

**Understanding Parental Strategies in Supporting Children's Second Language  
Learning from the Perspectives of Bourdieu's Concept of Capital:  
A Study of Hong Kong Chinese Parents**

by

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## ABSTRACT

### **Understanding Parental Strategies in Supporting Children's Second Language Learning from the Perspectives of Bourdieu's Concept of Capital:**

#### **A Study of Hong Kong Chinese Parents**

by KWOK, Yuk-yin

for the degree of Doctor of Education

The Hong Kong Institute of Education

There have been many studies concerning learning English as a second language in Hong Kong, but a relatively neglected topic is how parents' resources have an impact on their children's English learning. This study conceptualised parents' resources as different types of capital, namely economic capital, cultural capital and social capital, in accordance with Pierre Bourdieu's Concept of Capital (1986). From both a questionnaire survey and semi-structured interviews, the study collected data on the parents' perspectives to investigate how parental capital affects parents' choices of English learning strategies for their children. The results revealed a positive correlation between parents' cultural capital, economic capital and a few popular parental English learning strategies, while among the three types of capital, parents' social capital exerts the least influence on their choices of the strategies. In addition, it is found that when parents have more cultural capital, they can enjoy higher flexibility in the choices of English learning strategies. Although people in the community have already realised the inequalities caused by the variation in resources available to parents, they mainly focus on providing physical materials and financial assistances to the low-income families. However, based on the findings of the present study, it may not be a good solution to the problem in the long-run. Instead, the school personnel, charity organisations, and the policy makers should consider not only compensating parents' disadvantages in their economic capital, but also enriching their cultural capital, as well as social capital.



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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Learning English as a second language has been a popular topic for local research in Hong Kong. Some research is concerned about the status of English in Hong Kong in the past decades (e.g. Evans, 2010a; Lai, 2011), while some focuses on Hong Kong people's motivation to learn English (e.g. Lai, 1999), and some studies the pattern and effectiveness of particular types of learning strategies among Hong Kong learners (e.g. Bray & Kwok, 2003). However, not much research has addressed parental influence and parental roles when discussing learning English as a second language in Hong Kong. For example, little attention has been given to how learners are affected by their parents in terms of their views on English, motivation to learn English and strategies they usually adopt to learn English. In fact, research has shown that as one of the key stakeholders in the Hong Kong education system, parents are playing an indispensable role in fostering the development of English skills of most Hong Kong young learners (e.g. Tam & Chan, 2010).

This study is informed by two major areas. The first focuses on learning English as a second language in Hong Kong. Research concerning English learning in Hong Kong provides contextual information on understanding the status of English in Hong Kong and the motives for Hong Kong people to learn English. The second attempts to provide an inquiry into parental involvement in children's education. Studies on parental involvement provide inspiring and insightful ideas on understanding parents' role in children's education and how their attitudes and behaviours affect their children's learning process.

A review of the literature reveals arguments concerning the need to learn English as a second language in Hong Kong in the post-colonial era. Many Hong Kong Chinese still believe that high English proficiency is of crucial importance to their success in career (e.g. Evans 2010a, 2010b). In fact, comparing with other foreign languages, English is playing a prominent role in the Hong Kong society. It is one of the official



languages in Hong Kong (Official Languages Division, n.d.), a compulsory subject in most academic institutions (e.g. Chan, 2013), and a popular second language for most Hong Kong Chinese. This is supported by a number of studies on the role of English in different sectors of Hong Kong (e.g. Evans 2010a, 2010b; Tsang, 2008). With such importance attached by the general public to the English language, the strategies Hong Kong Chinese commonly adopt to learn English naturally have become another focus of research. The findings from literature (e.g. Tse et al, 2009) have inspired the researcher to explore the role of Hong Kong Chinese parents as a major source of support for young learners in the process of their children's English learning. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that parents' attitude towards education also plays an important role in the learning process of a child. Studies (e.g. Bartram, 2006; Gao, 2012) suggest that if parents demonstrate a positive attitude towards learning a language, their children would likely assume the importance of learning that language. While parents usually help their children make important decisions, their attitude towards children's English learning is also an important area that is worth further discussions.

In fact, the impact of parental involvement on children's education has been recognised. Parents are keen to be involved in their children's education in different aspects, including provision of learning resources (e.g. Jaeger & Holm, 2007; Teachman, 1987) and financial support, and direct involvement in their learning process, such as supervision of children's homework (Catsambis, 2001). Nonetheless, there is not much research providing both quantitative and qualitative data to analyse the involvement of Hong Kong Chinese parents in their children's language learning. Moreover, as mentioned, the strategies parents offer may vary quite a lot. Therefore, further investigations are needed to explore the complexities, characteristics and types of parental strategies that Hong Kong parents offer to assist their children's English learning.

Yet, there is a lack of research linking up the two, that is, concerning the involvement of Hong Kong Chinese parents in their children's English learning. Most importantly, there is a call for research to provide a theoretical approach to explain and understand



the complex nature of parental involvement as well as the different concerns underlying parents' decisions.

### 1.1 Objective of the Present Study

It is not questionable that parental involvement is of paramount importance to a child learner's second language learning experience, and maybe achievement as well, as Young (1994) stated, "The first source of outside influence to come into contact with the individual is that of the family" (p.86), yet as mentioned, there is not much research specifically focused on this area. In the circumstances of Hong Kong, English is not only regarded as a school subject, but a popular second language for most Hong Kong Chinese students. Thus, it is meaningful to explore parents' views on learning English in Hong Kong.

Responding to the gaps identified in the previous literature, this study aims to provide a brief account of the strategies Hong Kong Chinese parents adopt to assist their children's English learning, especially the support and strategies they use at home or outside school. The findings in this study will also generate solid evidence to support the linkage between parents' economic, cultural and social resources and their strategies of involvement in their children's second language learning. The data will provide useful reference for school personnel enabling them to enhance their cooperation with parents and so provide children with better and more effective English learning resources. Observing the relationship between the unevenly distributed resources and their impact on the variation in parental support provided to children, the policy makers may also take the findings into account when considering the allocation of educational resources.

To study Hong Kong Chinese parents' strategies in primary students' second language (i.e. English) learning, the researcher first needs to explore parental attitudes towards English learning in Hong Kong before looking at how the strategies parents have adopted are related to variables including family's economic status, parents' education background and their access to social networks. In addition, using the perspectives of



Bourdieu's Concept of Capital, the researcher attempts to provide evidence concerning the transmission of cultural and social capital from parents to their children. This transmission occurs via various parental strategies. Possible constraints that hinder the parents from gaining access to certain types of strategies are also discussed. It is noteworthy that though the parental strategies may vary among parents from different backgrounds, namely in relation to family's economic status, parents' education background and access to social networks, children's English results at school may not vary. This study will therefore take into account the types of strategies which could possibly lead to effective English learning.

## 1.2 Research Questions

This study attempts to answer the following questions:

1. What strategies do Hong Kong Chinese parents adopt at home or outside school to assist their children's English learning?
2. How do Hong Kong Chinese parents perceive their roles in their children's English learning?
3. How are parents' economic capital, cultural capital and social capital related to these strategies?
4. Which of these strategies can effectively help children's English learning?
5. In the local context, what are the implications of the similarities and/or differences of these parental strategies of supporting children's English learning?

## 1.3 Definition of Terms

The present study adopted Bourdieu's Concept of Capital (1986) as the major theoretical framework to quantify parental resources and address the relationship between parental involvement in children's second language learning and the availability of parental resources. In addition, the two major areas that inform the present study are the significance of parental involvement in children's education (e.g.



Bartrams, 2006; Catsambis, 2001) and learning English in Hong Kong (e.g. Evans & Green, 2007; Lai, 1999). The former focuses on the role and influence of parents in children's learning process, while the latter provides a context as well as a focus for the present study. The following sub-sections identify and explain the key terms used in the present study.

### 1.3.1 Concept of Capital

According to Bourdieu of Capital (1986), there are three major types of capital: namely, economic capital, cultural capital and social capital. Bourdieu stated that different forms of capital share the same common features. First, capital can be either material or ideational (immaterial) including the monetary wealth a person possesses, academic qualifications, religion shared by a group of people, tradition of an ethnic group and norms shared among a social group. Second, capital can be accumulated over time. It is noteworthy that the different forms of capital are reproducible in either identical forms or convertible to other forms of capital. Researchers have developed different types of notions, such as human capital (Coleman, 1988), emotional capital (Reay, 2000), and family capital (Coleman, 1988; Li, 2007; Tam and Chan 2010), but all have been derived from Bourdieu's Concept.

In the present study, Bourdieu's Concept of Capital is used as the major framework to conceptualise parental strategies in accordance with the different types of resources available to parents.

### 1.3.2 Economic Capital

Economic capital (Bourdieu, 1986) simply refers to monetary assets, such as money and property, which is tangible and material. In the present study, economic capital refers to both the parental financial resources, such as their financial income and the money and monetary resources provided by parents, either at home or outside. Previous research has proven that one of the major support that parents provide to children's language learning is financial support, in the form of money spent on

children's reading (books, magazines, etc.) and oral (videos, DVDs) learning materials, for instance (e.g. Li, 2007; Gao, 2012) and money set aside for their children to attend private tuition classes (e.g. Gao, 2006) or used to hire private tutoring services (e.g. Tam & Chan, 2010).

### 1.3.3 Cultural Capital

Cultural capital can be realised in three states (Bourdieu, 1986). First, it appears in the form of “embodied state” that is “connected to individuals in their general educated character – accent, dispositions, learning, etc.” (Grenfell & James, 1998, p.21). Cultural capital can also appear in the form of “objectified state” seen in objects such as books, libraries, and museums. Last but not least, cultural capital can be connected to institutionalised standards, or as Bourdieu put it, “may be institutionalized in the form of education qualifications” (Bourdieu 1986, p.242).

### 1.3.4 Social Capital

Social capital, according to Bourdieu (1986), refers to resources generated within social networks and a person can obtain the resources through being connected to the networks. Grenfell and James (1998) defined “social network” as “a network of lasting social relations; in other words, an individual's or individual group's sphere of contacts” (p.21). Bourdieu asserted that people participating in social groups, whether consciously or unconsciously, can benefit from the resources generated by personal relationship within the groups (Bourdieu, 1986). Portes (1998) specified that participation in a social group helps an individual to activate the resources of other members in the groups, but not the resources of the individual himself (p.7).

### 1.3.5 Parental Involvement

Catsambis (2001) described parental involvement in children's education as “multidimensional”, meaning that parents may get involved in their children's education in different ways. The spectrum of activities varies from providing a home



learning environment to participating in the decision-making process at school. In addition, Muller (1993) considered parents' education and family income as variables of parental involvement. These kinds of potentialities, though some are intangible, like parents' education, cannot be underestimated as they do play a role in children's second language learning progress.

### 1.3.6 English as a Second Language in Hong Kong

In the present study, the researcher argued that Hong Kong is an English as a second language (ESL) region because of several reasons. First, English is not simply taught as a school subject in Hong Kong. It also enjoys official status (Official Languages Division, n.d.) and is extensively used in business domains (Evan, 2010b). Second, the education environment of Hong Kong provides evidence that further justifies Hong Kong as an ESL region. Widdowson (1997) mentioned in his article that in many ESL countries, "English is widely used for institutional purposes" (p.144). In Hong Kong, not only many secondary schools adopt English as the teaching medium for core subjects (Kan et al, 2011), but English is also the major medium of instruction in local tertiary institutions (Evans & Green, 2007). Most importantly, in Hong Kong schools, English is taught as a second language in both Chinese-medium and English-medium schools (Curriculum Development Council, 2002). Last but not least, people in Hong Kong generally believe that high English proficiency can lead them to success in both academic and career development (Evans2010a; Tsang, 2008), which fits one of the defining criteria of an ESL region suggested by Richards and Schmidt (2010), who said "learning English is necessary to be successful within that context" (p.514).

## 1.4 An Overview of the Present Study

As mentioned above, the present study aims to provide an account of the common strategies Hong Kong parents usually adopt outside school to assist their children's English learning and to explore whether the resources available to them will affect their choices of the strategies. Also, the researcher will discuss the evidence of

transmission of parental resources to the next generation through examining their choices of parental strategies.

In order to answer the research questions, the researcher adopts Bourdieu's (1986) Concept of Capital as the framework to guide the present study. Conceptualising parental strategies by the Concept of Capital provides a comprehensive and solid system for the researcher to measure and compare the various resources available to different parents. In addition, the transformative and transmittable nature of the different resources suggested by Bourdieu (1986) will help to explain how the transmission of resources from parents to children happens through their adoption of a variety of strategies to assist their children's English learning.

The following chapters will first briefly introduce Bourdieu's Concept of Capital and the notions developed under it. Further, because the present study is informed by parental involvement in children's education and learning English as a second language, following a brief introduction of the theoretical framework, there is a review of literature discussing the importance of parents' role in children's education process, in particular, how parents' involvement will affect children's second language learning. Next, the researcher will discuss learning English in the Hong Kong context, including its importance and the motivating factors that drive Hong Kong people to learn English. Then, there are also discussions about how parents' resources can be conceptualised as different types of capital by the Concept of Capital in the respect of the strategies they offer to help with their children's English learning and how the parental capital can be activated and transmitted to their children through these strategies. Last, examples of previous studies will be cited to exemplify the application of Bourdieu's Concept of Capital as theoretical framework in educational research and the limitations identified in these studies will also be discussed.



## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter first presents a review of Pierre Bourdieu's Concept of Capital which is the theoretical framework that guides the design of the enquiry. Next, the significance of parents' involvement and its contribution to their children's second language learning will be discussed from the perspectives of parents' attitudes including the actual strategies adopted and the support provided to assist children's learning. In addition, this chapter provides an overview of learning English in the Hong Kong context and discusses its importance. Finally, there is a discussion justifying the reasons for conceptualising parental involvement using the Concept of Capital.

#### 2.1 Theoretical Framework

##### 2.1.1 Bourdieu's Concept of Capital

Pierre Bourdieu's Concept of Capital has been one of the most popular frameworks adopted by researchers in education research related to parental involvement (e.g. Gao, 2012; Jiang 2009; Lareau, 1987; Lee, 2008). Researchers have developed different types of notions, such as human capital (Coleman, 1988), emotional capital (Reay, 2000), and family capital (Coleman, 1988; Li, 2007; Tam & Chan 2010), but all have been derived from Bourdieu's Concept of Capital (1986).

In *The Forms of Capital*, Bourdieu defined the term "Capital"

[...] is accumulated labor...which, in its objectified or embodied forms, takes time to accumulate and which, as a potential capacity to produce profits and to reproduce itself in identical or expanded form, contains a tendency to persist in its being, is a force inscribed in the objectivity of things so that everything is not equally possible or impossible. (Bourdieu, 1986, p.241)



According to Bourdieu, there are three major types of capital: namely, economic capital, cultural capital and social capital.

### 2.1.2 Economic Capital

Economic capital simply refers to monetary assets, such as money and property. It is tangible and material, while cultural capital and social capital are rather immaterial. Both cultural capital and social capital are convertible into economic capital given certain conditions. As mentioned above, a person who has attained a high level of education may subsequently enjoy success in their career and be entitled to a good salary and fringe benefits. It is a typical example for demonstrating the conversion of cultural capital (education attainment) into economic capital (salary and fringe benefits).

### 2.1.3 Cultural Capital

Cultural capital can be realised in three states (Bourdieu, 1986). First, it appears in the form of “embodied state” that is “connected to individuals in their general educated character – accent, dispositions, learning, etc.” (Grenfell & James, 1998, p.21). Cultural capital can also appear in the form of “objectified state” seen in objects such as books, libraries, and museums. Last but not least, cultural capital can be connected to institutionalised standards, or as Bourdieu put it, “may be institutionalized in the form of education qualifications” (Bourdieu 1986, p.242). Jiang (2009) extended that cultural capital to encompass various types of “knowledge and skills that provide the individual with access to social advancement and higher status”.

It should be noted that previous research demonstrated different interpretations of cultural capital. Monkman (2005) and her colleagues further elaborated Bourdieu’s argument that children’s interactions with school and their academic attainment would be affected by their cultural experiences at home. In view of that, the existing studies usually conceptualised cultural capital as a variety of activities, but the nature of the activities varied a lot, including “attending classical music performance”,





“having fluency in foreign languages” and “possessing large numbers of books” and so on. Besides, they distinguished cultural resources from cultural capital by suggesting that it was “the transformation of cultural resources into cultural capital” since they regarded “knowledge, practices, and artifacts” (p.10) as cultural resources, while children’s interaction with schools and their academic attainments are examples of cultural capital. On the other hand, other researchers, such as Lareau and Weininger (2003), suggested that culture itself (e.g. knowledge and practices) is a resource, which can be treated as one’s cultural capital, as they stated, “The concept of “capital” has enabled researchers to view culture as a resource – one that provides access to scarce rewards” (p.567).

Because of such inconsistency, it is necessary to provide a clear definition of cultural capital for this study. Instead of having a clear-cut separation between cultural resources and cultural capital, Bourdieu’s classification provides a good ground for reasoning that cultural resources should be treated as different forms of cultural capital possessed by individuals.

First, the resources should be understood in a broader sense. Given that cultural capital is an abstract concept, there is a need to have some empirical yet measureable indicators when examining its impact on other areas, such as education attainments (Yamamoto & Brinton, 2010). Even though the indicators adopted in the existing studies have been quite varied, there is no violation to Bourdieu’s idea of cultural capital, since Bourdieu posited that cultural capital can appear in three manifestations. Taking second language learning as an example; materials like books, videos and computers are examples of “objectified cultural capital”, while “embodied cultural capital” could be evident in parents’ perception of and attitudes towards the targeted language. The latter, as discussed earlier, significantly affect their levels of involvement and choices of strategies in assisting their children’s second language learning. Furthermore, parents’ institutional cultural capital – their educational attainments – can be regarded as a kind of learning resource for children because parents can share their learning experience with their children, and may even ask their children to follow their examples. Researchers have discussed how parents’ education

experience affects their children's schooling experience in different aspects. Tam and Chan (2010) discussed how parents' own education experience affected their attitudes in monitoring and assisting their children's homework. They argued that, in general, due to their own experience, parents perceived that "homework is important for learning", which serves both teaching and non-teaching functions. Therefore, it is not surprising that the parents interviewed would adopt a variety of strategies to encourage their children to complete homework satisfactorily. Based on Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital, parents' academic attainments are the "institutional cultural capital" that the parents possess, and its impact on children's learning cannot be neglected.

Second, treating cultural resources as different forms of cultural capital extends Bourdieu's suggestion that – different forms of capital are transformative (Bourdieu, 1986). The same idea can also be applied to the inter-convertible nature of the three states of cultural capital, which would influence each other. In some respects, there are inseparable connections between institutional cultural capital and embodied cultural capital. The credentials and academic achievements a person has obtained certify "the value of embodied cultural capital items" (Symeou, 2007, p.474) and likewise a person's dispositions, interests and beliefs (embodied cultural capital) may affect his decision in what to study (institutional cultural capital).

Kraaykamp and van Eijck (2010) deliberately attempted to distinguish the three states of the cultural capital that parents possess to identify the impact of each. They measured the parents' institutional, embodied and objectified cultural capital through their educational attainments, their frequency of attending highbrow cultural events and their possession of certain cultural goods. They concluded that the three states are "interrelated". Nonetheless, it should be noted that when discussing the intergenerational transmission of cultural capital, they underscored that among the three states, embodied cultural capital is "the most central manifestation". Kraaykamp and van Eijck reasoned that parents' embodied cultural capital probably "shares its cognitive or experiential component with institutionalized capital and its taste-related component with objectified cultural capital" (p.226).



#### 2.1.4 Social Capital

There is a wide range of definitions derived from Bourdieu's concept of social capital. Bourdieu himself first defined it as "the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition" (Bourdieu, 1986, p.246). Social capital, according to Bourdieu, refers to resources generated within social networks and a person can obtain the resources through being connected to the networks. Grenfell and James (1998) defined "social network" as "a network of lasting social relations; in other words, an individual's or individual group's sphere of contacts" (p.21). Bourdieu asserted that people participating in social groups, whether consciously or unconsciously, can benefit from the resources generated by personal relationship within the groups (Bourdieu, 1986). Portes (1998) specified that participation in a social group helps an individual to activate the resources of other members in the groups, but not the resources of the individual himself (p.7). He further argued that Bourdieu put the emphasis on people's "instrumental" motivation for being a member of social groups, which should be distinguished from people's "consummatory" motivation for doing so. Though both of them are intangible resources that motivate people to activate their social capital through joining social groups, they are distinctive.

According to Portes, "instrumental" social capital can be seen as "primarily the accumulation of obligations from others according to the norm of reciprocity", while "consummatory" social capital refers to behavior that people think they have the obligations to perform and "the internalized norms that make such behaviors [such as obeying traffic rules] possible are then appropriable by others as a resource" (p.7). For the former, when people give benefits to others, they expect some kinds of benefits in return; the benefits may be either tangible or intangible: money, information, power, and reputation. For the latter, according to Portes, people give benefits to others simply because "they feel an obligation to behave in this manner" (p.7). For example, a person who donates money for the rights to name a building is activating his instrumental social capital because he can earn reputation. On the other



hand, a person who donates money to charity, asking for nothing in return but just thinking that he has the obligation as a member of the group to help those in need is a source of “consummatory” social capital to others. As Portes put it, consummatory social capital is common in a “bounded solidarity” (p.8), and is best exemplified in family support. Portes distinguished social capital into three basic functions: as a source of social control, as a source of family support, and as a source of benefits through extrafamilial networks (p.9). A similar idea has been raised by Furstenberg (2005). He viewed social capital from two levels: micro and macro. He referred family based social capital as the micro-level social capital: “By membership or affiliation, actors (in this case, members of a family or kinship system) may derive benefits through sharing objectives, sponsorship, connections, and support from others inside and outside that family” (p.810). In line with Portes and Furstenberg, Schneider (1993) agreed that parents can be seen as an example of social network. They know others’ families as well as their children’s friends and they have the obligation to take good care of their children and provide the latter with good education opportunities. Also, parents can establish social networks with schools and other parents to form extrafamilial networks.

Last but not least, it is noteworthy that according to Bourdieu’s Concept of Capital, even though all individuals possess these three forms of capital, the “volume of capital” varies from person to person; one’s volume of capital “depends on the size of the network of connections he can effectively mobilize and on the volume of the capital (economic, cultural, or symbolic) possessed in his own right by each of those to whom he is connected” (1986, p. 246). It is, therefore, reasonable to assume that variations found among families should lead to variations in the extent of parental support and involvement.

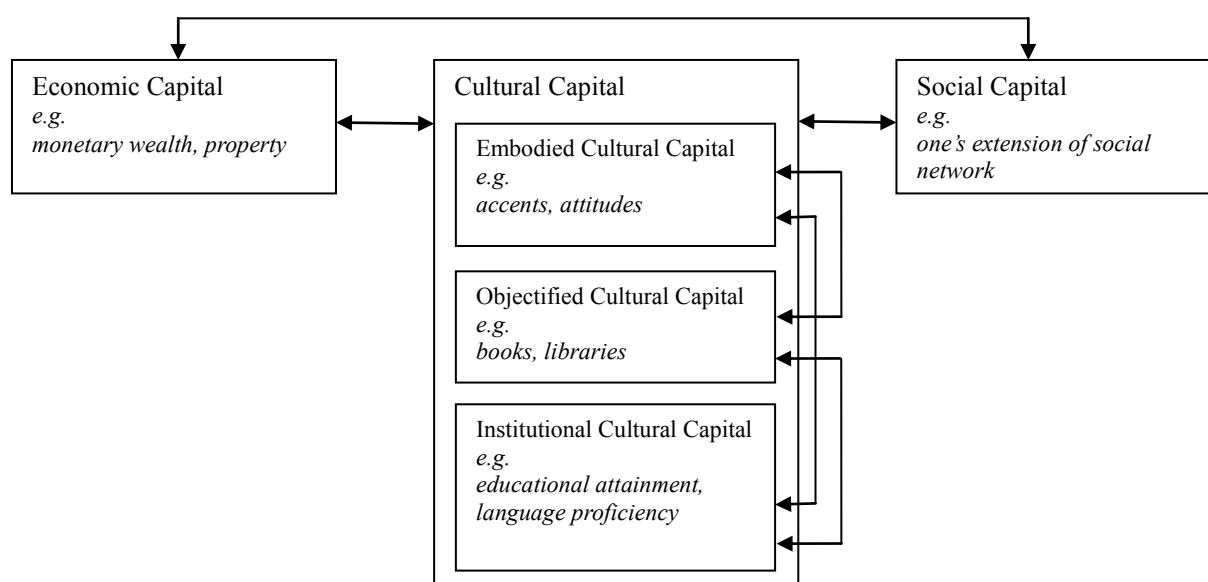
#### 2.1.5 The Transformative Nature of the Three Types of Capital

Bourdieu stated that different forms of capital share the same common features. First, capital can be either material or ideational (immaterial) including the monetary wealth a person possesses, academic qualifications, religion shared by a group of



people, tradition of an ethnic group and norms shared among a social group. Second, capital can be accumulated over time. Accumulation of monetary wealth as well as academic qualifications provide good examples for the accumulation of capital. Moreover, through appropriating different resources available to them, people can activate different forms of capital and gain benefits. For example, parents become involved in children's school activities in order to establish close relationships with school personnel (Lareau, 1987). It is noteworthy that the different forms of capital are reproducible in either identical forms or convertible to other forms of capital. For example, academic credentials are regarded as a person's cultural capital; however, when appropriated properly, they would lead to monetary wealth. Furthermore, the person also accumulates his social capital unconsciously as he establishes social networks through school life, and such networks may benefit him, such as offering him career information and earning him some internship position. As Monkman and her colleague (2005) mentioned, "school success is so important for social mobility (including access to opportunities to make an adequate living, among other quality-of-life dynamics)" (p.6), which inspired them to examine the presence, functions and interactions of social and cultural capital evident in a first-grade bilingual classroom in a Spanish-speaking community. Figure 1 demonstrates the transformative nature of the three forms of capital suggested by Bourdieu (1986).

**Figure 1. The transformative nature of the three forms of capital (Bourdieu, 1986)**



## 2.2 Significance of Parental Involvement in Children's Secondary Language Learning

Parents have been involved in their children's education process through the past decades. In fact, it is not easy to give a definition for parental involvement that suits all aspects of parents' roles in and influences on children's development, no matter at school, at home, or in their daily lives. Catsambis (2001) described parental involvement in children's education as "multidimensional", meaning that parents may get involved in their children's education in different ways. The spectrum of activities varies from providing a home learning environment to participating in the decision-making process at school. Morrison (1978) tried to give a general yet comprehensive definition to the concept:

Consequently, parent involvement is a process of actualizing the potential of parents; of helping parents discover their strengths, potentialities, and talents; and of using them for the benefit of themselves and the family. The essential shift in emphasis in this definition is from child and educational agency to parent. (p.22)

Although Morrison has provided a rather specific definition for parents' involvement, it is necessary to further specify it so as to fit in with the discussion about parental involvement in children's second language learning. First, it is important to explore what kinds of potentialities parents possess. While some are tangible, like the willingness and ability to spend money on resources, for example learning materials, others are more difficult to measure, such as their attitudes, experience as well as knowledge of the language. For example, in her study, Muller (1993) considered parents' education and family income as variables of parental involvement. These kinds of potentialities, though some are intangible, like parents' education, cannot be underestimated as they do play a role in children's second language learning progress. In view of this, there is a call for appropriate parameters for measuring the different types of parental involvement so as to achieve an effective evaluation of their respective impact on a learner's second language development.

Another important concern is how parents “actualise” their “strengths, potentialities, and talents” in order to “benefit” their children in different aspects, in terms of second language learning, since the actualisation of parents' potentialities can be evident firstly in how they perceive their roles in helping their children learn a second language. Secondly, there are the strategies they adopt for this purpose. A systematic framework is needed in investigating parents' preference and planning of strategies in order to understand the rationale and constraints behind parents' decisions.

### 2.2.1 Parental Attitudes and Children's Second Language Learning

Research has already pointed out that parents' attitudes have a direct impact on children's second language learning experience. Parents may instill their values, attitudes and viewpoints on learning a foreign language in their children through family activities (Young, 1994). Bartram (2006) suggested that if parents demonstrated their positive attitudes towards the usefulness of learning a foreign language, it would be encouraging and motivating for their children when involved in second language learning. Another crucial issue raised in Bartram's study was that “parents' language knowledge” would be “broadly mirrored in their children's orientations” (p.220). However, Bartram did not clearly mention how to measure “parents' language knowledge” in his study. For example, what is entailed in categorising parents as *knowing* that language? For further discussions on this issue, a consistent and systematic approach for measuring parents' “knowledge” of the targeted language is necessary. Measuring parents' educational backgrounds and their exposure to the target language would provide viable metrics. The information would also provide evidence for “parents' language knowledge” and be measured systematically.

As discussed in the previous section, Chinese parents in Hong Kong usually have supportive attitudes towards English learning. Similar situations have been reported in other Chinese societies. Chinese parents on the mainland and those in Taiwan place importance on English learning because they generally conceive that a high level of proficiency and competence in English is required for their children's educational



advancement and eventually upward social movement (e.g. Gao, 2012; Li, 2007). Likewise, Chinese parents in Hong Kong do not simply treat English as a second language, but a key to success in school and career developments. Hong Kong parents are thus believed to have a high level of aspiration for their children's English learning.

Chinese parents' involvement in learners' second language learning experience is well-recognised in previous research (e.g. Gao, 2006; Li, 2010; Tam & Chan 2010). Of equal importance is parents' own second language learning experience, which provides the background affecting parents' attitudes towards a second language. It also informs their decision-making process when choosing language learning support and strategies.

In short, it is useful to understand how these Chinese parents think about learning English in Hong Kong, as this lays the foundations for discussing why parents think there is a need to provide extra resources and assistance for their children's learning of a second language. In addition, parents' knowledge about a second language, which is English in the Hong Kong context, and their experience in learning the language cannot be ignored. Following the framework of Bourdieu's Concept of Capital, the present study conceptualises Hong Kong parents' knowledge about English as a learning source in order to investigate in what ways it will affect their children's English learning.

### 2.2.2 Parental Strategies in Children's Second Language Learning

Compared with parents' attitudes, parental strategies are more observable. In fact, some previous research has shown that parents actively involve themselves in their children's learning in different ways (Muller & Kerbow, 1993). Gonzalez-DeHass, Willems and Holbein (2005) pointed out that parental involvement should not only be measured by parents' involvements in school administration and their participation in parent-school activities (Ng, 1999; 2001), but also their engagement in a wide spectrum of activities at home, "including but not limited to homework, engaging in



student's extracurricular activities, assisting in the selection of student's courses, keeping abreast of student's academic progress" (Gonzalez-DeHass, Willems & Holbein, 2005, p.108). Hence, the strategies that parents adopt at home or outside school matter significantly to children's learning experience.

Specifically, how parental involvement significantly contributed to children's language learning became evident in Gao's study (2006). Gao interviewed twenty students from mainland China who were pursuing undergraduate programmes in Hong Kong. He identified six major groups of parental involvement behaviours, namely language learning advocates, language learning facilitators, language learning advisors, language learning coercers, language learning nurturers and collaborators with teachers. Parents acted as language learning facilitators by providing a good language learning environment for their children to learn the target language. Furthermore, they would play the role as collaborators with teachers when they provided monetary support for their children to attend private English tuition classes in addition to regular English classes provided at school. Parents were also directly involved in their children's language learning by giving advice to their children, nurturing particular language learning strategies among them, or even trying to coerce their children to apply particular learning strategies. In his recent research, Gao further discovered that Chinese parents are adopting different strategies outside school in order to equip their children with good English vocabulary skills; some parents may have even "outdone what language teachers could do" for the children's learning at school (Gao, 2012). Li (2010) studied the parental support of Chinese parents in Taiwan. Through in-depth interviews with parents, she summarised the common strategies and activities that Taiwan parents used in supporting their children's English learning. These practices and strategies include provision of English learning environments other than schools, such as enrolling children in after-school programmes or hiring private English tutors, assisting children with their homework, and using multi-media materials.

However, the discussions by Gao and Li were based on the qualitative data collected from interviewing a small group of students and parents from China and Taiwan.

