

# Navigating Singapore's Education System as an Immigrant Parent

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## Abstract

This paper examines the challenges faced by immigrant parents in navigating and shaping their children's education in Singapore. It explores how the parents' migrant backgrounds influence their actions, reactions, and coping strategies within the Singaporean education system, identifying patterns of behaviour specific to this group. The study reveals several challenges unique to immigrant parents, such as a lack of information about the local education system, disadvantages in the school admission process, and difficulties in providing adequate academic support to their children. Besides these challenges, the paper also highlights the resourcefulness of immigrant parents and the strategies they employ to navigate and mitigate these difficulties within an unfamiliar social and educational environment. By shedding light on the experiences of immigrant parents, this paper contributes to a deeper understanding of the diverse ways in which families adapt to and engage with the educational landscape in Singapore.

## Introduction

Singapore is home to a highly diverse population, including many immigrants. As of mid-2024, the total population in

Singapore stood at 6.08 million, of which non-residents made up approximately 30% (Prime Minister's Office, 2024). With such significant presence of immigrants, the issue of their integration into local society becomes both important and urgent. One category of immigrants of particular interest consists of those who are parents with children going to local schools. Given Singapore's demographic challenges, including sub-replacement birth rates and shrinking youth cohorts, children of immigrant parents are often seen as 'fresh blood,' vital to the country's future human capital. Therefore, how immigrant parents raise their children and guide them to integrate into Singapore's educational and social environments is a matter of concern not only to themselves but also to the broader Singaporean society.

However, navigating an unfamiliar educational landscape poses significant challenges for immigrant parents. Previous research has often attributed these challenges to factors such as a lack of sufficient knowledge about the host country's education system, language barriers, and cultural differences (Ladky & Peterson, 2008; Sohn & Wang, 2006; Zhong & Zhou, 2011). Yet, much of the existing literature was based on the experiences of (non-Western) immigrant

families in Western societies, leaving a gap in understanding how immigrant parents adapt to non-Western destinations like Singapore. This research seeks to address this gap by exploring, first, the challenges immigrant parents face in supporting their children's integration into Singapore's education system, and second, the strategies they employ to cope with the difficulties of raising children in an unfamiliar social context.

### Literature Review

Navigating the education system can be challenging, even for parents who are locals of the society. Göransson's (2023) research on Singaporean parents' perceptions of their children's education found that local parents often felt the pressure to balance academic focus with leisure activities for their children. They worried that their choices might disadvantage their children, leading them to adopt a mindset of providing as much support as possible throughout the educational journey. Furthermore, Göransson (ibid.) highlighted the concerns and uncertainty Singaporean parents face as they navigate the education system. While Göransson's research focuses on local parents, immigrant parents present an interesting group for further study. Immigrant parents bring with them distinct culture, values, beliefs, and behaviours which may differently shape their involvement in their children's education (Chuang et. al, 2011). This adds on a layer of complexity to how they engage with the education system in the host country.

With respect to immigrant parenting, one recent study involving Singapore explored the different challenges faced by Chinese immigrant parents regarding their children's education in various destination societies and the ways in which they cope with these difficulties (Zhou & Wang,

2019). Through comparing the parental expectations and practices of Chinese immigrant parents in Los Angeles and Singapore, Zhou and Wang (ibid.) found that similar profiles of immigrant parents can engage in different parenting methods and express different levels of expectations, depending on the context they are situated in. In Los Angeles, Chinese immigrant parents rely on external support throughout their children's education, such as ethnic institutions to support their children in yielding desirable educational outcomes. In Singapore, Chinese immigrant parents have established a strong stance to utilise intensive parenting and by setting high educational standards for their children in hopes of outcompeting the locals.

