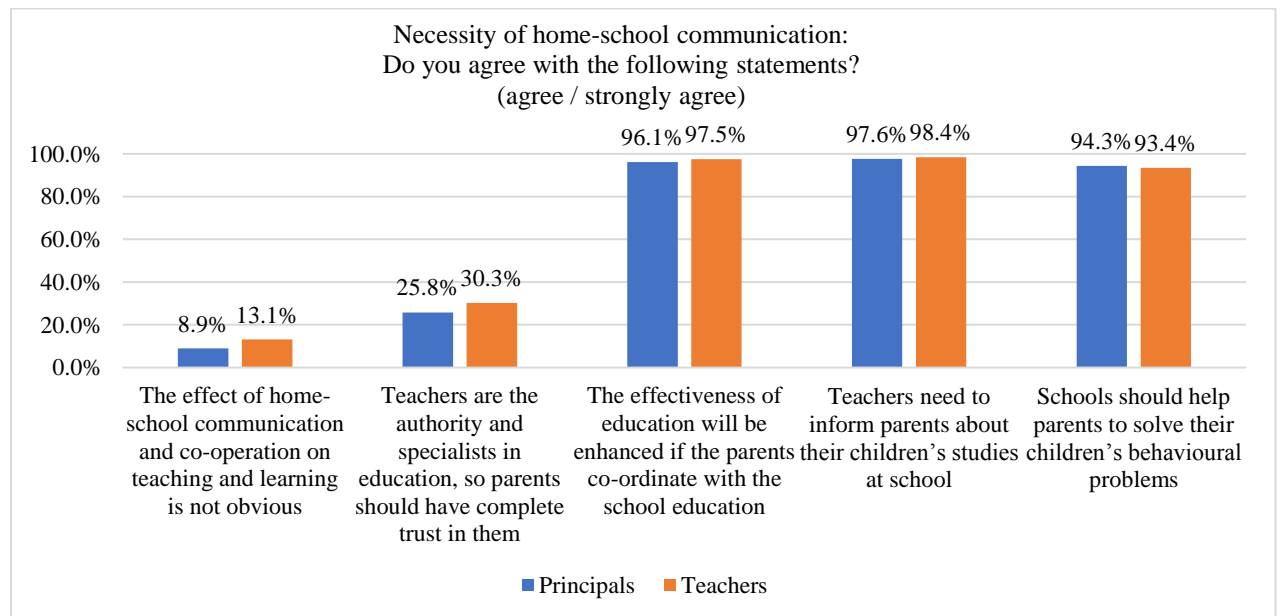
4.1 Perceptions and Attitudes

4.1.1 *Great importance perceived in home-school communication*

Principals' and teachers' opinions

Nearly all principals and teachers believed that home-school communication and co-operation were necessary

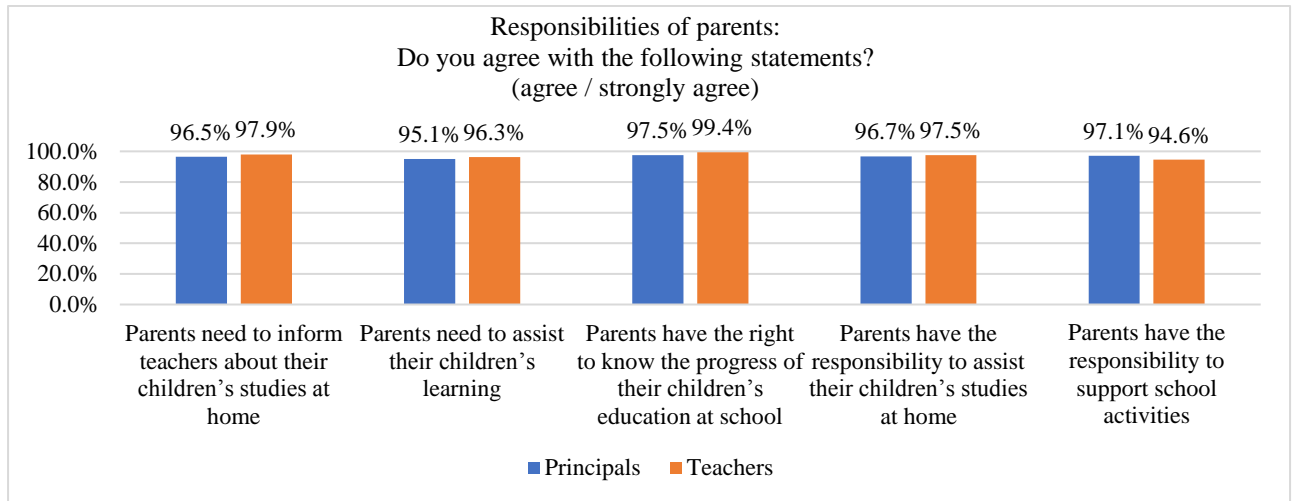
4.1.1.1 The principals and teachers had similar opinions regarding the necessity of home-school communication. Over 96% of the principals and 97% of the teachers believed that the effectiveness of education would be enhanced if parents could co-ordinate with the school education. Few principals and teachers stated the effects of home-school communication and co-operation on teaching and learning were not obvious (principals 8.9%, teachers 13.1%). In addition, nearly all the principals and teachers agreed/strongly agreed that teachers needed to inform parents about their children's studies at school (principals 97.6%, teachers 98.4%). For children's behavioural problems, again, nearly all the principals and teachers agreed/strongly agreed that schools should help parents to solve their children's behavioural problems (principals 94.3%, teachers 93.4%).



Nearly all the principals and teachers believed that parents should shoulder their responsibilities to assist in their children's education

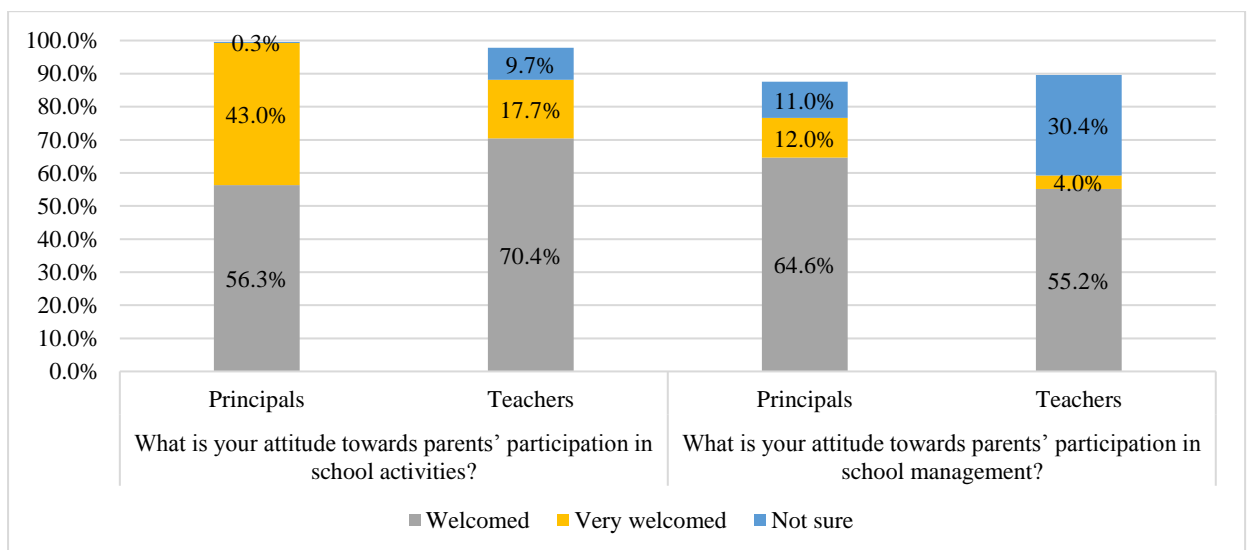
4.1.1.2 The principals and teachers had similar opinions regarding the responsibilities of the parents. A vast majority of the principals and teachers believed that parents should co-operate with the school in their children's education, including informing teachers about their children's studies at home (principals

96.5%, teachers 97.9%), assisting their children’s studies at home (principals 96.7%, teachers 97.5%), assisting their children’s learning (principals 95.1%, teachers 96.3%) and supporting school activities (principals 97.1%, teachers 94.6%). In addition, both the principals (97.5%) and teachers (99.4%) agreed/strongly agreed that parents had the right to know about the progress of their children’s education at school.



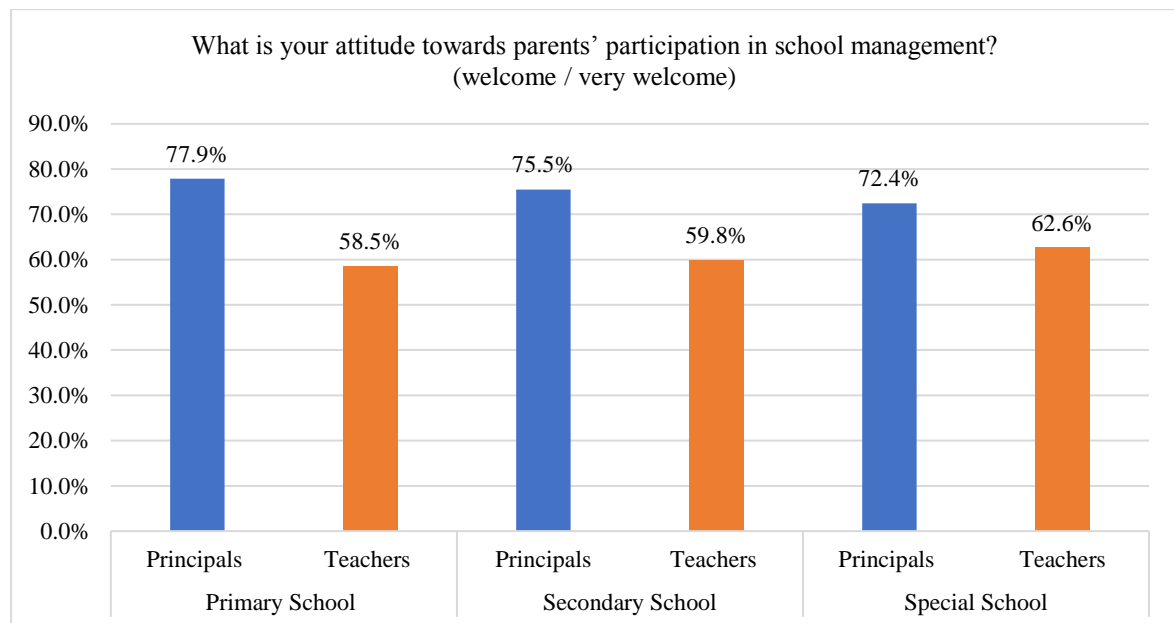
Fewer teachers than principals had a positive attitude towards parents’ involvement

4.1.1.3 A great majority of principals and teachers welcomed/very welcomed parents’ participation in school activities (principals 99.3%, teachers 88.1%), with more principals than teachers having a positive attitude towards parents’ participation in school activities. Among the school management, there was a large gap between the principals and teachers, with 76.6% of the principals but only 59.2% of the teachers welcomed/very welcomed parents’ participating in school management. In addition, there was a larger proportion of teachers who were not sure about the parents’ participation in school management. Also, fewer teachers than principals had a positive attitude towards parents’ participation in school activities and management.



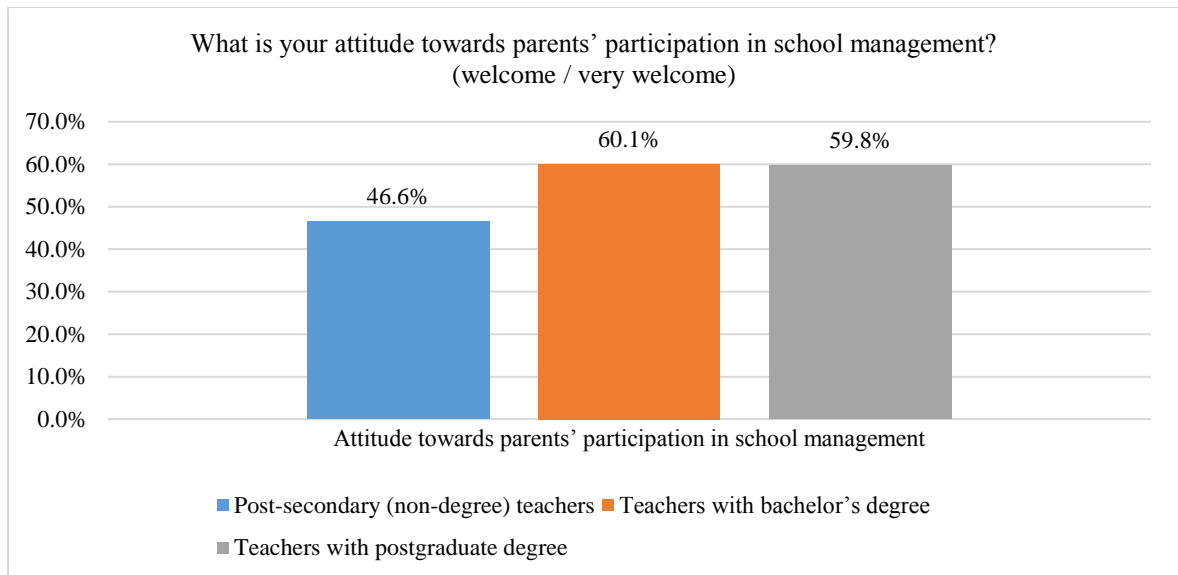
There was a smaller gap between the principals' and teachers' attitude towards parents' involvement in school management in special schools

4.1.1.4 Further analysis of the attitude of principals and teachers towards parents' involvement in school management showed that the large gap between the principals' and teachers' attitudes mainly occurred in primary schools and secondary schools. In primary and secondary schools, significantly more principals (primary 77.9%, secondary 75.5%) than teachers (primary 58.5%, secondary 59.8%) welcomed/very welcomed parents to participate in school management. But the gap between principals and teachers was less in special schools. More than 70% of principals and more than 60% of teachers in special schools welcomed/very welcomed parents to participate in school management (principals 72.4%, teachers 62.6%).



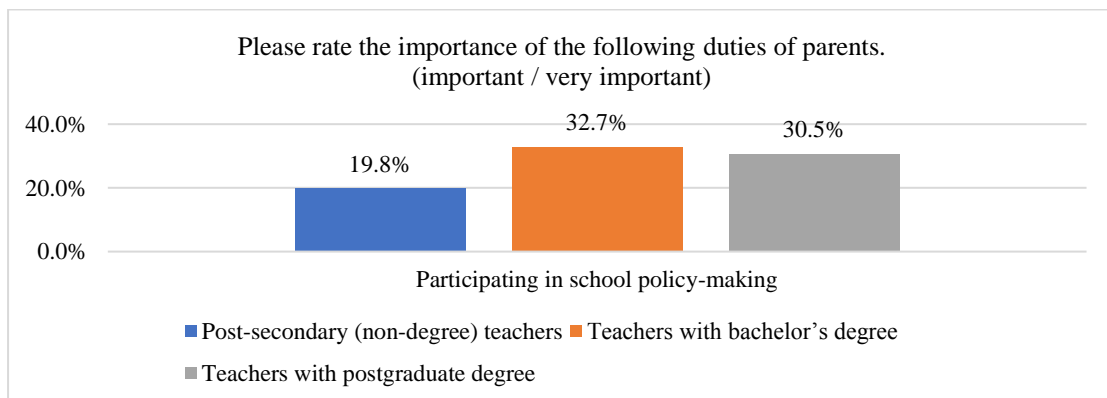
Fewer teachers attaining post-secondary (non-degree) qualification had a positive attitude towards parents' involvement in school management

4.1.1.5 Analyzing by the educational attainment of teachers, the proportion of teachers who had a positive attitude towards parents' participation in school management was the lowest in teachers who had attained post-secondary (non-degree) qualifications (post-secondary (non-degree) teachers 46.6%, teachers with bachelor's degree 60.1%, teachers with postgraduate degree 59.8%). The views of teachers with Bachelor's degrees and postgraduate degrees were close to each other. It seemed that teachers' educational attainment was significantly related to their attitudes to parents' participation in school management.



Few teachers attaining post-secondary (non-degree) qualification believed parents' involvement in school policy-making was important

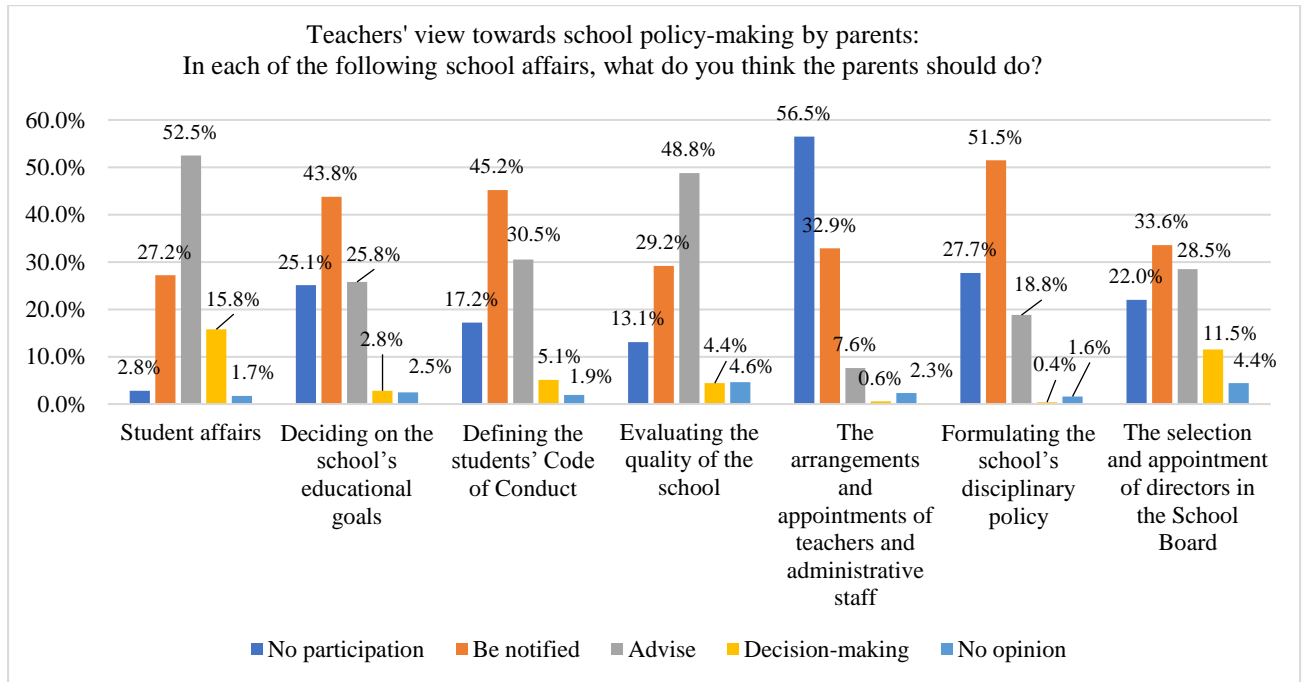
4.1.1.6 Teachers' views on parents' duties might reflect their attitudes towards parents' involvement in school management. According to the importance rated by the teachers, few post-secondary (non-degree) teachers (19.8%) believed that parents' involvement in school policy-making was important. Comparing with different level of educational attainment, their proportion was the least. Views of the teachers with bachelor's degree and postgraduate degree were close to each other (teachers with bachelor's degree 32.7%, teachers with postgraduate degree 30.5%). Teachers' educational attainment was significantly related to their views on parents' involvement in school policy-making.



Most teachers believed that parents should only be notified and should not participate in school policy-making

4.1.1.7 For school policy-making, few teachers believed that parents should be involved in the decision-making process of every aspect of school management. Only half of the teachers believed parents could advise on student affairs (e.g., school lunch, school bus, school uniform, etc.) (52.5%) or evaluate the quality of the school (48.8%). Most teachers did not expect

parents would participate in the arrangement and appointment of teachers and administrative staff.



4.1.1.8 From the above analysis, it was noted that the importance of home-school communication was highly recognized by the school stakeholders in Hong Kong. The discussions with the principals and teachers showed they agreed that parents were partners of the school, and communication between schools and parents were important to help students' growth. For example, they stated:

“Parents are the partners and peers of the school. If parents and school communicate closely, students will benefit from it. The common goal is students' growth.”

4.1.1.9 However, school social workers considered that the opportunities allowed by the school to parents for sharing their opinions on school management were limited. It was not healthy for a two-way home-school communication. One school's social worker said:

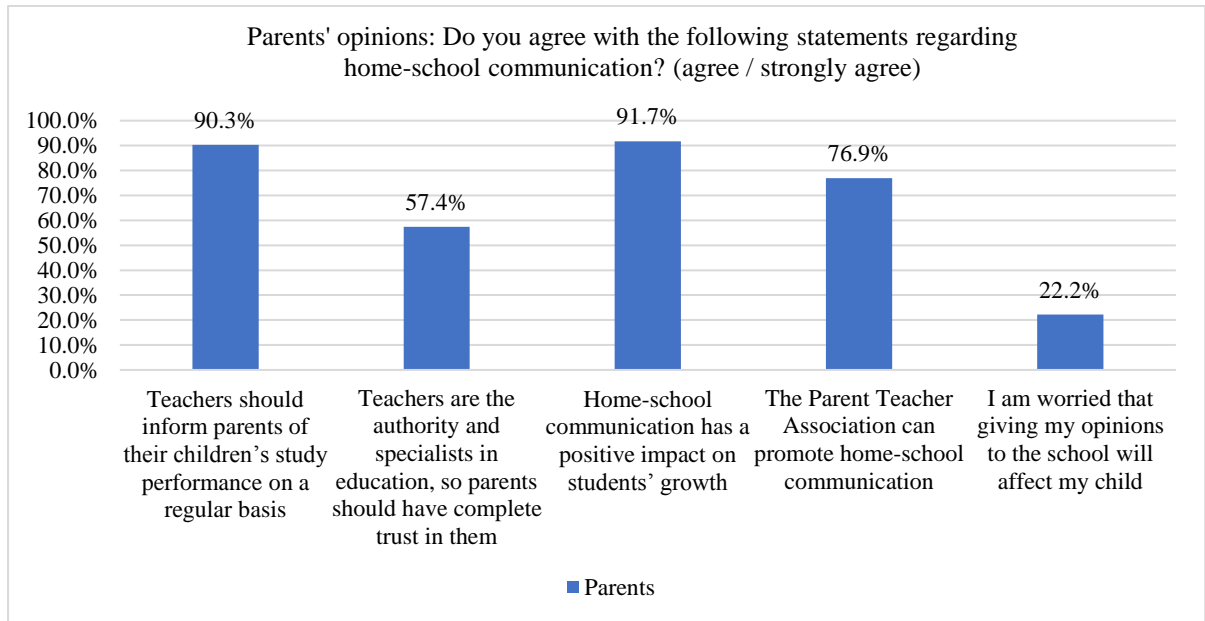
“The weakness is that the current home-school co-operation is nominal, because in many schools, parents are not able to participate in school policy-making.”

Parents' opinions

Generally, parents believed that home-school communication was important

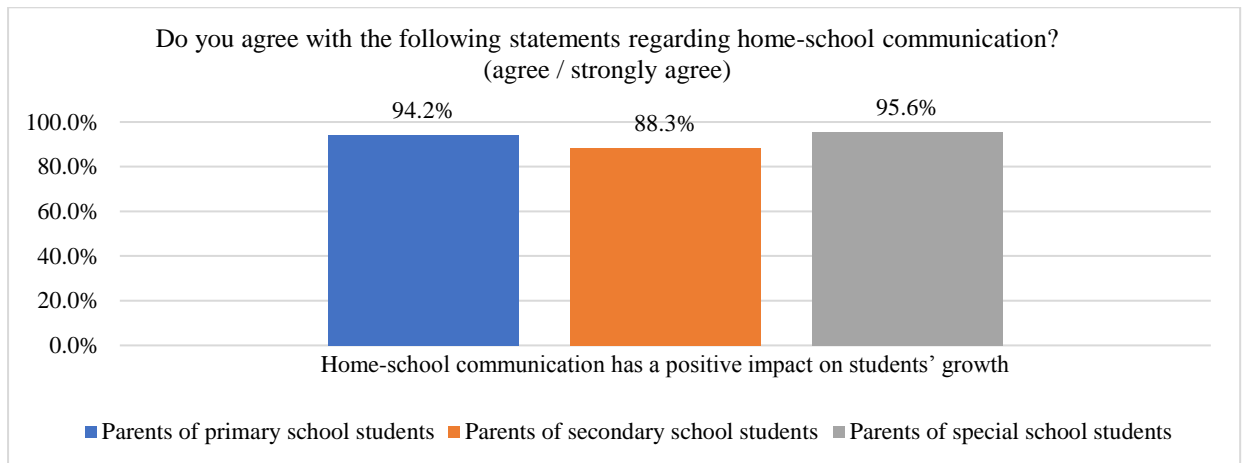
4.1.1.10 Overall, nearly 92% of the parents believed that home-school communication had a positive impact on students' growth. Only about 22% of the parents worried that giving opinions to schools would affect their children. Over 90% of the parents preferred to be informed of their children's study performance by their teachers on a regular basis. For the Parent-Teacher Association (PTA), about 77% of the parents believed that it could promote home-school

communication. Regarding the teacher’s authority, about 57% of the parents agreed or strongly agreed that teachers were the authority and specialists in education, so parents should have complete trust in them.



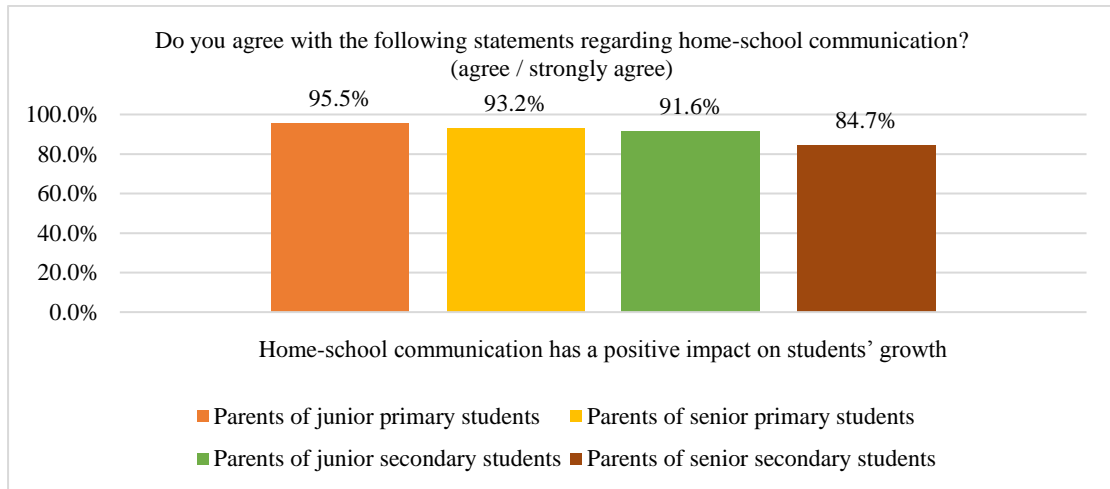
Fewer senior secondary students’ parents had a positive view on home-school communication

4.1.1.11 Parents of students of different types of schools had similar views on home-school communication. Most of them believed that home-school communication had a positive impact on students’ growth. There was no significant difference among the parents of different school types (parents of primary school students 94.2%, parents of secondary school students 88.3%, parents of special school students 95.6%).



4.1.1.12 However, a significantly lower proportion of parents of students of higher school grades believed that home-school communication had a positive impact on students’ growth. The results of the survey on parents showed that there were significantly more parents of junior primary students and fewer parents of senior secondary students agreed that home-school communication had a

positive impact on students' growth (parents of junior primary students 95.5%, parents of senior primary students 93.2%, parents of junior secondary students 91.6%, parents of senior secondary students 84.7%).



Parents could understand their children's situation at school through home-school communication

4.1.1.13 The survey results showed that parents were aware of the importance of home-school communication. In the discussions with parents, they perceived that home-school communication could help them understand more about their children's situation. Parents of students in secondary schools mentioned that they did not know their children's situation at school as their children behaved differently at home. They discovered that home-school communication could let them know more about their children's situation at school. Some parents said:

“If we have no any communication with the school, we would not know about every aspect of our children at school.”

“Home-school communication could help us understand our children's school life and growth.”

“We could know about the difficulties faced by our children through home-school communication, which would also enhance parent-child communication.”

4.1.1.14 In the discussions, the chairpersons of the PTAs and parents associations explained why most parents believed home-school communication had a positive impact on students' growth. The parents believed that home-school communication could help them understand their children's performance at school. It could also help teachers understand the student's lives and habits at home. It would be beneficial to parenting and school education.

“A child's performance at home and at school is very different. Parents lack understanding about their children's performance at school, and the teachers do not understand the situation of their students at home.”

“Parents can know the difficulties faced by their children at school and improve parent-child communication.”

4.1.2 It is a must for home-school co-operation

Parents and teachers could co-operate to educate the children

4.1.2.1 A PTA chairperson indicated that parents and teachers could educate the children together via home-school communication. As parents and teachers had the same goal concerning the children’s development, parents could adopt teachers’ teaching method. The children’s academic performance and moral development would be improved as a result.

“The aim of home-school communication is to allow parents and schools to educate students together, both in the academic performance and the moral aspect.”

“If schools and parents can co-operate with each other and consolidate the communication bridge, it will benefit greatly the education and development of children.”

4.1.2.2 The principals and teachers agreed that it was important for parents to communicate with school to help student’s growth.

“Parents can co-operate with teachers, using teachers’ methods to improve their children’s academic and emotional well-being. It requires parent-teacher communication.”

4.1.3 School’s attitude in home-school communication

Responding to parents’ requests promptly/Promptness in responding to matters

4.1.3.1 Better home school co-operation could help resolve potential conflicts between schools and parents, especially those with SEN children. Case studies show that different approaches led to different outcomes.

4.1.3.2 As an example of successful cases, the school followed up the opinions of a parent with dyslexia child promptly, referring the case to university professionals. The parent also realized the need for parental involvement and avoided imposing his views on the school’s arrangement.

School’s attitude also important

4.1.3.3 School’s attitude was critical, especially in dealing with hard-to-reach parents. Case studies showed that negative attitude exhibited by schools deterred parents from communicating with schools.

4.1.3.4 From the case study, the parent emphasized that:

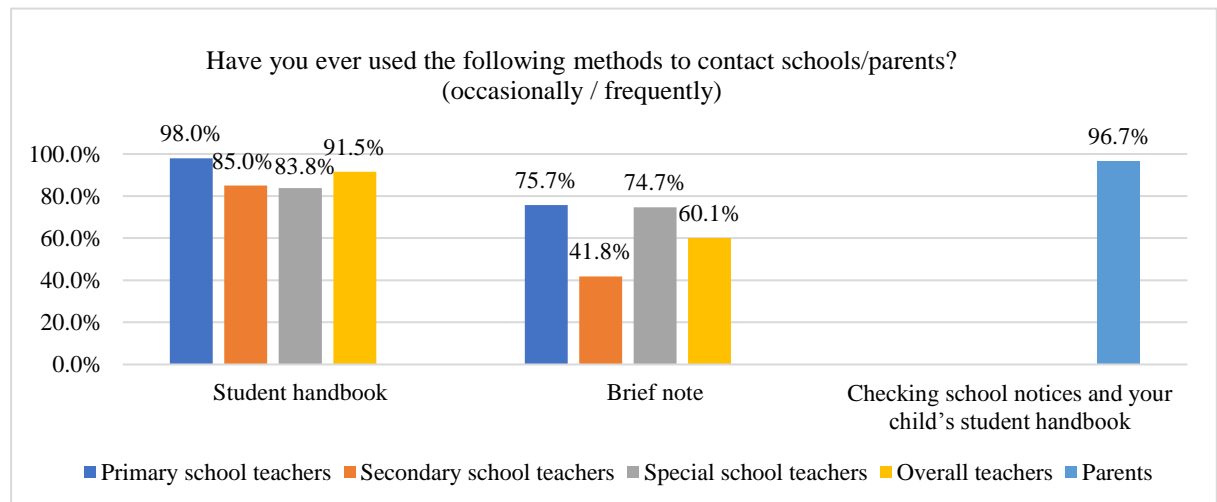
“The reason for not participating in school activities is teacher’s wording. The teacher concluded that her child would have no chance to enter the university, just because of his dissatisfactory academic results.”

4.2 Modes of communication between schools and parents

4.2.1 Wide use of traditional communication methods

Written communication

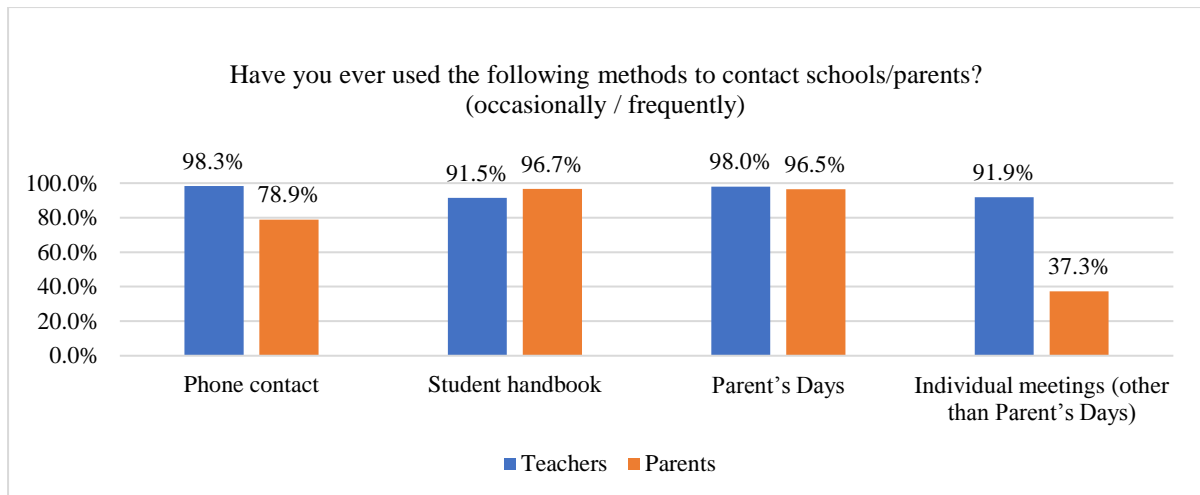
4.2.1.1 Overall, the majority of teachers (91.5%) used student handbooks for communication with parents, and nearly all the parents checked school notices and their children’s student handbooks either occasionally or frequently (96.7%). In secondary schools, fewer teachers used brief notes for communication with parents (primary 75.7%, secondary 41.8%, special 74.7%).



