

# **Home-School Communication with Indian Parents in New Zealand Primary Schools**

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## **Abstract**

This research explores the experiences and expectations of Indian immigrant parents in New Zealand regarding home-school communication practices. The aim of the research was to examine the current home-school communication practices and propose ways to improve them by investigating the possible alternatives to resolve the dissatisfaction from the perspective of an Indian immigrant parent.

The data collection for this research was undertaken in two stages. In the first stage, an online questionnaire was administered on three social media groups on Facebook comprising of potential participants. In the second stage, a focus-group interview was conducted with four members chosen on the basis of convenience sampling from the respondents of the online questionnaire.

What became evident from the findings of both the online questionnaire and focus-group interview was that Indian immigrant parents want regular and specific information on the academic learning of the child, rather than general feedback on overall progress and wellbeing. Findings from both the online questionnaire and the focus-group interview revealed that these parents want to be actively involved in their children's education and lack of awareness of the teaching strategies used and curriculum taught in the class restricts their participation

The implications of the findings point to the potential of using homework for improved home-school communication embedded in teacher's everyday activity. It also highlights the importance of the content of communication, centred around homework, for these parents. This study through its findings recommends using written communication as a means of continuous, on-going communication between the school and parents, and highlights the importance of giving regular homework for increased parental involvement.

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# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### Research Background

This is a small-scale, qualitative research study that investigates the experiences and expectations of Indian immigrant parents in New Zealand primary schools regarding current home-school communication practices. The research was carried out in the Auckland region where participants were drawn from social media platforms on Facebook. Research indicate that Asian parents lay a lot of emphasis on student achievement (Frensch & Okagaki, 1998; Kao,1995), a pattern that is similar to Indian parents (Inman, Sandhu & Tewari, 2003). The literature is particularly rich on the benefits of the involvement of parents regarding children's academic achievements in school (Chen & Fan, 2001; Desimone, 1999; Eberly, Joshi & Konzal, 2005). Parental involvement at school has a significant and positive contribution to students' academic and cognitive achievements (Epstein, 1990). Regardless of how researchers operationalise the concept of parental involvement, it has been found that race and cultural differences heavily influence the amount of parental involvement in their children's education (Turney & Kao, 2006). Effective home-school communication is necessary for improved parental involvement, particularly, for immigrant parents. Literature supports the assumption that parents of immigrant children face challenges and barriers to participation and involvement in their children's school as compared to children of native-born parents (Turney, 2009; Turney & Kao, 2006). These barriers emerge from the lack of understanding of these immigrant parents' cultural values and beliefs, and, parental expectations about education and academic goals (Greenfield, Quiroz, Rothstein-Fisch, Trumbull, 2001). These cultural barriers, and a lack of their understanding act as a hindrance in immigrant parents getting more involved in their children's school and subsequently, their education (Kaufmann, Perry & Prentiss, 2001). Ji & Koblinsky (2009) highlight additional barriers faced by immigrant parents which impede them from engaging in their children's education, and these include: different acculturation patterns, English

language skills and varying levels of parental education. Therefore, it is imperative to recognize the challenges and difficulties faced by this group of immigrant parents in educating their children in an environment that is significantly different from their native country. Eberly, Joshi, and Konzal (2007) state that, “increasing diversity in the student population intensifies the need for and the difficulties of establishing culturally sensitive and meaningful communication between teachers and parents” (p. 7).

### **Researcher’s Orientation**

My research stems from my own experience as an Indian immigrant parent in New Zealand. After I moved here in 2017, I was struck with the scarce communication practice between the school and the parents. I was surprised when I spoke to other new Indian immigrant parents who highlighted facing similar challenges and problems and had similar feedback on the lack of effective home-school communication. Also, despite a sharp rise in the Indian immigrant population in New Zealand in the last few years, limited studies have been carried out on the home-school communication expectations and practices of this group. These observations provided an impetus to undertake this research, to examine the current home-school communication procedures and propose ways to foster improved practice, particularly from an Indian immigrant parent’s perspective. I wanted to undertake this research to find out if other Indian immigrant parents were experiencing similar issues and gaps in school communication by studying the current practices and procedures, and suggest possible strategies that may resolve these issues, benefiting the Indian immigrant parents in the long run. This research, through its findings, also aims to build strong relationships between schools and Indian immigrant parents, so that they feel more involved in their children’s academic performance and achievements. Academic achievement expectations of Indian parents, deeply rooted in their cultural values and beliefs, is a matter of great pride and prestige for them. Appreciation of their cultural norms and practices can greatly enhance the understanding of their experiences and expectations regarding home-school communication practices in New Zealand.



## Research Questions

The aim of the research is to bring to the forefront the ways to examine the current home-school communication practices and propose ways to improve these practices from the perspective of an Indian immigrant parent, and also investigate the possible alternatives to resolve the dissatisfaction with the current practices and procedures. My research is, therefore, centered around the following research questions:

1. What are the expectations and experiences of Indian parents regarding home-school communication practices in New Zealand?
2. What do parents believe about the ways in which the schools are meeting these expectations?
3. What are the possible strategies to enhance the current practice?

New Zealand is a multicultural society with a large influx of immigrants every year, particularly from South Asian countries. This trend can be confirmed from the New Zealand census (2006) which identified that the percentage of immigrants within the New Zealand resident population increased from 19.5% in 2001 to 22.9% in 2006. Along with this, the Asian ethnic group formed the fourth largest ethnic group of New Zealand (Statistics New Zealand, 2006). Within this pattern, a particularly important trend, worth noting, is that Indian was the second largest Asian ethnic group in 2013, forming 32.9% of the Asian ethnic group, up from 29.5% in 2006 (New Zealand Census QuickStats about culture and identity, 2013). The census also points out that the Indian ethnic group grew faster than the Chinese ethnic group between 2001 and 2006, increasing by 68.2% and, again by 48.4% between 2006 and 2013. Furthermore, India replaces Australia as the third most common country of birth in 2013, from the fifth most common in 2006 according to the same census. There was also a large increase in the number of people speaking Hindi (Indian) language which jumped to the fourth most commonly spoken language in 2013, and the number of people speaking Hindi nearly tripled between 2001 and 2013 (New Zealand Census QuickStats about culture and identity, 2013). This growing diversity reinforces the need for removing the barriers and promoting a more open and

purposeful communication between Indian immigrant parents and the school (Joshi et al., 2007).

### **The Gap in Literature and the Benefits of this Study**

A substantial review of the literature on immigrant parents in New Zealand highlighted that studies were primarily focused on Chinese communities, which is not truly reflective of the practices of the Indian community. Therefore, a great deal of literature for this study is drawn from research on South Asian families, including Indian, residing in the United States of America (USA), United Kingdom (UK) and Canada, facing similar educational challenges and issues as those residing in New Zealand. Hence, a further rationale for this research project is to close the literature gap. A further aim of this research was to give a voice to the culturally diverse Indian parents in New Zealand and provide a platform to express their satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the current home-school communication practices and suggest ways to improve them. This research, through its findings, also aims to build a strong relationship between schools and Indian immigrant parents, so that they are satisfied with their participation in their children's academic performance and achievements.

### **Outline of Chapters**

This research study comprises of five chapters. The current chapter gives an overview of the research topic by outlining the research background. It highlights the research aims and research questions along with the gap in the literature and the benefits of this study.

The second chapter presents the literature review which explores the home-school communication experiences and expectations of Indian immigrant parents by first examining the literature on the socio-cultural pattern of this particular group. The review then shifts to establishing the meaning and standards of effective home-school communication as identified in previous studies, and the barriers and challenges faced in achieving them, particularly from the perspective of culturally and linguistically diverse immigrant parents. Finally, in light of the current knowledge, best practices and ways to foster communication with this group of immigrant parents in New Zealand, are outlined from the literature review.

The third chapter highlights the research design and the chosen methodology. The research questions and objectives are restated and the corresponding theoretical underpinnings are described. The two data collection methods, online questionnaire and focus group interview are discussed and justified. Furthermore, sampling, data collection and data analysis are explained for each of the methods employed. The validity issues and ethical considerations are addressed in the final section of this chapter.

The next chapter, chapter four, presents the research findings of the two methods of data collection, namely, the online questionnaire and the focus-group interview. The findings of the online questionnaire are presented in the form of tables along with verbatim quotes to support them and the findings from the focus-group interview are presented as the second stage under three headings namely: experiences, expectations, and recommendations of Indian immigrant parents regarding home-school communication practices in New Zealand primary schools. The key findings from both the methods are outlined at the end of each stage.

The last chapter, chapter five discusses the principal findings of the investigation in light of the literature backdrop outlined in Chapter two. Conclusions are drawn and recommendations for meeting the unique needs of these parents are made. Finally, the limitations of the research study are outlined.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter seeks to explore the home-school communication experiences and expectations of Indian immigrant parents by first examining the literature on the socio-cultural pattern of this particular group. The review then shifts to establishing the meaning and standards of effective home-school communication as identified in previous studies, and the barriers and challenges faced in achieving them, particularly from the perspective of culturally and linguistically diverse immigrant parents. Finally, in light of the current knowledge, best practices and ways to foster communication with this group of immigrant parents in New Zealand, are outlined from the literature review.

The literature review chapter is divided into four themes as follows.

1. Socio-Cultural Background and Educational Expectations of Indian Immigrant Parents
2. Effective Home-School Communication
3. Barriers to Communicate and Parental Involvement for Immigrant Parents
4. 'Best Practice' and Ways to Foster the Communication Practices with this Group of Immigrants

#### **Theme 1: Socio-Cultural Background and Educational Expectations of Indian Immigrant Parents**

Before we study the home-school communication experiences and expectations of Indian immigrant parents in New Zealand, it is important to outline and understand their socio-cultural pattern and how they adjust in a new culture to function within it successfully and stress-free. Highlighting these aspects will help us to understand their acculturation process, socialization patterns, child-rearing practices and their aspirations for their children. Furthermore, it will also help to see the home-school communication expectations and experiences from their perspective.

### ***Acculturation Style and Bi-Cultural Functioning***

Researchers have defined acculturation as the process of cultural adaptation of the immigrant groups when they come in contact with a different culture, according to the majority population (Berry, 1997). While most studies on early Indian immigrants have focused on issues such as continuity of religious faiths, arranged marriages, inter-generational differences, change of values, and choosing of partners, some have explored the issue of acculturation, child-rearing practices and educational expectations for their second-generation children in a new culture with new values.

While there are variations in the acculturation style of this group across different studies, most researchers imply an integrated style of acculturation (Aycan & Kanungo, 1998; Counselman & Jambunathan, 2002; Segal, 1991) for this group. With a few exceptions such as inter-generational differences in acculturation style (Badha, Ferver, & Narang, 2002), most ethnographic studies have accounted for integration as the acculturation style for Asian Indian immigrants. The integrating style is characterized on bi-cultural functioning where multicultural immigrants hold on to their core values and at the same time selectively acquire values of the host country (Beaumont, Howard, Inman & Walker, 2007; Siddique, Wakil & Wakil, 1981). There is enough evidence in literature on early ethnographic studies that suggest that Indian immigrants follow a bi-cultural functioning in the host country (Fever, Badha & Narang, 2002; Bhavnagri, Patel & Power, 1996) where they hold on to their core values (Wakil et al., 1981) while at the same time adapting and negotiating with the host country (Inman, Sandhu & Tewari, 2003). There is also a considerable amount of literature on first-generation Indian immigrants residing in the United States and Canada (Dhruvrajan, 1993; Kurian & Ghosh, 1983; Saran, 1985; Wakil et al., 1981) that are unanimous in their findings that Asian Indian immigrants lead a bi-cultural life based on traditional values. Gibson (1988) in his research study on Indian immigrant parents in Canada, used the term 'additive acculturation' which has a similar connotation as integration. He emphasized that these immigrants acquire new skills and tools in addition to their old values to adjust and function seamlessly within the new culture. Similarly, Patel et al., (1996) found in their research that Indian Gujarati immigrant parents in the United States do not replace one culture with another, but rather weave the two cultures together in the process of adjustment to make sense of their identity within their cultural context.

This pattern of acculturation has been attributed by researchers to the fairly good exposure of the Indians to the western values due to their colonial past (Segal, 1991). These influences have made the Indian education system to be largely British in its orientation (Ferver et al., 2002). Leonard-Spark & Saran (1980) assert that most Indians are fluent in English due to their exposure to the British rule and their colonial past. This has led most Asian Indian immigrants to be competent in English and quick to adopt western values (Ibrahim, Ohnishi & Sandhu, 1997).

### ***Their Ethnicity, Values, and Beliefs***

This literature review draws on the early research on South Asian Indian immigrant parents mainly in the United States of America, Canada, and the United Kingdom to study their cultural heritage and values, and how they mold and evolve to fit in a new environment. A considerable amount of early research pertaining to first-generation Indian immigrants in the US point that, Indians retain their strong sense of family culture (Dasgupta, 1986) and instill values in their children that are essential for keeping ties with their heritage past (Dasgupta, 1998). Other studies also highlight that the first wave of early Indian immigrants of the last century, particularly in the US, continue to base their life on traditional values and beliefs (Patel et al., 1996; Segal, 1991). Inman et al., (2007), talk of 'ethnic identity retention' where no matter how well adjusted and acculturated, first-generation Indian immigrant parents are, they pass on their traditional and cultural values to their second-generation children to keep their ties intact with their native culture and heritage (Dasgupta, 1998). Dasgupta (1998) argues that Asian Indians are deeply committed to maintaining their ethnic identity and cultural values by 'reinventing cultural heritage' on foreign soil.

