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**Title: Educating migrant children in England: Language and educational practices in home and school environments**

## **1. Introduction**

In UK primary schools, the proportion of pupils who speak at least one language in addition to English has increased from 16% in 2008 to 33 % in 2018 (DfE, 2019). Twenty percent of primary school children are learning English as an additional language (EAL) (DfE, 2017). In response to these demographic changes, schools face tremendous challenges to adapt their teaching practices to accommodate the large growing number of bilingual or multilingual pupils. These adaptations are reflected in school policies and educational practices concerning how teachers work with parents to support these children's multilingual literacy development, academic cultural adaptation, and social wellbeing (e.g. Dryden-Peterson, 2018). While these policies and practices are meant to engage parents in active school involvement to improve their children's language and educational experiences, conflicts may arise between teachers and parents because of their differences in culture, language, ethnicity, their perceptions of multilingual children, and their views on school responsibility. Resolving these conflicts is critical for educators, practitioners and policy makers as well as parents as they can directly affect the relationship between school and home, thus influencing migrant children's learning experience and their parents' involvement in their education.

This article reports on an on-going multilevel investigation of family language policies of transnational families in the UK (see [Project Website](#)). Family language policy (FLP) refers to explicit as well as implicit language planning in relation to language choice and literacy practices among family members in home domains (Curdt-Christiansen, 2009; King, Fogle & Logan-Terry, 2008). As part of the FLP project, this study focused on a group of

families of different Chinese origins who have enrolled their children in one primary school in the south of England, and on a group of teachers who teach at that school. It examines, from the perspectives of teachers and parents, their different expectations for educating migrant EAL children with regard to academic development and the role of language(s) in learning.

While recent studies on family education management have focused on how parents take agentive role in managing their children's language and literacy development (Curdt-Christiansen & Wang, 2018; Curdt-Christiansen & LaMorgia, 2018), in what ways socio-political educational environments influence family educational practices at home (Curdt-Christiansen, 2014; 2016; Song, 2019; Smith-Christmas, 2016), and how teachers provide parents with advice and guidance on teaching migrant children (Bezioglu-Goktolga & Yagmur, 2018; Kwon, 2017), few studies have examined the potential conflicts between the educational practices of home and school regarding parental involvement and engagement in their children's multilingual and educational development. This paper addresses these critical issues by examining parents' and teachers' perceptions of migrant children's English language and literacy development. It explores the discourse about cultural differences and educational expectations and what counts as educational engagement. The paper has important implications for migrant children's social and educational wellbeing and multilingual development as well as for home and school relations. It addresses the following research questions:

1. What are teachers' and parents' perceptions of migrant children?
2. How do parents involve in their children's education in home-based educational practices?

3. What are the teachers' expectations of parents' involvement and engagement in their children's education, and how are they different from parents' educational practices at home?

## **2. Language and Educational Practices in School and Home**

Building a meaningful partnership with families of culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds can be instrumental for migrant children's language and educational development as well as for their social wellbeing. Social wellbeing, in this context, is defined as a sense of belonging to a community and enjoying positive interpersonal relations (Berry, 2001). It is, therefore, imperative for schools and teachers to recognise that differences in language, cultural background and educational experiences may influence parents' perception of the school and their engagement in their children's education (Dryden-Peterson, 2018; Wong-Lo & Bai, 2013). In particular, teachers' attitudes towards migrant children and their pedagogical practices may have an impact on children's sense of belonging and parents' perception of the school, which can affect children's language learning and educational development in a positive or negative way.

### *2.1 Educational policy, EAL children, and teachers' attitudes*

The educational policy for migrant children in England has always emphasised the importance of learning English in schools (Leung, 2016). In an overwhelmingly monolingual English-medium school environment (see next section on non-settler society), migrant children often feel a pressure to learn English as quickly as possible to become assimilated and integrated into the mainstream educational system. Research has shown that the teaching EAL pupils, who are mainly from migrant backgrounds, has not been separated from mainstream classes in the past decades where provisions for support of migrant children have been insufficient (Flynn & Curdt-Christiansen, 2018; Arnot et al., 2014). Leung

(2016) critically highlighted the notion of 'equality in education' as the underpinning ideology that influenced the 'mainstreaming EAL' approach to teaching EAL pupils. While the ideological argument for equality seemed to make sense, the pedagogical approaches to teaching have not taken into consideration the linguistic needs of the EAL pupils. Costley (2014), for example, conducted an overview of EAL policy provision in state-funded education in England and found that there has been an apparent lack of EAL curriculum and teacher training over a 60-year period. Safford and Drury (2013) pointed out several issues regarding teacher training programmes, indicating that teachers are poorly prepared to identify EAL children's language needs, and there is a lack of clarity about the distinction between language needs and other cognitive or physical needs. Employing an online survey, Flynn and Curdt-Christiansen (2018) investigated how teachers make sense of EAL provisions and policy; they found that 73% (n=136) of the teachers had little relevant training and sought help from experienced colleagues to support their EAL related teaching. They pointed out that teachers' knowledge of EAL teaching is insufficiently developed.

Decades of research into migrant children's education has shown that when English has been legitimised as the only language of education, a monolingual ideology tends to become deeply engrained in educators (Conteh & Brock, 2011; Cunningham, 2019a). This ideology shapes teachers' attitudes towards and perspectives on how language should be used, taught and learned (Kroskrity, 2007). As language ideologies can legitimise and promote a particular language, English in UK schools has been uncontested in its dominance in education and enjoys unchallenged linguistic superiority. Conteh and Brock (2011), for example, engaged in a longitudinal study of bilingual children in England where they observed and interviewed practitioners and children. Over an extended period of observation, they found that although teachers may have the best interest of bilingual

children in mind and do try to support them, their practices often did not provide 'safe space' for migrant children to optimise their "personal, social and emotional knowledge of languages at home" (p. 347). Such practices reflect a rooted ideology in society and education that home languages are negatively associated with the cognitive abilities of migrant children.