Phone contacts and face-to-face communication

Most teachers and parents used two-way communication

4.2.1.2 The teachers and parents reflected that their schools had used two-way communication frequently. The communication methods included phone contacts (teachers 98.3%, parents 78.9%) and Parent’s Days (teachers 98.0%, parents 96.5%). Compared with the teachers, few parents occasionally or frequently used individual meetings (teachers 91.9%, parents 37.3%) for communication. Apart from the individual meetings, the majority of teachers and parents used the traditional two-way communication methods.



Face-to-face communication was highly preferred by parents

4.2.1.3 Traditional modes of communication were still prevalent among principals, teachers and parents. During the discussions with parents, teachers and principals, it was discovered that parents would like to be contacted by phone calls for serious issues and for invitation to participate in activities. Phone contacts were the most direct way of communication. Both parents and teachers believed face-to-face communication was the most effective communication method. They considered that face-to-face contact allowed immediate response and thus was most efficient:

“In terms of efficiency and speed, phone call is the most direct method.”

“Once the children get into trouble, we will call their parents.”

“Face-to-face communication and phone contacts could allow immediate response.”

“Face-to-face communication could help deal with the issues immediately.”

4.2.1.4 Furthermore, face-to-face communication could avoid misunderstanding as parents and teachers could observe the tone and mood of each other as they communicated. Therefore, face-to-face communication was preferred to be used for important and deep conversations.

“It is suitable for deep conversations.”

“If we would like to talk about specific issues, we prefer to talk face-to-face.”

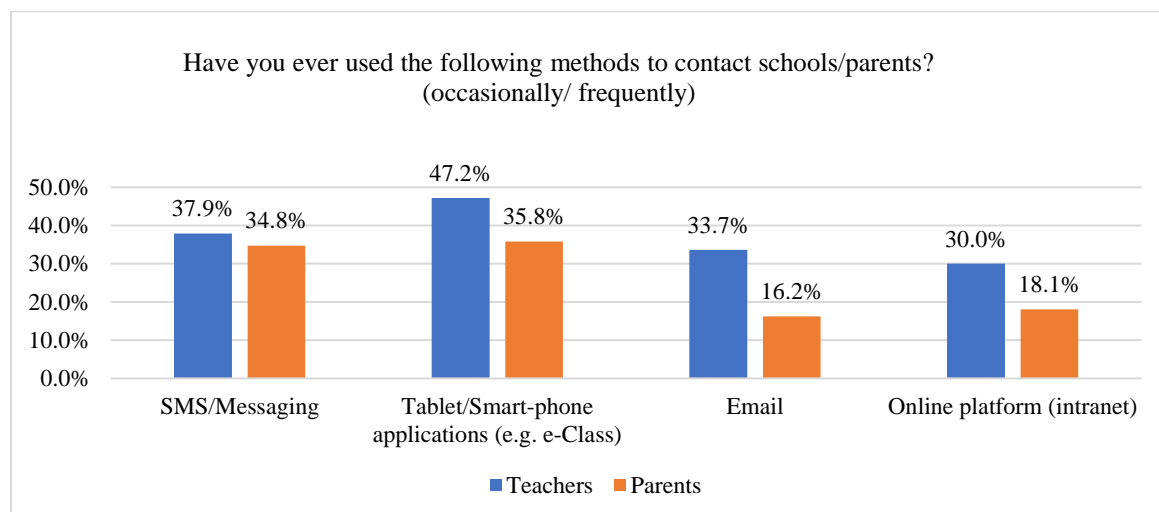
“It is better to have face-to-face detailed communication.”

4.2.2 *Increasing use of technology to facilitate communication*

Use of technology

Less than half of the teachers and parents used electronic methods to communicate with each other

4.2.2.1 The use of electronic methods, such as SMS/Messaging, tablet/smart phone applications, emails and online platforms (Intranet), were not prevalent in the communication between teachers and parents. The electronic methods that were used by the fewest parents and fewest teachers were email (teachers 33.7%, parents 16.2%) and online platforms (teachers 30.0%, parents 18.1%) respectively. Tablet/smart phone applications (e.g., the e-Class) were used by the largest proportion of parents and teachers (teachers 47.2%, parents 35.8%). However, none of the electronic methods was either occasionally or frequently used by over half of the teachers or parents.



Analysis of WhatsApp

Use of WhatsApp was more prevalent for parent-to-parent communication

4.2.2.2 It was also found that parents and the school mainly used WhatsApp as the SMS/messaging tool. Many respondents of secondary schools mentioned that they had set up WhatsApp groups for the PTA and parents. Most likely teachers were not involved in the WhatsApp groups. A few parents and teachers had privately used WhatsApp groups for communication between themselves. They said that the WhatsApp groups were not arranged by the school, but were organized voluntarily by the parents. Some PTA members mentioned:

“There are WhatsApp groups among us (PTA members), one for the committee, and also one for each working group.”

“The PTA has set up a WhatsApp group for all members of the PTA and the parents of Form 1 students.”

“The parents and the responsible teachers in the PTA have formed a WhatsApp group.”

- 4.2.2.3 The parents and teachers of secondary schools had spoken about WhatsApp groups for parents. The group most likely did not involve any teacher, and the parent representatives would reflect the opinions collected from the group to the school.

“Each class has a WhatsApp group for parents. There is no teacher in the group. The class representative in each class would reflect the concerns raised in the WhatsApp group to the PTA.”

- 4.2.2.4 However, some primary school parents reported that the principal was involved in the WhatsApp groups instead of the teachers.

“There was a WhatsApp group which includes the principal but excludes the teachers. The principal would pass the messages to the teachers.”

- 4.2.2.5 Parents and teachers would send WhatsApp messages to each other individually if they were in good relationship. A parent of a primary school said:

“Only the parents who have good relationships with the class teacher would communicate with the class teacher through the WhatsApp individually.”

“The class teacher and parents are in a WhatsApp group for exchanging information among themselves.”

WhatsApp was used for circulating news about PTA affairs, student affairs and school activities

- 4.2.2.6 The main purpose of using WhatsApp was to disseminate news about PTA affairs, student affairs and school activities. Some secondary school parents had mentioned how they discussed PTA affairs through the WhatsApp group. They also voted on PTA affairs, promoted PTA activities and reflected the parents’ opinions to the school by the WhatsApp.

“We would discuss and vote on PTA affairs through the WhatsApp groups.”

“We promote PTA activities in the WhatsApp groups for parents.”

- 4.2.2.7 Some secondary school principals and parents mentioned how they had exchanged information about students, such as their attendance, homework, etc., using WhatsApp:

“Parents will be informed about students’ specific issues via messaging, for example, students’ absence from school.”

“If we have doubts about our children's homework, we can ask their teachers directly via private messaging.”

“The teacher had expressed his concern and caring via WhatsApp when my child was admitted to the hospital and did not attend the school.”

“If we received complaints such as the fading of the school coat, we would immediately send information via the WhatsApp group to inform the parents how to handle the problem.”

- 4.2.2.8 Some special school parents said that teachers had sent photos about students’ learning to parents via WhatsApp, with the aim of letting parents understand their children’s growth and abilities.

“The teacher would take photos of our children at school and send the photos to us via WhatsApp.”

- 4.2.2.9 Some primary, secondary and special schools would encourage the parents via WhatsApp to join school activities. They would also remind parents to participate in the activities. The school would also use WhatsApp to promote and announce other school activities.

“The school often sends WhatsApp messages to parents, in order to promote PTA activities and remind parents to attend.”

“The school will notify parents about school activities via WhatsApp in order to estimate the participation rate.”

- 4.2.2.10 A secondary school teacher talked about the announcement of school activities via WhatsApp:

“The school would announce information about school activities via WhatsApp.”

Parents and schools used WhatsApp because it was efficient

- 4.2.2.11 Few teachers and parents in secondary schools mentioned that WhatsApp was an efficient communication method. Sometimes parents were busy with their work, and they could not contact the school by phone frequently. WhatsApp would allow them to send messages immediately whenever they wished and read the messages whenever they were free. WhatsApp would also encourage parents to give opinions:

“Due to their work, parents might not be able to take the phone call in time. Messaging is more direct and faster to handle.”

“WhatsApp is very convenient. You can know that your teacher has read the message and you do not need to respond immediately.”

“Some parents are afraid of face-to-face communication, but they dare to express their opinions via WhatsApp.”

- 4.2.2.12 Some school principals further explained why using WhatsApp was an efficient way to communicate. They believed that WhatsApp could fulfil parents’ expectations in terms of efficiency in response. Parents would like the school to reply and follow up their inquiries as soon as possible.

“WhatsApp is an effective communication method. Parents usually expect the school to reply and follow up their inquiries immediately. WhatsApp allows their message to be delivered to the school quickly.”

“WhatsApp is an effective platform in this electronic age, when responding fast is required.”

Parents and schools did NOT use WhatsApp to avoid misunderstanding

4.2.2.13 Some respondents worried that misunderstanding might be caused in the communication via WhatsApp, as unclear wordings in a message might cause misinterpretation, thus leading to ineffective communication. For example, a few teachers and parents of secondary schools said:

“WhatsApp may lead to misunderstanding among different parties. There is a chance that the message may be interpreted out of context.”

“The text in WhatsApp is unidirectional and is easy to cause misunderstanding.”

Parents and schools did NOT use WhatsApp because it might disturb teachers

4.2.2.14 Few parents in primary and secondary schools were concerned about teachers' workload and privacy issues when using WhatsApp. Using WhatsApp would require teachers to spend more time and effort to respond to parents. Furthermore, teachers' private phone numbers would be disclosed to parents, and this might be disturbing to teachers.

“WhatsApp is not good for teachers, as it will increase the workload of teachers. Teachers need time to rest.”

“Parents should not have teachers' personal phone numbers. We don't want to bother teachers unless it is urgent.”

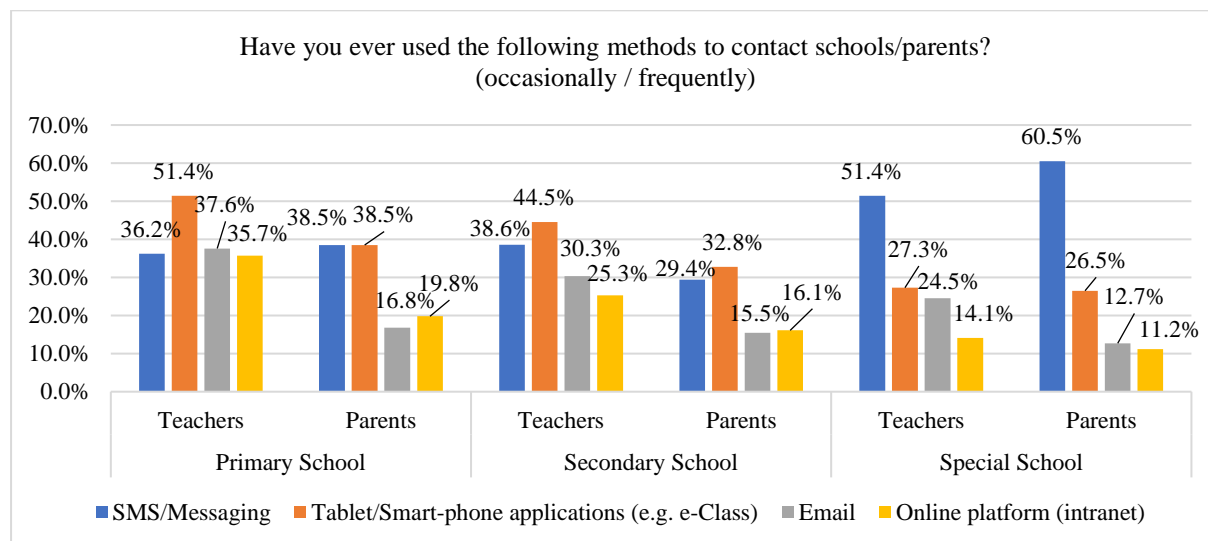
4.2.2.15 Some principals of special schools further mentioned the professionalism of teachers would be affected by using WhatsApp. They were afraid that teachers might lose the professional distance between parents and teachers, and it might also lead to parents' over-dependence on teachers. As a result, they did not encourage their teachers to use WhatsApp as a communication method with parents.

“At present, online communication, such as WhatsApp, is very convenient, but it will be easy for teachers to lose their 'professional distance'. It is also easy for parents to be over-dependent on teachers, and the relationship and boundary between parents and teachers will become blurred. Therefore, if it is not necessary, our school does not encourage our teachers to use WhatsApp.”

Analysis of SMS/Messaging

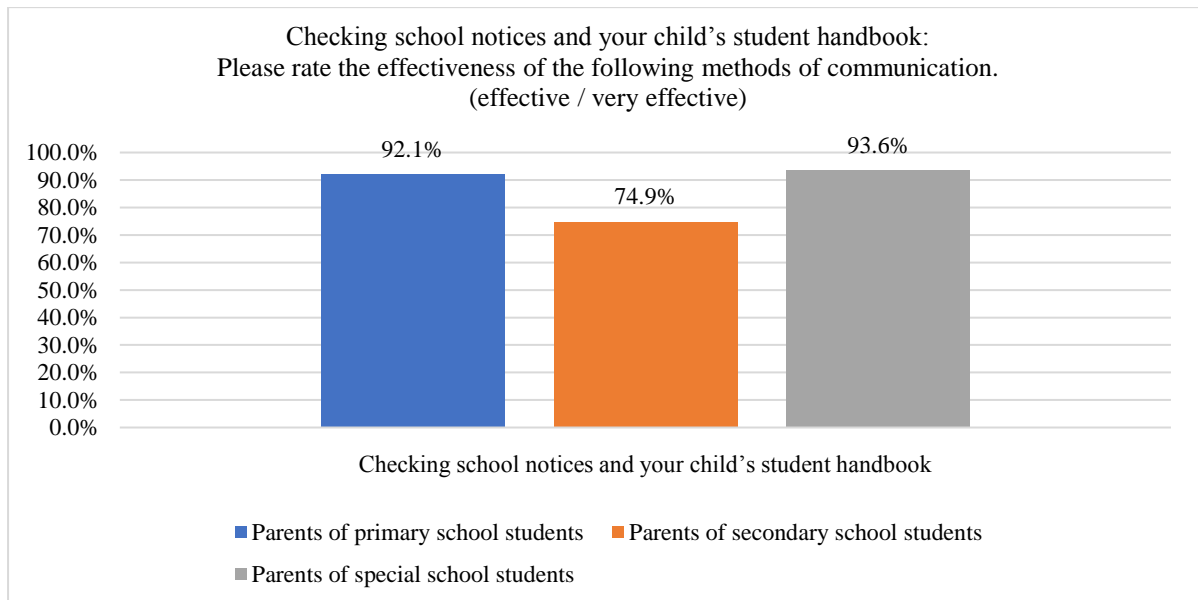
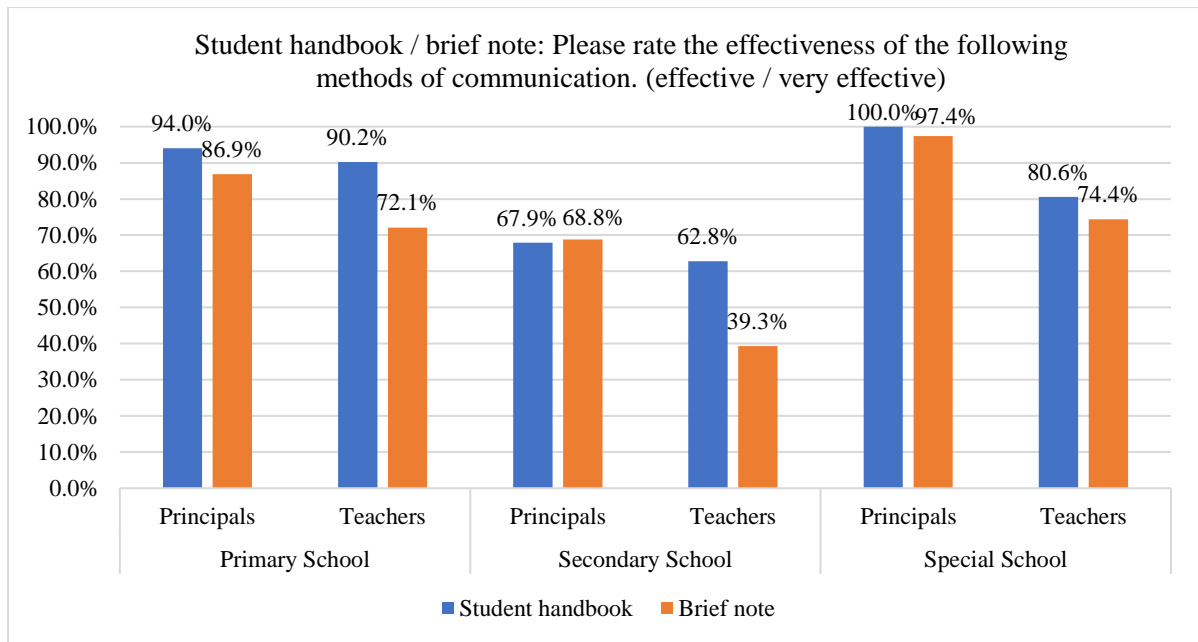
More frequent use of SMS and other messaging methods by teachers and parents of special schools

4.2.2.16 In special schools, most parents and teachers used SMS or other messaging methods for communication between parents and teachers (teachers 51.4%, parents 60.5%). A significantly lower proportion of special school parents and teachers used tablet/smart-phone applications (e.g., the e-Class) for communication between parents and teachers (teachers 27.3%, parents 26.5%). Much fewer special school parents and teachers used the email or online platforms for communication between parents and teachers.



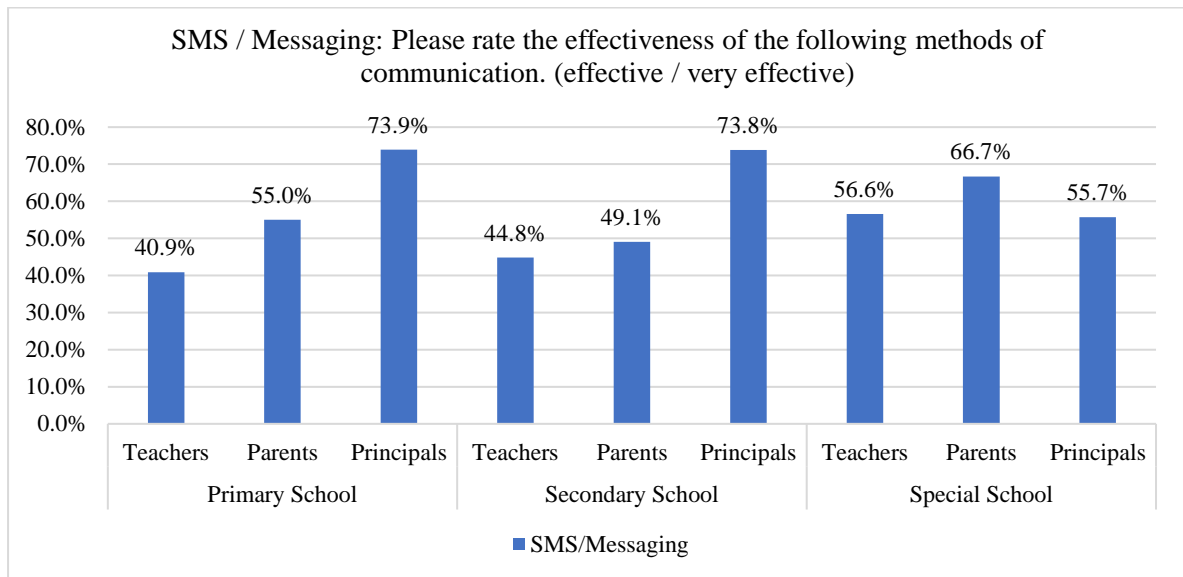
More principals, teachers and parents of secondary schools considered written communication ineffective

4.2.2.17 Fewer principals and teachers of secondary schools than primary and special schools considered that the student handbook (principals 67.9%, teachers 62.8%) and brief note (principals 68.8%, teachers 39.3%) were effective or very effective in home-school communication. Similar views existed for parents of secondary schools. Fewer parents of secondary schools than primary and special schools thought that checking school notices and their children’s student handbooks (74.9%) were effective or very effective in home-school communication.



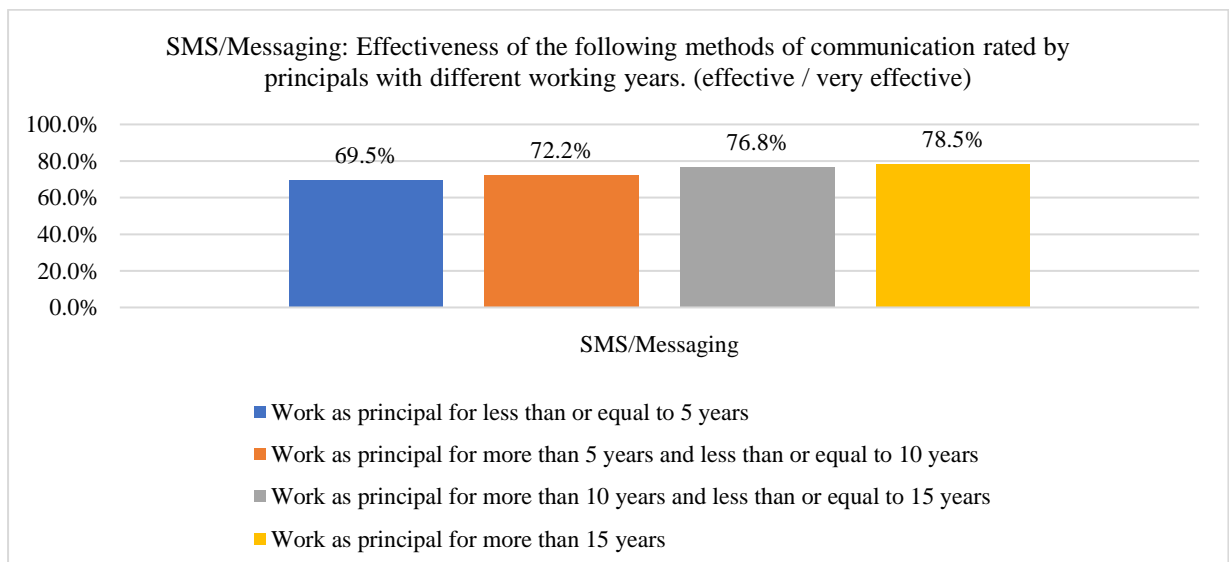
The effectiveness of SMS/Messaging in communication was in doubt

4.2.2.18 Comparing with the effectiveness of SMS / Messaging rated by the principals, teachers and parents, there was a significant gap between primary and secondary schools. Nearly 74% of the principals of both primary and secondary schools believed that SMS/Messaging was effective or very effective in home-school communication. However, only less than half of the teachers and around half of the parents of both primary and secondary schools agreed that SMS/Messaging was effective or very effective in home-school communication. In special schools, around 67% of the parents, and less than 60% of the teachers and principals perceived that SMS/Messaging was effective or very effective in home-school communication. It showed that there were contrasting opinions among the principals as well as teachers and parents regarding the effectiveness of SMS/Messaging in home-school communication.



More experienced principals believed in the effectiveness of SMS/Messaging

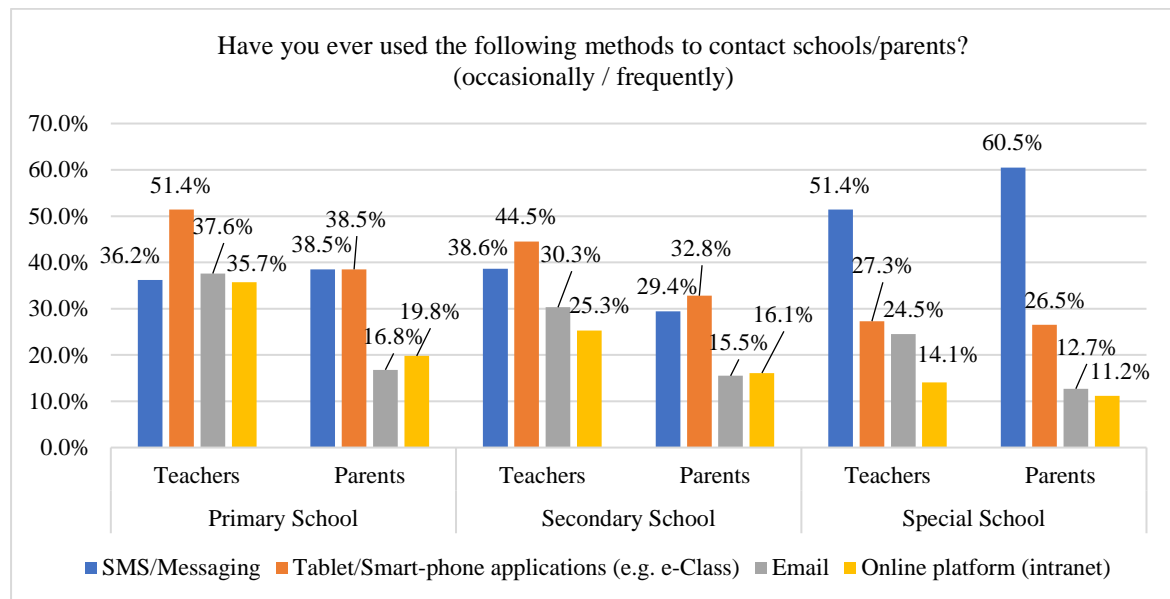
4.2.2.19 Further analysis on the principals' length of working experience found that a higher proportion of the more experienced principals perceived that SMS/Messaging was effective or very effective in home-school communication. Comparing with the other groups, the group of principals who had been in the position of the principal for more than 15 years had the largest proportion (78.5%) believing that SMS/Messaging was effective or very effective in home-school communication.



Analysis of tablet/smart-phone applications

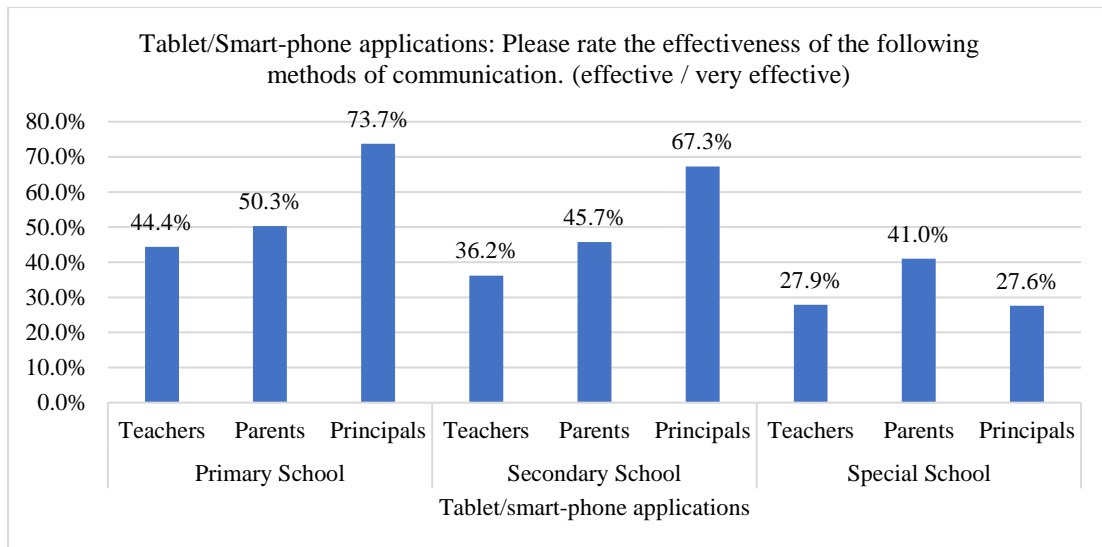
More frequent use of tablet/smart-phone applications by teachers and parents in primary and secondary schools

4.2.2.20 Compared with special schools, primary schools and secondary schools tended to use tablet/smart-phone applications (e.g. e-Class) more frequently. Among the other means (such as SMS, emails or online platforms), the most used electronic method by parents and teachers was tablet/smart-phone applications. About 51.4% of the primary school teachers used tablet/smart-phone applications, compared with the 38.5% of the primary school parents. In the case of secondary schools, about 44.5% of the teachers used tablet/smart-phone applications occasionally or frequently compared with the 32.8% of the secondary school parents. In the case of special schools, about 60.5% of the teachers used tablet/smart-phone applications occasionally or frequently compared with the 26.5% of the secondary school parents.



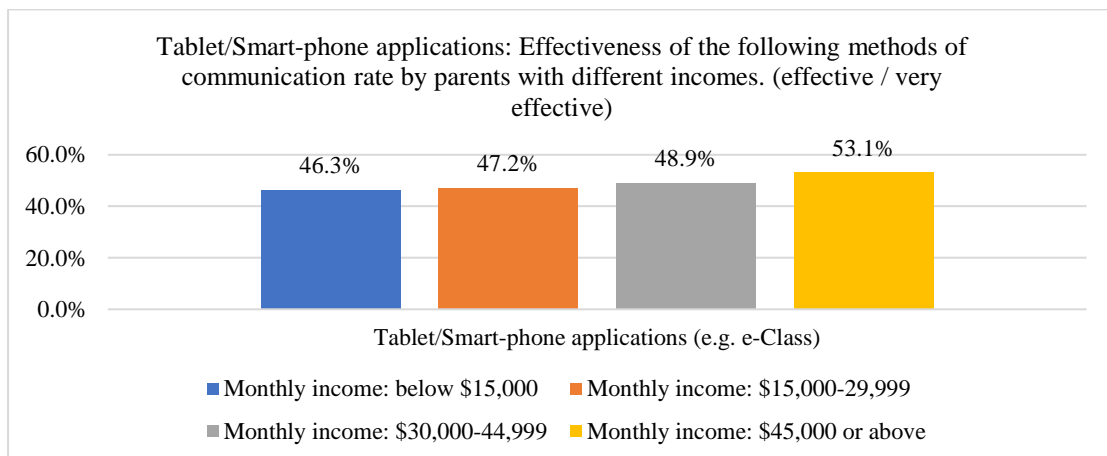
Special schools did not consider tablet/smart-phone applications effective

4.2.2.21 Rating the effectiveness of tablet/smart-phone applications by principals, teachers and parents, there was a significant gap between the opinions of primary/secondary schools and special schools. About 70% of the primary/secondary school principals believed that tablet/smart-phone applications were effective or very effective in home-school communication. Around 36–50% of the teachers and parents of primary/secondary schools agreed with this. In special schools, however, significantly fewer principals and teachers believed that tablet/smart-phone applications were effective or very effective in home-school communication (principals 27.6%, teachers 27.9%). The proportion of special school parents who agreed with this was slightly less than that of primary/secondary school parents (41.0%). It showed that, in the eyes of principals and teachers, tablet/smart-phone applications were relatively not effective in home-school communication of special schools.



Parents with higher income level believed more in the effectiveness of tablet/smart-phone applications

4.2.2.22 Analyzing the income level of parents indicated a trend that a larger proportion of parents with higher income level perceived that tablet/smart-phone applications were effective or very effective in home-school communication. As the parents’ income increase, they were more likely to trust in the effectiveness of tablet/smart phone applications in home-school communication (53.1%).



More tablet/smart-phone applications were being developed

4.2.2.23 Recently, few secondary schools had started to develop tablet/smartphone applications, such as e-Class. Some secondary school teachers and principals talked about their own development of tablet/smartphone applications:

“Our school will launch an application, ‘e-Notice’, in the coming year, but we are still using the traditional paper notices at present.”

“In the past two years, there have been ‘e-Class’ and ‘e-APP’ applications. Parents can now receive school information at any time.”

4.2.2.24 Some secondary school parents mentioned that primary schools had already used tablet/smartphone applications, but they were still new to secondary schools.

“The secondary schools have not fully used the online platforms, but the primary schools have done so already.”

Tablet/smart-phone applications were used for announcing information and students’ school performance

4.2.2.25 In secondary schools, tablet/smart-phone applications were mainly used for disseminating information to parents, such as class suspensions, school notices and school activities. Parents could also reply via these applications, especially when there were sudden changes to some events. The principals and teachers in secondary schools shared their use of these mobile applications:

“Notices will be uploaded to e-Class, and other information will be sent to parents via the apps. We have also tried to release information on class suspension via the apps.”

“If an activity is cancelled, we can use the app to inform the parents. In the past, you had to phone them one by one.”

4.2.2.26 Some secondary schools had also used tablet/smart-phone applications to report students’ performance at school, such as their attendance, homework records, examination results, etc. Some parents and teachers in secondary schools shared their experience about such use:

“There is an app for releasing to parents information on, for example, weather, exams, and rewards and punishments given to students.”

“The parents can watch the growth of their children at school via the system, including their behaviour records from Form 1 to Form 6 as well as the records of their academic achievements.”