Broader literature on the challenges and concerns of immigrant parents is largely based on Western contexts. Among the key issues identified are language barriers and a lack of familiarity with the host country's education system (Antony-Newman, 2018). González-Falcón and colleagues (2022) noted that immigrant parents with lower levels of education often struggle to communicate and express themselves in the host society's language. For those belonging to ethno-cultural minorities, limited proficiency in the dominant language can be a significant barrier to participating in their children's education (Antony-Newman, 2018). Conversely, when immigrant parents share the same ethno-linguistic background as the host community, higher levels of parental involvement in education are often reported (Coll et al., 2002). This highlights the critical role language plays in shaping parental engagement. Parents who are proficient in the local language are better equipped to understand their children's educational needs and progress, enabling them to make timely interventions and decisions that can positively influence their children's academic performance and

broader life choices. Beyond language, unfamiliarity with the host country's education system limits immigrant parents' ability to support their children. Immigrant parents must navigate school's rules and education policies in a foreign country (Yakhnich, 2015). Differences in grading systems and academic standards further complicate the situation (Dilon, 2018).

Extant research also suggests that immigrant parents exhibit different attitudes towards their children's education, which shapes their involvement accordingly. Some parents prioritise academic success, actively seeking ways to integrate and familiarise themselves with the local education system. This has shown to facilitate smoother adaptation in contexts like Singapore (Yeasmin & Uusiautti, 2022). This underscores the pivotal role immigrant parents play in fostering their children's academic excellence. Furthermore, alignment between immigrant parents' attitudes and the school culture in the host country contributes to greater support for their children's success (Yeasmin & Uusiautti, 2022).

Understanding the Singaporean education system is vital for immigrant parents, yet little research has focused on their process of familiarisation. Most extant studies overlook the challenges immigrant parents face before their children are admitted to local institutions. This study seeks to fill this gap by exploring immigrant parents' experiences across various stages of their children's education, from the pre-admission phase to full enrolment in Singapore's education system. In doing so, it aims to offer a more nuanced representation of the diverse trajectories that immigrant families experience upon migration to Singapore.

## Methodology

This paper draws on data collected in a study—led by the third author—that explores the influence of immigrant parents on the education of their 1.5- and second-generation immigrant children in Singapore<sup>i</sup> (OER 09/20 YPD). In the broader study, eligible participants must be foreign-born and had migrated to Singapore as adults. Migrants of Malaysian background were excluded due to their cultural proximity to Singapore, as were parents married to local-born Singaporeans. In addition, only immigrant parents with at least one child enrolled in mainstream Singapore schools, either at the primary or secondary level, were eligible.

Participants were recruited through snowball sampling and advertisements on public noticeboards. An online survey was used to collect descriptive demographic data on the participants before proceeding to interviews. In-depth semi-structured interviews were then conducted one-on-one, usually over the course of two sessions, in the participants' preferred language: either Mandarin or English. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed in their original languages. Mandarin transcripts were further translated into English for analysis. All names used in this study have been replaced with pseudonyms to protect participants' confidentiality. At the time of data analysis, the broader study had interviewed a total of 64 participants (Chinese = 31, Filipino = 12, Indian = 14, Indonesian = 4, Others = 3).

The findings presented in this paper were based on referencing a part of the database, looking into 7 Chinese and 16 non-Chinese immigrant parents (See Table 1). The mixture and diversity of immigrant parents allow for all types of parents to be represented and studied in this research. Immigrant parents have been residing in Singapore for a significant period of time, where the shortest duration of residing in

Singapore was 3 years. This shows that immigrant parents should have had their experiences, or are currently going through the education process with their child, providing firsthand information for their

perspective to be studied.

