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Foreign domestic helpers' involvement in non-parental childcare: A multiple case study in Hong Kong

This multiple case study investigates the involvement of foreign domestic helpers (FDHs) in Hong Kong early childcare. Three middle-class families were chosen; one parent, one FDH, one teacher, and one preschool child within each family were interviewed. Grounded theory analysis approach was adopted to examine the interviews. Analyses revealed the following four themes: (a) reasons for FDHs' involvement in childcare; (b) discrepancies in childcare beliefs and practices; (c) interactions among children, parents, FDHs, and teachers; and (d) the influence of FDH-involved childcare on child development. Parents were driven more by the financial benefits of FDH-provided childcare rather than by pedagogical considerations; however, they also expected the FDHs to discipline children according to their educational goals. Because FDHs could only offer basic childcare, they frequently came into conflict with the parents. FDHs also faced multiple challenges with the school teachers, with the children, and even from the local cultural context. These conflicts and challenges FDHs experienced had a substantial impact on the childcare provided, and subsequently on the children's language and socioemotional development. A theoretical framework was established to conceptualize FDH-involved non-parental childcare. The implications for childcare-related policies in Hong Kong and other societies were discussed.

Keywords: early childhood education, early child development, foreign domestic helpers, non-parental childcare, parent-child relationships

Introduction

Across industrialized societies, families have increasingly relied on non-parental childcare, or childcare provided by individuals other than the child's biological parents, to supplement the supervision and education of their children. Non-parental childcare is widely utilized in Hong Kong (Hong Kong Immigration Department of the Government, 2017), Singapore (Singapore Ministry of Manpower of the Government, 2018), the Arab states, North America, and Europe (International Labour Office, 2013). Examining the effects of non-parental childcare is therefore important to understanding and improving children's development and well-

being across different cultures.

Much of the previous work on non-parental childcare has focused on Western societies, (e.g., Adamson, 2017; Greenfield, Flores, Davis, & Salimkhan, 2008). More specifically, researchers have been interested in childcare involving *foreign domestic helpers* (FDHs; see Adamson, 2017; Greenfield et al., 2008), who come from countries in Africa, Asia, and South America and travel transnationally for employment. A review of childcare policy systems in three developed Western countries (i.e., Canada, the United Kingdom, and Australia) has suggested an increasing reliance on FDHs among families (Adamson, 2017). Because the families who employ FDHs and the FDHs typically come from different cultural backgrounds, they often experience some level of conflict (Greenfield et al., 2008). For example, European American parents often base their childcare beliefs on individualistic principles, such as raising their children to be autonomous and independent; by contrast, their FDHs, who often come from countries with more collectivistic mindsets, prefer to nurture children's interdependence with their caregivers at a young age (Greenfield et al., 2008).

Over the recent years, an increasing amount of research has been conducted on FDH-involved childcare in Asia. Among these societies, particularly those in East Asia, the FDHs are typically recruited from the Philippines and Indonesia and live full-time in the home with the families who employ them (Chan, 2005). The duties of FDHs include both domestic duties (e.g., cooking and cleaning) and caring for the families' children, and FDHs often spend a substantial amount of time with the children if they are young (Cortés & Pan, 2013; Tam, 2003). Given the widespread use of FDHs in families with young children, the nature and quality of care children receive are likely impacted not only by their own parents' pedagogical philosophy, but also by the caregiving style of the FDHs. Prior research has shown that childcare beliefs and practices often differ substantially by cultural background; for instance, caregivers in Western countries often support children's autonomy and apply

developmentally appropriate practices into childcare; by contrast, caregivers in East Asian societies are more likely to emphasize children's academic-related competence from young ages and to control their children's behaviors (McMullen et al., 2005; Pomerantz, Ng, & Wang, 2008). Given these differences, the interactions between FDHs and their Western employers are likely to vary from the interactions between FDHs and Asian employers, thus necessitating further examination of how at-home FDH childcare is implemented and evaluated in an Asian household.