Some special schools used tablet/smart-phone applications to report the students’ performance at school and upload learning materials

4.2.2.27 Parents could leave encouraging messages to their children through tablet/smart-phone applications. Some parents in special school shared their experience of using tablet/smart-phone applications.

“We have an online platform where parents can review students’ performance and leave encouraging messages to their children.”

“There is an online platform where teachers can upload learning materials.”

Primary and secondary schools used tablet/smart-phone applications because they could save time

4.2.2.28 Many principals and teachers in primary and secondary schools had mentioned that tablet/smart-phone applications could lessen their workload and save their

time in printing paper notices. The applications could also let the school inform parents on school matters immediately and quickly.

“The tablet/smart-phone applications will reduce the work and time in printing paper notices.”

“Online platforms are faster and more convenient to use for spreading information.”

“We have saved time in contacting parents after launching the mobile app.”

Primary and secondary schools used tablet/smart-phone applications for a higher penetration rate to parents

4.2.2.29 Before using the tablet/smart-phone applications, schools used paper notices to disseminate information to parents. However, parents might not see the notices, probably because students did not pass the notices to their parents, or parents had a low motivation for being involved in their children’s school life. Some principals and teachers of primary and secondary schools explained why the access rate of paper notices to parents was lower than that of tablet/smart-phone applications:

“In the past, after a teacher had released a notice, it is difficult for him/her to know whether parents had received the notice or not, because some students might not give it to their parents.”

“Electronic notices are more effective than paper notices because some parents sometimes do not read paper notices.”

4.2.2.30 Some parents also shared that their children had lost school notices. Therefore, they preferred to use tablet/smart-phone applications to ensure the notices would not be lost.

“Using the e-Class to receive notices would reduce the chance of students losing the notices.”

4.2.2.31 Using tablet/smart-phone applications could allow teachers to know which parent had not read the notices and to follow-up accordingly. Some primary school teachers shared their experience:

“After launching the mobile app, we can check which parents have read the notices. We can then follow-up with those who did not. No parent will be missed.”

Primary and secondary schools did NOT used tablet/smart-phone applications because they were not comprehensive enough

4.2.2.32 Some parents in primary and secondary schools had mentioned that the current tablet/smart-phone applications allowed only one-way communication. Parents could not raise questions or give opinions through the applications. It would reduce the motivation of parents for using them.

“The e-Class only provides a place for signature. There is no way for parents to respond and comment.”

“The e-Class cannot be used for communication purposes, because parents cannot respond or ask questions through it. It is just a one-way platform.”

Primary and secondary schools did NOT use tablet/smart-phone applications because of the backgrounds of the parents

4.2.2.33 Some primary school principals had mentioned that parents’ educational attainment was a factor in using tablet/smart-phone applications. They believed that more educated parents, compared with those who were less educated, would use tablet/smart-phone applications as the communication method.

“The choice of whether to use electronic or paper notices depends on the parents’ educational attainment, and parents who have higher levels of education can communicate using electronic methods.”

4.2.2.34 Some primary school parents had commented that the elder parents might not be able to use the mobile applications, because they might not know how to use them.

“At present, all notices are issued through mobile phones, but the older parents will easily forget to check the notices.”

4.2.2.35 Some primary and secondary school principals had also mentioned that they would keep using paper notices because it might not be convenient or even viable for some parents to use tablets or smart-phones. They had to confirm with every parent if they had received the information, whether on the tablets/smart-phones or paper.

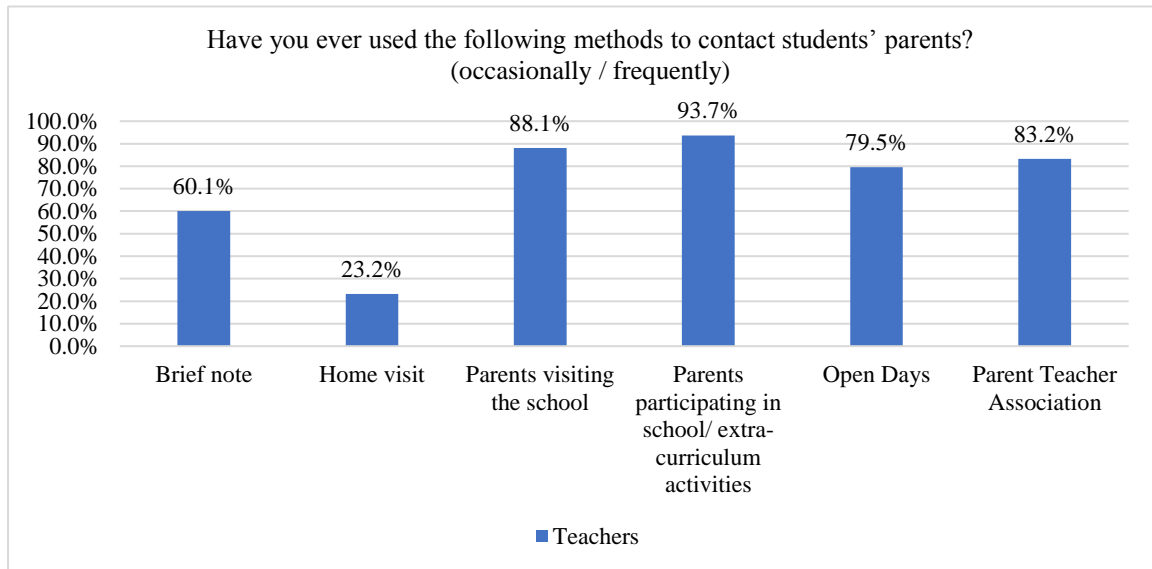
“There are still paper notices, as not all parents will adopt the e-Class platform. Some parents may even not be able to use smart-phones.”

4.2.3 ***Adoption of home visits***

Home visit was beneficial to understanding students’ needs but was not common yet

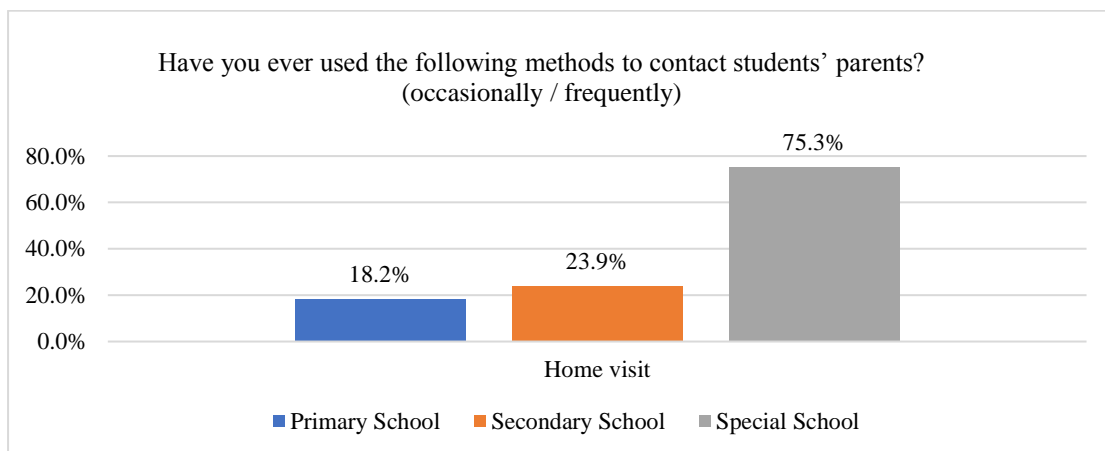
Home visit was not a common communication method used by teachers

4.2.3.1 Apart from the above methods, teachers also used other special methods to contact parents such as home visits, parents visiting the school, parents participating in school/extra-curriculum activities, Open Days and the Parent Teacher Association. Only about 23% of the teachers used home visits as a communication method. The majority of teachers communicated with parents when they were at school. Different channels had been provided including parents visiting the school (88.1%), parents participating in school/extra-curriculum activities (93.7%), Open Days (79.5%) and the Parent Teacher Association (83.2%). It might be noted that only a few teachers conducted home visits.



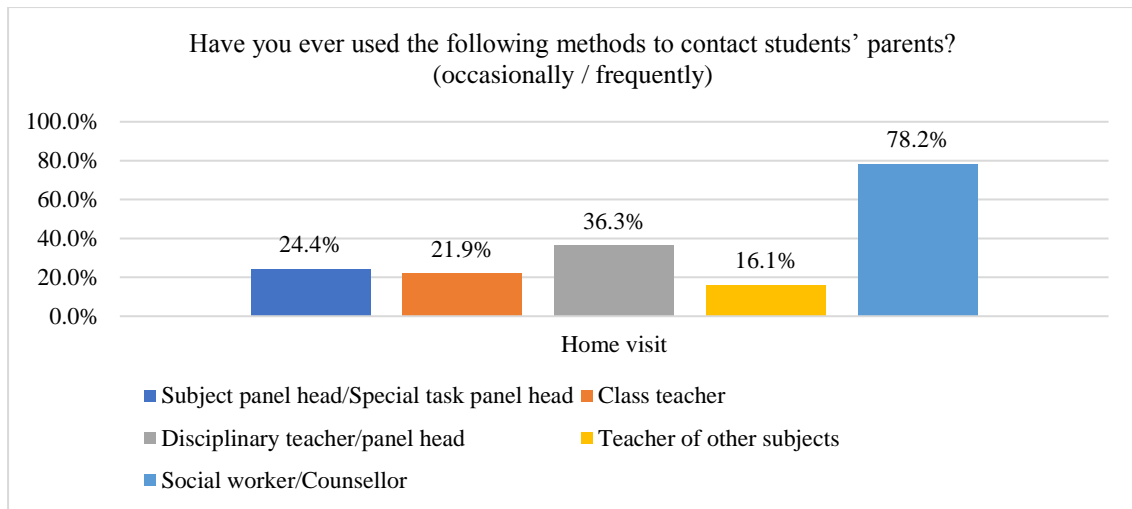
More frequent use of home visits by teachers in special schools

4.2.3.2 Significantly more special school teachers had conducted home visits (75.3%). The least group of teachers using home visits was primary school teachers (18.2%). It is found that home visits were commonly used among the special schools.



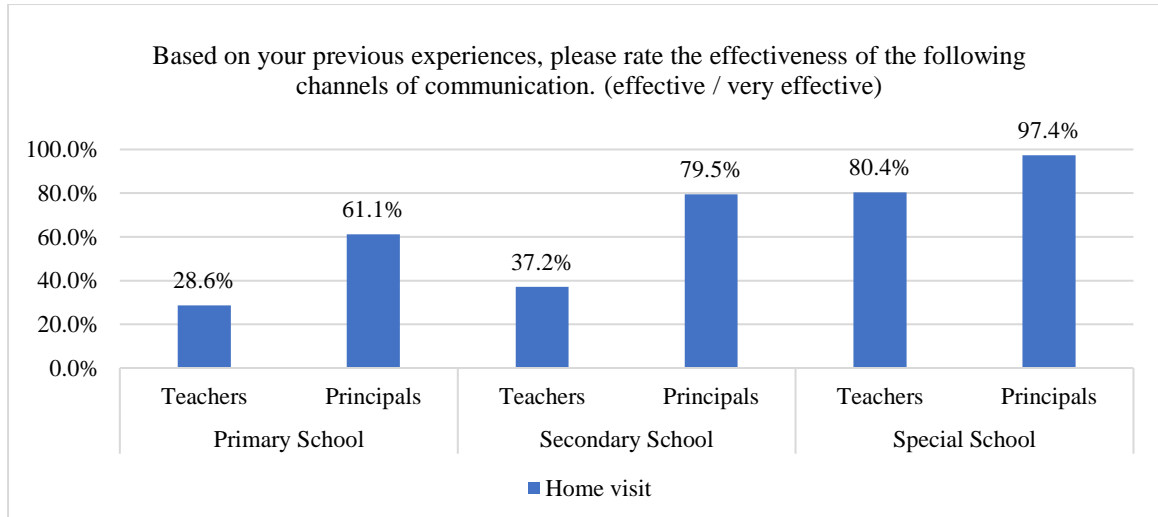
Home visits were mainly conducted by social workers/counsellors

4.2.3.3 Among the teachers of different positions, subject teachers were the smallest group (16.1%) who had conducted home visits. A lower proportion of class teachers (21.9%) than disciplinary teachers/panel heads (36.3%) had conducted home visits. The largest group of staff in the school who had conducted home visits was social workers/counsellors (78.2%).



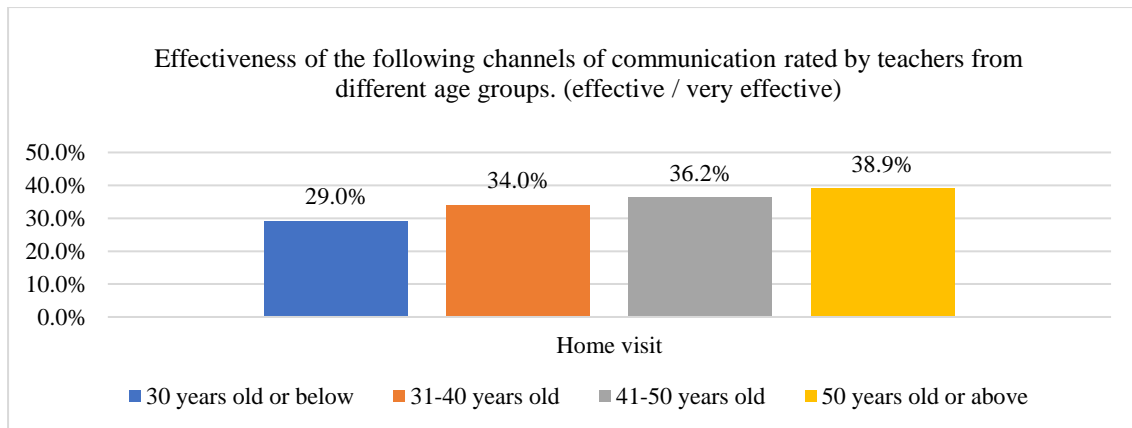
Fewer teachers in primary schools and secondary schools believed home visits were useful

4.2.3.4 There was a significant gap in the perception of the effectiveness of home visits between primary/secondary teachers and principals. In primary and secondary schools, significantly more principals than teachers believed home visits were effective or very effective. Significantly more teachers and principals in special schools (principals 97.4%, teachers 80.4%) than primary or secondary schools considered that home visits were effective or very effective for home-school communication.



Fewer young teachers believed in the effectiveness of home visits

4.2.3.5 The further analysis on the different age group of teachers revealed a trend that a lower proportion of younger teachers perceived that home visits were effective or very effective. Teachers of age 30 or below was the smallest group of teachers recognizing the effectiveness of home visits (29.0%).



Home visits were beneficial to understanding students' needs

4.2.3.6 Some special school principals and teachers had mentioned the benefits of home visits. Home visits would help the school understand their students' situation outside the school, e.g. their family situation, daily life and relationship with their parents, etc. Thus, the schools could understand their students' needs and know how to help them to learn. It would also help parents understand more about the school's attitude and expectations on home-school communication and co-operation. Some principals and teachers in special schools had said:

“The purpose of home visits is to understand the students' home situation, check whether the rehabilitation equipment such as wheelchair armrests are safe and effective.”

“Home visits will allow the school understand students' life. It also shows that school values home-school co-operation.”

Social workers could provide more professional suggestions to parents during home visits

4.2.3.7 Few secondary school social workers had explained why home visits were mainly conducted by social workers. Home visits were used for understanding a student's situation at home. It would be easier and better for social workers than teachers to give professional suggestions.

“At present, most of the home visits are conducted by social workers, and less by teachers. Home visits help to better understand the family situation and living habits of students, and it is easier for social workers to provide professional advice.”

It had been hard to conduct home visits due to the limitation of time and place

4.2.3.8 Some secondary school teachers had also mentioned that they usually conducted home visits after working hours. It had been difficult to arrange home visits because some parents had to go to work during the day. Thus sometimes they had to conduct home visits in the evening.

“I have tried to meet some parents several times but failed. They are too busy.”

“I have to conduct home visits after working hours.”

4.2.3.9 Few special school principals had also mentioned that some parents lived in the Mainland. Teachers were then not encouraged to conduct home visits in these cases.

“Some students’ families live in the Mainland. It is not recommended for teachers to conduct home visits outside Hong Kong. It may be expensive and unsafe.”

4.3 Content and purpose of communication between school and parents

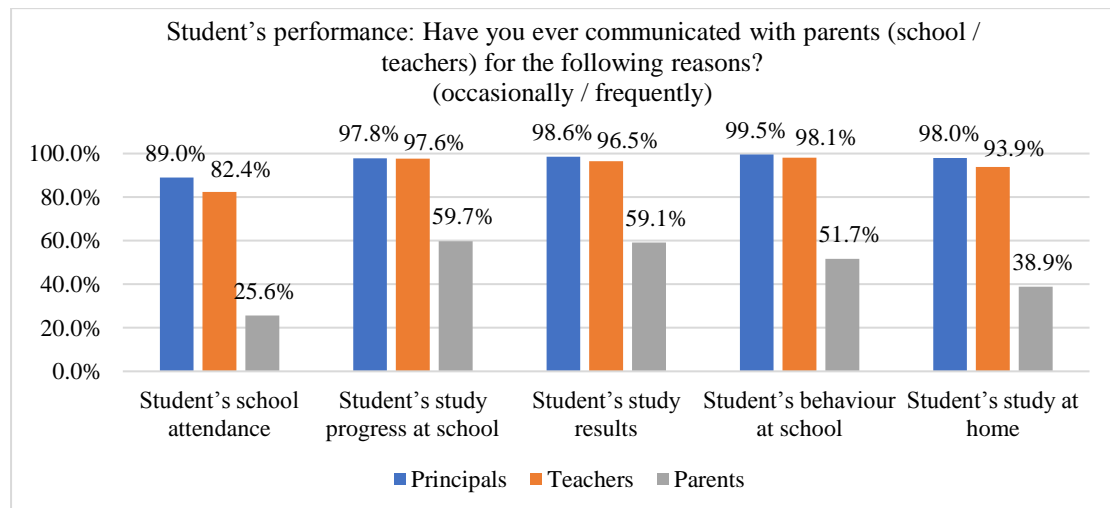
4.3.1 Related to students’ performance and development

Major concern on students’ performance and development

Teachers and parents mainly focused on students’ performance in communication

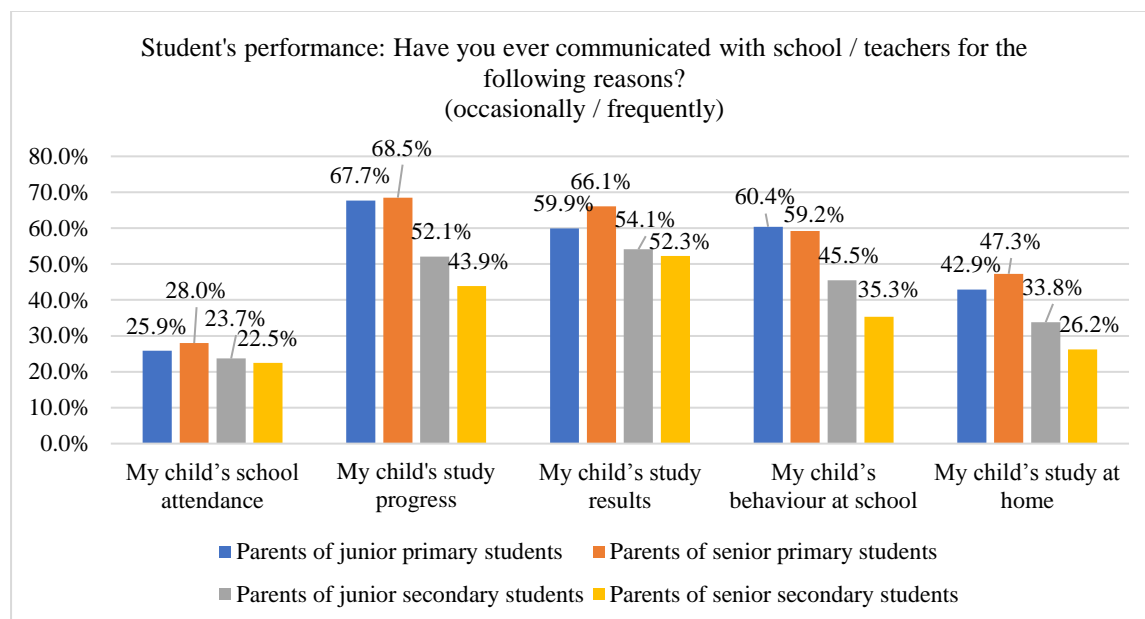
4.3.1.1 The majority of principals and teachers had occasionally or frequently contacted parents about students’ overall performance such as student’s study progress at school (principals 97.8%, teachers 97.6%), student’s study results (principals 98.6%, teachers 96.5%), student’s behaviour at school (principals 99.5%, teachers 98.1%) and student’s study at home (principals 98.0%, teachers 93.9%). Over 80% of the principals and teachers had contacted parents about students’ school attendance (principals 89.0%, teachers 82.4%).

4.3.1.2 The common concerns of parents in communication were related to students’ academic performance. More than a half of the parents had contacted the school on their children’s performance apart from their school attendance and their children’s study at home. About one third of the parents had contacted the school on their children’s study at home (38.9%).



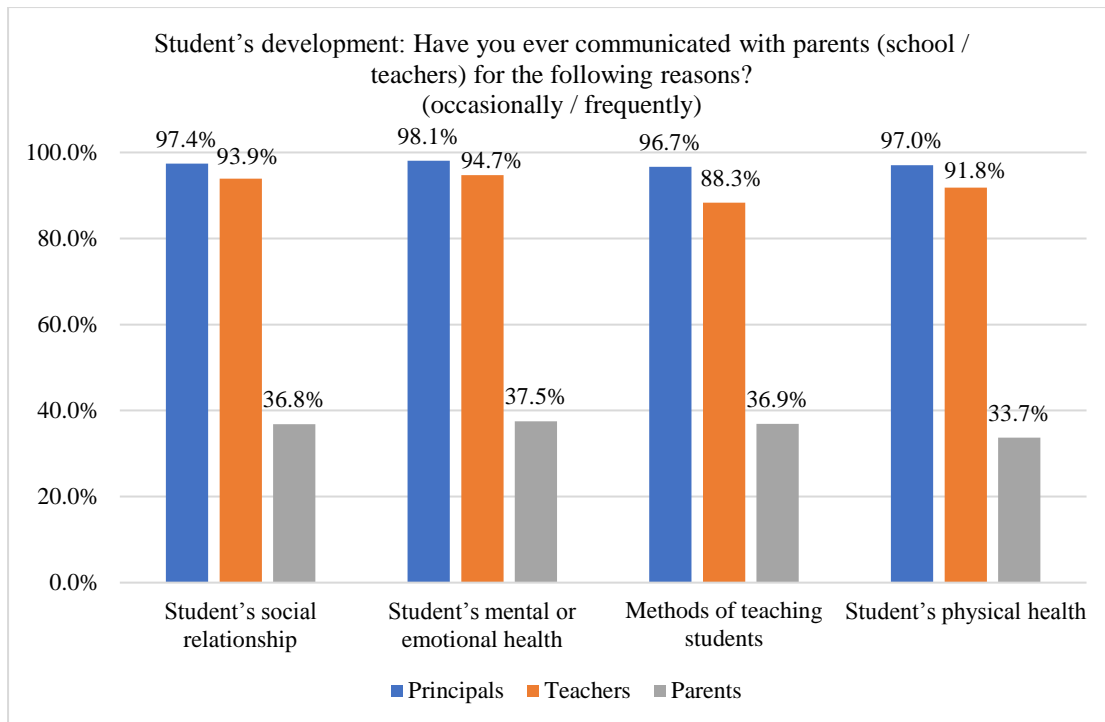
Fewer parents of students of senior grades had communicated with the school on matters related to students' performance

4.3.1.3 Senior secondary students' parents tended to communicate less with the school about students' performance, and senior primary students' parents were the largest group of parents who concerned specifically about the students' study. This might be because parents of senior primary students concern very much about their children's secondary school admission. This showed that the grade level of students would affect their parents' attitude when they communicated with the school on their children's performance.



The vast majority of principals and teachers had communicated with parents on issues related to students' development

4.3.1.4 In general, the principals, teachers and parents had reflected that the school had communicated with parents on students' development. However, a significantly higher proportion of principals and teachers had discussed such issues with the parents but not the other way round. Such issues included the student's social relationship (principals 97.4%, teachers 93.9%, parents 36.8%), the student's mental or emotional health (principals 98.1%, teachers 94.7%, parents 37.5%), the methods for teaching the student (principals 96.7%, teachers 88.3%, parents 36.9%) and the student's physical health (principals 97.0%, teachers 91.8%, parents 33.7%).



Parents believed that their children would be more mature when they entered secondary school

4.3.1.5 Social workers had compared the patterns of home-school communication in primary schools and secondary schools. There was less communication in secondary schools than in primary schools. Parents and teachers would more likely talk about students' situations in primary schools, but less frequently in secondary schools.

“In the primary school, teachers would proactively contact parents about their children’s daily school life. However, in the secondary school, teachers seldom do so.”

4.3.1.6 Some parents of secondary school students had mentioned why their involvement in home-school communication had changed from the primary school to secondary school. They did not like to be involved when their children were in the secondary school because they believed that their children should deal with the school issues on their own. They expected their children to be more independent when they began studying in the secondary school. As a result, the parents of senior secondary students had involved less with the school.

“When my children were in the primary school, I had participated in many voluntary activities. When my children went to the secondary school, they have grown up, and they may not want their parents to interfere with their school life anymore.”

“As my child grows older, he sometimes has to communicate with other people on his own. I prefer him speaking to his teachers himself first.”

4.3.1.7 Most parents worried about their children's secondary school admission. The survey showed that most parents of senior primary students concerned more about their children's study. Teachers said that the parents were worried about their children's performance in school's internal examinations which would affect their Secondary School Places Allocation (SSPA). Parents would proactively contact the school about such issues.

"Parents have a lot of worries. For example, many parents were worried about the internal examination for the purpose of SSPA. They would contact the school proactively and inquire a lot about related policies."

4.3.1.8 Previous researchers had found similar trends that parents of primary school students would generally be more involved in their children's education than those of middle-school or high-school students (i.e., secondary school students in Hong Kong). It was found that parents' perception of responsibility and abilities would affect their involvement. Magouirk's (2015) study⁷⁹ found that senior secondary school parents do not perceive that parenting involvement is their responsibility. Furthermore, senior secondary school parents do not feel confident about their abilities in helping their children with schoolwork because they may not understand the difficult concepts in the subjects.

Home-school communication should consider both students' learning outcome and learning process

4.3.1.9 The most common topic of communication between parents and schools was on students' learning outcomes, rather than on the education and whole-person development of students.

4.3.1.10 A member of parent association said:

"The communication between teachers and parents now only focuses on cliché conversation and reports facts about the other... lack of sharing."

4.3.1.11 A parent said that schools paid too much attention to academic results.

"...focused on academic results too much. Although the children were in elite class, they still needed care and attention from teachers. However, schools only focused on students' academic results, instead of their feelings"

4.3.1.12 A school social worker also said:

"Some schools only communicate academic performance of students with parents. However, if only academic performance is concerned, there are few opportunities to contact parents"

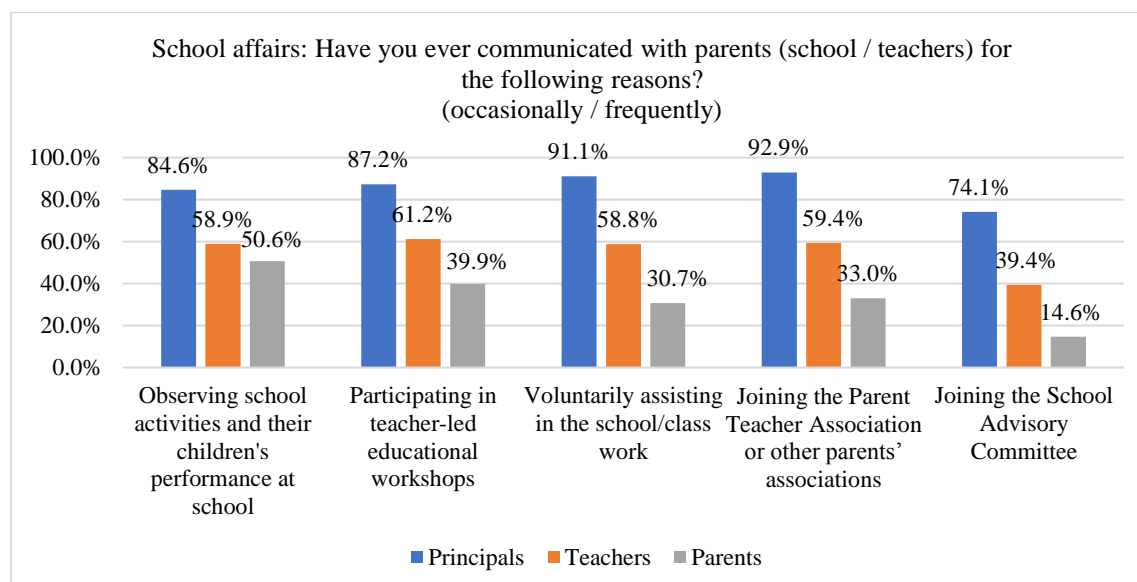
⁷⁹ Magouirk, Tammy Ann. (2015). *A Correlational Study of Parental Involvement at the Elementary School, Middle School, and High School Level*. Doctoral dissertations, Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA, USA.

4.3.2 *Related to school affairs*

Concern about school affairs

More principals than teachers and parents were concerned about school affairs

4.3.2.1 The principals, teachers and parents had reflected that their schools had communication with the parents on school affairs. A significantly higher proportion of principals than teachers and parents had communicated on school affairs. The content of the communication included participating in school activities and students' performance at school (principals 84.6%, teachers 58.9%, parents 50.6%), participating in teacher-led educational workshops (principals 87.2%, teachers 61.2%, parents 39.9%), voluntarily assisting in the school/class work (principals 91.1%, teachers 58.8%, parents 30.7%), joining the Parent-Teacher Association or other parents associations (principals 92.9%, teachers 59.4%, parents 33.0%) and joining the School Advisory Committee (principals 74.1%, teachers 39.4%, parents 14.6%). Furthermore, it was found that the principals, teachers and parents had communicated least on joining the School Advisory Committee.



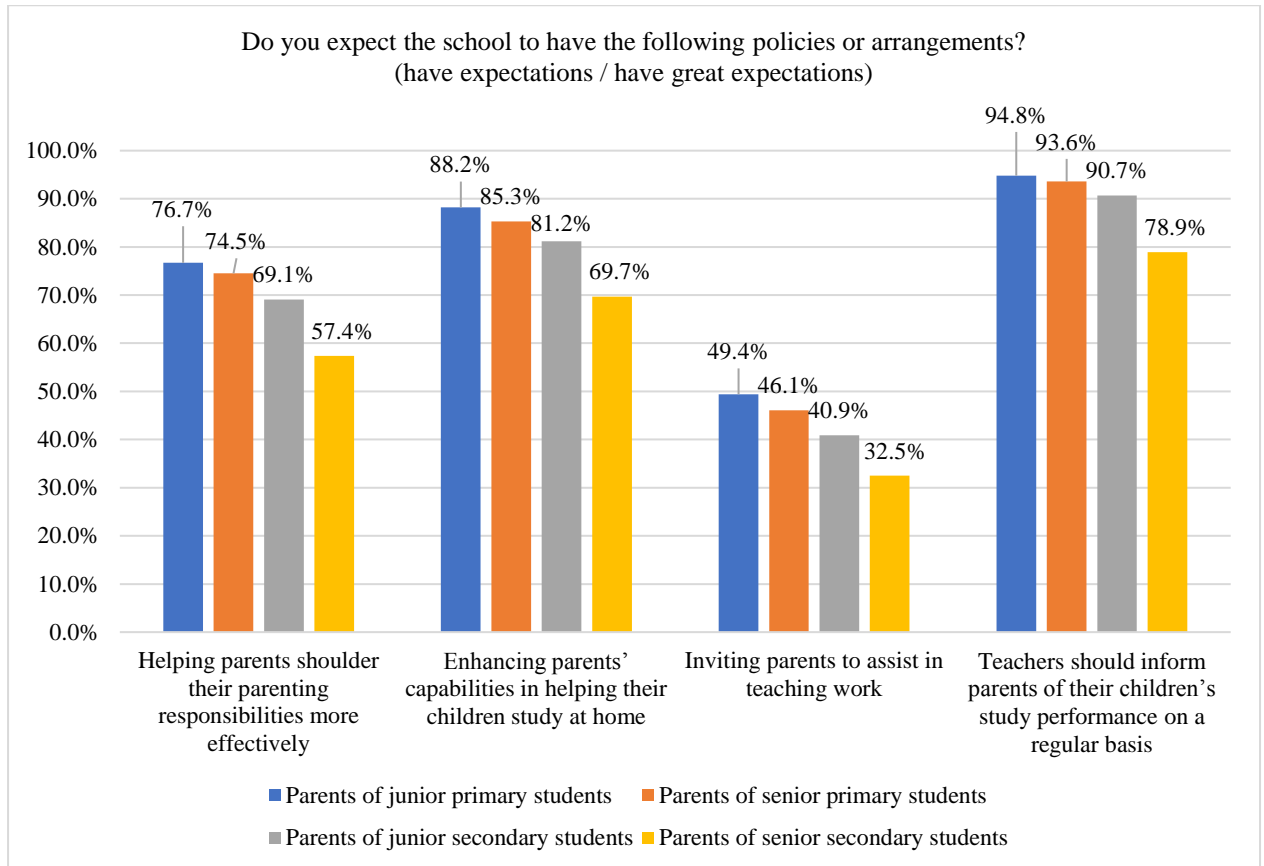
4.3.3 *Related to school policy*

Expectation on school policies

Parents of students of senior grades had less expectation on school policies

4.3.3.1 It was found that significantly fewer parents of senior secondary students would expect or greatly expect the school help them shoulder their parenting responsibilities more effectively (57.4%) and enhance their capabilities in helping their children's study at home (69.7%). A smaller proportion of parents of senior secondary students expected or greatly expected the school to invite them to assist in teaching work (32.5%). Although the majority of parents expected that the teachers should inform them of their children's study

performance on a regular basis, the parents of senior secondary students had the least proportion (78.9%) in this aspect.