**Table 1: Participants' Details & Background**

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Country of origin	Residential status	Length of stay in SG	Education	Age (child)
Aanya	Female	38	India	Employment Pass (EP)	14	Master's degree or equivalent	6
Amrita	Female	42	India	Permanent Resident (PR)	15	Master's degree or equivalent	16
Anika	Female	34	India	Permanent Resident (PR)	13	Bachelor's degree or equivalent	5, 11
Caitlyn	Female	40	Germany	Permanent Resident (PR)	14	Master's degree or equivalent	9
Camila	Female	40	China	Singapore Citizen	9	Master's degree or equivalent	7.5
Debora	Female	36	Philippines	S Pass (SP)	11	Bachelor's degree or equivalent	7
Harley	Female	53	China	Singapore Citizen	26	Bachelor's degree or equivalent	14
Jessica	Female	47	Philippines	Permanent Resident (PR)	15	Bachelor's degree or equivalent	16, 18
Karla	Female	47	Philippines	Permanent Resident (PR)	17	Bachelor's degree or equivalent	11
Linda	Female	44	China	Permanent Resident (PR)	8	Master's degree or equivalent	13, 17
Manish	Male	39	India	Employment Pass (EP)	12	Master's degree or equivalent	10
Maya	Female	38	India	Permanent Resident (PR)	6	Bachelor's degree or equivalent	7
Melanie	Female	40	Philippines	Singapore Citizen	9	Bachelor's degree or equivalent	6, 8
Micah	Male	35	Philippines	Employment Pass (EP)	16	Bachelor's degree or equivalent	7
Penny	Female	44	China	Permanent Resident (PR)	8	PhD or equivalent	8, 11
Ravi	Female	39	India	Dependent Pass	9	Master's degree or equivalent	10
Rebecca	Female	43	Philippines	Permanent Resident (PR)	15	Bachelor's degree or equivalent	9
Richard	Male	48	Philippines	Singapore Citizen	16	Master's degree or equivalent	13
Saisha	Female	42	India	S Pass (SP)	12	Master's degree or equivalent	14

Sam	Male	40	China	Singapore Citizen	16	Master's degree or equivalent	11
Siara	Female	49	India	Singapore Citizen	20	Master's degree or equivalent	19
Winnie	Female	48	China	Long Term Visit Pass (LTVP)	3	High school diploma	17
Yvette	Female	45	China	Singapore Citizen	26	Bachelor's degree or equivalent	14, 16

### Findings

The challenges faced by immigrant parents while navigating Singapore’s Education System fall broadly into three main types: (1) the lack of information and personal experiences with the local education system, (2) the difficulty in gaining entry into local schools due to their immigrant status and (3) providing suitable academic support for their child. The findings will unpack these areas and the immigrant parents’ responses to these challenges.

#### Immigrant parents’ lack of information and personal experiences with the local education system

Many immigrant parents in this study highlighted their unfamiliarity with Singapore’s education system, particularly with the various pathways available for their children, which can cause confusion. This confusion extends to both the structure of the system and the resources necessary to support their children academically. For instance, Amrita, a mother of one from India, commented that they were unaware of the different educational pathways, especially those beyond secondary school. Initially, she had little knowledge of the different tertiary options, such as polytechnics and junior colleges, and found herself learning about these tracks alongside her daughter. Similarly, Siara, another immigrant parent, expressed regret over some of the decisions made during her son’s schooling journey. She noted that

better choices could have been made, particularly regarding the distance between their home and his school, which resulted in long commute. This issue was exacerbated on days when her son attended co-curricular activities (CCAs), leaving him exhausted.

Several immigrant parents attributed their struggles to their lack of personal experience with Singapore’s education system. Aanya, a mother holding an Employment Pass (EP) from India, explained, ‘If I had been a Singaporean, I would have known how to manage the system, but I’m still learning, right?’ This sentiment reflects the broader challenge faced by many immigrant parents: their lack of familiarity with the system means that they often struggle to make informed decisions, provide relevant advice, and effectively support their children’s education. They must dedicate significant time to consulting with others, researching the education system, and understanding the specific terms and pathways unique to Singapore. These behind-the-scene effort are crucial for helping their children navigate the local educational landscape successfully.

#### Immigrant Parents’ Information Seeking Behaviour

Despite these challenges, immigrant parents express a strong desire to be actively involved in their children’s educational journey. They utilise various mediums and resources to acquire

knowledge about how the education system functions in Singapore, aiming to support their children's success. The information immigrant parents find particularly valuable includes details about different educational pathways, the streaming process, and even non-academic aspects such as the CCAs. Interviews revealed that Chinese and non-Chinese immigrant parents tend to rely on different sources of information.