The present study aims to understand why and how FDHs are involved in childcare and how they influence children at an early age. Specifically, we focus on Hong Kong, a society with one of the highest rates of FDH employment. Compared to other developed societies where FDHs are also hired to assist with childcare, Hong Kong has a relatively larger amount of employment of FDHs (International Labour Organization, 2013). Hong Kong employs an average of 350,000 FDHs per year (Hong Kong Census and Statistics Department, 2017), and more than one-third of households with young children involve live-in FDHs for childcare (Cortés & Pan, 2013). Notably, the steady increase in the number of FDHs over the past nine years implies a corresponding growth of FDH involvement in housework and childcare duties among Hong Kong families (Hong Kong Census and Statistics Department, 2017). In addition to the sheer number of FDHs hired in Hong Kong, another distinguishing factor is that the Hong Kong government has made it mandatory for FDHs to live in their employers' home (Hong Kong Labour Department, 2018). Consequently, the live-in full-time FDHs in Hong Kong spend more time staying and taking care of employers' children, especially compared to other societies in which FDHs are utilized. The comparatively higher rate of hiring full-time FDHs as young children's caregivers, together with the longer time that FDHs spend with children every day, make Hong Kong a uniquely appropriate place to study FDH-involved childcare.

On a broader level, studying childcare provided by live-in FDHs in Hong Kong can also have substantial practical implications—as a special administrative region of People’s Republic of China, Hong Kong can provide policy reference for mainland China, the largest economy in East Asia where the number of preschool-aged children exceeds 83.1 million (National Bureau of Statistics of China, UNICEF China, & UNFPA China, 2017). Because the mainland Chinese government has been considering a similar immigration policy as the one in Hong Kong to alleviate the workload of Chinese families and import labor from foreign countries (Siu & Zuo, 2017)—recently reaching an agreement with the Philippines to hire 300,000 Filipino workers (Dacanay, 2018)—the research results of the present study can serve as a reference for policy-makers, parents, and educators in mainland China when making decisions about involving FDHs in childcare.

The impact of non-parental childcare

For parents who pursue careers outside the home, rearing children has become a challenging task, especially without additional help. Previous work has shown that a large number of families have formally sought assistance from third parties since the 1980s (Gamble, Ewing, & Wilhlem, 2009; Presser, 1988), which can include other family members (such as the child’s grandparents), babysitters, or working staff in childcare centers (Yamauchi & Leigh, 2011).

Researchers have discovered that early childcare and education, including non-parental childcare, play a vital role in promoting children’s later development, both for children in developed and developing countries (NICHD ECCRN, 2005; Rao et al., 2012; Schweinhart et al., 2005). For instance, findings from the Perry Preschool Project in the United States indicate that attending preprimary education programs have a lifelong positive impact on children, improving children’s later school achievements and reducing the

possibility of delinquency in adulthood (Schweinhart et al., 2005). Likewise, for children in developing countries, attending early childcare and education programs can substantially prevent their loss of developmental potential (Engle et al., 2007) and predict their later school readiness and cognitive abilities (Aboud, 2006). Finally, a large-scale study conducted in Cambodia has indicated that different types of early childcare programs—including home-based or out-of-home preschool programs—can all significantly benefit children from diverse backgrounds (Rao et al., 2012).

Although non-parental childcare is largely deemed to be better than no childcare, research has also suggested that its positive influence on children remains secondary to parental childcare. Several studies have found that non-parental childcare for more than twenty hours each week can have an adverse impact on children, leading to worsened emotional well-being (Downie, Hay, Horner, Wichmann, & Hislop, 2010), insecure attachment with the parents (Ahnert, Pinquart, & Lamb, 2006), externalizing behavior problems (NICHD ECCRN 2004), difficulty with school adjustment (Solomon & Marx, 1995), and poor academic achievement (Sawyer & Dubowitz, 1994). However, this negative impact can be mitigated by certain factors—such as, crucially, the quality of the non-parental childcare provided (Yamauchi & Leigh, 2011).

