

HOME-SCHOOL COOPERATION FOR PRIMARY SCHOOL ENGLISH LEARNING IN  
CHINA: CHALLENGES AND STRATEGIES

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Abstract

HOME-SCHOOL COOPERATION FOR PRIMARY SCHOOL ENGLISH IN CHINA:  
CHALLENGES AND STRATEGIES

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Under the Supervision of Dr. Madelon Kohler-Busch

Children in primary school are mainly between seven and twelve years of age; this childhood phase is also known as the school-age or childhood period. We know that children have different physical and mental characteristics at different stages and many people compare entry into primary school to the starting line of a child's formal growth, for primary school students are not mature in physical and mental development. However, in current practices of teaching English at primary school level the collaboration between families, teachers, and schools is weak. This low level of collaboration, in turn, influences the effectiveness of home-school support of English teaching, thereby reducing the efficiency of students' English learning.

This thesis is divided into three parts. First, the author briefly introduces the study's purpose and defines relevant concepts. In the second part, the author analyzes problems uncovered by research. This will address the goals of primary education, parental involvement, the issues in current home-to-school cooperation, and some possible solutions. In the last part, the author provides a brief analysis and summary of the conclusions and shortcomings of this study.

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## **Chapter I Introduction**

China has a long tradition of attaching importance to children's education. This tradition continues in today's society. Yet a challenge to this tradition is a cumulative tiredness of parents and children running from one tutoring institution to another. Parents spend a lot of money and time providing their children with a wide variety of study programs so that their children have the best chances at the so-called starting line. However, their efforts in and out of school do not always promote children's overall development. To address this issue, a recent government policy document "Opinions on Further Reducing the Burden of Homework and Out-of-School Training for Students in Compulsory Education" sets out goals and requirements for upgrading school education and banning private extracurricular coaching.

According to the document, all existing private tutoring and training providers must convert to "non-profit" organizations. The policy document also aims to reduce the at home learning burden of students by limiting homework assignments. School teachers are asked not to assign homework tasks to students in grades 1 and 2. Furthermore, students in grades 3 through 6 should take no more than 60 minutes to complete their tasks, while secondary school students should take no more than 90 minutes. In addition, elementary and middle schools will provide daycare for students during the holidays so that parents do not have to schedule specific extra classes during the winter and summer breaks. The policy emphasizes the importance of homework and the diagnostic and analytical function of curriculum knowledge rather than rote memorization. As a result, more research will be conducted to improve the quality of homework assignments. By requiring schools to provide more non-academic educational programs for students, academic education will be integrated with extracurricular activities to promote the overall development of students.

Continuing in this framework, a growing body of research indicates that when parents are engaged in their children's learning and development, the children do better in school (Jeynes, 2005). Indeed, increased parental engagement has been found to improve children's accomplishments inside and outside of the classroom (McWayne & Owsianki, 2008). So, with today's double reduction policy in homework and extracurricular coaching, the question of how children can continue to learn English effectively in the waning of tutoring institutions has become a common problem and concern for schools and parents.

### **Statement of the Problem**

This study explores the challenges of China's home-school cooperation in primary school education. The trends and strategies of home-school collaboration in China's primary school education are also investigated in this study.

### **Definition of Terms**

New schools have placed a renewed emphasis on parental involvement. Ascher (1987) defines parental involvement as a range of activities from promoting the value of education in the home to the fundamental role of team decision-makers in policy, curriculum and instructional issues. According to Ascher (1987), parents can participate at various levels, including taking advocacy roles: sitting on councils and committees and participating in schools' decisions and operations. Parents can serve as classroom aids, for example accompany the class on a field trip, or assist teachers in various other ways.

Many scholars have described home-school cooperation as the process by which parents communicate their expectations for children's academic achievement or to their children. According to Epstein (2013), home-school cooperation refers to the shared responsibilities of educators, parents, and the community for their children's development. It includes six types of

practices: being a good parent, communicating with each other, volunteering, learning at home, participating in decision-making, and working with the community. According to Greenwood, parental involvement in schooling is the process of mobilizing parents at home and in school to benefit parents, children, and the school community (Greenwood, 1991, p. 281).

### **Purpose of the Study**

With the double reduction policy (which means the limiting of homework and the restrictions of tutoring services), tutoring institutions are strictly limited. Parents and students who have been used to attending tutoring classes will face new challenges, so it is essential to focus on learning at school, which requires close cooperation between schools and parents. The author analyzes the challenges in home-school cooperation and proposes corresponding countermeasures, which could give schools and parents some guidelines and references.

