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Engaging with Chinese Ethnic Minority Children's Voices Regarding Parental Involvement

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China, with a population of 125 million people, has 55 ethnic minorities. A large number of Chinese ethnic minority children lack confidence and motivation, and underperform in English as a subject. An effective way to narrow the educational achievement gap between the Hans and ethnic minority families is to enhance parental involvement, which is currently inadequate. Therefore, this qualitative study, based on interviews with 12 sixth-grade children aged 11 to 12 years in Guizhou's ethnic minority regions, examines the involvement of parents in the school and home with regard to the learning of English among ethnic minority children. A thematic analysis was conducted on the data, and the findings reflected that the degree of parental involvement in the school was largely event-driven and responsive, while in the home, it was limited and intermittent. The paper highlights parents' supportive practices and potential difficulties of school and home involvement. From the data, a quadripartite representation of parental involvement as a support system is proposed for more school-parent and parent-teacher collaborations to improve the achievement of ethnic minority children in English learning. The implications of assisting ethnic minority parents in overcoming obstacles to both school and home involvement are considered. However, due to the relatively small sample size, the findings should be interpreted within the context of the Chinese ethnic minorities in this study. The paper concludes by suggesting that to elicit the voices of ethnic minority children, it is necessary to include the voices of their parents and teachers within the contexts in which they are found.

Keywords: ethnic minority children, parental involvement in school, parental involvement at home, English learning

INTRODUCTION

In China, the practice of supporting the participation of young children and eliciting their 'voices' is almost non-existent despite the United Nations Convention on the

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Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in 1991 (Lyon, 2007). While progress has been made throughout the Western world to incorporate the rights of children, as enshrined in the UNCRC, this has not been a priority in China, and even if it is, the advancement has been slow, especially among children from Chinese ethnic minority families. Children are capable people who play a role in social interactions and can evaluate themselves, others and their circumstances (Kim & Barrett, 2019). This study began with the intention to better understand what young ethnic minority children in China think about the circumstances that affect them. More specifically, the aim was to gain a better understanding of the perspectives of ethnic minority children regarding their parents' involvement in their learning of the English language. Too often, studies on parental involvement navigate towards the perspectives of parents, guardians, and teachers, and scarcely to those of the children, who are the most affected (Butler & Le, 2018; Gültekin & Kılıç, 2017; Kalaycı & Ergül, 2020; Ön & Asım, 2024; Tong et al., 2021). This study provided a place for the children's voices to be heard, thereby acknowledging their mutuality of being. Data were gathered from interviews held with 12 sixth-grade ethnic minority children, aged 11 to 12 years. The findings of this study may have important implications for China's 'Five-year Family Education Plan 2021-2025' that seeks to advocate, through its policies and practices, greater parental involvement as a crucial element in the English learning outcomes of ethnic minority children, particularly, but not exclusively, in disadvantaged regions of China.

China is made up of 56 ethnic groups, of which the Hans are the dominant group, totalling approximately 1286 million people, followed by the other ethnic minority groups that make up approximately 125 million people (National Bureau of Statistics of the People's Republic of China, 2021). In addition, most of the ethnic minority groups reside in the less-developed mountainous inland or border districts in the southwestern part of China (Cao, 2025), with the provinces of Guangxi, Guizhou, Yunnan, Xinjiang, and Sichuan hosting over 60% of all ethnic minority children in the country (United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund [UNICEF], 2018). Ethnic minority children are acknowledged as 'disadvantaged children' (Cui et al., 2017). It should also be noted that China's one-child policy does not apply to its ethnic minority people (UNICEF, 2018). In 2010, approximately 50% of all ethnic minority families had two to three children (UNICEF, 2018).

English language proficiency is an important aspect in the context of English as a foreign or second language. This is because competence in the English language is labelled as an essential component of individual academic attainment and career advancement across Asia, which has the largest number of people studying or using English as a foreign or second language (Zhang et al., 2023). This is also true of ethnic minority children in China. With better English proficiency, the ethnic minorities perceive that they will receive better benefits, such as employment, education, and communication with the outside world (Blachford & Jones, 2011). However, a large number of ethnic minority children in China underperform in English as a subject, showing a lack of confidence and motivation (Cao, 2025). Ethnic minority children have a higher tendency to drop out of school when they struggle to master a foreign language (Hannum, 2002). Ethnic minority children risk lagging behind in enrolment in senior secondary schools after their primary and junior secondary education due to their

poorer performance in most of the national examinations in China. Such a situation is not healthy for the academic, social and economic development of those regions with ethnic minority children (Cui et al., 2017).

Parental involvement is viewed by policymakers, researchers, and educators as an element to safeguard underprivileged groups and a strategy for addressing educational inequity, while enhancing the English language achievement of vulnerable students. The evidence shows that economically disadvantaged children with highly engaged parents are likely to focus on academics and are motivated to achieve academic success in English (Tong et al., 2021). A rich body of literature also validates that a significant parental involvement can improve the children's English learning performance, motivation, and self-competence (Butler, 2015; Butler & Le, 2018; Kim & Barrett, 2019; Niehaus & Adelson, 2014; Tong et al., 2021). Despite this growing interest, there is a lack of consensus on a precise definition of parental involvement (Kalaycı & Ergül, 2020). The varying perspectives indicate that parental involvement is conceptualised in multiple ways and influenced by interactions between families and schools (Kalaycı & Ergül, 2020). Parental involvement is increasingly composed of two types, namely school-based involvement and home-based involvement (Epstein,1995). This is consistent with parental involvement in the Asian context. For instance, the academic attainment of children is highly valued by those parents who tend to demonstrate controlling behaviours at home and who are involved in their children's school events (Tan, 2018).