Research providing quantitative data to analyse the involvement of Hong Kong Chinese parents in their children's language learning is thus found wanting. A better understanding of parental involvement in English learning among Chinese learners in Hong Kong requires such research. It would give a general overview of what parents usually do at home or outside school to assist their children's second language learning and thus generate meaningful data. This data should enable a better understanding of the effectiveness of these strategies in children's second language learning. Indeed, some research findings suggested that effective parental involvement can act as "a resource for academic activities at home" and that children will be "more efficacious to master academic activities at school" (Gonzalez-DeHass, Willems & Holbein, 2005, p.118).

In addition to direct parental involvement in activities, parents' contribution to children's learning can also be seen in the resources available at home. Some research remarks that home environment plays an important role in a person's learning process. Jaeger and Holm (2007) used the term "learning lab" as a metaphor to describe the substantial role of a learner's home environment in developing "children's educational preferences, knowledge of the normative codes of the education system, and cognitive skills" (p.723). Echoing Jaeger and Holm, Teachman (1987) argued that educational resources can provide learners with a good learning environment at home, which is advantageous to their studies. Teachman used four criteria to measure the educational resources available to learners, namely: a specific study place at home, reference books, a daily newspaper, a dictionary/encyclopedia. It should be noted that the number of items included as "educational resources" in Teachman's study was limited and he admitted that the measures were not perfect "because a home environment that favors education likely has other material goods, and parents vary in the extent to which they encourage their children to use available resources" (p.550). More meaningful and convincing results and thus a more comprehensive picture can be generated if more items and attributes can be included as "educational resources" given by parents and different forms of resources are taken into account. In the situation of second language learning, "educational resources" can appear in tangible forms, including reference books, CDs and other learning materials. They could also



be less apparent, like taking children on study trips aiming at providing learners with “social opportunities” to expose themselves to English speaking environments (Gao, 2012). Sometimes, they could also involve external resources, such as hiring personal tutors to offer children extra learning assistance (Tam & Chan, 2010).

In fact, Teachman’s study has an inspiring conclusion that, following the line of his argument, the variation in the amount and types of parental support that a learner receives cannot be neglected. It is not possible to assume all parents possess the same resources and these variations may affect parents’ “decisions about the actions they take regarding their children’s education” (Schneider, 1993, p.1). In terms of second language learning, the differences may have a significant impact on the learners’ language learning processes, experiences and educational attainments. Li (2010) mentioned that the financial resources and language proficiency of individual parents would possibly lead to the different perceptions of roles parents have in supporting their children’s learning. In the context of Hong Kong, Tam and Chan (2010) examined the involvement of parents in children’s homework. One of the findings they discussed in the study was that parents’ academic competence was a crucial factor that affected the strategies involved in assisting with children’s homework. The study of Tse et al (2009) argued that financial resources would be another crucial factor that varied the support parents are able to provide. They found that a child’s English reading attainment has positive association with the presence of an English-speaking domestic helper at home (always regarded as an attribute of having a good economic status), and the survey showed that the parents of these high-performing children received high income and had high education levels.

### 2.3 Learning English in the Hong Kong Context

Before discussing the significance of learning English in Hong Kong, there is a need to define whether English takes up the role of a second language, or it is a foreign language to most Hong Kong Chinese. English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) are two most widely used acronyms refer the role of English in different contexts (Nayar, 1997). However, as he argued, because of

the “referential fuzziness within the two and denotative overlap between the two” (p.10), the distinction between ESL and EFL is not clear. Widdowson (1997) even addressed that the distinction between the two acronyms is of “doubtful validity” (p.145). Although there is no common consensus on the distinction between the two has been reached so far, there is a need for the researcher to define the situation of Hong Kong notwithstanding as it is one of the areas that informs the present study.

### 2.3.1 English as a Second Language in Hong Kong

In the present study, the researcher argued that Hong Kong is an ESL region, instead of an EFL one because of several reasons. First, although English is a foreign language to most Hong Kong people, the role English plays in the society is significantly different from other foreign languages in Hong Kong. Richards and Schmidt (2010) defined foreign languages are “typically taught as school subjects for the purpose of communicating with foreigners or for reading printed materials in the language” (p.225), but English is not simply taught as a school subject in Hong Kong. It also enjoys official status (Official Languages Division, n.d.) and is extensively used in business domains (Evans, 2010b). Second, the education environment of Hong Kong provides evidence that further justifies Hong Kong as an ESL region. Widdowson (1997) mentioned in his article that in many ESL countries, “English is widely used for institutional purposes” (p.144). In Hong Kong, not only many secondary schools adopt English as the teaching medium for core subjects (Kan et al, 2011), but English is also the major medium of instruction in local tertiary institutions (Evans & Green, 2007). Most importantly, in Hong Kong schools, English is taught as a second language in both Chinese-medium and English-medium schools (Curriculum Development Council, 2002). Last but not least, people in Hong Kong generally believe that high English proficiency can lead them to success in both academic and career development (Evans2010a; Tsang, 2008), which fits one of the defining criteria of an ESL region suggested by Richards and Schmidt (2010), who said “learning English is necessary to be successful within that context” (p.514).

Concluding from the diverse views on ESL in literature, Nayar’s (1997)’s suggestion



of the different ESL models provides a good position to argue that Hong Kong is an ESL region. Among his three interpretations of ESL regions, his interpretation of ESL1 region suits the context of Hong Kong well. The important characteristics of ESL1 defined by Nayar (1997) including (1) a few residents there speak English as their mother tongue; (2) English is widely used in influential domains such as education, administration, and business; (3) English can easily be found in the surrounding environment, such as public media; (4) English enjoys some well-recognised official status and prestige in the society; (5) communication with English speakers does not serve as a primary purpose of learning English.

Based on Nayar's (1997) interpretation, Hong Kong can be classified as an ESL1 region. A majority (about 90%) of Hong Kong people speaks Cantonese as their usual language (Census and Statistics Department, 2011). Moreover, as mentioned above, English is widely used in different social sectors as well as influential domains, including education and business. It is officially recognised as one of the official languages of Hong Kong (Official Languages Division, n.d.). In schools, English is not only taught to serve the purpose of communicating with English speakers, but is taught as a second language (Curriculum Development Council, 2002).

Since English enjoys a more prestigious status than other foreign languages in Hong Kong, it is thus worth to discuss the significance of learning English as a second language in Hong Kong.

### 2.3.2 Significance of Learning English in Hong Kong

In Hong Kong, English long enjoyed a prestigious status during its colonial period. Though it is gradually “detached from its symbolic meaning as a colonial language” (Lai, 2011, p.261), English has maintained its prestigious status more than a decade after the handover of sovereignty to mainland China in 1997. One of the major reasons is that a person with a good command of English is usually more likely to succeed in their career. Evans' recent questionnaire surveys (2010a, 2010b) provide evidence to support this claim. He found that English remains the major written

medium of professional communication in the workplace. It is, therefore, not surprising that career prospects serve as a driving force for Hong Kong people to keep learning English in the post-colonial era. Comparing learners' attitudes towards English learning between the pre- and post-1997 period, Lai (1999), with reference to surveys and news reports, concluded that though learners were not as strongly motivated to learn English as before (the pre-1997 period), they agreed that English continues to play an important role in their future careers.

In addition to career prospects, people in Hong Kong usually perceive a high English proficiency as an advantage for candidates competing for higher education opportunities. Tsang (2008) pointed out in his study that those students graduating from EMI (English as the medium of instruction) schools were in more advantageous positions than those from CMI (Chinese as the medium of instruction) schools when competing for admission offers from universities. A major reason is that English has continued as the major medium of instruction in local tertiary education (Evans & Green, 2007). This situation remains even after the HKSAR Government implemented some changes on language policies in education. Since the handover in July 1997, the HKSAR Government has been upholding mother-tongue education and has introduced several policies on the medium of instruction (MOI) in primary and secondary schools. The first one was the "Medium of Instruction Guidance for Secondary Schools" issued in September 1997. According to this Guidance, secondary schools were required, among other things, to prove the students' ability in learning English and teachers' capability in delivering lessons in English in order to be allowed to adopt English as the medium of teaching. As a result, only about 25% (114 out of 421) of secondary schools qualified to use English as MOI, while other (more than 300) secondary schools had to be CMI schools (Chan, 2012; Cheng, 2009). The Guidance was criticised for causing a labelling effect among secondary schools: CMI schools were perceived as weaker than their EMI counterparts and some parents discontented if their children were sent to CMI schools. Not surprisingly, EMI schools attracted the top students (Chan, 2012; Chan, 2013; Cheng, 2009). Considering the overwhelming public demand for EMI schools, the Education Bureau of the HKSAR proposed some substantive recommendations for the MOI in 2005,



and later announced the fine-tuning of the MOI policy in 2009 (Kan et al., 2011). By allowing schools more flexibility on MOI, the fine-tuning policy aimed at balancing the pedagogical needs in the classroom and the enhancement of students' English proficiency (Chan, 2013). However, Kan et al. (2011) revealed in a subsequent study that the fine-tuning policy had indeed driven many CMI schools to adopt English as the teaching medium for core subjects at the junior levels. Also, more CMI schools had to come up with a variety of English enhancement activities and English supplementary classes for students. Chan (2013) explained that one of the major reasons is that secondary schools need to provide students with a smooth transition to tertiary institutions, which in Hong Kong still predominantly adopt English as their MOI.

Bray and Kwok (2003) commented that due to these “contextual influences”, English continued to be treated as “of the greatest demand” (p.614) and its associations to “tangible rewards and power”, including but not limited to better education opportunities and better career prospects, are still strong driving forces to “contribute to the prevalence of instrumental motivation among ESL learners in Hong Kong” (Wu, 2012, p.46). In fact, such “strong instrumental, career-related motives” did not only affect learners' attitudes towards English learning, but parents' as well. They prefer to expose their children to English learning environments as early as possible, and most of them will make every effort to equip their children with better English. Naturally, they will pay extra attention to the achievement of their children's English learning, and it is understandable that parents will get themselves involved in helping with their children's English learning. For instance, many parents are providing their children with extra English learning resources.

It can be seen in the previous studies that English continues to occupy an important role in the education system and the job market in Hong Kong. On top of it, English is generally regarded as the world language of the globalised era. It is widely used in areas like business, communications, education, technology, and so on (Crystal, 2003; Nunan, 2001). Parents and learners, as the major stakeholders of the Hong Kong education system, are therefore inclined to think that school children should attain a



high English proficiency. Even though as Nunan (2001) suggested, people are increasingly aware of the heightened expectation of English proficiency, there is a pressing need to explore more possible and manageable resources for learners. As parents are the most easily accessible resources to many young learners, parental involvement and support are of key significance to the development of learners' English proficiency.

As evident in the previous research studies, the strategies adopted and support provided by parents vary among families. Families in Hong Kong are no exception. On top of investigating the types of activities parents provided and the language learning resources available at home, it is interesting to explore the possible causes of the variations in the types and amount of the language learning support available at home. The present study builds from the framework of Bourdieu's Concept of Capital and attempts to explain the root of such variations as well as to provide possible recommendations to alleviate the problems that may be associated with the variations.

Previous literature has already demonstrated the value of parental roles in their children's education. As second language learning has long been a popular area in children's education, the input from parents should not be neglected. However, as discussed above, there are many possible factors that may vary the support provided by parents, including but not limited to parents' attitudes towards the language, their knowledge of it as well as their possession of different types of resources. Bourdieu's Concept of Capital provide good grounds and a comprehensive approach for understanding the differences and discussing the ways in which the variations of resources available to parents are associated with the support they offer their children.

#### 2.4 Conceptualising Parental Strategies in Children's Second Language Learning by Bourdieu's Concept of Capital

Viewing parents' roles in children's second language learning from Bourdieu's perspectives is thus meaningful because as shown in previous research, parents are playing indispensable roles in their children's learning process as they are significant





sources of different types of capital and they play key roles in accumulating and activating different types of capital (Lareau & Horvat, 1999; Monkman, 2005). Education research from the perspectives of Bourdieu's Concept of Capital provides a sensible theoretical framework to conceptualise parents' strategies as one of the educational resources that benefit Hong Kong children's English learning.

#### 2.4.1 Parents as a Source of Economic Capital

Here economic capital refers to the money and monetary resources provided by parents, either at home or outside. In regards to parental strategies, previous research has proven that one of the major support that parents provide to children's language learning is financial support, in the form of money spent on children's reading (books, magazines, etc.) and oral (videos, DVDs) learning materials, for instance (e.g. Gao, 2012; Li, 2007) and money set aside for their children to attend private tuition classes (e.g. Gao, 2006) or used to hire private tutoring services (e.g. Tam & Chan, 2010). On the one hand, research has argued that due to unequal input of family resources, such as provisions for children's extra tuition, learners from middle-class families have more opportunities to access English than those from low-income families (Bray & Kwok, 2003; Gao 2012; Nunan, 2003). On the other hand, Li (2007), in her study discussing the relationships between family capital and second language learning, mentioned that the variation in financial resources of families was not a determinant factor affecting the quality of the children's language learning environment. Following her regular visits, observations and semi-structured interviews with four Chinese immigrant families in Canada, she argued that instead of the family's economic capital itself, it is the parents' choice of investing in the family's economic capital that is more relevant as it would directly affect the effectiveness of children's language learning. Through studying the strategies of Hong Kong Chinese parents, the current study attempts to examine how parents' financial resources affect their choices of strategies, how much they spend on children's learning resources, and how they allocate the investment of their economic resources.

#### 2.4.2 Parents as a Source of Cultural Capital

Li (2007) stated in her study that parents' education attainments "significantly influenced their ability and possibility to be actively involved in their children's second-language learning at home" (p.291), as well as their choice of investing the family's economic capital. As previously mentioned, academic qualifications and credentials are forms of institutional cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986). After reviewing the application of Bourdieu's writings on the concept of cultural capital, Lareau and Weininger (2003) suggested that "Bourdieu maintains that, from a sociological perspective, credentials ["institutional" cultural capital] must be understood to certify simultaneously two forms of competence on the part of the holder" (p.581). According to them, credentials "do guarantee a technical capacity". In the sense of parental strategies, it could be understood as the parents' capability in carrying out the tasks, for example, selecting learning materials, and assisting children with their homework. Drawing on the results of their questionnaire survey, Bray and Kwok (2003) argued that highly educated parents would have higher expectations of their children's education success and they are in better position to provide their children with better education resources; therefore, they are more inclined to send their children to private tutoring lessons in order to receive more professional and specialised training in core school subjects, particularly English. It has been shown in some research (Lareau, 1987; Weininger & Lareau, 2003) that the unequal opportunities of parents' exposure to the education system affects the school-parent relationship. They argued that middle-class parents, who are more familiar with the school system and therefore have better mastery of the system, would have a more positive school-parent relationship and thus collaboration with schools when compared to their counterparts from the working class. Similar arguments could also be found in other studies. Symeou (2007) reported that those families "lacking cultural and educational resources" found themselves limited or even powerless to support their children's learning. Therefore, researchers may want to investigate whether parents' education attainments would create constraints for less educated parents when choosing strategies.

More specifically, in terms of second language learning, it is worth exploring the relationship between parents' knowledge of the targeted language and the support and strategies they are choosing for their children's second language learning. For example, will their decisions be affected by their own learning experience? Does the transformation of parents' cultural capital exist in the assistance provided by parents? The concept of cultural capital may provide clues to explain parents' preferences in choosing strategies and activities as well as the considerations behind their choices.

#### 2.4.3 Parents as a Source of Social Capital

Some researchers have proposed that parents are actually a source of social capital when family itself is treated as a social network (Muller 1993; Schneider, 1993; Portes, 1998). Following the same line, McNeal (1999) also supported the view that parents can be seen as a source of social capital due to their “dyadic relationships” with their children, their “obligation” to invest in their children's development and their “reciprocity” based on kinship, as well as the “existence and degree of resources”, which refers to the social status of the parents. Li (2007) suggested a more explicit linkage between social capital and parental involvement. It could be reflected in “the network of social relationships that exist in the family (within-family) social capital or between the family and the community (between-family social capital)” (p.286). Undoubtedly, any form of social capital possessed by parents favors the parental involvement in children's education process. Even so, Furstenberg (2005) asserted that even though the resources available to families are equal, the degree of social capital within families usually varies. He pointed out that the variation is because of other factors including how parents “make use of the available stock of social capital”. Sometimes, they prefer to solve the problems themselves and may not want to ask people for assistance (p.818). Therefore, in addition to the extent of social networks of parents, it is also significant to study the “within-family” relationship, or parent-child interactions, as a kind of parental strategy of assisting children's second language learning, in order to understand how parents' extra-familial networks and familial social capital affect the decisions and effectiveness of their parental strategies.



## 2.5 Transmission of Capital through Parental Strategies in Children's Second Language Learning

It is remarkable that the different forms of capital can be inheritable and reproducible (Bourdieu, 1986), as Lareau and Weininger (2003) suggested, “The concept of “capital”... under certain conditions, may be transmitted from one generation to the next” (p.567). They can be transmitted from one generation to another, that is, from parents to children. Economic capital and objectified cultural capital are the two forms of capital that can be directly transmitted to the next generation. Yet, the transmission is superficial. Kraaykamp and van Eijck (2010) pointed out that “objectified cultural capital can be immediately transmitted. However, this transmissibility only applies to the material objects themselves (e.g. books, paintings) and not to the way in which these objects are to be appreciated” (p.211). It brings out another important concern here. Whether parents will provide the materials to children, especially what types of materials are provided, of course, would be of significance, but some other issues should not be neglected, such as what parents will consider when they choose learning materials or activities and how they make use of these materials. On the other hand, in their study, Kraaykamp and van Eijck concluded that unlike objectified cultural capital, the transmission of parents' embodied cultural capital “will not be reduced unless parents invest less of themselves into their kids. The investment of parents is not only limited to “objectified cultural capital”, but more importantly, the transmission of embodied cultural capital would happen “automatically” when the children “observed their parents' everyday behaviors, judgments, opinions, emotions and so on” (p.226). This claim is supported by other research showing that highly educated parents are more likely to “pass on” their rich and extensive cultural capital to their children in the form of their preference for particular educational paths as they possess more “realistic information on the strategic importance” of making the most appropriate choice for their children's education (Jaeger & Holm, 2007). In fact, parents may not be aware of the transmission of capital. Instead, they may unconsciously internalise their embodied cultural capital (values, preferences and practices, etc.) “through and during family socialization processes” (Symeou, 2007, p.474).



With Bourdieu's Concept of Capital in mind, the researcher of the current study will examine how the availability of different forms of capital to parents affects the transmission of capital to their children in the dimensions of strategies Hong Kong Chinese parents adopted in assisting their children's English learning. Li (2007) interpreted the different types of strategies used by the parents from four Chinese immigrant families in Canada as measurements of different forms of capital, for example, investment of monetary wealth (economic capital) in providing children with English learning materials, and parent-children interactions in English learning activities (cultural and social capital). Along the line of Li's study, this study attempts to discuss how parents as a source of capital in terms of (1) parents' investment of monetary wealth (i.e. the family income and how much they spend on children's English learning), (2) their educational attainment (i.e. educational background and English literacy) and (3) their social networks (sourcing and spreading of information) transmit the capital to their children in forms of parental strategies: provision of English learning resources, parent-children interactions and exposure to English environment.

## 2.6 Limitations of the Previous Studies of Second Language Learning from the Perspectives of Bourdieu's Concept of Capital

Following Bourdieu's Concept of Capital, some researchers have discussed the notion that the differences in the three forms of capital (economic, cultural and social capital) among parents would have an impact on children in different ways, for example, the family-school relationship (Lareau 1987, Weininger & Lareau 2003), the support and strategies parents would employ in assisting their children's schooling in general (Tam & Chan 2010), or assisting the English vocabulary development of more mature learners, like secondary school students (Gao, 2012), or learners of other Chinese societies (Gao, 2006; Li, 2010). Although previous studies using Bourdieu's Concept of Capital were mainly focused on parental involvement, and/or the impact of parental involvement on children's academic attainment, there are not many studies related to second language learning. Research is rarely found discussing parental



involvement in children's English learning among Hong Kong Chinese families, in particular, the parental strategies in children's second language (i.e. English) learning from such perspectives. There is little research found applying Bourdieu's Concept of Capital when discussing the relationships between the availability of different forms of parental capital and the strategies they adopt in supporting children's second language learning, in particular, in Hong Kong where learning English as a second language is such an important issue. As Grenfell and James (1998) stated, "Capital is not readily available to everyone on the same basis" (p.18), it is not realistic to assume all parents possess the same quantity and quality of the three kinds of capital. Through studying the constraints faced by Hong Kong Chinese parents and their choices of strategies, this study will generate data for analysing how parents' invest different forms of capital in order to assist their children to excel in English learning.

Furthermore, some studies argue that throughout children's language learning process, parents' assistance is usually not solely provided in one single form of possible resources. For example, after observing the learning progress of children from four Canadian Chinese families, Li (2007) compared the different resources the parents provided to their children and concluded that parents' education backgrounds and occupational choices outweighed their economic resources in the task of helping their children succeed in English learning. Bourdieu's Concept of Capital provides a good starting point to address the complexity of this issue. That is, when parents possess different forms of resources, they may adopt a more comprehensive approach to help with their children's English learning, and the different levels of impact on children's learning due to the availability of different forms of capital to parents should also be taken into account. However, as mentioned above, much previous research has mainly focused on the influence of a particular type of parental capital on a specific area of children's development, instead of addressing the concerns and actual operations of parents when actualising their capital. Therefore, the present study makes an attempt to understand the relationship between the availability of resources to parents and their choices of English learning strategies for their children from the perspectives of Bourdieu's Concept of Capital.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Research Design

Newman et al. (2003) advised that the typology of research purposes would be a helpful hint to guide the design of a research. Of the nine categories of typology suggested by them, the present study falls into that of “understand complex phenomena” as it intends to understand various phenomena and to interpret their underlying meanings. This category includes “research that seeks to explicate the behaviours, rituals, languages, symbols, values, and social structures of a particular group of people and intends to understand the culture of that group of people” (pp.175-179). The present study aims at not only providing an account of the strategies Hong Kong Chinese parents have adopted in assisting their children’s English learning, but also attempting to exemplify the variations of strategies among parents from different backgrounds. As remarked by Newman et al., these nine categories in the typology “are not independent; they may be interdependent and overlapping”. Such a remark is also applicable to the present study. It also fits the category of “add to the knowledge base” defined by Newman et al. as researchers attempt to “conduct studies to strengthen the knowledge bases”. The significance of parental involvement in education has already been well-proven in previous research, including their engagement in a wide range of extra-curricular activities (Gonzalez-DeHass, Willems & Holbein, 2005) and their involvement in schools’ activities and even schools’ policies (Epstein, 1992). Therefore, the present study attempts to investigate the impact of parental involvement specifically in the area of second language learning, for example, in the aspects of providing children with a second language learning environment and appropriate learning resources (e.g. Jaeger & Holm, 2007; Teachman, 1987).

As these issues are complex, the study cannot solely rely on data collected from questionnaire survey or interviews. Considering the multiple objectives of the present



study, the mixed methods approach would be the most ideal research design to answer the research questions and provide comprehensive solutions addressing the complexity of parental involvement in children's learning of a second language. As Newman et al. put it, "[t]he more complex the purposes, the more likely that mixed methods will be necessary" (p.186). The complexity of the research purposes means that they would be inadequately addressed using either the quantitative or the qualitative method. As a result, the mixed methods approach has been adopted because it takes the advantages of both the qualitative and quantitative approaches since the present study addresses both the breadth and depth of the issue. Creswell and Plano Clark (2011) discussed the characteristics of the two approaches:

There are times when qualitative research may be best, because the researcher aims to explore a problem, honor the voices of participants, map the complexity of the situation, and convey multiple perspectives of participants. At other times, quantitative research may be best, because the researcher seeks to understand the relationship among variables or determine if one group performs better on an outcome than another group. (p.7)

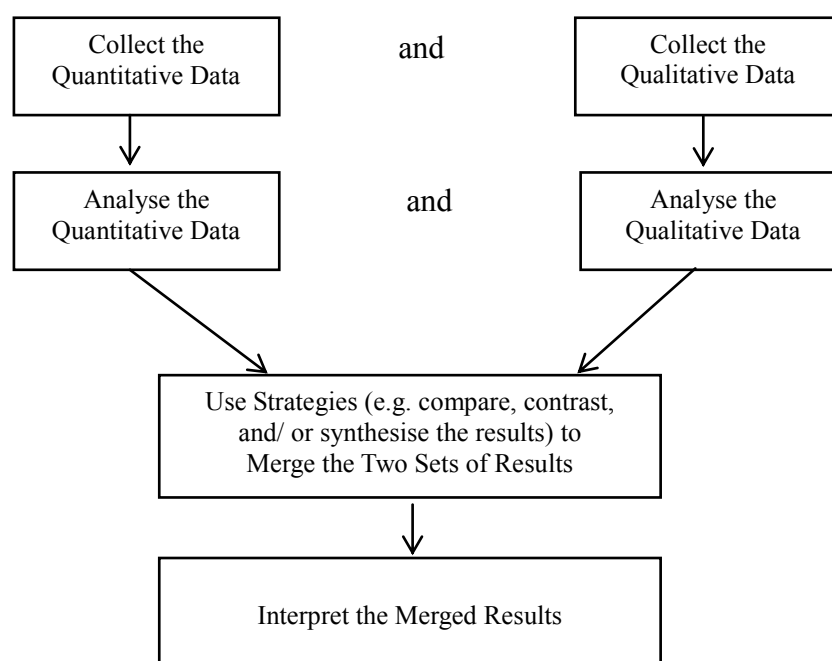
Following the convergent design identified by Creswell and Plano Clark, the present study consisted of two parts: a questionnaire survey and semi-structured interviews and the data collected from both sources are of equal importance. First, the quantitative data collected through the survey allow the researcher to give a brief account of the strategies Hong Kong Chinese parents adopt to assist their children's English learning. Furthermore, a questionnaire survey provides the study with a less sensitive yet an effective way of collecting the demographic data of the participants for the purpose of understanding their family backgrounds. However, as Gass and Mackey (2007) suggested, a questionnaire survey may not be an effective means to elicit "learner-internal phenomena" (p.162), such as the parents' attitude towards learning English. It is undoubtedly necessary to include other data collection methods in the present study in order to "paint a complete picture of the research phenomenon" (Gass & Mackey, 2007, p.162). Therefore, the present study included both the questionnaire survey and interviews. In fact, although both methods have



their own strengths, their shortcomings should not be neglected. Walliman (2006) pointed out the inadequacy of questionnaire surveys: “While questionnaire surveys are relatively easy to organize and prevent the personality of the interviewer affecting the results, they do have certain limitations. They are not suitable for questions that require probing to obtain adequate information” (p.91). On the other hand, even though participants are answering the same questions, their self-reported responses in the interviews can be quite varied, because they are asked to tell their own experience and opinions (Gass & Mackey, 2007).

Therefore, in order to provide a thorough and comprehensive discussion on the parental involvement in children’s second language learning, the researcher incorporated both quantitative and qualitative means when designing the research. Figure 2 illustrates the basic procedures in implementing a convergent design in the present study.

**Figure 2. Basic procedures in implementing a convergent design in the present study (adapted from Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011, p. 79)**



As Creswell and Plano Clark (2011) put it, the convergent design serves purposes including “illustrating quantitative results with qualitative findings” and “synthesizing complementary quantitative and qualitative results to develop a more complete understanding of a phenomenon” (p.77), which perfectly fit the objectives of the present study. To ensure the reliability and validity of the findings, triangulation of data from both sources was collected and analysed. There will be a more detailed discussion of this procedure in a separate section.

The questionnaire survey and the interviews were taking place concurrently, roughly at the same time not only because the present researcher strived for the least inconvenience to the participants but also, most importantly, because she intended to use the Concurrent Triangulation Strategy (Creswell, 2009) as the research design strategy to address the research questions. Creswell elaborated that when a researcher adopts the concurrent triangulation strategy, he “collects both quantitative and qualitative data concurrently and then compares the two databases to determine if there is convergence, differences, or some combination” (p.213). He also stated that this approach is “a means to offset the weaknesses inherent within one method with the strength of the other”. In addition, such an approach may enhance the two methods as the data from one method may add strength to the other. As discussed earlier, one single method may not satisfy all the purposes of the present study. Furthermore, according to Morse (2003), a qualitative method may be used simultaneously with a quantitative method “when some portion of the phenomenon may be measured, and this measurement enhances the qualitative description or interpretation” (p.202). In the current study, on the one hand, quantitative methods serve as an effective means to examine the relationship among some measureable and comparable variables, such as the parental strategies, parents’ education levels and monthly household incomes. On the other hand, there is a need to adopt qualitative means to understand and explicate parents’ motives for implementing various strategies to assist their children’s English learning.

## 3.2 Measurements

### 3.2.1 Parents' Economic Capital

The most direct way to measure the monetary wealth of a family is to obtain information about the monthly income of the household. Because one of the objectives of this study is to investigate how the strategies parents have adopted are in relation to parents' economic capital, in other words, the family's economic status, there is a need to have an objective and unambiguous system to measure this status. However, there are no clear or commonly agreed guidelines to define economic groups, suggested by either the Hong Kong government or any other accredited parties in Hong Kong. To define economic groups, the researcher used two sets of figures to justify the proposed categorisation. Following Tse et al. (2010), the researcher adopted the 'median monthly domestic household income' as one of the reference figures. As of July 2011, in the latest report released by the Census and Statistics Department, the 'median monthly domestic household income' was HK\$17,500 in the year of 2009 (Census and Statistics Department, 2010)<sup>1</sup>. The other set of reference figures used in this study is from the subsidised home ownership schemes, the Home Ownership Scheme and the Sandwich Class Housing Scheme, of the Hong Kong Housing Authority (HKHA) and the Hong Kong Housing Society (HKHS)<sup>2</sup>. Though the schemes are no longer available, the Hong Kong Housing Society set the monthly household income limit at HK\$39,000 for family applicants when announcing the sale of the remaining units of the Sandwich Class Housing Scheme in 2008 (HKHS, 2008). For the Home Ownership Scheme, the existing monthly household income limit is HK\$28,421 for a family of two to eight members (HKHA, 2010). Under these two schemes, a family whose monthly household income

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<sup>1</sup> The Census and Statistics Department carried out a population census in 2011, but the results were not publicly announced until September 2012. The measurement scale used in the present study has not been adjusted to accommodate the latest released reports of the population census 2011.

<sup>2</sup> The Hong Kong Housing Authority and the Hong Kong Housing Society launched new subsidised home ownership schemes in 2012-2013. The Home Ownership Scheme Secondary Market was extended to White Form Buyers, and the monthly household income limit in the new schemes was raised. Since the analysis had been completed before the launch of these new schemes, the measurement scale used in the present study has not been adjusted to accommodate the revised monthly household income limit of the new schemes.

exceeds HK\$39,000 is not entitled to any public housing subsidies. In view of these reference figures, in this study, three economic groups have been defined based on a family's average monthly household income: low (HK\$17,500 or below), middle (between HK\$17,501 and 39,000) and high (HK\$39,001 or above).

### 3.2.2 Parents' Cultural Capital

One of the focuses of the present study was to examine the extent the effect of parents' cultural capital would have on their decisions when choosing parental strategies for their children's second language learning. It was also intended to show how it is related to children's academic attainment. Although one's cultural capital embraces more dimensions, only parents' institutional cultural capital (i.e. their educational backgrounds) was chosen to measure parents' cultural capital in the present study. There are several reasons for doing so. First, parents' embodied cultural capital, such as their attitudes towards English, is too abstract and subjective that so more suitably addressed by qualitative rather than statistical analysis. Second, the objectified cultural capital found at the participants' home are regarded as some of the English learning strategies that parents adopt to help their children. If they are also dimensions used to measure parents' cultural capital, it will create an unfair advantage to those strategies that require parents to possess different kinds of objectified cultural capital, such as books and audio visual learning materials.

