Filipino Mothers’ Involvement in Children’s Education: Experiences and Challenges  
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Abstract
This study describes the different parental involvement strategies of Filipino mothers in relation to their children’s public elementary education in Oita Prefecture, Japan. Data of this paper were obtained from the in-depth interviews of eight purposively and conveniently selected Filipino mothers. This is an offshoot of the author’s dissertation on the educational outcomes and experiences of children (aged 10-12 years old) of Japanese-Filipino marriages. All eight Filipino mothers reported diverse ways in which they have participated in their children’s elementary education. Involvement of Filipino mothers in their children’s education were both direct (e.g., monitoring child’s homework; attending school activities; helping child accomplish homework) and indirect (e.g., providing nourishment to children; preparing lunch box). As reported by the Filipino mothers, the challenges they have encountered in their participation include (a) feeling of discomfort in attending PTA meetings, (b) issue of efficacy, (c) time constraints, and (d) language issues.

Introduction
Parental involvement is a “social relation” (Coleman, 1990) in which exchange of capitals is taking place. Using Coleman’s terms, it involves a structures of action in which activities or events happen within a given system. As a social structure, such involvement consists of actors namely but not limited to parents, teachers, and students. The structure is characterized by an exchange of resources driven by the interest of the actors (p. 130).

Broad in scope, parental involvement may include keeping children safe, attending children’s activities, and participating in community activities for the purpose of affecting children’s academic performance (Epstein, 1992 as cited in Domina, 2005, p. 235). Parental involvement can also mean performance expectations, verbal motivation, direct involvement for academic progress, and academic supervision (Keith, Reimers, Fehrmann, Pottebaum & Aubey, 1986 in Bempechat, 1992, p. 37). It can also include parent’s provision of educational resources to children (Grolnick & Slowiaczek, 1994, p. 238).

In Japan, the school-home relationship is notably strong because teachers consider parents as partners in children’s education (Jabar, 2010; Moorehead, 2007a). Teachers and parents are partners in “promoting the well-being of children’s minds and bodies” (Moorehead, 2007a, p. 77). This connection is further strengthened through school programs such as the jyugousankan (open school) and school practices such as the renrakuchou (contact notebook) and kateihoumon (homeroom teacher’s home visit) (Jabar, 2010). In and outside the family contexts, mothers more than fathers are said to be more involved in children’s education (Bempechat, 1992; Griffith & Smith, 1987/2000). In fact, the strong bond between the mother and the child is the pillar of success of the Japanese educational system (Le Vine, 2003, p. 176). Given this backdrop, this paper, therefore focuses on the experiences of Filipino mothers.

However, owing to language and cultural differences, Filipino migrant mothers in Japan may experience challenges or difficulties as they participate in their children’s education. Although in a different context, the study of Moorehead (2007b) described how Peruvian parents complained about the way Japanese teachers viewed them negatively (p. 9). Language
difficulty was also seen by some of Moorehead’s (2007b) study participants as a hindrance to participation.

The Filipino mothers’ experience in relation to their children’s education in Japan is the focus of this research. The purpose of this study is to look into the Filipino mothers’ involvement in their children’s elementary education, the challenges they encounter, and the potential assistance that the Japanese government can provide to enable them to fully participate in their children’s schooling. Specifically, this paper is aimed to answer the following questions:

- How do Filipino mothers in Japan participate in their children’s education?
- What are the challenges Filipino mothers encountered in their participation?
- What possible institutional assistance can the Japanese government provide to help migrant mothers participate in their children’s education?

Method
This paper is an offshoot of the author’s doctoral dissertation on the academic outcomes and experiences of children in Japanese-Filipino marriages. In the author’s dissertation, eight families were included as case studies consisting of Japanese fathers, Filipino mothers, their elementary (n = 7) and junior high (n = 1) school children (four girls and four boys), and the children’s homeroom teacher during the previous school year (triangulation of subject). However, the discussion of this paper only focuses on mother’s responses.

Interviews were conducted with eight (8) purposively selected Filipino mothers residing in Oita Prefecture, Japan (northeast part of Kyushu region). Using a set of criteria, participants were chosen through non-probability sampling (convenient and referral). Prior to conducting the interviews, the parents were given a prior and informed consent form with which they have to sign to express their voluntary participation. Most of the interviews took place in the informants’ residence. Interviews ran from an hour to about 2.5 hours. During the interviews, mother-informants were required to recall their and their children’s past and present experiences.