According to extant studies on parental involvement, its effects depend on several factors (e.g., Tan, 2018). Firstly, although schools are likely to prefer parents to formally participate in the school setting, many parents may prefer to be informally involved at home. It is particularly obvious that in Asian countries, parents are more likely to be involved at home rather than participate in school activities. Secondly, the previous studies demonstrate that the socio-economic status (SES), such as educational attainment, income, and occupation, influences a parent's involvement in their children's education (Li et al., 2020). Lower SES parents are unlikely to have sufficient time and may have a limited tertiary education, which would restrict their ability to offer effective guidance to their children (Tan, 2018). Higher SES parents tend to be more involved in their children's English education, partly because parents have financial ability to employ tutors for their child to have greater exposure to English, who also are more competent in English and more capable of guiding their child (Butler & Le, 2018). Conversely, Dawadi (2020) found that those parents with a poor command of English and who are more involved in their children's learning are more likely to exert greater pressure on their children's English exam revision. Chen et al. (2022) concluded that in China, lower SES parents tend to have limited access to language learning resources and fewer opportunities to spend time with their children, whereas higher SES parents have a tendency to be more 'ambitious' in supporting their child's language learning. However, Tao and Xu (2022) and Murshidi et al. (2023) lamented that such data, with respect to parental involvement, tend to be rather statistical, and only a handful have explored parental involvement through qualitative studies.

In addition to the scarcity of data from a qualitative perspective, many academics have highlighted the complexities of eliciting the 'voices' of children as a means of supporting their right to participation. These complexities involve, yet are not exclusively limited to, recognising and emphasising the particular significance of accentuating the silence of children (Lewis, 2009), the restrictions of child centrism (Taylor et al., 2012), the right of children to be unclear (Cannella & Viruru, 2004) and to be disregarded, as the crucial method for facilitating adult participation (Kraftl, 2013). To this end, this paper presents some of its findings on how parental involvement concerning English language education is perceived and experienced among ethnic minority children, as well as the children's input on recommendations as to how they and their families can be better supported to find pathways with which to improve their English learning.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The current study attempted to address the research gap and discover parental support practices and the possible challenges parents encounter in the ethnic minority context. The aim of the study was to delve into the details of children's perceptions of school-based and home-based parental involvement in English language learning. Specifically, this paper aimed to answer the following research questions:

1) What practices are parents involved in both at school and at home to support their child's learning of English?

2) What are the challenges to school-based and home-based parental involvement in a child's learning of English?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework for this study was shaped by the concepts derived from the sociology of childhood that reinforce the view that 'the experience of childhood matters' (McDonald, 2009; Van der Hoek, 2005). An attempt to capture the children's personal experiences of their parents' involvement in their learning, and their ways of responding, is consistent with current approaches to the sociological study of childhood (Van der Hoek, 2005). The sociology of childhood recognises children as being more than passive recipients of their experiences, but rather acknowledges them as competent social actors, in which their learning experiences are jointly shaped by the interplay between different contexts, including the school and home (Bronfenbrenner, 1974; Van der Hoek, 2005). Additionally, allowing children the opportunity to voice their opinions about their parental involvement and how it affects them is aligned with Sustainable Development Goal 16, (target 16.7), supporting the UNCRC, which advocates the participation of children in all decision-making that affects them (United Nations, 2015).

METHOD

Research Context

A small-scale qualitative investigation was conducted among ethnic minorities in Guizhou Province, which is home to major groups such as the Miao, Buyi, and Dong, and stands out as one of the most ethnolinguistically diverse regions in China (Lv,

2016). According to the exam results at schools, students are not measuring up to academic expectations. Even more worrying is that they are drastically falling behind in their mastery of English compared to children in urban areas. In 2025, data from a survey conducted in Guizhou ethnic minority regions (N=183, aged 6-12 years) further revealed children's low proficiency in English. It was reported that more than 50% of the children had no competency in basic listening and speaking, while 68.4% were entirely unable to read English, and 89.6% could barely write simple English words (Cao, 2025). In response to the educational disparities and uneven learning outcomes that continue to affect ethnic minority children in Guizhou, in 2021, the 'Five-year Family Education Plan 2021-2025' for students' growth was set up in China for incorporation into schools for the students' growth, where every school had to integrate a parental involvement plan or program into its school schedule (The State Council of the People's Republic of China, 2022).

Respondents

The respondents were 12 sixth-grade children from four different primary schools in ethnic minority regions in Guizhou, China. The students were selected from Grade 6 mostly because they were at the stage of transitioning from primary to junior secondary school. The parental involvement plan was intended to alleviate the transitional phase for these children, who were more likely to show a decline in their English language achievement (Luo, 2020). First, the school principals and each classroom teacher were contacted to obtain their approval and support for the data collection. The content, purpose, procedure, and duration of the interview were introduced at the outset of the recruitment process. Then, the teachers were requested to assist by contacting the students in their classes. In the present study, by 12 student interviews, their descriptions began to repeat similar ideas, which suggested that thematic saturation has been attained. For anonymity, student participants were assigned codes, which showed their school affiliation and individual order (e.g., P1-1, P1-2). Table 1 summarises the respondents' details.

