What Influences Cooperative Motivation of Foreign Brides From Southeast Asian Countries in Taiwan?

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Because women in Taiwan have had more and more opportunities to receive higher education and engage in different kinds of work, they have developed increasingly higher standards for their marriage partners. Men who are in the lower socioeconomic working classes such as those who work in agriculture, or fishing, or who are disabled can no longer compete in local marriage market. As a result, these men have begun to look for their brides from other countries to continue the family line, do the housework, and take care of their parents-in-law. In addition to the fact that these foreign brides are often young and from rural areas, language barriers and cultural differences make it difficult for them to raise and educate their children in Taiwan. The inability of these brides often leads to a higher percentage of children who are developmentally delayed, have poor pronunciation, behavior problems, and low academic achievement. Governmental agencies and schools recognize these issues and have tried to help foreign-born mothers take better care of their children. However, there are several influential factors that can limit the cooperative motivation of these foreign-born mothers, including language barriers, parenting stresses, low socioeconomic status, and cultural limitations. Therefore, governmental agencies and related professionals must take these factors into consideration to provide comprehensive services and a better learning environment.

Keywords: foreign brides, cooperation motivation, IEP, network theory, social capital, disabilities

Introduction

Because medical care has become more sophisticated, the number of children with disabilities has been increasing. According to the statistical data of United Nations, at least 25% of a country’s population is comprised of disabled persons who are partially or totally dependent on others for care throughout their lives. It is important to recognize these individuals’ special needs early to provide the services needed to help them fully participate in society. This would also help to decrease the costs to society. In 2011, the United Nations proposed a global strategy, the World Programme of Action Concerning Disabled Persons, to prompt national and international actions to take care of those disabled children and persons (United Nations, 2011). Many individual countries also have related laws or regulations to protect children with disabilities such as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in the United States.

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Taiwan, particularly with its growing number of foreign spouses, is another country with similar regulations. According to the Department of Statistics, there have been approximately 190,571 foreign brides over the last decade (Department of Statistics, 2011). The majority of these brides are from China, Hong Kong, and Macau, with the second highest percentage from Southeast Asian countries such as Vietnam and Indonesia. This may be a result of Taiwanese women, who have higher levels of education and working opportunities, having higher selective standards for their husbands. Men who are in the low socioeconomic classes such as those who work in agriculture, or fishing, or who are disabled cannot compete in local marriage market (Wang, 2001; Yen, 2002). To keep and maintain family lines, these men begin to look for foreign brides with traditional values such as doing the housework, raising children, and serving parents-in-law. For the foreign brides who come from poorer, developing countries, marrying men in Taiwan would be a chance to escape their poor life in their native countries and improve their families’ economic conditions. Moreover, the marriage agents have emerged to facilitate the increasing number of marriages between Taiwanese men and foreign brides (Hsia, 1997; Siao, 2000; Wang & Chang, 2002).

Foreign brides typically give birth within two years of marriage (Sheu, 2007; Siao, 2000). Based on the Department of Household Registration (DHR), the average childbearing rate of foreign brides was 10% between 2001 and 2010 (Department of Household Registration, 2011). Adjusting to motherhood while also adjusting to a new country can be stressful. Compared to brides from mainland China who already speaks the same language (Chinese) as their husbands, brides from Southeast Asian countries do not, and they may therefore have a higher stress level due to language barriers and cultural differences. Moreover, brides from Southeast Asian countries are often from rural and urban areas; as a result, they are more likely to be less educated, and are more likely to marry at a younger age. These factors have a negative impact on their abilities to become competent mothers or become incompetent mothers; as a result, their children have a greater higher chance of having a delayed language ability, developmental disabilities, poor school performance, and behavioral problems (Wang, 2004; Weng, 2007).

Therefore, foreign brides from Southeast Asian countries in Taiwan may need to work collaboratively with school teachers and related professionals to help their children fully engage in the school environment and participate in social life.

The purposes of this paper are to:

1. Explore the factors related to the IEP cooperative motivation between Southeast Asian brides of Taiwanese and educational professionals;

2. Provide recommendations to related professionals and governmental agencies to provide those children with better learning and living environments.