Research concerning migrant families has shown that parents often face a dilemma: either to raise their children bilingually or in the societal/school language only (Bezioglu-Goktolga & Yagmur, 2018; Kwon, 2017; Song, 2019). Their decisionmaking process is largely influenced by the broader societal discourse, favouring an assimilation ideology, and by teachers' attitudes towards migration, education and linguistic and cultural diversity. The assimilation ideology about educating multilingual children together with the sociocultural and sociopolitical realities may present difficulties and constraints that prevent families from developing literacy in the home language (Bezioglu-Goktolga & Yagmur, 2018; Curdt-Christiansen, 2013b). Bezioglu-Goktolga and Yagmur (2018), for example, studied Turkish migrant children in the Netherlands. Through observations of 20 families and interviews with 35 parents and five classroom teachers, they showed that teachers held the opinion that parents did not support their children's school education by using Turkish at home. Based on this ideological conviction, they advised parents that using the home language could slow down their children's academic development.

Also in the UK, studies have found that teachers and parents hold similar opinions, either explicitly or implicitly (Cunningham, 2019a, 2019b; Curdt-Christiansen & LaMorgia, 2018; Weekly, 2018). Curdt-Christiansen & LaMorgia (2018) explored FLP in Chinese, Italian and Pakistani communities in the UK. Using a questionnaire and interviews as the tools of enquiry in this comparative study, they found that parents showed different ideological

convictions about home languages and made different investments in their children's development of home language and English. The Chinese and Pakistani parents placed more emphasis on developing English language and thus provided fewer literacy resources and literacy practices in the home language. Some parents were concerned that their home language could "hinder their [the children's] learning in English" (p. 18).

When tracing the roots of family language policies, researchers have pointed out that teachers' attitudes towards migrant children's home language and cultural background as well as their discourse about home language practices may play an instrumental role in developing children's and their parents' views on their own language and cultural heritage, either positively or negatively (Conteh & Brock, 2011; Cunningham, 2019a, 2019b; Song, 2019; Weekly, 2018). Cunningham (2019a; 2019b), for example, examined the discourse of a group of UK teachers with regard to their attitudes towards EAL children's home language maintenance and literacy practices. While the teachers seemed to support the notion of additive bilingualism, their support tended to be rhetorical. When it came to issues of responsibility for developing additive bilinguals, they believed that the responsibility to maintain and develop children's home language remained with the parents, the children themselves and the ethnic community. Home languages, as pointed out by some teachers, should not enter the domain of public education. This ideological positioning reflects an ambiguous view on multilingualism and may project a language-as-problem attitude in home language development (Ganuza & Hedman, 2015; Ruiz, 1984; Song, 2019; Tollefson, 2013). Such attitudes can influence children's sense of belonging in schools, which in turn may influence their school experience.

## *2.2 Educational practices in home and mainstream schools*

With regard to family educational practices as the explicit/deliberate family language policy, studies show that migrant parents with Asian background are actively involved in their children's biliteracy development (e.g. Curdt-Christiansen, 2009; Song, 2019). Many take on responsibility to facilitate their children's language development in both mainstream and home languages, either through deliberate investments and strategies or implicit socialisation practices to provide linguistic conditions, literacy resources, and structured educational practices at home (Curdt-Christiansen, 2012, 2013b; Kwon, 2017; Ren & Hu, 2013; Song, 2019). For instance, they enrol their children in ethnic community/complementary schools, usually operated during weekends (Curdt-Christiansen, 2009; Li Wei & Zhu Hua, 2014; Sneddon, 2014; Zhou & Kim, 2006), they help with children's homework (Curdt-Christiansen, 2013c; Kang, 2015), organise and participate in various types of literacy activities (Curdt-Christiansen, 2013b; Lytra, Gregory, and Ilankuberan, 2016; Ren & Hu, 2013), and hire private tutors to 'shadow' school education (Curdt-Christiansen, 2012; Zhou, 2009).

These parents' deliberate educational involvement may not, however, always be highly valued by teachers or considered 'problem free' from the schools' perspective (Berry, 2001; Dryden-Peterson, 2018; Wong-Lo & Bai, 2013). Research evidence shows that differences in educational practices between school and home are often caused by unfamiliarity with the educational system and lack of knowledge about the contexts in which the families are situated, as well as by the parents' cultural disposition towards education and their own educational experiences, schooling and beliefs (Berry, 2001; Chua, 2011; Curdt-Christiansen, 2009; Guo, 2013, 2014; [Portes & Fernández-Kelly, 2008](#)). Migrant parents' human capital and the modes of integration into mainstream society, according to [Portes and Fernández-Kelly \(2008\)](#), play a critical role in their children's educational success



and upward mobility. From the perspective of cross-cultural psychology, studies have indicated that strategies of acculturation can vary from assimilation, integration, separation to marginalisation (Berry, 2001). Depending on the society of settlement, which can be settler societies, such as Australia and Canada, or non-settler societies, such as France, Germany and the UK, migrants may find themselves adapted to the host culture on a continuum scale reflected by “how they acquire the appropriate sociocultural skills for living effectively in the new sociocultural milieu” (Sam & Berry, 2011, p. 478). Educational practices at home, thus, is one of the cultural adaptations that indicate an individual’s feeling of wellbeing and sense of belonging.