The quality of childcare determines various facets of young children's development, including their early brain development (Gunnar, 1998), cortisol levels and well-being (Groeneveld, Vermeer, van IJzendoorn, & Linting, 2010), cognitive abilities (Duncan, 2003; NICHD ECCRN, 2000b), and socioemotional development (Peisner-Feinberg et al., 2001). *Structural determinants* and *process determinants* are identified as two primary factors that determine childcare quality (Friedman & Amadeo, 1999; Phillipsen, Burchinal, Howes, & Cryer, 1997; Vandell, 1996), which have been applied in assessing all types of non-parental childcare settings on a large scale (Burchinal, Howes, & Kontos, 2002; Dowsett, Huston,

Imes, & Gennetian, 2008; NICHD ECCRN, 2000a). Structural determinants refer to different aspects of the childcare settings, such as the caregiver-to-child ratio, the qualifications and educational background of a caregiver, and physical environment conditions (Phillipsen et al., 1997; Friedman & Amadeo, 1999). Process determinants, on the other hand, refer to the dynamic factors that occur during the process of caregiving (Phillipsen et al., 1997; Vandell, 1996), including the interaction between children and caregivers as well as children's participation in the activities initiated by caregivers (NICHD ECCRN, 2002). Both structural and process determinants are believed to affect children's developmental outcomes substantially (NICHD ECCRN, 2002).

Professional childcare centers with high-quality structural and process determinants can compensate for the adverse impacts of non-parental childcare to a certain extent (Belsky et al., 2007). More specifically, at childcare centers that score higher in structural and process dimensions (e.g., high caregiver-to-child ratio and developmentally appropriate activities, respectively), children often display more evidence of secure attachment (Howes & Smith, 1995), perform better in language and cognitive abilities (Burchinal, Roberts, Nabors, & Bryant, 1996; Mashburn et al., 2008), and score higher in measures of social competence (Dunn, 1993).

Even though much research has explored the quality and influence of non-parental childcare based on schools and other forms of center-based childcare (e.g., Burchinal et al., 1996; NICHD ECCRN, 2002), the quality and subsequent impact of home-based childcare remain less understood, especially in the case of childcare involving FDHs. Although FDHs are not biologically related to the children in their care, they frequently take on a relatively maternal role. That is, they are often responsible for taking children to school, attending extra curriculum activities, reading storybooks to children, playing games, and even tutoring

children after class (Chan, 2005), suggesting that their influence on the children they care for may define the children's early years.

Foreign domestic helpers' involvement in childcare

There is a growing body of literature on childcare involving FDHs (see Cheuk & Wong, 2005; Ip, Cheung, McBride-Chang, & Chang, 2008; Greenfield et al., 2008; Tam, 2001, 2003). Starting with searching all literature concerning FDH-involved childcare throughout all study fields in various societies, we gradually narrow the scope of works to review by its research topics and sites—specifically, we focus on the research exploring quality and influence of childcare provided by FDHs in East Asian families—to build the current study on it.

Previous studies have employed economic (e.g., Chan, 2005) and sociological (e.g., Groves & Lui, 2012; Tam, 2001) perspectives to discuss the provision of FDH-involved childcare and its influence on family relations through interviews with the parents. Findings suggest that FDHs are regarded as indispensable for middle-class families in well-developed regions within Asia. Despite this dependency on FDHs, however, parents often report being reluctant to employ FDHs for childcare purposes (Tam, 2001). Research has found that families perceive FDHs to be inferior to them in terms of the social status, and parents often experience feelings of jealousy over the relatively intimate relationships FDHs develop with their children (Chan, 2005).

Other work in this field has examined the causal relationship between FDH childcare and children's developmental outcomes in the context of Hong Kong (e.g., Cheo & Quah, 2005; Cheuk & Wong, 2005; Dulay, Tong, & McBride, 2017; Leung, 2012; Tse et al., 2009). Dulay and her colleagues (2017) discover that children living with English-speaking FDHs score higher in English vocabulary tests but perform relatively weaker at Chinese character

recognition tasks. Leung's study (2012) has also shown that children under FDHs' caregiving have significant advantages in developing English listening skills, especially in understanding English with accents of their FDHs' home countries. However, these previous studies mostly focus on exploring children's language development influenced by FDHs' childcare. To our knowledge, there is only one study that takes the impact on children's socioemotional abilities into account, which shows that FDHs' caregiving style, together with mothers' parenting styles, can predict children's social competence (Ip et al., 2008). Nevertheless, less is known about children's other aspects of development influenced by FDH-involved childcare and, more importantly, how childcare provided by FDHs can have such impact on young children.