### **Significance of the Study**

There are many studies on home-school cooperation in primary and secondary schools in China, but few studies are specific to teaching English. First, we have to connect the unique characteristics of English as an academic subject to the importance of a general home-school cooperation in elementary school; we then have to explore the problems at the various level, the parental level, the school level, and the teacher level, and then analyze the reasons for these challenges. Further, we have to arrive at preliminary conclusions, which can help provide a new way of thinking about English learning under today's double reduction policy, in order to better guide the home-school cooperation in teaching English.

## **Methodology**

The research method used in this thesis is qualitative analysis. Instead of using data experiments, the author refers to a significant amount of relevant literature, including data analysis, to find the problems in current home-school cooperation and how to solve them.

## Chapter II Review of Literature

In recent decades, home-school cooperation has been a hot topic in the education sector. As two essential vehicles constituting the education system, the family and the school share the important task of nurturing children's development. It is clear that in the nine-year compulsory and basic education, primary school occupies a singularly important position.

In 1925, Chinese educator Chen Hechen (2006) analyzed the ideas and methods of home education in his book. He believed that parents with high intellectual literacy would be able to give their children a good home education. The effects of this good education combined with school education would naturally complement each other. He emphasized the importance of combining home education with school education for children's personality development.

Home-school cooperation in English teaching profoundly impacts students' English learning and teachers' English teaching. Primary school teacher Ge Dongqing (2015) analyzes the advantages of carrying out home-school cooperation in primary school English teaching from three aspects: teaching quality, the social nature of teaching, and family education. She argues that home-school cooperation facilitates parents to develop good home education practices and promotes teachers' teaching quality. Sun Neng (2016) believes that home-school cooperation in primary school English teaching can make parents and students pay attention to the intrinsic factors of students' learning, while teachers provide parents with guidance for students' learning English. Parents can help teachers reduce certain burdens, which achieves "win-win" cooperation. According to Bao Lihong (2016), productive home-school partnership enhances students' self-consciousness, self-confidence, and interest in learning English, and raises parents' attention to home education. All the while promoting the development of sound English learning

habits in schools. However, current home-school cooperation in primary schools in China is still at the initial stages, and all aspects are not yet developed enough and face many problems that need to be identified and solved.

### **Goals for English Teaching in Primary Schools**

In 2001, the Chinese Ministry of Education promulgated the first national English curriculum standards, clearly stating that the elementary school curriculum should be set following elementary school students' physiological and psychological developmental stages. In addition, the purpose of the elementary school English curriculum is to stimulate students' interest in learning English, develop forward-looking attitudes, and build their initial self-confidence. Cultivating a certain sense of language and good phonetics and intonation can develop students' ability to use English for simple daily communication and lay the foundation for further learning. (Zhang Lixi, Liu Meng, & Guo Dongsheng. 2010).

The curriculum standards set out the requirements for two levels of primary education, level 1 for the third and fourth years of primary education and level 2 for the fifth and sixth years of primary education. The standards state that elementary education aims to stimulate students' interest and motivation in learning. Assessment should be primarily formative, based on students' interests, attitudes, and communication skills, as evidenced by their participation in various English Language Teaching (ELT) activities. The final assessment in grades 3 and 4 is not a written test but should be an evaluation through observation. The school year assessment for grades 5 and 6 may be a combination of oral and written tests. The oral exam should test students' ability to use the language they have learned, and the content of the oral exam should be reflective of their everyday lives. Written tests should focus on listening and reading skills.

## **Parental Involvement in Children's Education**

The National Medium and Long-Term Education Reform and Development Plan (2010-2020) call for parent committees in primary and secondary schools to promote a modern school system. (Zhang Lixi, Liu Meng, & Guo Dongsheng. 2010). The introduction of this outline has provided the institutional guarantee and goals for development of home-school cooperation in China. And some educators have already started various forms of home-school cooperation practices.