Interviews were conducted either in English, Filipino (the national language of the Philippines), or Cebuano (another Philippine language). All interviews were recorded to enable the researcher to fully capture the stories. Verbatim (word for word) transcriptions were then prepared after the interviews. Prior to fieldwork, the researcher prepared an interview guide in English which was then translated to Filipino by a hired research assistant. After the translation, the Filipino version was then back translated to English by another hired research assistant to ensure consistency. The interview guide was also pre-tested. For the data analysis, NVivo 8 (computer software) was used to code the interview transcripts.

Participants
The research participants are all Filipino mothers in Japanese-Filipino marriages. The average age of the informants is 45 years. Dulce and Rosanna are the oldest (49 years) among the group while Divorrah is the youngest (39 years). Four of the eight informants are English teachers, two are housewives, one is a grocery store staff, and one is a hotel room cleaner. All of the informants have been married for more than 10 years (range: 12 to 21 years) with an average of 16.4 years. See Table 1 for the profile of the informants. Pseudonyms were used to maintain confidentiality and to protect the privacy of the informants as agreed upon in the prior informed consent.
Table 1 Profile of the mother-informants.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age**</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Years of Marriage***</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dulce</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>English Teacher</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rosanna</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>English Teacher</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Martha</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>English Teacher</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diana</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>Grocery Store Staff</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daisy</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>Hotel Bed Maker</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amanda</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>Housewife</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roxanne</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>English Teacher</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divorrah</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>Housewife</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Pseudonyms **Mean: 45 years ***Mean (as of this writing): 16.4 years

Although this paper focuses on Filipino migrant mothers, it is also important to present the profile of their children. The average age of their children is 10.75 years. See Table 2.0 for the profile of children. Seven children are enrolled in public elementary schools while one is in public junior high school. Among the elementary school children (n = 7), three are in fourth grade, two in fifth grade, and two in sixth grade. One child is in the first year of high school. However, during the interview, discussions were highly focused on the said child’s elementary school experiences.

Table 2 Profile of children.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age**</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Year Level***</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yuichiro</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>1st year junior high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shino</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taisei</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mika</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masayoshi</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kenji</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sachika</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yuka</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Pseudonyms **Mean: 10.75 years ***As of this writing

Results and Discussion

This section provides the readers with the results of the study. Divided into three parts, the first section discusses the different ways in which Filipino mothers were involved in their children’s education. The second section talks about the challenges that Filipino mothers encountered as they participate in school-related activities and practices. The last section provides suggestions on how the Japanese government can help immigrant mothers to enable them to fully participate in their children’s education.

Types of Involvement

Each of the Filipino mothers reported diverse ways and means in which they participated in their children’s education. Some of the types of involvement were directly related to studies (e.g., monitoring child’s homework, attending school activities, helping child accomplish homework) while others were indirect (e.g., providing nourishment to children, preparing lunch box, bringing child to school, picking child up from school).
Participation of Filipino mothers occurred both at home and school. Mothers’ activities at home included but were not limited to helping child accomplish homework, discussing with child about school matters, and checking their contact notebook. Parental involvement activities at school included attending PTA meetings, volunteering at school activities, talking to the teachers, and participating in school activities. Table 3 exhibits the activities that the mothers engaged in relation to their children’s education.

**Table 3 Informants and their respective involvement.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Type of Involvement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dulce</td>
<td>Taking care of child’s needs; bringing child to school; monitoring child; motivating child to study; providing nourishment; buying child school supplies; attending school activities (e.g., sports day, open school); attending PTA meetings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rosanna</td>
<td>Attending PTA meetings; picking up child at school; attending school activities (e.g., sports day)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Martha</td>
<td>Helping accomplish assignments; attending school activities (e.g., sports day, open school); talking to the teacher; volunteering in school activities; checking studies; providing nourishment; listening to the child’s stories; discussing with the child about school matters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diana</td>
<td>Helping accomplish assignments; attending PTA meetings; participating in school activities (e.g., sports day); checking contact notebook; checking/monitoring child’s assignments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daisy</td>
<td>Providing comfort; volunteering in school activities (bellmark); attending school activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amanda</td>
<td>Attending school activities/events (e.g., school festival, open school); motivating the child to study; attending PTA meetings; volunteering at school (bellmark); checking assignments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roxanne</td>
<td>Waking child up for school; monitoring child’s homework; attending PTA meetings; attending school activities (e.g., open school, class observation)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divorrah</td>
<td>Helping accomplish assignments; attending school activities (e.g., sports day); attending PTA meetings; volunteering at school (bellmark)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Challenges Encountered**