When considering how to measure parents' institutional cultural capital, the researcher took into account the possibly rather varied education experiences among parents. On top of the credentials they have obtained, parents may have received overseas education or had exposure to different education systems. Moreover, since this study is also informed by learning English as a second language among Hong Kong children, parents' experience of exposure to English speaking environments may also be relevant. A systematic and comparable means to measure parents' education backgrounds is needed to address all those factors. Two previous studies (Kraaykamp & van Eijck, 2010; Robertson & Reynolds, 2010) provided a sensible and manageable measurement scale for parents' educational attainment. Both

measured parents' educational attainment based on the years of parents' schooling, that is, the normal duration of schooling for obtaining the respective credentials. These studies provided a blueprint for measuring parents' education attainment but it should be noted that in the present study, pre-primary education would not be included in the calculation. For example, a parent having completed Form 5 in Hong Kong would be considered to have received eleven years of education according to the Hong Kong education system. Such a system dealt with the problem of measuring the education level of those parents who received education outside Hong Kong. For example, suppose a mother reported that she had completed junior high school in mainland China. In accordance with the measurement scale, she received nine years of education, which was equivalent to the completion of Form 3 in Hong Kong. Following the research design of the two studies mentioned, this research asked the participating parents to report their educational attainment based on the eight categories, ranging from lower than primary school to postgraduate degree. In addition, participants were asked to report where they had received their education. Apart from parents' education level, all of the participating parents were asked to report how they view their own English proficiency as the present study also focuses on how parents' English proficiency would affect their adoption of English learning strategies.

### 3.2.3 Parents' Social Capital

In comparison with parents' economic capital and cultural capital, their social capital is rather abstract as it is not easy to measure one's social network. Furstenberg (2005) agreed that there was no consensus among social scientists on common scales and procedures for measuring one's social capital. Some researchers have used social classes as an indicator to predict or to measure the extension of a person's social network (e.g. Furstenberg, 2005; Lareau, 1987). However, such an indicator is not applicable to the situation in Hong Kong, because as with the problem of identifying different economic classes, there is no well-recognised classification of different social classes. Furstenberg pointed out that the construct for measuring social capital "refers to a collective property" (p.811), which fully reflects the complexity of



identifying a set of parameters for measuring social capital. In the present study, the measurement of parents' extensions of social networks was based on the level of formality of the networks, ranging from (i) formal authority bodies, such as schools and parent-teacher associations; (ii) public platforms, including public seminars and mass media; (iii) personal contacts, such as relatives, friends and private tutors; to (iv) free sharing on websites and online discussion forums.

### 3.2.4 Parental Strategies

Parental involvement in children's education covers a wide spectrum of parental activities, including homework supervision, learning activities at home and visiting the library, to name a few (Catsambis, 2001). Therefore, defining parental involvement indicators is an important concern. The questionnaire was the main instrument for investigating the strategies and activities parents adopt to help their children's English learning. The parental involvement indicators concerned in the questionnaire were developed based on the findings of Li (2008). Through classroom observations and interviews with parents and teachers, Li discussed the types of involvement and strategies the Taiwanese parents in her study used in supporting their third-grade children's English learning. Based on the data reported by parents, she summarised ten common types of strategies and activities the Taiwanese parents adopted. Her findings provided a clear, explicit and comprehensive picture of parental strategies, giving the current study a good start. Some modification has been made on Li's findings in order to make the questionnaire more accessible to the local parents (with, for example, items translated into written Chinese) and more realistic to the Hong Kong context (with, for example, items like "speaking to children in English", which is a common phenomenon locally, added). The items included in the first part of the questionnaire can be grouped around three themes in accordance with the forms of cultural and social capital: providing children with reading and oral materials, interacting with children and providing exposure for fostering children's English skills.

Li's study was chosen firstly because Taiwan, similar to Hong Kong, also has an

English-as-a-foreign-language context, where English is not the main language for everyday communication but rather a school subject. Secondly, the informants in her study are Chinese parents, the same as the target informants of the current study. Though there has been some previous research on parental involvement in children's English learning in Hong Kong, the research only generated qualitative findings on a particular strategy, such as assisting children's homework (Tam & Chan 2010) and hiring an English-speaking domestic helper (Tse et al 2009), while the current study attempts to provide quantitative data to illustrate a comprehensive picture of parental strategies Hong Kong Chinese parents have adopted in assisting their children in English learning.

### 3.2.5 Children's Second Language Attainment

The effectiveness of the strategies on children's English learning is one of the discussion focuses in the present study. However, it is not easy to measure the effectiveness of a strategy, so an objective and comparable scale is thus needed. With reference to previous studies (e.g. Fehrmann, Keith & Reimers, 1987; Ginsburg & Bronstein, 1993; McNeal, 1999), the researcher used children's academic results as a parameter to serve the purpose of measuring the learning effectiveness of individual strategies. The measurement and the scale of the grades variable used in the present study were similar to those used in the study of Fehrmann, Keith and Reimers (1987), of which the data were collected from students' self-report of their grades in high school. In the present study, children's English attainment was measured based on parents' self-reported data. In order to achieve a comparable scale, parents were asked to report only their children's overall performance in the English subject in the most recent semester as some schools may also provide sub-scores for individual English skills (e.g. reading, writing, etc.) in addition to the overall results of the English subject. Depending on the assessments of the individual primary schools, parents could report either in letter grades or the actual scores, and the parents were asked to specify the full marks where they were not 100 for the researcher to arrive at accurate and comparable percentages. To handle the discrepancies in the two scales (i.e. letter grades and actual scores), the researcher defined a table for the conversion, as shown

in Table 1.

**Table 1. Score-to-grade conversion**

<b>Score</b>	<b>Grade Equivalent*</b>	<b>Description</b>
90-100	A- or A or A+	Excellent
80-89	B- or B or B+	Good
70-79	C- or C or C+	Satisfactory
60-69	D- or D or D+	Fair
50-59	E- or E or E+	Pass
49 or below	F	Fail

Children's English results were categorised into six groups, ranging from F (fail) to A+ (excellent). In Hong Kong, the norm for a passing mark at the primary level of schooling is 50 or E, so the researcher used it as a reference point of the conversion table and each category of grades was set in an increment of 10 marks.

### 3.3 Participants

#### 3.3.1 Criteria for Selecting Target Participants

In the present study, the concept of a parent was not restricted to a father or mother of a child. Instead, following the previous studies (Gao, 2006; 2012), this study adopts a broader sense when defining "parents". Even though most of the participants in the study were either fathers or mothers of the children, the concept of "parents" also extends to the grandparents of the children, provided that the grandparents involved are taking up the responsibility as the main caretakers of their grandchildren<sup>3</sup>. Having working parents (i.e. both biological parents being in full-time employment) is a very common phenomenon among Hong Kong children. Epstein (1992) also mentioned that most children stay in the home every day, so even though they may not live with their parents, the importance and potential influence of other family members should also be recognised.

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<sup>3</sup> Two grandparents participated in the present study. Both of them reported that they are the major caretakers of their grandchildren, who are primary school pupils.



One of the perspectives advanced by Epstein in the discussion of parental involvement was to identify “a sequence of critical stages in which parents and teachers contribute in turn to child development and education” (p.2). As discussed in the previous chapter, though parental involvement has been found to play a prominent role in children’s language learning process, research suggests that the level of parental involvement declines with the advancing grade level of the children. It is generally believed that more prominent effects would be resulted if parents get involved in children’s education earlier (Cotton & Wiklund, 1989). Spera’s (2005) finding supported that “parental involvement declines in adolescence” (p.128) when investigating how parenting practices are related to adolescents’ school achievement. Catsambis (2002) further argued that the form and the extent of parental involvement may change over time to suit children’s developmental needs. For example, parents’ practice of daily supervision on children’s homework would be reducing when children were promoted to higher levels. Higher level of involvement among parents of elementary students was also evident in the study of Sung and Padilla (1998), comparing the parental involvement of elementary and secondary students in their language learning. Similar findings were recorded in the study of Kraaykamp and van Eijck (2010). Their findings noticeably related to parental involvement concerned the impact of parents’ educational backgrounds on their children’s academic performance, which declined as their children grew up. They argued that it was because of the “increasing openness in education over time”. In other words, other than their parents, older children have more chances to get in touch with more sources in their learning process, such as teachers, peers, Internet, etc. Therefore, it is more meaningful to focus on the parents of primary school students, instead of other groups of learners for studying the impact of parental involvement on children’s second language learning.

In addition, in the present study, children’s educational attainment is measured to examine the effectiveness of parental strategies on children’s academic performance, so as to enable discussion about the transmission of capital to the next generation. Though it is expected that parents would supervise pre-primary children more because they are too young to make decisions, the present study concentrates on

studying the effectiveness of parental involvement on primary school children because the primary schools' curricula of English subjects are more systematic and well-structured. Furthermore, because formal tests and examinations are usually included as assessment instruments in primary schools, children's English proficiency, with reference to their peers', is reflected in the school-based assessment results.

Therefore, the selection of target participants was limited to parents who have at least a child who is studying at a local primary school. In addition, to minimise the possible sources of intervening variables, such as ethnicity and culture (Spera, 2005), the researcher invited only Hong Kong Chinese parents to participate in the present study. Furthermore, since second language learning is one of the areas that inform the present study, and second language refers to English in this study, parents and/or children whose mother tongue is English were excluded from the study.

### 3.3.2 Sampling

Since the purpose of studying Hong Kong Chinese parents' involvement in their children's English learning has been clearly identified, every participant of the present study should thus fit all of the following criteria: (i) being a Hong Kong Chinese parent, (ii) having at least a child studying in a Hong Kong primary school, (iii) English not being the mother tongue of either the parent or the child, and (iv) the child learning English as a school subject. Though random sampling would be the ideal method to select a sample that best represents a population without any bias, observing the need to fulfill the above mentioned criteria and to ensure the participants possess relative experience in responding to the inquiry, non-probability sampling (Walliman, 2006) was selected as a more appropriate sampling method for the present study. Therefore, the researcher adopted "purposive sampling" strategy when recruiting the participants because "purposive sampling addresses specific purposes related to research questions; therefore the researcher selects cases that are information rich in regard to those questions" (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009, p.173).

The sampling procedure of the present study was challenging, which concurred well



with the observation of Punch (2005) that the “growing practical problem of obtaining access to the large and neatly configured samples” make it difficult to achieve “well developed and mathematically sophisticated sampling plans” for today’s research (p.101). For the present study, though the selection criteria were clearly identified, many challenges and constraints arose during the process of recruiting eligible participants. First, the primary schools in Hong Kong might not welcome the researcher to directly approach the parents of their pupils when they were told that the parents would be asked to comment on their children’s English learning experience at school. In addition, because the third party, that is, schools, parent-teacher associations or non-governmental organisations (NGOs) were not allowed to pass the parents’ contact information to the researcher without the parents’ permission, their assistance in coordinating with parents was needed. However, many schools and organisations turned down the invitation because of the lack of extra resources for the coordination work, such as scheduling the survey and making appointments with parents. Furthermore, both the questionnaire and the interview protocol involved some sensitive information, such as the monthly income of the family. It was expected that some potential targeted participants would have reservations about providing the information to the researcher whom they did not know.

To cope with the constraints on time and resources on the one hand, but to ensure the access to eligible participants who fit all the purposive selection criteria on the other, the researcher adopted convenience sampling (Mertens, 2010) as the major strategy for recruiting participants. Punch (2005) supports the argument that due to practical constraints, researchers “must take whatever sample is available”. Despite the increasing trend of adopting convenience sampling, Punch cautions researchers to be aware of the representativeness of their samples. Aiming to ensure the representativeness of the sample population, the researcher asked the participants to report their demographic information in the questionnaire. The participants were grouped based on their economic and educational backgrounds in order to make certain that the interest of parents from different backgrounds will be included so that their opinions and interests are included in the study.



The participants of the present study were recruited from two sources. First, the researcher invited friends and colleagues who fulfilled all the selection criteria of the target participants to take part in the questionnaire survey, and the participants were also asked to invite more parents to participate in the questionnaire survey. Sixty-two responses were recruited through this source. Among them, one did not complete all the questions stipulated in the questionnaire, while another six were completed by non-target participants, for example, parents of secondary school students and non-Chinese parents. These seven responses were excluded and not processed. There were eventually 55 valid responses received from friends and colleagues or those referred by them.

At the same time, letters were sent to a list of about forty parent-teacher associations, primary schools and NGOs recommended by a friend of the researcher, inviting them to participate in the questionnaire survey or the interviews or both. Finally, positive responses were received from two primary schools. Samples of the questionnaire and the interview questions were sent to schools for the principals' reference before the visits. Both schools invited the researcher to carry out the survey and interviews on their respective school open days when parents of their students were required to visit the class teachers and obtain their children's school reports. Prior to the visits, the researcher communicated with the school personnel about the selection criteria because the schools preferred to send invitation to parents via their internal communication channels. Thus, these parents participating in the study were recruited by the schools. The vice principal of School A informed the researcher that the message was sent to all parents together with the notice inviting parents to the open day. At School B, the vice principal told the researcher that the parents were mainly recruited from the parent volunteers who were helping with the school open day. In total, 27 parents were recruited from the two schools, of whom 12 were from School A and 15 from School B. Among these 27 participants, 23 also took part in the semi-structured interviews. Both the questionnaire and interview data collected from one of the parents from School A were not processed or included in the discussion of this study because she reported that both she and her son had been diagnosed as dyslexic and she needed extra support herself when handling the educational matters

of her son. After excluding this exceptional case, the researcher processed the data collected from 26 questionnaires and 22 interviews. Table 2 summarises the number of participants recruited from different sources.

**Table 2. Number of participants recruited from different sources**

Sources	Total No. of participants recruited	No. of valid participants taking part in the questionnaire survey	No. of valid participants having the semi-structured interviews
Friends /Colleagues /Their referrals	62	55	--
School A	12	11	10
School B	15	15	12
	n=89	n=81	n=22

### 3.3.3 School Backgrounds

School A is a CMI school located in the Central and Western District on the Hong Kong Island. It is a government-subsidised co-education primary school. According to the school website, this school offers classes from primary one to primary six, with two classes in each grade. 100% of their English teachers meet the requirement of the Language Proficiency Assessment for Teachers (English Language) (LPATE)<sup>4</sup> and there is a native English teacher at the school. The school has included different components in their English curriculum. For example, the school has developed its own reading and writing programmes for students in different grades and provides an English rich environment in senior grades. In addition to the formal curriculum, the school provides students with a variety of English enhancement activities, such as English field trips, drama classes and English day. The school also provides some

<sup>4</sup> The Language Proficiency Assessment for Teachers (English Language) (LPATE) is jointly administered and accredited by The Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority (HKEAA) and the Education Bureau (EDB). The English LPAT comprises five papers, namely reading, writing, listening, speaking, and classroom language assessment. A 5-point scale is used to assess the candidates' proficiency of individual skills. The minimum required level of proficiency for being English teachers is 2.5 to 3, depending on individual papers (HKEAA, 2007; Lin, 2007).

reading resources and English exercises to students through their school website and intranet. With regard to parent-school communication, School A has established a parent-teacher association (PTA). The webpage of the PTA shows that it organises activities and workshops for parents from time to time.

Located in the Wong Tai Sin District on the Kowloon Peninsula, School B is also a government-subsidised co-education primary school. According to the information provided on its website, the school offers full-time primary one to primary six classes. It offers five classes for each grade, but it should be noted that the school emphasises small-class size as one of the school's characteristics. School B particularly emphasises the English language development of their students. For example, the school has introduced its own English school-based reading programme and phonics programme. Students are streamed based on their English academic results, and weaker students will be assigned to smaller classes with the provision of remedial classes. Similar to School A, School B also offers their students a wide range of extra-curricular English activities, such as drama classes and a lunch reading programme. To facilitate students' learning, English e-learning resources and an e-learning platform are available to students. To encourage the communication with parents, the school has set up its parent-teacher association. In addition, the school hosts different talks, seminars and activities, aiming at enhancing parents' understanding and communication with the school.

### 3.4 Ethical Considerations

Among the three major areas of ethical issues raised by Diener and Crandall (as cited in Johnson & Christensen, 2008, pp.102-108), the one concerned most in the present study is “the treatment of research participants”, which refers to the potential harms to the participants caused by the research, especially when the participants are not well-informed of the purpose of the research and may not, therefore, be aware of the possible risks. Furthermore, Johnson and Christensen stress that another “subtle ethical issue” that researchers have to handle well is “the issue of privacy”. For example, when doing interviews, the researchers may touch upon or reveal sensitive

information from the participants. If this happens, they suggest that “the researcher must be prepared to address such issues rather than dismiss them as outside the confines of the purpose of the study” (p.108). Precautions were taken to address these ethical concerns in conducting the proposed research.

First, Salkind (2012) suggested one of the principles of conducting ethical research is to make sure all the participants “sign, and understand, an informed consent form” (p.37). Thus, before completing the questionnaire, the participants were asked to read through and sign a letter of consent (see Appendix A). The letter was written in both Chinese and English (NB: only the Chinese version was available for the online questionnaire). In the letter, the participants were well-informed of the information of the researcher, as well as the purpose of the study. They were also told of their rights to withdraw from the study if they were not willing to continue. All the participants of both the questionnaire survey (81 in total) and interviews (22 in total) had each signed a letter of consent prior to their completion of the questionnaire and agreed to take part in the study on a voluntary basis.

Though consent of participants has been obtained, confidentiality of the sensitive data, which includes the identity of the participants, should also be maintained in order to protect the privacy of the participants (Salkind, 2012). Apart from the guarantee of confidentiality mentioned in the letter of consent, the researcher reassured the interviewees of the protection of their privacy before the interviews. Moreover, the interviewees were told that the research was independent from any of the school personnel, school activities or children’s assessments, and they could share their ideas and opinions only when they wished to. If an interviewee indicated that they did not want some information given during the interview to be published, the parts concerned were not processed or disclosed in the report of the study. Last, when presenting the data and findings, the researcher would use labels like “School A” and “Sch\_A1” respectively to refer to the schools and parents involved in the study to avoid revealing their true identities.

### 3.5 The Questionnaire Survey

The quantitative data for the present study were collected through a questionnaire survey. A questionnaire survey asks participants to provide answers to the pre-set questionnaire on their own. The questions are mainly “closed-ended questions based on predetermined response scales, or categories” (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011, p.177). It is a common way used by many social sciences researchers to collect self-report data from the participants (Dörnyei, 2010). Vanderstoep and Johnston (2009) pointed out that the advantages of such self-report strategy are “the efficiency with which data can be collected” and “the robust approach to collecting attitudinal and behavioral data” (pp.66-67).

#### 3.5.1 Construction of the Questionnaire

The questionnaire used in the present study served two main objectives: (1) to collect information about the common strategies adopted by the Hong Kong Chinese parents to assist their children’s English learning, and (2) to obtain information about the parents’ social connections, their educational backgrounds and their family economic backgrounds and so gather the required information about factors that possibly affect their adoption of strategies.

The questionnaire contained three parts (see Appendix A and B). The first part consists of behavioural questions (Dörnyei, 2010) aiming to examine (1) what types of strategies and activities Hong Kong parents usually use to support their children’s English learning and (2) the extension and level of formality of parents’ social networks. The part (Question 1) concerning the strategies and activities parents adopt was developed based on the findings of Li (2008), which was originally presented in English. In order to allow the target samples (Hong Kong Chinese parents) to freely express their opinions and ideas in their native language, when incorporating Li’s findings into the questionnaire, the researcher translated the expressions into written Chinese and added more items that are common in the Hong Kong context, for example, speaking to children in English. For Question 1, participants were asked to



indicate the frequency with which they adopt individual strategies by indicating the choice that they thought best describes their behaviour on a 4-point scale, ranging from 1 (Never) to 4 (Very Often). If their answer to a question was “1(Never)”, they could optionally specify the reason(s) for not adopting that particular kind of learning strategy.

The second and third parts are factual questions (Dörnyei, 2010) about the children’s educational backgrounds, home and parent’s demographic background information. This information is crucial for analysing how the different types of strategies and activities are related to the resources available to the family, such as the family’s monthly income (economic capital) and parents’ educational background (cultural capital). In addition to providing a comprehensive picture of strategies among Hong Kong Chinese parents, this study also aims to discuss the transmission of capital from parents to their children via various types of parental strategies. Parents were, therefore, asked to report their children’s school performance in English subjects as a measure of the effectiveness of the parental strategies and activities as well as providing evidence for the transmission of capital to the children. Table 3 summarises the different types of questions items in the questionnaire.

### 3.5.2 Procedures

Quantitative data were collected through questionnaire surveys during the period between October 2011 and May 2012. There were two versions of the questionnaire used for data collection: a paper-version questionnaire survey and an online questionnaire survey. The contents of the two versions were the same. The major difference between the two versions was the language used. The paper version was written in both Chinese and English, while the online version was available in Chinese only. Other minor differences between the two versions are discussed in the following section explaining how the online questionnaire survey was conducted.

**Table 3. Different types of question items in the questionnaire**

Question Types	Purpose(s)	Sample Questions																		
Behavioral questions (Part I, Question 1-2)	Understanding what strategies and activities Hong Kong parents usually use to support children's English learning	<div>1. What do you do to help your children learn English? 你會做些什麼來幫助孩子學習英語? Circle the answers that best represent your opinion. (4 = very often, 1 = never) 請圈出最能代表你的意見的答案。(4 = 經常, 1 = 從不)</div> <table><tr><td></td><td>English learning strategies and activities outside school 課餘的英語學習策略及活動</td><td>Very Often 經常</td><td>Often 偶爾/間中</td><td>Seldom 很少</td><td>Never 從不</td></tr><tr><td>i.</td><td>Providing children with multi-media materials (e.g. DVDs, songs, audio books) 提供多媒體材料(如光碟、歌曲、錄音書)</td><td>4</td><td>3</td><td>2</td><td>1</td></tr><tr><td colspan="6">If you choose 1 (Never), please specify the reason(s). 如你選擇 1 (從不), 請註明原因: _____</td></tr></table>		English learning strategies and activities outside school 課餘的英語學習策略及活動	Very Often 經常	Often 偶爾/間中	Seldom 很少	Never 從不	i.	Providing children with multi-media materials (e.g. DVDs, songs, audio books) 提供多媒體材料(如光碟、歌曲、錄音書)	4	3	2	1	If you choose 1 (Never), please specify the reason(s). 如你選擇 1 (從不), 請註明原因: _____					
	English learning strategies and activities outside school 課餘的英語學習策略及活動	Very Often 經常	Often 偶爾/間中	Seldom 很少	Never 從不															
i.	Providing children with multi-media materials (e.g. DVDs, songs, audio books) 提供多媒體材料(如光碟、歌曲、錄音書)	4	3	2	1															
If you choose 1 (Never), please specify the reason(s). 如你選擇 1 (從不), 請註明原因: _____																				
Behavioral questions (Part I, Question 3-5)	Measuring the extension and level of formality of parents' social networks	<div>3. Where have you learned the information about the English learning strategies and/or activities? (You may choose more than one item.) 你從哪裡得知有關的英語學習策略及活動? (可選多項)</div> <div><input type="checkbox"/> School / Teachers (學校/老師) <input type="checkbox"/> Parent-teacher association (家長教師會) <input type="checkbox"/> Public Seminars / Talks (公開講座) <input type="checkbox"/> Mass media (e.g. TV, radio, newspapers, magazines) (傳媒, 如電視、電台、報紙、雜誌) <input type="checkbox"/> Other family members / Relatives (其他家庭成員/親戚) <input type="checkbox"/> Friends/ Neighbours (朋友/鄰居) <input type="checkbox"/> Private tutors (補習老師) <input type="checkbox"/> Websites/ On-line discussion forums (網頁/網上討論平台) <input type="checkbox"/> Self-experience (自身經驗) <input type="checkbox"/> Others (Please specify) (其他, 請註明): _____</div>																		
Factual questions (Part II)	Measuring children's educational backgrounds	<div>Part 2: Children's educational background 第二部份: 孩子的教育背景</div> <div>6. Number of children 孩子數目 <input type="checkbox"/> 1   <input type="checkbox"/> 2   <input type="checkbox"/> 3   <input type="checkbox"/> 4   <input type="checkbox"/> 5 or more (5 名或以上)</div> <div>7. Number of children attending primary school and level of study 現正就讀小學的子女數目及就讀年級</div> <table><tr><th>No. of children 數目</th><th>Level of study 就讀年級</th><th>Your children's overall result of the English subject in the most recent semester. You can enter either grade (e.g. A) or actual score here (e.g. 80). Please specify if the full mark is not 100. 子女最近一學期英語科的總成績。可填寫級別(例如: A)或實際得分(例如: 80)。如滿分並非 100 分, 請註明。</th></tr><tr><td>1</td><td></td><td></td></tr><tr><td>2</td><td></td><td></td></tr></table>	No. of children 數目	Level of study 就讀年級	Your children's overall result of the English subject in the most recent semester. You can enter either grade (e.g. A) or actual score here (e.g. 80). Please specify if the full mark is not 100. 子女最近一學期英語科的總成績。可填寫級別(例如: A)或實際得分(例如: 80)。如滿分並非 100 分, 請註明。	1			2											
No. of children 數目	Level of study 就讀年級	Your children's overall result of the English subject in the most recent semester. You can enter either grade (e.g. A) or actual score here (e.g. 80). Please specify if the full mark is not 100. 子女最近一學期英語科的總成績。可填寫級別(例如: A)或實際得分(例如: 80)。如滿分並非 100 分, 請註明。																		
1																				
2																				
Factual questions (Part III)	Knowing participants' home and parent's demographic background information	<div>Part 3: Home and parent's demographic background information 第三部份: 家庭及家長背景資料</div> <div>8. You are a 你是孩子的 <input type="checkbox"/> father (父親) <input type="checkbox"/> mother (母親) <input type="checkbox"/> guardian (監護人) (Please specify your relationship with the child/children. 請註明與孩子的關係_____)</div> <div>9. Your age 你的年齡 <input type="checkbox"/> 20-below 30 (20-30 或以下)      <input type="checkbox"/> 30-below 40 (30-40 或以下) <input type="checkbox"/> 40-below 50 (40-50 或以下)      <input type="checkbox"/> 50-below 60 (50-60 或以下) <input type="checkbox"/> 60 or above (60 或以上)</div>																		

### 3.5.3 Conducting the Paper-version Questionnaire Survey

Hard copies of the questionnaire were distributed to the researchers' friends and colleagues, and the parents of the two participating primary schools. The hard copy version of the questionnaire was a bilingual one, written in both Chinese and English. A total of 49 valid responses were received through the distribution of hard copy questionnaires.

First, the researcher distributed hard copies of the questionnaire to some friends and colleagues directly. As requested by the researcher, they subsequently distributed the paper-version questionnaires to their friends who they thought could meet the sampling criteria of the present study (NB: They could choose to ask their referrals to complete the questionnaire online when the e-version was made available in March 2012). The researcher's contact information was put on the front cover of the questionnaire and the respondents were told to approach the researcher in case of any problems and questions when completing the questionnaire. A total of 25 hard copy responses were received, but only 23 of them were valid as one questionnaire was found not fully completed while another one was completed by a non-Chinese parent.

The procedure for collecting data at the schools was more structured as it was dependent on the arrangements of the participating schools. The researcher was requested to send a sample of the questionnaire to both schools before the visits and to wait for the schools' responses.

School A invited the researcher to carry out the questionnaire survey on their open day scheduled in early December 2011. The researcher visited the school with an assistant. The data collection procedure took place in an activity room allocated by the school and none of the school personnel was present during the data collection procedure. All the participating parents were well-informed of the purpose of the study and they agreed to participate in both the questionnaire survey and the interviews. The school personnel scheduled individual parents to meet the researcher in person one by one around the same parents' schedules of meeting their child's class

teachers. When a parent arrived at the activity room, the assistant would first ask the parent to complete the questionnaire before having the interview. The respondents could ask the assistant questions about the questionnaire when necessary, although none of them did so. 12 parents were recruited from School A, and as mentioned earlier, the data collected from one of them were not processed, so in total, 11 valid questionnaire responses were collected.

Similarly, the questionnaire data collection at School B was mainly done through the school personnel. Explaining the difficulties of gathering a group of parents to do the questionnaire survey, the principal of School B suggested that the researcher send the questionnaire to the teacher-in-charge via email for the school to produce hard copies for the parents. School B scheduled the questionnaire survey in early March 2012. A few days before the school open day, on behalf of the researcher, the school personnel distributed the questionnaire to those parents who had agreed to participate in the study. On the school open day, the researcher arrived at the school with an assistant and received 15 completed questionnaires from the school personnel. All of the questionnaires were valid responses for further data analysis process. Based on the contact information on the questionnaires, the assistant called the parents and scheduled interviews with them. 12 of them agreed to participate in the interviews. The interviews took place on the same day in a computer room allocated by the school and none of the school personnel was present during the interviews.

#### 3.5.4 Conducting the Online Questionnaire Survey

In addition to the 49 respondents who completed the paper version of the questionnaire, at a later stage of the data collection, respondents were also recruited through a free online survey platform, [www.my3q.com](http://www.my3q.com). Development of the online questionnaire was recommended by the friends and colleagues of the researcher as they could then offer an alternative method when inviting potential respondents to complete the questionnaire. The online version of the questionnaire was thus developed and made available to respondents in March 2012. Being a free online survey platform, it is open to all Internet users. People only need to register for a free



account for uploading their questionnaires. Since usually many questionnaires are uploaded every day, in order to make sure they could access the correct questionnaire, the referred respondents were given a direct link to the questionnaire by their referrers. An online version of the questionnaire (see Appendix B) was developed based on the paper version and made available online from March to May 2012, but due to the limitations of the platform, some changes had been necessary. First, the online questionnaire only came in Chinese because the layout of the online survey platform made the bilingual version of the questionnaire appear too lengthy and clumsy so possibly discouraging the potential target parents from completing it. Also, the potential target parents were Hong Kong Chinese parents, so their literacy in Chinese was assumed. Moreover, having considered the risk of recruiting respondents who did not meet the selection criteria, the researcher added an extra question “你的孩子現正在香港就讀小學嗎?” (Is/Are your child/children studying in a Hong Kong primary school?) at the beginning of the questionnaire. If the respondent answered “No”, a message would pop up telling the respondent that was the end of the questionnaire. Also, as the screen could not display all question items at one time, the researcher needed to make use of the technical tools available on the platform to show the question items one by one to the respondents. Lastly, to safeguard their privacy, the respondents were not asked to leave any of their contact information when answering the questions, so it was not possible to invite them to participate in the interviews. Though the format of the online questionnaire could not be identical to that of the paper version, the question items were the same in both versions. In the end, 32 out of the 37 responses received from the online survey were valid.

Table 4 summarises the number of participants in the questionnaire survey recruited from different sources.

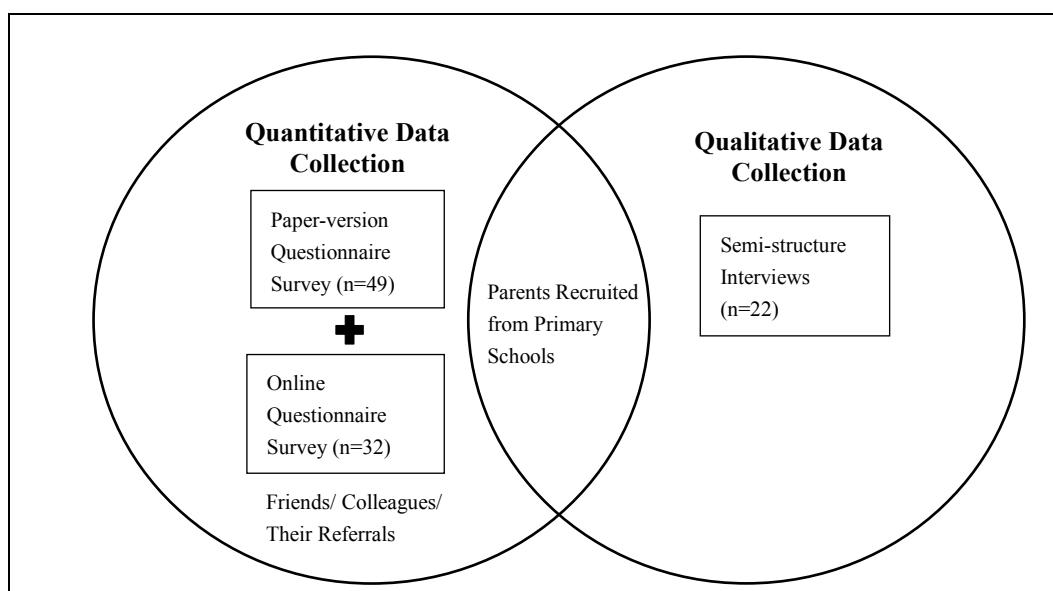


**Table 4. Number of participants in the questionnaire survey**

Source	Version	No. of responses received	No. of valid responses
Friends / colleagues	Paper	25	23
	Online	37	32
School A	Paper	12	11
School B	Paper	15	15
		n=89	n=81

Figure 3 showed the data collection process and the participants involved in the different sources of data collection. Both the quantitative and qualitative data collection processes took place during the same period (October 2011 and May 2012), but it should be noted that because the online questionnaire was open for participants only at a later stage and only available during March to May 2012.