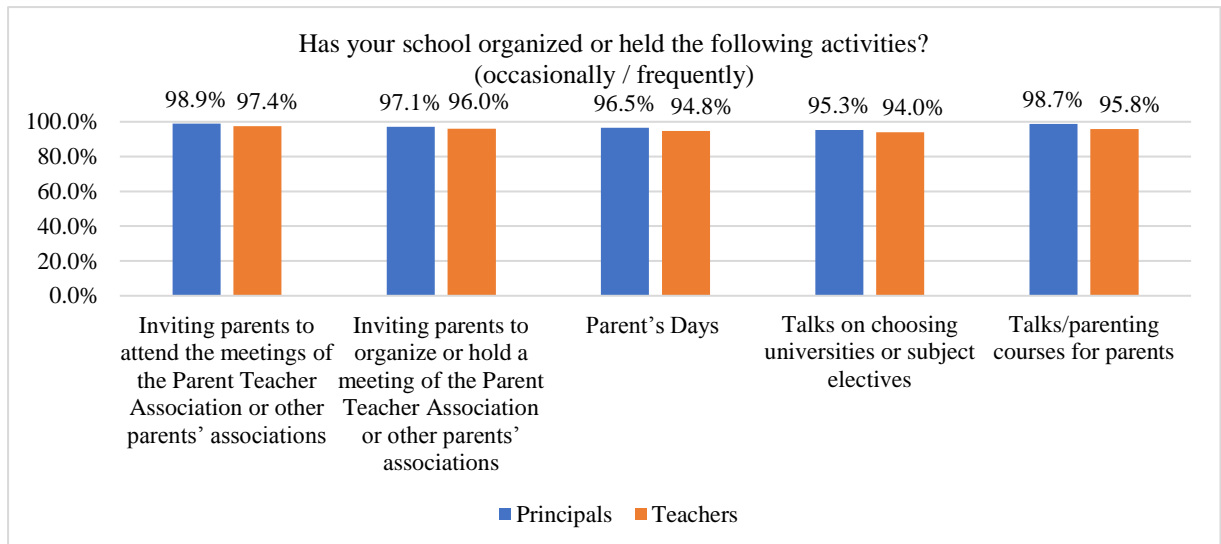


4.4 Participation in home-school activities

4.4.1 *Home-school activities held in promoting home-school communication and co-operation*

Type of home-school activities

4.4.1.1 Overall, a great majority of the principals and teachers indicated that their schools had occasionally or frequently organized or held a wide range of activities. Most principals and teachers, varying from 94.0% to 98.9%, reflected that they had organized some common types of home-school activities (one-off activities) such as talks on choosing subject electives, Parent's Days and PTA meetings.

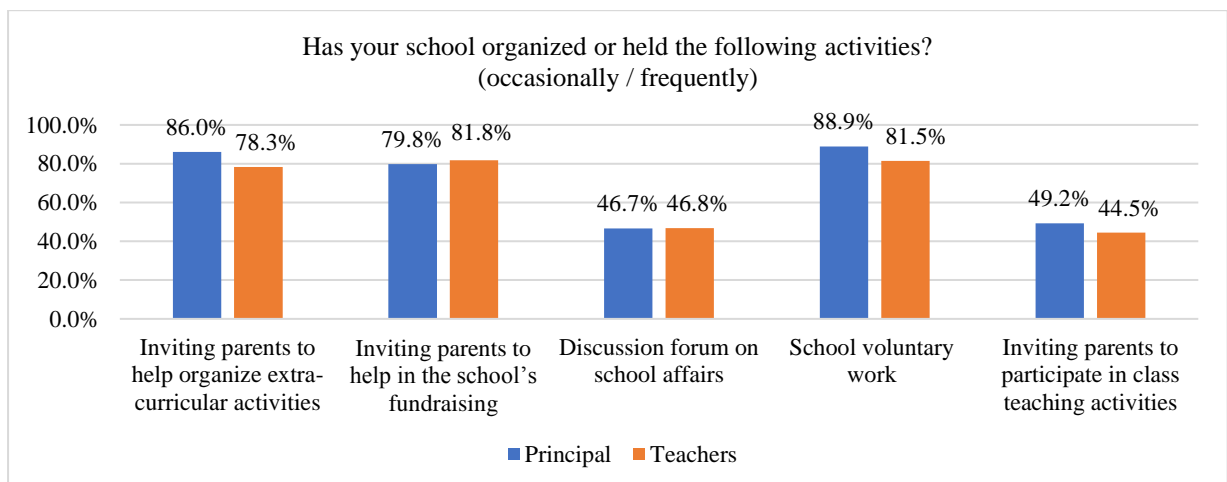


Schools had held less frequently activities which involved longer period of participation for parents

4.4.1.2 The principals and teachers reflected that their schools had held for parents less frequently activities which involved longer periods of participation. These activities included inviting parents to help organize extra-curricular activities (principals 86.0%, teachers 78.3%), inviting parents to help in the school's fundraising (principals 79.8%, teachers 81.8%), and school voluntary work (principals 88.9%, teachers 81.5%).

Schools had seldom held activities related to school policy

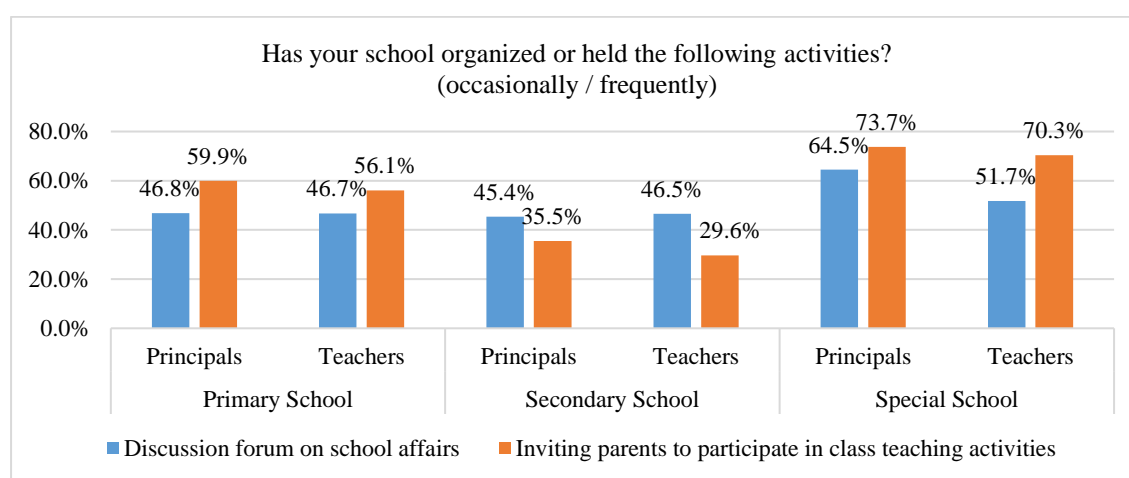
4.4.1.3 Only 46.7% of the principals and 46.8% of the teachers reflected that their schools had held discussion forums on school affairs occasionally or frequently. Also, only 49.2% of the principals and 44.5% of the teachers had occasionally or frequently invited the parents to participate in class teaching activities.



Special schools had held activities related to school affairs more frequently, while primary and secondary schools had held activities less frequently

4.4.1.4 The survey showed some activities had been held significantly more frequently by special school principals and less frequently by primary and secondary school principals. Such activities included discussion forums on school affairs (primary 46.8%, secondary 45.4%, special 64.5%) and inviting parents to participate in class teaching activities (primary 59.9%, secondary 35.5%, special 73.7%).

4.4.1.5 The survey on teachers found similar results. These activities for parents included discussion forums on school affairs (primary 46.7%, secondary 46.5%, special 51.7%) and inviting parents to participate in class teaching activities (primary 56.1%, secondary 29.6%, special 70.3%).



4.4.1.6 Schools had organized a wide range of activities for parents, including BBQs, parent-child travel tours, Parents’ Day, interest clubs, talks and many more. The main reason for the schools to organize these different activities was to meet the needs of the parents for better home-school communication. For example, a teacher had said:

“The PTA would ask the parents what kind of activities they are interested in. Then different activities will be organized according to their needs, such as behaviour management workshops and hair cutting workshops.”

4.4.1.7 However, some schools did not welcome parents to get involved in their school policy, and it might be the reason why these schools seldom arranged activities related to school policy. However, some other schools would hold activities related to school policy and agreed on the importance of such kind of activities. For example, a PTA chairman had said:

“Holding a tea meeting will give the parents and school an opportunity to exchange opinions on the direction of the school policy.”

“Regarding the affairs related to the school uniform and students’ lunch boxes, the school would invite the PTA members to participate in deciding which lunch box supplier to choose. The school will then set up a Lunch Box Committee and its members will visit the production site of each lunch

box supplier and make comparisons to see if their menus follow a healthy diet.”

4.4.1.8 A principal had also said:

“The parents would participate in regular school meetings. For example, the PTA meeting will discuss topics concerned by parents. The school also has a Supervision Committee to discuss daily matters such as tendering, and parents will also participate in it.”

4.4.1.9 In special schools, schools and parents were more concerned about the students’ development, some special schools had organized some activities related to students’ development such as overseas tours and STEM competitions. Parents were more willing to participate in these activities. For example, the PTA chairman of a special school had said:

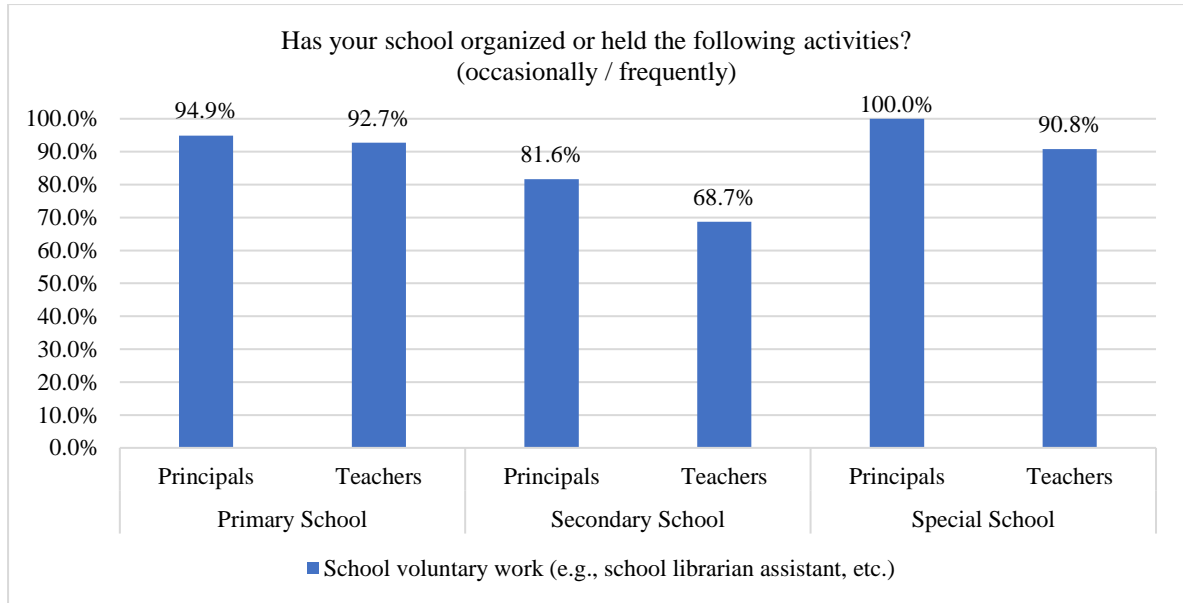
“Participation in such activities as STEM or robots competitions, etc. would know the direction of the school. Parents are also invited to participate in the competitions or lead the school team. We even invite the parents to attend Education Forums to learn about STEM education.”

“Through the home-school activities, such as overseas tours, Tai Chi classes, and parent interest classes, parents would learn more about the school.”

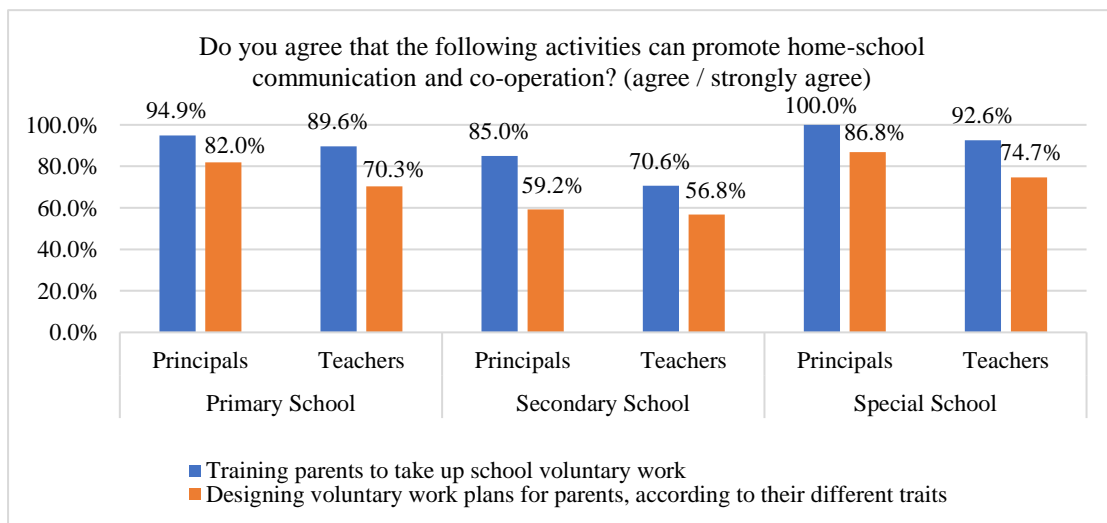
Importance of the activities

Fewer secondary schools were concerned about school volunteer work

4.4.1.10 The survey on principals and teachers found secondary schools had arranged school voluntary work less frequently. Only 81.6% of the secondary school principals had occasionally or frequently arranged school voluntary work, compared with the 94.9% of the primary school principals and 100.0% of the special school principals. For teachers, only 68.7% of the secondary school teachers had occasionally or frequently arranged school voluntary work, compared with the 92.7% of the primary school teachers and 90.8% of the special school teachers.

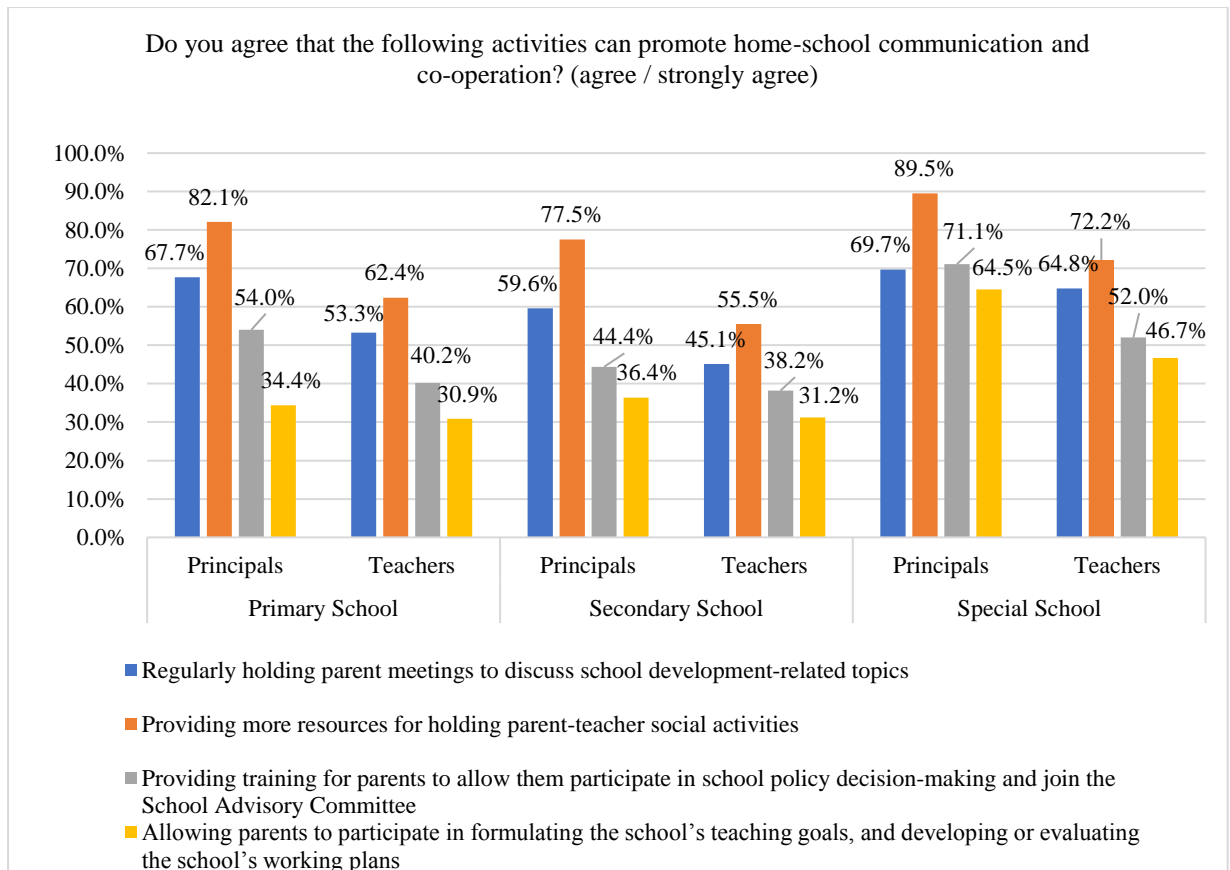


4.4.1.11 The data collected was consistent with the importance of school volunteer work to home-school communication as perceived by the principals and teachers. The data showed that a smaller proportion of secondary school principals and teachers agreed or strongly agreed that activities related to school volunteer work could promote home-school communication. For instance, only 85.0% of the principals and 70.6% of the teachers of secondary schools recognized the importance of training parents to take up school voluntary work, compared with the 94.9% of the principals and 89.6% of the teachers of primary schools and 100.0% of the principals and 92.6% of the teachers of special schools. Also, only 59.2% of the principals and 56.8% of the teachers of secondary schools agreed/strongly agreed designing voluntary work plans for parents according to parents' different traits could promote home-school communication, compared with the 82.0% of the principals and 70.3% of the teachers of primary schools and 86.8% of the principals and 74.7% of the teachers of special schools.



Secondary schools had less agreement on the effect of activities related to school development on the promotion of home-school communication

- 4.4.1.12 For secondary schools, a lower percentage of principals agreed or strongly agreed that the activities related to school development and school policy could promote home-school communication. These activities included regularly holding parent meetings to discuss school development-related topics (primary 67.7%, secondary 59.6%, special 69.7%), providing more resources for holding parent-teacher social activities (primary 82.1%, secondary 77.5%, special 89.5%), and providing training for parents to allow them participate in the decision-making of school policy and join the school advisory committee (primary 54.0%, secondary 44.4%, special 71.1%).
- 4.4.1.13 The survey on teachers showed the same trend. The activities included regularly holding parent meetings to discuss school development-related topics (primary 53.3%, secondary 45.1%, special 64.8%), providing more resources for holding parent-teacher social activities (primary 62.4%, secondary 55.5%, special 72.2%), and providing training for parents to allow them participate in the decision-making of school policy and join the school advisory committee (primary 40.2%, secondary 38.2%, special 52.0%).
- 4.4.1.14 For special schools, a higher percentage of principals and teachers agreed or strongly agreed that allowing parents to participate in the formulation of the school's teaching goals, and developing or evaluating the school's working plans could promote home-school communication. The survey of principals had showed about 64.5% of the special school principals agreed or strongly agreed on the importance of the activities, compared with the 34.4% of the primary schools and 36.4% of the secondary schools. The survey of teachers had shown that some teachers shared the same points of view with the principals. About 46.7% of the special school teachers agreed with the principals, while only 30.9% of the primary school teachers and 31.2% of the secondary school teachers did so.



4.4.2 *Parents' involvement in current communication between school and parents*

Overall participation

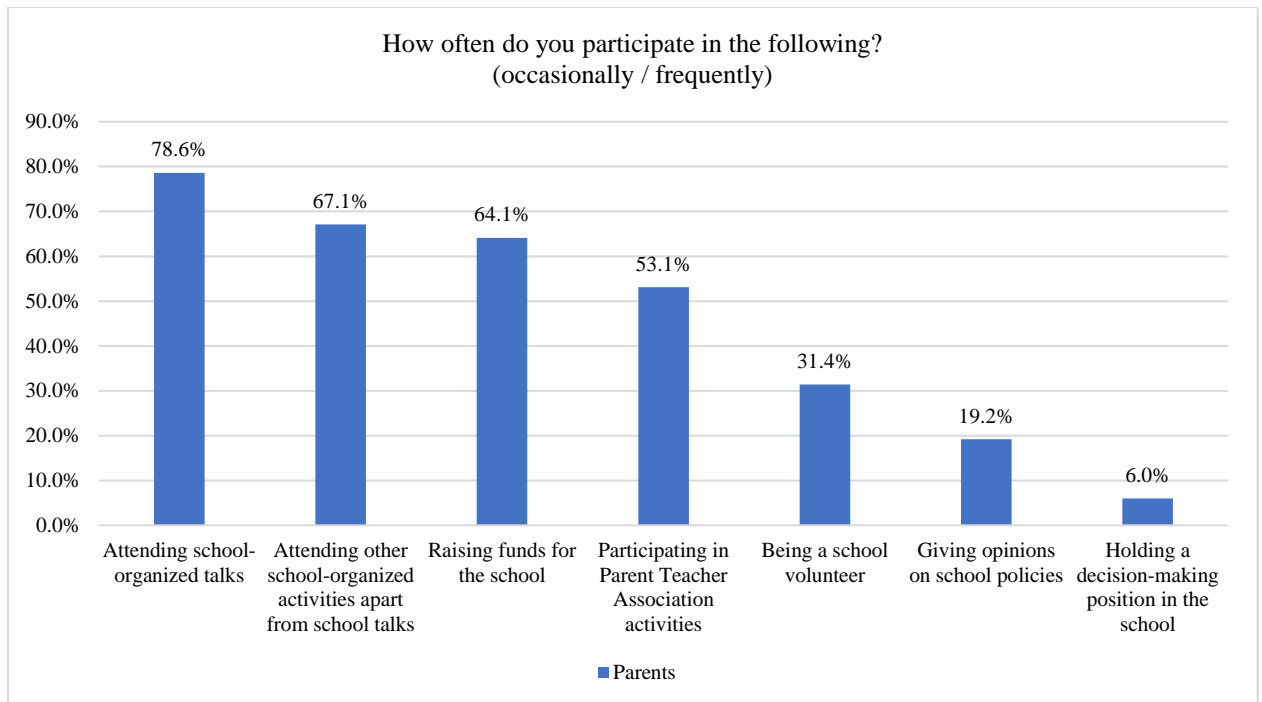
Low parents' participation in specific home-school activities

4.4.2.1 A wide range of school activities had been arranged by the schools, and the participation rate of parents in these activities had been quite high. About 78.6% of the parents had attended school-organized talks, 67.1% had attended other school-organized activities apart from school talks, and 64.1% had raised funds for the school.

4.4.2.2 However, for the activities organized by the Parent-Teacher Association, only 53.1% of the parents were involved, and only 31.4% of the parents had become a school volunteer.

Low participation rate of parents in activities related to the school policy

4.4.2.3 For the activities related to the school policy, the survey showed a very low percentage of participation by the parents. Only 19.2% of the parents responded that they had given opinions on school policy to the school and just 6.0% of them had held a decision-making position in the school.

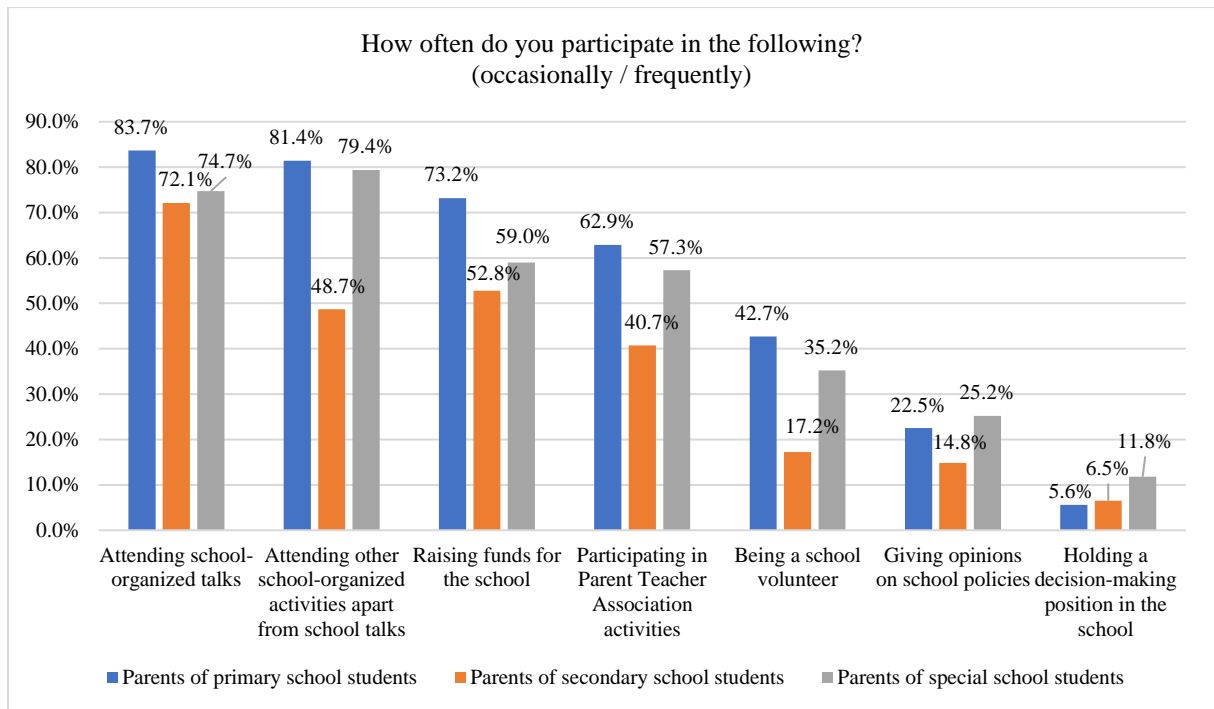


Participation by specific parents in specific activities

Parents of primary schools had a higher incentive to join activities than those of secondary schools

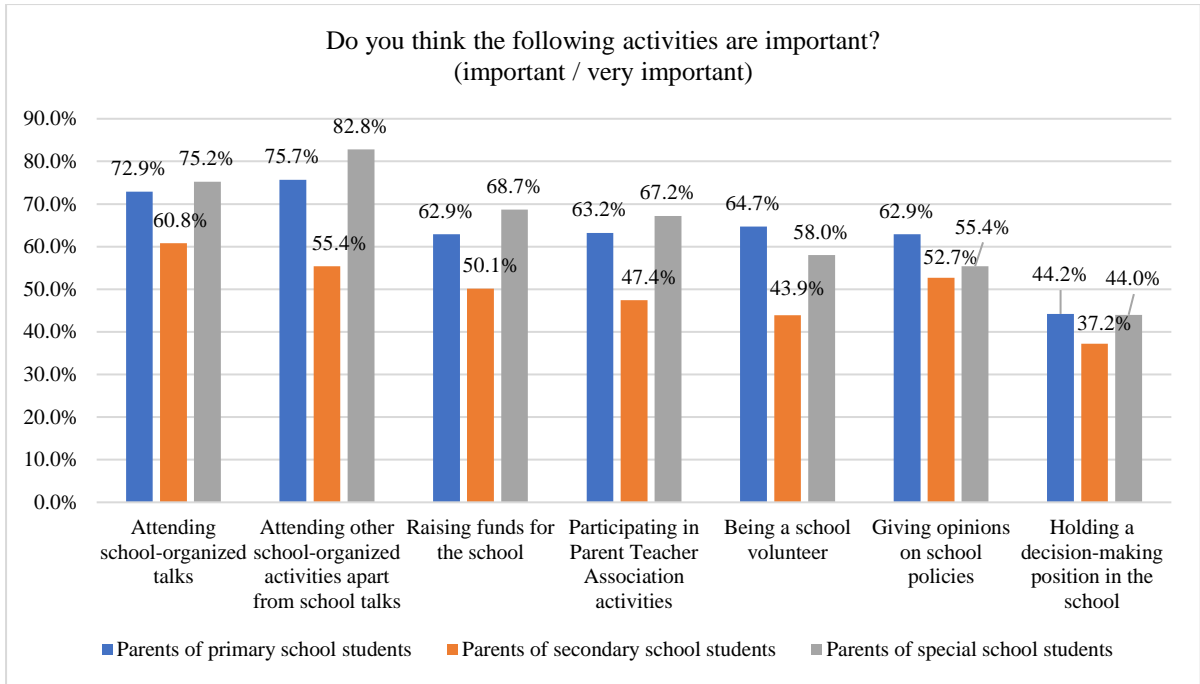
4.4.2.4 The survey of parents showed that primary school parents had participated in school activities more frequently than secondary school parents. It seemed that there was a great difference in the participation rate between primary and secondary school parents and this situation occurred especially in activities related to school volunteer work. About 42.7% of the parents of primary schools had become school volunteers but only about 17.2% of the parents of secondary schools had done so. This was consistent with the previous findings that secondary school parents paid less attention to school volunteer work.

4.4.2.5 For the activities related to school management, the survey showed that parents had a low incentive to participate in this kind of activities, regardless of the school types. Special school parents had a slightly higher percentage for holding a decision-making position in the school (parents of primary school students 5.6%, parents of secondary school students 6.5%, parents of special school students 11.8%).



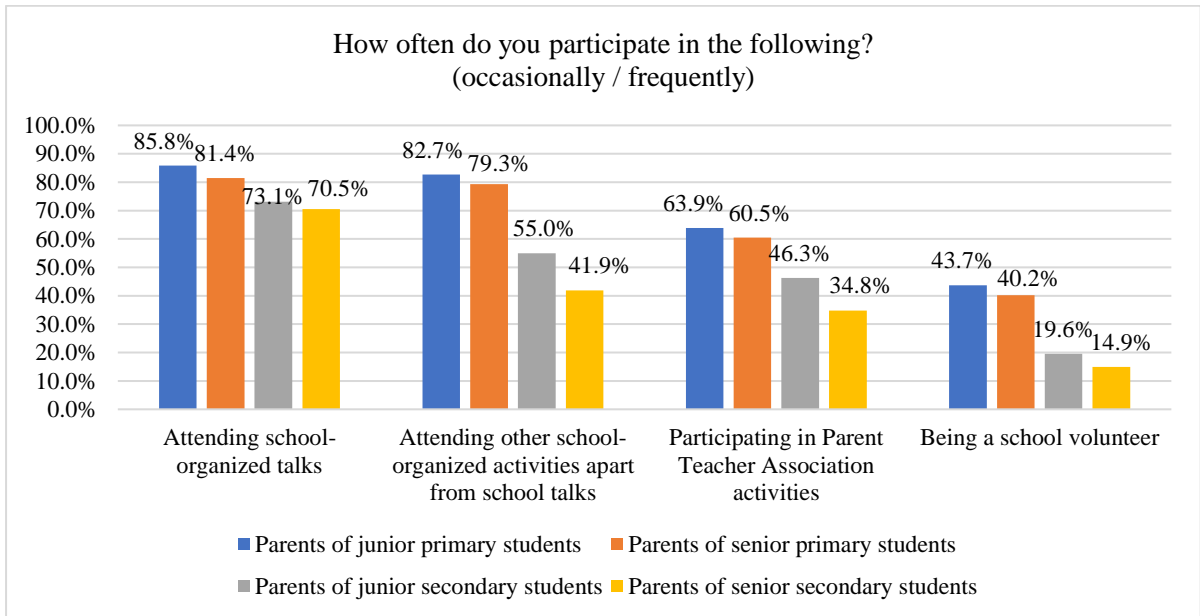
Parents’ participation rate was very low for activities related to school policy even though they had indicated a quite high importance of these activities

4.4.2.6 A certain proportion of parents had agreed on the importance of activities related to the school policy, such as giving opinions on the school policy (parents of primary school students 62.9%, parents of secondary school students 52.7%, parents of special school students 55.4%) and holding a decision-making position in the school (parents of primary school students 44.2%, parents of secondary school students 37.2%, parents of special school students 44.0%). However, the participation rate of parents was rather low in such activities as giving opinions on school policies (parents of primary school students 22.5%, parents of secondary school students 14.8%, parents of special school students 25.2%) and holding a decision-making position in the school (parents of primary school students 5.6%, parents of secondary school students 6.5%, parents of special school students 11.8%).