The Filipino mothers reported several factors which inhibited them from participating in their children’s education. Four themes emerged during the coding process namely (a) feeling of discomfort in attending PTA meetings, (b) issues of efficacy, (c) time constraints, and (d) language issues.

Feeling of discomfort

The first factor that discouraged three parents from attending PTA meetings was the issue of feeling of discomfort. One informant explained that most of the Japanese mothers viewed her as Japanese. When asked about the reason why she had this feeling of discomfort when she attended PTA meetings, Martha had this to say, “They (school authorities) expected that I will do the same like the Japanese. This is because they thought I speak good Japanese. They did not look at me as a Filipina. This is what they told me.”
Another Filipina mother, Dulce, also expressed her awkwardness toward the Japanese mothers because of the way they looked at her. She felt she was alienated because of her being Filipino. She uttered, “Yeah, I felt some Japanese parents were aloof towards me . . . When my son was in fifth and sixth grade; I was not comfortable with the other parents because they stared at me from head to foot. Maybe because they think I am a Filipina. Sometimes I felt like they were aloof at me.”

Rosanna, an English teacher and a highly educated mother, expressed her bias toward the Japanese. She disliked the strong “groupism” among the Japanese mothers. She narrated, “groupism is really strong among the Japanese. Sometimes you really have to be part of the group. I do not see the sense in it. I find it so difficult, why? They just criticize the teacher and when there is formal meeting, nobody tries to voice out their feelings. That is really difficult for me. I mean you have to deal with them in a very superficial way.”

Issues of efficacy
Two mothers, Daisy and Amanda, pointed out the issue of efficacy, in terms of their perceived inability to teach their children because of their lack of knowledge, as hindering factors to their involvement. Daisy, a hotel room cleaner, narrated that she only engaged in activities that were easier and did not require Japanese proficiency. Because of her mindset, Daisy chose not to be involved in tasks she deemed difficult. When she was asked whether or not she had difficulty engaging in school activities, she answered, “It was easy for me because I only volunteered in activities that I knew I can do it just like the bellmark (a seal found on pet bottles that Japanese schools collect in exchange for school supplies or vaccination for underprivileged children). This only involves cutting and computing. Before I involve myself, I make sure that I can do it.”

Amanda (who did not finish college) thought that as her daughter moved from one grade level to another, the lessons were getting harder. According to her, the level of difficulty of the lessons, besides language problems, inhibited her from helping her daughter. She had this to say, “When she reached grade 6, her lessons were getting harder and harder. I thought it was really getting difficult. And her grandmother even warned her that in grade 6, lessons are hard.”

Time constraints
Another factor hindering Filipino mothers’ involvement in their children’s education is time constraints. As indicated in Table 1, six out of the eight informants are working mothers. Because of work and time constraints, two mothers narrated that they could no longer participate in school activities. Diana, a grocery store staff, shared, “I can no longer attend activities at school because of my work . . . I find it hard to attend to school meetings because of my work schedule.” Roxanne, an English teacher, similarly reported, “I became a PTA officer when my child was in first and second grades but I stopped when she was in third grade because I was already busy (working).”

Language problems
All eight informants cited language problems as the most crucial factor that hindered or discouraged them from participating. Although they have the enthusiasm and willingness to take part in their children’s education, the level of their Japanese language is inadequate, so much so that they could not help their children accomplish their assignments. Daisy, Diana, and Roxanne shared the same sentiments:
“In terms of their education, I cannot personally teach them in their Japanese language subject. My kids really tried their best without my help. Language is really the main difficulty.” ---Daisy

“I find it hard to explain to my son (Masayoshi) because of the language. Even if I explain to my child in Japanese, he can hardly understand me. Unlike me, my husband can really explain to my son thoroughly.” ---Diana

“Unluckily I cannot help her (Yuka). I really want to join her, doing her homework, but I cannot do anything, even her Math (assignments) were written in Japanese characters.” ---Roxanne