**Figure 3. The data collection process and participants**



### 3.6 The Semi-structured Interviews

While quantitative data could be collected through the questionnaire survey, interview data from parents would provide an in-depth understanding of the parents' points of

view on their involvement in their children's English learning. Semi-structured interviews, instead of fully structured ones, were chosen to be the means of qualitative data collection in this study. Unlike a fully structured interview, a semi-structured interview only requires a set of similar, but not completely identical questions, which allows the researcher to make comparisons among the interviewed parents on the one hand, but on the other hand enables the probing into the unique information from individual interviewees (Bernard & Ryan, 2010). Bernard and Ryan listed other advantages for using semi-structured interviews as the data collection instrument. For example, they "ensure the data could be examined systematically" and "produce a lot of qualitative data quickly" (pp.29-30). More importantly, since most of the interviewees, that is, the parents concerned in this study were not familiar with academic interviews, an interview guide could give them some general ideas about the study and help them feel at ease throughout the interview.

### 3.6.1 Construction of the Interview Guide

An interview guide was an important data collection instrument for, as Bernard and Ryan suggested, "[s]emistructured interviews are based on an interview guide – a list of questions and topics that have to be covered" (p.29). The interview guide (see Appendix C) used in the present study was developed based on the research of Li (2008), in which she drew meaningful conclusions of the parental involvement among Taiwan Chinese parents based on her interview data.

Permission from Dr. Yi-chien Li had been obtained for adopting some questions from both the Chinese and English versions of her interview guide used in Li (2008). The current study adopted her interview questions about the parental strategies at home. Other questions in the interview guide were developed by the researcher, aiming at understanding parents' concerns about and constraints on strategy selection (Part II) and obtaining more information about their social network (Part III).

### 3.6.2 Procedures

As the information supplied by the interviewees mattered immensely in the study, besides encouraging the informants to express their ideas and opinions on any given topic freely, the researcher was solely responsible for conducting all interviews so as to minimise the risk of inconsistency in interpretation and presentation of the interview questions. As pointed out by Vanderstoep and Johnston (2009), “[t]he main disadvantage of all self-report measures is that the researcher must rely on the participants’ reports of their own attitudes, perceptions, or memories” (p.67). Echoing Vanderstoep and Johnston, Creswell (2013) claims that the interviewer-interviewee relationship in interview situations should be an important concern, which is not easy to address, though. In some cases, the interviewees might not want to completely expose their history or they might provide information in favour of the assumptions of the study. In this regard, friends and colleagues who had participated in the questionnaire survey were not invited to participate in one-one interviews because as they were conducted face-to-face, friends and colleagues might feel embarrassed when sharing sensitive information, such as monthly income and family conditions, with the researcher. In addition, it was not possible to approach those who had submitted the questionnaires online. As mentioned, they were not asked to leave information for further contact due to the privacy policy stipulated. In this regard, the researcher invited only the parents recruited from the two primary schools to participate in the face-to-face semi-structured interviews. First, these parents were referred by the schools. The researcher did not know them and had no personal contact with them prior to the study, which reduced the likelihood of them providing responses favourable to the researcher’s assumptions. Second, these parents had completed the questionnaire before having the interview, so the researcher could further explore their opinions and viewpoints based on their responses to the questionnaire.

As requested by the school principals, the interview guide was emailed to them for reference before the visits. The interviewees were recruited through the respective schools. 11 interviewees were recruited from School A, while 12 were from School B.





As mentioned above, one interviewee recruited from School A was excluded, so in the end, data collected from 22 interviews were processed. All the interviews were tape-recorded and permission for this was obtained from interviewees before the interviews. Table 5 shows the detailed information of the interviewees from the two primary schools.



**Table 5. Detailed information of the interviewees**

n=22	School	Parents*	Relationship with children	Age	Highest Education Attainment	Education experience outside HK	English proficiency	Household monthly income	No. of children	No. of children studying in primary school	Children's level of study (English subject results)
1	A	Sch_A2	Mother	30-below 40	Secondary 4-7	Yes. Mainland China	Poor	High	2	2	P3 (Excellent) and P6 (Good)
2	A	Sch_A3	Mother	40-below 50	Secondary 4-7	No	Good	High	2	1	P4 (Good)
3	A	Sch_A4	Grandmother	60 or above	Secondary 1-3	No	Satisfactory	Low	1	1	P3 (Good)
4	A	Sch_A5	Mother	30-below 40	Secondary 4-7	Yes. Mainland China	Satisfactory	Low	3	1	P2 (Good)
5	A	Sch_A6	Father	40-below 50	Diploma/ Associate Degree	Yes. Mainland China	Poor	High	1	1	P2 (Satisfactory)
6	A	Sch_A7	Mother	30-below 40	Undergraduate	Yes. Mainland China and Canada	Excellent	High	2	1	P4 (Excellent)
7	A	Sch_A8	Mother	40-below 50	Postgraduate	Yes. Taiwan and U.S.	Good	High	2	2	P1 (Excellent) and P4 (Excellent)
8	A	Sch_A9	Mother	40-below 50	Secondary 4-7	No	Good	High	2	2	P4 (Excellent) and P6 (Excellent)
9	A	Sch_A10	Mother	30-below 40	Secondary 1-3	Yes. Mainland China	Poor	Low	2	2	P2 (Satisfactory) and P4 (Good)
10	A	Sch_A11	Mother	40-below 50	Secondary 4-7	No	Poor	High	3	2	P1 (Excellent) and P4 (Good)
11	B	Sch_B1	Mother	40-below 50	Secondary 4-7	No	Good	High	1	1	P3 (Excellent)
12	B	Sch_B2	Mother	30-below 40	Secondary 4-7	Yes. Mainland China	Poor	Low	2	1	P6 (Excellent)
13	B	Sch_B3	Mother	30-below 40	Diploma/ Associate Degree	Yes. U.K.	Satisfactory	Mid	2	2	P1 (Excellent) and P3 (Excellent)
14	B	Sch_B4	Mother	40-below 50	Secondary 1-3	No	Satisfactory	Low	3	1	P6 (Good)
15	B	Sch_B5	Father	40-below 50	Secondary 4-7	No	Good	Mid	2	1	P1 (Excellent)
16	B	Sch_B6	Mother	40-below 50	Secondary 4-7	Yes. Mainland China	Poor	Low	2	1	P6 (Excellent)
17	B	Sch_B7	Mother	40-below 50	Secondary 4-7	No	Good	High	1	1	P6 (Excellent)
18	B	Sch_B8	Mother	30-below 40	Secondary 4-7	No	Satisfactory	Low	2	1	P3 (Good)
19	B	Sch_B9	Father	40-below 50	Diploma/ Associate Degree	No	Satisfactory	Mid	2	2	P3 (Excellent) and P6 (Good)
20	B	Sch_B10	Mother	40-below 50	Secondary 4-7	No	Satisfactory	Low	2	1	P6 (Fair)
21	B	Sch_B11	Mother	50-below 60	Primary School	No	Poor	Low	1	1	P4 (Excellent)
22	B	Sch_B12	Mother	40-below 50	Diploma/ Associate Degree	No	Satisfactory	Mid	2	1	P4 (Fair)

\*The interview data collected from one of the parents from School A (Sch\_A1) was excluded from the present study.

### 3.6.3 Interviews at School A

The interviews were conducted at School A on 9 December, 2011. On the same day, the school was having its open day and parents of the students were asked to meet the class teachers to collect the school reports and have short discussions with the teachers of their children's performance at school. The participating parents were asked to go to the assigned activity room themselves according to the schedule planned by the school personnel. They were scheduled to visit the researcher one by one and there would be a time interval of about five to fifteen minutes between any two interviewees. When the parents arrived at the room, they were first asked to complete the questionnaire near the entrance of the room. Upon completion of the questionnaire, the parents were invited to proceed with the interview in the same room. Although the interviews were scheduled, because of the delay or the prolonged meeting time with the class teachers, there was the possibility that the parents might leave after completing the questionnaire; some might not arrive on time and there might be two parents in the activity room at the same time. In order that parents would not overhear one another's responses, the researcher had the interview with the parents in another corner of the room.

The interviews at School A were mainly conducted in Cantonese, except for two conducted in Putonghua. Though these two interviewees understood Cantonese, they requested the interviews be conducted in Putonghua because they were native Putonghua speakers and wanted to accurately express their ideas in their native language. One of them was from mainland China (Parent Sch\_A6) and the other was from Taiwan (Parent Sch\_A8).

### 3.6.4 Interviews at School B

The school personnel of School B helped to recruit the parents and distribute the questionnaire to those who were interested in taking part in the study. The parents were informed that if they were willing to participate in the interview, they should complete the pro-forma reply attached to the questionnaire. Together with an assistant,

the researcher visited the school on its open day on 3 March 2012. The school allocated a computer room for the researcher to conduct the interviews. Based on the completed questionnaires returned by the school personnel, the assistant scheduled the interviews and called the parents concerned. The interviews were conducted one after another. The researcher successfully interviewed 12 parents at School B. All the interviews were conducted in Cantonese.

### 3.7 Data Analysis

#### 3.7.1 Quantitative Data

Data collected from the questionnaire were analysed by SPSS (v.16). First, the coding of data was done based on the participants' responses to the items on the pre-designed questionnaires. Both a descriptive statistics method and quantitative correlation analysis were used to analyse the data.

Pallant (2005) discussed the purposes of using descriptive statistics, including “to address specific research questions” (p.49). The function of Frequencies was used to compute and analyse the participants' responses to Question 1 of the questionnaire. Data generated were used to address the research question “What strategies do Hong Kong Chinese parents adopt at home or outside school to assist their children's English learning?” After comparing the percentage and mean score of each item, the researcher obtained a comprehensive picture of the various kinds of support parents provide to their children, for example, which type(s) of strategies has / have been the most or the least frequently adopted by the participating parents.

Quantitative correlation analysis was used to measure to what extent each variable (i.e. parents' educational background, average monthly household income and the extension of their social network) and parents' strategies in supporting children's English learning were correlated, in order to address the research question “How are parents' economic capital, cultural capital and social capital related to their strategies?” Cunningham and Aldrich (2012) defined a correlation coefficient as “a

numerical value and descriptive statistic that indicates the degree (strength) to which two variables are related and whether any detected relationship is positive or negative (direction)” (p.156). In the present study, Spearman rank correlation was chosen for the quantitative correlation analyses because the scales used in the study were measured at the ordinal level (Cunningham and Aldrich, 2012; Kinnear & Gray, 2009).

In this regard, the Spearman’s correlation coefficients between ten individual types of parental strategies listed in Question 1 and individual variables, namely parents’ educational background (Question 11) and English proficiency (Question 16), average monthly household income (Question 17) and the extension of their social network (Question 3-5) were computed to investigate how these variables are related to the different types of parental strategies, or in other words, to investigate whether the individual variables and different types of parental strategies are significantly related or positively related.

Furthermore, quantitative correlation analysis was also used to address the research question “Which of the strategies can effectively help children’s English learning?” The Spearman’s correlation coefficients between the ten listed parental strategies and children’s academic attainment in the English subject at school (Question 7) were computed and compared to see which of the strategies are the most or least effective in helping children enhance their English results at school. In addition, a multiple regression analysis was done to further examine the significance of conducting these strategies on children’s English results when they were acted together and the various types of parental resources were taken into consideration.

### 3.7.2 Qualitative Data

“The first step in systematic analysis is the conversion of audio into digital text” (Bernard & Ryan, 2010, p.48). Since most of the interviews were conducted in Cantonese, which is a Chinese dialect without standardised written forms, there arose the technical difficulty of transcribing the interviews verbatim. As a result, the

researcher chose to transcribe the interviews into written Chinese and follow the “denaturalized transcription” method (Oliver, Serovich & Mason, 2005). With this transcription style, the transcription focuses more on the content of the interview. As they put it, “accuracy concerns the substance of the interviews, that is, the meanings and perceptions created and shared during a conversation” (p.1277). In other words, elements of human speech such as pauses, non-meaningful repetitions and nonverbal sounds are not included in the transcription. The coding was done by the researcher alone. The interview data collected would help the understanding of the parents’ perception of their roles in their children’s English learning and provide details to supplement the quantitative findings.

For the sake of consistency, though the interviews were conducted in either Cantonese or Putonghua, the interviews were translated into English for data presentation. Random back translation (translated the English translation back into Chinese) by a second coder was done to ensure the quality and accuracy of the translation. In order to avoid revealing the identities of the interviewees, labels (e.g. Sch\_A1) were used instead of their names in the transcription. Furthermore, deemed irrelevant and distracting, the demographic detail of gender was not asked at interviews. As a consequence, the generic “he” was used in the transcription when a participating parent had mentioned the child concerned, unless the parent had used some gender-specific word such as “daughter”, “sister” or “brother”.

### 3.8 Reliability and Validity

The researcher installed various mechanisms at different stages throughout the study to minimise the threats to its reliability and validity.

#### 3.8.1 Instrument Development

A pilot study was conducted because the researcher aimed to “create a survey instrument that is grounded in the views of participants” (Creswell, 2009, p.219). Kemper et al. (2003) emphasised that a study may fail if a question cannot be



“empirically addressed” or the data collection instrument used cannot provide “sufficiently relevant and reliable data”. A pilot study was thus a crucial initial step in this research in order to reduce the chance of having any of these errors. Therefore, a pilot study was carried out from February to April 2011 when the researcher was devising the questionnaire and interview protocol for the present study. Through this pilot study, the researcher aimed at validating the quality of the data collection instruments as well as the future data collection procedures. Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009), in their book, illustrated the reasons for carrying out a pilot study before collecting the data for a research. Reasons they mentioned included “developing and testing the adequacy of the research”, “[d]esigning a research protocol” and “[a]ssessing whether the research protocol is realistic and workable” (p.203). In view of these reasons, the researcher interviewed a primary school English teacher, a university student and a mother of a primary school pupil. They were asked to attempt the questionnaire and give comments on the questions. The three were chosen because they represented three major groups of stakeholders, namely teacher, student and parent with regard to the common English learning environment in Hong Kong. All three of them were briefed on the objectives of the study and they all agreed to participate in the pilot study voluntarily.

The primary school teacher provided the researcher with the latest information about teaching English at a primary school and the primary education system in Hong Kong. In addition, the teacher made some suggestions about the questionnaire based on her observation and communication with parents. The university student was asked to reflect on the parental involvement he had experienced when he was receiving primary education. His comments made the questionnaire and interview questions more reflective of the Hong Kong parents’ strategies. A university student instead of a primary student was invited because he would be mature and independent enough to provide information from his own learning experience. Last, a mother of a primary school pupil was included to check the validity of the questionnaire and the interview questions. At the points where she needed clarification, the researcher took notes so as to revise the questions concerned accordingly after the pilot study.



The questionnaire and the interview protocol were reviewed and revised based on the feedback from the three participants, but the responses from them were not further analysed and discussed in the present study. For example, a question was added to the interview protocol, asking parents “你認為在香港，學習英語重要嗎？為什麼？”(Do you think learning English is important in Hong Kong? Why?), as suggested by the primary school teacher. She made this suggestion because she argued it is important to know what parents think about the learning of English in Hong Kong and meaningful to find out the reasons behind their views. The wording of another question was revised in response to the comment from the parent. The first version of the question was “你會如何形容你在孩子英語學習過程中的參與？”(How would you describe your involvement in your child’s English learning?). It was revised into “你會如何形容你在孩子英語學習過程中的角色？”(How would you describe your role in your child’s English learning?), because the parent found the term “參與” (involvement) rather abstract and broad, and the term “角色” (role) more understandable and specific. Also, she expressed that it was difficult to think of suitable answers for the former, but was easier to do so for the latter.

Considering the characteristics of the setting of the participants (Hong Kong Chinese parents) as well as the convenience of reporting the data, the researcher adopted both Chinese and English as the medium when constructing the data collection instruments. Because of the bilingual nature of the instruments, to ensure the validity of the question items in the questionnaire and the interview protocol, the researcher invited a colleague with a master’s degree in translation to do back translation of all the items. Comparison of the translations was made and each and every question item in the questionnaire was reviewed. Where discrepancies were found, the researcher would discuss the issue with the translator colleague and make appropriate revisions. The interview guide was subsequently revised likewise. Notwithstanding that Li had included both the English and written Chinese versions of her interview questions in her study, the back translation and review were done for the bilingual interview guide used in this study.



### 3.8.2 Data Coding

Coding of the quantitative data was done by the researcher. Codes were defined based on the questionnaire items developed. For further analysis by SPSS (v.16), which is mainly used for analysing numerical data, the researcher developed different sets of codes to handle different types of question items in the questionnaire. For example, when coding the responses to scaled-questions, such as Question 1 of Part 1, the coding corresponded to the frequency scale used, that is, “4” was used to represent if a participant answer “4-very often” in a question item and so on. When handling questions like Question 3, which asked a participant to indicate where he learned the information about English learning strategies, “1” was used to represent he learned the information from a particular source, “0” represented that he never learned information from this source. For the open-ended items, the researcher put a special remark there (“0” for not answered and “1” for answered) and the responses were handled case by case. When the coding was complete, a second coder was invited to conduct a random check on the coding, which was followed by an inter-coder comparison. A second review of the coding was then carried out and errors in the coding were eliminated as advised by the second coder.

Coding of the interview data was done with reference to Miles, Huberman and Saldaña (2014). At the beginning stage, the researcher followed the method of “Deductive coding” (p.81). A set of codes was developed based on the pre-set interview protocol, including “roles”, “use of English materials”, “time spent with children”, “effective strategies”, “ineffective strategies”, “English materials (factors)”, “difficulties”, “outside resources”, to name a few. Since all the parents participating in the interviews were asked the seventeen common interview questions, this set of codes provided an indexing system for categorising parents’ opinions. In particular, parents’ responses were usually not well-structured resulting in their mentioning similar ideas at different times during the interview, so this set of codes helped to group ideas for further analysis.

More codes were developed at a later stage to cater for those parents’ responses that



could not be included in the prepared categories. In addition to generating more codes for some common opinions, because some responses were quite unique, “In Vivo coding” method was used for handling them. According to Miles, Huberman and Saldaña (2014), “In Vivo coding uses words or short phrases from the participant’s own language in the data record as codes” (p.74).

After the preliminary coding was done, the researcher reviewed and refined the codes. Before proceeding with further analysis, the researcher followed the “intercoder agreement in qualitative research” procedure suggested by Creswell and Plano Clark (2011). A second coder was invited to randomly review the interview transcripts and the coding. He discussed with the first coder (the researcher) the parts he did not agree with in the transcripts and the coding. The discrepancies were solved based on the consensus reached by both the researcher and the second coder.

### 3.8.3 Checking the Validity of the Scale

Only Question 1 in the questionnaire involved using a scale to measure the frequency of adopting individual strategies by parents. The researcher adopted a participant-centred approach when devising this part of the questionnaire. Instead of aiming at working out any models for the parental strategies solely from the questionnaire, by asking parents to report the frequency and strategies adopted, the researcher employed the first part of the questionnaire to elicit the parents’ perception of their involvement and level of participation (e.g. frequency). This was necessary as it is hardly feasible to verify and count the actual frequency of particular parental strategies and it is an understandable limitation that parents’ perception is not objectively quantifiable. As mentioned above, because this part of the questionnaire is participant-centred and mainly relies on participants’ self-reported data, it is therefore important to minimise the possible random error of the scale. As suggested by Pallant (2007), one of the commonly used indicators for checking the reliability of a scale is “internal consistency”, which refers to “the degree to which the items that make up the scale are all measuring the same underlying attribute (i.e. the extent to which the items “hang together”)” (p.6), and the most common methodology is to test the

Cronbach's coefficient alpha among the items. In other words, the Cronbach's coefficient alpha can statistically validate the internal consistency of a scale by checking the correlation among attributes that form a scale, that is, the ten items of parental strategies and activities in the present study.

The researcher did a preliminary Cronbach's coefficient alpha test after receiving the first 20 questionnaire responses completed by her direct friends and colleagues in order to check the reliability of the scale used in the questionnaire. This test was done before the data collection at the two schools. Had this check only been done after all the interviews were completed and changes subsequently made a second round of school visits would have been required and this might not have been possible to arrange. The test was only applied to Question 1 of Part One of the questionnaire since it was the only group of questions measured in a scale. The Cronbach's coefficient alpha resulted in the preliminary test was  $\beta=.75$ . According to DeVellis (2003) the ideal Cronbach's coefficient alpha of a scale should be  $>.7$  (as cited in Pallant, 2007, p.95). The result showed a good internal consistency of the scale measuring the frequency of parents adopting various English learning strategies and activities outside school. The same questionnaire then remained to be used as the data collection instrument without further changes (except those changes made in the online questionnaire as stipulated by the online survey platform).

The same test was run again upon the completion of the data collection procedures for the main study. A total of 81 responses to the questionnaire (including the 20 responses in the preliminary test) were tested, and the Cronbach's alpha value resulted was  $\beta=.733$ , which further assured the satisfactory internal consistency of the scale.

### 3.9 Triangulation of Quantitative and Qualitative Data

Though the present study relied on the self-reported data from the participants, as Creswell and Plano Clark (2011) stated, the convergent design is usually used for the purpose of "corroboration and validation" by comparing and contrasting the

quantitative and qualitative data (p.77). So triangulation (Mertens, 2010) of data collected from the survey and interviews was performed in order to provide a more complete understanding of the parental involvement in children's second language learning.



## CHAPTER 4

### FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

This chapter presents statistical and interview findings for understanding what strategies that Hong Kong Chinese parents usually adopt at home or outside school to assist their children's English learning.

The data collected from both the questionnaire survey and interviews showed that parental involvement is not uncommon among Hong Kong Chinese parents. First, the data obtained from the questionnaire survey have revealed that without exception, parents attempt different strategies for their children's English learning outside school though the amount and variety of the activities may vary.

In general, Hong Kong Chinese parents believe that a good command of English is essential for their children's success in further studies as well as future careers. The present study examines why parents have such a belief in order to seek an explanation as to why they are interested in playing a part in their children's English learning process. This will be pursued through understanding how they perceive their roles in this process and why they think they have the responsibility to do so. This chapter discusses which English learning strategies that parents often adopt can positively help with children's performance in English subjects at school.

Last but not least, the present study also investigates and discusses to what extent the availability of parents' resources affects their adoption of English learning strategies from the perspectives of Pierre Bourdieu's Concept of Capital and how the three types of parental capital are related to each other.

#### 4.1 Hong Kong Chinese Parents' Strategies in Their Children's English Learning at Home or Outside School

The most impressive finding from the questionnaire survey is that none of the



participants responded “never” to all ten common types of parental strategies provided in the questionnaire, which means all the participating Hong Kong Chinese parents have adopted at least one learning strategy (in fact all of them adopted more than one) to assist their children to learn English outside school. In the questionnaire, parents were asked to use a 4-point scale (4=very often and 1=never) to indicate their frequency of adopting the ten types of common parental strategies to help their children to learn English at home or outside school. Table 6 shows a summary of parents’ responses to the questions. In addition, an open-ended question (Question 2 of Part 1) was included in the questionnaire to invite parents to suggest any English learning strategies they have adopted but were not included in the ten provided items. 16 parents responded to this open-ended question. Their responses were read and analysed. Among them, two responses were not answering the question. One said that the parent did not know English, while the other stated he would ask his domestic helper to take care of it. For the other fourteen, all of them were elaboration of their answers to Question 1 of Part 1. For example, three of them mentioned the details of the “parent-developed English study plan or activities”, such as asking his children to recite five new words a day. Four of them specified that the English tutorial classes their children enrolled in were taught by native English speakers. One of them simply repeated that he read English books with his child. The other six suggested they would let their children learned from English TV channel which was included as a multi-media source in the data analysis.

**Table 6. Parents' frequency of employing different types of English learning strategies at home or outside school**

	<b>English learning strategies and activities at home or outside school</b>	<b>Mean (Possible maximum = 4)</b>
1	Visiting bookstores or libraries with children	3.33
2	Providing children with English written materials (e.g. English or Chinese-English bilingual books, flashcards, workbooks)	3.22
3	Assisting with homework (English subjects) (including both school and after-school programmes)	3.19
4	Reading English or Chinese-English bilingual books with children	3.11
5	Enrolling children in after-school programmes (e.g. English playgroups, tutorial classes)	3.02
6	Providing children with multi-media materials (e.g. DVDs, songs, audio books)	2.89
7	Speaking to children in English (including single words and phrases)	2.84
8	Conducting parent-developed English study plan or activities	2.78
9	Enrolling children in English certification exams and relative preparation courses (e.g. IELTS, TOFEL, Cambridge Young Learners English (YLE) tests)	2.23
10	Travelling with children (including enrolling children in study tours)	2.00

n=81 (In this question, a 4-point scale was used: 4=very often, 3=often, 2=seldom, 1=never.)

#### 4.1.1 Providing Reading Materials

Among the ten English learning activities listed in the questionnaire, providing children with English reading materials is the most frequent strategies adopted by Hong Kong Chinese parents. The three strategies providing these reading materials to children are “visiting bookstores or libraries with children”, “providing children with English written materials” and “reading English or Chinese bilingual books with children”. The mean scores of these three items are all above 3.0, with “visiting bookstore or libraries with children” scoring the highest. A remarkable finding is that none of the 81 parents indicated “never” to the items “visiting bookstores or libraries with children” and “providing children with English written materials”.

The interview data is consistent with the survey findings. All 22 parents participating in the interviews reported that English books are a typical and major type of English learning resources available in their homes. For example, when being asked to talk

about the English learning resources available at home, Parent Sch\_A4 mentioned that she usually buys English story books and diaries for her grandchild, and sometimes she takes him to bookstores.

*(Sch\_A4)*

*I usually buy him some English story books and diaries. I let him read those diaries. When he does not understand, I will teach him.*

In addition to reading materials, English workbooks or supplementary exercises are very popular English written materials parents provide for their children.

*(Sch\_A5)*

*I will buy my child some [workbooks], for example, those reading comprehension exercises.*

As evident in the questionnaire survey, “visiting bookstores or libraries with children” is another common way for parents to let their children have access to English written materials. Almost half of parents (10 out of 22) explicitly indicated in the interviews that they would go to libraries or bookstores with their children to select English reading materials. Parent Sch\_A2 said she would borrow English books with her son and accompany him when reading the books at home.

*(Sch\_A2)*

*English books are available in public libraries and at the learning centre where he is taking an English class. I accompany him to borrow books and we read them together at home.*

#### 4.1.2 Assisting with Homework

“Assisting with homework” is another strategy that parents quite frequently adopt (mean score = 3.19), as it is a direct way for parents to learn about their children’s English learning progress and help them to do well in English subjects at school.





However, parents may not solely count on themselves when assisting with their children's homework. In the interviews, four parents reported that they could only offer help when their children were attending junior levels. When they could no longer manage their children's English homework at a later stage, they would offer children extra external assistance. As suggested in the study of Tam and Chan (2010), it is likely that when parents find themselves not able to assist their children with their English homework, they may seek external assistance. For example, six parents reported that when their own English proficiency is not good enough to handle their children's homework, they may seek help from other sources, such as hiring private tutors or sending their children to learning centres.

*(Sch\_B11)*

*We cannot manage to teach him. We need to hire a private tutor, because both of us [father and mother] do not know [English].*

Parent Sch\_B7 said because she is working, it is difficult for her to spend much time assisting children with their homework.

*(Sch\_B7)*

*In these few months, I am too busy with my work, so he is attending a tutorial class at a learning centre.*

#### 4.1.3 Enrolling Children in After-school Programmes

The responses of these parents also explain why many parents enroll their children in after-school programmes, including English tutorial classes (mean score = 3.02). Based on the interview data, these after-school programmes are mainly English learning classes, but these classes were different in nature. The after-school classes can be remedial classes where the tutors usually follow up on what the children have learned at school and give them extra assistance with their English homework. Another popular type of English learning class does not have much association with the school curriculum, but focuses more on drilling children's English skills in

particular areas, for example, oral English or writing skills. In addition to the tutorial classes at a learning centre, Parent Sch\_B7 enrolled her child in some English drilling classes outside school.

*Sch\_B7: There is not much I need to do at home, because he is attending some English drilling courses, such as comprehension or writing skill courses.*

*Interviewer: By some organisations other than the school?*

*Sch\_B7: Yes.*

Six parents participating in the interviews said they would deliberately choose the English courses taught by native English speakers as they think it would provide their children with a better English learning environment. Parent Sch\_A11 offered both types of English classes to her child.

*Interviewer: What kind of English activities do you do together with your child?*

*Sch\_A11: Reading books, doing homework online and those [classes] with a foreign teacher.*

*Interviewer: You mean going to a tutorial class?*

*Sch\_A11: No. On top of tutorial class, he also attends a class taught by a foreign teacher.*

#### 4.1.4 Providing Multi-media Materials

On the other hand, it is interesting to note that when compared with reading materials, multi-media materials, such as DVDs and songs, are less frequently used by parents (mean score = 2.89). The interview data may have provided a sensible explanation for this apparent inconsistency. Most of the interviewees reported that they would make use of the Internet resources and TV programmes as handy multi-media English learning resources available at home. First, parents reported that they frequently make use of the two free local English television channels as a means to create an English environment for their children. The responses of Parent Sch\_B3 and Sch\_B4

are quite typical.

*(Sch\_B3)*

*They like watching cartoons on Pearl [a local English TV channel]. Since they were small, I used to let them watch cartoons on Pearl. Let them have more chances to learn more English.*

*(Sch\_B4)*

*I usually tune in to the news report on Pearl. He may not have time to watch it, because it is for his elder brother, but he can listen to it as well. I hope this method can help him.*

In addition to the free TV channels, parents may also subscribe to some pay English channels to allow a wider range of English programmes for their children. For example, Parent Sch\_A8 said she had subscribed to the Disney Channel because apart from cartoons, there are some English dramas and shows suitable for her children available on the channel.

Learning from the interviews, the researcher found the Internet is another popular source of multi-media learning resources among parents. Many Hong Kong schools have developed their official websites and have made some online learning activities available on their school intranet. The two schools participating in the present study have both developed their own websites. Both schools have designed some English assignments and learning activities on their websites and parents make use of these online resources to assist their children's English learning. For example, parents from School A generally appreciated the English learning page called Fun English Corner (pseudo name) created by the school. Parent Sch\_A8 said her children enjoyed doing the school's online English learning activities.

*(Sch\_A8)*

*Every day, their school posts a passage on the Fun English Corner. They [my children] are eager to do it every day.*

Nonetheless, in the interviews, parents reveal very different opinions about using online learning resources. While five parents (including Sch\_A8) appreciate the easy accessibility and the variety of online materials, another parent questioned their effectiveness. In the opinion of Parent Sch\_A11, some online English assignments cannot effectively help her child develop English skills.

*(Sch\_A11)*

*I think some of the online assignments sound too boring to children. In particular, I think those only asking children to do assignments online are not effective.*

The parents' responses about choosing various types of English learning materials, such as online learning materials, TV programmes, as well as books from libraries or bookstores have revealed not only important evidence of parental involvement, but also parental control on the selection of learning resources. Parents also give children advice on learning materials to choose. On the one hand, 13 parents claimed in the interviews that they allow their children to have flexibility in choosing English learning activities or materials, but on the other hand, they act as a screener to make the final decision on the purchase of the materials or enrolment for the activities. Therefore, investigation into what criteria or elements parents would consider when choosing the materials and activities for their children is needed.

#### 4.1.5 Speaking to Children in English

It is common that parents think “speak more” is a classic but useful means to enhance one's English proficiency. The comment from Parent Sch\_A6 represents a typical view among parents.