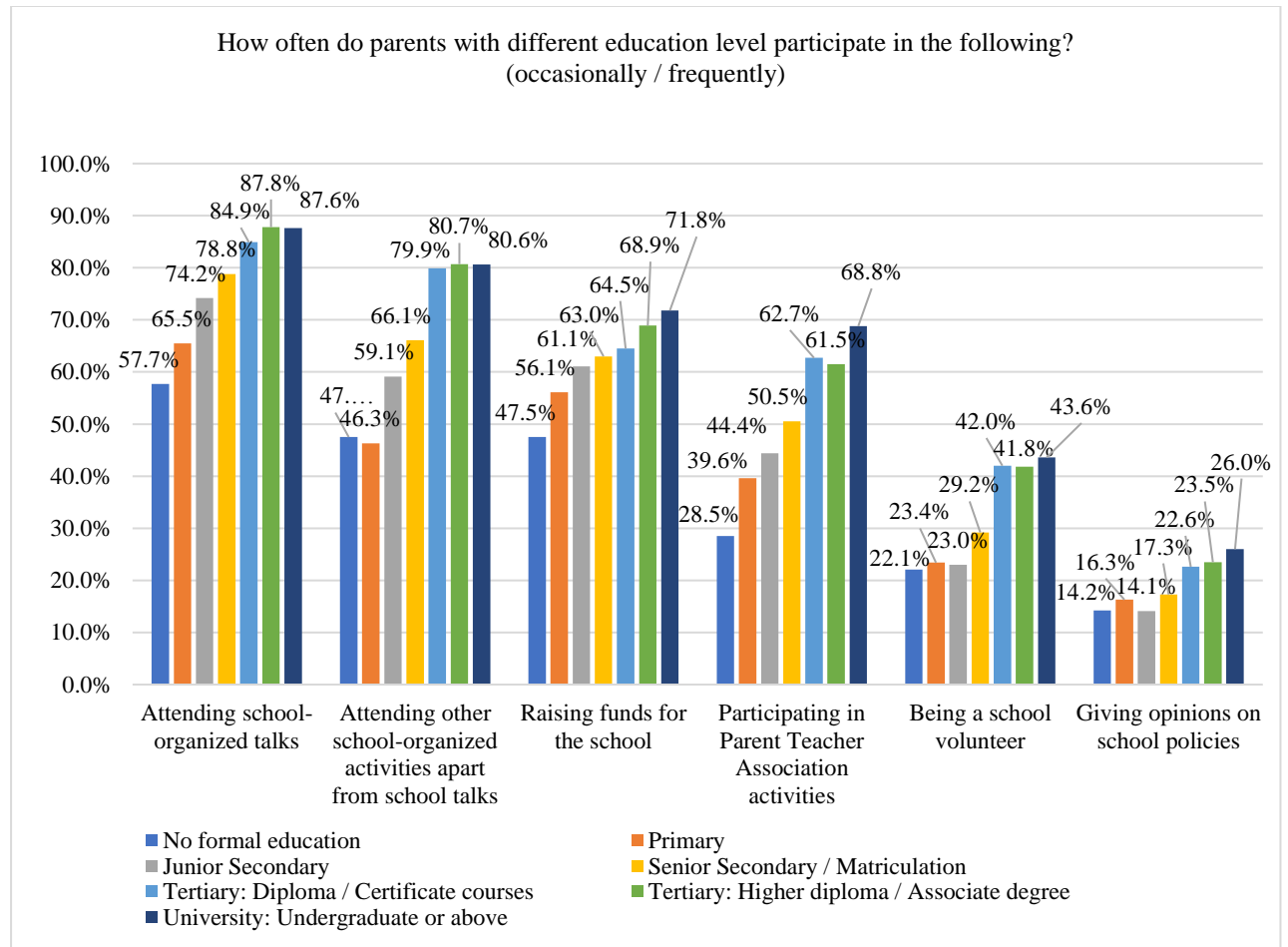
Parents of students in senior grades had less incentive to join school activities

4.4.2.7 The parents of senior grade students had participated in school activities less frequently. Only 41.9% and 34.8% of the parents of senior secondary students had respectively attended other school-organized activities apart from school talks and participated in Parent-Teacher Association activities, which were significantly lower than parents of students of junior grades. For other activities such as attending school-organized talks and becoming a school volunteer, the participation rates of the parents of higher grade students were also lower.



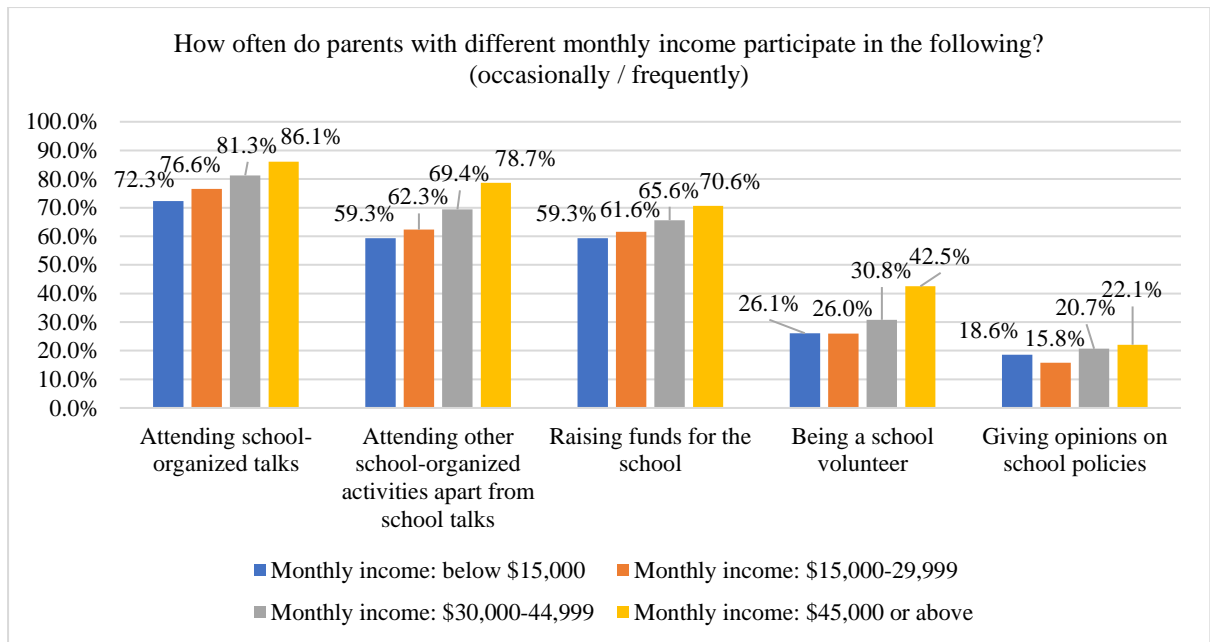
Parents at higher education levels had higher incentive to join the activities

4.4.2.8 The survey showed that the education level of the parents had been an important variable for the differences in their willingness to participate in the school activities. For most activities, parents at the tertiary level of education or above had a higher percentage of attendance than those with less formal education. For instance, parents at tertiary level of education or above had attended school-organized talks more frequently, varying from 84.9% to 87.6%, compared with the 57.7% to 78.8% of the parents with senior secondary education or below.



Parents with higher income had higher incentive to join the activities

4.4.2.9 The survey showed that the economic level of the parents would also affect the attendance of parents at school activities. For parents with a monthly income of \$30,000 or above, they had joined the school activities more frequently. For example, about 81.3% and 86.1% of the parents with a monthly income ranging from \$30,000 to \$44,999 and a monthly income of \$45,000 or above respectively had attended school-organized talks, compared with the 72.3% and 76.6% of parents with a monthly income below \$15,000 and a monthly income ranging from \$15,000 to 29,999 respectively.



4.4.2.10 It seemed that the participation rate of parents in home-school activities was quite low for activities that required longer period of participation (other than those one-off activities). After discussing with different stakeholders, some of the reasons for the low participation rate had been found. One of the reasons was the limitation of time as parents had to work or deal with their home affairs. The chairman of a professional body had said:

“Some parents need to go to work from Monday to Friday, and have no time to participate in the activities on weekdays. Their incentive to participate in the activities held on weekdays will be very low.”

4.4.2.11 A representative of a parent association had also said:

“The working parents in Hong Kong are very busy. For example, employees have to work from 9 am to 5 pm, and schools have to adjust their home-school activities to be held at 6 pm. However, those parents working at restaurants and other service industries may still be working at 6 pm. Hence, it is hard for them to attend the home-school activities. Also, it is difficult for parents engaged in the transportation industry to attend the activities as well.”

4.4.2.12 A parent from a secondary school had said:

“Each parent has a different background. Some parents need to work and it is difficult for them to take time to participate in school activities. Some parents want to participate, but they don't have the time.”

4.4.2.13 A parent from a special school had said:

“I could not attend the school activities because I need to take care of my child.”

4.4.2.14 Some parents had also reflected that the school activities were nothing “new”, and this had affected their incentive to participate.

“There are not many activities at school. The school activities are not attractive, and the type as well as the format of the activities are the same every year.”

“Some parents feel that the talks are not beneficial to their children, and the activities are dull and repetitive.”

4.4.2.15 The interviews had also showed that parents of senior grade students had less incentive to join the school activities and this was consistent with the previous key findings.

4.4.2.16 Some parents of a secondary school had said:

“The parents of lower grade students (Form 1–Form 2) may be more active in the school activities, while parents of upper grade students may not be interested to attend all home-school activities because they have participated already many similar events in the past.”

“We had participated in many volunteering activities when our children were in the primary school. When my children are in the secondary school, they have grown up and they may not want us to interfere in their school life. The school also does not invite the parents to participate in many activities.”

4.4.2.17 The vice principal of a secondary school had said:

“The Campus Life Experience Activity for parents were open to parents of secondary one to six students in the past. However, due to the low attendance rate of the parents of senior grade students, it is only held for the parents of junior grade students now.”

4.4.2.18 In the previous findings, parents at low economic levels were less willing to join the school activities. The interviews had showed similar findings. A Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) social worker had said:

“Some families have financial difficulties and do not want others to know their problems. They will feel embarrassed and thus are less willing to join the school activities.”

4.4.2.19 The principal of a special school had also said:

“Some parents may be reluctant to participate in school activities because of their poor economic situation. For example, in some secondary schools, some parents may have superior socio-economic backgrounds while some other parents are relatively poor. The parents with lower economic status may be unwilling to participate in the school activities.”

4.5 Difficulties encountered in communication between school and parents

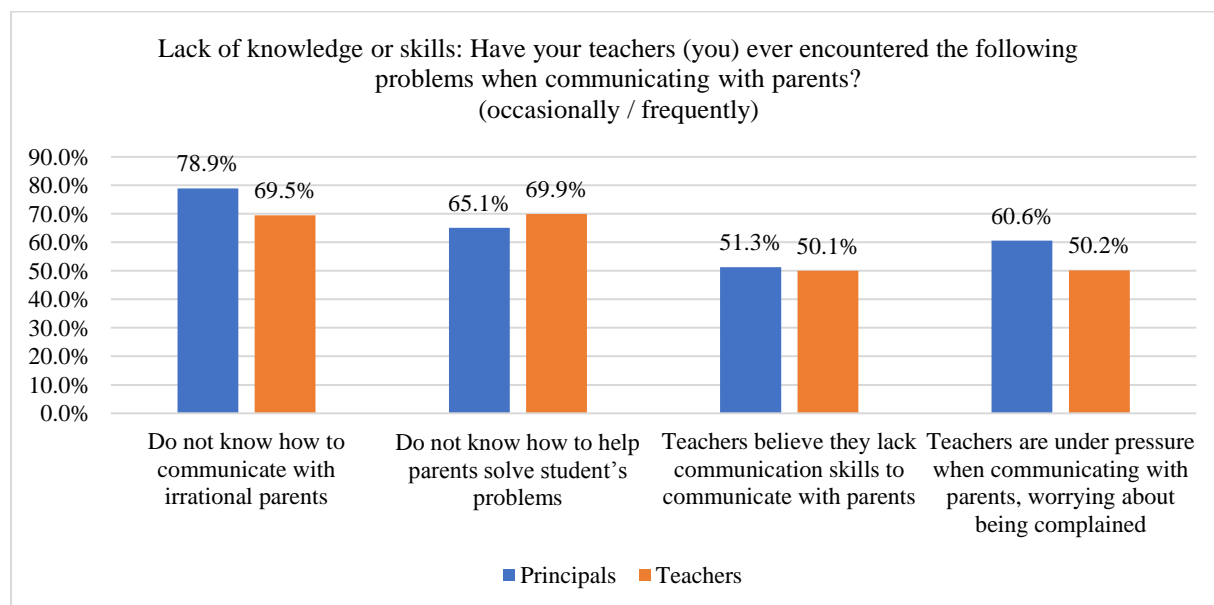
4.5.1 Difficulties faced by the teachers

Overall, the limitation of time rather than a lack of knowledge or skills was the major difficulty encountered by the teachers. Both the principals and teachers agreed that the most common difficulty faced by the teachers was a lack of time.

Lack of knowledge or skills

Irrational parents were one of the most serious issues which the teachers did not know how to tackle

4.5.1.1 Most principals and teachers claimed that the teachers did not know how to communicate with irrational parents (principals 78.9%, teachers 69.5%). About 70% of the teachers also said that the teachers did not know how to help parents solve the students' problems (principals 65.1%, teachers 69.9%). About half of the principals and teachers said the teachers believed they lacked the communication skills to communicate with parents (principals 51.3%, teachers 50.1%). Furthermore, more than half of the principals and teachers said the teachers were under pressure when communicating with the parents, worrying about being complained by the parents (principals 60.6%, teachers 50.2%). It seemed that teachers' lack of knowledge or skills to handle the requests from irrational parents was one of the most common difficulties faced by the principals and teachers.



Nearly 70% of the teachers and over 65% of the principals did not know how to help parents solve their children's problems

4.5.1.2 A vast majority of teachers and principals said that they did not know how to help parents solve students' problems (principals 65.1%, teachers 69.9%). After discussing with the parents and principals, it was found that there were

four main students' problems which the school did not know how to help the parents to solve: the language barrier faced by the students and their families, the students' study attitude, the mental or emotional situation of the students, and the workload of the students.

- 4.5.1.3 Some non-Chinese speaking students faced the language barrier at school, as told by a parent in the survey:

"Nobody reads Chinese at home but the school communicates in written Chinese with us."

"We are non-Chinese speaking and cannot join many activities organized by the school because of the language barrier."

- 4.5.1.4 Some principals expressed concern about a lack of translators in the school.

- 4.5.1.5 The school had no measure to improve the students' study attitude, as said by a parent in the survey:

"There is not any measure to improve the students' study attitude."

- 4.5.1.6 Some parents preferred to seek help from social workers instead of teachers to deal with the mental or emotional situation of the students.

"I shall find social workers but not teachers to help me to deal with the mental situation of my child."

- 4.5.1.7 Some parents complained that the workload of students was too heavy and the students had to do their homework till midnight.

"There is too much homework for my child who has to do the homework every day until 11:00 pm."

Time limitation

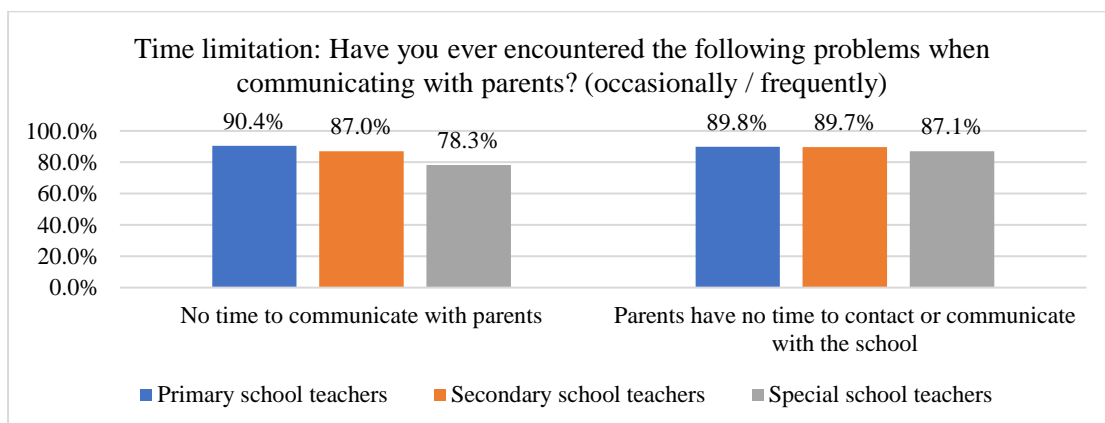
Time limitation was the most common difficulty in home-school communication

- 4.5.1.8 Over 90% of the principals claimed that the teachers had no time to communicate with the parents (90.2%) and the parents also had no time to contact or communicate with the school (94.0%). A large proportion of teachers indicated that teachers had no time to communicate with the parents (88.3%). On the other hand, quite a lot of the teachers also expressed that the parents had no time to contact or communicate with the school (89.7%). This showed that time limitation was the major difficulty faced by the teachers.



Teachers from all school types had little time to communicate with parents

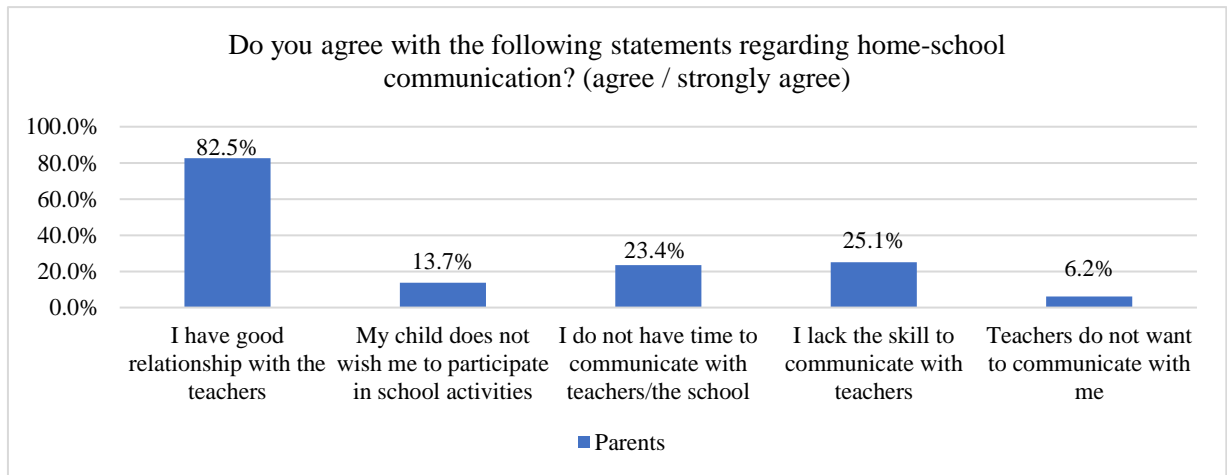
4.5.1.9 More teachers of primary schools than secondary schools and special schools indicated that teachers had no time to communicate with the parents (primary teachers 90.4%, secondary teachers 87.0%, special teachers 78.3%). In addition, most teachers indicated that the parents also had no time to contact or communicate with the school (primary teachers 89.8%, secondary teachers 89.7%, special teachers 87.1%). There was no significant difference among the school types.



4.5.2 *Difficulties faced by the parents*

Most parents had no difficulty in communicating with the school

4.5.2.1 Generally, few parents had difficulties when communicating with the school. The common difficulties were lack of skill to communicate with the teachers (25.1%) and having no time to communicate with the teachers/school (23.4%). Very few parents indicated that their child did not wish them to participate in school activities (13.7%) and the teachers did not want to communicate with them (6.2%). Over 80% of the parents said they had good relationships with the teachers.



4.5.3 *Parents in need*

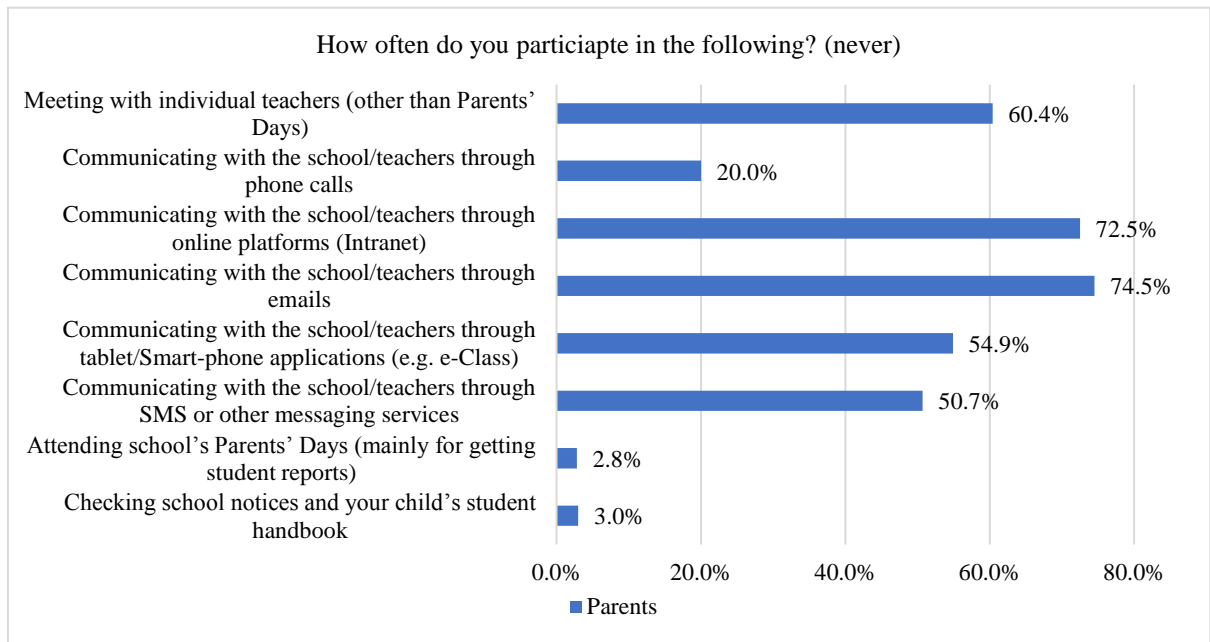
4.5.3.1 The survey identified the parents who needed more attention. Although most parents had no difficulty in communicating with the school, some were hard to reach or communicate.

4.6 **Hard-to-reach parent**

4.6.1 *Who they are*

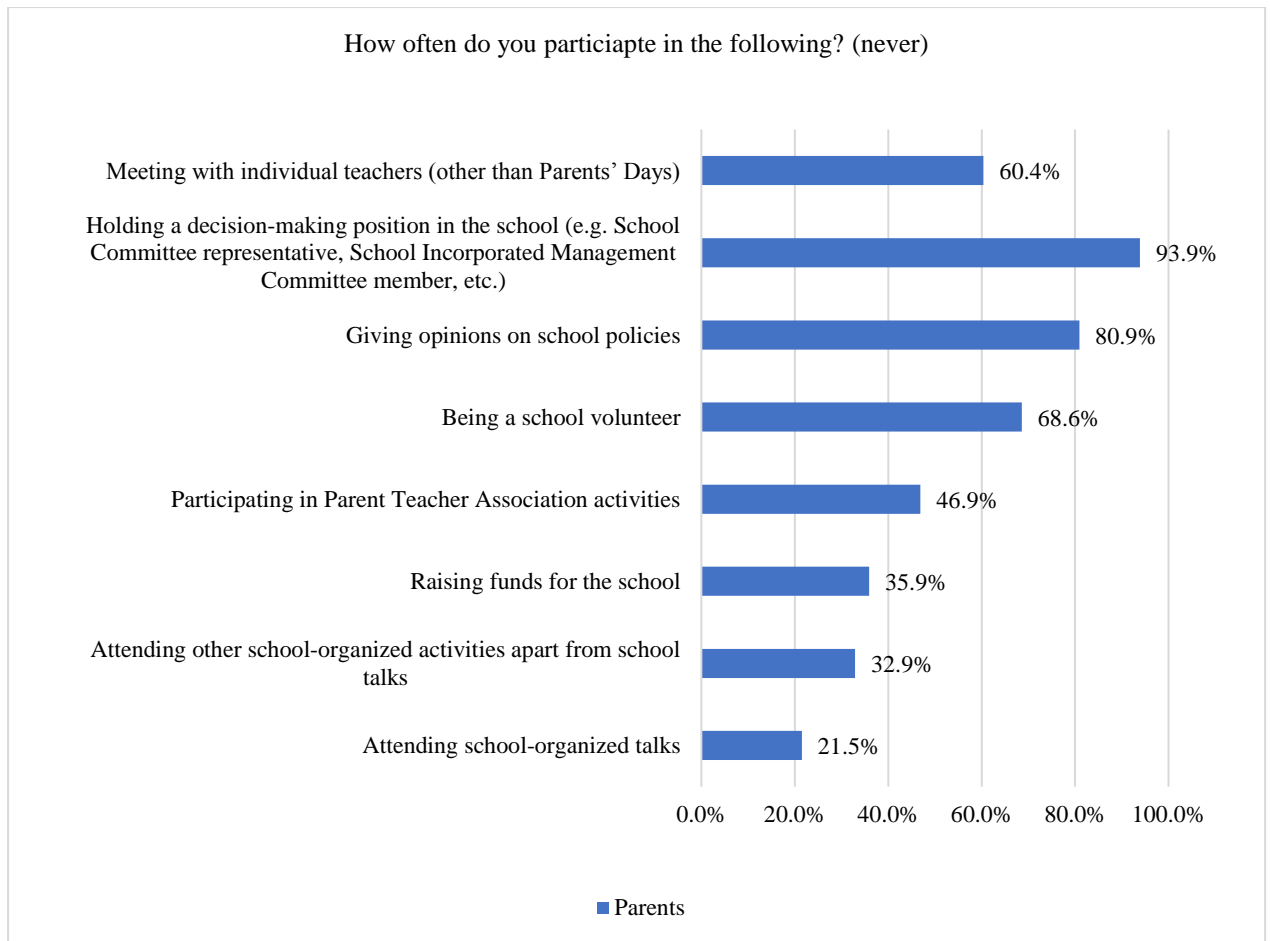
Rare communication with the school

4.6.1.1 Apart from checking school notices and their children's student handbooks, and attending the school's Parents' Days (mainly to get their children's school reports), some parents seldom communicated with the school. More than 70% of the parents had never used online applications and more than 50% of them had never used smart-phone applications to communicate with school. Slightly more than 60% of the parents had never communicated with the school via meeting with the individual teachers (other than on the Parents' Days). This showed there were parents who did not actively communicate with the school and their only occasional contact methods with the school were attending the Parents' Days and checking the school notices.



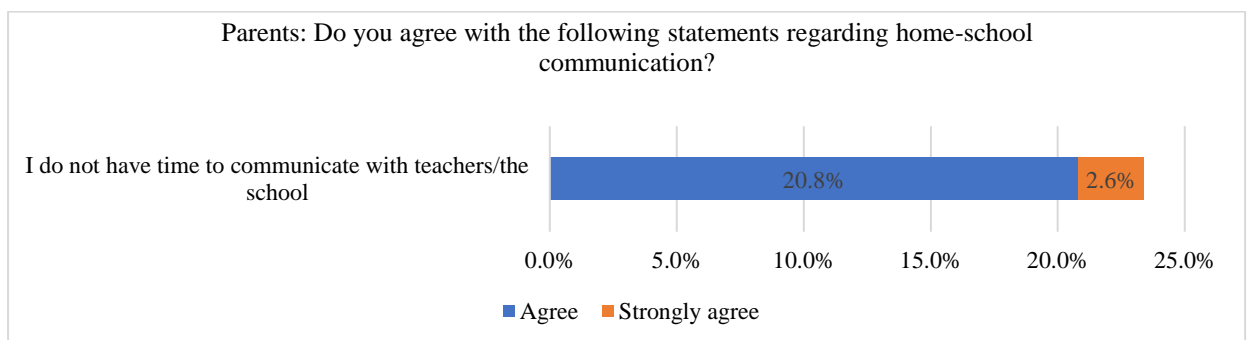
Very low participation rate in school activities

4.6.1.2 There were parents who never attended the school activities or participated in the decision-making of school affairs. For the general activities, some parents never attended school-organized talks (21.5%) and school-organized activities other than school talks (32.9%). A moderate proportion of parents never joined the PTA activities (46.9%) and school volunteer work (68.6%). For involvement in the decision-making of school affairs, a large proportion of parents never gave any opinion on school policies (80.9%) or held a decision-making position in the school (93.9%).



Lack of time to communicate with the school

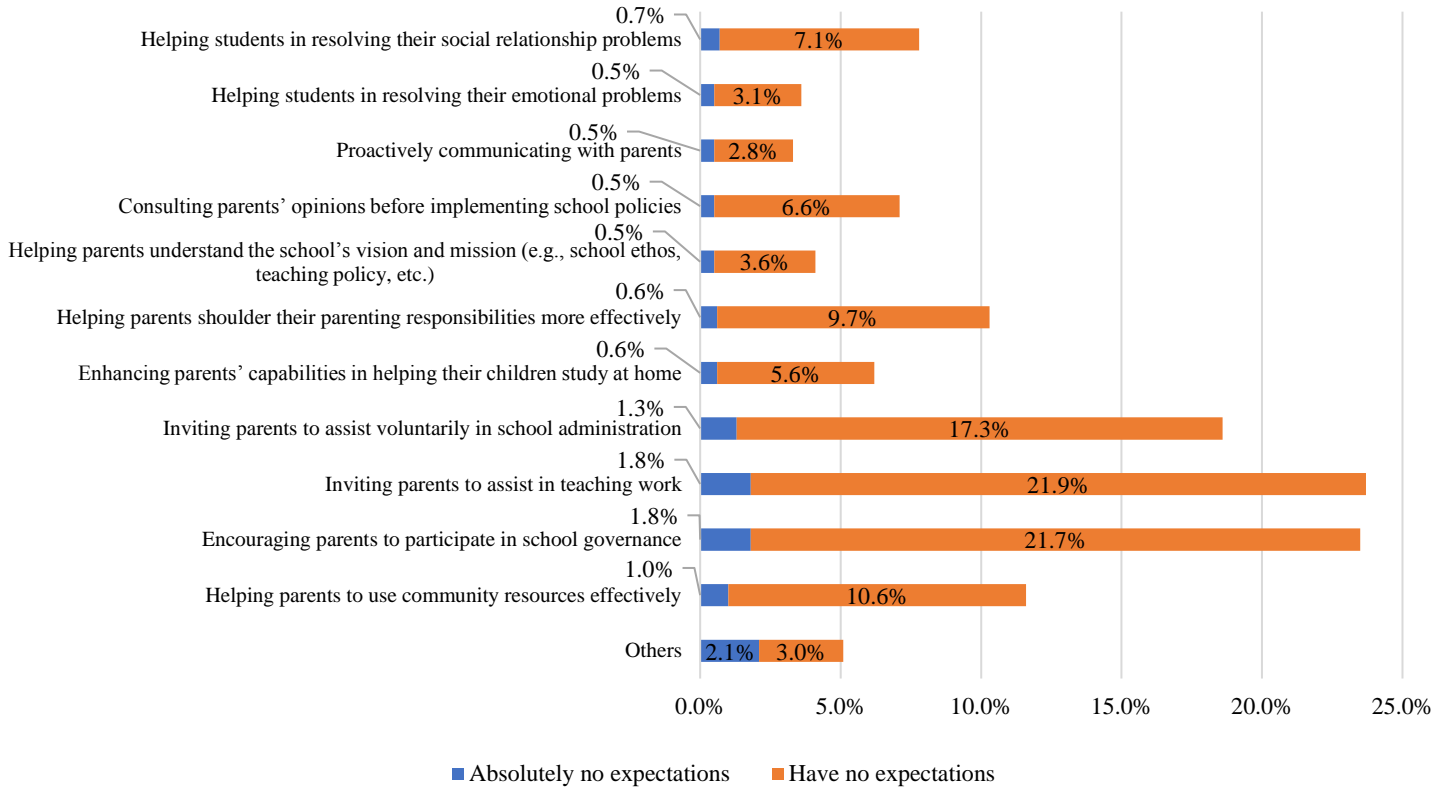
4.6.1.3 There were some parents who lacked time to communicate with the school, leading to less frequent home-school communication. Nearly one-fourth of the parents indicated that they did not have time to communicate with the teachers/school (23.4%).



No expectation for the school on school affairs and the school development

4.6.1.4 A few parents did not concern about the school development and how the school could help their children. They had no expectation for the school on these issues.

Parents: Do you expect the school to have the following policies or arrangements?



4.6.1.5 From the discussions with principals, teachers, parents and scholars, it was found that they shared similar views on the characteristics of hard-to-reach parents. For example, teachers were of the view that these parents would not respond to calls or letters from the school, would not answer teachers' phone calls, would not sign the student handbooks and even would not reply the messages left by teachers. One teacher interviewed had the following comment:

“They are parents who are not very interested in school affairs.”

“They are parents who are difficult to contact and are unwilling to confide to the teachers.”

4.6.1.6 A scholar interviewed also shared his view:

“They can't be reached. They may attend one or two school events at most, but always are hard to reach.”

4.6.1.7 The precise description of hard-to-reach parents is “non-responsive”, “hard to contact” and “rarely participate in school activities”. A school social worker also pointed out that these parents might have little care for their children:

“The parents who can't be reached may have little care for their children. They are not interested in participating in the activities organized by the school.”

4.6.1.8 In one survey conducted in the UK⁸⁰, hard-to-reach parents were defined as parents who “have low levels of engagement with the school”, “do not attend school meetings nor respond to communication” and “exhibit high levels of inertia in covering perceived barriers to participation”. In this Study, similar characteristics were found on the hard-to-reach parents. Based on the survey findings and the views gathered from the discussions with stakeholders, some rough descriptions of hard-to-reach parents could be summarized as below, and parents who exhibit one or more of such characteristics could be regarded as hard-to-reach parents:

- a) Not familiar with and not concerned about school affairs;
- b) Have little access to school information;
- c) Have little care for the child;
- d) Do not attend school meetings nor respond to communications;
- e) Have a very low level of participation in school activities even after having been invited by the school;
- f) Exhibit a high level of inertia in overcoming barriers to participation due to family and personal traits.