Table 1
The Number of Selected Primary Schools and Respondents from Guizhou's Ethnic Autonomous Prefectures

Guizhou's ethnic autonomous prefectures	Number of selected primary schools	Primary schools in Guizhou's ethnic minority regions	Number of selected Grade 6 children	Respondents' names
Qiannan Buyi and Miao	2	School A	5	P1-1, P1-2, P1-3, P1-4, P1-5
		School B	3	P2-1, P2-2, P2-3
Qianxinan Buyi and Miao	1	School C	2	P3-1, P3-2
Qiandongnan Miao and Dong	1	School D	2	P4-1, P4-2

Methods of Data Collection and Analysis

Semi-structured interviews were conducted to obtain the data for the present study. Twelve ethnic minority children were interviewed about their parents' involvement in their English learning. The interview questions were: 1) How is your English language

achievement? 2) What can you tell me about how your parents are involved in your school? 3) Are there any events or activities that your parents do not want to be involved in at your school? 4) Why do you think your parents take the trouble to be involved in your school activities? 5) Do your parents help you to learn English at home? How do they help you? 6) Why do you think your parents take the trouble to be involved in your English learning studies at home? All the interviews were conducted individually and face-to-face in the children's school in Chinese, the native language of the researcher and the children. These interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. After transcribing the interviews, the research team coded the data from all the interviews. To verify the reliability, a data analysis was structured in line with the six-phase thematic analysis framework outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). Familiarisation with the data was achieved by constant readings of the interview transcripts. The data were then systematically organised, and the initial codes were generated. In particular, emerging codes, such as "school activities", "monitoring", "confidence", "discussion", and "interaction" were obtained by utilising keywords and segments from the data. The emerging codes, which captured a variety of dimensions, were categorised and integrated into the initial themes (Goh, 2019). Thereafter, the relevant excerpts were organised systematically. The first researcher further read and proofread the initial themes with the required modifications and improvements. These themes were later reviewed by the second researcher and collated across the entire data set for further enhancements and were subsequently classified and grounded under two main constructs, namely, parental involvement in school and at home. The themes within the constructs were re-read and refined in order to ensure that they reflected the respondents' authentic perceptions. Meanwhile, the first researcher screened quotes from the pool of students' responses to build into the description for each theme. Finally, the research team read the responses once more. Powerful quotes that supported the identified themes were extracted and translated from Chinese into English for reporting purposes. The coding categories are listed in Table 2.

Table 2
The Themes and Sub-themes of Parental Involvement in School and at Home

Analytical Constructs	Themes	Subthemes
School Involvement	Participating in School Activities	Attending Parent-teacher Conferences
		Attending Children's Day or Sports Day
Home Involvement	Monitoring Children's Learning	Monitoring Textbook-based Reading
		Monitoring Technology-based Reading
	Helping Children with Academic Work	Directly Helping with Homework
		Using Siblings as a Resource
		Offering Private Education
	Parent-child Discussions	Providing Academic Encouragement
		Strict Discipline in Communication

Ethics

The present study was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of Taylor's University, Malaysia, which was the corresponding authors' institution. Confidentiality was observed with regard to the schools and respondents. The requirement for written consent, adherence to safeguarding measures and the use of pseudonyms to protect the

respondents' privacy and anonymity were adhered to. The respondents were allowed to withdraw from the study at any time. The consent of both the respondents and their parents was obtained. Any information, digital or otherwise, regarding their participation in the present study was kept confidential.

FINDINGS

To begin with, all the respondents reported that their parents regularly attended parent-teacher conferences. More than half of the respondents reported that their parents occasionally took part in school-related activities, such as Children's Day or Sports Day. In contrast, eleven respondents (P1-1, P1-2, P1-3, P1-4, P1-5, P2-1, P2-2, P2-3, P3-1, P3-2, P4-1) stated that their parents occasionally gave them some support at home. Only one respondent, P4-2, reported frequent parental involvement. It should be noted that in the present study, an occasional involvement indicates sporadic engagements, whilst frequent involvement denotes more regular and sustained support interwoven with daily home routines. In addition, specific supportive practices at home, including monitoring of learning, helping with schoolwork, and parent-child discussions, were mentioned in the interviews. Each type of parental involvement in school and at home is elaborated below.

Construct 1: Parental Involvement in School

Theme 1.1: Participating in School Activities

For the school-based involvement, the most frequently stated parental practice was attending parent-teacher conferences. All the respondents indicated that their parents attended parent-teacher conferences. Two respondents in particular, P1-1 and P1-2, stated that participation in parent-teacher conferences was the only school activity that their parents participated in. One respondent, P3-1, maintained that her parents had never missed a parent-teacher conference, "My parents have attended every parent-teacher conference, but they only occasionally participate in other school activities" (P3-1). Apart from that, according to the respondents, their parents attended these conferences to communicate with the teachers to understand their child's English learning progress.

> During a parent-teacher conference, the English teacher discussed my English language performance. This increased my parents' attentions towards my English language education. Sometimes, my parents privately ask my English teacher to ensure that I am on the right track in my English studies. (P1-1)

P1-2, further, stated that, "After the parent-teacher conference, my mother would tell me to what I needed to pay my attention and to consult my teacher if I had academic difficulties" (P1-2). P1-5 also reported that, "During a parent-teacher conference, the English teacher gave my parents suggestions that benefitted my English language education" (P1-5). The above extracts revealed that in the ethnic minority context, participation in parent-teacher conferences took on the role of building a connection between parents and teachers.