*Reliance on super-app from native country*

Chinese immigrant parents identified WeChat as their primary channel for gathering information about Singapore's education system. This reliance appears to be unique to the Chinese community. WeChat, a free messaging app popular among native Chinese users, allows individuals to exchange information through voice and video calls, text messages, photos, and more. The app is widely used among Chinese immigrants in Singapore, helping them stay connected to both their home country and local immigrant communities. Sam, a father emphasised the value of WeChat for immigrant parents, noting that it provides a platform where 'everyone exchanges information with each other.' Through the app, parents are able to search for specific details about the Singaporean education system, such as school admissions, course selection, and even advice on CCAs. Winnie, a mother holding a Long-Term Visit Pass (LTVP), shared how WeChat helped her gather information:

WeChat provides us with insights, such as which junior colleges (JCs) are suitable for our children, which subjects are best to take after O-levels, and which CCAs in secondary school would give students additional points.

The app also serves as a platform for Chinese immigrant parents to participate in online support groups. These groups facilitate the exchange of experiences and advice among parents who have already navigated the Singaporean education system. Parents such as Linda and Harley mentioned using WeChat groups to discuss supplementary classes and gather advice from others in the community. These interactions help new immigrant parents learn from the experiences of others who have gone through similar transitions. This network of Chinese parents not only provides practical information but also fosters a sense of familiarity and community. WeChat offers a space where immigrant parents can connect with those who share similar backgrounds, helping them feel more grounded in a foreign country. The platform allows parents to share tips and advice on how to navigate the differences between the Singaporean and Chinese education systems, making the transition smoother for their children. Additionally, Chinese immigrant parents are often eager to share their own experiences of parenting and schooling in Singapore. This interaction creates an online community where both information and support are exchanged actively, helping parents better navigate their children's educational journey.

*Local social network*

Other immigrant parents have credited their colleagues and neighbours as sources of information. Anika from India and Micah from the Philippines have cited their neighbours or colleagues for providing them with information about certain institutions or experiences with the education system. It is common for immigrant parents' social circles to comprise mainly neighbours and workplace peers due to regular interactions. These exchanges allow immigrant parents to

express their worries and concerns and receive response instantaneously.

Information from neighbours and colleagues are valuable because of their localised experience and familiarity with the education system. Penny, a mother of two, consulted a 'local person' who happened to be her colleague regarding PSLE, since her child had just taken the nation-wide examination a year ago. Winnie shared similar sentiments with Penny, where she mentioned that she will 'ask my local friends or friends who are engaged in education [about their parenting experiences]'. Immigrant parents direct their questions and queries towards local parents. These parents can provide valuable information from a local perspective while explaining the structure and components of the Singapore education system, which might be more relevant than official documents that often lack specific details. For example, Winnie gave credit to her Singaporean friends who 'gave good advices', which directed her to the official channels for school admission, rather than going through 'agencies or intermediary' which acts as 'side-channels'. The help given by local parents has directed Winnie clearly to the accurate information sources.

#### Evaluation of information gathered

Immigrant parents have access to various channels and platforms to gather information and resources to better understand Singapore's education system. However, they are selective in how they engage with this information. Rather than adopting advice blindly, these parents critically assess the relevance and applicability of the insights they receive before forming their own judgments. For instance, Winnie highlights that she does not treat information from platforms like WeChat as a 'standard.' She also seeks input from 'local people or local platforms'

but recognises that such information does not necessarily reflect the experiences of everyone. This underscores the importance of considering multiple perspectives and discerning the underlying meanings behind shared experiences. Linda, a mother of two said that 'every situation is different, and every child's personality, character, conditions, and interests are completely different.' Her emphasis on every child's unique personality, character, and interests reflects the broader sentiment among immigrant parents: the goal is not to compete, but to gather information that is most suitable for their own children's development. This approach highlights that while immigrant parents actively seek out resources and advice, they use them as guidance rather than a strict framework for parenting. This underscores the rejection of a 'one-size-fits-all' parenting approach, and instead, immigrant parents focus on tailoring their strategies to their children's specific needs.