### ***Parenting Style and Preserving Cultural Identity***

The characteristics outlined earlier of Indian immigrant parents influence their parenting style. A substantive body of literature highlights that first-generation immigrant Indians adhere to an authoritative style of parenting to pass on the values that were instilled in them, to their second-generation children (Carey & Sodowsky, 1998; Counselman & Jambhunathan, 2002; Inman et al., 2007; Tewari et al., 2003). Inman et al., (2007) in their research study argue that parents who have an integrated acculturation style and authoritative parenting style adapted better in the new culture. Drawing a distinction between the first and second-generation immigrants, Baptiste (2005) states that while most second-generation Indians have

tended to integrate into the host country culture, most first-generation parents follow an assimilation style of acculturation, to preserve their cultural values and maintain authority over their children as a means to control them. Counselman and Jambunathan (2002) in their study focusing on the parenting attitudes of Asian Indian mothers in the US, identified and highlighted three dimensions of their parenting beliefs as training, shaming and authoritative. Using shame and obligation in all significant relations has been observed as a common practice in other research studies too (Patel et al., 1996; Segal, 1991). Baptiste (2005) asserts that loss of parental control and authority to discipline their children is what worried Asian parents the most. He recognized that the majority of East Indians rely on shame and guilt to keep their children on track and focus on the importance of family honour. This is because, for them to succeed economically is a high priority and they keep reminding their children to perform well in academics and school (Baptiste, 2005; Bhattacharya, 2000).

Segal (1991) in her research on a selected group of Asian Indian immigrants in the US, found that most Asian Indians are allocentric and collectivistic in nature where the role of children is to bring honour to the family. Being allocentric implies that they are expected to make sacrifices for the good of the group. With a slight deviation to this, some other studies highlight that Indian immigrants exhibit a combination of individualistic and collectivistic traits (Mehta, 1998; Patel et al., 1996) which has been a result of British rule in India, which gave them western colour while at the same time maintaining their traditional values due to their eastern collectivistic roots.

### ***Educational Expectations and Involvement in School***

Research evidence acknowledges that Indian immigrants cite better opportunities for their children as a reason for migrating (Baas, 2006; Baptiste, 2005; Rutten & Verstappen, 2014) and therefore, heavily emphasize academic achievement (Tewari et al., 2003). Various other studies recognized that these parents believed that good education is an instrument in realizing their family ambitions (Basu, 2004; Bhattacharya, 2000). These findings have been reinforced in several other research studies that stress that Asian Indian parents place a high value on academic achievements of their children (Dasgupta, 1989; Helwig & Helwig, 1980; Wakil et al., 1981).

Similar observations were made by an ethnographic study of first-generation South Asian parents in Britain that highlighted the high expectations they held for their children (Bhatti, 2002). Another study found that Indian mothers in the US had higher age-specific educational expectations for their children, compared to their counterparts in India (Inman et al., 2007). Patel et al., (1996) in their research describe Indian immigrants as 'achievement-oriented', ambitious, materialistic and upwardly mobile, who place a strong emphasis on formal education and individual achievement.

Despite the evidence in the literature that supports high educational expectations for their children and integrating into the dominant culture, studies have found these parents tend to be less interested and involved in their children's education (Chavkin & Williams, 1993; Okazaki & Sue, 1990). Crozier and Davies (2006) however, challenge this deficit model that British South Asians are less interested or involved in their children's school and education. They argue that it is the school that sometimes fails to understand that it is not just the parents but the wider community that provides the social capital and plays a key role in guiding and advising their children. It is, therefore, imperative that schools understand their socio-cultural pattern and communicate with them effectively within their cultural context, to foster meaningful relationships with them and to promote the educational outcomes for their children.

## **Theme 2: Effective Home-School Communication**

The importance of home-school communication has been widely accepted in the literature (Ames, 1993; Dodd & Konzal, 2002; Epstein & Sanders, 2006; Helling, 1996). The frequency and content of communication are particularly important (Ames, 1993). A review of the literature highlighted certain key characteristics of effective home-school communication. A report to the New Zealand Ministry of Education in 2008 on successful home-school partnership, ascertained certain key features for effective home-school communication as: being collaborative and mutually respectful, multidimensional and being responsive to community needs,



coupled with timely two-way communication between school and parents (Brooking, Bull, & Campbell, 2008).

### ***Attributes, Advantages, and Meaning of Effective Home-school Communication***

A review of the literature brought out certain other features of effective home-school communication such as being two-way (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002; 2004), personalised and regular (Mutch & Collins, 2012) and, honest and easy to understand (Adam & Christenson, 1998; Christenson & Sheridan, 2001). Though there is not much evidence in the literature that effective home-school communication leads to improved student learning outcomes, a considerable amount of research agrees on the benefits of strengthening home-school partnership and building relationships, and its positive correlation with improved student learning outcomes and achievement (Hallinger & Murphy, 1986; Jeynes, 2007; Marzano, McNulty & Waters, 2003; Mutch & Collins, 2012). Mutch and Collins (2012) see communication as an important aspect of home-school relations and partnership. Home-school connection is integral for the desired development of the child (Bronfennbrenner, 1979) and central to this is an effective home-school communication practice (Epstein, 1990). Epstein's theory of overlapping spheres of influence (Epstein, 1995) also outlines the importance of family, school, and community working together to shape the child's developmental patterns. It is recognised that home-school communication is necessary when schools share responsibility with the home through cooperation and collaboration for child's education and socialisation (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Epstein, 2018; Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Ladky and Peterson (2008) also highlight the role of parents as co-educators at home and emphasize that this partnership works best when both institutions take a shared responsibility of achieving a common goal for the child and work in synergy. These assumptions are also based on the ecological, psychological and educational models of social organisations and relations (Bronfennbrenner, 1979; Epstein, 1994; Leitcher, 1974). The relation of the child with the family is also seen as social capital which influences their intellectual abilities (Coleman, 1988). Therefore, it can easily be inferred that a healthy connection between home and school is absolutely essential to completely tap into this social capital in the form of family relations. When schools engage parents and work in partnership with them, the students function better and show improved educational outcomes (Henderson &

Mapp, 2002). The starting point of this healthy home-school relationship is effective communication between the two.

### ***Increasing Parental Involvement Through Effective Home-School Communication and Partnership***

Researchers have also documented the importance of home-school communication in enhancing parental involvement (Chen & Fan, 2001; Desimone, 1999; Ho & Hong, 2005; Jeynes, 2007). A further review of the literature highlighted that effective home-school communication and its impact on parental involvement is positively related (Decker & Majerczyk, 2000; Fan & Chen, 2001; Hill & Tyson, 2009; Jeynes, 2005; Sui-Chu & Willms, 1996). Decker and Majerczyk (2000) in their study of the impact of home-school relationship on elementary school children's success, found that effective home-school communication can enhance parental involvement and promote a partnership between parents and teachers to be actively and constructively involved in the child's education process.

The research studies define parental involvement in a number of different and often contradictory ways. For the purpose of this research, I have defined parental involvement as parental support in school children's education to elevate their academic outcomes and achievements (Jeynes, 2003; 2005). However, irrespective of how the concept of parental involvement is conceptualised, it is found to be positively correlated to student outcomes (Griffith, 1996; Hill & Tyson, 2009; Jeynes, 2007; Paulson, 1994; Stewart, 2008). Parental involvement boosts a child's educational achievements and academic outcomes. This impact is particularly observable in the early and elementary years, and some researchers point that it goes down as children move up to secondary and tertiary schools and transition into adolescence (Darling, Dornbush, Lamborn & Steinberg, 1992; Hill & Taylor, 2004). After taking the socio-economic factors into account, most researches and theories seem to support this idea and emphasize that parental involvement in school increases student's academic achievements. Hill and Tyson (2009) in their meta-analysis of the impact of parental involvement on students' academic achievements in elementary school, found it to be positively correlated. Though there are many interpretations of parental involvement and engagement across literature, they all support the importance of dynamic home-school relations to promote parental involvement, which starts with effective home-school communication.

While there is a lack of narrative on the positive impact of effective home-school communication on immigrant parents, the research is consistent on the impact of parental involvement and its benefits for them and their children who settle and adjust in a new country and environment (Hill & Tyson, 2009; Kim, 2002; Ramirez, 2003). The significance of family and the wider community comes into play as these immigrants manoeuvre during their early years in a new country. Research confirms the importance of parental involvement and its positive impact on academic achievements, particularly for immigrant children (Bhattacharya, 2000; Joshi et al., 2007; Kao & Turney, 2006). The better the communication between home and school, the less stress the child experiences as he navigates between two cultures, native and host (Bhattacharya, 2000). There are some slight variations across studies, where researchers have claimed that the length of stay and English language ability influence, and are positively associated with, immigrant parents' involvement with their children (Li, 2006).

### **Theme 3: Barriers to Communication and Parental Involvement for Immigrant Parents**

There is a wealth of evidence that supports that immigrant parents face challenges to involvement in their children's education (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Ji & Koblinsky, 2009; Kao & Turney, 2009; Moles, 1993; Ramirez, 2003). Migrant parents perceive a greater number and magnitude of barriers to getting involved in their children's school than do native-born parents (Kao & Turney, 2009) which is alarming because the literature points to the importance of parental involvement and its influence on student achievement and behavioural outcomes. Literature on barriers to effective home-school communication and parental involvement highlight three barriers to effective home-school communication as: differences in perceptions on involvement by parents and educators which can reduce opportunities for communication between home and school (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011), schools lack of clarity in communicating with parents (Decker & Majerczyk, 2000; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 1997; Hornby, 2011) and, absence of strong relationship between the two socialisation units of the child (Sanders & Sanders, 2009). A further review of the literature, brought out additional barriers and challenges to effective home-school

communication and parental involvement for immigrant parents and the common themes identified were language and cultural differences, negative perception of the teachers about such parents, schools and teachers belief of these parents as being 'hard-to-reach', economic and social barriers, ineffective cross-cultural communications and, lack of clear policies of school on the involvement of ethnic parents (Dyson, 2001; Graham-Clay, 2005; Ladky & Peterson, 2008; Moles, 1993; Sohn & Wang, 2006).

Research acknowledges the barriers to open communication when teachers and parents come from different backgrounds (Kauffman, Perry & Prentiss, 2001). Parents, and particularly culturally and linguistically diverse parents, need clear feedback from teachers as to how the child is doing, what is expected of them and what each grade means (Okagaki, 2001) for their active participation in their child's education. Therefore, one needs to recognize that families have different expectations, patterns and norms about education, parenting, and child-rearing practices and understanding these differences can help educators and leaders design more effective, meaningful and participatory home-school communication practices, that will help these immigrant parents facilitate their child's school achievements (Okagaki, 2001).

### ***Ineffective Cross-Cultural Communication***

Studies have found that immigrant parents face additional barriers to involvement in their children's education due to ineffective cross-cultural communication by the teachers (Gay, 2002; Irvine, 1990; Irvine & McAllister, 2000). Seeing children from a single cultural perspective by teachers and schools poses a hindrance to effective communication and subsequent involvement (Trumbull et al., 2003). Previous research on home-school communication by Chinese researchers acknowledges that these parents face significant challenges when it comes to home-school interactions and cross-cultural communication (Chen & Fan, 2001; Dyson, 2001; Li, 2006). Dyson's study of Chinese immigrant parents' involvement in their children's education revealed that when teachers use jargon and difficult words while communicating with these parents it creates difficulties in understanding and comprehending.

Similarly, a study of Latino parents' involvement in the mainstream classroom concluded that these parents faced substantial barriers to communicating with their children's teachers due to ineffective cross-cultural communication and lack of school strategies to engage these parents (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005).

### ***Language Barrier***

Language can be another barrier to involvement for most immigrant parents (Dyson, 2001; Ji & Koblinsky, 2009; Shatrova, Smith & Stern, 2008; Smrekar et al., 2001; Sohn & Wang, 2006) where a lack of confidence or a past bitter experience may hamper their involvement and meaningful communication with their children's school. Bakker, Denessen and Gierveld (2007) in their research on four elementary schools' in the Netherlands with principals to study the schools' experience of parental involvement with ethnic parents, identified language problems and cultural differences as two main barriers. In their study, ethnic minority parents were less involved than the native-born Dutch parents due to these challenges and barriers.

### ***Lack of Understanding Amongst Teachers***

Teacher communication practices influence parental involvement (Becker & Epstein, 1982; Greenwood & Hickman, 1991) and the teachers' understanding of minority children's culture in a multicultural classroom, can greatly impact on making home-school communication practices meaningful (Devita, 2000; Gay, 2000; Gay & Howard, 2000). Despite this evidence, Joshi et al., (2007) found in his study large variations in teachers espoused belief and actual practice in understanding parents cultural beliefs and child-rearing practices, particularly when they came from different backgrounds. The teachers could be judgemental and biased in dealing with these immigrant students and parents. Bermudez and Marquez (1996) view the prejudiced and judgemental attitude of teachers, especially towards low-income group immigrants, act as a barrier in effective communication. Colombo (2004) in his study found that there could be challenges to communication within the context of cultural differences if teachers use their 'own cultural lenses' in interacting with culturally and linguistically diverse parents.

A lack of involvement due to the barriers outlined above, by culturally diverse minority parents, is also seen as a sign of disinterest by teachers and schools (Commins, 1992; Crozier & Davies, 2007) and these parents are termed as hard-to-

reach-parents. However, Crozier and Davies (2007) challenge this notion and argue that most parents in their study had no or little relationship with their children's school, as none of the schools in their study had a programme in place for parental involvement or building home-school relations with these parents. Similar observations were made by Harris and Godall (2008) who in their yearlong research in the UK, aimed at studying barriers to involvement of immigrant parents and ways to overcome them, found that it is the school and not the parents that are hard to reach. They draw a clear distinction between involving immigrant parents and engaging them in their children's learning and assert that while it is easy to involve parents in school activities, engaging them into meaningful partnership is a whole different task altogether. Meaningful parental engagement, according to them, needs time, commitment and effort of both parents and school. In contrast, some research studies found that schools do not have any clear policies on the involvement of ethnic minority parents (Denessen et al., 2007; Ladky & Peterson, 2008). Therefore, the need is not just to promote a healthy two-way communication with immigrant parents in a multicultural school setting, but a commitment to understanding why it is important.