Additionally, nine respondents (P1-3, P1-4, P1-5, P2-1, P2-2, P2-3, P3-1, P4-1, P4-2) narrated that parents could join the activities initiated by the school for Children's Day. For instance, "My school had a series of activities for Children's Day, including a charity sale. My parents participated in it, and I assume that these activities helped our primary school students realise educational values" (P2-1). Interestingly, P3-1 stated that,

> On Children's Day, the parents' committee designed interesting activities and prepared a few small gifts for the students. It was so much fun! It enabled me to be more engaged, motivated, and confident. It also helped me foster a relationship with my parents. (P3-1)

However, it is noteworthy that two respondents, P2-3 and P4-1, stated that their parents only contributed their time to parent-teacher conferences and school activities on Children's Day. As an illustration, "My mother has only participated in parent-teacher conferences and in school activities on Children's Day. Because participating in school activities has had a limited influence on my English language achievement, my mother seldom takes part in them" (P4-1). Four respondents, P1-3, P1-4, P1-5, and P4-2, stated that their parents participated in their school's Sports Days. For instance, P1-5 mentioned that "My parents tried to cooperate with the school and they would participate in the Sports Day, if they had the time" (P1-5). Apart from that, one respondent, P4-2, stated that, "Whenever the school invites them, my parents are ever willing to participate in the school's activities" (P4-2). This showed that although these ethnic minority parents paid a lot of attention to their child's educational development, yet most of the respondents declared that their parents would mainly focus on engaging themselves in parent-teacher conferences, Children's Day or Sports Day arranged by schools. However, the challenges faced by parents when it came to school involvement were primarily their occupation with work, lack of time, and clashes with the timing of siblings' school activities, as illustrated below.

Specifically, many of the children reported their parents' different barriers, although two respondents, P1-3 and P4-2, stated that their parents did not have any difficulties participating in school activities. In other words, the availability of time was the prerequisite of parental participation in any school activities. Five of the respondents, (P1-4, P1-5, P2-1, P3-1, P3-2) recalled that their parents could not attend school activities if their work schedules conflicted with the time of school events. For example, "If my parents are working, and they're invited to participate in a school activity, such as Children's Day, they won't take the day off from work" (P2-1). P3-2, similarly, stated that "They [parents] are busy with work. Sports Days are often held on weekdays, such as Thursdays or Fridays. So, they can't find the time to attend." (P3-2). The above extracts indicate that in ethnic minority families, the biggest challenge for parents to be involved in their children's school activities may be the need to concentrate on earning a living and supporting their families. Moreover, two respondents' parents (P1-1, P2-2) worked in another city and were not around to offer companionship. According to P1-1, "My mother works as a waitress at a hotel. My father has left home to work in another city. So, sometimes, they don't have spare time to participate in the [school's] activities" (P1-1). Meanwhile, P4-1's family's situation is complicated, and he reported

that "My father is ill, and my mother is busy working to earn money for the household" (P4-1). Another scenario was that parents were more likely to be cognizant of their younger siblings' education, as P1-2 narrated that "My mother can't participate in my school's activities if it conflicts with my younger brother's school's activities" (P1-2). Generally, her parents were precluded from giving enough support at school due to the time factor.

Construct 2: Parental Involvement at Home

Theme 2.1: Monitoring Children's Learning

Home involvement indicated most often was the monitoring of the children's English learning. Despite parents monitoring the progress of their children's English learning, according to P1-3, P1-4, P2-1, P2-2, P2-3, P3-2, and P4-1, the applied methods and approaches of the parents varied. P1-4 stated that, "My parents only have junior secondary school educations. So, they hardly understand English. Despite that, they prioritise monitoring my English learning" (P1-4). Likewise, P2-2 and P4-1 specified how their parents supervised their English learning, "In my family, my mother oversees English vocabulary and reading the English textbook out loud" (P2-2). Meanwhile, P4-1 reported that, "My parents ensure that I read supplementary English books" (P4-1). In addition to checking that the reading of English words and materials was completed, P2-1, P2-3, and P3-2's parents used technology to track their child's English learning. P2-1 described that, "My parents only have primary school educations. They have no knowledge of the English language. However, they helped me download English learning Apps, and monitor my reading via these Apps" (P2-1). Therefore, at home, he studied English mainly by using these online resources. Apart from that, according to P2-3,

> My mother realised that the transition from primary school to junior secondary school is very important. So, she ensured that I had intensive English lessons after I graduated from primary school. She also made me read and practice English via an English learning App called Beisu Classroom. (P2-3)

P3-2, similarly, depicted that her mother used technology to monitor her English learning, "My mother teaches me English. She also capitalises on English learning resources, such as an English learning App called ihuman ABC" (P3-2). The above extracts suggested that ethnic minority children considered that the greatest challenges their parents faced were low levels of education and a lack of English language knowledge. To clarify, only two respondents, P1-5 and P4-2, stated that their parents did not have any difficulties in helping with their English language education. In contrast, seven respondents, P1-1, P1-2, P1-3, P1-4, P2-1, P2-3, and P4-1, definitively expressed that their father or mother had low levels of education and English proficiency such that they could not directly provide their children with teaching instructions. For instance, "I live with my mother, but my mother only has a primary school education. So, she has no knowledge of the English language" (P1-2). Although P1-2's mother had high aspirations for her English language performance, yet her mother could not offer any real help to her.