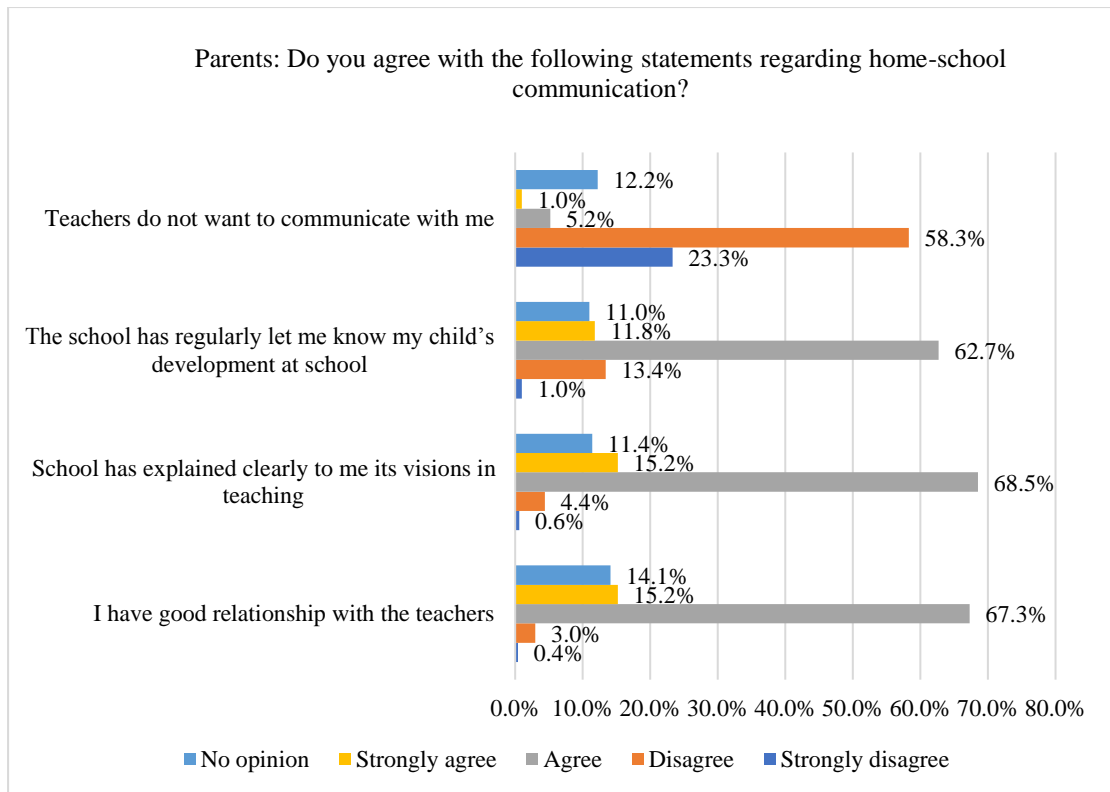
4.7 **Difficult parents**

4.7.1 ***Who they are***

Negative perceptions of the school

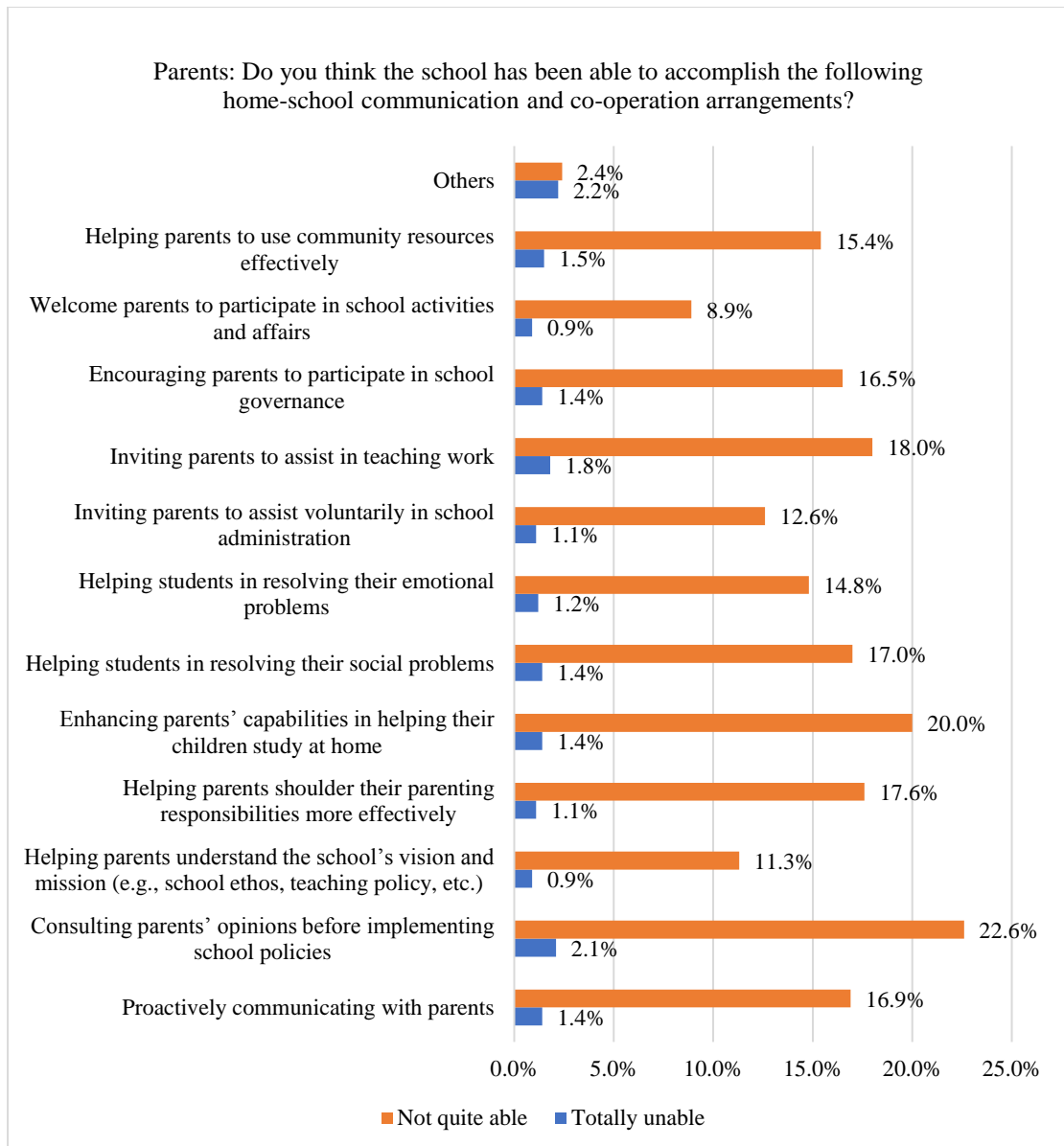
4.7.1.1 A few parents had negative perceptions of the school. They considered that the school did not let them know clearly about their children's as well as the school's development. Their attitude had sometimes made the teachers unwilling to communicate with them. Very few parents (3.4%) disagreed or strongly disagreed that they had good relationships with the teachers. Few parents (6.2%) agreed or strongly agreed that teachers did not want to communicate with them. About 5% of the parents disagreed or strongly disagreed that that school had explained clearly to them its visions in teaching and slightly more than 14% of the parents disagreed or strongly disagreed that the school had regularly let them know about their children's development at school.

⁸⁰ Campbell, Clare. (2011). *How to Involve Hard-to-reach Parents: Encouraging Meaningful Parental Involvement with Schools*. Nottingham, UK: National College for School Leadership.



Perceived inability of the school in enhancing home-school communication

4.7.1.2 Though a few parents perceived total inability of the school to help their children, consult and communicate with the parents, and help the parents to understand school affairs and its development, very few parents indicated that the school was totally unable to accomplish family-school communication and co-operation arrangements, such as proactively communicating with parents (1.4%), consulting parents' opinions before implementing school policies (2.1%), helping parents understand the school's vision and mission (0.9%), helping students in resolving their social problems (1.4%) and helping students in resolving their emotional problems (1.2%).



4.7.1.3 In the discussions with principals, teachers, parents and scholars, the respondents expressed that the characteristics of difficult parents were reflected in their behaviour. For example, some school and NGO social workers described that these parents had made complaints to the school many times, but most of their complaints were unreasonable:

“They do not like to communicate with the school and only make complaints.”

“They will complain about anything.”

“Their complaints are unreasonable and it is difficult to deal with them.”

“They have many complaints and are dissatisfied with the school. They even use foul language.”

4.7.1.4 Some stakeholders said that difficult parents were egocentric and would bitterly oppose to any change when communicating with them:

“They are subjective, unreasonable parents!”

“They will not listen to others’ opinions.”

“They are stubborn.”

“They are egocentric and insist on their own views.”

4.7.1.5 A PTA chairman also said:

“When discussing with them, they just keep repeating their stand and opinion.”

4.7.1.6 In the discussions, some stakeholders were also of the view that difficult parents would over-protect their children. The school and NGO social workers gave some examples:

“They are referred to as monster parents.”

“They believe that their children are always right.”

4.7.1.7 Another PTA chairman said:

“Some parents always disturb the teachers as they are excessively worried about their children.”

4.7.1.8 A teacher also explained:

“They just want the school to be more tolerant of their children.”

4.7.1.9 In addition to overprotecting their children, the principals and school social workers mentioned that difficult parents were also over-demanding on their children:

“They are over-demanding on their children’s academic results.” (A principal)

“They require their children to have great school results and treat their secondary school children as primary students.” (A school social worker)

4.7.1.10 Based on the survey findings and the views gathered from the discussions with stakeholders, some rough descriptions of difficult parents could be summarized as below, and parents who exhibit one or more of such characteristics could be regarded as difficult parents:

- a) They are egocentric and stubborn. They will not listen to others’ opinions and always think they are correct;
- b) They always make complaints to the school, but most of their complaints are unreasonable. Some of them use foul language frequently in their communication with the school;

- c) They over-protect their children or/and are over-demanding on their children.

4.8 **Discussions with hard-to-reach and difficult parents**

4.8.1 With the aim to study the factors hindering and the measures to improve the communication between the school and hard-to-reach/difficult parents, several focus group discussions and in-depth interviews were carried out with these parents. To identify and approach the target respondents, two methods were adopted:

4.8.1.1 Schools were invited to refer the target respondents. The questionnaire survey included a number of scanning questions related to the patterns of communication and participation. Schools with fewer or more hard-to-reach parents and difficult parents were identified after contrasting the data on the relevant questions. Some hard-to-reach parents and difficult parents were referred by some of these schools.

4.8.1.2 The Parent-Teacher Associations, NGOs and parents associations were also approached to refer the target respondents. Parent networks had also been used.

V. FACTORS, MEASURES AND GOOD PRACTICES

5.1 Overview

Although the development of home-school communication is positive in Hong Kong, some stakeholders are passive about it and do not get involved, in particular the hard-to-reach parents. The literature review indicated that various factors were associated with the effective communication between the school and parents, including the factors related to the school, family, individual and students. Through the survey, focus group discussions and in-depth interviews, numerous barriers that prevented the establishment of effective communication between the school and parents were identified. There were three categories of factors that affected the effective communication between the school and parents. To overcome these barriers, a number of measures to improve parents' involvement in the education process of their children were discussed.

5.2 School-related factors

5.2.1 *School policy*

- 5.2.1.1 It was found that the school policy (e.g. the importance accorded to home-school communication, the transparency of school policy, etc.) could influence communication between the school and parents. According to the views of different stakeholders, whether the school could create an open and free environment would affect the incentive of parents to communicate with the school or join the school activities, as well as the level of trust of the parents in the school. The following were some views shared by a principal and a PTA/FPTA chairman on the importance of school policy:

“To facilitate home-school communication, the school policy should clearly point out the importance of home-school communication.” (A principal)

“The transparency of school policy is an important factor in home-school communication.” (A PTA/FPTA chairman)

- 5.2.1.2 A parent and a school social worker also pointed out similar concerns in a focus group discussion:

“If the school creates an open and free environment, the parents and students will have trust in the teachers. The school staff, parents and students will form an excellent and united team.” (A parent)

“If the school atmosphere is friendly, parents will be willing to join the parents groups, even if they are shy to do so.” (A school social worker)

5.2.2 *Perception and attitudes*

- 5.2.2.1 Parents' willingness to be involved in their children's education was influenced by the school. As noted by the Study, the attitudes of the school principals and teachers were one of the school-related factors that influenced the communication between the school and parents. The improper attitudes of the school principals and teachers towards parents and especially low-income parents might make the parents think that they had nothing to do with the education of their children:

"The willingness of teachers to listen to and communicate with parents is very important. Teachers should provide more chances for parents to express their opinions." (A school social worker)

"The initiative of teachers is the key. Some teachers are relatively more attentive and will pay attention to even minor problems of the parents or students and resolve them as soon as possible, while some teachers may not be attentive enough to the relatively minor problems." (Another school social worker)

- 5.2.2.2 On the other hand, some stakeholders considered that communication was a two-way process, and a positive attitude of both the school and parents was necessary:

"Whether the school and parents are willing to understand each other and have empathy towards each other's situation are important to home-school communication." (A teacher)

"Good home-school communication depends on whether the parents will express their opinions honestly to the school, and whether the school will be candid in explaining the situations of the school and the students to the parents." (Another teacher)

"Good home-school communication depends on whether the school and parents will respect each other and on their willingness to share opinions with each other." (A school social worker)

- 5.2.2.3 The stakeholders were also concerned about the school's attitude towards the handling of parents' requests. A few stakeholders pointed out that whether the school would follow up and be able to deal with parents' requests promptly would affect home-school communication. Some stakeholders suggested that the school should be more proactive and try to contact the parents immediately to resolve the problems. Several principals reflected that teachers should not delay handling of issues related to parents.

"The school should handle the issues related to parents without any delay. Most parents ask questions urgently and would like to know the answer immediately. The school should respond to parents' requests as soon as possible regardless of whether the parents accept it or not." (A principal)

- 5.2.2.4 A school social worker described the arrangement to handle parents' requests at his school:

“Our school’s policies are highly transparent, creating an open campus. Parents are free to participate in the school’s morning meeting from Monday to Friday. The principal requires the teachers to reply to parents’ phone calls as soon as possible. Parents can see the principal at any time, and no appointment is required.”

5.2.2.5 Some teachers also shared their experience:

“We work together with all the school staff (including teachers, social workers and nurses). We have regular meetings every day to report students’ situations, so that the school staff can respond to parents’ questions immediately.”

5.2.2.6 Two parents described in the focus group discussions how they had approached the school to solve the problems of their children, which subsequently improved their relationships with the school:

“My child had some problems and I needed to take my child to consult a speech therapist. When the school principal knew about this, he immediately asked the teachers in various departments, deputy principal and social workers to discuss how to help my child and solve the problem.”
(A parent)

“Initially I did not understand the mechanism and policy related to the school’s multi-intelligence course and had mistaken that my child did not have any opportunity to participate in it. So I wrote a letter to reflect my dissatisfaction to the school board. The school board chairman immediately asked the relevant teacher to explain the situation and policy to me, and as a result, my misunderstanding was cleared.” (Another parent)

5.2.3 **Time and energy**

5.2.3.1 Responses from the interviews with teachers and principals revealed that the fatigue from teaching work would inhibit teachers from communicating with parents and organizing activities to encourage the involvement of parents. The teachers also said that the responsibilities on them grew more and more every year. Consequently, the teachers considered that communicating with parents and handling parents’ enquiries were some additional tasks which they were unwilling to do. Furthermore, the teachers, principals and school social workers all confessed that a lack of time was a major barrier to effective communication with parents.

“Lack of time is the main problem. As the timeslot does not match the parents’ schedule, the parents cannot be met finally.” (A teacher)

“The heavy workload of teachers is the key factor that affects home-school communication. It is unfair for teachers to handle issues related to parents after the office hours. If teachers need to reply to the WhatsApp messages from parents after work, their balance and performance in work will be much affected.” (A principal)

“It is mainly a matter of time, because the time of teachers and parents is difficult to adjust and rearrange.” (A school social worker)

5.2.3.2 Most teachers in the interviews responded that they were willing to involve parents in school activities and were favourable towards communication with parents. The teachers also suggested that parents could assist the school too. On the other hand, the social workers, parents associations and professional bodies interviewed also said that school support (e.g. providing teaching assistants and financial resources) was also a factor that affected the teachers’ willingness to involve parents at school. For example, one of the NGO social workers interviewed said:

“It depends on whether the resources are sufficient or not. Schools generally have insufficient staff to take care of all the students. As a result, the teachers might not have enough time to communicate with all the parents.”

5.2.4 **Manner of communication**

5.2.4.1 The manner in which the school communicates with parents is extremely important since the home-school relationship cannot be improved without effective communication with parents. In the interviews, school social workers, NGO social workers and members of parents associations talked about the current problem of communication between the school and parents:

“Some schools communicate with parents only on the academic performance of students. However, if only academic performance is of concern, there will be less opportunities for the school to contact with the parents.” (A school social worker)

“There is no basis for communication in the society at present, and everyone pays more attention to accountability than care.” (A NGO social worker)

“The communication between teachers and parents now only focuses on cliché conversation and reports facts about each other, but without sharing.” (A member of a parents association)

5.2.4.2 Literature in education also indicated that the traditional 5- to 15-minute Parents’ Day might be a significant barrier to home-school communication, offering little time for a meaningful communication on a student’s academic and school progress. Parents might still have the perception that the teachers were holding the “official evidence” of student achievement and this might further hinder a parent’s willingness to communicate with teachers (Nichols & Read, 2002)⁸¹. According to Powell’s (1969) theory⁸², such communication would confine only to factual conversation that reported facts about the other. There should be a higher level of communication to express ideas and opinions. During the discussions with parents, they also mentioned:

⁸¹ Nichols, S., & Read, P. (2002). “We never knew it was that bad: Home-school communication about children’s learning difficulties”. *Australian Journal of Language and Literacy*, 25(3), pp. 49–63.

⁸² See footnote 16.

“The time for Parents’ Day is too short, and there is not enough time to ask the teachers more and discuss with them more.”

5.2.5 *Usage of communication channels*

5.2.5.1 The interviews revealed that communication was important in conveying messages from parents to teachers and vice versa, and the type of communication channels to transfer messages was important. The findings further indicated that many parents did not get complete information from the school because of the improper type of communication channels used. Teachers would usually let students take the messages home, but not all students would do so, e.g. a NGO social worker said:

“If there is not any convenient communication channel for parents, the parents would not know what to do even though they would like to join the activities.”

5.2.6 *Nature of the school activities*

5.2.6.1 Nearly all respondents in the focus group discussions and in-depth interviews were of the view that the arrangement of activities was also a key factor affecting home-school communication. Some stakeholders pointed out that the content and quality of school activities would affect parent’s incentive to join. If the activities could meet the needs of parents and were beneficial to students’ development, the parents would be very willing to join.

“Parents would join the activities enthusiastically if the activities are related to their children’s development (e.g. talks about the elective subjects in Secondary 3, talks related to public exam results, and talk on Secondary 6 graduation ceremony, etc.). However, for those recreational activities, parents may not be interested to join.” (A school social worker)

“Parents are eager to help their children develop, and they would be grateful if the school could provide information to them concerning their children’s needs.” (A member of a parents association)

“If the event is held by an eminent person or an expert in related fields, the parents will be more willing to join.” (A member of a professional body)

“It will be better to have different types of activities. The activities should not only focus on the development of the children but also on the development of the parents.” (A member of a parents association)

5.2.6.2 In the interviews with representatives of parents associations, they were concerned about the variety of activities. The role of parents in the activities could also be helpers or organizers, not only participants:

“The school invites parents to be invigilators in the school examination, and the level of participation is high. This activity allows parents to have an actual and hands-on experience to understand the operation of the school examination.”

“For example, parents from the Mainland who speak good Putonghua can become volunteers in Putonghua classes. Activities such as parent-child cooking sessions would allow parents to communicate with other parents.”
(Members of parents associations)

5.2.6.3 Furthermore, some stakeholders said that it was difficult to arrange a suitable time for parents and teachers to contact with each other due to the heavy workload of both parties. The school and parents would have more chances to communicate with each other if the time arrangement could be more flexible. Furthermore, some stakeholders said that if the location of activities could be more convenient to parents, parents would be more willing to attend.

“Parents usually have dual duty. Even if they would like to participate in the school activities, they may not be able to spare the time to attend. Though many school activities are held after school, parents who have to work would not be able to participate.” (A NGO social worker)

“If the event location is convenient, parents would be more willing to join the event.” (A member of a professional body)

5.3 Parent-related factors

5.3.1 Perception and attitudes

5.3.1.1 From the discussions with teachers and parents, it was discovered that parents expected the school (or teachers) to communicate with them more on their children’s performance at school. On the other hand, teachers tended to contact parents only when some problems occurred. In this regard, a NGO social worker said:

“At present, parents would only contact the school when they faced problems. The same situation occurs for teachers who contact the parents only for problems with students. Therefore, we should start teaching parents how to communicate with the school, and the importance of home-school communication.”

5.3.2 Socio-economic status

5.3.2.1 The socio-economic status of parents is another factor that may influence parent involvement. Living in an economically disadvantaged and resource-constrained context implies various potential consequences and related challenges (Cooper & Crosone, 2007).⁸³ According to Cooper and Crosone, students whose parents were actively involved tended to enjoy school, were generally more academically orientated, and receive higher scores than their peers whose parents’ involvement was lacking or limited. Several school social workers were of the view that parents who had low social status would be less willing to communicate with the school, thus hindering them from participating in school’s affairs, e.g. a school social worker said:

⁸³ Cooper, C.E., & Crosnoe, R. (2007). “The engagement in schooling of economically disadvantaged parents and children”. *Youth and Society*, 38(3), pp. 372–389.

“There are many new immigrants living in public housing estates. The parents usually have to work long hours and it is hard for them to apply holidays for joining school activities.”

- 5.3.2.2 One of the principals also supported this idea when the principals was asked about his/her opinions on hard-to-reach parents:

“Some parents with relatively low social and economic status may compare themselves with others and will tend not to participate in school activities.”

- 5.3.2.3 Ricciuti (2004)⁸⁴ explained that the less support from lower income families could be associated with the time constraint and the occupation of the parents. Ricciuti further emphasized the fact that lower income parents (often single mothers) might have limited social and economic resources available to them and their families, implying the possibility of negative outcomes for their children.

5.3.3 ***Ability and knowledge***

- 5.3.3.1 Different stakeholders were of the view that parents’ ability to make the best use of communication methods was another key factor affecting home-school communication.

“Given the differences in parents’ backgrounds, electronic communication media may be difficult for some parents to use, and paper notices were better than electronic notices in this case. At present, all notices are issued through mobile phones, but it would be easy for parents to forget checking them.” (A teacher)

“Younger parents prefer to use mobile phones and other information technology and thus are more likely to accept electronic notifications, but older parents are less familiar with the new technology and it may not be suitable for the school to use electronic notifications.” (A hard-to-reach parent)

5.3.4 ***Language factor***

- 5.3.4.1 The interviews found that language was another problem. Some stakeholders mentioned that non-Chinese speaking parents might have difficulty in communicating with the school.

“If the parents speak only Mandarin, they are afraid that the teacher will not understand them, so they will hesitate to communicate with the teachers.” (A parent)

5.3.5 ***Education level***

- 5.3.5.1 Researches had indicated that the education level of parents could influence their level of involvement in school activities and in their children’s education.

⁸⁴ Ricciuti, H. (2004). “Single parenthood, achievement, and problem behavior in white, black, and Hispanic children”. *Journal of Education Research*, 97(4), pp. 196–206.

The survey showed that parents at education level of diploma or above had a higher percentage of attendance than those with less formal education. It had been shown that less educated parents would less likely be involved in their children's education (Jooste, 2011).⁸⁵ Similar findings were also identified by another study in South Africa, indicating that factors such as parents' education level and children's being victimized are important in determining parents' involvement in their children's education (Mncube, 2009).⁸⁶

5.4 Factors in connection with Hard-to-reach parents

Apart from the factors mentioned above, there were some other factors pointed out by the respondents in the interview regarding hard-to-reach parents and difficult parents.

5.4.1 *Self-efficacy*

5.4.1.1 The interview results indicated that parents' perceived self-efficacy was one of the individual factors influencing their level of willingness to communicate with the school. Self-efficacy described the parent's self-belief that they could make a positive contribution to their own children's learning.⁸⁷ Some NGO social workers pointed out that some parents might have low self-esteem and self-image, thus affecting their incentive to communicate with the school.

"Their low education level, low self-image, and negative experience from the many difficulties they faced when growing up are some of the factors that may hinder parents from taking an active role in home-school communication." (A NGO social worker)

5.4.1.2 The survey findings also showed that most parents were unwilling to participate in higher level activities, such as joining the PTA or the School Board. Only those parents (e.g. members of PTAs) who felt more efficacious themselves and who believed in their capacity to influence their children's performance would be more willing to communicate with the school and share their opinions. One member of a professional body and one scholar described that hard-to-reach parents might consider such involvement as official and worried that their insufficient knowledge would not allow them to voice out any useful opinions.

"Some parents may often have 'self-social exclusion' and feel that they have insufficient knowledge and ability to do things. Therefore, we must let them know that they can still participate via different channels." (A member of a professional body)

"Some hard-to-reach parents may have low self-esteem (e.g. those living in cage houses), and the school could communicate with them through their children." (A scholar)

⁸⁵ See footnote 7.

⁸⁶ Mncube, V. S. (2009). "Perceptions of the principal's role in democratic school governance in South Africa". *Journal of Educational Administration and History*, 41(1), pp. 29–43.

⁸⁷ Bandura, A. (1986). "The explanatory and predictive scope of self-efficacy theory". *Journal of Clinical and Social Psychology*, 4, pp. 359–373.

5.4.2 ***Parent's characters/personality traits***

- 5.4.2.1 Some teachers indicated that some parents were aware of their difficulties but were still unwilling to listen to teachers and accept the advice of teachers, e.g. a teacher said:

“Some parents know that they need to tackle their difficulties, but they still do not listen to teachers and do not accept teachers’ opinions.”

“Some parents are relatively introverted and this has affected the home-school communication. It is hard to change.”

5.4.3 ***Time and energy***

- 5.4.3.1 Similar to teachers, most hard-to-reach parents considered the main limitation to their involvement in their children’s education was the limited time due to their heavy workload. The lack of time had restricted their availability to review their children’s homework and to attend school events. Consequently, most parents’ involvement was limited to only one-off activities. In the in-depth interviews, both school social workers and NGO social workers agreed that many parents were busy with their work and did not have any spare time for communicating more with the school.

“Some parents are very interested in the talks and workshops related to the support of SEN parents, but many of them are not able to join due to their limited time.” (A school social worker)

“Parents usually have dual-duty nowadays. Even if they want to participate in school activities, they may not be able to do so. Many school activities are held after school, and parents who need to work then will not be able to participate.” (A NGO social worker)

- 5.4.3.2 Some hard-to-reach parents also indicated that they had to work or take care of their children, thus they could not participate in school activities.

“The main reason for not participating in school activities is the lack of time as we need to work.”

“As a housewife, I am very busy as I need to take care of three children.”

“I have to work and have no time to join school activities. In addition, I have to take care of three sons.”

- 5.4.3.3 Some teachers indicated that some parents had to work more than one job and hence it was difficult for them to join school activities.

“Many parents are double-income parents and it is difficult for them to take part in school activities.”

5.4.4 *Family structure*

- 5.4.4.1 Some stakeholders reflected that family structure had also an effect on parents' involvement in school activities. For instance, a principal said that hard-to-reach parents who were single parents or step parents had rarely attended Parents' Days:

“Some parents who had re-marriages would not attend the Parents' Day.”

5.4.5 *Residential status*

- 5.4.5.1 Some stakeholders said that some hard-to-reach parents did not reside in Hong Kong, and it was difficult for the school to maintain communication with them. A member of a parents association said:

“Some parents do not join school activities because they have no time, because of their work, or because they are living in the Mainland.”

- 5.4.5.2 Also, as mentioned by a principal:

“Sometimes parents would seek help from social workers, but some of the cases are difficult to handle because the parents do not live in Hong Kong.”

5.4.6 *Parents' negative experience*

- 5.4.6.1 The discussions with hard-to-reach parents revealed that negative school experiences of parents could also constitute a barrier to their communication with the school. Some parents said that their negative relationships with the school were linked to their unhappy experiences in the past caused by the unfriendly or unwelcome attitudes of the school staff or other parents. For example, one hard-to-reach parent described his negative experience with the class teacher on a Parent's Day:

“Nothing was positive during that short meeting. The teacher told me that the academic performance of my son was not very good. She said my son had no chance to enter the university. I really felt hurt and I don't want to talk to the school anymore since then.”

- 5.4.6.2 Such findings were quite similar with the findings in a study conducted in the UK. The National College for Teaching and Leadership published a survey-based study in mid-2011 about the practical strategies on how to reach out to hard-to-reach parents.⁸⁸ The perceived barriers included self-esteem, previous experience at school, and gender issues such as gender roles. There were also boundary issues, where school leaders did not recognize the importance of taking parents' involvement to beyond the boundaries of the school place and into the home as well, where children's education by parents mostly occurs.

5.4.7 *Physical and mental health issues*

⁸⁸ Campbell, Clare. (2011). *How to Involve Hard-to-reach Parents: Encouraging Meaningful Parental Involvement with Schools*. Nottingham, UK: The National College for Teaching and Leadership. Retrieved on 13/8/2018 from https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/340369/how-to-involve-hard-to-reach-parents-full-report.pdf

- 5.4.7.1 A few respondents of interviews pointed out that hard-to-reach parents might have physical or mental health problems. For example, a school social worker said:

“Some parents have mental health problems and they are more difficult to communicate with. Instead, the school has to communicate with these parents via their children.”

5.5 Factors in connection with difficult parents

5.5.1 Level of trust to school

- 5.5.1.1 During the discussions with principals and teachers, a number of prohibiting factors were identified which might affect communication between the school and difficult parents. For example, some social workers indicated that these difficult parents had a lack of trust in the school:

“As parents generally lack the trust in the school, and the school needs to build trust with these parents.”

“Parents may approach the school for help. However, when they feel that the school does not understand their problems and cannot help them, they will begin not to trust the school anymore.”

“The school should let parents know that the school understands them and cares about their children. The school will help them and their children as much as possible, in order to make them trust the school again.”

5.5.2 Different values shared with schools

- 5.5.2.1 Some teachers indicated that parents tended to focus more on students' benefits while the school tended to focus more on the safety of students.

“Parents' perceptions are sometimes inconsistent with the school's education vision.”

“Conflicts will start because of the contrasting perspectives of parents and the school. Parents tend to focus more on the students' preferences, but the school tend to focus more on the safety of students.”

5.5.3 Level of understanding to school

- 5.5.3.1 During the discussions with school social workers, some of them indicated that some parents worried about any unknown situation in the school because of their misunderstanding of the school.

“Some parents do not understand the current education system well. Schools should let parents know and explain to them that some problems are not due to the school nor the students.”

“When their children reach graduation, some parents would worry about their children’s future. They did not know whether the school can provide them support and help on this.”

“Some parents don’t understand the current situation and the rationales of the school. So they may have negative feelings about the school.”

5.5.4 Parent’s characters/personality traits

5.5.4.1 Some teachers indicated that some parents were unwilling to listen to nor accept the advice of others. They followed only their own thoughts. For example, a principal said:

“These parents are very stubborn and have only their own thoughts. They are subjective and unreasonable.”

5.5.5 Physical and mental health issues

5.5.5.1 Some stakeholders were of the view that difficult parents, similar to hard-to-reach parents, might have long-term physical diseases or mental health problems. One teacher explained:

“They may have illnesses and have stayed in the hospital for a long time. They may have mental health problems as well.”

5.5.5.2 In addition, a principal and a NGO social worker further explained:

“The husband and wife often have disputes and this may affect their children negatively. Most of the disputes are caused by family stress, emotional issues or marital problems.” (A principal)

“Parents going through significant family changes (such as divorce, emotional problems, drug abuse, etc.) would not be able to take care of their children because of their own problems.” (A NGO social worker)

5.6 Student-related factors

5.6.1 Grade level of students

5.6.1.1 Another concern that affected the effective involvement of parents, as noted by the parents interviewed, was their children. Some students, especially those at senior grade levels, might resist parental involvement. These students would deliberately not to inform their parents of events in the school. The PTA members pointed out that these students would affect the mind-set of their parents and affect the incentive of their parents to communicate with the school. For example, a member of PTA said:

“When their children are in the secondary school, many parents thought that they should give their children more freedom. So the parents are no longer enthusiastic about participating in school-related activities like what they did in the primary school.”

“My children do not want me to participate in school activities or monitor their behaviours at school. They will feel ashamed if I do so.”

5.6.1.2 Current studies explained that children’s stage of development seems to have an influence on the level of parental involvement at school. Epstein and Dauber (1993)⁸⁹ stated that, at the school level, parents’ involvement was typically more positive in the primary school. As the learner progresses through the different grade levels, fewer teachers tended to assist parents in becoming involved (Epstein, 1986)⁹⁰. This could explain the survey findings that secondary schools had less policy-related activities to promote home-school communication and less parents of students of senior grade levels participating in school activities.

5.6.2 *Learning difficulties and disabilities*

5.6.2.1 In addition, some stakeholders also mentioned that students with special educational needs (SEN) might affect the attitude and perception of their parents in communication with the school. Parents who felt that their children with special needs were being neglected at school would more likely be dissatisfied than the other parents and had the perception that their children’s need for special support would not be met at school. One principal had the following to say about the mind-set of the parents of SEN students:

“Some parents of SEN students perceive that they are special and expect to have special support from the school.”

“The parents may make unreasonable complaints, claiming that their children have congenital deficiency and demanding special treatment.”

5.7 **Measures improving and facilitating effective communication between schools and parents**

Responses from interviews revealed that there were school-, family- and child-related factors that influenced the effectiveness of communication between the school and parents. These factors also determined the views of teachers and parents on whether teachers or parents should be responsible for initiating parental involvement. Considering the factors which hindered communication between the school and parents, there were measures to be taken by school to improve the home-school communication and co-operation. During the discussions with principals, teachers, parents, scholars and other stakeholders, it was suggested a number of measures could be in place.