Chinese families, for example, have been reported to use home-based educational practices to support their children’s academic development. These practices include parents’ assisting with homework, prescribing drill practices and providing supplemental instruction, materials and extra activities (Wong-Lo & Bai, 2013). Guo’s (2014) study of Chinese immigrant parents in Australia, Chua’s personal narrative of her tiger mother style in the US, and Curdt-Christiansen’s (2009) investigation of Chinese immigrant parents in Canada all indicate that Chinese parents attach great importance to education because they strongly believe that good education is the main means to achieve success and improve social standing in a given society. As a result of such strong convictions, the active home-based educational practices mirror parents’ expectations for their children’s academic achievement.

Chinese parents’ expectations are often reflected in their demand for children to do extra homework. Portes and Rumbaut (2001), for example, reported that about 40% of Chinese migrant students in the US do two or more hours of homework daily. The deeply

rooted beliefs in education held by Chinese parents, especially those who have experienced excessive assessments in schools, motivate them to be involved in their children's education by providing extra homework. They tend to emphasise facts learning and foundational skills training. For example, when doing math exercises, parents would repeatedly provide their children with maths sheet for practicing foundational skills.

While studies in the US and Australia have found that such parental involvement contributes positively to the children's academic performance (Dryden-Peterson, 2018; Guo, 2014; Wong-Lo & Bai, 2013), little is known about how such involvement is perceived by teachers in the UK, especially with regard to language and literacy practices. As teacher attitudes and actions have great influence on how parents perceive the schools' interest in their families and their children's linguistic and cultural background, there is an urgent need to explore how schools and teachers perceive migrant children with EAL needs as well as families with linguistically and culturally diverse backgrounds. It is also pivotal to understand how and if sufficient educational support is provided for EAL children's academic learning at school. By looking at teachers' and parents' expectations of each other regarding migrant children's educational wellbeing, the study has important implications for supporting and enhancing the effective relationship between school and family.

### **3. The Study**

This study is located in a primary school in an affluent area of a city in southern England. Recognised as one of the best schools in the region with inspiring and supportive teachers, the school is also home to pupils with diverse linguistic and ethnic backgrounds. Making up about 20% of the total number of pupils, this group of multilingual children use between them 40 different languages at home with parents and siblings, including Mandarin and

other Chinese varieties, Arabic and Bengali, and a number of European languages, e.g., Polish, Spanish, German, Dutch and Russian. Although many languages are used by these pupils at home, visible minorities are rare. With regard to the teacher population, the majority are British white with only one exception. Nonetheless, the school places a strong emphasis on celebrating diversity. Valuing parental involvement, the school encourages teachers to work closely with parents to ensure that children enjoy their school life to the fullest. Despite the awareness of linguistic and cultural diversity, the school has an English-Only policy in classrooms.

As an active educational practitioner with a migration background and as a member of the Chinese community, I was contacted by one of the school's teachers (Andrea, pseudonym) who taught EAL pupils part-time and outside school hours. Introduced by two parents who were already involved in the larger FLP project, Andrea was concerned about how she could work better with parents of non-English educational background as she cared about EAL children's academic development. Her concern was shared by some other teachers who taught Chinese EAL pupils, and this became the basis of the current study when the management team asked me to conduct a roundtable discussion with the parents. As all parents included in the current study were already involved in the larger FLP project, this current study focused mostly on their communications with the school and concerns about their children's academic progress and language development as well as their school experience in general.

### *3.1 Participants*

The participants include two sets: ten parents from eight Chinese families with different home languages; and eight white British teachers, including a teaching assistant and a

deputy head-teacher. While all teachers were trained in England, most of the teachers had not received EAL training. Mr Hunt and Denise had TESOL training and related teaching experiences. Table 1 shows the profiles of these participants.

Table 1 Participants' profiles (all names are pseudonyms)

Parents				Teachers				
Name	Profession	Dominant home language	Education Level	Name	Age	Years of teaching experience	Knowledge of other languages	EAL related training
Mrs Ai	Restaurant owner	Min Mandarin	Secondary	Alice (TA)	27	2	French	none
Mrs Bai	Business owner	Yue Mandarin	Secondary	Briony	30s	8	Spanish	none
Mr Bai	Business owner	Yue Mandarin	Secondary	Cathy	40	10	French	none
Mrs Chan	Business in China	Mandarin	University	Denise	38	12	none	yes
Mr Chan	Business in China	Mandarin	University	Eric	30	6	n/a	none
Mrs Deng	Home maker	Mandarin English	MA	Fran	43	13	n/a	none
Mrs Eng	Restaurant owner	Min Mandarin	Secondary	Grace	35	11	n/a	none
Mrs Fung	University lecturer	Shanghai Mandarin	PhD	Hunt (deputy head-teacher)	45	20	French	yes
Mrs Gong	University lecturer	Sichuan Mandarin	PhD					
Mrs Hue	Home maker	Xiang Mandarin English	University					

### 3.2 Data sources

Data were collected through the following means and sequenced to capture the perceptions of the parents' educational expectations and teachers' concerns about the children: 1) individual interviews with parents; 2) focus group interview with teachers; 3) emails from teachers; and 4) a roundtable discussion with parents.

The **individual interviews with parents** were conducted in Mandarin Chinese with occasional use of English after the school contacted the author. As the school was keen on developing an effective working relationship, it was vital to understand how and to what degree parents were involved in their children's educational development and how they perceived the school's and the teachers' commitment. Topics covered parental beliefs about the languages in their life, their aspirations, and the challenge of raising bilingual children in the UK. Most importantly, parents were asked about their perceptions of the school's expectations and the teacher attitudes towards their children. Depending on parents' time schedule and availability, interviews were conducted either during home visits or in a café or in their workplace and lasted from 20 minutes to two hours. All interviews were audio recorded with ethnographic fieldnotes.