To summarise, the approaches parents used to monitor varied and comprised monitoring their reading vocabulary, the contents from their English textbooks, as well as other materials via the mobilisation of digital resources. However, the monitoring practice, including reading, was more process-oriented. The ethnic minority parents tended to favour monitoring their children's English learning presumably on the grounds of their limited education and inadequate English proficiency.

Theme 2.2: Helping Children with Academic Work

Four respondents, P1-1, P1-3, P2-2, and P3-1, reported that their parents prioritised directly helping them with their English homework. To be more specific, these parents helped their children memorise English words.

> My father is an English teacher in a volunteer programme. So, he has high expectations of me. From time to time, he helps me revise my English vocabulary and sentence structures. He has also helped me with my homework. But, most of the time, he's busy with work in another city, and doesn't have time to teach me. (P1-1)

P2-2's parents also prioritise mastering English vocabulary, "When my mother's home, she checks my English homework, listens to my English reading, and helps me revise my English vocabulary and sentence structures" (P2-2). On the top of that, according to P1-3,

> My parents don't have much formal education, and they have a limited understanding of English. So, most of the time, I can only learn English in a classroom or on my own. Nevertheless, my parents have helped me learn English words via dictation, that they read out words in Chinese and I write them down in English. (P1-3)

By contrast, P3-1 pointed out that, "My mother sometimes asks me to repeat the English lessons that I learned at school, in alignment with my teacher, and explain the lesson to her. From time to time, she has also re-taught me" (P3-1). The above extracts revealed that several parents directly rendered three types of academic assistance to their children in doing their homework: helping them to memorise English words and sentence structures, repeating English lessons, and re-teaching. It is also important to highlight that some parents were not able to support their children in their English homework because they were away from home, and thus, had no time to tutor their children. Two respondents, P1-1 and P1-4, reported that their fathers had left home to work in another city and were, therefore, seldom involved their English language education.

> My father works in another city and seldom comes back home. So, he has little to do with my education. Nevertheless, as he has limited English knowledge, if I have any questions related to my English learning, he seeks the help of others and guides me on how to resolve these English-related issues. (P1-4)

Besides that, four of the respondents, P2-2, P3-1, P3-2, and P4-1, stated that their parents used their elder siblings as an educational resource. "My older sister tutors my homework, answers my English-related questions, previews my English lessons with

me, teaches me English songs, and watches English movies with me on the weekends" (P2-2). Similar reports were also made by P3-1 and P4-1.

> My mother helps me study. But she also asks my elder brother, who has left home to attend university, to hop on video calls to answer my English-related questions. My brother has had a huge influence on my English learning. I've acquired good learning habits and a lot of language knowledge from my brother, as well as a lot of interest and confidence in my English learning thanks to him. (P3-1)

Additionally, in P4-1's family, his mother regarded non-academic school activities as having a limited effect on his English studies, but tended to use his siblings as a resource to help him, "My mother asks my older sister to help me, which has benefitted my academic performance in English" (P4-1). In comparison, P3-2's family leveraged siblings as a resource in a different way, "My mother taught me English from Grades 1 to 3, then, from Grades 4 to 6, she got my brother and sister to help me, which has significantly benefitted my academic performance in English" (P3-2). Another respondent, similarly, assumed that, "My mother considers my English proficiency to be good. So, she doesn't often involve herself in my English language education. She assumes that whatever she has taught me about the English language is systematic and useful" (P1-5). The above findings suggested that ethnic minority families took full advantage of the use of siblings as a resource with which to support their younger child's language learning. Further, parents with some English knowledge and skills were more likely to teach their child English at lower grade levels, and then used siblings as a resource at higher grade levels.

Moreover, in light of the perceptions of P2-2, P2-3, and P4-2, their parents invested in their children's English learning. For example, "In addition to my mother's tutoring, she has also signed me up for extracurricular English tutoring" (P2-2), while P2-3 asserted that, "My mother has bought the English language materials that my teacher recommended" (P2-3). P4-2 also received his family's financial support for his English learning and reported that "My mother has bought English language materials for me, and asks me to study English for more than half an hour every day" (P4-2). Even if a majority of the students in this study did not mention that their parents offered private English education, one respondent, P2-3, whose parents were less educated, stated that they were willing to allocate money to support their child's English learning. Furthermore, as P2-3's family could not recklessly invest in their child's English language education, they prioritised the teachers' recommendations.

In summary, the parents provided three main types of academic assistance for their children's English learning: directly helping with homework, using siblings as a resource, and investing in private education. In particular, the children depended largely on the learning environment in the classroom for English learning, with occasional support from their parents for their English academic work.

Theme 2.3: Parent-child Discussions

Two respondents, P1-5 and P4-2, stated that their mothers offered affective support and parent-child discussions.

> My mother is very passionate about learning English. She has high expectations of me. She hopes that, when I grow up, my mastery of the English language will help me succeed. So, she is very encouraging, which has given me a lot of confidence and motivated me throughout my English language education. (P1-5)

P4-2, similarly, stated that,

> Last term, I scored 99% for English. My mother is an English teacher, and she often talks to me about my English learning. She asks me to revise my English vocabulary and sentence structures. She prioritises interacting with me, and ensures that I have mastered what I have learned from my English lessons at school. (P4-2)

On the other hand, two of the respondents, P1-2 and P1-3, reported that their parents were authoritative when communicating with them. According to these two children, their parents were stern with their English education. P1-2 stated that her mother believes that one can master English simply by reciting English words. What's more, she is often reprimanded by her mother for her poor academic performance in English at school. Similarly, P1-3's mother is also critical of him.