#### **Theme 4: 'Best Practice' and Ways to Foster Communication Practices with this Group of Immigrants**

The literature review reveals certain strategies that could be employed to enhance the home-school partnership and communication for immigrant parents in a multicultural, diverse classroom setting, such as in New Zealand. The common strategies in the research point to the following practices: engaging immigrant parents, understanding their need for information, communication to build relationships, creating a welcoming environment, fostering partnerships, sensitizing the teachers with multiculturalism and professional development of staff and leadership.

A variety of recommendations came out from the literature examining school initiatives and practices to promote parental involvement and improving communication with multicultural parents. Underpinning these were specific recommendations such as addressing the need for information by providing regular

informational meetings specifically for these parents (Kaufmann et al., 2001), flexible hours for parent-teacher conferences and small group meetings (Bhattacharya, 2000), promoting mutual and shared understanding of the task rather than working in isolation, to overcome any differences in assumptions and private interpretations, (Timperley & Robinson, 2002), and, professional development of staff and leadership (Joshi et al., 2005).

### ***Professional Development of Teachers***

Professional development of teachers is of particular relevance, as it promotes a deeper understanding of the parent's perspective and expectations, thereby, building a trusting relationship based on two-way dialogue and meaningful communication between the teacher and the parents (Joshi et al., 2007). This becomes even more important for the educators to address when engaging with immigrant parents, with a socio-cultural context, different from theirs. Ladky and Peterson (2008) assert that teachers need to broaden their perspective and understanding of these parents as co-educators in their children's education process. Their research findings further revealed that when teachers were actively involved in the professional development to learn more about the immigrant parents' language and culture, it led to fostering greater partnership and stronger relationships with these families. Researchers have also accounted for inexperience and lack of training in skills to communicate with parents as a barrier to effective communication (Hradecky, 1994; Lightfoot, 2004).

However, it is important to note that it is not enough to have just a superficial knowledge of the culture of immigrants by teachers. According to Kasahara and Turnbull (2005), what is needed is a deeper understanding of the unique characteristics of each family, embedded in their socio-cultural context. For example, the Bridging Culture Project (Hernandez, Rothstein-Fisch & Trumbull, 2003) which provided professional development to the teachers, enabled them to understand the Latino immigrant families child-rearing practices and expectations of school, to alter their communication practices to one that increased their proximity to these families, also supported by the designing of innovative classroom practices. The teachers were subsequently able to shed their biases and judgemental attitudes to understand these families' culture which allowed them to work closely and successfully with them to increase their participation in problem-solving.

### ***Using Homework as a Tool to Enhance Communication***

Homework has emerged as a common theme, across literature, revealing it as an effective tool to increase home-school communication (Bursuck, Epstein, Jayanthi, Nelson & Sawyer, 1995; Chrispeels, 1988; Epstein & Jansorn, 2004; Graham-Clay, 2005). Homework provides an opportunity to let parents know the teaching happening in the class (Peterson & Ladky, 2008) along with the chance to be actively involved in their children's learning (Decker & Majerczyk, 2000). Using homework to engage immigrant parents in their children's learning was agreed upon by most teachers in the research conducted by Ladky and Peterson (2008). In addition, all the immigrant parents interviewed in their study, held a similar view and agreed that assigning regular homework gave them an opportunity to engage with their children and learn what their child has accomplished in school on that day. Lack of meaningful homework was seen as an inability to participate and help in their children's learning by parents participating in the discussion group for research, by Mutch and Collins (2012). This concern was particularly raised in Pacific, refugee and migrant families.

Again, a quasi-experimental study on the benefits of homework (Van Voorhis, 2001), found that well-designed, interactive homework positively engages parents and promotes student achievement. While there is little variation in the satisfaction with the amount of homework given (Li, 2006), most research studies on immigrant parents' involvement with their children's education revealed dissatisfaction with the quality and frequency of homework (Barton, Carreon & Drake, 2005; Dyson, 2001). For example, participants in Dysons (2001) study of Chinese immigrant parents in Canada, found homework not only to be insufficient but also, unproductive and non-academic. They feared that this combined with unstructured curriculum may be harmful to their children's academic progress in the future. Some studies also highlight the importance of modifying the homework to include 'shared learning activities' to fulfil the need for information, of immigrant parents. These shared learning activities not only encourage the students and parents to work together to accomplish a task, but also form the basis for discussing issues and concerns in the parent-teacher meetings and conferences in the near future (Decker & Majerczyk, 2000; Ladky & Peterson, 2008). A New Zealand study on home-school communication reinforced this view and found that interactive homework projects



that require partnership with parents can greatly enhance parental involvement and collaboration in students' education (Booking, Bull, & Campbell, 2008).

### ***Formal and Informal Communication***

Several other recommendations came out of literature to increase parental involvement through effective home-school communication. Though most of these were not specific to the immigrant population in their study, they could aptly be applied within the context of this study. One aspect that emerged repeatedly in the literature, and has been highlighted in a number of studies, is the inadequacy of formal involvement of parents in their children's school (Allen, Harry & McLaughlin, 1995; Cohen-Vogel & Smrekar, 2001; Epstein, 1986). When it comes to immigrant parents, informal communication provides greater impetus for participation for them (Hernandez, Rosenthal-Fisch & Trumbull, 2003). This preference for communication was confirmed by the participants in Ladky and Petersons' (2008) study, who expressed that a fifteen-minute formal meeting, twice a year, was completely insufficient and not meaningful for them. What is needed is an ongoing, two-way communication channel (Graham-Clay, 2005; Lightfoot, 2004). A two-way communication channel in the form of parent-teacher conferences should be interactive and informative (Graham-Clay, 2005) and should be seen as an opportunity to fill in any gaps in knowledge between the two socialisation units of the child, school, and home (Ferrara & Ferrar, 2005). Graham-Clay (2005) emphasises teachers should use various strategies for communication depending on the characteristics of the parents, and see it as an ongoing process, rather than a discrete activity. This is important because the ultimate aim is to promote parent-school partnership through effective communication, to support students' learning.

### ***Written Communication***

A wide range of other effective communication practices has come up in the review of the literature. Identifying the acculturation and the socio-cultural pattern of this group of immigrants, certain other recommendations have been discussed that can be greatly beneficial in enhancing the home-school communication experience for them. Written communication in the form of notes, and the signing of tests and reports have been identified as an effective home-school communication tool (Dyson, 2001; Gonzalez, Borders, Hines, Villalba & Henderson, 2013; Graham Clay, 2005; Ladky & Peterson, 2008; Li, 2006;). Cartledge and William (1997) point out

that, “written communication is probably the most efficient and effective way we can provide a valuable ongoing correspondence between school and home” (p.30). Using report cards for written communication can be a useful tool for communication available to the teachers (Cox, 2005; Epstein, 1987; Graham-Clay, 2005). Similarly, school-to-home notebooks is another effective way teachers can use to engage the parents and in providing updates on a daily basis (Graham-Clay, 2005).

The report card is another traditional medium of written communication of the child’s assessment giving precise and specific information regarding the child’s progress towards a standard. These reports are personalised documents of child’s academic achievements across content areas, evaluation of social development and highlight the areas of further improvement by outlining specific goals and targets (Aronson, 1995).

### ***Cross-cultural Communication***

Finally, cross-cultural conference (Altchech, Greenfield & Quiroz, 1999; Graham-Clay, 2005; Greenfield, Quiroz, Rothstein-Fisch & Trumbull, 2001; Joshi et al., 2005) has been attributed as an effective way for cross-cultural communication (Delgado-Gaitan, 1991; Greenfield, Quiroz & Raeff, 2000). These conferences help the parents to understand school functioning within their cultural context and also provide an opportunity for them as avenues of redress to be heard and feel empowered (Delgado-Gaitan, 1991). Greenfield and Quiroz (2000) emphasised that these conferences gave a chance to remedy any cross-cultural miscommunication and discord in teaching models between Latino parents and teachers in his study.

Other general recommendations across literature, to enhance home-school communications with immigrant parents, that can be useful for this specific group of Indian immigrant parents in New Zealand, include, organising cultural nights to discuss thematic units of work for each term along with feedback from parents (Decker & Majerczyk, 2000), harnessing mother tongue to design mother tongue literary practices (Auerbach, 2007; Sanders & Sheldon, 2009), and, creating a welcoming environment and strengthening relations with families and communities (Epstein & Salinas, 2004; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Lopez, Maitivanichcha & Scribner, 2001).

# CHAPTER THREE

## METHODOLOGY

This chapter highlights the research design and the chosen methodology. The research questions and objectives are restated and the corresponding theoretical underpinnings are described. The two data collection methods, online questionnaire, and focus group interview, are discussed and justified. Furthermore, sampling, data collection and data analysis are explained for each of the methods employed. Finally, the validity issues and ethical considerations are addressed in the final section of this chapter.

### **Research Questions and Objectives**

The research questions are at the heart of any research and form the blueprint for the research design and its chosen methodology. The central questions guiding this research were:

1. What are the expectations and experiences of Indian parents regarding home-school communication practices in New Zealand?
2. What do parents believe about the ways in which the schools are meeting these expectations?
3. What are the possible strategies to enhance the current practice?

This research sought to document the experiences and expectations of Indian immigrant parents of primary school children in New Zealand regarding home-school communication. It also gave an opportunity to give a voice to the culturally diverse Indian parents in New Zealand and provide a platform to express their satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the current home-school communication practices and suggest ways to improve them. Lastly, its additional aim was to gather recommendations on the area of improvement in home-school communication practices in New Zealand.

## **The Theoretical Underpinnings**

The underlying ontological and epistemological assumptions behind this research are highlighted and how these assumptions relate to the chosen methodology and methods is explained. Approaches to research are underpinned by two different paradigms, namely, the positivist and the post-positivist (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). The choice is dictated by the nature and the purpose of the research. Each paradigm is further underlined by ontological considerations and epistemological assumptions (Davidson & Tolich, 2003) which are central to any social science research. According to Bryman (2012), the epistemological position of positivism advocates the generation of the hypothesis that can be tested leading to the assessment of laws. The positivist paradigm takes the philosophical position that explanation precedes by way of scientific description (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). However, this paradigm was not suitable for the research I undertook as it involved uncovering people's perspectives and experiences which are unique to them. The research subscribed to a theoretical philosophy different from the positivist paradigm as it determined to investigate the nature of expectations of home-school communication of Indian immigrant parents in New Zealand. Cohen, Manion & Morrison (2011), state that, "positivism is less successful is in its application to the study of human behaviour where the immense complexity of human nature and elusive and intangibility quality of local phenomena contrast strikingly with the order and regularity of the natural world" (p.7).

This research attempted to look at ways to recognise the experiences of home-school communication of Indian parents within the New Zealand education system due to their growing number. Therefore, the researcher subscribed to an epistemological position of interpretivism, associated with the post-positivist paradigm (Cohen et al., 2011; Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Guba & Lincoln, 1985) and an ontological position of relativism which views reality as subjective, different for each person (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Interpretivism or the interpretive paradigm is a contrasting epistemological position to positivism for social science research such as educational research, where people and institutions display the characteristic of uniqueness (Creswell, 2003; Schwandt, 2000). Epistemologically, the interpretive paradigm is underlined by subjectivism which implies that people may construct

reality in different ways and, therefore, the “social world can only be understood from the standpoint of individuals who are participating in it” (Cohen et al., 2007, p.19). The interpretive paradigm is concerned with individuals, their behaviour and experience and how they interpret the world they live in (Cohen et al., 2011; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). It assumes that every single event can be interpreted in multiple, subjective ways and that there is no one, objective reality, but reality can be socially constructed (Merriam, 2009). Therefore, this research held the position that reality is relative (Corbetta, 2003) which is subject to what individuals experience in creating their social world (Cohen et al., 2011) and the social reality of people has a meaning for them (Bryman, 2012). In contrast to the quantitative and scientific research that claims a positivist epistemology of objectivism, this social science research represents multiple ways of looking and interpreting a social reality (Cohen et al., 2011). The central endeavour of this research within the interpretive paradigm context was to study and understand the subjective reality of Indian immigrant parents and their experience in relation to home-school communication in New Zealand, one which reflects their viewpoints and expectations. This subjective research also supports the interpretive philosophy of ‘no universal truth’ (Davidson & Tolich, 2003). There is no single truth, rather there are multiple truths (Cohen et al., 2011).