V. Morgan, a British scholar, uses the depth of parental involvement in home-school cooperation as a criterion to classify cooperation into three categories: low-depth involvement, high-depth involvement, and formal organizational involvement. Low-depth involvement is a superficial and informal involvement. The school and parents organize it to collaborate to learn about and share information about students' academic performance and school performance. High-depth involvement is when parents actively and voluntarily participate in school activities and as a two-way communication process they work together to organize and collaborate on an activity. Formal organizational involvement, also known as "management involvement," involves parents in the entire management process of school operations, including initiation of, organization, decision-making, implementation, and feedback, as well as the day-to-day teaching and learning tasks. (Liu Li, 1992, p. 62-66).

The Vanderbilt University Laboratory, which specializes in home-school partnerships, has concluded from research that a sense of cooperation between parents and schools is an essential prerequisite for successful home-school cooperation. (Wilson Sherri, 2012). If parents participate in the school's home-school cooperation activities or are proactive in communicating with

teachers, then home-school cooperation will work well. If parents do not establish a correct awareness of home-school co-education, they are more likely to be hostile, indifferent, and unwilling to cooperate, and then home-school cooperation will not be carried out correctly. (Cormick, Cappella & Connor, 2013).

Of course, culture and educational background shape who we are, our personalities and prejudices, and may impact parents' attitudes towards education. To strengthen the development of a kind and intellectually curious child, a well-rounded education and positive attitude towards education is vital. All of the above is conducive to developing sound emotional, physical, and intellectual health in children and forming a pleasant communication environment, harmonious interpersonal relationships with teachers, and mutual support and cooperation. Said concisely, it affects the harmonious and friendly relationship between parents and teachers, thus affecting the effectiveness of home-school cooperation. (Carthey, 2010).

Contrary to the above studies, Williams et al. found through their study that school administrators are more inclined to accept and support parents' assistance in the school's general operation, and that they are less favorable in their attitudes toward parental involvement in decision-making on significant school matters. (Lin Yue, 2009)

### **Analysis of the Problems of Home-school Cooperation in Primary School English Teaching**

Since home education and school education occupy different positions, the two sides are prone to disagreement in cooperation. Hence, understanding home-school association by both sides is also an essential factor for the successful development of home-school cooperation. We

can analyze the problems of home-school cooperation from three aspects: parents, teachers, and schools.

### **Family**

We have to admit that the quality and ability of the support parents can give, vary, and the personality of parents themselves is an essential influence on the education that students receive at home, and on the cooperation between parents and teachers in teaching English. The more educated parents are, the higher the potential that they understand the importance of home-school cooperation. On the one hand, highly qualified parents are more likely to create more ways for their children to succeed and help students build an interest in learning English to improve their skills. On the other hand, it is not enough to rely on teachers' educational efforts and their attention for students' mental health and quality of learning.

Some parents do not have higher education, so there is a tendency to put all the responsibility of educational achievement on the teachers. These parents more likely feel overwhelmed in tutoring students' learning, and over time, they participate less and less in students' learning. When students' performance drops, they do not analyze the reasons for such a decrease but likely blame the students, which, in turn, contributes to a negative attitude which students' exhibit toward learning. In addition, due to their lower education level, parents may have low self-esteem and retreat, and they may be uncomfortable and unwilling to participate in home-school cooperation. Such cooperative actions include parent-teacher conferences, and less formal communication with teachers, which become ever more infrequent, and the content of this communication is also relatively non-complex. Such parents might even worry that their

own low education level will be discriminated against by teachers and that this in itself causes a negative influence on their children.

Often parents do not have time to engage in deeper home-school cooperation and, at the same time, parents' understanding of the true meaning of “home-school cooperation” is still vague. Due to traditional thinking, many parents believe that if the teacher notifies the parents of a school visit, the child is not doing well. As a result, many parents are already under significant psychological pressure before they meet the teacher and are in an unequal position in communicating with the teacher, which inevitably leads to obstacles and barriers in communication between the two sides and makes home-school cooperation a meaningless formality. It takes the joint efforts of teachers and parents to address these stereotypes and establish a corrected concept of home-school cooperation. Home-school cooperation is not simply communicating with teachers, which is only the lowest level of involvement. Thus, a significant hurdle to meaningful communication is the fact that parents lack a true sense of what home-school cooperation actually is.