Given the large role FDHs often play in raising young children, more research is needed to fully understand these questions. Since Hong Kong children are often enrolled in pre-primary school by the time they are three years of age (Hong Kong Government Educational Bureau, 2018), much of their early life experiences are shaped by their teachers in school and by FDHs at home. We therefore examine how children's educational experiences are impacted by their time with their FDHs, in addition to their schooling and time with parents. We also focus on all of the key stakeholders in our work: not only the parents and the FDHs, but also the teachers who instruct the children and the children themselves. Finally, we ask these stakeholders to share their understanding of the effects of FDHs' childcare on children's cognitive abilities (see Cheuk & Wong, 2005; Dulay et al., 2017; Leung, 2012; Tse et al., 2009) as well as their socioemotional development and mental well-being.

The present study aims to explore the nature and influence of FDHs' involvement in early childcare and education from diverse perspectives, focusing on how children's language and socioemotional development are affected. FDHs' involvement in childcare is a social

phenomenon that deserves further study by researchers, and understanding its nature needs to be grounded with cases related to contextual conditions in real-life settings. Although quantitative studies can examine potential correlations between substantial variables about FDHs' involvement in childcare, such as its impact on children's language development (e.g., Dulay et al., 2017; Leung, 2012), it provides only limited insights into how and why the impact occurs.

By contrast, conducting case studies can more fully explore the reasons behind the decisions of the various stakeholders (Yin, 2014). In our study, by probing into specific cases involving Hong Kong families who employ FDHs to assist with childcare, we can gain more information from the people closest to the young children being raised—the primary caregivers, the FDHs, the school educators, and children themselves. A multiple case study, by including several families who have hired FDHs under varying circumstances, allows us to detect patterns that cannot be found with just one case study (see Yin, 2014), therefore providing more in-depth findings and depicting a more comprehensive picture. Gaining a thorough understanding through several cases enables us to further theorize about these types of childcare experiences (Eisenhardt, 2002).

Thus, we employed a multiple case study in the present paper, selecting three Hong Kong families with children enrolled in preschool. Here, we engaged the three children, their biological parents, the FDHs who help raise them, and their teachers in interviews—all stakeholders' perspectives regarding FDHs' involvement in childcare were collected to improve the inclusiveness of data. Through these interviews with multiple informants, we investigated (a) the nature of FDHs' involvement in non-parental early childcare; (b) the more specific influence of FDHs' childcare on young children; and (c) the relationships between FDHs and the other adults responsible for childcare, especially the potential

problems that may arise as parents, teachers, and FDHs negotiate with one another to raise their children.

Method

Case selection

As purposive sampling based on specific criteria is a well-accepted strategy for researchers to select the appropriate cases (Patton, 2005), the study recruited three target Hong Kong families with their children's teachers according to the following criteria: (a) children should be preschoolers aged three to six years old in Hong Kong; (b) the two-parent household families hired FDHs with legal contracts; and (c) the children were cared for by FDHs over 20 hours a week.

Description of cases

Based on the criteria above, three target preschoolers' families along with their class teachers were recruited for the interviews. To ensure the participants' privacy, we labeled the families as families A, B, and C, and each stakeholder within the family was assigned the corresponding letter. The participants in the study were the target children (Child A; Child B; Child C), the parents who were the primary caregivers in the family (Mother A; Mother B; Mother C), the FDHs responsible for taking care of target children (Helper A; Helper B; Helper C), and three principal class teachers of target children (Teacher A; Teacher B; Teacher C). In total, there were 12 interviewees, four for each family. Table 1 contains the background information of three target families.