#### **Uncertainty in registering immigrant children in local schools**

Immigrant parents have commonly shared their concerns about the uncertainty of securing places for their children in local schools. The school admission process accords lower priority to children of non-resident status and school slots available to them are limited. This is highlighted by Maya, who is currently a permanent resident (PR). She has commented that:

as a foreigner, the allotment is in the last phase, and also the schools are not as per your choice and they are not in the vicinity or neighbourhood that you stay. So it could be really far away from the place where you stay.

Maya's experience was not unique. When Siara's son first applied for primary school, he could only attend the last

balloting session. This was because they had not obtained the Singapore citizenship at that point of time. Additionally, Camila, whose child was not a citizen at the point of school admission, also shared her knowledge that the ‘percentage to get selected (for primary school) through drawing lots’ are low. Maya, Siara and Camila’s experience of registering their non-citizen children for a local school highlight the systemic educational disadvantages faced by immigrants in Singapore at the point of admission, generating much uncertainty and anxiety for immigrant parents.

Yet, despite these challenges, many immigrant parents express a strong desire to enrol their children in local schools, perceiving them as vital to their children’s integration into the Singaporean society. Aanya, a mother of a 6 year old, explained that ‘Singapore is already a bubble, and international school in Singapore is a bubble within a bubble’. This shows immigrant parents do not want their children to be disconnected from the rest of Singapore. Instead, they prefer local schools to help their children build connections with local peers and gain exposure to Singapore’s social fabric.

Maya, a PR from India, described her child’s local pre-school experience to be diverse, with ‘a lot of Singaporeans and other background students’. She appreciated the mix of demographic, which is why she would prefer her child to continue having such interactions and being able to mingle with everyone. Immigrant parents appreciate the structure and diversity that local institutions provide. With the desire to enter local school, immigrant parents seek to increase their chances of enrolling their child into a local education institution through the following strategies.

### Conversion of Citizenship

With citizenship being a major factor in the school registration process, many immigrant parents in our study attempted to apply for Singapore citizenship or Permanent Residence (PR). Maya believes that obtaining a Singapore citizenship will open up more opportunities for her child, as compared to being a foreigner in Singapore. Another motivation for acquiring Singapore citizenship is the higher schooling costs for non-citizen students. Linda noted that ‘school fees are quite expensive because the tuition fees for PRs are not as low as those for citizens’. Singapore citizens are able to tap on government subsidies for school fees. By changing their children’s citizenship, they would stand a higher chance in their admission into the local schools.

### Volunteering for school admission

Some immigrant parents would volunteer at their desirable primary school to increase the chances of admission for their children because most schools take into consideration parental contributions, even though weight of this factor in the admission process is likely not significant. Rebecca, from the Philippines, is currently a Singapore PR. She did her fair share of research for her child’s admission and found out that volunteering in schools carried some weight. Her status as an immigrant parent made her feel that she had no choice but to volunteer for her child’s sake.

Faced with the uncertainty with school admission, immigrant parents will usually be more inclined to participate in these volunteering opportunities. This could be in the form of recess duty, where parents would be tasked to ensure the well-being of students during their break time. Other volunteering opportunities include assisting



teachers during learning journeys, or ushering students around school during morning assembly. Many have indicated their interest and signed up for similar programmes. However, our interviews revealed that immigrant parents would have to meet certain requirements before gaining a chance to volunteer in those primary schools.