The **focus group interview with teachers** then followed. Prior to conducting a roundtable discussion with the parents, it was equally important to understand what the teachers' concerns were about the Chinese EAL pupils, what expectations they had of parental involvement, and how they wanted to work with parents. Thus, the focus group discussion covered topics such as classroom policies, challenges when working with parents, miscommunications between teachers and parents, and incompatibility between school pedagogical practices and home teaching practices. Through the discussion, the teachers' expectations for parental involvement and their attitudes towards EAL pupils became apparent. The audio-recorded focus group interview took place during school hours and lasted about 45 minutes. Because of their busy teaching schedules, a few teachers had brief **dialogues and email communications with** me after the group meeting.

Following the group interviews with the teachers, the **roundtable discussion with parents** was organised by the school and took place on campus. As a starting point, the roundtable discussion used three case studies of migrant families with different literacy practices at home to engage parents in conversations about cultural practices that differ between school and home. Lasting 2½ hours, the discussion (audio recorded) focused on issues of miscommunication between mainstream schoolteachers and migrant parents, on differences in educational practices between home and school, and on the different expectations of parents and teachers for the children's academic development.

The different sets of data were then triangulated to complement the analysis which will be discussed below.

### *3.3 Data Analysis*

In order to understand the multi-dimensional factors influencing parental involvement and home educational practices as well as teachers' expectations of parental involvement, all data were transcribed or, if conducted in Chinese, translated, reviewed, coded and reflectively studied. Transcribed key points and representative transcripts were shared with parents through WeChat (a Chinese social-media platform) to obtain their feedback. Summary of the focus group interview with teachers was also sent to the management team of the school. The process of reviewing and validating data together with parents and teachers aimed to avoid de-contextualised interpretations of expectations and concerns from both the teachers' and parents' perspectives.

Data coding was guided by situational analysis and mapping (Clarke, 2003; Khaw, 2012). It consisted of three levels of coding, viz. open coding, axial coding and selective coding. At the level of open coding, data were broken into detached parts which were

labelled as, for example, home language, EAL, mathematics, reading comprehension, extra homework, etc. At the axial level, connections were made among the various open codes to identify the relationship between them. For example, home language, reading comprehension, EAL, and limited English were all placed under the thematic of *EAL or bilingual*. The third level involved the process of drawing connections from the axial coding to derive a hypothesis about cultural and educational practices that differ between school and home in relation to other discursive elements, such as the purpose of education related to the participants' educational experiences, the invisibility of home language in academic learning, and their expressed concerns about the children's overall educational wellbeing in school.

Two major themes emerged from interviews with both parents and teachers: 1) the perceptions of multilingual pupils; and 2) culturally oriented educational practices. In the following sections, the parental accounts of their home language and educational practices and the teachers' expectations and perceptions are presented accordingly.

#### **4. Findings**

Data analysis from the study revealed that there were differences between the parents' and the teachers' perceptions of academic learning. While the parents viewed themselves as responsible for their children's overall social wellbeing, they also believed that the school in general, and the teachers in particular, were responsible for providing their children with an environment conducive to learning and, when needed, also with extra assistance.

##### *4.1 EALs or bilinguals*

The participants expressed perceptions of Chinese migrant children that demonstrated their beliefs in and attitudes towards the children's ability to develop academically. While both

parents and teachers acknowledged that the children needed support in English literacy to develop their academic skills, they held different views based on their cultural and ideological orientations. Mr Hunt, the deputy head-teacher, for example, proffered the following explanation of the terms used in the school for different types of migrant children,

Mr Hunt: ...so grade xx and xx have the largest [number of] bilingual learners ...

Researcher: So, you don't call them EALs, you call them bilingual learners?

Mr Hunt: Yes, we don't tend to. The reason is that EAL is a very specific thing for us, it's where a child struggles to access curriculum, so we call them EALs and ..., and we've got three of those Chinese children who had to have extra input because they struggled to access curricula.

Researcher: So, Chinese EALs

Mr Hunt: Then bilingual, we call everybody who uses another language for whatever reason. So, we try to be positive with bilingualism... so we thought, we try to make it positive about bilingualism and encourage people to see it as an asset. And - but on the other hand, we also want people to be open with us because then we can see what their children might have [home language]. So maybe one reason why we have difficulty is when people come to the school, either they don't declare their home language, or they don't reveal the language they use at home. So, they don't understand how important it is for the school to know what languages they speak at home. Sometimes they think negatively about their home language...

How to label migrant children and what terms to use for these migrant pupils clearly have a strong ideological connotation for the school. From the school's perspective, bilingualism was regarded a positive attribute and an asset. As indicated by Mr Hunt, the school viewed children who use other languages in addition to English as bilinguals. On the other hand, EAL was used with caution for those who "struggle to access curriculum".

While Mr Hunt (school) was clearly supportive of bilingualism, the monolingual non-settler environment in the UK has not made bilingual a positive term. Mr Hunt's accounts revealed an implicit perception of bilinguals among parents as he expressed "when people



come to the school, either they don't declare their home language, or they don't reveal the language they use at home". Although the school encouraged parents and children to view bilingualism "as an asset", parents were unwilling to reveal the languages they use at home. In Mr Hunt's words, "sometimes they think negatively about their home language". The mixed picture of the positive image of bilingualism with the negative discourse of home languages provides evidence for the current government's hostile migration policy which conflates home languages with negative views of migration (Jaworska and Themistocleous 2018; Lavener & Cole 2017). The policy was established as part of the government strategy to reduce UK's migration population (Hill, 2017). In educational context, this policy coincided with DfE's introduction of the Proficiency scales which require schools to report all EAL pupils' language profile (DfE, 2018). This mandatory assessment was viewed by some parents and teachers as an intention of the government to control migrant status (Hutchinson, 2018). As a result, parents were reluctant to provide information about their children's actual language use at home. It is, therefore, not surprising that some parents did not perceive their home languages as valuable, partly because of the migration policy, and partly because migrant children were frequently portrayed in the media and public discourse as a problem that had lowered the standard of education in the UK (Sutton, 2017). The finding is also consistent with the results from Cunningham's (2018, 2019) study of primary school teachers in northern England where a covert negative view of migrant pupils' home language was found in schools despite the current educational policy overtly embracing linguistic and cultural diversity.