*(Sch\_A6)*

*I think language environment is of the most importance for learning English. For example, if he [the child] can interactively chat with an English-speaking teacher, the most important...he is willing to express, to speak.*

Therefore, parents try different methods to provide their children with more chances to speak English. As mentioned earlier, some parents (6 out of the 22 participating in interviews) reported sending their children to English classes taught by foreign tutors and 2 of these 22 parents deliberately employ English-speaking domestic helpers, but surprisingly, “speaking to children in English” ranks only the seventh among the ten strategies (mean score = 2.84), which means not many parents frequently adopt this strategy at home. Some parents reflected that though they would try, they think they cannot do it well because of their limited English knowledge. Parent Sch\_A2 expressed her concerns during the interview.

*(Sch\_A2)*

*The duration of English lessons at school is limited, but when my child returns home from school, because my own English proficiency is poor, I can't help him. In addition, my pronunciation is not accurate. I am worried that my child cannot learn the correct pronunciation.*

#### 4.1.6 Conducting Parent-developed English Study Activities

Similar to “speaking to children in English”, “conducting parent-developed English study plans or activities” is a less frequent strategy adopted by parents who are concerned that their own proficiency and knowledge of English are not up to standard. Although initiating English learning activities can be regarded as an alternative for parents to provide their children with an English learning environment, according to the interview data, the parent-initiated activities vary and some require that parents should have a good command of English. One point in common among these activities is that parents are all trying to put their effort into helping their children’s English learning. Parent Sch\_A4 reported that she would use role-play as a means to help her grandchild to review what has been taught at school.

*(Sch\_A4)*

*Sometimes it would be in the form of question-and-answer. He asked me to play the student while he acted as the teacher. Sometimes we changed our roles; I acted as the*



*teacher and he was the student. We often use this method to review the school work.*

To provide intensive English writing training for her child, Parent Sch\_B10 asked her child to do free writing at home, and she would set clear guidelines for her child.

*Sch\_B10: During long holidays, such as the summer holiday, we will strengthen the training in his weak areas. During summer holiday, in addition to doing verb tense exercises, we will give him intensive training in his English composition.*

*Interviewer: How to train?*

*Sch\_B10: Free writing, such as asking him to write something about his experience of trips or going to swim, etc.*

*Interviewer: Did you set some requirements that are similar to the school's? For example, would you set a word limit or the length of the composition?*

*Sch\_B10: The school required him to write about 60 words, but we asked him to write about 100 words. If we train him to achieve a higher requirement, then he will find it not difficult when the school sets a lower level.*

Both Parent Sch\_A3 and Parent Sch\_A8 shared the practice of having an English day at home so the children practise oral English. More importantly, setting the English day as a regular exercise, Parent Sch\_A8 thought it was a good way to boost her children's confidence in speaking English, but she emphasised that parents' English proficiency would be an important consideration for having an English day at home.

*Sch\_A8: We always talk with them [the children] in English. The conversations are completely in English. Although they may not speak accurately, they are brave enough to express in English.*

*Interviewer: So they are more confident.*

*Sch\_A8: Yes. And, we have an English day every week. [...] Because the school had an English day, we followed it, but we did it casually*

*before; we did not set any guidelines. In recent months, we began this [regular English day].*

Parent Sch\_B7 used other ways to train her child's oral English. She would take her child to Stanley, a popular tourist spot in Hong Kong, in order to give him more chances to speak English. She would also travel abroad with her child for him to have more practice of speaking English.

*(Sch\_B7)*

*Sometimes we deliberately take him to places like Stanley, where more foreigners will be there. We give him opportunities to buy food on his own, but he must speak English, or we may go on trips with him. Then he can practise English during the trips.*

#### 4.1.7 Travelling

As Parent Sch\_B7 claimed, it would be a good chance to let children practise their oral English during overseas trips. However, “travelling with their children” or “enrolling their children in study tours” is the least frequent strategy adopted by parents (mean score = 2.0). 30 out of the 81 respondents of the questionnaire remarked that they had never adopted travelling as an English learning strategy. Eight of them gave supplementary information when answering the questionnaire that they think their children are too small to be able to learn through the trips. Consideration of the expenses is another reason for parents to hesitate considering this strategy. Parent Sch\_B10 stated that she wished to let her child join some study tours, but she could not make it at the moment because she could not afford the costs.

*Interviewer: Then why don't you consider study tours?*

*Sch\_B10: It's too expensive. I can't afford.*

#### 4.1.8 Enrolling Children in English Certification Exams

“The children are too small” is also one of the main reasons to explain why many of



the parents (28 out of 81) said they had never enrolled children in English certification exams or relative preparation courses, which is the second least frequently adopted strategy (mean score = 2.23) among the ten. “The children are too busy already” is another popular reason that stopped parents from enrolling their children in these courses. For example, Parent Sch\_A9 mentioned that the daily schedule of her children is already very packed and they feel tired after school. In addition, she thought her children were already facing vigorous competition in the learning environment in Hong Kong, especially her elder child, who is now in senior primary and is going to enter a secondary school, so she does not want to add more stress.

The findings of the present study have reassured the researcher that parents devote much effort to assisting their children’s English learning. The results not only support the findings of the study of Li (2008) that parents are keen on providing different kinds of English learning support to their children, but also provide evidence that fits the local context, that is, the circle of Chinese parents in Hong Kong. But it is noteworthy that parents’ frequency of adopting different strategies varies. Some parents emphasise the importance of providing children with reading materials but think it is not useful to enroll children in English learning groups. Therefore, it is useful to be able to look more closely at the variation among the parents, as the interview data revealed some thought-provoking points for an extended discussion about these variations from two aspects. First, parents who appeared to have adopted similar English learning strategies at home may apply them using different styles. How do they actually apply the resources or conduct the activities? Second, the findings have provided solid evidence for comparing the popularity of various common parental strategies among Hong Kong Chinese parents and have revealed that the frequencies of carrying out the strategies varied. What are the factors that would likely affect parents’ choices of adopting these learning strategies?

#### 4.2 How Parents Implement English Learning Strategies at Home

The previous section has discussed the variation found among parents’ choices of





different English learning strategies. In fact, when discussing the effectiveness of these strategies, how parents implement them at home should also be taken into account. The present study has hinted that obvious differences have been found among parents with regard to the time they spent with children on these English learning strategies and the quality of implementing these strategies at home.

#### 4.2.1 Time Spent with Children on the Strategies

An obvious difference in how parents adopted the English learning strategies at home is found in the amount of time spent with their children using these strategies. To further explore the issue in the interviews, the researcher invited the parents (22 out of 81) to report, on average, the amount of time they usually spend with their children on English learning activities and to describe how they spend the time in detail. Table 7 reports a summary of the average time, on a weekly basis, that parents usually spend with children on English learning activities. The results are quite varied, ranging from “too little that hardly quantifiable” to about “14 hours per week”. On average, these parents usually spend about four to five hours a week on their children’s English leaning activities. In other words, on average, less than an hour a day is spent helping their children with English learning.

**Table 7. Parents' average amount of time spent with their children on their English learning activities**

n=22	Parents	Relationship with children	Occupation	Time spend with children on English learning activities (average time <i>per week</i> )*
1	Sch_A2	Mother	Housewife	About 1 hour
2	Sch_A3	Mother	Working	7 hours
3	Sch_A4	Grandmother	Housewife	14 hours
4	Sch_A5	Mother	Working	14 hours
5	Sch_A6	Father	Working	Too little that hardly quantifiable
6	Sch_A7	Mother	Working	7 hours
7	Sch_A8	Mother	Housewife	7 hours
8	Sch_A9	Mother	Housewife	About 2 hours
9	Sch_A10	Mother	Housewife	3-4 hours
10	Sch_A11	Mother	Working	1-2 hours
11	Sch_B1	Mother	Working	1 hour
12	Sch_B2	Mother	Housewife	Too little that hardly quantifiable
13	Sch_B3	Mother	Housewife	3-4 hours
14	Sch_B4	Mother	Working (Part-time)	3-4 hours
15	Sch_B5	Father	Working	7 hours
16	Sch_B6	Mother	Housewife	Too little that hardly quantifiable
17	Sch_B7	Mother	Working	2-4 hours
18	Sch_B8	Mother	Housewife	3-4 hours
19	Sch_B9	Father	Working	Too little that hardly quantifiable
20	Sch_B10	Mother	Housewife	3 hours
21	Sch_B11	Mother	Housewife	5-7 hours
22	Sch_B12	Mother	Housewife	7 hours

\*The parents were asked to report the time they usually spend with their children in a day, but some parents found it easier to report the time they spend weekly. For an easy and direct comparison, the data have been computed on a weekly basis. For example, if a parent reported that he or she usually spends one hour a day on the English learning activities, the entry would be presented as "7 hours a week".

As Table 7 shows only Parent Sch\_A4 and Sch\_A5 claimed to spend about 14 hours a week on their children's English learning activities. Another eight parents usually spend an hour a day on these activities, while about half of them reported that they only spend several hours on them weekly. Four of the parents reported that the time spent on their children's English learning activities is too little to be of statistical significance. It is quite surprising that among these four parents, two are housewives (Sch\_B2 and Sch\_B6). Coincidentally, both of them explained that they spent less time with their children on English learning activities when their children became older (both of their children are studying in primary 6). The change can be evident in the response of Sch\_B2.

*Interviewer: So did you spend much more time [with your child on English activities] when he was small?*

*Sch\_B2: Yes, I spent much time at that time when he was studying in primary one and two. After he returned home from school, he could raise questions whenever he encountered something he did not know when he was doing his homework.*

The other two who reported that they usually spend very little time on children's English learning activities are working fathers (Sch\_A6 and Sch\_B9). Both of them reported that they cannot spend much time with their children on these activities because they are busy with their work. While Parent Sch\_A6 explained that matters concerning the child's education are handled by his wife, Parent Sch\_B9 said he and his wife, who is also working, count on their domestic helper.

#### 4.2.2 Quality and Effectiveness of the Strategies

Another important consideration regarding the effectiveness of conducting the parental strategies is how parents actually apply the strategies at home. Because all the parents participating in the interviews claimed that they provide reading materials for their children, to achieve a direct and consistent comparison, the researcher asked the parents to report how they would use the reading materials with their children. Their responses highlighted great differences in how they make use of the reading materials at home. Some parents, like Parent Sch\_B9, provide reading materials to their children, but they seldom spend much time reading with their children because they are working parents.

*(Sch\_B9)*

*Both of us [mother and father] need to work, and the domestic helper cannot manage him, so we let him do the reading himself. Because I think if he is interested, he will read the books on his initiative. If he is not interested, even though we force him to do so, he would just look at the books in a daze.*

Some parents do accompany their children when they are reading, but they have no interaction related to the English reading materials. Parent Sch\_B6 said though she and her child were reading together, they would each read their own material.

*(Sch\_B6)*

*We used to read our own materials, but we usually sit together when reading.*

Some other parents adopt a more proactive approach. They would not only prepare the reading materials for their children, but also read the materials together with them, like Parent Sch\_B5. He said he would prepare some English story books and put them on his child's desk so that his child can have access to them at any time, and he would read the story books with his child.

*(Sch\_B5)*

*We share the stories together. We read the English story books. I can then observe which level he has reached, although he still needs to look words up in the dictionary.*

From this response, it can be seen that some parents plan their children's English learning carefully. The difference is quite obvious when parents are discussing how to use the English learning resources at home. The interview data have indicated that some parents have well-structured plans, while some do not.

It is interesting to note that only three parents reported that they plan how to use the resources. Some parents set a study schedule for their children. For example, Parent Sch\_A11 has set a plan and asked her child to complete the supplementary English exercises as scheduled. When doing so, she has made the guidelines clear to her child.

*Interviewer: How would you use these learning resources? Would you set a plan for your child to follow or just let them take the initiative to use them in their time?*

*Sch\_A11: It's planned. We are always on schedule.*

*Interviewer: Guidance is given?*



*Sch\_A11: Yes.*

*Interviewer: So would you have any study plan, such as asking your child to finish a chapter every day, memorise ten words or accomplish a goal?*

*Sch\_A11: Yes.*

*Interviewer: Have you clearly communicated the study plan with your child?*

*Sch\_A11: Yes.*

This suggestion of Parent Sch\_A11 does indeed represent the thoughts of a group of parents. However, some parents reflected that it is not easy to keep up with the plan for a long period, especially when the children are getting older and are occupied by more school work. Parent Sch\_B8 shared why she has given up the plan set for her child.

*Interviewer: How would you use these learning resources? Would you set a plan for your child to follow? For example, would you make him do an [English learning] exercise or read a few pages of a book?*

*Sch\_B8: I did it before, but now I won't make him do it because now he has much more homework, but at least will do something on Saturday nights.*

On the other hand, some parents do not have any plan about how to use the English learning resources at home, though they will prepare those resources for their children. Almost all the parents who reported they have not planned how to use the resources explained that it is difficult to do so because their children already have a lot of homework to do.

*Interviewer: How would you use these learning resources? Would you set a plan for your child to follow? For example, would you make him read a few pages of a book every day?*

Sch\_B2: *No. It is not possible to do so because he has different homework to do every day. He may have so much a day that he needs to work until 11:00 at night.*

In fact, the situation of Sch\_B2 is far from rare among participating parents. Sch\_B12 reported a similar concern in the interview.

(Sch\_B12)

*It's not possible to have any plans. I don't know what will happen tomorrow. I don't know how much homework he will have tomorrow.*

In fact, the findings of the present study reflected that although all the parents in the study reported some English learning strategies to help their children at home, their execution of the strategies varies in variety, quantity and most importantly, quality. Some parents spend much more time with children on the English learning activities, while some do not, but it does not mean the more time they spend with the children, the better the quality of the activities will be. It also depends on how they make use of the resources and strategies. As learned from the interview data, some parents would set up plans and use the strategies in a more systematic and structured way to achieve the purpose, while some just provide their children with the resources.

#### 4.3 Factors Taken into Consideration When Parents Adopt English Learning Strategies to Help Their Children's English Learning

As shown in Table 6, the parents' frequency in employing different types of English learning strategies at home or outside school varies. Assuming the parents' choices and preferences of the strategies are not randomly driven, the researcher found it necessary to investigate the reasons behind this phenomenon, that is, the parents' considerations that would lead to the differences. Therefore, the parents participating in the interviews were asked what factors they would take into account when choosing English activities and materials for their children.

More than half of the parents reported they would choose the activities “based on the children’s interest”. Parent Sch\_B3 said she would heed her child’s opinions before enrolling him in an English activity.

*(Sch\_B3)*

*I will let him try anything. I will ask for his opinions. In fact, when he enrolls in any extra-curricular activity, no matter at school or outside school, such as a drawing class, he will choose to learn it in English. I will ask for his opinion, and will not force him to do anything.*

Another popular concern among parents is the practicality of the English activities. For example, Parent Sch\_B7 chose the activities in accordance with her child’s academic performance, while Parent Sch\_B6 was concerned whether the activities would help boost her child’s English proficiency.

*(Sch\_B7)*

*Interviewer: You have just mentioned that you will let your child attend some classes or courses. What factors would you take into account when choosing these activities for your child?*

*Sch\_B7: Based on his academic performance at school. See which area he is weak on. I will also talk with him to see whether he understands where his weakness lies.*

*(Sch\_B6)*

*I consider whether the activity can improve his English standard.*

In addition to these two popular responses, a few parents said that they would also consider other factors such as costs, learning environment and comments from others.

When compared with their choices for English learning activities, parents would consider more factors when choosing English learning materials for their children. Surprisingly, only four parents said they would choose the materials based on their

children's interests. Instead, more parents reported that they would consider whether the materials are suitable for their children's levels. For example, Parent Sch\_A10 said she considers only the appropriateness of the level and the usefulness of the content.

*Interviewer: You have just said that you have bought books or other learning materials [for your child]. When you buy these materials, what factors would you consider, level, price or others?*

*Sch\_A10: Level only.*

Some other parents, such as Parent Sch\_A2, consider the designs of the materials because they think attractive designs can arouse their children's interests in learning English.

*Sch\_A2: I will first consider whether they can attract my children, for example, some familiar cartoon characters.*

*Interviewer: You mean the design?*

*Sch\_A2: Yes, the design. For example, when my child loves that cartoon character, he will think the material is attractive.*

In addition, some parents expressed the view that they may also consider materials based on the recommendations of others, such as friends or school teachers. Interestingly, all the 22 parents consistently opined that price is not their major concern. Though some of them did make remarks concerning the price such as "provided the materials are not too expensive", they emphasised that they will provide their children with the resources as long as they can afford them. For example, Parent Sch\_B11 said she would spend less on herself in order to buy English learning materials for her child.

*(Sch\_B11)*

*I have bought my child some English history books because he likes reading history books. He likes reading English books. My child likes English very much. To save*



*money, I would rather buy fewer clothes. Because I cannot help him [in English learning], I buy him some CDs and story books to help him.*

Many parents screen the activities or materials for their children though. Parent Sch\_A7 said she prefers her child to read something serious and useful, while Parent Sch\_B1 thinks if she finds a book interesting, her son would find it interesting too.

*(Sch\_A7)*

*Very often, I let him read those [materials] I like. In addition, if he likes to read something, I will see what the materials are and decide whether to let him borrow or buy them when we go to a library or a bookstore. If I think a story book may be interesting, I will let him read it. I will let him read something serious, such as those about history or geography. If he wants to read comics, I may not let him do so.*

*(Sch\_B1)*

*If I find I read a book devotedly, I think he must be interested in reading it, so very often, I bring him to a library or a bookstore to choose the materials together.*

It seems that parents are most interested in what their children like when adopting the strategies or selecting the learning materials. However, according to the data collected in the present study, the claim that most parents made regarding their considerations of their children's preferences does not completely preclude their interferences in the final choices of English learning materials for younger ones. As discussed above, parents may act as screeners and overrule their children's choices of the activities or materials. Therefore, how parents perceive their roles in children's English learning process is of true significance.

When discussing the involvement of Hong Kong Chinese parents in their children's English learning process, the present study has found that:

- The 81 participants in this study are keen on providing children with assistance in learning English.



- These parents have provided their children a variety of English learning strategies at home, including provision of different English learning aids to their children, accompany children when doing homework and English learning activities, and enrolling their children in English learning classes.
- Among the English learning strategies, those related to the provision of English reading materials to children have been found the most frequently adopted by the participating parents, while travelling with children has been found the least.
- The parents' adoption of the English learning strategies varies in quantity and quality.

#### 4.4 Hong Kong Chinese Parents' Perception of Their Roles in Their Children's English Learning

The findings of the present study indicate that all Hong Kong Chinese parents participating in the survey have adopted some English learning strategies to help their children. However, discussions about the reasons why parents think they should do so, in particular, from the parents' perspectives, are wanting. Therefore, the present study examined why parents are interested in playing a part in their children's English learning process through understanding how they perceive their roles in the process and why they think they have the responsibility to do so. Prior to the discussion of all these questions, the first and foremost task is to understand how they view learning English in Hong Kong. Data were collected from interviews so that parents could express their opinions in much more detail and with more information.

##### 4.4.1 Parents' Attitudes towards Learning English in Hong Kong

Without exception, all the parents participating in the interviews agreed that learning English is important in Hong Kong. Most of them explained that they think so because English is an international language and children will benefit if they are good at English skills. In the interviews, parents demonstrated their strong belief that equipping their children with good English proficiency is necessary for children's

academic and career developments.

*(Sch\_A9)*

*[...] most importantly, I have read some reports. The reports said that a higher percentage of students from EMI schools were admitted to universities when compared with CMI schools. Therefore, [learning English] is very important.*

*(Sch\_A3)*

*Because in everywhere, for example, in the workplace, [you] need to use English. Unless you are working at a China-based company; the average documents are almost all in English.*

*(Sch\_B11)*

*Because I think in Hong Kong's workplace, for example, in my cousin's office, people from the mainland who do not know English, like us, cannot communicate with others, and therefore are difficult to earn a living.*

Parents also consider the importance of learning English from the practical use of English in children's everyday life, such as learning effectiveness, daily communication with foreigners, and acquiring knowledge or information from other sources.

*(Sch\_B3)*

*[Learning English is important] because of the social needs. First, learning English is easier for them [children], compared with learning Chinese, because a Chinese character is usually made up of many strokes. My daughter can do an English composition quickly, but she spends much more time thinking about a Chinese one. In addition, in the future, [my children] may have a chance to be asked for directions in the street, and at least she can reply in English; [she] can teach people how to go to their destinations.*

(Sch\_A8)

*If kids want to obtain more knowledge, first, the books they read may be published overseas, and they may listen to something obtained from other countries. If you [they] do not have the [language] capability to do so, you [they] can never understand [those materials].*

(Sch\_B7)

*Because...Actually I have a job and the clients I encounter are always foreigners. No matter for studying or working, English is essential in different areas; it is an important medium of communication.*

The parents' belief is affected by their own experience. Parent Sch\_B9 shared the experience that he felt his problems accumulated when he was learning English and these minor problems turned into a big problem in the end. Therefore, he thought he should help his son to overcome the problems in his English learning in the early stages, so that his son could be proficient in English. This reflects the notion that because parents had experienced difficulties and therefore they did not have a good command of English, they thought their children should have good English skills.

In fact, parents, like Sch\_A11, explicitly instilled their attitudes towards English learning in their children. She has used daily examples to show her child the importance of English.

(Sch\_A11)

*In fact, I started to inculcate the importance of English in my child, because when teaching children, I think it is important to let them know why they need to learn something, and how it will benefit them...I would explain to my child, for example, when seeing a kid in a T-shirt with some English words on, I would ask my child the meanings of the English words. I would tell him when he didn't know the meaning of what he was wearing, he should be more aware of the importance of learning English. I would let him think about it.*

The data collected clearly indicated that most Hong Kong Chinese parents think learning English is of particular importance in Hong Kong. It is not surprising especially when they reflected that they think children's English proficiency has a direct impact on their children's further education opportunities and future career prospects. Also, they treat English a skill needed for everyday life in Hong Kong as they believe English is one of the direct and approachable media to bridge their children and the outside world. They instill these ideas in their children, both directly and indirectly. They may communicate their thoughts to their children, telling them the importance of learning English. Furthermore, parents' eagerness to equip their children with good English proficiency can be regarded as a realisation of their positive attitudes towards English learning, which drives them to try different means to help their children learn English, including the provision of a variety of learning resources and sending the children to tutorial classes.

#### 4.4.2 Parents' Observations of Their Children's English Learning at School

Most parents in the study provide assistance to their children in addition to the formal curriculum their children receive at school. Does their intervention mean that they are not satisfied with the school curriculum or are there any other reasons behind? How do parents perceive the English education their children receive at school? This latter question is particularly relevant as English is a core subject in Hong Kong primary schools. To find out, the 22 participating parents were invited in the interviews to give details of their views about this issue because both schools in the present study emphasise the effort and resources they have offered to help students to enhance their English proficiency.

It is interesting to note that almost half of the interviewees (5 out of 12) recruited from School B are satisfied with the English learning support provided by the school. They think the school offers sufficient resources and their children can, in general, obtain satisfactory results in English subjects. The response from Sch\_B1 may represent why these parents think the school has already done quite well in supporting children's English learning.

(Sch\_B1)

*I think it is very good already, because they offer a lot of chances to children. In addition, the school does not require students to stay late after school or go to school earlier. The school makes use of their lunch time. For example, the school once sent some students to participate in an English poem speech competition, and it made use of their lunch time, because their lunch time is rather long. The school arranges after-lunch reading periods for students [...] During the period, they can stay in touch with English.*

One parent from School B was satisfied with the school in general. Her only dissatisfaction stemmed from the medium of instruction at School B, since School B is a CMI primary school.

(Sch\_B6)

*After all, this is a CMI primary school. If everything can be changed into English, that will be more satisfactory. Now, there is still room for improvement, regarding the learning environment.*

Four other parents from School B reflected that improvement is needed in the school arrangements, including the lesson time and deployment of teachers, which may hinder their children's English learning.

(Sch\_B4)

*I think [children's English learning at school] is generally acceptable, but can hardly be said to be enough. Because of the number of students [in each class], teachers can hardly accommodate the need of each student, so it is necessary to find a private tutor to provide customised teaching to my child.*

(Sch\_B12)

*It very much depends on the teacher. If that teacher is good, my child will perform well. If the teacher is slack, then he cannot do well in his study. Teachers' qualities are important.*

The other two interviewees from School B were not satisfied with their children's performance at school, but they did not complain about the school. Instead, they reported that it was their children who should be responsible for the problems.

*Interviewer: How do you think about your child's English learning at school?  
Are you satisfied? Do you think it's good or not?*

*Sch\_B8: Not very satisfied.*

*Interviewer: Not very satisfied with your child's performance or the resources provided by school?*

*Sch\_B8: My child's performance, because he is usually careless.*

On the other hand, only three of the ten interviewees recruited from School A were satisfied with their children's English learning at school. While two reported they found it acceptable, only one of the three specifically commented that her child's English learning at school was good.

*(Sch\_A7)*

*The situation is good, as far as I know. I think it's good because the school is now more diversified. The school has adopted another set of textbooks. It's good, not too simple, yet not too difficult. I think it's above average. [...] In addition, the school provides some dramas and books featuring roles he would find interesting to play, which may in turn make him feel very good about English.*

Nevertheless, parents from School A and those from School B were dissatisfied for similar reasons. First, like those from School B, some of the parents thought a CMI school was not a favourable environment for learning English. Parent Sch\_A8 reported that she did not find the learning environment good enough not only because of the medium of instruction but also because of the busy school schedule.

*Sch\_A8: It could be said to be not enough, because what they are learning, on top of the textbook materials, are only some extracurricular materials. But, you know, the best way of learning English is to read*

*more, listen more.*

*Interviewer: Yes. So, it's still about the environment?*

*Sch\_A8: Yes, but in this aspect, it's a bit difficult, because there are more assignments in Hong Kong [schools].*

The response of Sch\_A8 restated the parents' concerns about the limited time and resources, which are both common constraints on teaching English subjects at Hong Kong primary schools.

It is interesting to note that although English is already a core subject at primary school, for different reasons, parents still assume that they have the responsibility to provide their children with extra English learning resources. Some parents showed their concerns about the schools' inadequacies in different aspects, such as the medium of instruction and limited lesson time. Some of the parents think that in addition to schools, families should provide their children with ideal English learning environments, while some suggested nurturing children is a parental obligation, so they cannot solely count on schools. It is noteworthy that the school context probably makes a difference to parents' perceptions of their children's English learning experience at school. From the interview data, though both schools concerned are CMI schools, obviously the parents from School B were more satisfied with the English classes and the extracurricular English enhancement activities offered by the school.

#### 4.5 Reasons for Parents Wanting to Get Involved in Their Children's English Learning

Since local Chinese parents think that it is important to learn English in Hong Kong and many of them are worried that the school curriculum may not effectively equip their children with a sufficiently good English proficiency, it is not surprising that they want to become actively involved in their children's English learning and provide their children with favourable English learning conditions. First, some parents commented that the subject syllabi were limited. Taking into consideration the





inadequacy of English subjects offered by schools, parents think they need to provide their children with alternative means to learn English.

*(Sch\_B2)*

*At school, in fact, they are learning something from textbooks. Things in their daily life cannot be comprehensively covered at school.*

*(Sch\_B5)*

*A school has its own way to teach a subject. I want it to be more diversified. For example, let children have exposure to more things.*

Apart from the designs of the syllabi of English subjects, some parents showed their concerns about the limited lesson time.

*(Sch\_A8)*

*It is usually hard to achieve more comprehensive [learning] at school, because the study time at school is inevitably short.*

Therefore, parents like Parent Sch\_B8 think they need to do something to help consolidate the English skills their children have learned at school in order to supplement the insufficient contact time of English lessons.

*(Sch\_B8)*

*Because things learned at school...like now I allow [my child] to attend an English class on Sunday, a specialised English class, he needs to consolidate what has been learned at school.*

In addition, some parents thought that schools cannot provide satisfactory English learning environments for their children.

*(Sch\_A9)*

*I think in the classroom, teachers are teaching the things in textbooks, but what does*

*[my child] need? ...or to enhance his ability, he must depend on other settings or resources to help him improve English, ... This is a CMI primary school, at most of the school time, except during English lessons, teachers use Chinese as the medium of instruction, so I help my child at home; I try my best to create an English environment for him.*

While some parents were concerned about the English learning resources provided by schools, others emphasised that it is parents' responsibility to be involved in their children's learning process.

*(Sch\_A7)*

*Because sometimes at school...it depends on the teachers' styles; sometimes they may not suit your children's styles, or you will not know the pedagogies of some teachers. All these are methods at school. [...] When some teachers use teaching methods well, the children may like the lessons very much, so I think parents, if time is allowed, should directly accompany their children.*

*(Sch\_B7)*

*I think the English teaching provided by school is not enough, because each school may need to take care of different aspects of the children ... As parents, we certainly want to give [them] the best.*

Some parents thought that it was their responsibility to provide assistance because their children are too young to make decisions or they may even not know what they need. Parents, therefore, have the responsibility to protect them and guide them.

*(Sch\_B1)*

*Because my child is small, he may not know how to ask for chances himself.*

*(Sch\_A3)*

*You [We] cannot solely rely on the school, but need to consider whether the child is independent or his other personality traits. I need to take care of two children and*

*both of them like to have me accompany them. If I don't assist them at their young age, they cannot grow.*

Last, it is interesting to learn that some parents suggested that they could also benefit from helping their children's English learning process. The response of Parent Sch\_A4 showed that in addition to parents' responsibility, another motive that drives parents to help with their children's English learning is the chance to learn with their children or to review their own English skills.

*(Sch\_A4)*

*... I also want to enrich my English knowledge; in addition, there is a need to teach my child. Apart from teachers, even though my child is studying at school, we still need to teach him, but we cannot solely rely on teachers.*

Since parents think it is their responsibility to equip their children with good English proficiency, they may play different roles when assisting children's English learning, and usually they will play more than one role. In fact, in addition to investigating how they perceive their roles in their children's English learning process, understanding how they play these roles is much more important.

#### 4.6 Parents' Roles in Assisting Their Children's English Learning

Gao (2006) defined the roles of parents in a learners' language learning process. His conclusion was drawn from data reported by some adult learners. In other words, Gao's study discussed the parental involvement from the learners' perspectives, while the present study discussed the parents' involvement from the parents' perspectives. In the interviews, when talking about their roles in their children's English learning process, the 22 parents were all aware of their involvement in it and they could all clearly tell the researcher how they perceived their roles. The parents expressed their intention to help their children in learning English, and most of them are very clear about the roles they are playing.

First, parents would try to show their children the importance of learning English in Hong Kong. All the interviewees have indirectly instilled their values in their children through implementing a variety of English strategies at home, and some parents are doing it deliberately and they explicitly tell their children their wish for their children to have a good command of English. For example, Parent Sch\_A6 said he would directly tell his child parents' expectation.

*Interviewer: Have you communicated with your child, like telling him “we want you to learn English well, so you need to work hard”, etc.?*

*Sch\_A6: Yes, we have.*

*Interviewer: So he knows?*

*Sch\_A6: Yes, he does.*

Besides telling their children how important English is, most of the interviewees motivate their children to learn English through action. The most common role that parents are playing is providing children with financial resources. Most interviewees reported that they often buy different types of English learning resources, such as supplementary exercises, story books and DVDs, for their children. In addition to the English learning materials, parents would pay for people who possess the expertise like private tutors to help with their children's learning. For example, Parent Sch\_B4 explained that because she could not manage the English taught at school since her child was promoted to primary six, she decided to hire a private tutor to teach her child.

*(Sch\_B4)*

*I teach [my child] as much as I know. Now, my child is studying in primary six, and the English taught at school is much more difficult. It seems that I cannot help him anymore, so I need to find a private tutor.*

Unlike Parent Sch\_B4, some parents have direct involvement in their children's learning, such as providing children with direct guidance on their learning. From the data collected from parents, the researcher categorised four major types of “advice”

parents offer to their children. First, some parents search information about English learning resources for their children and advise them to have a try. Parent Sch\_B6 mentioned that she searches for information for her child though she claimed she does not know much English.