Moreover, despite a willingness to volunteer, immigrant parents are not always able to due to their work commitment. Karla, a working mother, shared that her full-time job made it hard for her to volunteer – she felt that the administrative system in schools discriminate against working mothers, where they ‘automatically assume that she should not be helping’. Conversely, Yvette, also a working mother, expressed that she had never attended a volunteering session, or took on the role as a parent volunteer. Her responsibilities at work made it harder for her to volunteer, as she would have to go out of her way to ‘take leave and be absent’ for her job. The conflict between being a full-time employee and mother has made it hard for Yvette to have the capacity to volunteer in primary schools, as volunteering timings would often coincide with immigrant parents’ working hours. Only immigrant parents with the luxury of time can tap on this system to increase the enrolment opportunities for their children. Even so, the opportunity to volunteer is not a guarantee.

Indicative of another situation, Anika shared that as a foreigner, she was not eligible to volunteer due to her status – only PRs and/or citizens were able to volunteer. This was not the only instance that immigrant parents who have expressed interest in volunteering were excluded. Manish wanted to volunteer for his son’s school – he had indicated his preferences for the opportunities available. However, he

was not allocated any.

In short, while immigrant parents may have the desire to be involved as school volunteers, opportunities are limited and local schools are often selective.

### **Challenges in providing academic support**

Immigrant parents often find themselves navigating an unfamiliar educational landscape, leading to uncertainty about the extent of academic support they can provide for their children. We identified both similarities and differences in how these parents exert their influence throughout their children’s educational journeys to offer support. There are observable patterns in the subjects that immigrant parents often struggle to help their children with language subjects. Both Chinese and non-Chinese immigrant parents have identified their children’s weaknesses in this area. For children of Chinese immigrants, who often rely on Chinese for communication at home, English is a challenge. Conversely, non-Chinese immigrant children frequently struggle with the non-native mother tongue mandated in school. Jessica, a mother of two, highlighted her inability to support her children in their school’s Chinese language classes due to her lack of knowledge and background in the language. This limits her ability to assist with homework or engage in conversations in Chinese, leading her to outsource support by enrolling her children in tuition classes.

### Hands-on Involvement

To compensate for their disadvantages as immigrant parents, these parents became highly involved in their children’s education. While immigrant parents typically assert that they do not impose unreasonably high expectations on their

children, they do not want their child to struggle either. Many immigrant parents have thus put in conscious efforts to be involved in their children's learning and interests. Caitlyn, from Germany, stated that 'I do have the time, I do have the luxury and the means to help my son, so I don't rely on external tuition.' Caitlyn believes that she can help her child with their work. The supervision of their children's homework and academic progress to ensure that they can keep up with the local curriculum, becomes a method of involvement for immigrant parents. From here, they have also extended their involvement beyond the academics and would actively participate in the non-academic development of their children.

#### Intervention through tuition

To compensate for their perceived shortcomings and disadvantages as immigrant parents, many enrol their children in tuitions to help them keep pace with the academic rigor in school. This decision is often driven by the desire to ensure their children are as well-prepared and knowledgeable as local students. However, the extent to which immigrant parents can support their children's education varies greatly, depending on their own strengths and subject proficiency. Some parents possess diverse skill sets that allow them to assist with a range of subjects, while others, lacking such abilities, feel compelled to outsource these services. Richard, a father from the Philippines, noted that as 'the topics became more complex, it's a little bit tougher to juggle'. As a result, Richard, like many other immigrant parents in our study, resorted to tuition centres to guide his child in areas where his own knowledge fell short and to supplement their parenting efforts.

Moreover, immigrant parents frequently use national examinations as critical

benchmarks and decision points for considering tuition. Aware of the high stakes of these examinations, parents strive to provide all necessary support to help their children excel. Melanie, a mother of two children aged six and eight, is already contemplating enrolling them in tuition for subjects like Maths, Science, or Chinese 'when the time comes'. Similarly, Linda enrolled her children in tuition classes for all four subjects during their PSLE and O-Level examination years, emphasising the lengths to which immigrant parents go to ensure their children's success in these key performance assessments. Although immigrant parents may be uncertain about when to intervene in their children's education, they often use key events like national examinations as indicators to determine when tuition might be necessary. This approach allows them to strategically frame and facilitate their involvement in their children's education, leveraging the national education timeline as a guide for intervention.