The mixed image of positive linguistic diversity and negative view of home language may also influence teachers' attitudes towards EAL children. The next excerpt illustrates

how Alice, a teaching assistant (TA), discussed the reading practices of Chinese EAL children.

(A: Alice; R: Researcher). When asking her what her job entailed, she said,

**Alice:** So, I pick up on if they [children] haven't been reading.

**R:** Uh, really so these children are all having a problem in -

**A:** Well, they should read every night.

**R:** And they don't? Do you know...

**A:** They probably do. But the best thing is to read with a - with an adult so that the adult can correct them.

**R:** Hmm.

**A:** Of course, you see if their parents aren't - you know, those are not speaking English at home, and that's a very -sort-sort of difficult task, so, therefore, um, you know, that-that ...

**A:** Generally, they are very good readers--but it's just those-those sort of like- -you know, picking up on those finer points of, understanding the comprehension, we find quite a lot that-that- They just don't get the **Englishisms** and the comprehension-

**R:** Yeah. Well, what are some of the, you know, the biggest issues in terms of reading they have? Things like background knowledge and they don't have the schema or is it something else?

**A:** No, it's-it's just the sort of **colloquialism** of understanding the sort of language in the way **we** put them. So, if it was, it was **very simple** then they would get it. But the colloquialism like idioms it rains cats and dogs...

Alice showed a noticeable hesitation when discussing the Chinese children's reading issues.

She firstly emphasised that the children "should all read every night" and such reading practices would be best carried out together with an adult. From a reading developmental perspective, Alice made a relevant argument, as children would gradually become independent readers with the assistance of adult scaffolding.

She then shifted the focus from the children to adults by mentioning her concerns about the parents' English ability or non-English language use at home. This concern seemed to suggest a link with the children's reading comprehension problems.

Acknowledging that "background knowledge, schema" were not the barriers to reading

comprehension, she stressed that it was the “Englishisms” and “colloquialisms” that prohibited the children from becoming proficient readers. Her view suggested a conflictual ideological stance on migrant children’s home language. On the one hand, she confirmed that the children “are good readers”. On the other hand, she seemed to suggest that these children were different from locally born English children who were socialised into understanding idiomatic expressions such as “it rains dogs and cats”. While her stance showed her concerns for these children’s English reading development, it also indicated an implied ideological position that home language may be the cause for these children’s reading problems. Her stance also reflected what Cunningham (2019) called a rhetorical support for home language maintenance or bilingual development in the UK. Such conflictual views may also be the source of parents’ reluctance to “declare their home language,” as pointed out by Mr Hunt in his earlier discursive comment.

In the next section, I present data from the round-table discussion in which Mrs Ai shared her concerns for the wellbeing of her son and children with similar backgrounds,

<p>我觉得他 (儿子) 英文好像做错了, 我说, 你为什么做错了? 他说老师说过, 好像 “我听不懂, 老师说听不懂就去问同学”。所以说他比较内向, 没有问。他班里面好像中国学生也有三四个。所以说这个班的状态, 好像是讲英文的课时, 家长有提过这个问题。毕竟回来跟我们都是讲母语的, 好像有的东西没有办法理解, 最好是再把它说一下。</p> <p>我觉得, 站在这里的这个 xx 老师, 他对我们帮助很大, 如果每个老师都能像他那样的话, 我觉得我们孩子一点问题都没有。我就想知道, 他们的老师是不是应该有沟通一下? 就是说, 对我们华人这些语言上肯定</p>	<p>Sometimes I see mistakes in his [her son’s] work in English, then I ask him why there are mistakes? He said “I didn’t understand what the teacher had explained. When asking the teacher again, the teacher suggested that I ask my classmates”. So, he is shy, he won’t ask. There are 3 or 4 Chinese pupils in this class. So, in this class, and for English lessons, parents have raised this issue. After all, he speaks mother-tongue with us at home, there are things that are difficult to understand, so it would be best [if teachers were] to repeat [the difficult content]. The teacher X, for example, really gives us a lot of help. If every teacher could be like him, I think our children would have no problems [in learning].</p>
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有一点点差距的小孩，多做一点事情，如果这样的话，会更好一定。这个 xx 老师就很好，但是不是每个老师都向他这样。不要因为英语差或家庭语言的原因，就把所有的事情都推在孩子身上。那老师也是有责任的，就哪怕是那个眼神那，多几个眼神在我们孩子身上，我们孩子一定会做好的。

I just want to know if the teachers communicate with each-other? What I mean is: could they not do a few more things for our Chinese children and for those who are a bit weak and have a gap in English? if they could do that, that would be great. Mr X is a very good teacher, but not everyone is like him. (They) should not blame the children because their English is weak or because they have different (home) languages. The teachers have a responsibility, too. Even the ways they look at the children. If they could cast a few more glances at our children, the kids would do much better.

One of the main purposes of organising the roundtable was to talk about issues of communication between the teachers and the parents. In this almost emotional comment, Mrs Ai pointed out a few critical issues, including teachers' responsibility for migrant children's learning; teachers' attitudes towards these children; and teachers' concerns about the children's social and emotional wellbeing. Regarding responsibility, Mrs Ai asked for more additional assistance for migrant children's learning; she acknowledged that "After all, he speaks mother-tongue with us at home, there are things that are difficult to understand, so it would be best [if teachers were] to repeat [the difficult contents]". A similar request was made by other parents when they argued that teachers should be more patient and understanding, given these children's linguistic and cultural backgrounds. During the discussions it transpired that parents viewed their children as capable learners who "have no problems [in learning]", but they were concerned about English language as well as the social support that children would receive from the teachers.