Dulce, Daisy, and Divorrah pointed out that language problems were the main reason they did not want to participate in PTA meetings. Daisy and Divorrah shared:

“I don’t want to waste my time going to school (to participate in meetings and activities) because anyway I cannot understand (them).” ---Daisy

“I am the only Filipina among the PTA officers. Sometimes I cannot really understand. In this case, I really have to ask. They know that I am not Japanese and I don’t know how to write but at least I can read some. At first, I was hesitant to be involved because I am not Japanese.” ---Divorrah

Diana and Amanda shared their difficulties in reading school correspondence (letters and printed materials) because they were all in Japanese. Diana, for instance, when asked whether or not she signs her son’s contact notebook, she responded, “of course, my husband does the signing of the school prints because he can read Japanese characters. Maybe if they were written in Hiragana maybe I can do it myself.”

Amanda also shared the same feeling, “I really want to sign her school letters but the thing is my handwriting is not good. To tell you the truth, even if I cannot read those materials, I just stare at them and I am trying to understand them. Even if I really want to sign those materials, I really don’t want to force myself.”

What Can The Japanese Government Do?
The informants were also asked about the potential assistance that the Japanese government could provide in order to help foreign migrants cope with the demands of the schools, particularly in relation to parental involvement. Five of the eight informants recommended some ways by which parents will be motivated to be active in their children’s education. One informant underscored the importance of providing free language lessons to foreign migrants. Martha suggested, “It is good if they can provide lessons, free lessons to mothers and it should be held at the school. We have to learn the language especially writing. I think this is a good cause and I myself would like to join.”

Two other informants advised that schools should provide English translation to school materials for easy reading and understanding. Rosanna and Roxanne conveyed:

“Actually, I have made this recommendation once. My husband had an acquaintance at the local ministry of education. I suggested to his acquaintance to make a list of the Japanese
terms they used at school and translate it in Tagalog. I think it is a good idea and I was not able to follow through and he moved to a different area.” ---Rosanna

“They should have someone to translate the school correspondence. I think schools should pay someone to translate those materials in English. [They can even translate] just the dates, the titles, and the basic information. These are the things that most parents are only interested in. I think they (schools) should allot a time to this matter.” ---Roxanne

One informant suggested that the Japanese government should conduct a needs assessment survey to be able to design policies that are responsive to the genuine needs of the foreign migrants. Diana recommended, “I think the government has to do a research on the needs of migrants especially that international marriages is increasing.”

Conclusion
All eight Filipino mothers reported diverse ways in which they participated in their children’s education. As described in this paper, involvement of Filipino mothers in their children’s education can be direct (e.g., monitoring homework, attending school activities, helping accomplish homework) and indirect (e.g., providing nourishment, preparing lunch box, and attending sports day). Participation of Filipino mothers took place both at home (e.g., helping accomplish homework) and school (e.g., attending PTA meetings).

As reported by the Filipino mothers the challenges they encountered as they participated in their children’s education included (a) feeling of discomfort in attending PTA meetings, (b) issues of efficacy, (c) time constraints, and (d) language issues. Of the four areas, language problems seemed to be the most significant factor hindering Filipino mothers’ involvement. Thus, many of the mothers suggested that the Japanese government should conduct free Japanese lessons and provide English translations of school materials and correspondence.

What is then the implication of this research on the Japanese society? If Japan decides to welcome immigrants due to its aging population, a people-friendly policy should be crafted to make sure that there is a smooth enculturation process. International marriage in Japan is fast becoming a trend. It is therefore imperative for the Japanese government to carefully examine this social phenomenon and its consequences, including the increasing number of children of international marriages.

Biographical Statement
Melvin Jabar is a Ph.D. candidate at Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University, Japan. He obtained his Master’s degree in Health Social Science from De La Salle University, Manila, Philippines. His undergraduate degrees include a BS in Psychology, a BA in Sociology-Anthropology (Xavier University, Philippines), and a BA in Social Science (Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University, Japan). Melvin had a two-month internship stint at Cultural Survival in Cambridge, MA. He also spent 10 months for language and cultural exposure at the Beijing Language and Culture University in China. Melvin’s research interests are intercultural marriages, bicultural children, educational sociology, social capital, parental involvement and health social science.

References