5.7.1 *Parent-Teacher Association*

5.7.1.1 From the interviews, it was discovered that the Parent-Teacher Associations had served as a bridge between parents and the school, and would affect parents’ participation in school activities and improve the communication

⁸⁹ Dauber, S. L., & Epstein, J. L. (1993). “Parents’ attitudes and practices of involvement in inner-city elementary and middle schools”, in N. Chavkin (ed.), *Families and Schools in a Pluralistic Society*, pp. 53–71. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

⁹⁰ Epstein, J. L. (1986). “Parents’ reactions to teacher practices of parent involvement”. *Elementary School J.*, 86, pp. 277–294.

between the school and parents. Some principals explained why the PTA was important in home-school communication:

“The PTA is important. It is a group with parents and teachers. The PTA would let the school know if there is any problem raised by parents and help the school to deal with it immediately, otherwise it would be too late to be solved.”

5.7.1.2 Some parents also agreed that the PTA was helpful in communicating with the school:

“I would like to send WhatsApp messages to the PTA to ask questions about the school.”

“The PTA chairman would reflect to the school parents’ opinions about school development and also discuss them with the school.”

5.7.1.3 The PTA chairmen explained one of the functions of the PTA was to be a communication bridge between parents and the school:

“The PTA would spread information of the school to parents clearly as soon as possible.”

“The PTA provides a way for parents to contact the school and meet the teachers.”

“The school could listen to parents’ opinions through the PTA.”

“The PTA could enhance the relationship with parents.”

5.7.1.4 The PTA members also shared their experience in spreading opinions between parents and the school:

“The school would listen to the PTA for parents’ opinions and the PTA collects opinions from parents as well.”

“Some parents do not contact the school often, but we still spread and explain the school news to them as soon as possible.”

“We would specially organize a tea gathering for Form 1 parents. In the gathering, they could express their opinions to us, and we would summarize their opinions and present them to the school.”

5.7.2 Diversified communication channels

5.7.2.1 Having diversified communication channels was one of the measures to improve parental participation in education, to facilitate the conveying of messages from parents to teachers and vice versa, and the spreading of messages such as messages of positive parenting to parents, especially hard-to-reach parents and difficult parents. The findings of the Study further indicated that many parents did not get complete information from the school because of the limited types of communication channels used. The interviews pointed out that the school should try to contact parents through different ways

of communication. For example, two school social workers had the following to say:

“The most important thing in home-school co-operation is to have the proper communication channel.” (A school social worker)

“Through these communication channels, passive parents will also have the opportunity to contact teachers.” (Another school social worker)

5.7.3 Use of technology

5.7.3.1 It was discovered that existing and emerging electronic communication technologies would provide opportunities for schools to increase the involvement by parents in their children’s academic life. A social worker said:

“There are ‘e-Class’, ‘e-APP’ and other applications through which parents can receive information from the school at any time.”

5.7.3.2 Some principals and teachers also shared similar views:

“The email and e-Class are very useful. Each student has an individual email account, and parents can use the email to monitor their children and contact teachers.” (A principal)

“The school will use an online platform to issue announcements to parents daily. The online platform has made the information flow faster and communication more convenient.” (A teacher)

5.7.3.3 A PTA chairman interviewed also indicated that technology had provided more convenience to working parents:

“Some working parents like to communicate with the school through WhatsApp.”

5.7.4 Volunteering programmes

5.7.4.1 It was discovered during the interviews that launching volunteering programmes was one of the ways suggested to improve the effectiveness of home-school communication. It was believed that through the volunteer programmes, parents could motivate each other to participate in home-school activities and share their parenting experiences. On the other hand, parent volunteers could invite more parents to join the programmes using their connections with parents. A PTA chairman shared how he promoted activities through parents:

“There are at present hundreds of parent volunteers. They would spread messages to other parents.”

“Through the parent volunteers, more parents could be encouraged to join the school activities. Some parents may want to join the school activities but they don’t know how. The parent volunteers may then help them.”

5.7.5 ***Home- school activities***

5.7.5.1 The survey and interviews found that parents' participation in school activities would help build a more in-depth communication between the school and parents. For example, a principal stated:

“These school activities can provide opportunities for informal communication between the school and parents.”

5.7.5.2 Some school social workers also agreed that holding more school activities for parents could improve home-school communication. For example, a school social worker said:

“Holding school activities is an effective way to let parents communicate with the school, because during an activity, parents can communicate with the principal and teachers face-to-face individually.”

5.7.6 ***Involvement of social workers or other professionals such as psychologists during communication***

5.7.6.1 The interviews also found that involving social workers in communications with parents would give better results. Some stakeholders pointed out that the school should seek help from social workers or psychologists when needed. The social worker or psychologist could act as an intermediary between the school and difficult parents or hard-to-reach parents. For example, a teacher said:

“When a student has a problem, I would arrange a meeting for parents, hoping they could have more understanding of their child. If necessary, we would involve a social worker, a discipline team teacher, or an educational psychologist in the meeting to explain more details to parents to understand the student's problem, parents are most likely to accept the explanation.”

5.7.6.2 Also, a principal said:

“For example, for students with autism, the school would invite the parents to meet the social worker together with the student. This can enhance better home-school co-operation to improve the development of the student.”

5.8 **Good practices**

In order to improve the effectiveness of home-school communication, a number of measures could be implemented by schools. During the discussions and interviews, several good practices were recommended by the stakeholders, and some of them had successfully improved home-school communication. The good practices also offered ideas for creative partnerships, not only with parents but also with external organizations. Below are some good practices cited or recommended by schools to enhance home-school communication between the school and parents, especially hard-to-reach parents and difficult parents. These practices are categorized into four types of communication:

Spreading messages of positive parenting to parents, especially hard-to-reach parents and difficult parents	Encouraging hard-to-reach parents and difficult parents to communicate with schools	Collecting views and opinions from parents, especially hard-to-reach parents and difficult parents	Handling communication problems between schools and parents
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5.8.1 ***Identification of good practices on spreading messages of positive parenting to parents, especially hard-to-reach parents and difficult parents***

Welcoming parents

Holding Primary 1 Parents' Days

5.8.1.1 Principals were of the view that Parents' Day for Primary 1 students was useful and important for spreading the messages of parenting, as one principal stated:

“Primary 1 Parents' Day is the best occasion to encourage parents to participate more in school activities. When children grow up, parents will involve less in school affairs. Therefore, the school should take the opportunity to encourage parents to join parents groups when their children first enter the school.”

Training on appropriate parenting

Organizing parents' talks and workshops

5.8.1.2 The talks and workshops aimed to spread the messages of parenting to parents. It was expected that parents could exchange information on parenting with each other.

“The PTA will organize workshops for parents which can educate the parents.” (A teacher)

5.8.1.3 The talks covered various topics, such as methods of parenting, sex education and mental health, with hard-to-reach parents, principals or school social workers as speakers. As a result, parents could learn more about child education.

“The school has held several talks on educating the child and stress alleviation.” (A hard-to-reach parent)

“The school has organized talks on resilience for parents one or two months after the semester started. The school has also organized talks related to methods of parenting. On the other hand, some workshops have been organized by the school and others by parents. Parents can interact with other parents during the workshops to share their knowledge and experience on parenting.” (A principal)

“The school has organized talks on mental health for parents, and in this year talks on positive education and sex education will be held.” (A school social worker)

- 5.8.1.4 Some schools might invite local or overseas professionals or scholars to hold talks for parents.

“The school will invite professionals from local/overseas universities to host the talks.” (A principal)

Organizing book sharing groups

- 5.8.1.5 The book sharing group would allow parents to share with each other the knowledge they learned from books and provide support to one another.

“Parents have established voluntarily the book sharing group and they share with each other the knowledge gained from books. The parents will also tell others about the problems they face. Through sharing, parents will know that their children need their support all the time at different age. Parents will also share their feelings from reading. In this way they can help and support one another in the group.” (A PTA chairman)

Supporting parents

Organizing art expression groups

- 5.8.1.6 The stakeholders interviewed reported that some schools organized art expression groups which aimed to alleviate parents’ stress and enhance their mental health.

“Last year we started an art expression group. Sometimes parents might be affected by their emotions and forget appropriate skills when handling their children. We hope the group can help them to stabilize their emotion and stay calm.” (A school social worker)

Organizing support network groups for parents

- 5.8.1.7 Some stakeholders expressed that support network groups would provide a channel for parents to share their views and support each other. It could alleviate parents’ stress. Some schools had co-operated with the social workers of the Hong Kong Single Parents Association to set up support network groups, as informed by a principal.

“The group organizes talks and painting activities for parents to reduce their stress.”

- 5.8.1.8 The parents groups were highly recommended for enhancing home-school communication, and their effectiveness was widely recognized. In Singapore, parents of the Parent Support Group (PSGs) will meet to discuss with the school’s key personnel on educational concerns and improvements in school programmes (MoE, 1998).⁹¹ The PSGs will provide a network of support

⁹¹ Ministry of Education (MoE). (1998). *Partners in Education: Guidelines on Home-School Links*. Singapore:

amongst the schools, families and the community. The PSGs and the schools can collaborate in a symbiotic relationship towards a common vision to improve the school (MoE, 1998).⁹² The PSGs also serve as a communication channel for parents to seek information, raise questions, and voice their concerns on school policies and practices (MoE, 2017).⁹³

5.8.1.9 In Taiwan, the development of parents groups is relatively mature. From the 1990s, parents committees have become the representatives of parents and participated fully in the work of parents associations in schools,⁹⁴ from class management, teacher assessment, to discussion on school affairs. Recently, the parents committees in Taiwan have been developed from the class, grade, school to the national level. In particular, relevant legislations to protect parents' right have been introduced.

Establishing parents' resource centers

5.8.1.10 The Parents Resource centres were launched by some schools to provide consultation service to parents, as said by a PTA chairman:

“Our school wants to allocate time to parents for parental consultation at the Parents Resource Centre which the school sets up for such purpose.”

Promoting good parenting

Holding parent sharing sessions like “Father Li & Mother Wong”(「李爸爸、王媽媽」)

5.8.1.11 Parents of students with special educational needs (SEN) were invited to share their successful parenting experiences with other parents. The principals and teachers believed that this could provide support and help the parents tackle their difficulties.

“The school will invite parents of SEN students from Taiwan to share their successful parenting experience.” (A teacher)

“Parents attending the talk are surprised by the talk and they think the talk can help them tackle their difficulties.” (A principal)

“Other parents can give support to these difficult parents and help them to accept their difficulty.” (A principal)

“Some parents are willing to share their thoughts with others after the talk.” (A principal)

Ministry of Education.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ministry of Education. (MoE). (2017). Parent Support Groups: A How-to Guide By Parents For Parents. Singapore: Ministry of Education.

⁹⁴ 張嘉明. (2006)。《深化家校合作：台灣的發展情況》。台灣：家庭與學校合作事宜委員會。 Available at: http://www.chsc.hk/chi/content_news/20061218_Symposium_2006_cheung.pdf

Organizing parents' groups / parents' gatherings

5.8.1.12 Parents expressed that parents groups allowed parents to interact with each other, exchange information on parenting and school affairs, and share their experience with each other.

“Parents can set up a group for communication among themselves.”

“There is interflow between parents, such as parenting skills.”

“Parents can be a role model. When they participate in activities actively, other parents would follow.”

5.8.1.13 Some teachers informed that some schools invited educational psychologists to communicate with parents and provide counselling service to the parents if needed.

“Parents are under stress after taking care of SEN children for a long time. My school has invited educational psychologists to communicate with parents and provide counselling service to them.” (A teacher)

5.8.1.14 After joining the parents group, parents would gather regularly. They would talk about school development and other matters and share their parenting experience.

“We talk about school development, teacher training and other matters, and exchange parenting experience with each other during the gathering.” (A parent)

5.8.2 Identification of good practices in encouraging hard-to-reach parents and difficult parents to communicate with schools

Cultivating communication

Holding adaptation courses for parents of Form 1 students

5.8.2.1 Schools organized adaptation courses for parents of Form 1 students to allow them to know each other and understand more about the school policy and school environment.

“Through the gathering and activities of the adaptation courses, attending parents can know more about each other. Parents are also invited to join the PTA activities.” (A PTA chairman)

Organizing Campus Life Experience Activity for parents

5.8.2.2 The Campus Life Experience Activity for parents provided a chance for parents to experience the school life. The activity allowed parents to understand more about the school environment and affairs, communicate more with teachers and students.

“Parents can have a chance to experience both the in-class and out-class school life via the Campus Life Experience Activity for parents.”(A principal)

5.8.2.3 The activity was launched at school for parents of students of junior grade levels only, as the attendance for parents of students of senior grade levels was too low, as revealed by the school. Below is the general operation of the Campus Life Experience Activity of a certain school, as described by its principal.

- 1. The school sent out a school notice to parents to invite them to sign up for joining the activity.**
- 2. On the day of the activity, the programme would be as follows:**
 - a. Talks**
 - I The talks would be on different topics such as parenting and online culture. The talks would be hosted by social workers.
 - b. Arranging parents to have a class with students**
 - II This would allow parents to understand the learning situation of their children.
 - c. Parents having lunch with their children**
 - d. Parents gathering**
 - III This would allow parents to share with other parents the difficulties faced by them.
 - e. Survey of parents to find out what they thought of the activity**
 - f. A tour of the school campus**

Conducting home visits

5.8.2.4 Home visits were launched in some schools, as reported by their principals. Home visits would allow teachers to know more about the study environment, habits and family life of the students. The teachers could know about the changes in students’ lives as well.

“The home visit would let teachers know about the family life of the students such as their daily schedule, help the students eliminate their bad habits, and increase their study efficiency. It can also help teachers discover the needs of students, such as mental or physical therapy.” (A teacher)

“Some schools have arranged home visits to particular families from time to time.” (A scholar)

“The most effective method to know more about students is having home visits.” (A teacher)

5.8.2.5 A school social worker said some teachers would conduct at least one home visit for each student in the class. Teachers and social workers could provide professional opinions to parents during home visits. Also the school should consider conducting home visits to hard-to-reach parents, parents having

physical problems or parents with whom the school could not get in touch to facilitate communication, as said by some principals and teachers.

“Our school has a regulation that a parent must receive his/her child’s academic transcript personally, and our school suggests that the teachers could conduct home visits if the parents could not come to school. After the school has implemented this regulation, parents would receive their children’s transcripts personally within two to three weeks. Also the teachers would spend more time to meet and communicate with these hard-to-reach parents.” (A principal)

“Teachers can try other channels such as home visits to contact hard-to-reach parents.” (A teacher)

5.8.2.6 For the arrangement of home visits, the teachers and social workers could conduct the home visits together. They would understand the problems of the parents and students more thoroughly, as told by some scholars and principals.

“In some cases, social workers will be involved and they can conduct the home visits.” (A principal)

“Currently, most home visits are mainly conducted by social workers.” (A school social worker)

5.8.2.7 A teacher suggested that the home visit should last for 30–60 minutes. A hard-to-reach parent said his home visit was conducted in a park. A teacher had to conduct at least 10 home visits annually for one class and the families to be visited include not only general families, but also problematic families.

“Of course, the problematic families would account for a larger proportion of home visits. If the parents of some selected students are busy and the families are considered as being necessary to be visited, the school would invite the parents to have a face-to-face meeting at school.” (A principal)

5.8.2.8 Below is the general home visit procedure of a school which carried out home visits, as told by its principal:

1. The teachers, social workers, and principals if possible, would visit the home of the selected students.
2. During the visit to a family, the teacher would take a look at the study environment of that family to see if there was any independent study space.
3. After the home visit, the student of that family would accompany the teacher to visit the next family, and this would give a chance for that student to understand the family situation of other students.

5.8.2.9 Home visit is widely used in improving home-school communication in some countries/regions. For example, in the Parent-Teacher-Home Visit Project

(PTHVP)⁹⁵ in the USA, teachers and other school staff visited families with the goal of building relationships of trust and respect between the home and the school. During the 2011–2012 school year, a total of 450 home visits were successfully conducted. Strategies devised by school leaders to engage hard-to-reach parents in the UK (Campbell, 2011)⁹⁶ included support from home liaison officers and home visits followed by subsequent invitations to “drop-in” events at school.

5.8.2.10 In Mainland China, the format of home visits has been improved⁹⁷ according to the needs of different families: general visits (普訪), follow-up visits (隨訪) and regular visits (定期訪問). The home visits aim to target at specific students to help them to solve practical problems and to promote a better parent-teacher networking.

Launching “Case Worker” programmes

5.8.2.11 One or two teachers were selected by school to be the “Case Worker(s)” and he/she would be the main contact point for hard-to-reach and difficult parents. This would allow the school to communicate with parents in a more effective way.

*“We communicate with hard-to-reach and difficult parents through one or two colleagues as the main contact point (Case Workers) so as to avoid the involvement of too many colleagues, thus causing confusion subsequently.”
(A teacher)*

Launching the school caring plans - “Sunshine Phone Calls Program” 陽光電話計劃

5.8.2.12 The programme aimed to let teachers understand more about the students’ situation as well as their family, showing school’s care to parents and students.

“Our school joined the “Sunshine Phone Calls Programme” and our teachers would try to contact all parents by phone at the beginning of a semester.” (A principal)

Maintaining effective communication

Launching the Parents’ Worlds (家長天地)

5.8.2.13 Some schools launched the Parents’ World which provided a chance for parents to communicate and exchange information with other parents and the school. It was generally held at lunchtime, as explained by a PTA chairman:

“The Parents’ World is held by teachers with counselling experience at lunchtime every Wednesday or Friday. Parents will gather at school voluntarily and will communicate and exchange information with teachers and other parents.”

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ See footnote 75.

⁹⁷ See: <http://www.wenku1.com/news/014325C8ECB7CC6E.html> & http://www.jyb.cn/china/gnsd/201610/t20161013_676810.html

Organizing tea gatherings

5.8.2.14 Some schools held tea gatherings for parents when parents could gather together to share information and express their opinions to the school through the attending teachers.

“The tea gathering allows parents to express their opinions.” (A school social worker)

“The tea gathering allows parents to know each other and communicate with the school in order to improve the school.” (A PTA chairman)

“The tea gathering can let parents know more about the school and enhance home-school relationship.” (A parent)

5.8.2.15 The date of the tea gathering could be in March, after the Chinese New Year holiday at lunchtime. The schedule informed by a PTA chairman is as follows:

1. Parent volunteers prepared food for the gathering.
2. Parents and teachers had a simple gathering and had a light lunch together.
3. After lunch, the school held a talk for parents.

5.8.2.16 As suggested by parents, the school might have tea gathering once a semester or every three months and invite not only PTA members, but also parents to join.

Launching “Respect Our Teachers Campaign”

5.8.2.17 Some school launched the “Respect Our Teachers Campaign” which would give a chance for parents to express their gratitude to teachers.

“The parents can express their appreciation to teachers. The value of the presents given to teachers is not important. The most important thing is parents’ participation and this would allow teachers to feel the parents’ support.” (A PTA chairman)

5.8.2.18 During the “Respect Our Teachers Campaign”, the school invited parents to come to the school at the end of the semester to prepare gifts and food for teachers, such as soup or desserts.

“The “Respect Our Teachers Campaign” is held in February or March, and parents will prepare some handicrafts or small gifts for the school staff.” (A parent)

Launching the “Tue Station”

5.8.2.19 Schools launched the “Tue Station” which allowed parents to visit the school and prepared lunch for students. During the activity, parent volunteers came to the school campus to prepare free lunch for Form 1 and Form 2 students.

“Parents are not allowed to give special care to their own children. Every student will have the same food.” (A PTA chairman)

Organizing local visits and overseas tours

5.8.2.20 Overseas tours or visits to local universities or other institutions were organized by the PTAs of some schools. The visits and tours would enhance the communication among parents, teachers and students.

“During the tour, parents and teachers will also talk about school affairs.” (A PTA chairman)

“About 40–50 persons participated in our last tour.” (Another PTA chairman)

5.8.2.21 Some schools had held various tours and visits in the past. A school had organized a visit to the universities in Guangzhou, participated by students, teachers, parents and even some hard-to-reach parents.

“The school has organized a visit to universities in the Mainland for parents and their children. The school has made reference beforehand to other schools which have organized visits to universities in the Mainland.” (A hard-to-reach parent)

“Our school has organized local and overseas exchange visits.” (A teacher)

“Our school has organized a sketching activity at the CUHK for students.” (A teacher)

Organizing cheering activity for Form 6 students

5.8.2.22 Some schools organized cheering activities for Form 6 students and parents were invited to prepare for the event.

“Our school has organized a cheering activity for Form 6 students, which allows parents to communicate with the alumni, teachers and students.” (A principal)

“The cheering activity is held in January and parents will prepare food for the Form 6 students.” (Another principal)

5.8.2.23 For the type of activities, a school had organized a “Fruit Biweekly” (水果雙週) activity for the Diploma of Secondary Education (DSE) students. In the activity, parent volunteers would prepare fruits and make handicrafts such as “heart” and “little angel” decorations for the students, as described by the teachers.

Implementing the parents-teacher class teaching plans

5.8.2.24 Through the plan, schools allowed parents to go to the class and assisted the teachers in their class teaching.

“The school allows parents to assist in class teaching work.” (A PTA chairman)

5.8.2.25 Before participating in the class teaching work, parents first had to obtain a certificate by passing the training provided by the school regarding the kind and teaching pattern of the class, as emphasized by a PTA chairman.

Arranging lesson observations

5.8.2.26 Some schools arranged lesson observation for parents. During the lesson observation, the school invited parents to attend the class and observe the students’ performance. Lesson observation would allow parents to understand more about the teachers (class teachers and subject teachers) and students’ performance. Parents could talk to the teachers after the class observation for a better understanding of the students.

“The school has arranged lesson observation which allows parents to know more about the teachers and the class situation” (A parent)

“Parents can interact with teachers and know more about their children’s study via observing the lesson in person.” (A PTA chairman)

“I can communicate with the teachers after the lesson observation and understand the students more.” (A hard-to-reach parent)

5.8.2.27 A hard-to-reach parent suggested that the school could have a live broadcast of school lessons and the video would then be posted to the school’s webpage for viewing. In this regard, one of the members of a professional body said:

“Video recording is a feasible method for lesson observation. The class situation will be uploaded to the school’s webpage and parents can discuss the lesson after viewing it on the webpage.”

Setting up personal study plans for students

5.8.2.28 A personal study plan customized for individual students could better help students to achieve their targets and enhance their personal development. Also it could better assess the learning progress of the students.

“The school has established personal study plans for SEN students.” (A principal)

“The parents will take leaves and attend the meetings. They are touched and can feel the attention given by the school to the students.” (A principal)

5.8.2.29 A principal shared the general procedure:

1. The school convened a meeting and invited teachers, students and parents to participate. During the meeting, the parties would discuss how to let students achieve the pre-set study goal.
2. The school teachers would evaluate and monitor the students’ progress every

six months. Teachers might discuss with parents on how to improve the situation when needed.

3. If the situation of the students had not been improved at the end of Form 4, the school would communicate with the parents and recommend the students to participate in “sheltered workshops” in order to receive better assistance.

Supporting communication

Holding territorial parent sharing sessions (全港性的家長分享會)

- 5.8.2.30 The sharing sessions for family caregivers and parents provided support to the participants by sharing useful information among them.

“The territorial parent sharing sessions are held regularly, and the objective is to connect parents with the same needs and establish a support network for them. At present six special schools have joined the sharing sessions.” (A principal)

- 5.8.2.31 There is another form to support communication in USA. The USA had launched the Academic Parent-Teacher Teams (APTT),⁹⁸ which focused on group learning and collaboration. Family members of all the children in a single class met together with the teacher three times a year for 75 minutes, along with a single 30-minute individual parent-teacher conference. It would provide a structure for parents to meet with teachers and converse, build networks with other parents, and learn ways to support their children’s academic skill development. During the 2011–2012 school year, the staff of Stanton Elementary School in Washington DC had scheduled 30 APTT meetings for families.

Establishing the e-Class app/e-Class parent tab

- 5.8.2.32 The e-Class app had been launched in some schools and used to disseminate school information and students’ learning progress to parents promptly, as told by the parents. Teachers could also respond to the questions raised by parents, as told by a principal.

“We encourage parents to receive e-Notices through the e-Class platform so they could know what happens at school.” (A principal)

- 5.8.2.33 One NGO social worker also shared:

“The school teachers will regularly update the contents posted in the e-Class app and respond promptly to the questions raised by parents.” (A NGO social worker)

- 5.8.2.34 This channel was also welcomed by many parents:

“I have expressed my opinions via the e-Class app.” (A parent)

⁹⁸ Department of Education. (2013). *A Dual Capacity-building Framework for Family-School Partnerships*. Austin, Texas: SEDL. Available at: <http://www2.ed.gov/documents/family-community/partners-education.pdf>

“Parents will use the e-Class app to receive school notices. This avoids the loss of notices.” (A parent)

“The school should continue to use the app to disseminate information to parents.” (A parent)

5.8.2.35 The use of the e-Class app is extensive. It allows teachers to disseminate school news and class-related information to parents. As a parent said, they could vote for the destination of a trip and sign the notices issued by the school via the e-platform. The school tended to use the e-Class app to disseminate school news to parents, such as the schedule of school activities.

“The school will disseminate the news of class suspension to parents via the e-Class and parents can sign the notices in the e-Class app too.” (A teacher)

“The school will upload the class timetable to the app and students can read it promptly.” (A principal)

“The parents appreciate the school for reminding them to attend the school activity via the e-Class app.” (A teacher)

5.8.2.36 Some hard-to-reach parents suggested adding a “message box” in the e-Class app so that teachers could reply to the messages there.

“A message box for parents can be added to the e-Class to reflect non-urgent opinions. Teachers will read the messages and reply to them promptly.” (A hard-to-reach parent)

Promoting effective communication

Launching the Reward Programmes

5.8.2.37 Some schools launched the Reward Programme, which rewarded parents for their participation in school volunteering. The programme aimed at encouraging more parents to participate in school affairs.

“The school has invited parents to distribute presents and the participating parents will be rewarded.” (A PTA chairman)

“The school uses stamps as rewards to encourage parents to join school activities.” (A hard-to-reach parent)

5.8.3 ***Identification of good practices in collecting views and opinions from parents, especially hard-to-reach parents and difficult parents***

Building channels for gathering views

Establishing “Parents’ Voice” sessions

5.8.3.1 The “Parents’ Voice” sessions, organized by the school, provided a chance for parents to voice out their opinions to the school. In some schools, the agenda

of the PTA's regular meetings included a session called "Parents' Voice", in which the PTA members reflected the parents' opinions collected to the school.

Establishing the Lunch Box Committee

5.8.3.2 Some school would invite parents or PTA members to participate in the decision-making of some school affairs and this was important for collecting parents' opinions.

"The school will invite PTA members to decide on matters related to school uniform and students' lunch boxes." (A PTA chairman)

5.8.3.3 The chairman of a PTA shared the operation of the Lunch Box Committee.

1. The school set up a Lunch Box Committee and invited parents or PTA members to be the committee members.
2. The committee members paid a visit to the factory of each lunch box supplier and compared to see if the lunch menu offered followed the principle of healthy diet.

Launching the "Class Representative System"

5.8.3.4 Class representatives are parents appointed by PTA to collect opinions from parents and reflect them to the school. Some schools launched the class representative system in each class, as told by some parents.

"The school has a class representative in each class, thus providing a chance for parents to reflect their opinions to the principal through the class representatives." (A parent)

"There is one class representative in each class for senior grade and two to three class representatives in each class for junior grade." (A parent)

"The school has two to three class representatives in each class." (A PTA chairman)

5.8.3.5 In Mainland China, similar form of parental involvement has been introduced into schools, i.e. the "Parents' Spokesperson" system.⁹⁹ A spokesperson is a person who speaks on behalf of a certain social class or group. The parents' spokesperson is the person who, on behalf of all the parents of students in a class, speaks directly with the school. Any parents in the group could reflect problems or put forward suggestions to the school through the parents' spokesperson without worrying that the school might think adversely of them, because the spokesperson would observe strictly the discipline of confidentiality.

5.8.3.6 Below is the operation of the class representatives system, as shared by a PTA chairman.

⁹⁹ Zhang, Yan, & Kristoffersson, Margaretha. (2013). "Home-school collaboration in Sweden and China". *US-China Education Review B*. 3(3), pp. 188-201.

1. The class representative collected emails and WhatsApp messages from all the parents of students in the class.
2. When the school received complaints from parents, such as the fading of the school uniform, the school would disseminate the information via the WhatsApp groups to remind parents to pay attention to and follow up, i.e., to check the school uniform of their children.
3. Parents could also raise their concerns via the WhatsApp groups.
4. After collecting all the concerns, the class representative would reflect them to the PTA.

Establishing channels for sharing opinions

Holding discussion forums

- 5.8.3.7 Discussion forums allowed the school to inform parents of school affairs and discuss with them.

“The school will hold discussion forums and invite parents to attend. The topics discussed in the forums are usually related to STEM education.” (A PTA chairman)

Organizing Open Groups

- 5.8.3.8 Schools arranged Open Groups which involved both parents and teachers or principals. The group allowed parents to discuss and express their opinions freely.

“This is two-way communication and it can build a sense of belonging among parents. Parents can deliver their opinions freely.” (A NGO social worker)

- 5.8.3.9 Some schools arranged an Open Group for parents which involved also the principal. It was held from 9 a.m. to 10 a.m. every day, as informed by a NGO social worker.

Making use of external tools for gathering views

Padlet

- 5.8.3.10 The Padlet is a user-friendly e-learning platform provided by a company. It provided a blackboard for the user to write messages, post pictures, upload documents and recordings to the blackboard for sharing with others. Some schools chose to use the Padlet also for opinions sharing.

“Our school has used the Padlet as one of the methods of communication with parents.” (A teacher)

5.8.3.11 It is a trend that technology is more and more involved in home-school communication. As mentioned in the literature review, schools in Mainland China have already adopted modern technology in communication with parents. For example, the Internet Plus (互聯網+), which was established to develop online learning and listening to parents (家長微課)¹⁰⁰. The WeChat groups were introduced to engage hard-to-reach parents and develop close communication between parents and education specialists (建立“微信群”, 家長足不出戶便可以與專家對話). Parents could also monitor their children's study by using apps. During the interviews with professional bodies, one member had the following comment:

“In Mainland China, study lessons (even live broadcast) can be uploaded to the QQ groups, and parents can see and discuss.”

“We should try to make good use of technology (such as Skype). It is convenient for some parents who are not able to attend the school activities in person, and it will greatly help them if the school can broadcast or put the activities online. However, this still can't replace the face-to-face contact which will deepen personal relationships.”

5.8.3.12 In the case of Estonian,¹⁰¹ as discussed earlier, the e-School (i.e. eKool) is a school management system used in Estonia, covering 90% of the nation's school networks and connecting all the pupils, parents and teachers involved. It is used by teachers, pupils and parents to exchange information about time tables, grades, homework assignments and other similar features. The eKool was created in 2002 by the Look@Workd Foundation in co-operation with private sector companies.

Enhancing the collection of views

Organizing tea gatherings

5.8.3.13 Some schools held tea gatherings for parents. The gatherings did not involve any teachers so as to allow parents to express their opinions freely. This also allowed the school to know the concerns and difficulties faced by parents.

*“The PTA has organized tea gatherings which do not involve any teachers.”
(A parent)*

“During the gatherings, the school can know the concerns of parents from each grade.” (A parent)

“Parents of Form 1 students have more concerns and opinions.” (A parent)

“Parents can express their opinions freely.” (A parent)

“The PTA has organized tea gatherings especially for parents of Form 1 students. We can communicate more deeply with parents during the gatherings.” (A PTA chairman)

¹⁰⁰ See <http://www.wenku1.com/news/014325C8ECB7CC6E.html> & http://www.jyb.cn/china/gnsd/201610/t20161013_676810.html

¹⁰¹ See <http://www.gemalto.com/govt/inspired/estonia/ekool>

5.8.3.14 Below is the flow of a tea gathering shared by a PTA chairman.

1. Parents would be divided into several groups.
2. Parents in each group would be asked for their opinions about the school. The opinions would be written down and collected later.
3. After consolidating the opinions, the PTA would pass the opinions to the school.
4. The school would sort the opinions and reply to them.

Allowing “Walk-in” conversations

5.8.3.15 Some schools allowed “walk-in” conversations by parents for communication with the school. A school social worker said it was good for the school to accept parents’ “walk-in” conversations for communication with the school.

“The school achieves an open campus in this way.” (A school social worker)

5.8.4 Identification of good practices on handling communication problems between schools and parents

Supporting the proper handling of communication problems

Providing courses or trainings for young teachers

5.8.4.1 It was necessary to provide training to teachers in order to enhance their communication skills. Some schools provided school-based training to their staff themselves while other schools encouraged their staff to pursue further education outside.

“The school will encourage their young teachers to take a diploma in discipline and counselling.” (A teacher)

“The school provides training to newly-employed school staff to help them adapt to the school environment more quickly.” (A teacher)

Implementing the dual class-teacher system

5.8.4.2 The dual class-teacher system would allow teachers to take care of students more and reflect the students’ development to their parents promptly. It was helpful in tackling the difficulties faced by students promptly.

“The class teachers will be able to communicate with parents promptly for both positive and negative aspects of the student’s performance.” (A principal)

5.8.4.3 Some schools had already launched the dual class-teacher system:

“The school has implemented the dual class-teacher system in the junior grade levels and it decides to implement the system from Form 1 to Form 5 next year.” (A principal)

“The school has now two class teachers and one class teaching assistant for each class.” (A difficult parent)

5.9 Successful case studies

Case 1: Handling of difficult parent A

Introduction

The case was related to communication between a school and a difficult parent with a SEN child. The school did well in handling the requests of this parent.