Child A was 42 months of age at the time of the study. She was in her first year (K1) at a kindergarten in Hong Kong. Child A was the eldest in her family, with one younger sister; her mother was also pregnant during the study. Her father had a full-time job, while

her mother quit her job after Child A was born. Family A employed one FDH when the Child A was born, and parents expected the FDH to participate in childcare duties. However, during the past three and a half years, Family A changed FDHs over ten times. Helper A had been working for Family A for three months when she was interviewed. Teacher A was Child A's class teacher in the kindergarten and had worked at the school for four years.

Child B was 48 months of age and was enrolled in his second year (K2) at a different kindergarten in Hong Kong. He had four siblings: an older sister, an older brother, a twin brother, and a younger brother. Both his father and mother were employed full-time. At the time of the study, a total of four FDHs had been hired to help with childcare and housework; one helper (Helper B) was mainly responsible for Child B and was thus interviewed. Helper B had been employed by Family B for four years. Teacher B was Child B's class teacher in the kindergarten and had been working at the school for over six years.

Child C was 66 months of age and was enrolled in his final year (K3) at a third kindergarten. Child C had an older sister, and his parents both had full-time jobs. Mother C employed Helper C to assist with childcare after the birth of their first child. Helper C had worked for Family C for ten years before the project was conducted. Teacher C was the class teacher for Child C and had been working for the kindergarten for one year.

Data collection

The project was approved by the ethics committee of the university with which the corresponding author was affiliated at the time before data collection. Prior to the interviews, all adult participants provided written consent to participate in the study; we obtained parental consent first before obtaining verbal consent from the children.

Protocols were developed to conduct the interviews. The protocol for parents, FDHs, and teachers covered the following three dimensions: (a) caregiver's beliefs on childcare, (b)

caregiver's behavior on childcare, and (c) the interactions among caregivers and children. The protocol for preschoolers was adjusted in consideration of their young age, covering only the latter two dimensions of caregiver's behavior and interactions with them. The interview protocols were verified and revised under the guidance of one of the senior researchers in this project, and a doctoral student who was not involved in the study checked the two versions of interview protocols in English and Chinese to ensure that the content was consistent across both. All the interviews were conducted in the interviewees' preferred language. Specifically, all three FDHs, Parent C, Teacher C, and Child B were interviewed in English, and the other six informants from three families spoke Chinese in interviews. All the interviews conducted were audiotaped, and the recordings were then transcribed into the text of the language used in each interview.

Data coding and analysis

The interview data was coded in accordance with the guideline of a well-accepted approach developed for coding semi-structured interview transcripts (Campbell, Quincy, Osserman, & Pedersen, 2013); specifically, a coding scheme for the study was established after the corresponding author and third author of the paper reached consensus on definitions of the themes and criteria to categorize the data, and then the corresponding author completed coding all the transcripts independently guided by the coding scheme. The analysis drew from grounded theory, a systematically inductive methodology to analyze the qualitative data (Martin & Turner, 1986; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). More precisely, the analysis of the interview data contained three main stages: (a) *coding the text*, (b) *making memos*, and (c) *constructing theories* (Bernard, Wutich, & Ryan, 2016; Glaser & Strauss, 2017). In the first stage, the text was coded through three rounds. At the *initial coding* round, transcripts were read line by line, and similar patterns from the responses of interviewees within each

dimension of the protocol were identified and categorized into separate themes (e.g., “childcare beliefs,” “childcare behaviors,” “parent-child interaction”). In the second round of *constant comparative coding*, the text in transcripts was read and coded again. By comparing the uncategorized contents with the existing themes, new themes were identified (Glaser & Strauss, 2017). At the end of the second round of coding, all the remaining information concerning childcare provided by the interviewees was incorporated in the existing themes. In the third round of *adjusted coding*, the themes were further organized; themes that overlapped in content were combined, while broader themes were further subdivided into different themes.

