

A Case Study of an Elementary Teacher's Interaction with the New Immigrant Children

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Abstract: *With the increase of new female immigrants and the decrease of fertility rate in Taiwan, the percentage of babies born to new immigrants has been increasing gradually. Yet, the new immigrant children were viewed as a minority group in education, especially in the subjects of science and mathematics where the new immigrants fell behind those of native children.*

The purposes of this study were to examine elementary science teacher's interaction with new immigrant children and to find the difficulties and methods of problem solving that science teacher's deal with when faced with the new immigrant children. The case study methodology was conducted in this research. Interview, classroom observation as well as document analysis were also adopted.

The main findings of this study were as follows: 1) The science teacher's teaching strategies differed with these children. In order to help the students of immigrants, the science teacher adjusted teaching materials and methods. 2) The condition of children's life adjustment is related to the family atmosphere. 3) With the different teaching skills and problem solved for the children of immigrants, the science teacher gains professional development.

Keywords: new female immigrants, new immigrant children, low birth rate

Introduction

With its increasing internationalization and flourishing foreign trade and travel, Taiwan has seen a general increase in transnational marriage which has in effect become another category of marriage (Hsia, 2000; Wang, 2001). Given the prevalence of transnational marriage, it has become increasingly common for a Taiwanese to have a foreign, such as Southeast Asian, or Mainland Chinese spouse. Over the past decade, besides the problem of population ageing, what cannot be ignored in Taiwan is the fast growing number of foreign spouses. "Children of transnational unions are defined as those Taiwanese nationals who reside in Taiwan but who have a non-Taiwanese parent" (Wu & Lin, 2005, p.156). In recent years, the number of this type of nationals has increased dramatically, and they represent an important portion of the newborn population. They are commonly called "new Taiwanese children" or "new immigrant children." Concerns have been raised about the problems these children encounter with respect to cultural integration, language barrier, challenges in learning, developmental delay, and the resulting social problems.

New immigrant families may very well be a disadvantaged group in Taiwanese society. As a result of inadequate family education and cultural resources, new immigrant children face greater difficulties in their education (Huang, 2006.) The problems they encounter include: identity, integration, lack of self-confidence, racial labeling, language barrier, unsatisfactory peer interaction, and alienation in the educational environment. They often

face economic difficulties as well, exacerbating the situation (Mo & Lai, 2004; Tsai & Huang, 2004).

It is alarming that various negative labels are placed on the new immigrant children. If the government, the school, or the society as a whole fails to take effective measures to provide the proper education that these children need, they will grow up to be wholly different adults. In order to achieve equal-opportunity education, helping new immigrant children to grow and learn has become a pressing social issue.

Although increasing attention has been paid to the new immigrants and transnational marriage, the research regarding new Taiwanese children has focused mostly on the parents' attitude toward education, the students' integration and academic achievements (Hsu, 2014; Wang & Tsai., 2008; Wu, 2014) or the immigrant mothers' social adjustment (Lin, 2012); there has virtually been no study on the interaction between teachers and new immigrant children. With the rapid increase in the number of new immigrant children, they will encounter many difficulties once they begin their schooling. In dealing with the problems of social adjustment, verbal communication, cultural identity, alienation, and falling behind in schoolwork, teachers must ponder how to counsel the immigrant children during the educational process, in addition to giving them more general help and care. The main aim of this paper is to investigate teachers' interaction with new immigrant children, their teaching strategies, and the problems they encounter and the ways to cope with them in the teaching process. It also hopes to make recommendations on the current educational problems of new immigrant children and the ways of implementing them in order to serve as a reference for the relevant organizations and teachers.

Literature Review

As of September 2016, the number of new-born babies in Taiwan is 151,411; the number of mothers who are Taiwanese is 142,046, or for 93.81%, while mothers who are foreign, including Mainland Chinese, Hong Kong, and Macao number 9,365, or 6.19%. On average, for every 10 new born babies, 0.66 is new immigrant children (Ministry of the Interior, 2016). Over the past decade, the number of students in primary and secondary education has dropped from 2,783,000 to 1,962,000, but that of new immigrant students has risen from 60,000 to 208,000, representing an increase from 2.2% to 10.6%; this means that there is one new immigrant child in every 9 students in primary and secondary education (Ministry of Education, 2016).