### **Teacher**

In China, teachers' academic ability is often linked to students' academic performance, which has led to the current situation where teachers communicate with parents mainly about students' academic performance. However, students' English learning is about academic performance as well as interest in English education and their performance in English activities. Currently, there is no affiliation between teachers and parents in China. Under the influence of China's traditional educational environment, some teachers think too highly of their professional status and believe that they have the most to say in their teaching and are skeptical of parents'

suggestions. Some even ignore them, resulting in poor cooperation. Some teachers even feel that some parents' participation in English teaching will only bring unnecessary trouble to their educational work, so they are not willing to cooperate with parents. Over time, teachers' lack of communication skills and narrow topics of communication with parents has dramatically reduced the effectiveness of home-school cooperation.

### **School**

The fact of the underdeveloped state of home-school cooperation in China and the fact that the situation varies from region to region, has attracted the interest of many scholars and there are many studies concerning this issue. Still, it is not known what and how much schools have learned and applied; what we can see is often a variety of formal activities, but not a real sense of equal collaboration. Most schools are focused on accomplishing academic goals first and foremost, and collaboration is not clearly defined but only a superficial nod. Schools do not have policies that clarify the legal rights of parents to participate in school education and, therefore, cannot guarantee that parents are protected in their participation in school management and teaching activities.

The ideal state of home-school cooperation is one in which both sides, the family and the school, have clear responsibilities, interact closely, divide and collaborate, and work together to bring about the most significant educational synergy and promote the overall development of the students.

## **Strategies of Home-School Cooperation in Primary School English Teaching**

There is no single standard in the academic community for standards and practice paradigms for home-school cooperation in elementary schools. Since we find that the problems in home-school cooperation mainly originate from the family, the teacher, and the school, we should also start from these three areas to find appropriate strategies.

### **Home**

Good English learning habits are the foundation of successful English learning for elementary school students and essential English education. However, it is unrealistic to rely solely on teachers to develop good English learning habits in elementary school students. In Chinese schools, it is challenging to implement the foreign small class teaching model because of the population problem, so it is very typical to have 30 to 40 students in a class. The characteristics of the class room teaching system predetermine that the teacher cannot take into account all the matters related to learning for each individual student in the class. Therefore, it is necessary to cooperate with the home to cultivate good English learning habits in primary school students.

Although some parents have limited knowledge and ability, this does not prevent families from facilitating their children's learning. Parents are the first teachers their children experience, so they can study in their spare time, try to improve themselves, realize the importance of their participation in their children's English learning, and actively participate in the process of tutoring their students. Self-learning is especially important for students. However, because elementary school students are less autonomous, how parents guide their students affects their

learning to a certain extent. Some parents do whatever the teacher tells them to do without considering their children's actual situation and English foundation. Parents should provide targeted tutoring to their students based on their understanding of their own learning of English and the information coming from the teachers and the students themselves.

In the process of home-school cooperation, family education is also a vital aspect and force in home-school cooperation. Parents first need to have their position in home education clarified, know their responsibilities in students' English learning, actively participate in English teaching, gradually establish the right ideas consistent with English teachers, and jointly promote students' English learning. In cooperation with English teachers, the parents should establish a partnership of mutual trust, better cooperate with English teachers' teaching activities, and actively provide English teachers with relevant feedback from students. Parents should not just be passive recipients, but change the current situation where the school is the main focus and family is the support. They need to communicate and interact with each other and school education to synchronize their students' education, forming a complementary education segment and taking joint responsibility for students' development. For the tasks arranged by English teachers, the active participation and cooperation of parents is needed, not to be intimidated, but finding problems and giving feedback to teachers, and giving guidance and help to students so they are able to learn within their ability. Parents should take ownership of home education, recognize that they, the parents are an essential part of their student's learning and growth, establish a healthy view of home-school cooperation, actively participate in the various activities organized, and listen carefully to the teachers' suggestions.

## Teacher

Zhu Hong (2014) said, "Family education is a broad discipline based on multiple disciplines, and teachers must master not only the basic knowledge of education, educational psychology, family education, and the sociology of family education but also learn the skills of communication with parents, all of which cannot be done by untrained teachers. It is not something that untrained teachers are capable of doing." Therefore, our colleges and universities should include expert training in home-school cooperation in the content of teacher education programs and teach the fundamental theories of home-school cooperation to future teacher educators.

To some extent, students' English learning performance is closely related to the quality of the teaching team. Therefore, the comprehensive quality of English teachers is paramount in teaching. English teachers should consider this from the perspective of long-term development. This is on the one hand, continuously improving their effectiveness, including improving their teaching ability, their communication skills for a meaningful exchange with parents, psychological education for their ability to reach and interact positively with students. On the other hand, teachers should strengthen their willingness to cooperate with parents, accept their participation and suggestions, and narrow the psychological distance between themselves and the parents.