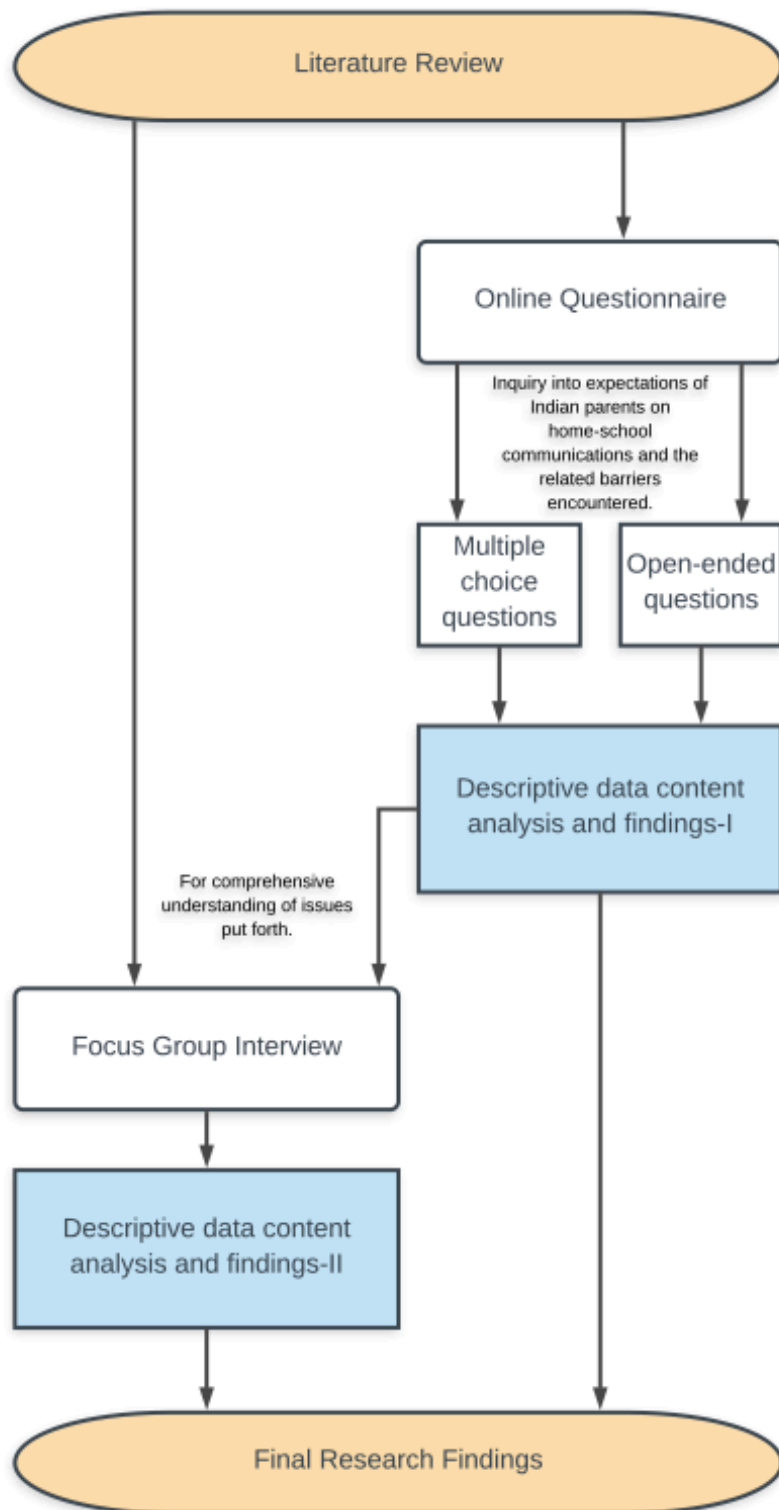
The philosophical assumptions of ontology and epistemology associated with the post-positivist, interpretive paradigm, guided me to a qualitative methodology and led to making this a qualitative study. The focus of quantitative research is on presenting the result in numerical form (Merriam, 2009) as opposed to the qualitative research which is “interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds and what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (Merriam, 2009, p.5). This methodology fitted best with my educational research which sought to uncover the experiences and understandings of immigrant parents in New Zealand regarding home-school communication. Merriam (2009) emphasises that “qualitative research seeks to ask questions about people’s lives, the social and cultural contexts in which they lived, the ways in which they understood their worlds, and so on” (p.6). This qualitative research study’s aim was to reveal the views of the members of a particular immigrant group, their understanding of the world and as a

result, give them a voice within a New Zealand education setting. All these considerations called for an interpretive paradigm and qualitative research.

## **Research Design**

A two-stage data collection method was used to gather information about the home-school communication experience and expectations of Indian immigrant parents of primary school children in New Zealand. The first phase of data collection constituted of an online questionnaire with the sample size of n=30. In the first stage, an online questionnaire comprising of multiple-choice and open-ended questions was employed to gather data from three social media groups on Facebook, targeting Indian Immigrants in New Zealand. The descriptive content analysis of the received complete online questionnaire identified certain themes and patterns that formed the basis of framing the interview schedule for the second stage of data collection, using focus-group interview. The sample size of the focus-group interview was a four-member group where the participants were chosen from amongst the participants of the online questionnaire on the basis of convenience sampling method. The focus-group members were representative of the target population of Indian immigrant parents residing in New Zealand for a period of five years or less, to ensure they had the experience and the knowledge that would be valuable for this research. The secondary method of focus-group interview was used for additional data collection to increase the validity of the research by addressing any gaps in data analysis of the first stage and its findings. Key findings from both the methods of data collection were identified and brought together as consolidated findings of this research study. (See Figure 1: Research Design).

The questionnaire is attached as Appendix 1 and the focus-group interview schedule in Appendix 2.



**Figure 1: Research Design**

## **Primary Method of Data Collection: Online Questionnaire**

The first phase of the data collection consisted of an online questionnaire comprising of two main sections, multiple-choice questions and open-ended questions. The first section of the questionnaire included multiple choice questions. The second section of the online questionnaire included open-ended questions that would elicit deep and meaningful responses from the participants about their experiences and expectations of home-school communications in New Zealand. As Gray (2004) explains, “the potential for richness of responses, some of which may not have been anticipated by the researchers...may lead to interesting or unexpected responses” (p.194-195). Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000) assert that an open-ended question is useful in prompting a well thought out response that “might contain the ‘gem’ of information that otherwise might not have been captured in the questionnaire. Furthermore, it puts the responsibility for and ownership of the data much more firmly into the respondents’ hands” (p.255). Research also points out that using open ended questions also increases the response rate of the online questionnaire (Denscombe, 2009).

The order of the questions was particularly important while designing the questionnaire as it encourages or demotivates the potential respondent to fill or ignore it (Bell, 2007). I used two-part questions, placed one after the other, one that checks the experience, and the following question to elicit expectations, in a similar context. This allowed for a comparison of responses, reflecting their experiences and expectations regarding home-school communication practices.

### ***Sampling and Data Collection***

Convenience sampling and snowball sampling methods were used due to the hard-to-reach nature of the sample population. Snowball sampling is one where “identified members of the rare population are asked to identify other members of the population, those so identified are asked to identify others, and so on, for the purpose of obtaining a non-probability sample” (Thompson, 2006, p.183). Snowballing implied that the people who participated in the research were asked to recommend other potential participants who would be relevant for this research. This method is particularly useful when the target population is hard-to-reach in any other



way (Davidson & Tolich, 2003). Convenience sampling, also known as availability sampling, uses the first conveniently available participant from the target population for data collection (Marshall, 1996). According to Cohen et al., (2000), convenience sampling “involves choosing the nearest individuals to serve as respondents and continuing that process until the required sample size has been obtained” (p.102). A link to the online questionnaire was sent to people who identified themselves as potential participants on the various online, social communities of Indian ethnicity. The purpose of the questionnaire was explained along with the promise of anonymity and confidentiality on various online Indian community social groups across Auckland. The interested participants were sent the link to the online questionnaire for completion and submission.

### ***Reasons for Choosing Online Questionnaire as a Primary Method of Data Collection***

The primary reason for opting for an online questionnaire as a preliminary method of data collection, was the growing number of virtual communities online (Lavrakas, 2008). Also, in recent times, with the increasing growth of social media, people have become more comfortable in expressing their views and opinions on issues that affect them, in an open and frank manner (Ellison et al., 2007; Wright, 2005). An additional advantage of these online questionnaires is the exposure to a very large audience comprising of potential participants, regardless of their ethnicities, backgrounds, beliefs (Baltar & Brunet, 2012; Wright, 2005;). This method is better than the traditional face-to-face survey methods, as it saves on time and effort of the researcher in locating the potential participants, with the additional advantage of being cost-effective (Alkassim, Etikan & Musa, 2016; Bhutta, 2012; Couper, 2000; Wright, 2005). The participants are more comfortable participating in an online survey on social media as it feels like a part of their normal, daily routine, whereas, a face-to-face survey may seem more like a temporary intrusion into their private space (Wright, 2005). Additionally, virtual data collection methods that involve the use of the internet can be useful for studying “hard-to-reach” population (Baltar & Brunet, 2012; Wright, 2005) that would be difficult to access through other sources.

Evans and Mathur (2005) have identified various other strengths and advantages of online surveys such as; flexibility, cost-effectiveness, easy follow-up, quick data entry

and analysis, controlled sampling and easy access to a large sample size, among many others. Such questionnaires give the respondents an opportunity to fill the questionnaire at their own pace and convenience, thereby, increasing the likelihood of participation (Bryant, Gilmartin & Sax, 2003). All these advantages provided the impetus for choosing online questionnaire over postal or face-to-face surveys for this particular research. Yet it has many limitations too.

### ***Disadvantages of Online Questionnaire***

The researcher was also aware of the disadvantages associated with using the online questionnaire as a method of data collection. It is found that online questionnaires have various drawbacks and shortcomings too, particularly with regards to sampling because little can be said with surety about the authenticity and the characteristics of the people participating in these online communities (Dillman, 2000). Several drawbacks have been pointed out by Wright (2005) which include the possibility that the self-reporting participants may not provide accurate demographic or characteristics information. However, these problems are not specific or unique to just online surveys and face-to-face or postal surveys are brimming with similar constraints (Wright, 2005).

### ***Posting of Online Questionnaire***

The invitation to participate in this survey was posted on three social-media groups comprising of Indian immigrants in New Zealand. The criteria for participation included Indian immigrant parents of children studying in primary schools and residing in New Zealand for a period of 5 years or less. A link of the online questionnaire was sent to people who identified themselves as potential participants on social communities of Indian ethnicity on Facebook, which were to be mailed back after completion to the researcher.

### ***Using Social Media for Data Collection***

I had overestimated the rate of response that I would get from posting the questionnaire on social media. Over two weeks of posting the questionnaire on different social media groups on Facebook, on both weekends and a weekday, only ten complete questionnaires were returned. Several steps were taken to encourage responses such as keeping the questionnaire brief (Best & Hugick, 2008; Nulty, 2008) and assuring anonymity (Baum, Dommeyer, & Hanna, 2002). Again, frequent

reminders were given to the participants to complete the questionnaire as this boosts the response rate (Cook et al., 2000; Dillman, 2011; Solomon, 2001). Furthermore, every effort was made to persuade the respondents of the nature and potential benefits of the research study as this too increase the response rate (Nulty, 2008).

The literature on the response rate of an online survey is not unanimous. While some studies point to a higher response rate of face-to-face paper surveys (Bell, 2007), others assert that emails used in conjunction with follow-up, results in a higher response rate compared to traditional paper mail (Mehta & Sivadas, 1995; Stanton, 1998). My experience of online questionnaire response rate was in contrast to certain other surveys carried out using Facebook and other Social networking sites, that claim a high response rate of online surveys (Baltar et al., 2012; Bhutta, 2012). It was more in line with various other research studies that found that the rate of response of online questionnaires is prone to be less than those associated with phone, mail and interviews (Baruch & Holtom, 2008; Converse et al., 2008; Cole, 2005, Evans & Mathur, 2005; Kongsved et al., 2007). Similarly, it has been found that the response rate of online surveys is much lower than those administered on paper. Various studies were found to support these findings (Cobanoglu et al., 2001; Cook et al., 2000; Dommeyer et al., 2004; Fan & Shih, 2008; Fricker & Schonlau, 2002; Greenlaw & Welty, 2009).

To increase the sample, I decided to visit a Gurudwara (place of worship of Sikhs) and a Temple (place of worship of Hindus) to look for additional potential participants. The families that accompanied primary school going children were identified and approached and a brief outline of the research and its purpose was given. This elicited interest in them followed by sharing of email addresses on which the link of the questionnaire was sent for completion. I was able to generate approximately 25 email addresses from each holy place, a total of fifty addresses on which the link to the online questionnaire was sent. The rate of responses from these was a little over one-third, and twenty completed questionnaires were mailed back out of fifty sent out. This combined with ten complete questionnaires obtained using social media, I managed to achieve my minimum number of 30 complete online questionnaires.

### **Data Analysis**

Descriptive data content analysis method was used to analyse the data collected through the online questionnaire. Data analysis was done to study patterns and regularities in the data collected. Cohen et al., (2000) define content analysis as, “a multipurpose research method developed specifically for investigating a broad spectrum of problems in which the content of communication serves as a basis of inference, from word counts to categorisation” (p.164). A coding system was used to reduce the responses to different answer categories (Basit, 2003; Davidson & Tolich, 2003; Life,1994). All the descriptive and narrative responses of the open-ended questions were studied, and a coding system was devised after identifying different categories and themes that emerged from it. According to Loftland and Loftland (2006), “the essence of coding is the process of sorting your data into various categories that categorise and organise it and render it meaningful from the vantage point of one or more frameworks or sets of ideas” (p.200). To create the online survey, Google forms were used. The feedback template of google forms was used for both multiple-choice and open-ended questions. Four options followed each of the four multiple-choice questions and paragraph format was used for the open-ended questions. This enabled participants to give their comments without any difficulty. Google forms were used for this research as they are simple, quick and user-friendly and allow the respondents to give their feedback in an uncomplicated manner.

Even though the online questionnaire comprised of open-ended questions, most responses were very short and brief, of not more than a few words or a sentence. Some respondents even gave one-word answers to most questions, with a simple yes or no. Due to the shortness and poor quality of responses, a secondary method of data collection was employed, in the form of a focus-group interview. The purpose of this additional method of data collection was to enhance further the findings of the questionnaire and to build on the responses received. This enabled a deeper understanding of the issues that remained unclear in the first method due to the inadequacy of the responses.

## **Secondary Method of Data Collection: Focus-Group Interview**

The secondary qualitative data collection method was the focus-group interviews. The focus-group interview involves a group discussion around a specific issue and is particularly useful to gain insights, opinions, and beliefs of a segment of the population on the research topic (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Kitzinger, 1995). The descriptive content analysis of the received online questionnaires, which involved interpreting people's values and attitudes from what they had said or written, by identifying words and phrases (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003), presented certain themes and patterns. This provided the basis for outlining the framework for the focus-group interview. The aim of the focus-group interview was to inquire and elaborate further on the different aspects and themes that were highlighted in the questionnaire findings. Its further purpose was to gather personal stories and experiences of the target immigrant group regarding home-school communication practice in New Zealand. The focus-group interview was designed in such a way that it would encourage participants to share their thoughts, narrate their personal accounts and life stories along with opinions pertaining to the specific areas of research. A parallel was seen between the subjective narratives in the focus-group interview and the responses of the open-ended questions of the questionnaire.