Thus, 'language gap' and the wellbeing were deep concerns among the parents. While Ai reckoned that teacher X had provided her son with support and help, she also

emphasised that “not everyone is like him”. From her remarks, a sense of despondency could be discerned when she expressed “could they not do a few more things for our Chinese children and for those who are a bit weak and have a gap in English?” Her sense of despondency turned into open criticism when she argued that teachers “should not blame the children because their English is weak or because they have different (home) languages”. While her view on the school’s teaching practices may not reflect what teachers did, her concerns may be related to the deficit view on migrant children in UK schools in general (Cunningham, 2019; Weekly, 2018). Fundamental to her discussion was again the issue of English vs. home languages which was embedded in the rhetorical discursive practices of supporting linguistic and cultural diversity.

The third critical point raised by Mrs Ai was how she perceived that migrant children with different home language were treated by teachers. While Mrs Ai did not overtly express that some teachers had treated these groups of migrant children with ‘neglect’, her subtle emphasis on “the ways they look at the children. If they could only cast a few more glances on our children, the kids would do much better” implied a degree of inattention from the teachers. It should be noted here that the point of the study was not to apportion blame, it was meant to understand how teachers and parents viewed migrant children and how their expectations of each other could result in conflicts and miscommunications that affect children’s social and academic wellbeing. While the school encouraged a close collaboration between teachers and parents, Mrs Ai’s accounts suggested that such a relationship had yet to be established. Teachers’ ‘inattentive’ attitudes towards migrant children, from her perspective, could cause a sense of alienation which can have serious effects on migrant children’s school experiences.

#### 4.2 *Culturally oriented educational practices*

'Language gap' has been a recurring issue, discussed by teachers and worried over by parents. Although bilingualism and cultural diversity were active items on the school's agenda, the discourse related to language gap had only to a small degree taken into consideration children's home language and cultural practices. Cathy, a year 3 teacher, had worked with Amy (one of the Chinese EAL pupils) for some time. Because of the parents' insufficient English proficiency, there had been some miscommunications between Cathy and Mrs and Mr Chan. As Cathy explained,

Parents are unable to support their child's reading development [in English]. It has taken me 6 months to get A's parents to sign her reading record. However, their lack of English means that they are unable to support A in her vocabulary development or decoding skills at home. They are only concerned about her finishing the book and moving on to the next.

(Cathy, year 3 teacher, email communication, 24 April 2019)

Clearly, Cathy wanted to reach out and work collaboratively with the parents to help Amy. Her email was, however, 'tinted' with a gentle 'complaint'. In her short email, "unable to support" was mentioned twice. Despite her deep concerns for Amy's English development, she seemed to think that parents' "lack of English" was delaying Amy's decoding skills and vocabulary development. A language-as-problem ideological belief was discernible in her email. This ideological belief is not new to researchers in the field of bilingual education (Ruiz, 1994). As the school was new to migrant children, and teachers were not trained to teach them, both families and schools may encounter unfamiliar educational and cultural practices from each other. In what Cathy described above, we see that she was troubled with the educational practices at home when she accentuated that "it has taken me 6

months to get A's parents to sign her reading record" and that "they are only concerned about her finishing the book and moving on to the next".

A discussion with Amy's parents, Mrs and Mr Chan, did, however, show a degree of miscommunication between Cathy and the parents. Mrs and Mr Chan expressed their deep concerns about their children's academic progress and understood well that their culturally oriented educational practices might differ from those of the school (in order to save space, all dialogues in Chinese are presented in English translation only),

Mrs Chan: Our educational practices are different from here; of course, we should adapt to the school practices here.

Mr Chan: When in Rome, do as the Romans. [We] should integrate into the local culture, [but] we also need to teach the children some of our own culture.

R: How do we reduce the tensions between the school and parents? In situations like this, the teachers feel that the parents are not involved [in the right way in the children's education], while parents actually do participate in their children's learning.

Mrs Chan: Since we came to this country for our children's education, I believe we, the parents, need to make a change. I reckon it is important to communicate with the teachers. Whatever the child's needs are, the teachers should provide the child with the necessary. She/he [the teacher] should pay more attention to the children. Therefore, from what we discussed earlier we hope that the teachers can give more recognition (respect) to the children. As parents, we have limited time. In addition, we don't know how the school conducts teaching. On top of that, the school didn't communicate with us. They didn't tell us how they teach here, how we should teach (at home). Our pedagogical practices are different from those of the school, we do care about the results. Now, if the child can do the maths of year 7 [their son is in year 5], that's the result of our teaching.

In this dialogue, Mrs and Mr Chan clearly acknowledged the educational differences between the home and the school. While accepting that "when in Rome, do as the Romans" and "adapt to the school practices" were the 'right' way for them to integrate into the school culture, they also conveyed that teaching "some of our culture" was important. Convinced that they needed to make a change and communicate with the teachers, they nevertheless believed that teachers should "pay more attention to these children" and it

was the teachers' responsibility to provide the necessary assistance to help the children with their academic development.

Elaborating on the importance of communication, Mrs Chan stressed that "the school didn't communicate with us". In particular, she emphasised that "The school didn't communicate with us. They didn't tell us how they teach here, how we should teach (at home)". This is different from what Cathy explained in her email. Perhaps the message was lost in translation when the parents did not understand how to teach decoding skills and why they needed to sign their daughter's reading record. It should be noted that these parents, being aware of their limited English proficiency, employed Andrea as a private tutor to help their children with reading comprehension issues. In addition, they offered what they could by working with children on spelling exercises, checking homework, and buying resource books. However, despite the efforts the parents made, their practices were not in concert with what the school did, as indicated in Cathy's email. This sentiment was also echoed in the focus group interviews with other teachers.