*(Sch\_B6)*

*First, I don't know English. I can only follow people to read, but it is not possible to ask me to speak [English]. However, if he needs any details, any information, I can search for him or relay the information to him.*

Second, it is quite common for parents to help children review what has been taught at school. They simply repeat and review the school materials. For example, Parent Sch\_B8 follows her child's school textbooks when teaching her child to do homework.

*Sch\_B8: While he was doing homework at home, I would assist him when he didn't know how to do.*

*Interviewer: Were you assisting him or teaching him?*

*Sch\_B8: I would follow the textbooks. After he has received the textbooks, I would read the books first.*

Furthermore, some parents will act as teachers and teach their children some English skills in addition to the school curriculum. Parent Sch\_B10 described her role as a private tutor of her child.

*Sch\_B10: I think I am his private tutor.*

*Interviewer: What do you do, for example?*

*Sch\_B10: Exercises.*

*Interviewer: You buy some supplementary exercises and instruct him to do them?*

*Sch\_B10: Yes, in addition, I will explain to him, for example, where the tense problems are spotted. I will also help him to revise for dictations and teach him English words, etc.*

Last, parents may give their children some advice on English learning strategies. For example, Parent Sch\_A5 encourages her child to seize upon opportunities to practice oral English.

*(Sch\_A5)*

*Sometimes, when he is speaking in Chinese, I will remind him that he should speak some English.*

Several parents reflected that they do not only give advice to their children, but also insist that their children should take their advice. Some parents would even exercise full control of their children's English learning plans. Parent Sch\_A11's response demonstrated a typical example of such parental involvement. She started some English learning plan when her children were young.

*(Sch\_A11)*

*I have started to arrange it [listening skills training] since they were small, in particular, for the youngest child. He started learning listening skills when he was very small. It has been nine months already.*

Parent Sch\_B10 reported that during the last summer holiday, she made her child recite a list of words and their different forms, such as past participles. She would regularly check her child's progress by dictation, mark the dictation and give her child a score.

*(Sch\_B10)*

*Mainly in the summer holiday, I made him recite a tense table. There were about 200 words in total. Every word on the list has its different forms for different tenses, including present tense, past tense, present and past participles. There were also Chinese translations and remarks next to each word. I made him do the dictation throughout the summer vacation. I would randomly pick ten words each time. Although there were only ten words each time, each word came with its different forms of past tense, present and past participles, in addition to its Chinese remarks. I*

*would mark the words one by one and calculate the score. I made him recite all these words.*

When answering the question about parents' roles in their children's English learning, Parent\_A9 reported that she takes full control over her children's English learning, including scheduling extra English tutorial classes, subscribing to English newspapers for them and selecting the news columns for her children's reading.

*(Sch\_A9)*

*Most are my roles. I arranged everything. I take the control, almost all.*

While some parents may "force" their children to follow their advice, more parents prefer to adopt strategies to nurture their children's interest in learning a language. Parent Sch\_A7 said she helps her child to develop his interest in learning English.

*(Sch\_A7)*

*In fact, my main role is to build his interest so that he does not resist learning English. For example, when we were learning Chinese, we felt resistant to wenyan (the traditional Chinese writings) because it sounded very boring. However, when you could find a part that you like, you would have interest to continue reading. Therefore, the role I play at home, or our family, is to let him think this [learning English] is neither a source of pressure nor a burden. He should not feel it is a kind of extra job he needs to finish.*

Some parents reported that they do not simply accompany their children when doing the English learning activities. Instead, they learn together with their children in the process. For example, despite her education in the United Kingdom, it turned out Parent Sch\_B3 was not familiar with some skills taught in her child's English classes. She thought getting involved in her child's English learning could give her a chance to learn together with her child.

(Sch\_B3)

*I am getting involved. For one thing, because I have left school for a long time, we can learn together, as there are many new things nowadays. For example, I haven't learned Phonics (Pinyin) before; I can learn it as well as teach him.*

Because both he and his wife were from mainland China, Parent Sch\_A6 said they would learn English in their spare time. He mentioned that even though he has not spent as much time as his wife getting involved in his child's English learning, he found it provides a good chance for his wife to learn.

Sch\_A6: *In fact, his mommy is learning English too. She uses methods such as "Instant Dict" [an electronic dictionary].*

Interviewer: *Mommy is learning together with the child?*

Sch\_A6: *Together. For learning, not only English, but also Chinese, Mommy is going to school again indeed.*

Parents participating in the present study are all evidently aware that they are doing something to help their children's English learning, although they may not be able to articulate exactly what their roles are. The scope of parents' roles is quite wide, as they try different means to motivate their children to learn English. Their roles can be interpreted at two levels. At the children's perception level, parents alerted their children of the importance of learning English by telling them directly and through the adoption of English learning strategies, while at the operation level, parents provide resources to support children's English learning, give advice to guide them through the learning process, nurture their interest in learning, and even learn with them.

Based on the findings, the researcher analysed the parents thinking about learning English in Hong Kong in order to understand why they want to get involved in their children's English learning. The following conclusions have been drawn from the data collected from parents' perspectives.





- Hong Kong Chinese parents generally hold a positive attitude towards learning English in Hong Kong. Therefore, they think it is necessary to equip their children with good English proficiency.
- Some parents opine that schools cannot provide their children with satisfactory English learning environments, so they think they should provide extra assistance to their children.
- Some parents think they cannot solely rely on the school curriculum and they have the responsibility to provide their children addition English learning resources outside school.
- The parents are actively playing different roles in their children's English learning process.

#### 4.7 How Parents' Economic Capital, Cultural Capital and Social Capital Are Related to These Strategies

The present study attempts to explain the variations of parents' choices of English learning strategies from the perspectives of Bourdieu's Concept of Capital (1986). Therefore, a correlation analysis was done to examine the relationship between the ten strategies and parents' economic capital, cultural capital and social capital respectively. Table 8 shows the results of Spearman's correlation coefficients from the analysis.

The results of the analysis reveal that parents' economic capital and cultural capital are significantly related to the frequency of parents' adoption of some of the English learning strategies, while their social capital does not show any significant impact on it.

**Table 8. Relationship between the ten parental strategies and parents' economic capital, cultural capital and social capital**

		Providing children with multi-media materials	Providing children with English written materials	Assisting with homework	Reading English or Chinese-English bilingual books with children	Visiting bookstores or libraries with children	Conducting parent-developed English study plan or activities	Travelling with children	Enrolling children in English certification exams and relative preparation courses	Enrolling children in after-school programmes	Speaking to children in English
<b>Monthly Household Income</b>	Spearman's rho	-.040	.109	.052	.386**	.290**	.051	.090	-.065	.129	.314**
<b>Parents' Educational Level</b>	Spearman's rho	-.052	.090	-.054	.295**	.197	-.063	.046	-.141	.037	.421**
<b>Parents' English Proficiency</b>	Spearman's rho	.017	.102	-.020	.395**	.321**	.070	-.062	-.165	.044	.467**
<b>Coverage of Parents' Social Network</b>	Spearman's rho	-.022	.208	-.082	.093	.135	.163	.107	.162	.157	.013
<b>Parents' Source of Information</b>	Spearman's rho	.059	.182	-.034	.083	.126	.173	.081	.137	.063	.057

*n*=81

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

#### 4.7.1 Parents' Economic Capital and the Strategies

Although the participating parents claimed cost is not their major concern when adopting different English learning strategies, it is nonetheless rewarding to investigate to what extent parents' economic capital affects their choices. A Spearman correlation analysis has been done to investigate how the average family monthly household income is related to the frequency of parents' adoption of the ten common parental strategies. The findings indicated that parents' economic capital is significantly related to three strategies, namely "Reading English or Chinese-English bilingual books with children" ( $r=.386$ ,  $p=.000$ ), "Visiting bookstores or libraries with children" ( $r=.290$ ,  $p=.009$ ) and "Speaking to children in English" ( $r=.314$ ,  $p=.004$ ). The results imply that when a family has a higher monthly income, the parents would be more likely to adopt these strategies.

Surprisingly, the findings show that it is not necessarily the case that parents with higher monthly incomes tend to choose strategies that cost more, such as enrolling children in various courses and travelling, more frequently. The correlation analysis shows that these items, namely "Travelling with children" ( $r=.090$ ,  $p=.424$ ), "enrolling children in English certification exams and relative preparation courses" ( $r=-.065$ ,  $p=.563$ ) and "Enrolling children in after-school programmes" ( $r=.129$ ,  $p=.250$ ) are not significantly related to a family's average monthly household income. In addition, as tabulated in Table 9, there is no significant relationship between a family's monthly household income and the percentage of the monthly income that parents usually spend on children's English learning (excluding regular English classes at school) every month. Thus, there is no evidence to prove that when a family has a higher monthly household income, the parents are more likely to spend a higher proportion of their income on children's English learning materials and activities.

**Table 9. Relationship between a family's average monthly household income and the percentage of monthly income parents usually spend on their children's English learning**

			Monthly Household Income	% spent on children's English learning
Spearman's rho	Monthly Household Income	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	-.071
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.526
		N	81	81
	% spent on children's English learning	Correlation Coefficient	-.071	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.526	.
		N	81	81

#### 4.7.2 Parents' Cultural Capital and the Strategies

Parents' cultural capital is measured by two factors. In addition to parents' education attainment, their English proficiency has also been taken into account because some strategies such as "speaking to children in English" require parents to have some knowledge of English. Also, it should be pointed out that parents' educational level does not necessarily correspond to their English proficiency. For example, the parents may come from places where English education is not popular or English is not a required school subject. Therefore, a test was carried out to examine to what extent these two factors are related. As shown in Table 10, among the parents participating in this study, their educational level is significantly related to their English proficiency, which means when they are highly educated, they are likely to be more confident with their English proficiency.

**Table 10. Relationship between parents' educational level and their English proficiency**

			Educational level	English proficiency
Spearman's rho	Parents' educational level	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.724**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	81	81
	Parents' English proficiency	Correlation Coefficient	.724**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	81	81

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The results (as shown in Table 8) show that both of these two factors are significantly and positively related to the frequency of parents' adoption of English learning strategies for their children. The findings are similar to the correlation analysis between the parents' economic capital and the ten parental strategies. The three strategies, "Reading English or Chinese-English bilingual books with children" ( $r=.395$ ,  $p=.000$ ), "Visiting bookstores or libraries with children" ( $r=.321$ ,  $p=.003$ ) and "Speaking to children in English" ( $r=.467$ ,  $p=.000$ ) are significantly related to parents' English proficiency, while two of them "Reading English or Chinese-English bilingual books with children" ( $r=.295$ ,  $p=.007$ ) and "Speaking to children in English" ( $r=.421$ ,  $p=.000$ ) are also significantly related to parents' educational level. The findings of the two factors are quite consistent except for the item "Visiting bookstores or libraries with children", which does not show a significant relationship with parents' educational level.

The findings reveal that when parents are better educated, they tend to read English books with children and speak to children in English more frequently, but whether the parents are well-educated or not will not affect whether they would take their children to bookstores or libraries, but those who have higher English proficiency would be more likely to do so.

The findings show that parents' English proficiency does have some impact on the frequency of adopting some strategies, especially those requiring parents to have some knowledge of English. It is likely that when parents have some knowledge of English, they can provide much more assistance to their children.

In the present study, some parents stated that their inadequate English proficiency is a major difficulty they are facing when helping their children to learn English.

*Interviewer: When supporting your child's English learning, have you faced any difficulties?*

*Sch\_A6: There are difficulties all the time.  
[...]*

*Interviewer: Can you tell me more specific details about the difficulty?*

*Sch\_A6: Because I don't know English, I cannot understand what my child has told me. It is very frustrating.*

In fact, according to Bourdieu, cultural capital includes, but is not limited to, ones' education attainment or English proficiency, as their own learning experience should also be taken into account. Interestingly, in the interviews, when parents were asked whether their own experience in English learning had affected their choices of parental strategies, more than half of them admitted that their own experience would affect their choices of strategies and even their choices of the English learning materials. This influence comes in different ways.

It is common that when parents had tried some English learning methods before and found them useful, they would recommend these methods to their children, but they would not force them to follow the methods. Parent Sch\_A7 shared her experience of advising her child on a method of learning English grammar.

*(Sch\_A7)*

*I think this [use of prepositions] really needs repeated practice to avoid making mistakes, so I make him recite them. I use this method myself, but he may not want it.*



*He may want to learn it through application or copy them many times. I will tell him the methods I used, and see if he likes them.*

As discussed in the previous sections, some parents act as screeners when choosing English learning resources for their children. They do that based on their own experience and knowledge about English learning. Some parents, like Parent Sch\_A8, choose activities or learning materials on her children's behalf.

Sch\_A8: *We always visit libraries and bookstores. The books we borrow and the books they read are chosen by me. [...]*

Interviewer: *So do you mean that when your experience tells you learning environment is important or interest is important, you will start from that area?*

Sch\_A8: *Exactly.*

Having learned from their own experience, some parents think it is more important to motivate children to learn English. Parent Sch\_A11 said that she puts the emphasis on nurturing her child's interest in English, while Parent Sch\_B7 shared her experience of playing a role model and often demonstrates to her child how she loves reading English.

*(Sch\_A11)*

*I think forcing children [to learn English] is not useful. In fact, it is useless to force someone to study or to learn. It will only distract their concentration. First and foremost, I think we should open his mind, and get him interested. When he knows the reasons behind, he will be interested to do so.*

*(Sch\_B7)*

*Because I myself like reading...I mean to read aloud, I like holding a book, even when my child does not read, I read it myself.*

In fact, English can be learned from their sharing so that even parents without good

English proficiency themselves can still positively influence their children's English learning. Parent Sch\_B6's sharing is not an isolated case among the parents.

(Sch\_B6)

*My English lacks grammar, so I don't know English. When my child began to study, I reminded him that he must manage grammar well. If he does not know grammar, he cannot even write an essay. Therefore, years ago, I bought many grammar exercises for him.*

How parents' own English learning experience has affected their choices of parental strategies is clearly evident in the parents' responses. Based on the interview data, it is sensible to reason that the different roles parents play are related to their own experience in English learning, that is, their cultural capital. In other words, the fact that parents' cultural capital, including their education attainment, their English proficiency, as well as their own learning experience, does have significant impact on their choices of parental strategies is not deniable.

#### 4.7.3 Parents' Social Capital and the Strategies

In the present study, parents' social capital was measured by where they have obtained the information about the English learning strategies and/or activities (Question 3 in the questionnaire). This question was chosen because among the three questions (Question 3, 4 and 5) related to the measurement of parents' social capital, only this question solicits the input of information about the parents' social network, which is presumed to give parents more ideas on the availability of a spectrum of English learning activities. Moreover, aiming at obtaining a comprehensive understanding of parents' scope of social connection, the other two questions seek information about whom they seek help from (Question 4) and whom they share experience with (Question 5), usually after they have adopted the parental strategies and thus perhaps not directly affecting parents' choices.

The parents' extended social network is measured by the coverage of parents' social





network and the level of formality of their networks. Measurement of the coverage of a parent's social network is based on the response to Question 3 in the questionnaire. When a parent indicated he or she had obtained information from a source, he or she would earn a score, but a zero would be given to the option "self-experience", which is not a social source. For example, if a mother indicated she had learnt about children's English learning strategies from "other family members / relatives", "mass media" and "self-experience", she could earn a score of two for her coverage of social network. A correlation analysis has been done between the parents' coverage of social network and the ten parental strategies, as shown in Table 8.

For measuring the level of formality, the researcher classified parents' social networks into groups, ranging from (i) formal authority bodies, including schools and parent-teacher associations; (ii) public platforms, including public seminars and mass media; (iii) personal contacts, such as relatives, friends and private tutors; and (iv) free sharing on websites and online discussion forums.

The level of formality of these social networks is defined by their level of recognition among the general public and the reliability of the information sources. Schools and parent-teacher associations are regarded as "formal authority bodies" because they are officially regulated bodies that are serving educational purposes and the general public usually assumes the education-related information from schools and parent-teacher associations is reliable and trustworthy. The operation of schools is regulated by the Education Bureau of HKSAR government in order to maintain the quality of education. Likewise, according to the *PTA Handbook*, establishment of a parent-teacher association requires the committee of the association to go through proper registration under the "Societies Ordinance" or "Companies Ordinance" (Committee on Home-School Co-operation, 2014).

Parents may also obtain education-related information from public seminars or mass media. They are classified as "public platforms" as they can be accessed publicly and the information spread through them is trustworthy. However the general public may not treat them as main sources for education-related information. The public seminars

refer to those held by educational bodies or NGOs, which exclusively relay education-related information to parents. The speakers at these seminars are usually people who have expertise in education or parenting areas. The information spread through mass media can be presumed to be reliable since they have the responsibility to spread information from reliable and trustworthy sources. Also, they are monitored by government departments, such as the Office of the Communications Authority. When a media organisation violates the Codes of Practices or Guidelines, it may receive penalties. In addition, the public can make complaints to the government departments concerned if they found the broadcast materials misleading or problematic.

Personal contacts are a common source for parents to gain information. However, when comparing with that from “formal authority bodies” and “public platforms”, this source of information is less trustworthy and reliable because the information shared among parents’ personal contacts may not be professional and sometimes may be inaccurate or biased. Nonetheless, as personal contacts are traceable sources, parents can have opportunities to clarify the information when they are in doubt.

Compared with three other sources of information, free sharing of information on websites and online discussion forums is the least formal source because the information obtained from these sources is the least trustworthy and reliable. The information shared on the Internet is not well-monitored and the quality of information is not guaranteed, and so may contain biased, inaccurate, or even fake information. Worse still, the source of information is not easily traceable. For example, it is not compulsory for users to disclose their real identity when uploading information onto free sharing websites or forums.

When doing the correlation analysis, the different sources of information are ranked in accordance with their level of formality. Table 11 shows the ranking of different sources.



**Table 11. Ranking of different sources of information**

Sources of information	Level of formality	Ranking (4 = the highest; 1 = the lowest)
School / Teachers	Formal authority bodies	4
Parent-teacher association	Formal authority bodies	4
Public seminars / Talks	Public platforms	3
Mass media	Public platforms	3
Other family members / Relatives	Personal contacts	2
Friends / Neighbours	Personal contacts	2
Private tutors	Personal contacts	2
Websites / Online discussion forums	Free sharing	1
Self-experience	NOT a social source	0
Others		Considered case by case

Among the parents' responses to the questionnaire, only three respondents indicated "others". One parent specified it as "church". Though "church" is a kind of well-structured social group, it mainly serves religious rather than educational purposes; therefore it is ranked as the parents' "personal contacts". Another parent who indicated "others" specified it as "parents of other kids" and is regarded as "personal contacts" as well. The third parent who chose "others" as one of the sources specified it as "just learned from this questionnaire". It is treated as "free sharing" as the parent may not have a chance to verify the validity of the information and more importantly, the parent may not get any feedback or further exchange of information with the source.

As shown in Table 8, the results of the correlation analysis show that both the coverage of parents' social networks and where parents obtain information about the possible strategies do not have any significant impact on their frequency of adopting the ten common parental strategies. An attachment to however wide a range of social networks or formal social networks will not affect a parent's frequency of adopting these strategies.

In fact, in the interviews, the parents' responses about the sources of information they learned about English learning resources were quite diverse, including schools and teachers, other parents, some learning centres and websites, to name but a few. What is common among the parents, however, is that they mostly learn about the

information from multiple sources. For example, Parent Sch\_B10 seeks information from different sources depending on the nature of the activities.

*(Sch\_B10)*

*For study tours, of course I have learned the information from the school; for other information [about other English learning resources], in general, from organisations such as community centres.*

Some parents, such as Parent Sch\_B12 and Sch\_A6, seek information from a variety of sources, while Parent Sch\_B12 emphasised that she will pay extra attention to those recommended by others.

*(Sch\_B12)*

*I usually search the information on the Internet or ask for other parents' recommendations; some of them are experienced. I will pay attention to those [resources] highly recommended by them.*

*(Sch\_A6)*

*There is so much information. Some is from my friends, and it is better to share the information among parents. We would also get some information on the Internet and from the recommendation of school teachers, who would show us [the learning materials] and tell us to have a try if we are interested.*

The response of Parent Sch\_B12 implied that she would not simply rely on the sources of information, but also filters the information herself when adopting the various parental strategies. Indeed, a majority of the parents participating in the interviews reported that they would sift through the information in order to select the English learning resources they think are suitable for their children.

*Interviewer:*      *So you have obtained the information about English learning from your friends and other parents?*

*Sch\_A3:*            *I may also get it from email and the mass media.*

*Interviewer: That means you will also pay attention to and study the public information?*

*Sch\_A3: Yes. I will see if it is good. I will study if it is suitable. I will ask others.*

The examples above from the interview data amply illustrate the reasons why parents' social capital is not significantly related to the frequency of their adoption of these common strategies as it was found that parents usually do not only rely on the sources of information when choosing the English learning strategies. No matter whether the information is from formal authority bodies, such as schools and teachers, or from some free sharing online platforms, they will screen the information before making decisions. In other words, parents' social networks mainly help them gain information about the learning resources, but when selecting the resources for their children, parents likely take other factors, such as their own knowledge and experience, costs incurred and their children's interests, into consideration and judge what strategies they think are "appropriate" to their children.

As mentioned above, a person's social network involves not only the input of information but also seeking other forms of assistance from or contributing to the social groups. Thus, the present study compared the parents' scope of social connection when obtaining information, seeking assistance and sharing information about their children's English learning. Table 12 summarises the results.

**Table 12. Parents' scope of social connection when obtaining information, seeking assistance and sharing information about their children's English learning**

	Level of formality	Obtaining information	Seeking assistance	Sharing information
School / Teachers	Formal authority bodies	55 (67.9%)	48 (59.3%)	27 (33.3%)
Parent-teacher association	Formal authority bodies	10 (12.3%)	0 (0.00%)	2 (2.5%)
Public seminars / Talks	Public platforms	12 (14.8%)	2 (2.5%)	1 (1.2%)
Mass media	Public platforms	31 (38.3%)	6 (7.4%)	2 (2.5%)
Other family members / Relatives	Personal contacts	13 (16.0%)	22 (27.2%)	19 (23.5%)
Friends / Neighbours	Personal contacts	40 (49.4%)	20 (24.7%)	51 (63.0%)
Private tutors	Personal contacts	13 (16.0%)	30 (37.0%)	18 (22.2%)
Websites / Online discussion forums	Free sharing	26 (32.1%)	26 (32.1%)	8 (9.9%)
Self	NOT a social source	26 (32.1%)	37 (45.7%)	Not Applicable
Others		3 (3.7%)	3 (3.7%)	1 (1.2%)

*n=81*

It should be noted that participants were allowed to choose more than one item when responding to each of the questions. Surprisingly, the results indicate that no participating parents would seek assistance from parent-teacher association (PTA) when they come across difficulties in assisting their children's English learning. Furthermore, only a few parents reported that they had obtained information about children's English learning from the PTA or shared information there. The findings offer an interesting insight in that although one of the aims for establishing a PTA, as its name suggests, is to strengthen the connection between parents and teachers, it does not seem very effective or actively involved in the aspects related to children's English learning process.

Another noteworthy finding is that parents have a tendency to seek information (55 out of the 81 participating parents, 67.9%) and assistance (59.3%) from schools or teachers, but only about one-third of them have shared their experience with school personnel in return. Some parents explained that they had sought assistance from school teachers because they think school teachers are knowledgeable and professional. In addition, parents think school teachers know their children well enough to have a better understanding of their learning progress. Indeed, the following responses of parents are quite representative of the interviewees'.

(Sch\_B1)

*When I really need help, I will seek help from school first. I will see how to solve the problems and seek teachers' advice. Because when children are studying at the primary level, they spend most of the time at school or at home. I truly believe that if I really come across any problems, I will first approach my child's English teacher and find out what goes wrong, or maybe some others such as the class master, to see how to help him or accommodate to his needs.*

(Sch\_B7)

*In fact, for learning English, my child spends most of the learning time at school. Although his class master or English teacher may not know [his progress], when I ask them, I think they may be aware of something, so we can exchange ideas and communicate with each other.*

(Sch\_A3)

Sch\_A3: *I ask my friends if it is at night, but if the time allows [it is during the day], I usually [ask teachers] because teachers know children's curriculum well; at least they are familiar with it.*

Interviewer: *So do you think teachers know it better?*

Sch\_A3: *Friends...because they learned [English] a long time ago. No matter how proficient they are, they need some time to think about it. They may know how to use [English], but they do not know how to express [explain] it.*

Interviewer: *Because you think teachers are more professional in this aspect?*

Sch\_A3: *Yes.*

Nevertheless, though parents usually seek help from school teachers, some of them have expressed the point that they do not do it very often. The comments of Parent Sch\_A2 and Parent Sch\_B8 may explain why parents do not often seek help from school teachers.

(Sch\_A2)

*I seldom seek help from school teachers. It may be because a teacher needs to take care of a lot of students, and many parents ask them for help.*

(Sch\_B8)

*Because school teachers are busy, I usually can meet the class master only when I pick up my child after school, so I seldom see the teachers.*

Therefore, in addition to school teachers, parents would find some other sources of assistance. Parent Sch\_A6 stated that when compared with school teachers, private tutors are a more ready and accessible source for solving problems about their children's English learning.

(Sch\_A6)

*It is more direct to find his private tutor and I only need to spend much more money. When my child comes across any problems, I can pay the tutor for an extra tutorial hour... It is more convenient and easier in helping my child's learning.*

In short, other than seeking assistance from schools or school teachers, parents would seek help from other social sources, such as private tutors, relatives and friends, as long as parents have the trust that these people possess sufficient knowledge of English. For example, Parent Sch\_A7 said that she would consult someone with a good command of English in her view.

Sch\_A7: *I search information on the Internet or ask someone I think with the authority.*

Interviewer: *For example?*

Sch\_A7: *For example, I search the websites or I find somebody among my friends who I think is reliable, or possesses a higher level, such as editors or reporters, because these people can be found at my workplace.*



It should be noted that about 46% of the parents consider themselves a resource for solving the problems in their children's English learning. Like Parent Sch\_A7, the parents will first attempt to solve the problems themselves, including searching for the possible solutions on the Internet. It can be evident in the findings that about one-third of the parents reported they have sought assistance from websites or online discussion forums.

Another interesting finding of the present study is that nearly 40% of the participating parents have obtained information about children's English learning from the mass media, but only very few of them would seek assistance from or share information on public platforms. Similar results can be found in the use of websites or online discussion forums. More than 30% of the parents reported that they have got information from the websites but only about 10% of them share information with others via this channel. It is sensible to reason that a majority of parents are more willing to share their experience with somebody they know compared with their other social connections. That explains why more than 60% of the parents choose to share their experience with their friends and neighbours. These examples are not difficult to find in the interviews. Among the 22 interviewees, 20 of them said they would choose to share their experience with other parents or friends who have children. The main reason is that their situation has resonance for other parents since they are facing similar situations when taking care of their children, as described by Parent Sch\_B12.

*(Sch\_B12)*

*We have resonance [empathy with other parents]. What their children are learning, my child is learning the same as well, and what problems their children are facing, my child may be facing something similar.*

These parents share with each other information concerning different topics. Most often, they share information about helping children's English learning, including some tips they think useful or some resources they find not useful.

Sch\_B5: *When I find something good and helpful for children, in addition to other information, such as the cost and accessibility, I will share it with [other parents].*

Interviewer: *In contrast, do you share with them when you encounter something not good?*

Sch\_B5: *Yes.*

Some parents said sharing experience with other parents is a way for them to help each other, and they can obtain a sense of self-satisfaction. For example, Parent Sch\_A11 said she wants to help others because she has experienced failure, while Parent Sch\_A9 stated that she feels happy when knowing parents and children can make progress together.

*(Sch\_A11)*

*I will answer them whenever [other parents] ask me. I have experienced many failures and have wasted much effort and time. People should help and encourage each other, so I must [share experience with other parents].*

*(Sch\_A9)*

*We can make progress together. I can also witness the growth of my own child. I am happy. We are sincere parents. Although I am busy and cannot spend too much time talking or interacting with other parents, I think if we can get along well, have the same goal and similar level, we can have more communication.*

One of the two parents who reported that they rarely share their experience with other parents claimed that she prefers to share the experience with school teachers, while the other one thinks that she has not yet done well in helping her child's English learning, so she is not confident about sharing her experience with others.

From the findings, it can be seen that parents' social capital does not show a significant impact on the frequency of their adoption of the English strategies. Among the various social networks, schools and school teachers remain important social

resources for parents in obtaining and sharing information about children's English learning. In contrast, the role of parent-teacher association is not optimised in assisting parents in this area. In addition, parents prefer to exchange information and experience with their friends and neighbours among the various personal contacts because they are facing similar situations. It is noteworthy that some parents tend to count on themselves when handling issues about their children's English learning. In other words, parents count on their own knowledge and experience to help with their children's learning process.

#### 4.7.4 Relationships Among the Three Types of Parental Capital

The findings resulting from the correlation analysis show that those strategies significantly related to parents' cultural capital are also significantly related to their economic capital. On the other hand, their social capital does not show any relationship with the other two types of capital in terms of their significance for the frequency of parents' adoption of these strategies. Correlation analysis has thus been conducted to examine whether the similarities and contrasts found are coincident. Table 13 shows the results of correlation analysis among the three types of parental capital.

**Table 13. Results of correlation analysis among the three types of parental capital**

			Correlations				
			Income	Educational Level	English Proficiency	Source of Information	Coverage of Social Network
Spearman's rho	Monthly Household Income	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.734**	.616**	.147	.176
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000	.000	.192	.116
		N	81	81	81	81	81
	Parents' Education Level	Correlation Coefficient	.734**	1.000	.724**	.154	.203
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.	.000	.169	.069
		N	81	81	81	81	81
	Parents' English Proficiency	Correlation Coefficient	.616**	.724**	1.000	.195	.228*
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.	.081	.041
		N	81	81	81	81	81
	Parents' Source of Information	Correlation Coefficient	.147	.154	.195	1.000	.922**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.192	.169	.081	.	.000
		N	81	81	81	81	81
	Coverage of Parents' Social Network	Correlation Coefficient	.176	.203	.228*	.922**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.116	.069	.041	.000	.
		N	81	81	81	81	81

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). \* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The results of the analysis have shown that the three items, namely the family household income, parents' educational level and parents' English proficiency, are significantly related to each other, but none of them shows a significant relationship with parents' source of information. The results have shown that parents with more formal education or a good command of English would have higher household monthly income than their counterparts and vice versa, but on the other hand, their good educational background or high monthly household income does not guarantee that they can have more social sources to obtain information or stay in touch with

more social networks. However, parents who are proficient in English are more likely to have a wider coverage of social networks. Based on the results, it can be concluded that it is not a coincidence that parents' economic capital and cultural capital are significantly related to some parental strategies as these two types of parental capital are proven to be positively related to each other.

The present study analysed how parents' economical capital, cultural capital and social capital are related to their frequency of adopting the English learning activities. It found that

- Parents' economic capital and cultural capital are significantly related to the frequency of parents adopting strategies which usually require parents to have higher educational background and higher English proficiency, such as speaking to children in English.
- Among the three types of capital possessed by parents, social capital is the one that has the least impact on their choices of parental strategies of assisting their children's English learning.
- Among the three types of capital possessed by parents, parents' economic capital and cultural capital are significantly and positively related to each other, while their social capital, generally speaking, does not show a significant relationship with the other two.

#### 4.8 Strategies That Can Effectively Help Children's English Learning

The previous section has shown how parents' possession of three types of capital affects the frequency with which they implement the learning strategies and provide support for their children's English learning. In fact, the parents' ultimate goal is to motivate their children to learn English. However, the effectiveness of the strategies on children's English learning is not easy to measure; therefore, children's results in their school English subject is used as a solid yet objective scale for the statistical analysis.