> My mother plays a monitoring role [in my English learning]. She just listens to me as I read aloud from my English textbook. However, when I come across words that I don't know how to pronounce, even though my mother doesn't know how to pronounce them either, she says, "These words are so simple and easy! Why don't you know how to pronounce them?" (P1-3)

Overall, the above findings indicated that the more educated parents adopted an autonomous parenting style and provided emotional support to help their children excel academically, while the less educated parents were more likely to control their children and admonish them for their learning behaviour. Although the correlation between parents' educational level and the degree of emotional support they give their children cannot be generalised, in this study, the approaches used by parents to interact with their children differ significantly.

DISCUSSION

This study aimed to explore the types and obstacles to parental involvement in school and at home from the perspective of ethnic minority children to extend the existing understanding of how ethnic minority children's English learning can be better enhanced. The findings revealed that school-based involvement appeared to be more visible than home-based involvement, mainly because the parents generally responded to some aspects of the school, whereas parental support at home was described by the respondents as being inadequate. Based on the findings, it can be argued that the support system for ethnic minority students' English learning in primary schools directly and indirectly includes interactions among four stakeholders, namely, parents, teachers, schools, and students (Figure 1).

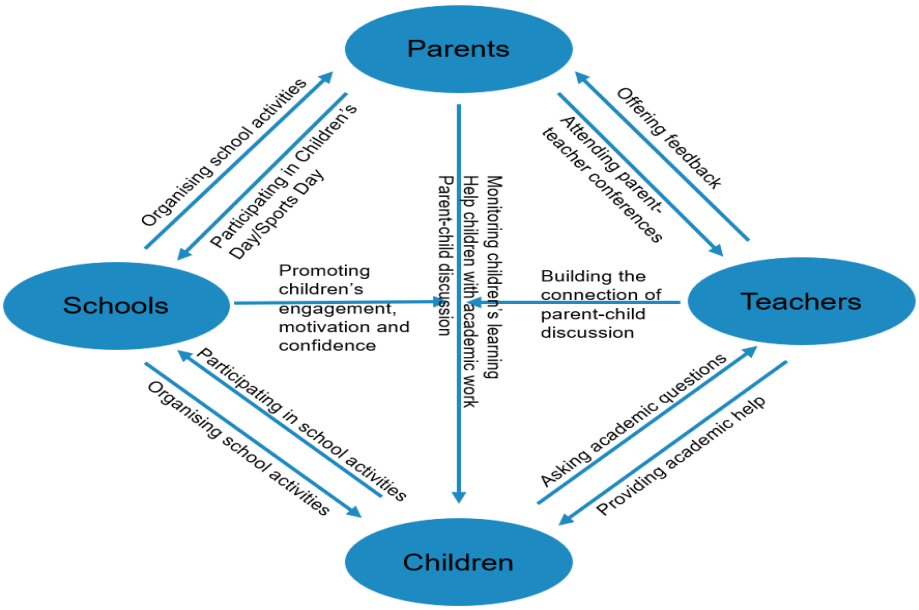

Figure 1
A Quadripartite Representation of Parental School-based and Home-based Involvement for Ethnic Minority Children

a) Parental Involvement in School

The respondents reported that two types of school involvement, namely parent-teacher communication and parents' participation in school activities, reflected similarities with those of Tan's (2018) study. Generally speaking, the parents tended to have a positive attitude towards school involvement. In simpler terms, their participation in parent-teacher conferences indicated that an important aspect of school involvement was the high level of parent-teacher discussions concerning their children's English learning performance and progress. The findings also reflected that parent-teacher communication emerged as a key approach to parental support for children's English learning, as it might pave an effective path for teacher-student and parent-student interactions in tackling English academic issues as the two stakeholders, namely, parents and teachers, may exchange updated and accurate academic and behavioural information on the children both in school and at home (Sylaj, 2021).

Moreover, a handful of parents exhibited a strong desire to be involved in school activities as long as they were invited to do so by the schools. To some extent, this parental participation in school activities might have been symbolic of their concern and the importance they placed on their children's education, which in turn strengthened the children's motivation and confidence in their English academic studies (Niehaus & Adelson, 2014). Other than that, activities organised by the schools acted like a bridge between the parents and schools, where the parents were particularly devoted to

participating in Children's Day and Sports Day, which illustrated that a couple of ethnic minority parents might have identified the significance of constructing collaborations between families and schools to promote their children's educational development (Chan et al., 2021). This was consistent with prior studies, which show that parental involvement in school activities may positively contribute to their children's attitude, engagement and motivation in education (Niehaus & Adelson, 2014).

b) Parental Involvement at Home

In the present study, with the limited academic support, the monitoring of the children's English learning took priority. The ethnic minority parents concentrated on process-oriented monitoring to ensure that young students cultivated a reading habit. Meanwhile, the findings revealed that some parents were more likely to oversee their children's English learning practices. This showed that although the children were in Grade 6, these parents believed that their children were unable to regulate themselves and required proper management and planning to develop their learning autonomy (Tao & Xu, 2022). Additionally, some of the parents made effective use of technology to complement their monitoring of their children's English learning. Explicitly, the ethnic minority parents were able to utilise English digital tools and resources such as online learning Apps. This strategy proved to be valuable in increasing the children's exposure to the targeted English language via visual and auditory means, which is particularly essential for English learners residing in an environment where English is a foreign language (Tao & Xu, 2022).