### ***Sampling and Data Collection***

The focus-group interview comprised of four participants and lasted for about an hour. Morgan (1996) comments that from a moderator stance, smaller groups are easier to manage, especially if the topic of discussion is highly complex and charged. Carey (1994) reinforces this view and states that the fewer people there are, the greater the likelihood that they will interact, and this makes it easier for the moderator to ensure that the discussion is moving in the right direction and at the right pace. Kitzinger (1996) actually advised there should be four members in a focus-group interview as small groups give ample time and opportunity to the participants to speak (Gill, Stewart, Treasure & Chadwick, 2008).

The participants of the focus-group interview were selected from the participants of the online questionnaire, on the basis of convenience sampling method in which

members are “selected purely on the basis that they are conveniently available” (Gray, 2004, p.88). The sampling method for the focus-group interview involved choosing appropriate Indian immigrant parents of school-going children, representative of the target population, to ensure that they had the experience and the knowledge needed for this research (Kruger & Casey, 2014)

Data collection was done using an audio recorder and the interview was conducted in a community hall located in West Auckland. Every effort was made to ensure that the meeting place for the focus-group was neutral and one that allowed for frank and unhampered discussion (Powell & Single, 1996). Literature supports that location and setting are very important (Dilorio et al., 1994) and should be neutral but familiar (McLafferty, 2004; Kruger & Casey, 2014). Therefore, a community hall for chosen to carry out the focus-group interview that was known to all the participants. The focus schedule comprised of five open-ended questions phrased clearly in a simple language. In the Interview schedule, the questions moved from general to more specific. Many authors claim that the set of questions, called the interview route or interview guide, should involve questions moving from general to more specific topics (Gill et al., 2008; Shamdasani & Stewart, 2015) and should be given to the participants at the beginning of the interview (Casey & Kruger, 2014). Time was allocated before the beginning of the discussion for participants to introduce and familiarize themselves with other members, through informal conversation, as this breaks the ice and fosters a relaxed and conducive environment for a frank and open discussion (Powell & Single, 1996). This was followed by the signing of the consent form where members were assured of the confidentiality and anonymity of the focus group discussion (Powell & Single, 1996).

### ***Advantages of Using Focus-Group Interviews***

The focus-group research method was adopted for this research because questions in the focus-group interviews encourage interaction and exchange of dialogue and ideas, rather than a simple ‘yes’ or a ‘no’ (Casey & Krueger, 2014). Interaction is the key to a successful focus-group (Gill et al., 2008) where large amounts of data through interaction can be observed in a limited period of time (Morgan, 1996). This was particularly useful because when questions are asked in a group environment, valuable insights emerge (Casey & Krueger, 2014). Complex issues can be identified

and discussed (Powell & Single, 1996) through interaction and positive group dynamics (Kitzinger, 1995; Gill et al., 2008), by expanding on the points raised by other participants (Powell & Single, 1996; Morgan & Krueger, 1998). In a group setting, “when participants answer questions, their responses spark ideas for other participants” (Casey & Krueger, 2014, p.40) triggering memories and thoughts of other participants. A focus-group generally employs conversational questions which maintains an informal environment and encourages participants to have a conversation and build on one another’s comments (Kruger & Casey, 2014). Casey and Krueger (2014) list many advantages of focus-group interviews such as: allowing spontaneity, relaxing the participants and creating a natural environment. They assert that the biggest advantage of such conversations is the useful information that comes out from such deep levels of discussion. Focus-groups can produce new and insightful information (Gill et al., 2008; Kitzinger, 1995) and is highly effective in eliciting emotional responses (Schumm, Sinagub & Vaughn, 1996).

In addition, in the focus-group interview setting, the target audience of Indian immigrant parents were encouraged to talk to one another, share their experiences, ask questions, narrate anecdotes and give their unbiased point of view. Kitzinger (1995) asserts that “this method is particularly useful for exploring people’s knowledge and experience and can be used to examine not only what people think but how they think and why they think that way” (p.299). Therefore, the focus-group interview, grounded in the naturalistic-interpretive philosophy, triggers dialogue and exchange of ideas, to bring out clarity in sometimes misleading and contradictory statements. Such group discussion is particularly relevant when there are a series of open-ended questions. Every effort was made to encourage participation to give prompt responses that would explore the issues of importance, different perceptions and understanding of the group members and their priorities as sound group dynamic also sometimes leads the focus group interviews into new and unexplored territories (Kitzinger, 1995).

Focus-groups are useful for studying dominant cultural values (Kitzinger, 1995) and in a focus-group, “the researcher can identify shared and common knowledge, and this makes focus group data collection technique particularly sensitive to cultural

variables- which is why it is so often used in cross cultural research and work with ethnic minorities” (Kitzinger, 1995, p.300). Due to the sensitivity of this research to cultural variables, focus-group method was employed for data collection as it is particularly useful for studying the social realities of cultural groups and ethnic minorities, through direct access to their experiences, in their own language (DuMont & Huges, 1993; Kitzinger, 1995; McLafferty, 2004).

The focus-group interview was used as a secondary method of data collection for this research as various authors and studies assert that focus-group for data collection, when combined with survey (McLafferty, 2004; Morgan, 1996), is a rich source of follow up data to expand the findings from the primary method (Morgan, 1996). Single and Powell (1996), claim that it is most useful when the study of investigation is complex and requires simultaneous use of additional data collection methods to increase the validity of the research.

### ***Data Analysis***

Just like the online questionnaire analysis, coding and content analysis were used for analysis of the descriptive, qualitative data gathered from the focus-group interview. The voice recordings from the focus-group interview were first transcribed into a written text. Different themes and patterns emerged from these transcripts. Based on the principle of coding, a coding manual was generated which identified category names and categories associated with them by stating an example alongside. Properties of different categories began to emerge and various patterns were identified from the final coding of the whole text. Lofland and Lofland, (2006) define coding as a “process of sorting your data into various categories that organise it and render it meaningful from the vantage point of one or more frameworks or sets of ideas” (p.200).

### **Validity and Ethical Issues**

Validity refers to “the extent to which a question or variables accurately reflects the concept the researcher is looking for” (Davidson & Tolich, 2003, p.31). Cohen et al., (2000) emphasise that in a qualitative data, “validity might be addressed through the honesty, depth, richness, and scope of the data achieved, the participants



approached, the extent of triangulation and the disinterestedness or objectivity of the researcher” (p.105). Therefore, efforts were made to address the issues of validity and reliability of the data collected for this qualitative research, through the online questionnaire and focus-group interview methodologies. The online questionnaire, due to its far-reaching characteristic, ensured the soundness and the robustness of the research, which are important aspects of the validity of qualitative research. Similarly, the highly descriptive data of the open-ended questions in the online questionnaire implied understanding the subjective world of the Indian immigrant parents and their beliefs and expectations around home-school communication practice, through their eyes and point of view, which adds to the research’s validity.

A multi-instrument approach was used, known as methodology triangulation. This implies that two different methods were used to gather data on the same subjects of study. According to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011), “a multi-method approach provides triangulation and concurrent validity and gives a closer, more authentic meaning to the phenomenon or culture” (p. 193). Parallels were seen in the narratives given in the open-ended questions of the questionnaire and the responses of the focus-group interviews, which implied that the findings of the first method were confirmed by the second method. This kind of triangulation strengthens the reliability of the findings (Creswell & Miller, 2000). In qualitative research, the logical integration of data from multiple angles, perspectives, and methods, to draw a common, consistent inference, adds to the validity of the research process (Davidson & Tolich, 2003).

The data collected from the online questionnaire was coded to ensure its valid analysis, as this analysis influenced the next stage of focus group interviews. These simultaneous processes of data collection and data analysis ensured constant comparisons were made of the results from the two methods used for gathering data. Cohen, et al., (2000) point out that, “triangulation is a powerful way of demonstrating concurrent validity, particularly in qualitative research” (p.112).

Ethical principles of informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity, and respect had been considered while undertaking this research project. Bryman (2012) asserts, the principle of informed consent entails that “when people know they are being asked to

participate in research, they should be fully informed about the research process” (p.138). Therefore, the prospective research participants were given complete and true information about the purpose of the research so that they could make an informed decision about whether they wish to participate in it or not (Bryman, 2012). The participants of the focus group interview were briefed at the outset about the nature and implications of the research, and their participation. Providing participants, a complete and clear account of what the research entails (Bryman, 2012) was the prime concern of the researcher. See Appendix 3 for the information sheet and Appendix 4 for the consent form.

The verbatim data presented has been kept completely anonymous by assigning pseudonyms to participants. Hence, it can be concluded that all participation was voluntary, the anonymity and confidentiality of the participants were maintained, and data was analysed and presented truthfully.

## CHAPTER 4

### RESEARCH FINDINGS

This chapter presents the research findings of two methods of data collection, namely, an online questionnaire and a focus-group interview. The findings of the online questionnaire are presented in the form of tables along with verbatim quotes. The key findings from the questionnaire are outlined at the end of findings of stage one. The findings from the focus-group interview are presented as the second stage under three headings: experiences, expectations and recommendations of Indian immigrant parents regarding home-school communication practices in New Zealand primary schools.

#### **Stage One: Online Questionnaire**

The online questionnaire started with two multiple-choice questions to ease the participants into the process of filling the online questionnaire before addressing aspects which needed deeper thinking and were more time consuming. The first question was aimed at studying the characteristic of the participating parents to ensure that they fulfilled the research criteria. It was to inquire about the time-length of their stay in New Zealand as this research aims to study the perspective of the recent Indian immigrant parents, residing in New Zealand for five years or less. The total participants of the online questionnaire were thirty.

It was learned that nearly half of the respondents had lived in New Zealand for one to three years. Another 29% of the respondents had lived in New Zealand for three to five years. Whereas, the fresh arrivals in New Zealand, who had been living for less than a year, comprised of 23% of the total thirty respondents.

The second question sought to find, at the onset, the most preferred mode of communication of the parents with the school. It was noted, that nearly half of the

respondents preferred a direct, face-to-face, parent teacher meeting with the teachers to receive feedback about their children's performance in school.

These two multiple choice questions were followed by 12 open-ended questions that sought to find out the experiences and expectations of Indian immigrant parents regarding home-school communication practice in New Zealand. The questions were strategically sequenced in a manner that the experiences and expectations regarding a particular aspect of home-school communication were placed one after the other so that the gaps between the two could be studied, by comparing the responses.

The third question of the online questionnaire, asked about the frequency of communication, the school initiates with the parents. The responses were clubbed into four categories ranging from every week to once in six months. The most common response was beginning or end of each term which is about three months long in New Zealand primary schools.

**Table 4.1**  
***Frequency of Communication Experienced***

	Number of respondents'	Percentage of respondents'
Every week	1	3.3
Every fortnight	7	23.3
Beginning or end of term	20	66.6
In six months	3	10.0
Total	30	100

The findings highlight that the majority of schools communicated with the parents at the beginning and end of each term while very few parents reported other frequencies such as every week or once in six months.

One particular respondent (R-16) said, *“weekly newsletter from school, but very rare occasional communication from the teacher. Depends on the nature of communication”*. Another parents, (R-22) mentioned that, *“one on one is once in 6 months, on request anytime, common message through newsletter every month”*. Other common responses included: regularly, once a month, once in three months, occasionally and three to four times a year.

The next question, question 3, sought to find how often the parents would like the school to communicate with them. While some parents were happy with the frequency of communication, others said that they would prefer more frequent communication from the school. The responses were grouped together into the following categories: every two weeks, every month, once in two months, beginning and end of each term.

**Table 4.2**  
***Frequency of Communication Expected***

	Number of respondents'	Percentage of respondents'
Every week	1	3.3
Every fortnight	4	13.3
Beginning or end of term	22	73.6
In six months	1	3.3
Total	30	100

It can be noted from the table that most parents were happy if the school communicated with them at the beginning and end of each term, while a few of them would prefer monthly or fortnightly communication.

One respondent (R-10) commented that *“at least every month a PTM should be organised”*, while another respondent (R-8) commented, *“would prefer if the teacher communicated at least once a week on activities/learnings happening in school”*.

The next question, question 4, asked the respondents about how the school communicates with them? The responses were grouped into the following categories, shown by the table. Some parents mentioned more than one method of communication, therefore, the total responses added to more than 30.

**Table 4.3**  
***Mode of Communication Used by School***

	Number of respondents'	Percentage of respondents'
E-mail	18	46.1
Parent-teacher meeting	11	28.2
Newsletter	22	20.5
Phone call	1	5.1
Total	39	100

One parent (R-9) remarked for this question that, *“mostly emails, except the biannual progress report. We are encouraged to book 30-minute sessions with the teacher in case we need to communicate more”*.

The responses of the question revealed that most parents reported newsletters and emails as the mode of communication of the school with the parents. Nearly 30% percent stated that the school used parent-teacher meeting for communicating with the parents.

Question 5, aimed at finding the most preferred mode of communication of Indian immigrant parents in New Zealand, with the school. The results show a similar break-up of choices, as in question one, which included: face-to-face, email with occasional face-to-face meetings, parent-teacher meetings, and emails.