#### 4.8.1 Measuring Children's Results in the English Subject

In the present study, children's English attainment was measured based on the self-reported data of the parents. They were asked to report their children's overall results in English subjects in the most recent semester when the present study was conducted. When doing the correlation analysis, the researcher needed to find a solution to handle cases where a participating parent may have more than one child attending primary school. Because the purpose of measuring children's results in English subject is to measure the effectiveness of different types of strategies, it sounds more sensible to do the analysis based on the average score of the children who are from the same family. There are several reasons for doing so. First, parents may apply different strategies to their different children. For example, Parent Sch\_A7 mentioned that she uses different strategies when handling her two children's studies:

*(Sch\_A7)*

*Sometimes when I am teaching my son, I would force him to do something, but he finds it not appropriate. On the other hand, I cannot use the same method to teach my daughter, so I must teach them in different ways.*

In addition, it is sensible to believe that even when the parents have applied the same strategies to their different children, the outcomes could vary. Therefore, it is more reasonable to analyse the effectiveness of individual strategies by using the average score of the children from the same family. Also, when adopting average values, the researcher was aware of the existence of extreme values in the data set, which may affect the representativeness of the average score. However, because the present study targets only children attending primary schools, the chances of a family having many children attending primary school at the same time are very slim.

For analysis, the children's English results have been categorised into six levels based on their overall academic results in English subjects at school, ranging from F (fail, score=1) to A+ (excellent, score = 6). Suppose a parent has two children attending primary school, one obtaining grade B while the other obtaining grade D respectively

in their English subjects, the average score of them is 4, as grade B is categorised as “Good” (score = 5) and grade D is categorised as “Fair” (score = 3). There were four cases excluded from the analysis. Among them, three could not provide the academic results from schools because their children were in primary one and had not received any school report at the time of data collection. The other one reported that her child’s school did not use grades or marks to evaluate students’ English results.

The present study may be questioned for comparing the academic results of children of different levels of study. In fact, it is justifiable to conduct the analysis based on their school results. Although the children involved in the present study are going to different schools and studying at different levels, their academic performance in English subjects was evaluated by their school teachers and with reference to their peers who were taking the same levels of English subjects at the same schools. More importantly, there is no significant relationship between children’s level of study and their academic results in English subjects ( $r=-.030$ ,  $p=.767$ , see Table 14). In other words, although it is likely that the older children would have been exposed to English learning for a longer period, it does not necessarily mean that they must perform better than those younger children. Therefore, the comparison in the study can be regarded as encompassing an objective scale to measure the English results of the children involved.



**Table 14. Results of correlation analysis between children's level of study and their English results at school**

Correlations			level of study	result
Spearman's rho	level of study	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	-.030
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.767
		N	102	102
	result	Correlation Coefficient	-.030	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.767	.
		N	102	102

*n=102 (The total number of children who are attending primary school of the 81 participating parents, excluding the 4 invalid cases.)*

#### 4.8.2 Relationship Between Parental Strategies and Children's English Results

One of the questions that the present study intended to answer is: among the common strategies, which of them can effectively enhance children's English proficiency as their parents had expected? To answer this question, a correlation analysis was carried out to examine to what extent the frequency of conducting these strategies are related to children's attainment in English. Table 15 illustrates the results of the analysis.



**Table 15. Correlation between the frequency of implementing the common parental strategies and children's English results**

		Children's English Results
Providing children with multi-media materials	Spearman's rho	.230*
Providing children with English written materials	Spearman's rho	.323**
Assisting with homework	Spearman's rho	.014
Reading English or Chinese-English bilingual books with children	Spearman's rho	.378**
Visiting bookstores or libraries with children	Spearman's rho	.337**
Conducting parent-developed English study plan or activities	Spearman's rho	.339**
Travelling with children	Spearman's rho	.003
Enrolling children in English certification exams and relative preparation courses	Spearman's rho	-.051
Enrolling children in after-school programmes	Spearman's rho	.096
Speaking to children in English	Spearman's rho	.453**

n=77 \*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed). \*\*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The results of the analysis are split. A significant positive correlation is evident in six types of parental strategies and children's English results, namely "providing children with multi-media materials", "providing children with English written materials", "reading English or Chinese-English bilingual books with children", "visiting bookstores or libraries with children", "conducting parent-developed English study plan or activities" and "speaking to children in English". That means when parents adopt these six types of strategies more frequently, it is more likely that their children will perform better in English subjects at school.

The results of the correlation analysis show the relationship between the frequency of parents' conducting these strategies and children's attainment in English, but it should be noted that the results were generated based on the assumption that parents conduct

each of these strategies alone and regardless of the availability of parents' resources. However, parents may conduct more than one strategy to assist their children's English learning. Although among the ten strategies, not all of them show a significant correlation (as shown in Table 15) to children's English attainment when they are conducted individually, the impact may be different when parents do more than one strategy simultaneously and when the availability of parental resources are taken into account. Therefore, a multiple regression analysis was done to address the complexities of the actual situation, as Sweet and Grace-Martin (2012) stated, "multiple regression examines how two or more variables act together to affect the dependent variable" (p.171).

Table 16 illustrates the contribution of the ten parental strategies and the five types of parental resources to children's English results by the multiple regression model and the regression analysis (ANOVA) of the model. The model tests how the parental strategies and parental resources (independent variables) act together to affect children's English results (dependent variables).



**Table 16. Multiple regression model showing the contribution of the ten parental strategies and five types of parental resources to children's English results**

Model	Coefficients				
	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	.558	.862		.647	.520
Providing children with multi-media materials	-.177	.223	-.121	-.791	.432
Providing children with English written materials	.257	.245	.161	1.049	.298
Assisting with homework	-.109	.169	-.079	-.645	.521
Reading English or Chinese-English bilingual books with children	.242	.214	.161	1.133	.262
Visiting bookstores or libraries with children	.436	.228	.226	1.913	.060
Conducting parent-developed English study plan or activities	.154	.172	.106	.894	.375
Travelling with children	-.071	.144	-.055	-.495	.622
Enrolling children in English certification exams and relative preparation courses	.019	.136	.017	.140	.889
Enrolling children in after-school programmes	.086	.157	.065	.545	.588
Speaking to children in English	.297	.177	.215	1.675	.099
Monthly household income	.159	.221	.111	.717	.476
Parents' educational level	.097	.140	.121	.697	.489
Parents' English proficiency	.025	.213	.019	.115	.909
Coverage of parents' social network	.141	.293	.158	.483	.631
Parents' source of information	-.060	.104	-.185	-.581	.564

n=77

Dependent Variable: Children's English results

ANOVA					
Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	50.665	15	3.378	3.160	.001
Residual	65.192	61	1.069		
Total	115.857	76			

The p-value of F-test of the regression model is .001, which means the model is highly significant. The model shows that although some individual strategies are correlated to children's English results when they are conducted alone, when the availability of parental resources and the combination of different strategies are taken into consideration, these strategies are no longer significantly related to children's English results. In other words, the model implies that even if parents frequently adopt a wide variety of English learning strategies at the same time, it may not benefit children's English results. Furthermore, none of the five types of parental resources shows significant contributions to children's English results. The results reveal that the effectiveness of conducting individual strategies by parents from different social economic backgrounds does not have any significant differences.

Although parents may not fully understand such a relationship between their own resources and children's English competence, they reflected they will also take "effectiveness" into account when choosing English learning strategies for their children.

#### 4.8.3 Parents' Opinions

There are some important observations among the six types of parental strategies that are found significantly correlate to children's English results. First, all of these strategies can fulfill what parents regard as "the most effective" ways to help with their children's English learning. In fact, during the interviews, the 22 parents were asked to discuss what they think are the most effective English learning strategies. For these parents, there are two major groups of effective activities, namely providing an English learning environment for children and helping their children improve their academic performance. About 80% of them suggested that effective English learning strategies are those that can provide their children with an English learning environment and provide them with chances to apply their English skills in order to boost their confidence or nurture their interest in using English. As Parent Sch\_A6 stated, giving children English environments can show them how to use English in communication.

(Sch\_A6)

*I think it probably is the provision of a language environment. I think...also based on my experience, if you cannot speak...there is no language environment...you [children] may have learned some words, some sentences or some grammar rules in a fastidious way, but it doesn't mean you [they] can express well. I think, more importantly, English is learned for expression and communication.*

Some parents, like Parent Sch\_B5, suggested that provision of reading materials to children and reading with them are effective means because they can help children learn some basic English phrases.

Sch\_B5: *The most effective one is story books. Read the stories for him and help him understand.*

Interviewer: *Why do you think it is effective? In what ways? Because you can see his improvement in academic results or in other aspects?*

Sch\_B5: *He has improvements in comprehending ideas. Because story books for children are simple and, in particular, some ideas are presented in one-word phrases, he can learn the pronunciations and meanings of new words in a gradual manner. Then I find that he can apply the words in daily life.*

Other suggestions include watching English movies and TV programmes, talking with their children in English, and letting children join some extra-curricular English activities. In particular, those activities reportedly hosted by native English speakers are valued, as parents appreciated that these strategies can help improve their children's English listening and speaking proficiency, and most importantly, they believe their children can pick up good English accents.

The other type of English learning strategies that parents regard as effective serves a more practical purpose. About one-fifth of the interviewees suggested that those strategies which can directly benefit children's results at school are effective. Not surprisingly, these activities include hiring private tutors, sending children to English

tutorial classes, helping children with their homework and doing subject-related supplementary exercises. For example, Parent Sch\_B11 thought the writing exercises were effective.

*(Sch\_B11)*

*Learning and writing vocabulary, composition and letter writing are useful.*

In addition to referring to academic reports from schools, another common way for parents to measure the effectiveness of English learning activities is observing whether children can apply their different English skills in daily life.

*Interviewer: Why do you think the methods you mentioned [watch English TV channels and read English books] are particularly effective?*

*Sch\_B6: He can use more new words.*

*Interviewer: It is because you have found that he can use more new words?*

*Sch\_B6: Yes. For example, he can use some sentences about environmental protection.*

Another observation is that these six types of strategies can be further classified into two groups due to their different natures. Among them, two are directly related to parents' provision of English learning materials to children, so it is reasonable to argue that when parents frequently provide their children with English learning materials, either in the form of multi-media resources or reading materials, it is more likely that their children will perform better in their English subjects at school.

The other four types of strategies share some important elements in common; all of them require the parents to accompany their children when conducting the strategies, but they are not necessarily related to school or homework. For example, parents read books with their children or visit libraries together with their children. In addition, these strategies require parents to have some basic knowledge of English. As shown above, when parents provide their children with English materials, no matter whether

buying the materials for them or borrowing the materials from libraries, they will screen the materials and select those they think are suitable for their children. Three types of strategies, including “reading English or Chinese-English bilingual books with children”, “conducting parent-developed English study plan or activities” and “speaking to children in English”, require parents to have higher competence in English.

Although most of the interviewed parents claimed that it is more important to nurture their children’s interest in learning English and boost their confidence in using English so that they can apply their English skills in daily life, they also place importance on children’s academic results. It can explain why “assisting with homework” is one of the most popular strategies parents adopt at home (as shown in Table 6). Such a contrast implies that although parents may have planned their children’s English learning, based on their own experience, the school’s academic results are still regarded as an important and objective way to evaluate a child’s English proficiency and have significant impact on the child’s future study and career opportunities. As Tam and Chan (2010) stated, “homework was considered an essential part of learning, especially in the unique educational context in Hong Kong” (p.367). Therefore, children’s performance at school is always the prime concern of many parents.

In short, the findings of the present study have suggested that

- Six types of strategies show a positive correlation to children’s English results when they are conducted individually. However, when combinations of these strategies and availability of parental resources are taken into account, these six individual strategies are no longer significantly related to children’s English results.
- Those strategies that are contributive to children’s academic achievement in English subjects are usually regarded as “the most effective” strategies among parents, in regard to providing children with a good English learning environment and helping children to improve their academic performance.

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION

While there have already been a number of studies discussing parental involvement in children's development from different dimensions (e.g. Furstenberg, 2005; Ginsburg & Bronstein, 1993), these studies seldom explore how the resources possessed by parents affect their children's second language learning and why parents want to help with their children's second language learning. Muller (1993) suggested that the differences of parents' resources and circumstances may influence how parents get involved in children's education and "each context is likely to constrain or facilitate involvement in different ways" (p.100). Having considered the variations in parents' resources and contexts, the present study has described a successful attempt to use the categories conceptualised in Bourdieu's (1986) Concept of Capital as the parameters to measure different types of parental resources, ranging from the tangible financial and cultural resources to the intangible parental attitudes and social network. It has then shown how the parental input does have an impact on children's second language learning in an ESL context, that is, Hong Kong. In this chapter, the researcher will start by addressing the significance of the findings in the present study. This will be followed by a discussion about the relationship between parental capital and the support parents provide to their children from the aspects of capital transmission. Next, there will be an examination of how the variations of parental capital affect the roles parents are playing in their children's English learning process, and finally how parents can become effective resources for second language learning.

#### 5.1 Observations Arising from the Present Study

##### 5.1.1 Parents' Choices of English Learning Strategies for Children

The findings in the present study suggested that Hong Kong Chinese parents would be fond of using a spectrum of English learning strategies to help with their children's English learning. Among the common strategies, provision of English written





materials to children, including visiting bookstores or libraries with children and providing them with books and exercise books is the most popular strategy adopted by the participating parents. This result is not surprising. Based on the data obtained from interviews, the parents generally agreed that written materials, such as books, newspapers and workbooks are the most common and handy English learning materials in their homes because it is not difficult for them to get access to these materials. There is a variety of English written materials available in bookstores and public libraries, which are suitable for children at different education levels. Also, as discussed earlier, parents did not mind spending money buying extra-curricular English reading materials for their children. This did not differ among families from different economic backgrounds. In addition, schools also provide children with these reading resources. For example, the two participating schools have set up their own school library for students' use. Furthermore, it does not require parents to have a good command of English when providing the reading materials to children. Even for those parents who claimed they are not proficient in English, they reported that they usually accompany their children when having casual reading times at home.

More importantly, more reading is always regarded as one of the effective ways to enhance one's English proficiency. In fact, previous research has already hinted that parent-child reading is a key home activity that noticeably contributes to children's language development (Scarborough & Dobrich, 1994). Some other studies have further found that storybook reading can have a long term positive impact on children's literacy development (Collins, 2005; Wood, 2002). Some parents reflected in the interviews that they believed reading can help their children because they had learned its value from their own experience as well as that of other parents. It should also be noted that parents with higher English proficiency are more likely to adopt this strategy. Therefore, it is reasonable to believe that their own successful experience in English learning tells them that the provision of written English materials to their children can be an effective means to improve their children's English proficiency.

Assisting children with their homework is another popular strategy parents tended to



adopt. Parents think homework is crucial in children's learning at school (Tam & Chan, 2010), and children's academic results are always regarded as objective evidence when evaluating their achievement. Therefore, parents actively got involved both directly and indirectly in children's homework. They would directly guide children to complete the homework and they would activate their different forms of resources to help their children. For example, they could offer financial support for hiring private tutors, sending children to tutorial centres or seeking help from their friends and relatives if they could not assist with the homework themselves. The parents' desire to facilitate their children's achievement of good academic results in English subjects is understandable. Their high aspirations towards their children's English proficiency were mainly developed based on their own experience, and they strongly believed that good English proficiency can lead their children to excel in study and career in the future.

On the other hand, travelling was the least well-received English learning strategy among the parents. Surprisingly, costs were not the main concern of many of the parents, including those from low-income families. As the findings indicate, even for those parents who could afford the costs, they were concerned more about the usefulness of the trips for their children. While some parents thought the trips may not help to enhance their children's English proficiency, some thought that this strategy will be more applicable when their children are more mature. It reflects the fact that when parents consider the available strategies, their perceptions and experience towards them outweighs the tangible resources they possess.

In fact, when parents choose English learning strategies for their children, the availability of resources is not the major factor that drives them to or hinders them from using the strategies. Some of them simply do what they think is best for their children's English development. The statistical findings of the present study agreed that the availability of parents' capital shows a weak linkage with parents' choices of strategies, but the findings also showed that some of these strategies are not as effective as parents had expected.

### 5.1.2 Relationship between Parental Capital and Parents' Choices of English Learning Strategies for Their Children

It is too assertive to conclude that parents who possess more economic, cultural or social resources are more likely to conduct parental strategies, as the findings do not show a significant relationship between parents' different forms of capital and all the common parental strategies. In fact, the present study has shown a positive relationship of parents' economic capital and cultural capital to only three common parental strategies, while parents' social capital does not show any significant relationship with any of these common parental strategies. Also, some popular strategies that Hong Kong Chinese parents usually adopt, such as "assisting with homework" and "enrolling children in after-school programmes" did not show a direct contribution to boosting children's results in school English subjects.

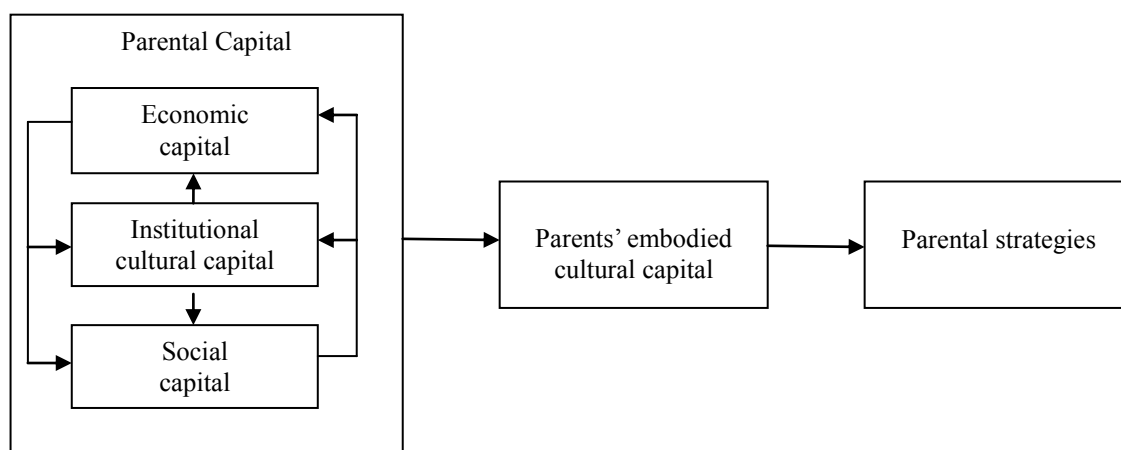
These findings imply that children from higher monthly income families and/or have well-educated parents did not necessarily receive more English learning resources from their parents. Parents who have higher monthly income and higher academic qualifications were just slightly advantaged and more flexible than their counterparts when choosing the strategies. Furthermore, the gap can be narrowed if parents can compensate for the inadequacy of a particular type of capital with other forms of capital. For example, when they find that they are unable to assist with their children's homework, they can hire private tutors for help. In such cases, the parents use their economic capital to compensate their institutional cultural capital.

Although it is not explicitly observable, parents' embodied cultural capital exercises influences over their choices of learning strategies for their children. When choosing the learning strategies for their children, parents prefer to choose those that they think will be of most significance to their children's English development. Parents emphasised that when they choose English learning strategies for their children, preferences are always given to those they think can effectively and practically enhance their children's English learning. But one important point that should be addressed is how parents judge the effectiveness and practicality of a strategy chosen

mainly based on their own English learning experience and their knowledge of English learning, i.e. parents' embodied cultural capital.

Therefore, the transformative nature of different forms of capital and parents' embodied cultural capital (e.g. their attitudes and aspirations) should also be taken into account when considering how parents' capital is related to their adoptions of parental strategies. Figure 4 illustrates the relationship between parents' capital and parents' choices of parental strategies.

**Figure 4. Relationship between parents' capital and parents' choices of parental strategies**



### 5.1.3 Parents' Constraints

One of the focuses of the present study is to investigate the common strategies that Hong Kong Chinese parents usually adopt at home. It has been revealed that even though the parents have adopted similar strategies, the resultant outcomes are not the same. The variations of parental capital are actually one of the root causes that lead to the variation of parents' adoption of particular English learning strategies. The English learning environment at home (e.g. Teachman, 1987), as well as the role parents play in assisting their children's learning (e.g. Gao, 2006), and eventually, a difference in parents' choices of English learning strategies are all linked. Theoretically, a feasible means to make parents effective English learning resources

is, therefore, to enrich the different forms of parents' capital, but it is not easy to achieve, as there are many constraints.

First, it should be noted that parents' English learning experience and their knowledge of English may be limited. For one thing, as discussed, a parent may not have a sound educational background or a good command of English. Among the 81 parents participating in the present study, some were plainly not confident with their own English proficiency, especially those who received both primary and secondary education in the mainland where English was not a core school subject during their schooling.

Moreover, parents' own English learning experience may not keep up with the changes in the Hong Kong education system. Lareau (1987) suggested that parents with sound educational backgrounds, that is, rich cultural capital, including experience in education and knowledge of school subjects, should be more familiar with the institutional system, which can be advantageous to their children. However, after discussing with the participating parents, the researcher found that parents may not thoroughly understand the education system, the school pedagogies, or even what their children are learning at school. For example, although there have been observable changes in the MOI policies in Hong Kong in recent years, such as the fine-tuning policy in 2009, many parents in the present study still generally split schools into two major streams, namely, EMI and CMI, based on the teaching language used in schools. In fact, under the latest fine-tuning policy, schools are allowed flexibility in the adoption of MOI. In other words, the boundary between CMI and EMI is not as clear-cut as the parents experienced in their schooling. In fact, it can be argued that these constraints may not only compromise the effectiveness of parental involvement in children's education but also bring conflicts with the schools' educational purposes (Symeou, 2007).

The important revelation here is that parents rich in cultural capital, including knowledge of the education system, still have to keep themselves up-to-date and keep acquiring much more information about their children's schooling. Gao (2012)



suggested in his study that parents with a good understanding of what their children are learning manage the progress of their children's language learning "in a much more subtle and sophisticated manner" (p.587). Therefore, apart from their knowledge of English, if parents want to be effective in helping their children, they should also stay well-informed of what their children are actually learning at school.

Another common constraint for many parents is time. Many parents in the present study reported difficulties in finding time for English learning activities with their children, and this does not only apply to working parents. Full-time caretakers are faced with the same problem as they may have to take care of two or more children at home and do the myriad household chores. Parents reflected that time constraints had also prevented them from keeping a close contact with school teachers.

#### 5.1.4 Overcoming Parents' Constraints

Symeou (2007) believed that parents would try their best to overcome the constraints and even "[transcend] their personal or family constraints in their commitment to support their child's school work" (p.483). Educational authorities, such as schools and parent-teacher associations, are well placed to help parents tackle these constraints. Catsambis (2001) suggested that if schools can make much more effort to involve parents in their children's education, children can achieve better academically. The most straightforward way is to endow parents with a thorough understanding of what they can do to help with their children's English learning. First and foremost, schools should consider holding seminars or parent-training sessions to help parents understand the current education environment, including the syllabus, changes in education policies and schools' pedagogical methodology that would directly or immediately affect their children. By doing so, schools can minimise the gap among parents in regard to their knowledge about the education system in order to avoid the inequalities brought by the difference in the amount of information about schooling possessed by parents (Lareau, 1987).

In addition, although it is not easy to improve some parents' institutional cultural



capital instantly, it is feasible to enhance their other forms of capital by taking advantage of the transformative nature of the different forms of capital. Gao (2012) mentioned in his study that through their active support, parents can improve their children's institutional capital. Eventually, the children would have a better chance of entering elite schools and building their own social and cultural capital. It is a typical example of activating one's social capital by one's own cultural capital. The same mechanism can work for parents if they are united and actively share with one another their skills and knowledge in assisting children's English learning. However, many parents reflected in the present study that they are not actively attached to formal school-teacher associations and do not have frequent communication with school personnel. Muller (1993) discussed this phenomenon and argued that "whether a parent develops acquaintance ties with other parents will depend in part upon the willingness of other parents to engage in those relations" (p.101). Therefore, schools may consider taking the initiatives to strengthen their link with parents and optimise the operation of parent-teacher associations in order to encourage parents to have more active communication with the schools.

Although the gap among parents can possibly be narrowed, the inequalities of different forms of capital available to parents are unlikely to be completely eliminated. After all, it still depends on parents' individual decisions to activate their different forms of capital. As Teachman (1987) put it, "[parental capital] should only be moderately (positively) correlated with usual measures of family background because investments in children remain discretionary" (p.549).

## 5.2 Whether Parental Strategies Serve as a Means to Transmit Parental Capital to the Next Generation

The present study suggested that the English learning strategies that parents offer to help their children's English learning is a means for parents to actualise their capital, and more importantly, through these English learning strategies, parents can transmit their different forms of capital to the next generation. Some of the transmission is tangible and measurable, such as the transmission of economic capital and objectified

cultural capital, while some is abstract, such as the transmission of embodied cultural capital and institutional cultural capital. In this section, the researcher attempts to discuss how the different forms of parental capital are transmitted from parents to children.

### 5.2.1 Transmission of Economic Capital through Parental English Learning Strategies

Economic capital is the most tangible and measurable type of capital that parents can transmit to their next generation. With regard to English learning strategies, parents' economic capital can be actualised as the financial support involved, including the expenses on English learning aids for their children, the fees they pay for the after-school programs or private tuition, and the money spent on travelling with their children. It has been evident in the present study that these kinds of financial support, especially buying English learning materials for children, are quite common among Hong Kong Chinese parents.

### 5.2.2 Transmission of Cultural Capital through Parental English Learning Strategies

#### 5.2.2.1 Embodied Cultural Capital

First and foremost, the present study investigated parents' views on learning English as a second language in Hong Kong and the impact their views would have on their involvement in their children's English learning. The study obtained data from the parents' perspectives for investigating their attitudes towards their children's English learning. The findings indicated that Hong Kong Chinese parents still have a strong belief that learning English is important in Hong Kong even though it is more than fifteen years since the end of the colonial era. As evidenced in the study, the notion that a good command of English can lead to success in both study and career has been deeply rooted in parents' minds. Parents reflected that they learned the importance of English in Hong Kong through their own daily and workplace experience, regardless of their own proficiency in English. Some of them enjoy the benefits of having a good



command of English, such as good career prospects, while some others have learned from their unpleasant experience from not having good English skills. In this respect, parents' embodied cultural capital, that is, their experience, is one of the main motives that drives parents to be involved in their children's English learning process. They are eager to equip their children with good English proficiency, which they think can pave the way to a bright future for them.

Hong Kong Chinese parents can, in general, be said to have positive attitudes towards English learning. As discussed Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's study (1997), when parents believe something is important to their children's learning and the resources allow, they would get involved in their children's education. It can be seen in this study that parents possessing the idea that learning English is important to their children's future will in all likelihood instill these values in their children. Therefore, parents may have either consciously or subconsciously transmitted their embodied cultural capital, that is, their positive attitudes towards English learning, to their children. Previous studies (Bray & Kwok, 2003; Wu, 2012) suggested that the instrumental and career-related nature of English motivates Hong Kong people to learn English, but they did not discuss how the learners had acquired their positive attitudes towards English. The present study has suggested that parents are probably a source of those values. Parents may explicitly tell their children of their desire to see them equipped with good English proficiency. More often, though, parents implicitly show such a desire through offering their young ones a variety of English learning aids. As Wu (2012) suggested, one of the possible recommendations to enhance ESL teaching in Hong Kong is to foster a learner's positive attitude towards English, and this can be achieved through involving them in some popular English learning activities. Based on the findings of the present study, if parents can activate their capital appropriately, they can act as an effective medium to foster learners' positive attitudes as well as providing thoughtful English learning activities to nurture their children's interest in learning English.

#### 5.2.2.2 Objectified Cultural Capital

According to Bourdieu (1986), one's cultural capital can also appear in the form of an "objectified state" that can be seen in objects such as books, libraries and museums. As shown in the present study, visiting libraries or bookstores with children is the most preferred strategy adopted by parents to support their children's language learning. Also, parents frequently provide their children with English learning materials, including books, flashcards and audio-visual materials. Parents expressed their view that these materials are the most common and handy English learning aids that they usually prepare for their children at home. In fact, when parents adopt these strategies, they are transmitting their resources to their children in the form of objectified cultural capital.

The results of the present study support the findings addressed in Wu's (2012) study that "using audio-visual means" including "reading" and "listening to English songs/radio channels/music" are the "out-of-class" English learning activities the learners most frequently adopted (p.42). Yet, Wu did not discuss why the learners had adopted these activities and when they had started doing so. As suggested in the present study, the family is one of the most possible sources for them to first come into contact with these learning resources.

#### 5.2.2.3 Institutional Cultural Capital

The transmission of parents' institutional cultural capital to their children is not apparent or observable, but it has great impact on children's English learning for it is a major cause of the variations in quality and quantity found among the English learning strategies adopted by parents. In the present study, parents' institutional cultural capital is measured by parents' educational background and their English proficiency. Echoing the study of Baker and Stevenson (1986), the present study reveals that parents who possess higher education qualifications are more likely to have more flexibility in choosing and planning different kinds of learning activities for their children outside school. The results have shown that parents' institutional

cultural capital plays a role in the quality of implementing the English learning strategies. Furthermore, according to Bourdieu (1986), the different types of capital are inter-transferable. It provides a plausible ground to justify the perception that the participating parents who have received more education are more likely to have a higher monthly income. Moreover, parents' own successful experience in transferring their institutional cultural capital into economic capital probably strengthened their belief that having a good command of English can bring their children a prosperous future.

Nevertheless, even when the findings of the present study agree with Symeou (2007) that more educated parents are found "more able" to help with children's education, they are in contrast to Symeou's suggestion that parents who have little education experience may only be able to provide their children with limited educational resources. As seen from this study's results, when parents found themselves unable to handle their children's English learning, they sought help from external resources, such as hiring private tutors and asking for friends' assistance. In other words, parents can activate their other types of capital to compensate for their inadequacy in institutional cultural capital.

### 5.2.3 Transmission of Social Capital through Parental English Learning Strategies

Unlike in some previous studies where parents' social capital proved to be crucial to children's educational development (e.g. Dufur, Parcel & Troutman, 2013), the findings of the present study do not show any significant relationship between parents' social capital and their adoption of common parental strategies. However, it may be too assertive to conclude that these parental strategies are not the actualisation of parents' social capital. It depends on how parents' social capital is interpreted because, according to Furstenberg (2005), the extent to which people can benefit from their social network "might not be always apparent because residing in a high social capital system not only confers benefits but also entails obligations" (p.817). The present study measured parents' social capital by probing the coverage of their social networks and the sources of information from which they learn about English

learning strategies. However, if a broader sense of social capital is adopted (Furstenberg, 2005; Portes, 1998), that family support and kinship is considered as a kind of social capital, then the time parents spend with their children can also be regarded as parents' social capital. If it is the case, those strategies requiring parents' company, such as parent-child reading, should be treated as a realisation of the transmission of social capital from parents to their children. It provides another dimension to understand the variation in quantity and quality among the strategies conducted by parents. As evidenced in the discussions about interviews, the time parents spent together with their children doing English learning activities varied quite a lot, and this variation was also found to be a constraint that affected parents' adoption of some English learning strategies. For example, some busy parents have found it difficult to have a sophisticated English study plan for their children, while some have reported that the more time they spend with children doing English learning activities, the more effective the activities can be. The positive impact associated with parent-child activities can be found in Chow, McBride-Chang and Cheung (2010), where the researchers found that quality parent-child reading can positively influence children's English learning. Therefore, if within-family social capital is also taken into account when considering the transmission of parents' social capital to the next generation, the transmission may be more obvious.

In addition, another obvious but effective form of within-family social capital transmission can be found when parents encourage their children to establish their own English speaking social circles. For instance, some parents reported that they had conducted English speaking days at home or deliberately hired English-speaking maids to take care of their children. In doing so, the parents intended to establish an English speaking environment for their children in order to let them have more opportunities to speak English in their daily social contexts. The study of Palfreyman (2006) suggested that improving learners' accessibility to English speaking networks is an effective means of enhancing their English proficiency. Therefore, parents are attempting to transmit their social capital to children by starting up some English speaking social networks for them.



In short, parents' positive attitudes towards learning English can explain why they are keen on providing a spectrum of English learning resources to their children. Previous studies (Lareau, 1987; Symeou, 2007) showed that a majority of parents, no matter what their social or economic classes were, placed a high priority on their children's educational success and thus expected their children to perform well at school. So it is unsurprising that all parents participating in this study have tried to adopt different strategies to assist their children's English learning. This phenomenon implies the demand for a variety of English learning resources, including reading materials, multi-media resources, tutorial classes and private tutors, even though parents may not know how to use these materials effectively or how to choose the most suitable materials for their children. Also, it is noteworthy that the ways parents adopted the strategies vary in quantity and quality and this variation is invariably decided by the capital parents possess. The findings, however, revealed an interesting contradiction. On the one hand, some parents claimed that they might not have sufficient knowledge of English, but on the other hand, they were usually responsible for choosing and screening the English learning resources for their children. Thus, the criteria on which parents based their choices of learning resources should be further explored. When parents chose the resources, neither costs nor others' recommendations (sources of information) appeared to be their prime concern. Instead, parents often made decisions based on their own experience and knowledge, however limited that might be.