In addition, the significant success achieved by the parents in directly assisting their children in the recitation of English words may indicate that despite the parents' inadequate knowledge of English and lower level of education, they could still help their children through this approach. For example, those parents who had limited knowledge of the English language were able to dictate English words through reading out Chinese words and then asking their children to write down the corresponding English words. By contrast, parents with a relatively high proficiency in English could utilise effective strategies such as requiring their child to act out the role of an English teacher giving instructions for the lessons at home. Notably, as the students' grade levels increased, the more educated parents reduced tutorials their children in English learning, which was consistent with Tao and Xu's (2022) finding that the parents of children in higher grades were less likely to directly help with homework.

Besides, the data showed that ethnic minority parents used their child's siblings as an educational resource. This finding was in line with that of existing studies that parents with more than one child tend to reuse the educational resources of the first-born child for their other children (Shi et al., 2021). Extant research also explains that, in larger families, the older siblings tutor the younger ones, thus reducing the expenditure and offering advantages in improving the academic achievement of the children (Shi et al., 2021). The findings of the present study were also identical with those of prior studies on rural families in China, where families with more than one child, especially in the poorer regions of China, have an edge over those with only one child (Shi et al., 2021).

Also, in relatively more educated ethnic minority families, using siblings as a resource becomes particularly more pronounced when a child enters Grades 4 to 6.

Alternative forms of academic support, including the purchasing of extra-curricular English materials and providing private tutorials, were adopted by a tiny fraction of the more and less educated families. This probably validated that irrespective of the parents' education level, they were willing to put the monetary investment to support their child's English learning, which confirmed the findings of extant studies (Tao & Xu, 2022). More importantly, the parents focused on the teachers' recommendations when investing in their child's English learning materials, which implied that numerous Chinese parents usually assert that teachers, as authority figures in the Chinese culture, have professional knowledge and have greater insights into their children's education (Lau et al., 2012). Parents in China have high expectations that teachers will provide their children with top-class education, and give feedback about the children's learning process (Tao & Xu, 2022). Although the parents in this study attempted to provide their children with additional inputs for the target language, many of them were less likely to afford hiring tutors or other private English educators due to their restricted financial capacity. Accordingly, those parents with lower levels of education and occupation tended to prioritise work and the demands of making ends meet for the survival of the family (Rahman et al., 2024). This may illustrate that the priority of these was to ensure that the family's basic needs were met, but this might be detrimental to their children's educational needs (Jabar et al., 2023).

With regard to parent-child discussions, the present study found that the more educated parents provided more affective support to their children and significantly more encouragement, whereas the less educated parents tended to resort to authoritarian parenting techniques. Extant studies (Butler, 2015; Butler & Le, 2018) have similarly concluded that parents with better English proficiency and higher education levels may be enriched with more communication skills and adjust their behaviour to stimulate their children's learning motivation. Yet the outcome of the investigation was that children from less educated families suffered from severe remarks, which differed from the findings of Tao and Xu (2022) that less educated parents showed empathy for their children's challenges in learning English. and therefore, aimed to address their difficulties by collaborating with their children.

c) Socio-cultural Factors

Based on the findings, socio-cultural factors, including cultural influences, power relations, SES, educational background, and linguistic barriers, were also assumed to influence school and home involvement. Initially, instead of contradicting the extant studies influenced by Confucian values, where Chinese parents are traditionally less involved in school events, preferring to help their children's learning at home (Li et al., 2020), the present findings add a nuanced picture by showing that parents are generally responsive to school-initiated activities, although such involvement remains event-driven. Although parental participation in schools was visible, several ethnic minority parents in this study were exclusively engaged in some facets of the school. It is possible that as some of the ethnic minority parents were away from home, the time

available for them to apply for leave from work was restricted and limited, leading these parents to be more selective in contributing their time and energy to what they postulated would most effectively promote their children's educational success (Tan, 2018). More specifically, the parents tended to be involved in school activities when they viewed their participation as important to their role, when they were more confident of their involvement, and when they perceived that the schools valued their contribution (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). To elaborate further, in the present study, one respondent's parents could not participate in their child's school activities as they conflicted with a sibling's school activities. This also sheds light on the hypothesis that parental resources are not infinite, and as the number of children within the family increases, the proportion of parental resources, as well as interpersonal resources, available to any one child reduces (Shi et al., 2021).

In China, the craze to learn English may have intensified the vertical stratification in social capital between the elite and non-elite groups, and therefore reinforced the existing inequalities concerning access to high-quality K-12 education (Tong et al., 2021). However, findings from the current study reflected that it was inaccurate to portray parents from lower SES with limited knowledge of the English language as being entirely uninvolved in their children's English learning. Notably, this present study indicates that parents may offer strategic support and access disparate resources differently due to their SES, which differs from the findings of extant studies, indicating that less educated parents also do not have conducive and constructive approaches to match their children's constantly changing learning demands (Butler, 2015). This proves a claim by Castillo and Camelo (2013, p:56), who drew upon the analogy, "A parent can teach a kid to ride a bike, even if he/she does not know how to ride.", to underline the crucial role of parents in their children's educational learning process. It reflects that Chinese parents, especially those with high expectations for their children's academic achievement, may make great efforts to be involved in their children's learning process (Tong et al., 2021), since education in China is perceived as one of the most essential ways for social mobility (Li et al., 2020).