While the miscommunications may portray the parents as "unable to support", they have been observed to provide supplementary educational activities at home, such as giving the children higher maths instructions, and assigning extra maths and English grammar exercises. Their educational practices have resulted in what Mrs Chan stated as "our pedagogical practices are different from that of the school, we do care about the results. Now, if the child can do the maths of year 7, that's the result of our teaching".

Research has shown evidence that assisting with extra homework assignments and providing supplementary instruction from home not only help children who struggle with academic work to gain confidence but also reinforce school learning (Won-Lo & Bai, 2013). According to the school, however, such home-based practices need to be in alignment with



the school-based practices. The school teachers, therefore, argued that parents should observe the school's educational concepts and pedagogical practices (especially with regard to maths).

**Denise:** ...what we expect of all of our parents is that the children go home and they talk to their parents about the math they've done that day, and normally we'll still give them two or three more examples just to finish that evening. And the important thing is that parents need to only do that day's math with the child, not trying to **teach them a different method** when they get home. So supposing I've been teaching the children some sort of mental method of addition, what I often find with **Chinese parents** is that they'll look at it, see it's addition, but then go back to a formal written algorithm with their child, column addition and that isn't what I want them to do. So that's quite a big challenge to **get the Chinese parents to follow our methods of mathematics**, which are often quite different.

**R:** Uh-huh. So, have you talked to the parents about it?

**D:** Yes, so we've spoken to - I think it's really hard sometimes for them to appreciate the importance of just doing what the child is doing at that moment because we've dealt with some very confused children.

**R:** So, it's kind of the process in-in-in learning that parents do not see?

**D:** Yes, and it's quite different. It's just getting on board with **our methods** and sort of **valuing** the way that we're teaching it and the methods we're using. Because, eventually, we will get to the formal written methods, but it's really important to lay all the **foundation first**.

**Eric:** I think, add to that, the mind-set is that the parents - many parents think that the **way they further their children's learning is by letting them do years 7, 8, 9, 10 here and it's not that way**. We're - We very much - We follow mastery here and it's very much the breadth and how they apply the learned knowledge that we were doing in the past- -to real life situations, not calculative situations.

It is evident from the teachers' discussion that Chinese parents tend to provide their children with more maths instructions and advanced maths exercises. Such practices are derived from their high expectations for their children and from deep-rooted convictions that learning and practicing more will give their children a head-start. As many of the parents went through education in China, which has a very different educational system

with different curricula and different instructional approach, they emphasised repeated practicing of foundational skills. These foundational skills were regarded quite differently from Denise' view in which she considered it as processing the concepts of maths, not internalising the foundational skills. In China, however, foundational maths skills are taught in the early years and repeatedly practiced in class through different methods. By year 2 or 3, mental calculation is already mastered by almost every child. The maths curricula in the UK were generally regarded as too simple for the children by many Chinese parents. As a result, many parents provided extra maths exercises at home.

The disagreement between the teachers and parents on learning maths could lead to more conflicts. While parents believed that extra maths could boost up their children's confidence, teachers regarded such practices as not aligning with "our methods" and not "valuing the way that we're teaching it and the methods we're using". The disagreement was further extended to the parents' "mind-set" by Eric who believed that "many parents think that the way they further their children's learning is by letting them do years 7, 8, 9, 10 here and it's not that way". Culturally shaped practices can be difficult to change (Berry, 2001), and the Chinese parents are known for their high aspirations for academic success because of Confucius' influence in their socialisation (Curdt-Christiansen, 2009; Guo, 2013). Scholarly achievements have always been considered the most important way to establish an individual's social status. For these parents, doing advanced maths was one way to give their children a head-start to achieve scholarly success.

With regard to English literacy, teachers also disagreed with the parental reading practices with their children. In the following dialogue, Fran and Grace offered their opinions.

**Fran:** Children who speak Chinese predominately at home find the language tasks quite difficult, particularly things like comprehension. So, they read quite fluently. They can read and they can understand the meanings of the individual words, but when you ask them questions about, you know, the-the text they've read or a story or something, they find that much more difficult.

**R:** So, they understand, they can decode, but they can't really understand the story grammar and structure of the text?

**Fran:** Yes, yes, yes. I think at home, they do the writing that we ask them to do (spelling and vocabulary), but not necessarily asking questions about the text that they've read. **Questions like inferencing, such as why do you think that character did this or that.** Those kinds of questions, so I think from my point of view, I find that the Chinese speaking children find **that element of comprehension very difficult.**

**R:** And why do you think so?

**Fran:** Um, because I don't- I'm not sure that the parents ask them those kinds of questions about the text at home. They listen to the reading. They (children) read for 10 minutes, a parent will listen, too. So that's very good. Well done, lovely reading, but they don't ask them any questions about it. So their reading skills, oral reading skills are good. The vocabulary that they can- they can read really good, but their comprehension skills is-is weaker, because I don't- I'm not sure that they do those kinds of questions with them.

**Grace:** I think the parents just don't **have a confidence with the language.** So the children **can't converse over the text** that they're reading and explain what's happening or interpret them or kind **of engage with them,** because the parents just don't have **that level of language to be able to do it with the children at home.** They're just reading it and it's just seeing as, "Yes, you've got all the words correct, that's fine. You can leave that". They should be able to answer the questions, but they're not thinking it, because they can't discuss the text or what it means or what it might mean or interpret it.