Most of the families with immigrant mothers are economically disadvantaged, and together with the issues of language, culture, and living habits, the problem of maladaptation is bound to arise with these immigrant women (Lo, 2011). With additional factors such as social alienation and the urban-rural gap, it is difficult for foreign spouses to adapt to the life in Taiwan within a short time. Getting married and becoming mothers while they are relatively young, these women are not well prepared for parenting duties; unable to adjust psychologically and emotionally and inexperienced in life, they often create problems for the next generation in language learning, academic development, living habits, interpersonal relationships, and personality development (Ministry of the Interior, 2003). Further, such unfavorable factors as low economic and social status, lax discipline attitude, communication problem, or difficult livelihood may lead to the children's negative behavior and poor academic performance (Wu & Liou, 2004).

The likelihood of learning disability and developmental delay among children from poor families with low socioeconomic status is 1.3 times higher than those of better-off families (Wanger, Spiker, & Linn, 2002). Ryabov and Hook (2007) indicated that in general, families that are higher up in the social hierarchy possess greater cultural capital; their children are placed in an advantageous position whether in terms of learning environment, resources, or teachers' attitude toward them, hence capable of achieving better academic results more easily. The transnational marriages of new immigrants are mostly found in families with lower socioeconomic status, and the cultural and social capital of their children are lower than those of native Taiwanese students (Chen, 2012). In sum, the inability of foreign spouses to take up the responsibility of educating their children is a cause of the problems their children often encounter in learning and cultural adaptation.

As the majority of the parents of new immigrant children come from lower socioeconomic status, generally with low educational level and mostly engaging in menial labor, the care they provide for their children is confined to basic needs; they can't help with the children's schoolwork. If the parents are working hard to make ends meet while having problems with verbal communication, the children will have no one to guide them in doing homework when they return home after school. With nobody to turn to for help, the children's problems in learning will only get worse, contributing to their poor academic performance.

Chiou and Cheng (2005) mentioned that teachers worry about the following issues facing children of immigrant families: poor performance in language, low willingness to learn, failure to concentrate their attention, racial labeling, and fear about being excluded. In addition, foreign spouses' inaccurate view on nurturing, inability to help their children in their studies, poor financial conditions and marital relationship, failure to communicate effectively as they don't speak Chinese: all these factors demand greater efforts on the part of teachers in their teaching. In addition, cultural differences make new immigrants unwilling to learn the ways of another culture, and they build a culture of their own that they can live with, i.e., forming a special, albeit marginalized, group of their own (Anderson, 1999).

As the rapid increase in new immigrant children is certain to play an important role in the makeup of the population, culture, and educational development of the future, related organizations have to pay even more attention to the education and learning conditions of new immigrant children. If considerations can be given to the needs of these children when the schools and teachers provide care or design the school curriculum, such as implementing a multicultural curriculum, not only will they help these children to understand cultural values, they will also assist them in attaining a sense of identity and eliminating prejudices (Banks, 1993); this will be highly beneficial to their education and adaptation to school life.

Research Methodology

Design of the Study

This study was conducted as a qualitative research. The case study methodology was adopted in this research. Interview, classroom observation as well as document analysis were also conducted.

Research Participants

The research participants of this study were a teacher (Li-Chun) of Hope Elementary School in Taitung County as its case teacher and a child (Hsiao-Ya) of an Indonesian spouse as its main subject. For the sake of privacy, pseudonyms are used for the school and people that appear in the study.

Data Collection Instruments

Interview

In order to understand the teacher's educational philosophy and method, a semi-structured interview was used to collect information which is recorded for the purposes of objectivity.

Classroom observation

In order to acquire firsthand information, researcher went into the classroom to observe and record relevant information. The purpose of classroom observation was to acquire an in-depth understanding of the actual teaching-learning situations, the use of teaching strategies, and the student's interaction with her teacher.

Document analysis

In order to truthfully reflect the teaching method of the case teacher and the learning situation and outcomes of the student, researcher has sought the case teacher's consent in collecting as much as possible the related documents such as teaching files, curriculum designs, test questions, and the student's assignments and test results.