**Table 4.4**  
***Mode of Communication Preferred by Parents***

	Number of respondents'	Percentage of respondents'
E-mail	6	20.0
Parent-teacher meeting (PTM)	15	50.0
E-mail + occasional PTM	7	23.3
Phone call	2	6.6
Total	30	100

The responses also included words such as; meetings, personally, which imply a similar preference as parent-teacher Meeting or face-to-face interaction. The answers clearly signal to a more one-on-one interaction as the most preferred mode of communication with the teachers. One particular parent (R-27) said “*at least a monthly meeting with the teacher* “, while another respondent (R-5) said, “*meetings should be once in the beginning of the term- goal setting meeting and then closer to the term to check the achievement on goals*”.

Question 6, asked the respondents what the communication from the school and teacher, mostly centered around. While most parents said it is mainly concerning the updates about the child’s learning, others responded with words such as; general wellbeing, school events, learning and grades, progress and performance, learning in class, co-curricular activities, learning goals and sports, progress report, and behavior.

One particular parent (R-14) said that *“it’s mostly about things happening in school such as school trips, parent info session etc.”* other respondent (R-23) commented communication was *“about healthy progress and about future projects or anything where only parents can help out”*. Another parent (R-19) said that the communication centered around, *“my child’s development, progress, areas for concentration and overall performance”*. The responses are grouped and shown in the following table.

**Table 4.5**  
***Aspects of Child Progress Communicated by School***

	Number of respondents'	Percentage of respondents'
Overall progress and wellbeing	18	32.0
Academic learning	11	18.0
School events	22	30.0
Co-curricular activities	1	20.0
Total	44	100

The respondents were asked about which aspect of their child’s performance they would want more feedback on in Question 7. The most common theme of response directed at feedback on the academic progress of their children and included responses such as; academic achievement, academic report, academics, overall learning outcomes for the week, studies and extra-curricular activities, reading and



writing, about learning and grades, subject knowledge. One particular parent (R-5) said that *“not feedback, but an update on what’s being taught so we can spend some time at home to hone those learnings further”*. Another respondent (R-17) said, *“overall progress. I would prefer overall progress, be it academic or sports or any other curricular activities”*. On similar lines, another respondent (R-8) said, *“I want communication on each aspect of his holistic development”*. One particular parent commented that he would want the teacher to give update on *“improvement in grabbing things and strengths and weaknesses”*.

**Table 4.6**  
***Aspects of Communication Parents Seek from School***

	Number of respondents'	Percentage of respondents'
Overall progress and wellbeing	6	20.0
Academic learning	21	70.0
School events	0	0.0
Co-curricular activities	3	10.0
Total	30	100

It can be noted from the responses of Question 8 that these parents seek most feedback on the academic learning of their children, from the school. This is followed by overall progress and wellbeing and very few respondents wanted feedback on participation in other co-curricular activities.

The parents were then asked in the next question, Question 9 of the questionnaire, if the communication given by the school was clearly understood by them?

Most parents responded with a definite yes, one said no, while some felt they understood partially, and others said sometimes. The responses indicate that these

parents did not face any barriers in understanding the communication given by the school.

**Table 4.7**  
***Comprehension of Communication***

	Number of respondents'	Percentage of respondents'
Yes	23	80.0
No	1	3.0
Sometimes	3	10.0
Partially	2	6.0
Total	30	100

The next question, Question 10 in the online questionnaire, asked parents if they were satisfied with the frequency and quantity of communication by their child's school. The responses fell into the broad categories of yes, no, yes; but could be improved, almost, not completely and not much.

**Table 4.8**  
***Satisfaction with the Communication by the School***

	Number of respondents'	Percentage of respondents'
Yes	19	63.0
No	6	20.0
Could be improved	5	16.0
Total	30	100

One parent (R-29) said that *“yes if not sometimes I go for one on one meetings”* while another respondent (R-12) commented, *“satisfied because on request they do communicate but official meetings should be conducted more frequently”*. On similar lines, another parent (R-15) said that *“it’s good but they should communicate more”*.

Question 11, asked parents on what aspects of communication do they feel can be improved by the school? The question generated a variety of responses where parents felt that more feedback on child’s academic learning would be helpful as it would enable greater participation by them in their child’s learning and education. This they felt would benefit the children in the long run.

**Table 4.9**  
***Aspects of Communication to be Improved***

	Number of respondents’	Percentage of respondents’
Feedback on academic learnings	23	80.0
Letting them know the objectives for each term	2	6.6
Child’s personal development	3	10.0
None	1	3.3
Total	30	100

One particular (R-19) parent said that *“letting us know learning outcomes and objectives in a nutshell”*, while another (R-11) said, *“keeping parents more informed about the syllabus they cover during the year”*. A particular respondent (R-23) said that *“more involvement from the teacher, however I understand this comes at a cost as he/she may not be able to spend more time in class then”*. Another (R-5) parent said, *“the communication should be more specific and clearer as per the individual child”*. The responses reveal that parents want specific feedback from the school,

centered mostly on child’s academic learning rather than a general assessment of their overall progress and wellbeing.

The next question, Question 12 in the online questionnaire asked parents about how involved they feel in their child’s education?

The responses are clubbed into the following categories: very involved, reasonably involved, very less, not involved at all.

**Table 4.10**  
***Involvement Felt by the Parents***

	Number of Respondents’	Percentage of respondents’
Very involved	14	46.0
Reasonably involved	4	13.0
Very less involved	7	23.0
Not involved at all	5	16.0
Total	30	100

One respondent (R-11) said, *“very less as compared to what I would like to be, as I’m not abreast with the advances in learning/teaching methodologies being followed since the time we left school”*. Another parent (R-7) said, *“have no idea as no homework or clue about what’s being going on in their classroom except asking from school”*. One parent (R-24) said, *“I do feel like I am actively involved, but could do better”*.

One particular (R-28) parent gave an elaborate answer and commented *“being born and brought up in India, sometimes we feel that we don’t really know about what child does at school because they keep notebook at school. Also, no homework, more than that different strategies to teach”*. The responses reveal almost a clear

divide, with nearly half of the parents feeling involved while the other half seem to be dissatisfied with the level of involvement in their child's education.

The next question, Question 13 sought to find parents perspective on practices by school, that would increase their involvement in their child's education. The common thread that ran across most responses was the allocation of some homework for their children which would give them an opportunity to learn about the studies happening in class, thereby, promoting their involvement in their child's educational journey. One respondent (R-18) shed light on this concern for involvement through homework and said, "*some homework, which we can get idea of what they are doing in school*". Similarly, another parent (R-25) said, "*weekly updates on what's being taught/what will be taught next week, as well as information around things we can work with child at home*". Again, another (R-16) respondent said, "*telling me what they intend to teach during a period so that I could help out*". Furthermore, another parent (R-11) said that "*giving challenging activities for homework and self-study where my child can ask me for the doubts*".

The final question, Question 14 of the questionnaire asked parents, overall, on what aspects of their child's education do they feel the school should seek more feedback from parents? A variety of responses came from the respondents that comprised of Indian immigrant parents of primary school children in New Zealand, residing for five years or less. One particular parent (R-17) replied to this question with "*on different aspirations of each community and culture related to their child's study*". Another respondent (R-10) answered this question with "*learning and communicating aspects as children are coming from different cultures and backgrounds with different ways at home with parents. School is where the kids all meet and become one*".

One respondent (R-2) gave an elaborate response and said, "*there should not be any casual approach if the child is not performing in certain areas. Parents should be equally involved or asked to make specific changes in kids schedule or give them extra attention if needed. They should work in conjunction with the parents*".

**Key findings from the questionnaire:**

The key findings are as follows.

***What Parents Experience***

The findings revealed that a majority of parents (67%) are happy with the frequency of communication initiated by the school, which is the beginning and end of each term. Nearly half of the parents (46%) commented that schools communicated with them through e-mails and, another 20% reported the use of newsletters for communication. A significant percentage of those who responded (62%) expressed that feedback from the school mostly centered around overall progress, student wellbeing, and school events, and only 11% reported feedback on academic learning. While most respondents (nearly 80%) could understand and comprehend the communication given by the school, nearly 40% of them did not feel actively involved in their children's education. Some attributed it to the differences in strategies used to teach in their native and home country.

***What Parents Expect***

Of the thirty respondents, fifteen (50%) reported that a personal, face-to-face meeting was their preferred style of communication with the teachers in New Zealand primary schools. This indicates their preference for a more personal and traditional method compared to other formal, impersonal and indirect methods such as emails and newsletters. It was noted that while most schools communicated on school events with feedback on overall progress and wellbeing, a vast majority (70%) of Indian parents want a feedback on the academic learning of their children happening in the school. A clear gap in the experience and expectations of the content of communication can be inferred from the responses of the participants of the online questionnaire.

***What Parents Recommend***

It became clear from the responses of the online questionnaire that an emphasis on homework was laid in view of the understanding of the Indian parents. Over one-third of respondents believe that homework helps them to know the teaching happening in the class and increase their involvement in their child's education. Other recommendations to enhance communication included giving specific information

about the child without any casual approach by the school along with information on the intended teaching in each term.

## **Stage Two: Focus Group Interview**

### **Background Information:**

The focus group interview was conducted to gain a deeper understanding of the Indian parent's experiences and expectations regarding home-school communication in New Zealand. The interview was conducted in the community hall in West Auckland and included four parents chosen from the participants of the online questionnaire. There were three females and one male participant. The interview lasted for about an hour and was recorded on a voice recorder.

The background information of the participants is as follows: Parent 1 has been in Auckland for one year and has three children. One is eleven and in Year 5, the other is seven and in Year 2 while the youngest is less than a year. She was a graphic designer in India. Parent 2 has been residing in Auckland for a year and has one child who is ten years old and in Year 5. She was a primary school teacher in India. Parent 3 has been in Auckland for two years and has two children. One is ten and in Year 6 while the other is eight and in Year 4. He was a businessman in India. Lastly, Parent 4 has been in Auckland for three years and has one child who is six years old and in Year 2. She was a homemaker back in India.

A simplified version of the findings of the online questionnaire was given to the parents at the beginning of the discussion. The participants were also given the interview schedule beforehand so that they could familiarize themselves with the direction and nature of the discussion. The findings of the focus group discussion were divided into three broad categories, which are as follows:

1. Experience of Home-School Communication Within the New Zealand Education System.
2. Expectations of Home-School Communication.

3. Barriers to Communication and Recommendations on the Areas of Improvement in Home-School Communication.

### **Experience of Home-School Communication Within the New Zealand Education System**

The focus-group discussion revealed that all four parents felt extremely comfortable and did not hesitate in communicating with the teachers in their children's school.

Parents did not feel much barrier to communication and felt that the teachers were friendly and always available for communication. Parent 4 said, *"yes what I like here is that I can easily go to the school meet the teacher in the morning too and it's not difficult to meet the principal"*. Parent 3 added, *"I don't think there is less communication with the teachers. Once a term they have parent teacher meeting, and this is more than enough for us"*.

Their responses indicated the contrast in how approachable and forthcoming teachers are in New Zealand compared to India. It was understood that in New Zealand neither the parents nor the children feel inhibited in talking to teachers on all kind of matters.

Parent 4 was happy that the teachers here are friendly and approachable. She added, *"That's the good thing about this place...the teachers in India were like Gods"*. She went on to elaborate on this and said, *"Here you can meet in the morning every day...she will talk to you nicely and if you have any problem anything you can ask any query...even in between the classes I have gone there and she has talk to me"*.

Parent 1 mentioned that her daughter is not afraid to go up to the teacher, like she was in India and commented, *"So this one good thing about this place that teaches a very friendly, they are very nice with you, they are very soft spoken, and they are eager to help you out. They want to talk to you and you don't feel scared of them. Even the children don't feel scared of them. So, this is one good thing. This is a very good part of it that they are feeling at home and at school they are not scared to talk to their teachers"*.



Finally, Parent 3 sealed the unanimity on approachability of teachers by commenting *“I feel is that if I want to talk to a teacher I can very well go, even in the full break if I am standing there and if I want to talk to her class in-charge. She is welcoming, and she has the time and she never says that maybe some other day or like that. They are good enough at communicating”*.

What also became evident at the beginning of the discussion was that the parents felt a sharp difference in the amount of pressure their children experienced in performing academically in school. There was unanimity amongst parents that their children are under significantly less academic pressure and that they experience considerably more freedom as compared to their native country. While they felt it was a good thing, they worried that this might lead to their children losing interest in studies.

Parent 1 remarked, *“okay, I think starting off I was a bit confused about the system because I feel there was less of pressure, less of homework and which I think is a bit necessary for children because otherwise they start losing interest in studies and which I see mostly over here”*.

Discussing about the need of freedom, she said, *“my daughter is enjoying, she is loving it”*, and was happy that her daughter is trying out new things. She further added, *“everybody gets an opportunity and she is not feeling that she is good or bad at something. She just wants to do something she will just do it”*. She felt that the New Zealand education system is more balanced compared to her native country as children are given an opportunity to explore and are exposed to a variety of activities. She added, *“that one thing is very nice because in India, the children who are good at things, are good at studies are preferred more, they are given more importance and that's what happens that children lag behind, who are weaker will stay weak and who are good will become better because the teacher only focusses on the cream and the other children are left behind.”*

## **Expectations of Home-School Communication**

The parents (1, 2 and 3) felt that, while it was easy to communicate with the teachers, the content of the communication did not meet their expectations as it is all too general. Parent 1,2, and 3 commented that the teacher only gave an overall positive feedback, which cannot be truly reflective of the child's performance. They want more detailed feedback on their child's progress and were concerned that if any difficulties are not addressed in the beginning, they might turn into bigger problems in the future.

Parent 2 said, *"Expectations for my child is like when you know teacher is teaching the topic and if my child is not doing good or she is not understanding that topic...I expect the teacher should communicate this to the parent that she is not doing well and that's the area she should have practice"*.

Parent 1 added by saying, *"the sad part is unfortunately they never say never let you know that. It's the child you know losing interest on that topic then slowly gradually and doesn't want to do that"*.