#### Teacher-parent communication

Another important way immigrant parents in our study sought to support their children academically is by maintaining effective communication between teachers and immigrant parents is crucial in supporting children's development.

Amrita, a 42-year-old Permanent Resident from India, highlights the importance of communication, stating that he relies on 'parents-teacher meeting' to obtain information on whether 'the child is lagging'. Parent-Teacher Meetings (PTMs) play a pivotal role in facilitating communication between parents and teachers, offering updates on the children's academic performance and behaviour. These meetings ensure that immigrant parents remain aware of their children's development and can provide support when

needed. PTMs can also provide reassurance for immigrant parents through positive feedback from teachers about their children's progress. Ravi, a mother from India, shared her positive experience, where her daughter's teacher provided updates on her excellent performance, noting that she consistently scored near-perfect marks across all subjects. This feedback alleviated her concerns over her daughter's education and affirmed her parenting methods.

PTMs also serve as a platform for identifying areas where the child may need improvement. Debora, from the Philippines, found face-to-face communication with her child's teacher invaluable as she was informed about her child's need to attend remedial lessons. This insight enabled Debora to better support her child by providing additional resources to address his academic struggles. Direct feedback from teachers is often precise and reflective of the child's progress and needs. Such interactions offer immigrant parents reassurance and guidance, allowing them to adjust their parenting strategies to help their children thrive in Singapore's education system.

However, as their children progress to higher levels of education, some immigrant parents become less involved in direct communication with teachers. Siara, for example, expressed trust in her son as he grew older, eventually deciding to stop attending PTMs, saying, 'he did not need that kind of support'. Winnie shared similar views, noting that she had ceased contact with her son's junior college teachers compared to his secondary school years.

Interestingly, language barriers, which are common challenges for immigrant parents in other countries, were not significant obstacles for those in Singapore. Many immigrant parents in other contexts struggle to communicate with teachers due

to unfamiliarity with the native language. In contrast, immigrant parents in Singapore are generally well-equipped to communicate with their children's teachers. This is attributed to their high levels of educational attainment. Most parents in the sample have at least a bachelor's degree, with many holding master's degrees, suggesting that they mostly possess the cultural capital necessary to engage effectively with teachers.

## Conclusion

To conclude, this paper has investigated the key challenges faced by parents of immigrant background in navigating the Singapore education system, as well as their strategies of managing these challenges. The findings reveal that immigrant parents face significant challenges in gathering and understanding information about the local education system. They must navigate and internalise complex, unfamiliar processes from various sources, often relying on research rather than personal experience to guide their child's educational journey. Furthermore, enrolling their children in local schools poses additional challenges due to fixed quotas and systemic restrictions. Some immigrant parents thus attempt to increase their chances of securing a place through applying citizenship and volunteering.

Once admitted, immigrant parents often find their experiences aligning more closely with those of local parents, with their immigrant status becoming less of a defining factor. They encounter similar challenges and focus primarily on being present for their children and providing support when necessary. Despite these difficulties, immigrant parents actively seek guidance from local parents and strive to support their children to the best of their abilities.

The interviews conducted for this study involved only immigrant parents, and the analysis focused on the challenges they faced. However, due to the strong overlap between their identities as immigrants and parents, it is difficult to ascertain whether the issues they face are strictly related to their immigrant status. Future research could explore the difficulties encountered by local parents in Singapore to enable a parallel comparison, providing deeper insights into whether these challenges are unique to immigrant families. Additionally, gathering accounts from immigrant children could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the support they receive from their parents compared to their local peers. This perspective would enhance the analysis of immigrant parental support, revealing potential differences between the support immigrant children perceive they need, and the actual support provided by their parents.

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<sup>i</sup> While a second-generation is defined as those born locally in Singapore to first-generation immigrants, 1.5-generation refers to foreign-born children who migrated to Singapore before the age of 12.