Case description

The parent had a child with dyslexia and the child did not have any difficulty in social contact. However, the parent discovered that the child's learning ability was weak. So the parent tried to contact the parents in other schools and learned that other schools allowed those students with weak attention to wear headphones during the lessons so that students could listen to what the teachers said clearly. The parent told the school social worker about this.

Case handling by the school

After the parent had informed the school social worker about this practice adopted in other schools, the school social worker passed the information to the professionals of the Education University of Hong Kong (EdUHK) for further study and also to the school for follow-up. The school then had a discussion on this practice.

Result

The school considered the possibility of adopting this practice in the school. In the meantime, the parent was appreciative of the school's high efficiency in following up the matter, though at this moment, it was still unknown if the school would adopt this new practice.

Impact

This enhanced the home-school communication. Some communication problems such as "Certain parents refuse to communicate with the school" could be solved.

Parents would be more willing to express their opinions and even make suggestions to schools. It could also enhance school development by taking parents' suggestions into account.

Discussion

Overall, the parent and the school did well in this case. School-related factors, such as the attitude of teachers in response to the requests raised by parents, especially difficult parents, would affect the outcome of the handling of the case. To evaluate the school's response to this difficult parent's request, the following school-related areas were considered.

Attitude of school teachers and other school personnel

In this case, the school social worker was willing to listen to the parent's opinions and did not show any discontent towards the parent. The school social worker had followed up the parent's request promptly by passing the suggestion of the parent to the school and the professionals of the EdUHK for further discussion and study on the possibility of adopting the practice. This implied that the school was willing to consider and accept if the suggestion proposed by the parent is practicable.

To evaluate the parents' action in communication with the school, the following parent-related areas were considered.

Attitude and perception of the parent

In this case, the parent understood the role of parental involvement and did not take the view that the matter would be time-consuming or the school must accept his/her suggestion. The parent took the initiative to exchange information with parents in other schools and found a practice that might help his/her child. In addition, the parent expressed his/her opinions to the school actively.

Conclusion

School's attitude in handling parents' request could affect the effectiveness of home-school communication. When schools communicate with parents, especially for hard-to-reach parents or parents of SEN children, they should pay attention to their attitude and follow up parents' requests or suggestions immediately.

On the other hand, parents' initiative is important in achieving effective home-school communication. Parents should express their opinions or make suggestions actively to schools.

Case 2: Handling of difficult parent B

Introduction

The case was related to communication between a school and a difficult parent who raised unreasonable requests. The school did well in handling the requests from this parent.

Case description

The school had a mechanism that students were divided into different classes based on their academic results. For example, students in classes A and B had better academic performance than those in classes C and D.

A parent whose child had been arranged into class B complained about the school, asking why his child had not been arranged into class A. The parent indicated that his child was in class A in the previous year and the school should not arrange his child into class B this year.

Case handling by the school

After receiving the complaint from this parent, the school met the parent and listened to his/her complaint. The school explained to the parent the mechanism behind the assignment of students into different classes.

Result

The parent was unwilling to accept the school's explanation. To this unreasonable complaint, the school declared the school's position that the school would not compromise on the complaint and would only consider those reasonable points of view of the parent.

Impact

This enhanced the home-school communication. Some communication problems faced by teachers such as "certain parents and the school share different values" could be tackled when the school is more patient and active in explaining the policy to parents.

This school also kept school's ground when dealing with irrational parents. This prevented parents from making more and more unreasonable requests as they knew that the school would not compromise on such requests.

Discussion

Overall, the school did well in this case. School-related factors, such as the attitude of teachers in response to the requests raised by parents, especially difficult parents, would affect the outcome of the handling of the case. To evaluate the school's response to this difficult parent's request, the following school-related areas were considered.

Attitude of school teachers and other school personnel

In this case, the school colleagues were willing to listen to the parent's opinions and responded to the parent's complaint accurately by explaining to the parent the school mechanism behind the assignment of students into different classes.

School policy

As commented by other principals, the school should hold its ground firm and should not concede to parents' unreasonable requests.

"Every party of the school should have consistent viewpoints towards the same issue." (A principal)

In this case, the school stuck to its policy and did not give way to the parent.

Conclusion

School's attitude and policy would affect the effectiveness of home-school communication. Schools should hold their ground when dealing with parents' complaints, rather than accepting irrational requests. Teachers should be calm when communicating with parents as well.

Case 3: Handling of difficult parent C

Introduction

The case was related to communication between a school and a difficult parent who misunderstood the school mechanism. The school did well in handling the complaint from this parent.

Case description

A parent who did not know clearly about the allocation mechanism of the modules in the “multi-intelligence” subject discovered that his/her child did not have any chance to participate in a certain module of the subject. The parent wrote a letter to reflect his/her opinions and presented the letter at the meeting of School Management Committee.

Case handling by the school

After receiving the letter from this parent, the Chairman of the School Management Committee immediately asked the teacher responsible for the subject to make an appointment with the parent for a meeting and to understand the concerns raised by the parent at the same time. During the individual meeting with the parent, the responsible teacher explained the school policy to the parent and indicated that his/her child’s got no chance because of his/her child’s unsuitable physical ability. The teacher also accepted the parent’s suggestion that the school should have a more open and transparent school policy.

Result

After listening to the teacher’s explanation, the parent understood the reason behind and accepted the school’s answer. The parent was also satisfied with the school’s prompt action on his/her complaint.

The school also promised to modify the relevant school policy so that the policy would be more open and clear to parents.

Impact

This enhanced the home-school communication. The school was willing to accept the parent’s suggestion and adjusted the school policy. As a result, the parent would get a feeling of respect and care from the school. This could maintain good home-school communication.

Some communication problems faced by teachers such as “no time to communicate with parents” or “certain parents and the school share different values” could also be tackled when schools used proper channels of communication and devoted time to communicate with parents.

Discussion

Overall, the school and parent did well in this case. School-related factors, such as the attitude of teachers in response to the complaints raised by parents, especially difficult parents, would affect the outcome of the handling of the case. To evaluate the school’s response to this difficult parent’s complaint, the following school-related areas were considered.

Attitude of school teachers and other school personnel

In this case, the school responded to the parent's doubt promptly by arranging a meeting for his/her with the responsible teacher immediately after receiving his letter and explaining the school's allocation mechanism of the "multi-intelligence" subject to the parent.

The school was willing to listen to the parent's opinions and modify the school policy to meet the parent's needs.

Time devoted

The teacher had devoted a lot of his/her time to arrange an individual meeting with the parent immediately and explain the school policy to the parent.

Usage of communication channels

The school used an effective communication channel in this case, i.e. face-to-face meeting, to explain the school policy to the parent, thus eliminating the misunderstanding of the parent.

To evaluate the parents' action in communication with the school, the following parent-related areas in relation to this case were considered.

Parental attitude and perception

In this case, the parent took the initiative to raise his/her concern to the school by writing a letter and presenting it at the School Management Committee meeting.

Conclusion

School's channels of communication used would affect effective home-school communication. School should try to adopt face-to-face channels in home-school communication in order to achieve the highest effectiveness in communication.

Of course, school's attitude and time devoted in communication are important as well. If school could devote more time to listen to parents and consider their opinions, parents would be more willing to communicate with schools.

On the other hand, parents should be more active in expressing their views to schools and make suggestions when necessary.

Case 4: Handling of difficult parent D

Introduction

The case was related to communication between a school and a difficult parent who had marriage problems himself. The school did well in handling the complaint from this parent.

Case description

A Form 2 student did not come to school occasionally. His parents were undergoing a divorce. The school had appointed a social worker/counsellor to follow the case.

One day, the student did not hand in his cell phone before class and his phone was then confiscated by the school. The school notified the student's mother. The father went to the school and scolded the school for not informing him of the issue instead, as the phone was bought by him for the student. The father used foul language in their communication.

Case handling by the school

The school tried to explain to the father but the father was still angry. Hence, the school sought help from the police and the school social worker.

Result

The father continued to protest about the handling of case against the school for quite some time. The student did not come to school for a long time afterwards.

Impact

The case would be handled more properly by seeking help from external parties when needed as professionals could provide suggestions on how to deal with the case.

Some communication problems faced by teachers such as "certain parents make things difficult for the school", "lacking communication skills" or "do not know how to communicate with irrational parents" could also be tackled.

Discussion

Overall, the school did well in this case. School-related factors, such as the attitude of teachers in response to the complaints made by parents, especially difficult parents, would affect the outcome of the handling of the case. To evaluate the school's response to this difficult parent's complaint, the following school-related areas were considered.

School policy

If some irrational parents used foul language and threatened the school, the school should seek help from the school social worker and external parties such as the police when necessary.

As commented by some principals, the school should ask for help from professionals, e.g. educational psychologists or the Police Public Relations Branch of the Police Force, or the EDB if needed.

Since the school had limitation on the authority exercised, the school should refer the case to other organizations if needed. (A principal)

Conclusion

School's course of action would affect effective home-school communication. School should take appropriate action when necessary and try to seek help from external parties such as psychologists for case that was beyond schools' ambit.

5.10 Failed case studies

Case 1: Handling of difficult parent E

Introduction

The case was related to communication between a school and a difficult parent who complained about the school. The school did not do well in handling the complaint from this parent.

Case description

The school held a table tennis tournament and a student was rejected to participate in it. The parent of the student complained that it was unfair to the student.

Case handling by the school

After receiving the complaint from this parent, the principal did not make any response to the complaint.

Result

The parent was dissatisfied that the school took no action.

Impact

This destroyed the home-school communication. Parents would refuse to communicate with schools anymore due to negative experience.

Discussion

Overall, the school did not do well in this case. School-related factors, such as the attitude of teachers in response to the complaints raised by parents, especially difficult parents, would affect the outcome of the handling of the case. To evaluate the school's response to this difficult parent's complaint, the following school-related areas were considered.

Attitude of school teachers and other school personnel

In this case, the school did not listen to the parent and respond to the parent's complaint. This worsened the communication between the parent and the school.

Time devoted

The school principal/teachers did not devote any time to handle the complaint of the parent.

Suggestions to the school

What the school should do is to try to respond to the parent's complaint, first by understanding the concerns of the parent and then addressing the concern. The school should explain to the parent the school situation when needed.

Case 2: Handling of difficult parent F

Introduction

The case was related to communication between a school and a difficult parent who made a request to the school. The school did not do well in handling the request from this parent.

Case description

The parent of a student with autism wanted to seek help from the school social worker. So the parent reflected his/her concerns and difficulties to the school.

Case handling by schools

The school did not understand the difficulties and stress of the parent and did not provide any help to the parent.

Result

The parent thought that the school could not provide any assistance and hence sought assistance himself/herself elsewhere.

Impact

This destroyed the home-school communication. The parent may not communicate with schools anymore as the school could not help the parent.

Discussion

Overall, the school did not do well in this case. School-related factors, such as the attitude of teachers in response to the requests raised by parents, especially difficult parents, would affect the outcome of the handling of the case. To evaluate the school's response to this difficult parent's request, the following school-related areas were considered.

Time devoted

The school principal/teachers did not devote any time to understand the concerns of the parent.

Level of understanding to the parent's needs

The school did not try to understand the parent's concerns. This worsened the communication between the parent and the school.

Suggestions to the school

The school should try to understand the parent's concerns. In general, the school should provide more help to the parents of SEN students.

5.11 Case on hard-to-reach parents

Introduction

The case was related to the experience shared by a hard-to-reach parent who had joined school activities occasionally. The school did not do well in communicating with the parent, causing her to become a hard-to-reach parent.

Case description

In the parents meeting, a teacher told the parent of a Form 2 student that the examination results of her child was not satisfactory, and her child would have no chance of entering the university, or obtaining even an associate degree. The parent felt immediately that the school had given up her child and she thought her child's school performance was not too bad.

Case handling by the parent

After that, the parent did not participate in any school activities anymore, including such activities as visits to the universities and school talks. The parent emphasized that it was because the teacher said her child would have no chance to enter the university, which had hurt her very much.

Result

The parent became a hard-to-reach parent and did not participate in school activities anymore.

Discussion

Overall, the school did not do well in this case. School-related factors would affect the desire of parents for further communication. To discuss the school's course of action in this case, the following school-related areas were considered.

Attitude of school teachers and other school personnel

In this case, the school's attitude was very bad.

The school did not communicate well with the parent and said negative words to her during their communication.

Manner of communication

In the communication, the school focused only on the academic performance of the student and concerned only about the career path of the student. The school did not concern about the development of the student's other aspects.

Parent-related factors also affected the desire of parents to communicate.

Negative experience

In this case, the parent had bad experience during her meeting with the school and she was very dissatisfied with the school's views. This hindered her from continuing to communicate with the school.

Suggestions to the school

The school should provide training to the teachers on the proper attitude and way of communication. The school should educate the teachers to include more encouragement and care for students during their communication. Teachers had to change their attitudes and avoid using negative wordings for communication.

VI. OBSERVATIONS, DISCUSSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Observations and Discussions

As discussed in Chapter II, Epstein's (1995) model provides a framework for this Study. It indicates the importance of effective forms of school-to-home and home-to-school communication and emphasizes two-way communication as important for school-community partnerships. The findings of the Study clearly showed that home-school communication is perceived as important among schools and parents, and schools also have implemented numerous measures and devoted staff resources to maintain and promote effectiveness communication with parents, but still some components need to be improved such as the contents of communication and the parental participation in higher level of home-school co-operation such as involvement in decision making process.

6.1.1 *Home-school communication perceived as important*

6.1.1.1 Overall, evidences from the Study suggested that home-school communication was important as indicated by both parents and schools. Most of the respondents believed that home-school communication had a positive impact on students' growth. Although the principals, teachers and parents had similar views regarding the impact of home-school communication, their initial expectations of communication were different. Many parents stressed the importance of being informed by teachers about their children's academic performance and well-being at school (Van Wyk & Lemmer, 2009)¹⁰², whereas teachers often argued that some parents were especially difficult to reach (Van Wyk & Lemmer, 2009)¹⁰³ and principals and teachers expected that parents also should take up the role to assist in children's education.

6.1.1.2 Similar to the existing literature, parents of students in senior grade levels have less intention to be involved in the school's daily operation, even if they were asked to do so. From the current Study, it was obvious that parents of students that senior grade levels were significantly less likely to believe that home-school communication had a positive impact on students' growth. Even for some teachers of secondary schools, they did not expect the participation by parents in school affairs. This aligns with the findings of existing studies which explain that apparently, children's developmental level also has an influence on the level of parent involvement at school. Epstein and Dauber (1993)¹⁰⁴ stated that, at the school level, parental involvement is typically a stringer in primary schools, and is more positive and comprehensive when compared to secondary schools. As a learner progresses through the different grade levels, fewer teachers tend to assist parents in becoming involved (Epstein, 1986)¹⁰⁵.

¹⁰² Van Wyk & Lemmer (2009), op.cit.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Epstein, J. L., & Dauber, S. L. (1993). "Parents' attitudes and practices of involvement in inner-city elementary and middle schools", in N. Chavkin (ed.), *Families and Schools in a Pluralistic Society*, pp. 53-71. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

¹⁰⁵ Epstein, J. L. (1986). "Parents' reactions to teacher practices of parent involvement". *Elementary School J.*, 86, pp. 277-294.

6.1.2 *Schools actively encouraged parents to communicate with them*

6.1.2.1 Evidences showed that there are numerous communication channels provided by schools, covering one-way and two-way communication by means of the written form, telephonic communication, technological applications and meetings in person. The responses revealed that, parents were quite satisfied with the channels provided by schools. The findings of the current Study indicated that the modes utilized for home-school communication were determined by factors such as the purpose of communication, the nature of problems, as well as the attitudes and perceptions of all stakeholders involved (Ellis, 2017).¹⁰⁶ This finding adds to the existing literature as it highlights the idea that each mode of communication has advantages and disadvantages and is difficult to identify the most effective and efficient modes of communication (Ellis, 2017)¹⁰⁷. Apart from that, schools had organized a wide range of activities to encourage parents to participate in activities as a way to improve the communication between parents and schools. Most principals and teachers reflected that they had organized some common types of home-school activities (one-off activities) such as talks on subject selection, Parents' Days and PTA meetings. The effectiveness of these activities to improve the communication had been highly confirmed by respondents in the interviews.

6.1.3 *New modes of communication being developed*

6.1.3.1 Cox-Petersen (2011)¹⁰⁸ claimed that technology can assist teachers and parents to overcome barriers, such as the possible time constraints. Moreover, Cox-Petersen (2011)¹⁰⁹ also stated that information can be immediately conveyed through this channel and be quickly accessible to many parents and teachers. The findings identified from the current Study showed the increasing use of technology to facilitate communication, but it was not prevalent in all school types. The use of technology was mainly for spreading information and uploading learning materials. Some also doubted the effectiveness of the SMS/Messaging, and the majority of the respondents used traditional modes of communication, such as student handbooks and Parents' Days. The responses revealed that, although respondents confirmed that technology could save time and raise the penetration rate, they had to retain traditional communication methods, considering parents' varied levels of literacy in technology.

6.1.3.2 Existing overseas practices show that parents groups are used in establishing the connections between parents-to-parents and parents-to-schools, such as the "Parents' Spokesperson" system in Mainland China and the Parent Support Groups in Singapore. From the current Study, similar practices were also identified, e.g. the use of technology was more prevalent for parents-to-parents communication. Some respondents from secondary schools mentioned that they had set up WhatsApp groups for the PTA and WhatsApp groups among

¹⁰⁶ Ellis, Bronwyn Wendy. (2017). *How Teachers and Parents Perceive Parent-teacher Communication in Resource-constrained Primary School Settings*. Master's degree dissertation, University of Pretoria.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Cox-Peterson, (2011), op. cit.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

parents. Some stakeholders interviewed expressed that support network groups provided a channel for parents to share their views and support each other. It could alleviate parents' stress. Some schools had co-operated with social workers from NGOs to set up a support network group. Parents in the group could reflect problems or offer suggestions to the school.

6.1.3.3 The Study showed that different from the practices in Mainland China and the USA, home visits were not the common mode of communication in Hong Kong, even though there were still a few respondents believed in the effectiveness of home visits to understand students' needs. In Mainland China and the USA, home visits are considered effective for home-school communication to benefit the development of students. In the Parent-Teacher-Home Visit Project (PTHVP) in the USA, for instance, teachers and other school staff visit families with the goal of building trust and respect between home and school. In the UK, home visits are followed up by invitations to 'drop-in' events which aim at engaging hard-to-reach parents. In Mainland China, there are general visiting (普訪), follow-up visiting (隨訪) and regular visiting (定期訪問). Through home visits, teachers may gain valuable insights into the child's home and family, and learn about the family's goals and values, and the ways the family supports student's learning at home, in school, and in the community (Weiss, 2015)¹¹⁰. The current Study found special school teachers had conducted home visits more frequently. Social workers, not class teachers, had taken up the role to conduct home visits and provided more suggestions to parents.

6.1.4 *Communication over-focused on students' academic outcomes*

6.1.4.1 Responses from focus group discussions and interviews showed that the optimal, open and in-depth communication between parents and schools did not necessarily always occur. The findings showed that the frequent contact or communication between parents and schools were for spreading information or communicating on students' performance. The responses revealed that the purpose in communicating and collaborating with schools was mainly about students' learning outcomes, but seldom about learning process or school education. Furthermore, parents indicated the use of individual meetings (such as Parents' Day) where teachers primarily discussed the academic progress of students as well as their behavioural concerns. This finding matched the views of Kraft and Rogers (2015)¹¹¹, who pointed out that, teachers may, for example, tend to communicate more regularly with parents of children who are academically weak or display behavioural problems.

6.1.5 *Parents' involvement can be enhanced*

6.1.5.1 In addition, the current Study found out that parental involvement in schools remained limited. The survey findings showed that most parental participation was limited in school affairs. It might be worth noting that fewer teachers from secondary schools had a positive attitude towards parents' participation in

¹¹⁰Weiss, H. B. (2015). "Reimagining the Parent-Teacher Conference". *Harvard Family Research Project News*.

¹¹¹ Kraft, M. A., & Gogers, T. (2015). "The underutilized potential of teacher-to-parent communication: Evidence from a field experiment". *Economics of Education Review*, 47, pp. 49–63.

school management and even fewer of them towards parents' participation in school policy-making. Most teachers believed parents should only be notified or not participate in school policy-making. On the other hand, the common types of home-school activities were one-off activities such as talks on subject selection, Parents' Days and PTA meetings, but few respondents considered taking part in the School Advisory Committee. Communications on policies, reforms, and programmes were not specifically foregrounded. In line with the study of Ho (2009)¹¹², the current findings were similar to that of other Asian countries, that involvement in school affairs were not expected by school stakeholders. According to the level of involvement developed by Epstein (1995)¹¹³, Argyle (1991)¹¹⁴ and Shen, et al (1994)¹¹⁵, the current findings indicated the lower degree of parental involvement in advanced levels of school affairs, such as helping to set major school policies and including parents in school management.

6.1.6 *Attitudes, time and skills were all the major concerns*

6.1.6.1 A number of factors that negatively influenced home-school communication as identified by the respondents of the Study and in the existing literature supported the work of Couchenour and Chrisman (2011) and Epstein's theory (1995)¹¹⁶: home-school partnerships depend on the attitudes, skills and behaviour of all involved, and individual relationships and internal organizations are influenced by children's ages, grade levels and conditions experienced over time as well as by the practices, attitudes and decisions of teachers and parents. The interviews and case studies showed the perceptions and attitudes of the principals, teachers and parents would directly affect their willingness to communicate with each other. For example, in the review of successful cases and failed cases on handling of difficult parents, the attitudes of school leaders and teachers were the major factor influencing the effectiveness of communication.

6.1.6.2 The lack of time is always claimed by both teachers and parents as one of the barriers to communication between schools and parents. Responses from the interviews of teachers and principals revealed that fatigue from teaching duties inhibited teachers from communicating with parents and organizing activities to encourage involvement of parents. Being occupied by their heavy workload, teachers had little time to communicate with parents. Many parents, in particular hard-to reach parents, stressed their limited time available to involve in school activities. They might not even have enough time to spend with their children, and thus, they had to leave many things for teachers to handle. Hence, some scholars have suggested that parents in Hong Kong were especially difficult to reach (Van Wyk & Lemmer, 2009)¹¹⁷.

6.1.6.3 The knowledge and skills with which schools communicate with parents are extremely important since the efforts of improving home-school relationship

¹¹² Ho, E.S.C. (2009). "Home-school collaboration in two Chinese societies: Hong Kong and Macao".

¹¹³ Epstein, J. L. (1995). School/family/community partnerships: Caring for the children we share. *Phi delta kappan*, 76(9), 701-712.

¹¹⁴ Argyle, M. (1991). *Co-operation – The Basis of Sociability*. London: Routledge.

¹¹⁵ 沈雪明、龐憶華、蔡黎悅心、葉兆輝及容家駒 (1994) 家庭與學校合作研究報告 香港：政府印務局。

¹¹⁶ Epstein (1995), op. cit.

¹¹⁷ Van Wyk & Lemmer (2009), op. cit.

cannot succeed without effective communication with the parent community (Susan, 2005)¹¹⁸. From the views of different respondents, parents' ability to make the best use of different communication methods was one of the key factors affecting home-school communication. Given the differences in parents' backgrounds, electronic communication media is difficult for some parents to use. At the same time, the response from professionals indicated that schools' communication with parents often focused on negative student performance and school's general affairs. This showed a potential weakness in the skills and content of communication from schools to parents. From the findings of the current Study, some teachers considered themselves lacking in knowledge or skills to help parents solve students' problems. Also, they did not know how to communicate with irrational parents.

6.2 Conclusions and Recommendations

6.2.1 It is clearly that effective communication between schools and parents is important and beneficial. As observed, similar practices such as use of technology in promoting effective communication between schools and parents are also adopted in both Hong Kong and other places. However, there are still the possibilities to have better co-operation to enhance comprehensive care for children, such as enhancing the level of parental involvement from just simple communication to active participation in volunteering and school policies.

6.2.2 At the same time, problems facing schools and parents in maintaining effective communication are expected to continually evolve with time, as the relationship between parents and their children becomes increasingly complex and multi-faceted, affected by say an increase in single-parenthood and absentee parents. Different parties have to rise to challenges posed by parents having difficulties in communicating with schools and try to adopt appropriate measures to overcome these challenges. Therefore, based on the findings above, the following recommendations are provided for government and its agencies, employers, schools, PTAs/FPTAs, and parents.

*Suggestions for moving towards effective and efficient home-school communication*¹¹⁹

6.2.3 From the messages released in the current Study, the good practices identified and the overseas experiences reviewed, there were a number of suggestions for action, in particular on the content and modes of communication, in order to plan the way for effective and efficient communication.

The government and its agencies

6.2.3.1 *Educating the community.* Even though the respondents of the Study were fully aware of the importance of home-school communication, their perceptions and attitudes toward their role in the relationship were not very

¹¹⁸ Graham-Clay, Susan. (2005). Parent teacher cooperation; educational strategies; parent participation; parent school relationship; information technology; computer mediated communication. *School Community Journal* 16, 1, 117–129.

¹¹⁹ The suggestions presented here are as part of objective 7.

clear. During the interviews, some members of parents associations indicated that many parents might not understand thoroughly their duties. Nevertheless, it is important for the community to understand the concepts and benefits of effective home-school co-operation. It is thus recommended that the government could provide more resources to educate the public, schools, teachers and parents on how to constructively communicate with each other as well as promoting the importance of home-school communication and co-operation.

6.2.3.2 *Providing information and support to teachers.* Adopting appropriate attitudes and skills among parents and schools are important to enhance the effectiveness of communication. The social workers interviewed were of the view that teachers could implement strategies that can potentially improve communication with parents, such as listening to parents' thoughts and accrediting more appreciation with less criticism to students. It is recommended that the government could provide more reference materials to schools and teachers to reduce the "negative" communication culture and create a positive communication experience for parents within the school environment.

6.2.3.3 *Promoting family-friendly policies to employers.* In some countries, business companies would give additional leaves to their employees so that they can deal with their children's problems at school. For example, in the USA and Canada, business companies allow parents to apply for one-day leave for joining school activities. Conversely, in Hong Kong, employers consulted in the Study indicated that they did not know how to help home-school communication and co-operation. In this regard, it is recommended that the government could promote family-friendly policies to the companies on how to help home-school communication, for example, finding out any possible arrangement such as a day per year for Parents' Days or talks.

6.2.3.4 *Providing support to teachers to release their time to communicate with parents.* Time is a major concern. As suggested by the professional bodies, the government should provide more resources to schools to create more time and space for teachers or invite more parents to take up some of the tasks related to home-school communication, such as networking.

Committee on Home-School Co-operation (CHSC)

6.2.3.5 *Conducting research on a regular basis.* It is suggested that CHSC should conduct more research regularly, especially on hard-to-reach and difficult parents, to re-examine current practices as well as explore a wider adoption of new ones that are conducive to effective communication between schools and parents, making references to practices in other places as well. Some possible researches are presented in para. 6.2.4.

6.2.3.6 *Promoting the importance of home-school co-operation.* The report to be released in 2019 by the Task Force on Home-school Co-operation and Parent Education appointed by the Education Commission in 2017 might also provide more insights. In the community level, the CHSC could take the lead to raise awareness of the public to the importance of home-school co-operation by providing more related education to them.

Employers

6.2.3.7 *Employers arranging flexible work.* Companies could give leave to their employees for them to deal with children's problems at school.

Schools

6.2.3.8 *Making the best use of technology.* The use of technological applications has assisted schools in enhancing and maintaining regular communication with parents. The review of overseas work shows that Estonia puts most efforts amongst Taiwan and Macau on improving school-parent communication. They also use both traditional and technology-assisted channels to enhance communication. The USA is the most open to parental involvement in student and school matters, including key decision-making platforms. Hong Kong is mediocre compared with other countries in this aspect. Schools are encouraged to use more diversified channels and technology for collecting and reviewing the opinions of parents on school policies.

6.2.3.9 *Adjusting the design of school activities.* It is found that parent's involvement in school activities would help build up a more in-depth communication between schools and parents. However, some parents rarely participate in school activities and rarely communicate with the school. It is suggested that schools should hold some activities that could be interesting or more closely related to parents' daily life. In addition, respondents of the Study mentioned that schools should allow more flexibility in time and venue of home-school activities, such as organizing activities in different timeslots and in different venues that are more convenient to parents, in particular hard-to-reach parents.

6.2.3.10 *Establishing parents groups.* Similar to the Parent Support Groups in Singapore, schools in Hong Kong are encouraged to help parents establish parents groups and share the information about activities in the group. Apart from spreading positive parenting messages, parents in the group are given the opportunity to share suggestions on the school education.

6.2.3.11 *Enhancing the role of children to be the facilitator.* Existing studies (Kraft & Rogers, 2015;¹²⁰ McNeal, 1999¹²¹) emphasize the importance of parent-child relationships. However, suggestions on how schools can assist in strengthening family bonds are relatively limited. According to McNeal (1999)¹²², parent-child discussions are likely to raise educational expectations and influence learners' performance. The findings from the current Study show that the grade level of children might hinder or facilitate home-school communication, and should as a result be involved in communication in a positive manner. It showed that some students, especially those at the high school level, resisted their parents' inclination to participate in school education (Magwa & Mugari, 2017).¹²³ In this regard, parent-child

¹²⁰ Kraft & Gogers (2015), op. cit.

¹²¹ McNeal, R. B. (1999). "Parental involvement as social capital: Differential effectiveness on science achievement, truancy, and dropping out". *Social Forces*, 78(1), pp. 117–144.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Magwa, S., & Mugari, S. (2017). "Factors affecting parental involvement in the schooling of children". *International Journal of Academic Research and Reflection*, 5(1), pp. 74–81.

communication and teacher-child communication need to be encouraged in support of parent-teacher communication.

6.2.3.12 *Collaborating with social workers.* With new government support for school social work services in kindergartens and schools, it is hoped that the schools could work together with PTAs, teachers and social workers to step up their support to students and parents in the transition stages e.g. from kindergarten to P1, from Primary to secondary, and graduation from secondary education to work or higher education.

6.2.3.13 *Providing more support for students with hard-to-reach parents.* The study has not been too successful in accessing hard-to-reach parents. Aside from the need to step up needed communications with such parents, there should be more concern over their children in the schools. It is hoped that teachers can co-operate with social workers to develop more sensitive support to these students.

FPTAs/PTAs

6.2.3.14 *Strengthening the role of the FPTAs/PTAs.* As observed, PTA is a bridge between parents and schools. As found in the survey, the setting up of PTA was to some extent welcomed by parents and teachers. PTAs should make more effort to encourage parents to communicate more with teachers and to actively participate in school activities. It is suggested that the Federations of Parent-Teacher Associations (FPTAs) should consider holding different activities based on parents' needs and interests, such as workshops on behaviour management and parents' emotional management or even hair-cutting course. Sometimes, FPTAs could organize activities for schools in the same district, which could promote the involvement of parents.

6.2.3.15 *Offering platforms for sharing of opinions.* NGO social workers suggest that the community should offer platforms for professional exchanges among stakeholders, such as seminars or forums, to allow different parties to understand the points of view of each other. It is also recommended that a multi-professional platform, such as seminars, should be developed.

Parents

6.2.3.16 *Learning the role of parents in school affairs.* It is important for parents to understand their role in school affairs. Apart from participating more in school activities, parents are encouraged to express their opinions to the school proactively and not to rely on the school to initiate communication with them.

6.2.4 ***Recommendations for further research***

6.2.4.1 Based on the findings of the Study, the following are recommended for possible future research:

- a) This Study was on a wide area in which primary, secondary and special schools were selected. The study adopted both quantitative and qualitative designs with a large sample. Therefore, a small-scale study is recommended to study the factors which have been identified as hindering parents'

participation in school activities. For example, researchers are encouraged to further investigate the impact of individual factors to broaden the knowledge of this important construct in the field of parent education. On the other hand, future studies could also focus on reviewing the reasons why hard-to-reach parents are difficult to reach. Findings of such studies would help identify the strategies to approach these parents and improve their level of involvement at school.

- b) Future studies can also explore the factors that would influence the level of parental involvement. In particular, they could examine the influence of child characteristics on parental involvement. These include, but not limited to, an exploratory study on parent-child communication and teacher-child communication, the value, attitude, and the perceived purpose of such communication. The investigation of this will help to understand how to promote effective communication through the support of children.
- c) A descriptive study on students' perspective of home-school communication in secondary school settings is recommended.
- d) A case study on the application of technology to support home-school communication and the strategies to overcome the challenges of this mode of communication is suggested.
- e) A follow-up study on the output and outcome of the strategies suggested in this Study for enhancing home-school communication, such as the suggestions on establishing parents' groups is also recommended.

6.3 Limitations

6.3.1 There are four main limitations in this Study.

- 6.3.1.1 Schools and NGOs were the main channels to identify hard-to-reach and difficult parents but the effort could still not meet the target sample size, showing some parents were really hard to be accessed. This lack of success raises concern over the reality that some school children are going through very challenging family situations when their parents are not very accessible. This warrants attention beyond the concern of not meeting the target sample size.
- 6.3.1.2 Private schools (though mainly schools adopting non-local curriculum) are also not very ready in lining up in-depth interviews and focus group discussions.
- 6.3.1.3 No attempt has been made in contrasting practices of schools facing more or fewer challenges in communication with parents, as no information is available to facilitate say classifying schools into different categories and cross-tabulating the survey findings for different categories. For example, no information is available to the study team to identify schools of different bandings which reflects the academic performance of students, and the proportion of NCS or SEN

students. Admittedly, such analysis is likely to be controversial though potentially useful.

- 6.3.1.4 It is found that some school stakeholders like school social workers are playing an active role in home-school communication. The opinions from them were mainly collected in the form of qualitative information, as originally the designed target respondents of the school survey were principals, teachers and parents. This reflects the limitation of the current Study and suggestion for future research to study the role of these supporting staff.