In the second stage (i.e., making memos), memos were created from the notes simultaneously written down throughout the whole process of implementing interviews and coding in the first stage (Bernard et al., 2016). Based on the memos, the themes were further organized to relate to each other, resulting in four general themes. In the third and final stage (i.e., constructing theories), we drew from our findings—including the themes and memos—to construct a new framework (or theory) in the third and final stage. Please see Figure 1 for the overall process of data coding and analysis.

To examine the validity of our coding, we employed the technique of *peer debriefing* (Creswell, 2009; Creswell & Miller, 2000) to ensure that the study findings were not impacted by the subjectivity of the coder (i.e., the corresponding author of the paper). Following each of the first two stages—including after each of the three rounds of coding in the first stage—a researcher with expertise in early childhood education who was unaware of the study purpose reviewed the coding results, made critical inquiries, and provided oral and written feedback to the coder. The coding results were adjusted accordingly. We also employed the technique of *member checking* to validate our results of data analysis (Creswell & Miller, 2000). That is, after the last round of coding was complete at the end of the first

stage, the interviewees received explanations about the coding results and themes, and were invited to provide feedback. The coding results were then adjusted based on their responses before we proceeded to stages 2 and 3.

Findings

After three rounds of coding mentioned above, the interview data were classified into the following four themes: (a) reasons for FDHs' involvement in childcare; (b) discrepancies in childcare beliefs and practices; (c) interactions among children, parents, FDHs, and teachers; and (d) the influence of FDHs' involving childcare on child development. We provide more detail on the four themes below.

Reasons for FDHs' involvement in childcare

When asked why they became involved in early childcare, all three FDHs replied that they had traveled to Hong Kong for higher wages, and were introduced to their employers through employment agency companies. Because their employers had young children, they were required to take care of them as part of their everyday responsibilities. For all of the interviewed families, the parents made the final decision to involve FDHs in childcare. Like the FDHs, Mother A and Mother B reported that the financial benefit was one of the main reasons for hiring FDHs to assist in childcare. As Mother B explained (responses in Chinese were translated by the first author, who is a fluent Chinese-English bilingual speaker):

For a regular Hong Kong family, parents can only make a living by both working outside the home. If you hire a foreign domestic helper, it only costs you around 4,000 HKD [per month, approximately 510 USD]. In this way, you can still maintain the household using a part of the mother's salary to cover the expense for hiring the helper. However, if the mother had no job but only relied on the father's wages, we would doubt whether this family can sustain a living in Hong Kong anymore.

Teacher A's responses echoed those of Mother B: "It is because the high living expense that pushes parents to focus on their own work. The pace of life in Hong Kong is too fast. It is a convenient way for parents to hire a foreign domestic helper spending 3,000 to 5,000 HKD (approximately 380 to 640 USD) monthly."

In addition to the financial reasons, Mother B and Mother C also reported that involving FDHs in childcare allowed for more time for themselves. Mother B said "I wish to make some compensation by spending more time accompanying them. However, five kids are too many for me to take care of. I have to work every day, and I also need to rest." Mother C was more explicit in her reply: "Instead of taking care of children by their own, they [some of my friends] would rather like to go out for teatime or play mahjong with friends." Teachers also noted this desire for additional time. For instance, Teacher C noted her opinion as follows:

I don't think it is necessary [to have a full-time foreign domestic helper], I think it is pure laziness...; I mean, I think [tracing] back to when I was young, my mom was a single mom working, so we had to go to a babysitter. You know, but in the evening, she would take care of us, so is there such [a] thing like a domestic helper that can take care of the kids and then turn it over to the family in the evenings?

Teacher C's concern reflected the perceived importance of parental involvement in child education over other types of childcare. However, these concerns were not expressed by the parents and the FDHs, who shared the responsibilities of non-parental childcare at home. For the parents and the FDHs, the main reasons for the involving FDHs in childcare were largely consistent with one another.

Discrepancies in childcare beliefs and practices

In contrast to their agreement about the reasons for involving FDHs in childcare, parents and FDHs differed substantially in their beliefs with regards to childcare. For all three FDHs,

when asked about their childcare beliefs, their answers essentially revolved around children's safety and discipline. On the other hand, all three mothers were more concerned about their children's overall cognitive and socioemotional developmental progress, stating their desire to foster their children's independence, resilience, sense of responsibility, respect for others, and success later in life.