English teachers could set up an "open day" for the English courses and invite parents to experience students' learning in the English classroom. It would help parents form a concrete, reality-based grasp of students' performance in the English classroom, understand the English teachers' teaching methods, and enable them to offer their suggestions and opinions on the

content of the lessons. Teachers could also receive feedback and suggestions from parents after the English open day. In response to the input from parents, they could make selective improvements by combining their teaching situation and diversifying their teaching techniques and habits, which, in turn, would prevent that teachers blindly listen to parents' suggestions and would make the suggestions made by parents more relevant and more acceptable to teachers. Teachers should strengthen the cooperation with parents, but the cooperation has to include action, as to involve parents input in teaching, so that students' English learning level can be improved.

### **School**

Schools are responsible for educating students, but they are also responsible for guiding parents. Family education is the first link in the establishment of effective education. If family education is not in place, it will counteract the effect of school education and negatively impact students' development. Furthermore, schools need to strengthen their support for family education. The involvement of parents in their students' learning English requires the school to create a comprehensive, harmonious and efficient environment for home-school cooperation. On the one hand, we should guide parents to master scientific, educational concepts and methods and strengthen their responsibilities in family education. On the other hand, the school should understand the difficulties and need, which parents encounter in tutoring students in English, and should systematically organize training for parents to address these problems, invite experienced English teachers from the school to guide the activities, and solve challenging issues for parents in person. At the same time, parents and teachers would be able to solve their educational

problems together, cultivate parents' awareness and knowledge of methods in English education, and improve their English education and family education skills.

These institutional safeguards need to be practical rather than paper-based. They should be developed reasonably and implemented naturally after introducing the system, not just formally. In this system, the two parties must communicate most closely with each other, teachers and parents, are the cornerstones of home-school cooperation. Therefore, it is essential to help teachers and parents establish the proper awareness of home-school cooperation based on their respective needs. At the same time we cannot forget, that the effect of education is long-term; no significant educational adjustment can be achieved overnight.

### **Summary**

The purpose of education is to foster the development of students, and a positive learning environment is essential for students' development. Among the many factors that determine a child's development, the family and the school have the most critical impact on the student. The harmonious relationship between parents and teachers plays an essential role in students' development. There are still many problems in elementary school English teaching in China, and it is imperative to promote elementary school English teaching through home-school cooperation.

### **Chapter III Conclusions and Recommendations**

The author analyzes the current problems of home-school cooperation in elementary school English teaching from three levels: parents, teachers, and schools, and proposes corresponding countermeasures to solve these existing problems.

For the families, some parents do not tutor students' learning effectively, and do not cooperate enough in the cooperation with teachers. For these problems, the author makes corresponding suggestions. The parents' uneven quality ability does not entirely determine the level of home-school cooperation. Parents should continue to learn, strive to improve their quality, participate in their children's learning as much as they can, combine their students' situation with targeted tutoring, actively cooperate with teachers' teaching and communicate with them promptly, and strive to achieve a higher level of home-school cooperation.

Teachers need to avoid focusing only on students' grades and pay more attention to students' overall ability. For learning English, interest is also an essential part, and too much attention to rates tends to cause significant pressure on students, which is not conducive to language learning. In this regard, I think teachers should actively communicate with parents, encourage parents to participate in students' learning, give parents tasks that they can do, and work together to create a good atmosphere of cooperation. Secondly, teachers' educational methods should keep up with the times, build a diversified communication platform, improve their comprehensive quality, and strengthen cooperation with parents.

Schools currently lack norms to guide home-school cooperation, and there is no relevant cooperative organization to further the smooth development of home-school cooperation in English teaching. Therefore, schools should improve the management mechanism of home-school cooperation in English teaching while attaching importance to parent education and providing

professional guidance and help for home-school education. Finally, schools should also rely on modern technological innovation cooperation channels to counsel English teachers

Although our national school cooperation started late compared to foreign countries, China is paying more and more attention to it. However, there is not much research on home-school cooperation specific to elementary school subjects in China, and very few of them are specific to the teaching of English. Consequently, if we want to find out the new problems of home-school cooperation in elementary school English teaching, we need to conduct a targeted and in-depth investigation and research based on the experience and achievements of our predecessors.

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