Comments made by the interviewee's revealed that all four parents expressed a strong desire to be actively involved in their children's education process because they felt they were in a position to help them achieve their academic goals. They believed this can only be done if the teacher's communication conveyed specifically the areas that need improvement and practice. What became evident from the discussion was that these parents want regular feedback on their child's progress, particularly on academic performance because they want to participate in their child's learning process. This need for active participation in turn stems from their high aspirations for their children. All respondents in the discussion held high aspirations, expectations for their children and a preference to attend a professional course at university. They want their children to be academically ahead.

Parent 3 commented, *"I make sure that the child is studying". I make emphasis on timetables and we should know them by heart the calculations, addition, subtraction*

*and multiplication*". Parent 1 built up on what Parent 3 said and added, "So I regularly keep her motivated that she has to go ahead with them some good professional choices".

The lack of content of communication also resulted in the lack of awareness of the curriculum, which was not conveyed to the parents by the school or the teacher. The comments made by the parents revealed that they are not completely aware of the curriculum of their child, nor the teaching strategies used in class. They expect the teachers to clearly communicate and inform the parents of the curriculum to be taught in each term.

Parent 1 indicated that she is not amply involved in the New Zealand curriculum because of her lack of awareness and that she is instead continuing to involve herself in the Indian curriculum. She remarked, "I am using Indian studies right now. That's how I am keeping my daughter updated because I got books from India and I am using that as my basis. She further commented on her lack of awareness of the strategies used in New Zealand to teach children, particularly mathematics. She added, "I have to look to the internet in to find out what strategies my daughter talks about. I have learnt one strategy, I can't know each and every strategy. I have to learn about the new strategies. So that is one problem."

Parent 2 exclaimed that she should know more about the curriculum. She said, "the way they give reports, it's more of like they are taking one single thing that she has learned and in a generalized way they tell you and not specifically. So, it is still very unclear."

Parent 3 felt that in India the focus was on rote learning. He remarked, "Here children learn to do things by struggling on it practically, which is a good thing". However, he informed that though the language skills have improved, the kids have not gotten the opportunity to improve their mathematical skills. He said, "in India if teacher has decided that she is going to do these four topics in say a 3 months' time. Over here it is not like that. It's not something fixed. Children have learnt how to write on their own. If I give any topic they can write about a page on it, they can make a

*story on it. So yes, that's an achievement. But on the other side, mathematical skills are you know poor I say because the kids know more."*

Parent 4's comment resonated with Parent 1 and she made a similar comment, *"I think that they have no fixed curriculum for the particular year so I feel that I should have a book that these are the topics and these are the things that they are going to cover for 6th and 7th and everything so what I expect is they should do something like this. Like divide the topics or make at least photocopy version of something for the parents that they are going to do all of that"*.

All four parents want the teacher to communicate on aspects of academic learning and provide a clear outline and information on the curriculum to be taught each term.

### **Barriers to Communication and Recommendations for Improvement in Home-School Communication**

Though parents did not express any barrier to communication and reported that teachers are extremely friendly and approachable, differences in teaching strategies limit open communication and elaborate discussions of the learning happening in school. These differences also inhibit their participation and involvement in their child's learning and education process. These differences were particularly evident in math education. The parents revealed that if teachers communicated the different strategies used in class, their future communication with the teacher could be more productive and meaningful. Comments made by the interviewee's revealed that all four parents expressed a strong desire to be actively involved in their children's education process because they felt they were in a position to help them achieve their academic goals.

Parent 2 highlighted that she came from an environment of tough and fierce competition where emphasis was on the ranking system. Therefore, she always expects her daughter to be ahead in class, academically. However, parents' comments revealed that there is a significant difference in the educational practices in their native country and New Zealand and their lack of understanding of these practices reduced their level of involvement with their children

Drawing on the educational practices in the New Zealand context, Parent 1 commented, *“Like in math they don't teach things in one way. They have strategies in which we didn't do and science also they do more practical work but what I really feel is that I don't know what they are doing that is because I want to work with them on that thing if they are doing something in math I want to know that because I want to give her more work at home”*.

Parent 3 built on this and said, *“I feel math's also specially...I make emphasis on times tables and we should know them by heart the calculations, addition, subtraction and multiplication...And the teacher thinks that is perfectly ok if you don't know them. Which is a big deal for me. I want my children to know the times table”*. Similarly, Parent 4 said she is not as involved as she would like to be. She said, *“I would like to know what they need to learn and where they are falling short in and what they are doing well in”*.

Parent 3 also agreed with parents 1 and 2 regarding teaching strategies and added, *“I taught my child to carry forward and borrow...he came home one day saying my teacher said that all of this is wrong. That what he did in his exercise is not an acceptable strategy. You have to do neat numbers and tidy numbers and write it off and because of which he was very upset. So, every time after that I make him do maths with me he would get really upset because according to him I teach it all wrong because the teacher says it's wrong”*. These specific comments about teaching strategies and lack of awareness of them, particularly in math, gave the impression that they inhibited their parental involvement.

The recommendations for improving communication with the parents that came out from the focus group discussion included, initiating written communication with the parents, organizing parent info-sessions to communicate and update parents on the curriculum and other aspects of school and communication through regular homework to increase the involvement in their child's learning process.

### **Written Information**

Parent 4 proposed a written information process for communicating with the teacher. She commented, *“I think they can have something like in India, not for the elder ones but younger one, for instance Year 1 child, they can have a diary for a written communication”*. Elaborating on this point she said, *“Also the parents want to communicate with the teacher in written form. Or that okay she needs to work on these things, please help her out. I think this must be old school for them, but I think it works well”*.

### **Parent Information Sessions**

In order to know about the curriculum and plan of each term, the parents agreed that a Parent Information session at the beginning of each term should be held. Knowing the curriculum to be taught in each term, they felt, would help to increase their involvement in their children’s learnings. Parent 2 and 3 commented that a parent info-session at the beginning of the term, where parents can be briefed about the intended teaching for the term, would enable them to work alongside with the teacher.

### **Homework**

All parents were unequivocal on the importance of homework in not only enhancing their child’s learning but also increasing their involvement in their child’s education.

Parent 1 said *“But one thing is that I really want more homework because I feel at home there’s a lot of time specially because we don’t have anything else to do and children are sitting idle and this leads to an especially the weather here after that they are sitting at home and this leads to them watching TV and mobiles and that’s all they want to do”*.

Parent 2 highlighted that *“My daughter doesn’t even get homework and even if she does it is some fun task”*.

Parent 3 remarked *“I have to every time whenever she is at home she is sitting, and I have to tell her to find out something good in the Sciences, say some activities she can do that at home. She can take out some worksheets on the Internet and she can*

*solve that so that is what is I try to do...I don't have so much of time...my expectation from the school that she should be given some kind of homework you know in the form of a worksheet only so that she I feel like yes, she is being encouraged or...her level of learning is increasing”.*

### **Key findings from the focus-group interview:**

The key findings are as follows.

#### ***What Parents Experience***

All the participants of the focus group interview stated that they were happy that the teachers in their child's school are friendly and approachable, and they face no inhibitions in meeting them at their convenience. However, the parents expressed that the content of communication given by the teachers is too general and focused only on positive feedback. Again, they highlighted that different teaching strategies between host and home country inhibited their involvement in their child's education. Also, a lack of knowledge of the curriculum was evident amongst the participants of the interview which was a matter of concern and uneasiness for these parents.

#### ***What Parents Expect***

Throughout the discussion, the parents' comments clearly illustrated that they held high aspirations for their children with a strong desire to be actively involved in their education process. However, different teaching strategies, particularly in mathematics, inhibit their involvement. Therefore, they expect the schools to outline the curriculum to be taught at the beginning of each term and want a mechanism to learn the teaching strategies used in the class.

#### ***What Parents Recommend***

The parents in the focus-group interview made recommendations such as parent-information sessions, written communication, and homework, to make home-school communication practices more effective and meaningful. They believe that these tools will not only give them an insight into the learning happening in the class but also enable them to participate in their child's learning by becoming aware of the curriculum taught and the strategies used.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### DISCUSSION

The purpose of this small-scale study was to document the experiences and expectations of Indian immigrant parents in New Zealand regarding current home-school communication practices. On the basis of the information gathered through a questionnaire and focus-group interview, this chapter will discuss the principal findings of the investigation in the light of the literature backdrop outlined earlier in Chapter 2. Conclusions are drawn and recommendations for meeting the unique needs of these parents are made. Finally, the limitations of the research study are outlined.

The key findings are discussed under the following headings:

1. Face-to-Face Communication
2. No Linguistic Difficulties
3. Frequency of Communication
4. The Content of Communication with More Feedback on Academic Achievement
5. Lack of Knowledge of Curriculum and Teaching Strategies Leading to Reduced Parental Involvement
6. Homework and Written Communication

#### **Face-to-Face Communication**

A number of distinctive findings emerged from this study, revealing that while most schools conveyed or initiated communication with parents through emails and newsletters, these parents held a strong preference for face-to-face communication with the teachers. The parents commented that while this may be supplemented with occasional emails, they actually want regular, personal meetings with the teachers.



Research supports this notion, that when parents and teachers talk, they can understand each other's point of view (Eberly, Joshi & Konzal, 2005; Lightfoot, 2004). The common interest of enhanced learning outcomes for the child can be best addressed and achieved when parents and teachers feel "comfortable enough to talk to each other and share their worlds" (Miretzky, 2004, p.842). Even though researchers have claimed that using technology to communicate with parents is quick and cost-effective (Greenfield & Subrahmanyam, 2008; Rogers & Wright, 2008), especially with technology being readily available to everyone, the findings of this research suggests that these parents prefer a more traditional and interpersonal means of communication with the teachers. The findings of the focus-group interview highlighted that these parents do not face any difficulty or inhibitions in approaching the teacher who they think are extremely warm and friendly. The parents reported that it is not difficult to meet the teachers even during school hours and they always come across as approachable and ready to help. The parents were consistent in their belief and understanding that they experience ease and comfort in initiating informal communication with the teachers at their convenience. The result of this study is in accordance with the result of the study conducted by Cattermole and Robinson (1985) which confirmed that parents in their research had a preference for a traditional face-to-face or over the phone communication with the school which promotes personal contact with the teacher.

### **No Linguistic Difficulties**

The findings of the online questionnaire revealed that nearly all the parents understood the communication initiated by the school and teachers. They did not experience any linguistic difficulties or challenges. This characteristic regarding Indian immigrant parents is in contrast with immigrants from other parts of the world, such as Chinese and Latino, where studies reveal that these parents face considerable challenges in communicating with the school due to their lack of understanding of the host country's language (Chen & Fan, 2001; Dyson, 2001; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Li, 2006). These findings are also consistent with the literature on early Indian immigrant parents overseas which outline their ease, comfort, and fluency with the English language due to their colonial past and a fairly western education system (Ferver et al., 2002; Segal, 1991; Spark & Saran, 1980). It

is interesting to note that even though these parents can speak and understand English fairly well, they still experience low engagement with the school and in their children's education. This proposition has been supported by Hidalgo et al (2004) where differences in cultural patterns can result in low engagement with the school even when parents speak and understand English. Literature supports the view that educational levels of parents' impact on their parental involvement in school (Glasgow & Whitney, 2009; Kim, 2002). However, the findings reveal that even though all participants in the focus-group interview were college graduates, they felt they were not actively involved in their children's education. Given the scenario, it is then not unreasonable to assume that this could be due to ineffective home-school communication experienced by these parents.

### **Frequency of Communication**

It was noted from the findings of the study that the data on the frequency of communication from the school was inconsistent. There was almost a clear divide on this aspect of communication, where, nearly half the parents were satisfied with the frequency of communication initiated by the school, whilst the other half desired that there should be an increase in the frequency of communication from the schools. The satisfied respondents felt that the communication with teachers at the beginning and end of each term was sufficient, whereas the dissatisfied parents desired communication every fortnight or monthly. These differences in experience may be attributed to the practices and policies of individual schools regarding communication with the parents. On the whole, Sanders and Sheldon (2009) suggest that home-school communication should be timely, focused and up-to-date. Literature also supports that the length of stay in a new country (Ran, 2001) make a difference to the level of immigrant parents level of engagement. Since all the participants of both online questionnaire and focus group interview were recent immigrants, there could be a possibility that they still have not completely developed the cross-cultural skills to completely adjust in a new country. Hence, this was ambiguous feedback on this aspect of communication experienced by these parents. This has been documented in the literature too, that the longer the stay, the greater the degree of acculturation (Bermudez et al., 2004; Dow, 2011).

## **The Content of Communication with More Feedback on Academic Achievement**

A strong finding from both the online questionnaire and focus-group interview, was the parents' need for specific information about their children. These parents pointed out that the information given by the teachers on their child's progress did not reveal any real details. These parents expressed that the information given about their child should not be superficial or seen as a to-do task by the teacher, but rather a meaningful, productive activity. These parents expressed that they want personalised, regular and honest feedback about their children's learning and progress. They further commented that timely and accurate information can help them keep their children on track with important tasks. The findings of the study revealed that discipline and productive utilisation of time was the prime concern of these parents. These parents were also dissatisfied with the content of the communication and felt that the teacher did not give a clear picture of the child's progress and learning. The communication largely centred around praising the child without any constructive criticism. They felt that the teacher did not highlight or specify the exact areas that needed improvement or further practice. Researchers have demonstrated that the content of the communication, also called school parent contact, makes significant differences to parental involvement, student efficacy and intrinsic motivation (Fan & William, 2010). When schools relay meaningful information about the students learning and behaviour, parents can involve themselves productively with their children.

One distinctive feature that came out of this study was that Indian immigrant parents wanted more feedback on the academic achievement of their children. These findings are consistent with Dyson's (2001) study of Chinese immigrant parents' who held similar expectations from the school. It was noted that the Indian parents focus significantly more on academics and desired feedback on learning in mathematics and science. This also stems from their high educational expectations for their children. This can be linked to Baptiste's (2005) research on Asian Indian parents in the US, who link future success to current academic outcomes. While the parents in this study were happy with the praises their children get and the encouragement they

receive from teachers, they fear that this attitude may deter them from their academic pursuits and goals.