The Main Findings

Case teacher's teaching strategy

Although Li-Chun had experience in teaching new immigrant children when she was a practice teacher, she was rather concerned about Hsiao-Ya's adaptation and learning. When designing teaching materials, Li-Chun would first think about how to use different strategies to help Hsiao-Ya learn. Through the help of her peer group, Li-Chun explained Hsiao-Ya's situation to other students, in the hope that they would understand her decisions and help her achieve her goals. If Hsiao-Ya has questions when Li-Chun teaches or discusses a test, Li-Chun would ask Hsiao-Ya's teammates to help her understand during recess. In class, if Hsiao-Ya responded to the teacher's questions by raising her hand, the teacher would always give her the chance to respond. If her answer was incomplete, the teacher would ask other students to explain it or would give further explanation herself; or she would rephrase her question or simplify it so as to gradually build up Hsiao-Ya's confidence.

As Hsiao-Ya lagged behind her peers in language and Mathematics and failed to retain what Li-Chun had taught, Li-Chun designed different homework assignments tailored to Hsiao-Ya's needs in order to help her adjust to the learning conditions. Moreover, in the teaching process, Li-Chun would promptly revise her teaching method in response to Hsiao-Ya's actual situation and performance in class and the problems she faced. In order to help Hsiao-Ya so that she would not fall behind her peers, Li-Chun offered extra help for Hsiao-Ya after school.

Interaction between teacher and student

As Hsiao-Ya is weak in oral and text comprehension abilities, her recognition of Chinese characters is inadequate compared with her peers, and so her performance in the language class is barely satisfactory. When the class reads a passage or a test question, she needs to

concentrate more. According to classroom observation records, when the class reviews a test and the questions are read out loud in class, it seems that Hsiao-Ya's has trouble with her pronunciation, because the shape of her mouth does not match the desired sound. This might be because she does not understand the test questions, and thus fails to pronounce them accurately, only imitating the pronunciation of other students. Moreover, in answering the test questions, Hsiao-Ya does not speak clearly and her pronunciation is not distinct. However, in following other students in reading the text, it can be faintly heard that her pronunciation is basically correct, and there is no obvious falling behind in the speed of shadowing or inappropriate mouth shape. The possible reason might be that she has a target of imitation when the teacher leads the reading, and thus showed obvious improvement in her speaking performance and speed. As regards text comprehension ability, as Hsiao-Ya is unable to understand the main questions of the test, there are inconsistencies between the questions and the answers, and she often writes the wrong answers.

As regards her performance in the natural sciences, Hsiao-Ya seldom speaks or asks questions, failing to think as other students do according to the teacher's questions. Hsiao-Ya can be easily distracted in the classroom; while other students interact with the teacher, she sits quietly in her seat most of the time; when her classmates speak, she looks at the teacher or the textbook. She shows a lack of interest, occasionally resting her head on the desk or playing with a ruler or other knickknack, without trying seriously to understand and participate in the question under discussion in class. It is only in the lab class that she raises her hand to show her interest because she finds the class interesting or the questions less difficult.

When the teacher gives a work assignment, Hsiao-Ya often revises her answers. She steals glances at her classmates' answers. She gives up quickly if she encounters something she does not understand. All in all, during the class, Hsiao-Ya fails to comprehend the meaning conveyed by the teacher. She sometimes does not understand what is written on the blackboard. She also answers the questions in a low voice, and in order to make sure that she meets the requirements of the teacher, she always observes her classmates and follows their actions, showing a lack of self-confidence.

Case student gets along with classmates and the desire for self-expression

In general, Hsiao-Ya's relationship with her classmates is harmonious. She is very enthusiastic, actively helping to take out the garbage. During class break, female classmates would take the initiative to talk to her and ask about her lessons. She sometimes would ask her classmates questions. So her interpersonal relationship is normal. Moreover, from classroom observations, if the teacher asks a question, she would raise her hand and speak if she is confident of her answer. She is happy when she gives the right answer, and cheerful after the lesson if she gets encouragement from the teacher. As Hsiao-Ya's ability to express herself is rather weak, she sometimes needs Teacher Li-Chun's guidance to give the correct answer; however, if her answer is drastically revised by the teacher, she would often be quiet in the latter half of the lesson, possibly due to the lack of a sense of achievement. She starts the class in high spirits, then her reaction turns slower because of distraction. Occasionally, she is not concentrated enough and fails to keep up with the class, or, in discussing a test, when she finds that her answer to almost every question is wrong, she would feel dejected for having no sense of achievement.