In summary, viewed via the lens of the sociology of childhood, parent-teacher communication seemed to function largely as an indirect type of support for children, in which its impacts were mediated by how information and educational aspirations were conveyed to children. This suggests that children are active interpreters of adult-mediated interaction, which influences how parental and teacher support is experienced. (Sylaj, 2021). Moreover, parental participation in school activities, acts as a venue for children's socialisation, which enables children to actively construct their understanding of value of education. Additionally, home involvement, including supervision of homework, reading, and academic assistance, played a more direct role in supporting children's English language learning. Parent-child communication differed, with a few interactions including criticism instead of encouragement. This means that even in families with similar backgrounds, children perceived home involvement differently, which depended on how children explained and responded to their parents' actions at home. These findings highlight that children's perceptions of school and home involvement are influenced by both their own agency and practical difficulties encountered by families, which also reveals that an integration of school and home

involvement develops via effective and continuous interactions among schools, parents, teachers and children (Bronfenbrenner, 1974; Van der Hoek, 2005).

CONCLUSION

a) Summary

Based on interviews with 12 sixth-grade ethnic minority children in Guizhou Province, China, this qualitative study explored the types of parental involvement in school and at home for children's English learning and also endeavoured to identify its impediments. The interview data showed that parents were relatively responsive to involvement in schools, primarily attending parent-teacher conferences, followed by participation in school activities organised for Children's Day or Sports Day. The level of parental involvement at home was comparatively limited, with the top priority being given to monitoring their children's English learning, directly helping with homework, using siblings as a resource, offering private English education, and having parent-child discussions. Their direct assistance mainly pertained to their children's mastery of English words and sentence structures. According to the respondents, the extent of parental involvement was primarily influenced by their parents' education levels, English proficiency, available time, parenting skills, and the grade level of their child. Furthermore, the many difficulties and challenges the parents encountered in their involvement at home probably prevented them from contributing to their children's English education, even if they understood the importance of English learning for their children. Although several of the less educated parents seldom helped their children directly with their English homework, they were more likely to rely on 'external powers' or take steps to ensure their children attained better English proficiency, such as by using siblings as a resource, seeking the assistance of teachers, purchasing English materials, asking for guidance from other people and so forth. As for the more educated parents, they were more likely to seek effective strategies with which to support their children on their own, including encouraging their children to repeat lessons and re-teaching them, as well as providing emotional support. However, the more educated parents in this study were more likely to be less involved in their child's English education at higher grade levels, as they assumed that their involvement in the early stages of their child's English education and the English instruction that their child was receiving in school might not be cognitively challenging. This reinforced the idea that in this study, parents with better English proficiency were inclined to immerse themselves in their children's English learning in the early stages.

b) Practical Recommendations for Schools, Teachers, and Parents

The 'Family Education Plan 2021-2025' states that it is crucial to improve parents' awareness of their educational duties and to strengthen their ability to support their children's growth. The proposed quadripartite framework of parental school-based and home-based involvement visualises the support and interactions among schools, parents, teachers, and students in ethnic minority children's English learning. It suggests that schools and teachers provide appropriate and well-tailored support for different ethnic minority families to better foster the children's English learning process. Learning environment in school is of equal importance (Goh et al., 2017; 2020). More

school-parent and parent-teacher collaborations are suggested to boost the children's English language achievement and affective outcomes. More precisely, it was suggested by Chan et al. (2021) that schools could provide more opportunities, including parental learning workshops, to better enhance parents with practical skills and knowledge while collaborating with teachers. Meanwhile, schools could take the initiative to invite interactions and work with parents to enable them to be involved in different school activities. In fact, to promote greater collaboration between parents and schools, the latter are also advised to arrange a more convenient and flexible schedule for events to make it easier for parents to attend (Chan et al., 2021).

In addition, English teachers should play a role in parental involvement in school and at home by being a supporter of parental empowerment, a creator of emotional connection and a key hub in the development of the English language among ethnic minority children. For ethnic minority parents who lack English knowledge and are less educated, English teachers could use simple language to help parents understand English learning objectives, strategies, and methods. Such approaches could enable parents to comprehend how to support their children. It is also recommended that English teachers consider facilitating more parent-teacher digital communication. For example, through the use of WeChat, China's dominant communication platform, English teachers can regularly share children's performance, learning process and engagement in the classroom. This could help ethnic minority parents who work away from home to increase their psychological presence in their children's educational process (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 1997). Furthermore, these findings indicate the significant role of parents in their children's English learning. The useful methods and diverse support that less educated parents or parents with limited English proficiency applied in this study could also be meaningful, with implications for families with similar experiences.

c) Limitations of the Research and Directions for Future Studies

The present study had several limitations. First, school-based and home-based parental involvement in their children's English learning was explored primarily through the children's self-reported experiences, which were affected by social desirability. Future studies could incorporate multiple data-collecting approaches, such as parent reports, teacher reports, and classroom or home observations, to offer a more detailed comprehension. Second, this study merely utilised a single data source. Therefore, a longitudinal or mixed-methods study is suggested to further investigate how different types of school and home involvement in English learning evolve and correlate with children's English learning outcomes across various socio-cultural contexts.

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