### **Lack of Knowledge of Curriculum and Teaching Strategies Leading to Reduced Parental Involvement**

The findings further revealed that the lack of knowledge of curriculum and teaching strategies, particularly of mathematics, inhibited the involvement of these immigrant parents in their children's learning. These shortcomings made them feel helpless in assisting their children to overcome any learning difficulties. It was found that all participants in the focus group interview were at least college graduates and wanted to be proactively involved in their children's education. The findings further revealed that Indian parents held high expectations of their children and also placed a high value on education and want to be actively involved in their children's education. These findings are in agreement with early studies on Indian immigrant parents (Dasgupta, 1989; Wakil et al., 1981) which confirm that Indian immigrants emphasise academic achievement for their children as means to move up in life. This behaviour pattern of the Indian parents can also be seen in the comments of the focus-group interview where the issue of not knowing the curriculum at the start of terms proves to be rather difficult for them to accept. Letting the parent's know of the curriculum to be taught at the beginning of each term can facilitate their involvement. Research (Decker & Majerczyk, 2000) suggests organising curriculum nights where the parents can be informed of the thematic units to be taught in each term. These can help the parents to organise and coordinate studies at home, aligned with the teaching happening in the class. Literature also supports that when parents are actively involved in the teaching happening in the class and reinforce it at home, it leads to improved student learning outcomes (Good, Powell-Smith, Shinn & Stoner, 2000; Shirvani, 2007). When parents are informed with the teaching happening in the class, they can monitor the same at home. Communicating with parents and giving them information about the school and the child is a skill as important as teaching for the teacher. Hill and Taylor (2004) assert that "Most parents want information about how to best support their children's education, but teachers have little time or resources to devote to promoting parental school involvement, and some parents are simply 'hard to reach.'" (p. 163). The parents' comments during the

focus-group interview strongly suggested that they can be co-educators of their children at home and use their social capital only if they have the complete knowledge and information of what is being achieved at school.

The parents were consistent in their belief on the importance of mathematics education. Mathematics education is important for Indian immigrant parents and the difference in teaching strategies in native and host country inhibits their involvement in maths teaching. Epstein and Sheldon (2005) in their longitudinal study on parental involvement and student outcomes, found that activities such as an interactive maths homework assignment and resources for families to use at home significantly improved student achievement levels and positively related to maths outcomes. Several meta-analysis also confirm that parental involvement and student achievement are positively related (Chen & Fan, 2001; Hill & Tyson, 2009).

### **Homework and Written Communication**

As a corollary to the previous finding, Indian parents also desired that more homework should be given to the children not only as a communication tool but also as an opportunity for enhanced engagement in academic work. Designing and giving interactive homework by teachers can also give parents a chance to know the curriculum being taught in the class and in turn reduce the uneasiness these parents experience due to the unawareness of what is being taught in the class. Literature supports that parental involvement through homework results in enhanced achievement related outcomes (Cooper, Patall & Robinson, 2008). It has been confirmed that homework is especially valuable for parental engagement and improved outcomes, especially in elementary years (Cooper, Lindsay & Nye, 2000; Epstein & Sanders, 2002). Children also show greater enthusiasm and do better in school when parents help them with their homework (Balli, 1997). The parents in this study felt that a daily homework task is important to reinforce discipline and healthy utilisation of time, in their children. Their children losing interest in studies, due to the absence of regular and meaningful homework is what worries them the most. Though scholars have found a weak relation or link between the amount of homework given and student achievement (Koller & Trautwein, 2003), studies have supported that interactive homework given by the teacher enhances parental

appreciation and involvement in schooling (Balli, 1998; Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2001; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2001; Van Voorhis, 2003), which in turn leads to improved learning outcomes.

Using written communication for on-going, two-way communication was another suggestion from the parents in this study regarding effective communication. Providing regular inputs on the children through notes in their diaries which parents would check daily was suggested. Decker and Majerczyk (2000) agree that maintaining mini-folders of completed work and sending them home weekly can be a nice way of engaging parents. These provide an opportunity for the parents to see the child's completed work and communicate with the teacher. They also suggest organising curriculum nights where the thematic units of work for each term can be discussed along with feedback from the parents. Furthermore, sending out mini-reports of the students' behaviour and progress in academics to be signed and returned by the parents was proved to be useful. The schools and educators could use these different forms of written communication to engage these parents in their children's schooling and learning (Decker & Majerczyk, 2000).

Brooking, Bull, and Campbell (2008) also suggested in their report to the New Zealand Ministry of Education, the potential of building up on homework and parent-teacher conferences as important tools of communication that still remain untapped and can be built upon. Again, encouraging staff to do more professional development that would help train them to design interactive homework assignments along with innovative written communication methods, can be extremely beneficial in increasing the parental involvement of these parents through effective home-school communication. (Van Voorhis, 2003). Designing an effective home-school communication mechanism for school programs and child's progress is outlined as one of the six dimensions of fostering parent-school partnership by Epstein (1995). The message from the parents through this study is their perception that they can, and their belief that they should be actively involved in their children's education is not fully realised because of the differences in expectations regarding meaningful home-school communication. These parents want detailed feedback on their child's learning with a greater emphasis on academic achievement, and opportunities for increased parent involvement through learning activities at home.

## **Conclusion**

Several of the key findings from this study have implications for improving communication practices from the perspective of Indian parents of children in New Zealand primary schools. These findings point to the potential of using homework for improved home-school communication embedded in teachers' everyday activity. Designing and giving interactive homework by teachers can give these parents knowledge of the curriculum being taught in the class which would, in turn, reduce the uneasiness these parents experience due to the lack of understanding of teaching happening in class.

Another conclusion from this study is the importance of the content of communication for these parents. This again shows that Indian parents would like to be more actively involved in the education and growth of their children. The Indian parents prefer that the school authorities keep them informed regularly, enabling them to engage with activities taking place in their children's education. Therefore, it is seen that these parents are keen on communicating with school teachers more often, particularly on academic aspects. Creating an environment and structure for personalised, regular and honest feedback of their children's learning and progress can help them keep their children on track with important tasks.

## **Recommendations**

The recommendations for the schools and parents for improving home-school communication practices have been summarised as follows.

1. The schools could create a permanent mechanism for continuous, ongoing communication with the parents through the use of homework as a communication tool.
2. Parents could suggest ways in which they could interact with teachers using a homework mechanism.
3. Schools could organise curriculum information sessions which may provide an opportunity to inform parents of the thematic units of the curriculum to be

taught each term and address any differences in understanding and gaps in communication.

4. The parents should take steps to become better informed themselves of the curriculum being taught in the class.
5. Parents should be more willing to become proactive in voicing their concerns and views to the schools.
6. Schools should collect parent feedback specific to home-school communication.
7. Finally, further research should be carried out to bring in the schools' perceptions of this particular ethnic group, regarding home-school communication practices. Doing this would give more depth and value to this study.



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## Appendix One: Questionnaire



### INFORMATION FOR THE PARTICIPANTS

#### **Title of Thesis: HOME-SCHOOL COMMUNICATION WITH INDIAN PARENTS IN NEW ZEALAND PRIMARY SCHOOLS**

My name is Rashi Seemar. I am currently enrolled in the Master of Education Leadership and Management at Unitec Institute of Technology and seek your help in meeting the requirements of research for a dissertation course which forms a substantial part of this degree.

The aim of my research project is to find out the expectations and experiences of Indian immigrant parents regarding home-school communication practices in New Zealand and to examine their perceptions about how their expectations are being met. This would further help to explore ways to foster and enhance current communication practices between home and school. This research will also be an opportunity to give a voice to the culturally diverse Indian parents in New Zealand, provide a platform to express their satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the current home-school communication practices and suggest ways to improve them. I will be collecting data using an online questionnaire and request you to participate in the same. If you wish to participate in this research, please inbox your email address and a link of the questionnaire will be mailed to you for completion and submission. The participants will not be identified in the dissertation and all names and comments will be kept anonymous. I do hope that you will come forward to take part and that you will find this participation of interest.

#### **UREC REGISTRATION NUMBER: (2018-1019 Seemar)**

This study has been approved by the Unitec Research Ethics Committee from (8 June 2018) to (June 2019). If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Committee through the UREC Secretary (ph: 09 815-4321 ext 8551). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.

## QUESTIONNAIRE

Dear participants, kindly answer the following MCQs:

Q1. How long have you been residing in New Zealand for?

- A. Less than a year
- B. 1 to 2 years
- C. 2 to 3 years
- D. 3 to 5 years

Q2. What is your preferred mode of communication with your child's school?

- A. Parent teacher meeting
- B. Newsletter
- C. E-mail
- D. Open meeting

Kindly answer each of the following questions in not more than 50 words:

Q3. How often does your child's school communicate with you?

Q4. How often would you like your child's school to communicate with you?

Q5. How is the communication carried out between you and your child's school?

Q6. What would be the best mode to clearly communicate with you about your child's education?

Q7. What is the communication with your child's school mostly about?

Q8. Which aspects of your child's progress would you want more feedback on from the school?

Q9. Is the communication given by your child's school clearly understood by you?

Q10. Are you satisfied with the quantity of communication your child's school has with you?

Q11. What aspects of the communication by the school do you feel could be improved by the school?

Q12. How involved do you feel in your child's education process?

Q13. What practices by school do you feel would increase your involvement in your child's education?

Q14. Overall, on what aspects of your child's education do you feel the school should seek more feedback from parents?

## **Appendix Two: Focus-Group Interview Schedule**

Q1. Your background information.

How long in New Zealand? How many children? Which school years? Your occupation back home?

Q2. Your experience of New Zealand schools/education system compared to India? How different is it from India? Satisfied or not? How aware are you of the New Zealand curriculum and education system?

Q3. Your aspirations/expectations for your children and practices of education?

Q4. Barriers to communication faced by you? How do they impact your involvement with your children's education?

Q5. Recommendations on the area of improvement in home-school communication.

## Appendix Three: Focus-Group Interview Information Sheet



### INFORMATION SHEET FOR PARTICIPANTS

#### **Title of Thesis: HOME-SCHOOL COMMUNICATION WITH INDIAN PARENTS IN NEW ZEALAND PRIMARY SCHOOLS**

My name is Rashi Seemar. I am currently enrolled in the Master of Education Leadership and Management at Unitec Institute of Technology and seek your help in meeting the requirements of research for a dissertation course which forms a substantial part of this degree.

The aim of my project is to find out the expectations and experiences of Indian immigrant parents regarding home-school communication practices in New Zealand and to examine their perceptions about how their expectations are being met. This would further help to explore ways to foster and enhance current communication practices between home and school. This research will also be an opportunity to give a voice to the culturally diverse Indian parents in New Zealand, provide a platform to express their satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the current home-school communication practices and suggest ways to improve them.

I request your participation in the research in the following way:

I will be conducting focus group interviews and would appreciate your contribution as a member of the group. I will also be asking you to sign a consent form regarding this event. The focus group interview venue will be one that will be suitable for everybody and the duration of the focus group interview will be approximately one hour.

The participants will not be identified in the dissertation and all names and comments will be kept anonymous. A voice recorder will be used to record your contributions.

I do hope that you will agree to take part and that you will find this participation of interest. If you have any queries about the project, you may contact my supervisor at Unitec Institute of Technology.

My supervisor is Carol Cardno and may be contacted by email or phone.  
Phone: (09) 815 4321 ext 8406      Email [ccardno@unitec.ac.nz](mailto:ccardno@unitec.ac.nz)

Yours sincerely

Rashi Seemar

**UREC REGISTRATION NUMBER: (2018-1019 Seemar)**

**This study has been approved by the Unitec Research Ethics Committee from (8 June 2018) to (June 2019). If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Committee through the UREC Secretary (ph: 09 815-4321 ext 8551). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.**

# Appendix Four: Focus-Group Interview Consent Form



## CONSENT FORM

**RE: Master of Educational Leadership and Management**

**THESIS TITLE: HOME-SCHOOL COMMUNICATION WITH INDIAN PARENTS IN NEW ZEALAND PRIMARY SCHOOLS**

**RESEARCHER: Rashi Seemar**

### Participant's consent

I have been given and have understood an explanation of this research and I have had an opportunity to ask questions and have had them answered. I understand that my name will not be used in any public reports. I also understand that I agree to the recording of this group interview. I understand that I cannot withdraw myself or any information that has been provided for this project after the focus group interview event. I agree to respect the confidentiality of all discussion that occurs in the context of this group interview.

**I agree to take part in this project.**

**Signed:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**UREC REGISTRATION NUMBER: (2018-1019 Seemar)**

**This study has been approved by the Unitec Research Ethics Committee from (8 June 2018) to (June 2019). If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Committee through the UREC Secretary (ph: 09 815-4321 ext 8551). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.**





## DISSERTATIONS

### RESEARCH BANK UPLOAD FORM (LIBRARY)

**Full name of author:** RASHI SEEMAR

**Full title of the dissertation:** HOME-SCHOOL COMMUNICATION WITH INDIAN PARENTS IN NEW ZEALAND PRIMARY SCHOOLS

**Practice Pathway:** TE MIRO POSTGRADUATE

**Degree:** MASTER OF EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

**Year of presentation:** 2018

**Associated URL link(s) (OPTIONAL for example ORCID ID):** .....

**Principal Supervisor:** CAROL CARDNO

**Associate Supervisor:** JOANNE ROBSON

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**Signature of author:**

**Date:** 20.12.2018

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#### ADMINISTRATION

Email this form and final PDF of dissertation to David Church [dchurch@unitec.ac.nz](mailto:dchurch@unitec.ac.nz)