**Literature Review**

**Theoretical Perspective**

**Network Theory**

Network theory has long been applied in many professional fields such as economics, computer sciences, and sociology for a long time. For example, sociological researchers have explored how the embedded relationships between organizations turn into the network (Powell & Smith-Doerr, 1994; Swedberg, 1994). Other sociological researchers have studied the relationship between structural holes or tie formation and
strategic alliances (Gulati & Gargiulo, 1999; Stinchcomer, 1990). Those related concepts have also garnered
attention in education fields but with different definition. Sociopsychologists define the network as a group of
organizations or individuals linked by formal or informal ties (Borgatti & Foster, 2003). In education,
Handfield, Jopling, Noden, O’Leary, and Stott (2006) defined network as “groups or systems of interconnected
people and organizations (including schools) whose aims and purposes include the improvement of learning
and aspects of well-being known to affect learning” (p. 5).

Educators should take network theory into consideration. For example, schools in disadvantaged areas
may need to work with external organizations to provide multiple services, such as health, recreational and
mental services to meet students’ needs. Schools may also develop joint activities or curricula with these
third-party organizations to reduce staff and material costs.

In addition to jointed performance such as joint exam and resources sharing, the construct of cooperative
networks has been strongly integrated into national and local regulations, such as the IDEA in U.S., and the
Special Education Act in Taiwan. Among the children of foreign brides from Southeast Asian countries in
Taiwan, 17.1% are diagnosed as being developmentally delayed or having other developmental problems (Hsu,
2004). It is to the benefit of these children and their mothers to be protected under the Special Education Act
and Enforcement Rules for the Special Education Act (Ministry of Education, 2009).

The Individualized Education Program (IEP) may be the most prominent and representative measure of a
cooperative network within the Special Education Act. The public schools are required to convene a team to
design an IEP for each child who has a disability, not only to meet his/her unique education needs but also to
help him/her participate in as a normal school environment as possible. The team member must include anyone
working with children with disabilities, such as regular and special education teachers, school administrative
staffs, school district representatives, related service professionals such as physical therapists, and parents.
These team members need to work collaboratively to design an IEP on the behalf of the individual child. The
IEP needs to be updated and revised to meet the child’s needs.

Among the team members, the IEP places particular emphasis on the importance of parents. It not only
strongly emphasizes the equal rights and participation of parents, but also requires parents to be knowledgeable
about their children’s disabilities, their legal rights, and the procedures and the policies of local offices. The
school needs to take any action such as parental counseling and training, early notification of the IEP meeting,
and necessary information to ensure that the parents fully understand the context of IEP (Ministry of Education,
2009).

Although parents play an important role in the IEP, foreign brides from Southeast Asian countries who
usually take full responsibility for their children’s education may be unable to understand the context of IEP
because of the communication difficulties (Yang & Wang, 2003). Moreover, they may not have authority to
follow the results of the IEP because of the intervention of their parents-in-law (Chen, 2002; Hwang & Chang,
2003). Under these circumstances, foreign brides from Southeast Asian countries may feel anxiety, depression,
and hopelessness (Foss, Chantal, & Hendrickson, 2004).

According to Durkheim’s network theory, an individual might enter into a state of anomie and feel
rejected or alone because he/she lacks a strong connection with society or holds a different set of values from
that of society (Durkheim, 1972). This state of anomie is particularly common in foreign brides. When they
first arrive in Taiwan, they not only deal with language barriers, but also hold different values and beliefs.
Moreover, these brides have to struggle with having no or only a few ties with their families. These challenging
circumstances often put them under substantial stress. As a result, foreign brides have to collaboratively engage in a societal network such as the IEP and other community activities to not only feel included and a part of the community but also to improve their children’s learning performance (Shu, Chuang, Lin, & Liu, 2008).

Theory of Social Capital

Transnational marriages introduce new cultures to Taiwan. “Culture” is defined as a set of standards or norms that inherently influence people because it tells people how to frame the world, behave society and react to people or the environment (Helman, 1994). Moreover, it helps people create a sense of self as well as their own beliefs and value systems (Ringberg, Oedleren-Schröder, & Christensen, 2007). Since culture plays an important role in our daily lives, researchers apply it into different academic fields such as sociology and marketing. In the marketing field, for example, some researchers have noticed the importance of culture. To increase consumers’ satisfaction, the managers needed to understand whether the consumers’ cultural models were relational, oppositional or utilitarian (Hess, Ganesan, & Klein, 2003; Ringberg et al., 2007).