Further to Muller and Kerbow (1993), who state that parents' willingness to allocate money for education can be said to be "symbolic of parents' attitude" as they think their investment in children's education can bring their children a bright future. Parents' cultural capital, that is, their experience and knowledge, evidently plays a more important role than the other two types of parental capital when parents are considering strategies to help with their children's English learning.

In addition, the high correlation coefficient between parents' cultural capital and economic capital cannot be neglected. It is an example of the transformative nature of capital suggested by Bourdieu (1986) and parents' own successful experience is a



convincing instrumental motive that drives them to adopt their parental strategies. Furthermore, their positive attitudes and values towards English learning have been inculcated into the next generation through the parental strategies. As Gao (2012) stated, “parents managed to foster positive values, beliefs and knowledge” about learning English through effective use of the learning support strategies. Although the instillation may be done implicitly or the parents even unaware of it, its impact on children’s English learning process should not be ignored, not least because it can also be regarded as the actualisation and transmission of parents’ capital.

### 5.3 Whether Variations in Parental Capital Lead to those in Parents’ Provision of English Learning Strategies to Their Children

Although it cannot be concluded from the present study that the three types of parental capital show a significant relationship with all the ten common types of parental strategies, the findings do show that when compared with parents’ social capital, their economic capital and cultural capital can be seen as having noticeable impact on parents’ choices of these strategies. However, it may be an overstatement to conclude that parents’ economic capital would be a major concern hindering their choices of strategies. As learned from the present study, parents’ economic capital does not have much impact on those strategies involving considerable financial support, such as providing children with different types of English learning resources or travel opportunities. Instead, what is significant in the findings is that strategies positively related to parents’ economic capital are consistently positively related to parents’ cultural capital. While such interaction of the two types of capital has already been shown in the previous chapter to be non-coincidental, it is more reasonable to believe that parents also activate their cultural capital (i.e. their experience and English knowledge) when choosing the strategies or resources, and seldom make decisions solely based on the amount of economic capital they possess. The findings further proved that parents’ decisions are usually not driven by how much capital they have; rather, it is a matter of choice as to how to invest the capital (Li, 2007; Muller & Kerbow, 1993).



It is incontrovertible that at the actual application level, as evident in the findings, there exist significant correlations between parents' capital and some of their strategies in assisting their children's English learning. In particular, when parents possess more economic or cultural capital, they are more likely to adopt strategies that would in turn require more knowledge about English. The variations are not coincidental but indeed lead to the range of roles parents play in their children's English learning process.

### 5.3.1 Parents' Capital and Variations of Their Parental Roles

The present study's results concurred with the study of Gao (2006) that parents play various important roles in their children's English learning process. All the six types of parental roles suggested by Gao have been found in the present study. In addition, learning from parents' responses, the researcher has identified a seventh type of parental role – “fellow learners”, which refers to parents who learn English together with their children.

When discussing the different parental roles, Gao (2006) emphasised that “parental involvement for individual learners might have been limited to one or two aspects of the participants' language learning” (p.295), but he did not elaborate how and why parents are limited when taking up the different parental roles. In fact, parents have their own preferences and choices when taking up different roles simultaneously. Also, they will take their own limitations into account when playing these roles. It can be observed in the findings that parents' choices and limitations are closely related to the capital they possess. First, parents' embodied cultural capital, that is, their attitudes towards English learning, has a great impact on parental roles. All the seven roles require parents to have a positive attitude, believing in their children's future success through parental assistance in their English development. In particular, as Gao suggested, some parents, acting as “language learning advocates”, “had exerted profound influences” that would affect learners' attitudes and motivations. In assuming their roles, parents' attitudes and beliefs towards English learning are of paramount significance. Gao mentioned that the different types of parental roles may



not require parents to have professional knowledge of language learning, but as revealed in the present study, when parents are more proficient in English, they tend to have more flexibility in choosing the strategies. For example, when taking up the role of “language learning advisors”, parents who report that they have systematic English learning plans for their children are usually more confident in their English proficiency.

Another point not mentioned in Gao’s study was that even though parents played the different roles, the quality and quantity (or frequency) differed greatly. For example, one of the popular parental roles is as “language learning facilitators”, which refers to parents who provide learners with learning aids, including reading materials, audio materials and even native English speaking tutors in order to offer their children an optimal English learning environment. The findings of the present study have found that parents who have a higher monthly income and higher education levels are more likely to take up this role, and adopt relevant strategies, such as reading with their children, more frequently. Furthermore, once family and parents are also included as sources of social capital as suggested by some researchers (e.g. McNeal, 1999), the variation of a family’s social capital shows a more obvious and direct impact on the different ways in which parents choose to adopt the various English strategies. For instance, the present study has shown differences among parents in terms of the amount of time involved in their children’s English learning activities.



## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSION

In this chapter, findings of the present study on how parents' capital impinges upon children's second language learning are summarised. Next, limitations of the present study are observed and addressed. Finally, some useful insight into parental support is shared, and implications for future research are examined.

#### 6.1 Concluding Remarks

Unlike previous research that largely focused on discussing how a particular type of parental capital affects children's development, the present study offers a comprehensive analysis of how the three types of parental capital, namely economic, cultural and social capital, influence parents' preference and frequency when adopting some common types of strategies to help with their children's English learning and in what ways these strategies activate parents' capital and transmit the capital from parents to their children.

Among the three types of parental capital, parents' economic capital and objectified cultural capital are the most observable resources as well as the most easily transmittable resources. However, the transmission of parents' embodied and institutional cultural capital cannot be ignored. In particular, the former can provide a perspective from which to understand why many parents are actively involved in children's education and explore parents' influence on nurturing children's interest and motivation to learn a second language. As for parents' institutional cultural capital, the present study has shown that the different educational backgrounds among parents do make a difference to the strategies they adopt. However, the difference is neither drastic nor extensive, but mainly in terms of the flexibility and availability of activity choices.



The present study provides a new dimension for examining parents' roles in children's second language learning experience. It does not simply examine the different parental roles descriptively, but rather attempts to explore the relationship between the parental roles and the resources they possess from the perspectives of Bourdieu's Concept of Capital. In addition, the present study discusses parental roles from the parents' points of view, which is a rarity among comparable studies. It is interesting to learn that many parents were aware of the different roles they played in their children's English learning process and some even said that they indeed chose to play those roles.

In fact, people in the community have already realised the inequalities caused by the variations in resources available to parents. Some schools and the government are taking action, for example, by providing physical materials, subsidies and funding to low-income families, such as the School-based Fund for Cross Boundary Learning Activities offered via Community Care Fund. However, the assistance is mainly focused on minimising the difference in those tangible resources. Though it can support the low-income families in the short run, it is perhaps of much greater significance and urgency to look into pragmatic approaches to help parents to improve their competitiveness and capability in assisting their children's second language learning. It is best to consider taking advantage of the inter-transferrable nature of different forms of parental capital. In other words, school personnel and education authorities can begin with inspiring parents to activate their social capital so as to solicit their different forms of capital through social connections. As suggested by Roberts (1992), if parents are given guidance and support, even though they may not know how to help with their children's education, they would become more actively involved in their children's education. For example, parents can obtain more information about the education system and parental strategies from different social circles (Gao, 2012). In addition, as parents, especially those wanting in institutional cultural capital, are likely to seek help from external resources, they can also benefit from sharing with teachers and other parents their experience of, for example, using some effective strategies to help with children's learning, provided they have access to more sources of information.



## 6.2 Limitations of the Present Study

The present study has its limitations, which presented themselves predominantly at the stages of data collection and data analyses. First, since the data were collected through convenience sampling, they may not fully represent the opinions of all Hong Kong Chinese parents. Furthermore, the researcher had to rely on the two schools to select the participants for the study. Thus the researcher had difficulty in eliminating sampling bias, leaving the fact that the present study did involve parents from two primary schools, not one, as the sole redeeming feature. Moreover, it must be stressed that the parents were invited to participate in the present study on a voluntary basis and they were told the objectives of the study. It readily engaged those parents who are more active in helping with children's learning instead of those who are passive and not so involved in children's education.

Second, when performing data analyses, the researcher recognised limitations in the data collected, which mainly relied on parents' self-reports; thus, the findings would have been more robustly supported had more quantitative data been collected for triangulation analyses. For example, when discussing parents' attitudes towards learning English in Hong Kong and the roles they play in children's learning process, the present study has relied mostly on the qualitative data although more reliable results would have been secured through face-to-face interviews with the parents' to gather their points of view.

Third, the parameters for measuring different types of capital sometimes can be quite broad and diverse. This means those parameters can vary quite a lot because of the scope of analysis and different notions of the framework, as seen in previous research. For the present study, the researcher was struggling in choosing appropriate parameters to measure different types of parental capital. For example, the researcher found that there was no common system for measuring a person's cultural capital in previous research. Some researchers adopted a sophisticated approach to measure a person's different states of cultural capital. For instance, Kraaykamp and van Eijck (2010) measured a person's cultural capital through the frequency of his attendance of

highbrow cultural events, possession of particular culture goods and educational attainment. However, some argued that a person's cultural capital should involve abstract information such as his belief, knowledge and practice (e.g. Lareau & Weininger, 2003). Therefore, as discussed in the Methodology chapter, the researcher identified parents' educational attainment and their English proficiency as the major parameters to measure parents' cultural capital. While educational attainment provides an objective and comparable scale to measure parents' education level, it does not provide any specific information of parents' English proficiency. Therefore, parents were asked to report how they view their own English proficiency, which provides a ground for the researcher to measure to what extent they are confident with their English proficiency, thereby understanding how it will affect their choice of parental strategies. Although meaningful findings were obtained, the present study provided only a limited dimension to examine how parents' cultural capital impacts their children's English learning. It is believed that if more parameters could be adopted, more useful and meaningful findings could be obtained, which would definitely lead to a more thorough understanding of such impacts.

Even though Bourdieu's Concept of Capital may not always perfectly fit into the ground of identifying data collection parameters, it provides a sensible framework for understanding investigating, in a relatively comprehensive fashion, the complicated relationships between the availability of family resources and learners' attainment in learning a second language. This is evidenced by the present study, which has successfully conceptualised parental resources as different types of capital possessed by parents, and which has obtained meaningful findings.

Last but not least, the findings in the present study can only enjoy limited generalisability. The arguments of the present study have been drawn from the 81 Hong Kong Chinese parents participating in it. In fact, there are far more varied Chinese parents in Hong Kong than the target groups of participants included in the present study; there are parents who have different learning experiences and different viewpoints about learning English in Hong Kong. What is more, the participants in the present study are all parents of primary children. Hence, even though the findings

of the present study were generated from the actual experiences and opinions of Hong Kong Chinese parents, their strategies might keep changing due to changes in other factors, such as changes in their children's levels of study, the amount and forms of capital parents possess, or the education system.

### 6.3 Implications for Future Study

First, although the present study intended to achieve a comprehensive analysis of parental capital and the English learning strategies parents implement, it is self-evident that more quantitative findings would have provided more data on how parents view English learning in Hong Kong and how they actually carry out the strategies, such as how they allocate the amount of time to different strategies. Moreover, as proven in Barnard's (2004) study, parental involvement can have long-term effects on children's educational experience. Therefore, further research to investigate the benefits and drawbacks of various parental strategies in the long run as well as the impact of changes in parents' capital on the strategies they adopt could prove to be feasible and meaningful.

Transmission of capital may happen in areas other than second language learning, which justifies more research on capital transmission. In addition, the present study suggested having an in-depth examination of the relationships among the three forms of parental capital. It is demonstrated in the present study that the interaction of different forms of capital may come up with meaningful findings. Future research in this area may provide more data for better understanding of the inter-transferability of the different forms of capital.

It is evident that parents, or the extended family, play an important role in their children's learning process. However, parental capital is only one dimension in which to measure the resources available to parents. There are other factors that may affect parents' decisions, for example, family structure (see Furstenberg, 2005), parenting style or appropriateness and level of parental involvement in children's education.

The parental role in children's development and education is undisputedly an area that is worthy of further exploration.



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## Appendix A: Paper-version Questionnaire

### LETTER OF CONSENT FOR 同意書:

A study of the involvement of Hong Kong Chinese parents in their children's English learning  
有關香港華人家長對孩子英語學習的參與的研究

Dear Parents,

My name is Kwok Yuk-yin, Frieda. I am pursuing Doctor of Education (Language Education (English)) at the Hong Kong Institute of Education. Currently, I am working on my dissertation, studying the parental involvement of Hong Kong Chinese parents in their children's English learning. The target informants of the study are Hong Kong Chinese parents who have a child/children attending primary school.

This questionnaire is intended to investigate strategies and activities that parents used outside school to foster children's learning of English. The results of the survey will be used in understanding not only the support parents are offering to assist their children in English learning, but also their concerns and needs in doing so. Your identity will not be disclosed, and all the information collected will be kept confidential and confined to academic purpose only.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may withdraw at any time. If you have any questions about the study, you may contact me at 9415-6350 or email to s0866861@s.ied.edu.hk

You may keep this letter for your record. Thank you for your time and participation in this study.

Sincerely,

Frieda Kwok

\*\*\*\*\*  
親愛的家長：

您好。我是郭玉燕，現正於香港教育學院修讀教育博士(語文教育(英語))課程。我正撰寫我的博士論文，方向為研究香港華人家長對孩子英語學習的參與；研究對象為香港小學生的家長。

本問卷調查旨在探討家長對促進孩子英語學習的策略及活動。研究結果不單有助了解家長對孩子英語學習所提供的支援，更有助了解他們於過程中的顧慮及需要。我不會披露您的身份，而且，所有收集的資料將會保密並只會作學術用途。

您的參與屬於自願性質，您可以隨時要求退出本研究。如您對本研究有任何疑問，請致電 9415-6350 或電郵至 s0866861@s.ied.edu.hk 與我聯絡。

您可以保留這封信作紀錄。感謝您抽空參與本研究。

郭玉燕 敬上

\*\*\*\*\*  
I have read this informed letter and consent to participate in this study.  
本人已閱讀此信件並同意參加是項研究。

Signature 簽署: \_\_\_\_\_

Date 日期: \_\_\_\_\_



## Part 1: Strategies and activities outside school

### 第一部份：課餘的學習策略及活動

#### 1. What do you do to help your children learn English?

你會做些什麼來幫助孩子學習英語？

**Circle the answers that best represent your opinion. (4 = very often, 1 = never)**

請圈出最能代表你的意見的答案。(4 = 經常，1 = 從不)

	English learning strategies and activities outside school 課餘的英語學習策略及活動	Very Often 經常	Often 偶爾/間中	Seldom 很少	Never 從不
i.	Providing children with multi-media materials (e.g. DVDs, songs, audio books) 提供多媒體材料(如光碟、歌曲、錄音書)	4	3	2	1
If you choose 1 (Never), please specify the reason(s). 如你選擇 1 (從不)，請註明原因： _____					
ii.	Providing children with English written materials (e.g. English or Chinese-English bilingual books, flashcards, workbooks) 提供英語文字材料(如英語或中英雙語書籍、flashcards、補充練習)	4	3	2	1
If you choose 1 (Never), please specify the reason(s). 如你選擇 1 (從不)，請註明原因： _____					
iii.	Assisting with homework (English subjects) (including both school and after-school programs) 協助孩子完成英語科的作業(包括學校規定的及課餘學習班的)	4	3	2	1
If you choose 1 (Never), please specify the reason(s). 如你選擇 1 (從不)，請註明原因： _____					
iv.	Reading English or Chinese-English bilingual books with children 陪伴孩子閱讀英語或中英雙語書籍	4	3	2	1
If you choose 1 (Never), please specify the reason(s). 如你選擇 1 (從不)，請註明原因： _____					
v.	Visiting bookstores or libraries with children 帶孩子逛書店或圖書館	4	3	2	1
If you choose 1 (Never), please specify the reason(s). 如你選擇 1 (從不)，請註明原因： _____					





vi.	Conducting parent-developed English study plan or activities 讓孩子遵循家長為他們訂立的英語學習計劃或活動		4	3	2	1
If you choose 1 (Never), please specify the reason(s). 如你選擇 1 (從不)，請註明原因： _____						
vii.	Travelling with children (including enrolling children in study tours) 旅遊(包括參加遊學團)		4	3	2	1
If you choose 1 (Never), please specify the reason(s). 如你選擇 1 (從不)，請註明原因： _____						
viii.	Enrolling children in English certification exams and relative preparation courses (e.g. IELTS, TOFEL, Cambridge Young Learners English (YLE) tests) 讓孩子參加英語證書考試及有關的預備班(如 IELTS, TOFEL, Cambridge Young Learners English (YLE) tests)		4	3	2	1
If you choose 1 (Never), please specify the reason(s). 如你選擇 1 (從不)，請註明原因： _____						
ix.	Enrolling children in after-school programs (e.g. English playgroups, tutorial classes) 讓孩子參加課餘學習班(如英語遊戲小組、補習班)		4	3	2	1
If you choose 1 (Never), please specify the reason(s). 如你選擇 1 (從不)，請註明原因： _____						
x.	Speaking to children in English (including single words and phrases) 跟孩子說英語(包括英語單字及詞組)		4	3	2	1
If you choose 1 (Never), please specify the reason(s). 如你選擇 1 (從不)，請註明原因： _____						

**2. In addition to the items listed above, what would you do to help with your child's English learning?**  
除了以上列出的項目外，你還會做些什麼來幫助孩子學習英語？

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**3. Where have you learned the information about the English learning strategies and/or activities? (You may choose more than one item.)**

你從哪裡得知有關的英語學習策略及活動? (可選多項)

- ☐ School / Teachers (學校/老師)
- ☐ Parent-teacher association (家長教師會)
- ☐ Public Seminars / Talks (公開講座)
- ☐ Mass media (e.g. TV, radio, newspapers, magazines) (傳媒, 如電視、電台、報紙、雜誌)
- ☐ Other family members / Relatives (其他家庭成員/親戚)
- ☐ Friends/ Neighbours (朋友/鄰居)
- ☐ Private tutors (補習老師)
- ☐ Websites/ On-line discussion forums (網頁/網上討論平台)
- ☐ Self-experience (自身經驗)
- ☐ Others (Please specify) (其他, 請註明): \_\_\_\_\_

**4. When you have questions about your children's English learning, whom do you usually seek help from? (You may choose more than one item.)**

當你有關於孩子學英語的問題時, 你會請教誰? (可選多項)

- ☐ School / Teachers (學校/老師)
- ☐ Parent-teacher association (家長教師會)
- ☐ Public Seminars / Talks (公開講座)
- ☐ Mass media (e.g. TV, radio, newspapers, magazines) (傳媒, 如電視、電台、報紙、雜誌)
- ☐ Other family members / Relatives (其他家庭成員/親戚)
- ☐ Friends/ Neighbours (朋友/鄰居)
- ☐ Private tutors (補習老師)
- ☐ Websites/ On-line discussion forums (網頁/網上討論平台)
- ☐ Yourself (自行解決)
- ☐ Others (Please specify) (其他, 請註明): \_\_\_\_\_

**5. Do you share your strategies and ideas about children's English learning with other?**

你會跟別人分享關於孩子學英語的策略及心得嗎?

- ☐ Yes. I share with \_\_\_\_\_ (You may choose more than one item.)  
(會, 我會跟\_\_\_\_\_分享) (可選多項)

- ☐ School / Teachers (學校/老師)
- ☐ Parent-teacher association (家長教師會)
- ☐ Public Seminars / Talks (公開講座)
- ☐ Mass media (e.g. TV, radio, newspapers, magazines) (傳媒, 如電視、電台、報紙、雜誌)
- ☐ Other family members / Relatives (其他家庭成員/親戚)
- ☐ Friends/ Neighbours (朋友/鄰居)
- ☐ Private tutors (補習老師)
- ☐ Websites/ On-line discussion forums (網頁/網上討論平台)
- ☐ Others (Please specify) (其他, 請註明): \_\_\_\_\_

- ☐ No, because \_\_\_\_\_  
(沒有, 因為\_\_\_\_\_)



## Part 2: Children's educational background

### 第二部份：孩子的教育背景

6. Number of children

孩子數目

☐1   ☐2   ☐3   ☐4   ☐5 or more (5 名或以上)

7. Number of children attending primary school and level of study

現正就讀小學的子女數目及就讀年級

No. of children 數目	Level of study 就讀年級	Your children's overall result of the English subject in the most recent semester. You can enter either grade (e.g. A) or actual score here (e.g. 80). Please specify if the full mark is not 100. 子女最近一學期英語科的總成績。可填寫級別(例如: A)或實際得分(例如:80)。如滿分並非 100 分，請註明。
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		

## Part 3: Home and parent's demographic background information

### 第三部份：家庭及家長背景資料

8. You are a

你是孩子的

- ☐ father (父親)  
☐ mother (母親)  
☐ guardian (監護人)

(Please specify your relationship with the child/children. 請註明與孩子的關係 \_\_\_\_\_)

9. Your age

你的年齡

- ☐20-below 30 (20-30 或以下)      ☐30-below 40 (30-40 或以下)  
☐40-below 50 (40-50 或以下)      ☐50-below 60 (50-60 或以下)  
☐60 or above (60 或以上)

10. Your profession

你的職業

- ☐ I am working and my job title is \_\_\_\_\_.  
我是在職人士，我的職銜是 \_\_\_\_\_。  
☐ I am a housewife.  
我是全職家庭主婦。  
☐ I am retired.  
我是退休人士。  
☐ Others 其他 (Please specify 請註明：\_\_\_\_\_)



11. Your education background

你的教育程度

- ☐ Lower than primary school (小學以下)  
☐ Primary school (Level \_\_\_\_\_) (小學 \_\_\_\_\_ 年級)  
☐ Secondary school (Level \_\_\_\_\_) (中學 \_\_\_\_\_ 年級)  
☐ Diploma/Associate Degree (文憑/副學士)  
☐ Undergraduate (學士)  
☐ Postgraduate (深造文憑/碩士/博士)  
☐ Others (Please specify) (其他，請註明) : \_\_\_\_\_

12. Your education experience

你的學習經驗

Please put a "✓" where appropriate. (請在適當的空格加上✓號。)

	Hong Kong 香港	Mainland China 中國大陸	Others (Please specify): _____ 其他，請註明：_____
Primary school 小學			
Secondary school 中學			
Diploma/Associate Degree 文憑/副學士			
Undergraduate 學士			
Postgraduate 深造文憑/碩士/博士			
Others (Please specify): _____ 其他，請註明：_____			

13. What languages do you speak? (You may choose more than one item.)

你會說哪種語言？(可選多項)

- ☐ Cantonese (廣東話)  
☐ Putonghua (普通話)  
☐ English (英語)  
☐ Others (Please specify) (其他，請註明) : \_\_\_\_\_

14. What is the language **mainly** used at home?

家中**主要**的語言為

- ☐ Cantonese (廣東話)  
☐ Putonghua (普通話)  
☐ English (英語)  
☐ Others (Please specify) (其他，請註明) : \_\_\_\_\_

15. Is there any English-speaking member (including domestic helper) at your home?

你家裡有說英語的成員嗎 (包括家務助理)?

- ☐ Yes (Please specify) (有，請註明) : \_\_\_\_\_  
☐ No (沒有)

16. How would you describe your English proficiency?

你會怎樣形容你的英語能力？

- ☐ Excellent (優)
- ☐ Good (良)
- ☐ Satisfactory (尚可)
- ☐ Poor (弱)

17. Average monthly household income

家庭平均月入為

- ☐ HK\$17,500 or less (港幣 17,500 或以下)
- ☐ Between HK\$17,501 and 39,000 (介乎港幣 17,501-39,000 之間)
- ☐ HK\$39,001 or more (港幣 39,001 或以上)

18. How much do you usually spend (on average) on each of your children's English learning (excluding regular English classes at school) every month, in terms of percentage of average monthly household income?

平均每月花費於每名孩子英語學習活動(不包括學校規定的英語課)的費用為

- ☐ less than 10% (不足家庭平均月入的百分之十)
- ☐ 10% - 19% (家庭平均月入的百分之十至百分之十九)
- ☐ 20% - 29% (家庭平均月入的百分之二十至百分之二十九)
- ☐ 30% - 39% (家庭平均月入的百分之三十至百分之三十九)
- ☐ more than 40% (家庭平均月入的百分之四十或以上)

In addition to the questionnaire survey, I would also like to have an interview with you to further discuss the issues addressed. The interview will last about 20-30 minutes. The interview will be conducted in Cantonese. All your personal information will be kept completely confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission.

Please leave your name, contact number and email address (if any) for further contact if you would be willing to be interviewed. Thank you.

除問卷以外，我亦希望可以與您面談，進一步了解問卷中所提及的問題及意見。訪談將以廣東話進行，為時約 20-30 分鐘。

您的個人資料將會保密或在得到您的許可下才會被公開。如您願意撥冗接受訪談，請填妥以下資料，以便日後聯絡。謝謝！

Name 姓名: \_\_\_\_\_

Contact number 聯絡號碼: \_\_\_\_\_

Email (if any) 電郵地址 (如適用): \_\_\_\_\_

Signature 簽署: \_\_\_\_\_

Date 日期: \_\_\_\_\_

– End of the questionnaire –



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## Appendix B: Online Questionnaire

### 有關香港華人家長對孩子英語學習的參與的研究

答 卷 人 [xxxxxxx.xxxxx.com](http://xxxxxxx.xxxxx.com) 2012 年 5 月 7 日 (Mon) 12:52:34

1\* 你的孩子現正在香港就讀小學嗎?

否

如果你回答 '否', 你已完成問卷。請按 '遞交'

#### 第一部份 (1): 課餘的學習策略及活動 (以下各題, 如選擇"從不", 請註明原因。)

2\* 你會提供多媒體材料(如光碟、歌曲、錄音書)來幫助孩子學習英語。

Null

3\* 你會提供英語文字材料(如英語或中英雙語書籍、flashcards、補充練習)來幫助孩子學習英語。

Null

4\* 你會協助孩子完成英語科的作業(包括學校規定的及課餘學習班的)。

Null

5\* 你會陪伴孩子閱讀英語或中英雙語書籍。

Null

6\* 你會帶孩子逛書店或圖書館。

Null

7\* 你會讓孩子遵循家長為他們訂立的英語學習計劃或活動。

Null

8\* 你會讓孩子去旅遊(包括參加遊學團)來幫助孩子學習英語。

Null

9\* 你會讓孩子參加英語證書考試及有關的預備班(如 IELTS, TOFEL, Cambridge Young Learners English (YLE) tests)。

Null

10\* 你會讓孩子參加課餘學習班(如英語遊戲小組、補習班)來幫助孩子學習英語。

Null

11\* 你會跟孩子說英語(包括英語單字及詞組)。

Null

12 除了以上列出的項目外, 你還會做些什麼來幫助孩子學習英語?



## 第一部份 (2): 課餘的學習策略及活動

13\* 你從哪裡得知有關的英語學習策略及活動? (可選多項)

NULL

14\* 當你有關於孩子學英語的問題時，你會請教誰? (可選多項)

NULL

15\* 你會跟別人分享關於孩子學英語的策略及心得嗎?

Null

如果你回答 '1 = 會', 請跳到 [16](#).

如果你回答 '2 = 不會, 因為', 請跳到 [17](#).

16\* 我會跟\_\_\_\_\_分享(可選多項)

NULL

## 第二部份: 孩子的教育背景

17\* 你有多少個孩子?

Null

18\* 你現正就讀小學的子女, 他/她就讀年級

Null

19\* 該名子女最近一學期英語科的總成績。

例: 可填寫級別 (例如: A) 或實際得分(例如:80)。如滿分並非 100 分, 請註明。

20 你現正就讀小學的子女, 他/她就讀年級 (如你有超過一名子女就讀小學,請回答此題。)

Null

21 該名子女最近一學期英語科的總成績。

例: 可填寫級別 (例如: A) 或實際得分(例如:80)。如滿分並非 100 分, 請註明。

22 你現正就讀小學的子女, 他/她就讀年級 (如你有超過兩名子女就讀小學,請回答此題。)

Null

23 該名子女最近一學期英語科的總成績。

例: 可填寫級別 (例如: A) 或實際得分(例如:80)。如滿分並非 100 分, 請註明。

## 第三部份: 家庭及家長背景資料

24\* 你是孩子的

Null

25\* 你的年齡

Null



26*	你的職業
	Null
	如果你回答 '1 = 我是在職人士', 請跳到 <a href="#">27</a> .
	如果你回答 '2 = 我是全職家庭主婦', 請跳到 <a href="#">28</a> .
	如果你回答 '3 = 我是退休人士', 請跳到 <a href="#">28</a> .
	如果你回答 '4 = 其他', 請跳到 <a href="#">28</a> .
27	你的職銜是
	例: 消防員
28*	你的教育程度
	Null
29*	你在哪裡就讀小學?
	Null
30*	你在哪裡就讀中學?
	Null
31*	你在哪裡就讀學士課程?
	Null
32*	你在哪裡就讀深造文憑/碩士/博士課程?
	Null
33*	除上述以外, 你還有在哪裡接受過學校教育? (請註明有關課程/學歷)
	Null
34*	你會說哪種語言? (可選多項)
	NULL
35*	家中主要的語言為
	Null
36*	你家裡有說英語的成員嗎 (包括家務助理)?
	Null
37*	你會怎樣形容你的英語能力?
	Null
38*	你的家庭平均月入為
	Null
39*	平均每月花費於每名孩子英語學習活動(不包括學校規定的英語課)的費用為
	Null

必須回答有 '\*' 記號的問題



## Appendix C: Interview Guide

### Part I: Parental involvement in English learning

1. Do you think learning English is important in Hong Kong? Why?  
你認為在香港，學習英語重要嗎？為什麼？
2. Why do you think you need to get involved in your child's English learning?\*
3. How would you describe your role in your child's English learning?\*
4. How do you feel about your child's English learning at school?\*
5. What kinds of English materials are there available at your home? What do you usually do with them? Can you walk me through some of the things you did?\*
6. What kinds of English-related activities/practices do you usually do with your child? Can you walk me through some of the things you did?\*
7. How much time in a day do you usually spend with your child on his or her English learning activities?
8. Is there anything else you do at home to support your child's English learning that you want to tell me about?\*
9. For the strategies you have done, which of them do you think are effective, which are not? How to justify?

### Part II: Parents' concerns of and constraints on strategy selection

10. What factors would you take in to account when choosing the activities/practices for your child's English learning?  
當你為孩子選擇英語學習的活動時，你會考慮什麼因素？
11. When you choose English learning materials for your children, what factors would you consider?  
(e.g. Cost / Recommendations from others / Content/ Design / Level appropriateness)  
當你為孩子選擇英語學習材料時，你會考慮什麼因素？（如價錢，別人的推薦，內容，設計，深淺程度等）
12. Do you think your own experience in English learning affected your choices in parental strategies? How?  
你為孩子選擇英語學習的活動時，有受到你的自身經驗影響嗎？如何影響？
13. Are there English learning activities/practices you would expect to be part of your child's learning experience but not yet realised? Why?  
你心目中有那些英語學習活動或練習很想讓孩子參加，但還沒有實行？為什麼？
14. What are the challenges that you face in supporting your child's English learning? How did you solve them?\*



### Part III: Parents' social networks

15. Where have you learned about the activities/practices for your child's English learning?  
你從哪裡得知有關英語學習的活動或練習的資料？
16. Do you share your experience in assisting your children's English learning? Who are they? Why do you want to share with them?  
你會跟別人分享協助孩子學英語的經驗嗎？跟誰？為何會選擇跟他們分享？
17. When you need to seek outside resources, whom do you approach? Why? Can you tell me some of the experiences?  
當你需要尋求他人協助時，你會找誰？為什麼？可以談一下有關經驗嗎？

*\*Interview questions adopted from*

Li, Y. C. (2008). *Parental involvement and support for Taiwanese children's English language and literacy learning*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Lynch School of Education.