The difficulties encountered by the case teacher and the ways to cope with them

Li-Chun sometimes feels frustrated in pondering Hsiao-Ya's progress. Hsiao-Ya is inattentive in class, fails to pay attention, and does not hand in her assignments on time. Li-Chun understands that Hsiao-Ya's father is busy with his job and her mother doesn't have adequate ability to supervise her schoolwork, and that these reasons explain Hsiao-Ya's problems in class. Moreover, in order to build Hsiao-Ya's self-confidence, the teacher can only try to be supportive and refrain from putting pressure on her, and this might also explain her inattentiveness. In tackling Hsiao-Ya's distractions, Li-Chun has to encourage her student often, asking her to turn to a certain page of the textbook, or calling her name so as to remind her to be attentive.

Furthermore, as Hsiao-Ya's response is slow at the beginning of the school term, the teacher has to slow down and repeat the explanation or allow Hsiao-Ya longer time to answer the questions. All this arouses the dissatisfaction of other students. Li-Chun takes more time to explain herself, and it slows down the progress of the class. On the one hand, Li-Chun hopes that other students give Hsiao-Ya the opportunity to learn with them, but on the other hand, she has to consider the progress of the whole class. To her, this is the most difficult thing in teaching.

Moreover, the school has paid attention to the learning of new immigrant children and helped the immigrant parents become literate and adapt to the life in Taiwan; it organizes various activities for the parents to participate in so as to enable them to integrate in the community, but such activities are not compulsory. For example, Hsiao-Ya's mother is a full-time housewife and does not work to support the family, but she has no intention of attending the literacy class. Furthermore, Hsiao-Ya's mother is very strict in her parenting style; she often beats and scolds Hsiao-Ya, but almost spoils Hsiao-Ya's younger brother and sister. This produces in Hsiao-Ya a desire to rebel, and she often fights with her mother in first and second grades, and Li-Chun has to employ different counseling methods to help her. As for Hsiao-Ya's schoolwork, even though Li-Chun communicates with Hsiao-Ya's mother through family visits and when the mother comes to school to pick up Hsiao-Ya, the mother is often negative and passive in her attitude, always saying that she does not have the ability to supervise Hsiao-Ya.

Li-Chun encounters many difficulties and setbacks as a teacher. She consults with the other teachers who have similar experiences to come up with solutions. She gets support from other teachers. In teaching Hsiao-Ya this year, Li-Chun says that she takes the initiative to understand and care about the issues of the new immigrant children. Except for the need to improve her learning attitude, Hsiao-Ya does not have other bad behavior. Li-Chun also feels that her ability to handle special cases has improved. She also ponders ways to let students understand her teaching strategies in order to attain professional growth.

The Suggestions

Based on the findings, the suggestions are as follow:

Schools should organize remedial classes for new immigrant children

In response to the increase in new immigrant children, schools can set up special remedial classes for them. In most schools, teachers use their spare time to teach remedial classes. If there are regular and professionally run remedial classes, they can reduce the

teachers' fear of falling behind their teaching schedule since they have to make extra allowance for the care of new immigrant children.

Establishment of education counseling groups for new immigrant children in all counties and cities

Currently, the resources for immigrant spouses focus on helping the new immigrants themselves, with no provision for their children's education. The education departments of all counties and cities should set up education counseling groups, plan related parenting courses, and increase the parenting consultation and support channels for new immigrants; they can also provide professional advice and help for frontline teachers so as to alleviate their predicament of relying only on themselves.

Parental education in child rearing

Schools can work with social organizations in creating parental education classes in order to increase the knowledge and ability of new immigrant women in rearing their children. This helps parents in solving their problems in child rearing, and they will also gain counseling ability to help their children in their learning and growth.

Schools should strengthen communication channels with new immigrant parents

Besides regular family visits, PTAs, and other activities, schools should diversify communication channels with new immigrant parents. At present, new immigrant women willing to participate in PTAs are few, possibly because they want to avoid racial labeling of their children. Based on this consideration, schools can organize more diversified activities for parents. Through regular communication channels, parents can understand the learning adjustment of their children while teachers and parents can establish a relationship that aids in the learning of the students.

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