For those foreign brides from Southeast Asian countries, the role of cultural differences is especially significant. Because their culture is deeply rooted in their lives, it is difficult to change traditional practices within a short period of time. They have to quickly adjust to a different language, food, living habits, and religions, which is a stressful process that can make them feel lost (Meadows, Thurston, & Melton, 2001). Moreover, they often get pregnant shortly after their arrival in Taiwan. They also have to prepare for motherhood, even if they are not yet ready for such an adjustment (Yang, 2003).

During the adjustment period in becoming a new immigrant and mother, foreign brides need some sort of social capitals such as family support, fiscal and family resources, and information, to thrive within their new environment. The more social capitals they have, the more easily and quickly they can adjust. On the contrary, if they do not have any social capitals, they have a more difficult time adjusting, which may lead to family crises (Chen, 2001; Liu, 2000). Unfortunately, for foreign brides, the latter situation more accurately reflects reality. Because they usually get married to Taiwanese men with low socioeconomic classes, their social networks are limited, restricting their access to social capitals.

In addition to receiving social capitals, foreign brides must learn how to use and control information, and exchange knowledge with others in their social networks (Lin, 1999). By involving in the structural holes, they can expand their knowledge and learn about important information such as welfare policies, and child allowances (Burt, 1992). The access to such information is especially important for foreign brides with disabled children. With information concerning the available resources, foreign brides can give their disabled children with better living environments, subsidized medical services, free public transportation, hearing aids and prosthetic devices as well as wheelchairs (Liu, 2005). Moreover, if these mothers collaboratively work with IEP members, their children can have greater access to corrective and supportive services such as hearing aids, transportation, medical services, and parental support. Access to related services, including physical therapy, occupational therapy, speech therapy, psychological therapy, and musical therapy, can also help their children better adjust to school life (Ministry of Education, 2003).

Factors Related to Cooperative Motivation of Foreign Brides

Engagement in social networks, such as the IEP or related services, not only increases their social capitals but also provides access to resources and information for foreign brides and their disabled children. Nonetheless, even if foreign brides are aware of the advantages of IEP-related activities, there are some factors
that may limit their cooperative motivation (see Figure 1).

Language barrier

Parenting stress

Low socioeconomic status

Cultural limitation

Figure 1. Theoretical framework of factors related to cooperative motivation of foreign brides in Taiwan.

Language Barrier

Research has consistently shown that language or literacy problems are the greatest barriers for foreign brides from Southeast Asian countries in Taiwan. Although some of them have lived in Taiwan for more than a decade, they often still have difficulties with reading and writing Chinese (Lin, 2003; Tsai, 2004). Because of communication difficulties, these foreign brides may not be able to understand and fully participate in the IEP. As a result, they often feel a sense of uselessness and purposelessness, which decreases their cooperative motivation within the IEP.

Proposition 1: Language barriers have a negative influence on foreign brides’ cooperative motivation within the IEP.

Parenting Stress

Children of foreign brides are primarily educated and raised by their foreign mothers. However, these mothers, especially from Southeast Asian countries, usually have a hard time themselves with the local language because they have had not sufficient time to learn Chinese. As a result, even healthy children born by foreign brides have poor language development such as poor verbal communication, inaccurate pronunciation, and poor phonological awareness (P. Chen & S. Chen, 2003; Cheng, 2008; Wang, 2004). Moreover, language ability is positively related to academic achievement (Kastner, Raggio, & May, 2000; C. D. Mercer & A. R. Mercer, 2005). In Taipei City, 38.11% of the children born of transnational marriages had some type of learning problem (Taipei City Government, 2003). Even when foreign mothers recognize that their children have learning difficulties, they have a difficult time helping their children with their homework because thirty percent of the mothers from Southeast Asian countries get married at younger age and are less educated (Chiu & Lin, 2004; Yang, 2003). Their husbands often blame their children’ school failures on the mothers and believe that foreign brides need to spend more time teaching their children (Liu, 2000; Wang, 2008). If their children have a disability, foreign brides need to spend more time taking care of them which may further decrease their cooperative motivation to participate in the IEP because they do not have the extra time or energy.