The dialogue focused on children's reading comprehension problem which seemed unrelated to 'language gap' in children's English proficiency; as Fran repeatedly put it: "they read quite fluently. They can read and they can understand the meanings of the individual words". However, the 'fluency' of these readers was conditioned by comments like "questions like inferencing, such as why do you think the character did this or that". From Fran's perspective, the Chinese speaking children had difficulties in understanding

inferencing or higher order thinking questions because “I'm not sure that the parents ask them those kinds of questions about the text at home”. Although “I am not sure” was used before her argument, there was an implication that the parents’ practices were incompatible with what the teachers expected.

Grace supported Fran by confirming that “the parents just don't have **that level of language to be able to do it with the children at home**”, and as a consequence “children can't converse over the texts” or “engage with them”. The teachers’ ideological beliefs seemed to suggest that there was a ‘mismatch’ between literacy practices of schools and homes, a situation which has long been studied by linguistic anthropologists and literacy scholars such as Heath (1983) and Street (2001). Grace further suggested that the conversational quality and quantity did not meet the teachers’ expectations because “parents just don't **have the confidence with the [English] language**”. This ideological stance could invoke a sense of less competence in parents which could lead to a strained relationship between teachers and parents.

Arguably, teaching migrant children needs concerted efforts from both teachers and parents. The Chinese parents, however, believed that teaching academic literacy was the school’s responsibility. Mrs Fung stated that “our children are generally obedient, they listen to the teachers, all our children are intelligent. So, if there are any academic issues or if our children are falling behind, then teachers should be responsible for helping them to catch up”. Mrs Fung’s perception was based on her educational socialisation in China where it is traditionally believed that schools are responsible for turning a child into an educated person with or without the parents’ support. Parents also hold teachers in high regard because they can make changes in their children’s life. This cultural socialisation has led to the different beliefs between the parents and the teachers about who is accountable for

teaching migrant children and developing their academic knowledge.

The different beliefs about who is responsible for educating migrant children together with other differences in language, culture, race and educational norms can exacerbate or diminish the conflicts between home and school, making parents either feel welcome or rejected by the school. The essential key lies in the communication between the parents and the teachers who have the same ultimate goal - to provide multilingual children with the best possible education.

## **5. Discussion and Conclusion**

The study explored, through a comparative lens, how teachers and parents perceive migrant multilingual Chinese children and their academic learning in the school and at home. It further examined the differences in educational practices between home and school. The data suggest that parents and teachers hold disparate views on educating migrant children with regard to language/literacy practices, educational expectations, and parental involvement. There are two interrelated main factors that can explain this disparity: 1) the 'language gap'; and 2) language, culture and power.

Language fluency was clearly a critical matter for both groups of participants at two levels: the level of accessing curriculum for children and the level of participating in children's homework for parents. For teachers, children's lack of English proficiency was considered a 'language gap' which prohibited the children from accessing curriculum contents. Findings suggest that teachers' perceptions of Chinese migrant children were influenced by the 'language gap' ideology, which demonstrates a rhetorical support for the school's positive bilingual policy. Although home language was never overtly discussed by the teachers, there was an implied discourse that "not speaking English at home" was the

cause for failing academic development. This implicit or covert ideological stance seemed to affect the teachers' perceptions of Chinese migrant children and their parents. Their teaching practices, when it came to migrant children, were interpreted by parents as 'inattentive' and 'uncompassionate'. The findings are consistent with studies of multilingual children in other UK contexts and in other English speaking countries, which have evidenced that home languages have been consistently viewed as problematic and as impeding children's learning in English (Conteh & Brock, 2011; Cummins, 2000; Cunningham; 2018; 2019; Weekly, 2018).

This 'language gap' stance was also considered a major hindrance for the teachers to communicate with the parents and build a productive relationship with them for educating these migrant children. From the teachers' perspective, the 'language gap' was the cause of being "unable to support" the children's academic development. This miscommunication could be related to a deficit view that 'questions' migrant parents' skills and the knowledge obtained in their home country. This deficit view, caused by failure of intercultural relations (Berry, 2001; Sam & Berry, 2010), may lead to the assumption that these families are not able to provide adequate linguistic and academic support for their children's school learning (Kwon, 2017; Song, 2019).

In relation to 'language gap', there is the issue of intercultural relations and communication. According to Berry and colleagues (Berry, 2001; Sam & Berry, 2010), effective intercultural communications are related to receptive attitudes, cultural identities, language knowledge and use, social relationships, and values.

Dialogues with the parents and teachers revealed that there was an intercultural miscommunication between them as they tried to claim the legitimacy of educational practices for these bi/multilingual children. Embedded in the discourse of "not speaking

English at home” reflects implicitly the attitudes of the larger society towards migrants as well as the UK’s immigration policy against migrants (Jaworska and Themistocleous 2018; Lavener & Cole 2017). The teachers’ expectations of parental involvements were based on the British educational culture which is incompatible with the educational socialisation which the Chinese parents went through. The cultural conflicts in educational expectations inevitably resulted in communication breakdown. From the teachers’ perspective, the parents’ methods of teaching at home were unacceptable because they do not speak English at home, and they have not been socialised in British schools. From the parents’ perspective, the criticism of their educational practices at home and their English language proficiency was a denial of their acculturation into the British educational system. The intercultural miscommunication caused a certain anxiety, both in the parents and the children, as well as in the teachers, which may affect the children’s cultural and educational experiences in UK schools.

While the school encourages bilingualism and parental involvement, teachers’ implicit attitudes towards home language and home-based educational practices may exacerbate the conflicts between schools and home. By the same token, parents should reflect on their cultural practices and educational socialisation to align with the educational objectives of the school to improve their children’s educational experiences. For future studies, it is important to explore how communication can be established between teachers and parents to create an inclusive and conducive educational environment that meets the needs of language minority families and multilingual children.

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