Proposition 2: High levels of parenting stress have a negative influence on foreign brides’ cooperative motivation with respect to their involvement in the IEP.

Low Socioeconomic Status

Research has shown that a family’s socioeconomic status may be a predictive factor of a child’s language
abilities (Hart & Risley, 1992; Fish & Pinkerman, 2003). Some children of a low socioeconomic status may also have lower academic achievement and greater adjustment difficulties (Chia, 2000; Chiu, 2003). Because foreign brides from Southeast Asian countries are usually married to Taiwanese men from low socioeconomic classes, they may also have to work to increase the family’s income. As a result, if their children are disabled, the mothers must juggle their time between home, school, and their working place, leaving them no time to participate in the IEP.

Proposition 3: Low socioeconomic status has a negative influence on foreign brides’ cooperative motivation with respect to their involvement in the IEP.

Cultural Limitation

From the traditional perspective of Taiwanese elders, they always think children with developmental delay are simply not mature enough. As a result, the Taiwanese grandparents of these children do not think that it is necessary for their grandchildren to receive special education or necessary services. Moreover, the cultural differences between foreign brides and their Taiwanese parents-in-law lead to differing opinions with respect to rearing children (Hwang & Chang, 2003). Often, the elders spoil the children, while foreign mothers try to discipline them when they misbehave (Ispa & Halgunseth, 2004). As a result, the children of these families may have a higher risk for learning and adaptive problems in school. Thereafter, the parents-in-law insist their daughters-in-law spend more time engaging in their children’s school lives. In other words, if foreign brides from Southeast Asian countries live with their parents-in-law, they may be less inclined to participate in the IEP.

Proposition 4: Living with their parents-in-law has a negative influence on foreign brides from Southeast Asian countries’ cooperative motivation within the IEP.

Conclusions

Communication difficulties, stress, economical status, and cultural differences have major influences on foreign brides’ cooperative motivation within the IEP. Even if these mothers understand that their children can benefit from IEP-related activities, it is still difficult for them to participate and get involved because of a lack of time and energy. Governmental agencies, schools, and the medical systems may need to based on these influential factors to design and execute the integrated strategies to help these foreign mothers to engage in school activities (i.e., the IEP), medical services (i.e., developmental screening tests), and community activities (i.e., religion groups).

Language Barrier

Because foreign brides from Southeast Asian countries only receive short-term language training in Chinese before they arrive in Taiwan, governmental agencies should legally require that the marriage agents who arrange these marriages provide longer-term language training.

Governmental agencies should also set up official organizations to provide literacy education, a systematic educational program, and a supportive team, including a social worker, a counselor, a translator, to help these foreign brides overcome language obstacles (Liu, 2003; Tsai, 2004).

Parenting Stress

The local government should establish the support group to encourage foreign brides to participate in community activities in order to understand the local cultures and develop their own leisure activities such as
WHAT INFLUENCES COOPERATIVE MOTIVATION OF FOREIGN BRIDES

local tours which help these brides relief from their stress temporarily. Moreover, school teachers or medical service providers can encourage these brides to join different social networks such as religion or parenting groups to increase their knowledge of parenting (Liu, 2003; Wang, 2004).

Low Socioeconomic Status

The government should propose measures to provide childbearing subsidies, child allowances, and tax breaks to improve the fiscal situation of foreign brides (Lan, 2008). Moreover, the children of foreign brides typically do not have the opportunities to attend preschool because of financial difficulties. The government therefore should save any vacancies in public preschool for children of foreign brides (Weng, 2007).

Cultural Limitation

The local government should arrange for social workers and counselors to provide regular home visits to foreign brides. Doing so would help foreign brides and other family members to understand each other’s cultural differences such as food, living habits, values, and tradition. These professionals can also give foreign brides opportunities to seek help when they have difficulties or problems (Shu, Chuang, Lin, & Liu, 2008; Tsai, 2004).

Due to the increasing number of foreign brides in Taiwan, the government should recognize their communication difficulties, stressful circumstances, economical burdens, and cultural differences, and legalize the appropriate measures or regulations to help them quickly adjust to their new homes in Taiwan environment. Moreover, the educational and medical systems should provide the children of these brides the necessary assistance to help them fully participate in school life and live in good health.

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WHAT INFLUENCES COOPERATIVE MOTIVATION OF FOREIGN BRIDES

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