The parents in Family B, for instance, expected their children to become more independent and demanded that Helper B train their child to become more self-reliant in his daily activities. As Mother B explained:

If the helper helps him put on [the shoes], I observe that it only takes less than 10 seconds. If we [parents] require him to put on the shoes all by himself, we need to wait for 5 to 10 minutes or even more. But as parents, we have the patience to nurture their self-care ability [by waiting for him].

However, as the FDH did not hold the same goals as her employers, she usually completed the child's tasks for him, putting on his socks and shoes when parents were absent instead of allowing the time for him to put them on himself. The differences between the parents and the FDHs in childcare beliefs led to discrepancies in childcare behaviors. That is, while parents usually sought to educate their children while disciplining them, FDHs found it hard to discipline children in the same way.

Two of the mothers interviewed, Mother A and Mother C, reported that parents spent relatively less time with children compared to the FDHs, but they (both mothers and fathers) spent the time they had with their children putting their educational beliefs into practice—including proper discipline. Regarding children's misbehaviors, parents tended to communicate with children patiently instead of turning immediately to punishment. As Mother C expressed, "I don't believe punishment so much as to communicate with [children], but to talk to kids to let them know the consequences of their behaviors and to let them

understand why particular actions are right or wrong.” Similarly, Mother A stated that Helper A was not allowed to punish her children, especially with corporal punishment, although she still expected her helper to assist in discipline and reported being disappointed with the inability of Helper A to discipline Child A in accordance with her childcare beliefs. As Mother A described: “Sometimes I think she [Helper A] is wrong in educating my children. She can’t correct children’s misbehaviors, for example, they [Child A and her sibling] are impolite to others at times.”

Although FDHs spent more time overall with the children, they were less focused on educating them in the home. According to their responses, the sheer length of time they had to spend watching the children (six days a week) in addition to other domestic duties, such as cleaning and cooking, often led to the exhaustion and impatience. Helper B described this view in detail: “I need to improve patience and passion [about childcare]...[Spending a] whole long hour with kids is okay, [but] I mean after two hours, three hours, another hour is hard for me to take care of them [carefully].”

Because of this fatigue and the lack of time, all three FDHs’ ways to discipline the children conflicted with parents’ behaviors and beliefs. For instance, even though Mother A preferred not to use punishment when disciplining her child, Helper A admitted that “if they [Child A and her sibling] do something that’s not good, we [I] will have a punishment [towards them].” Even though Helper C understood it was improper to punish children, she noted that occasionally she could not control herself:

When you are always with the children, you cannot control yourself very well sometimes. I remember once the boy [Child C] is [was] doing the racing competition with the [older] sister – they were trying to touch the light over there, but the boy was too small; he failed the game. He was very competitive, and he pushed the sister to the ground. The sister got the bruise and cried. I felt so angry at that time, and I shouted at the boy and hit him [slightly].

Moreover, two of the FDHs, Helper A and Helper B, complained that they could not discipline children well because the children did not listen to them. As Helper B explained, FDHs often experienced difficulty in managing children's misbehaviors by mere communication, as they did not share parents' authority in caring for children. Teacher A supported this view, stating that children knew that parents "took in charge of everything." According to Teacher A, children understood the FDHs were just employees of their parents through their title—typically *gong ren jie jie* in Chinese, translated as "sister worker." Accordingly, the difference in authority made it difficult for FDHs to discipline children. Helper B stated that whenever she failed to discipline children, she had to report the children's misbehaviors to parents and ask help from parents to talk to children directly. All three FDHs reported that children were more likely to behave themselves well with their parents than with them. Thus, both Helper A and Helper B shared the opinion that parents should undertake more responsibilities to discipline and educate their children.

The interactions among children, parents, FDHs, and teachers

The interaction between the child and parents

With the involvement of FDHs in childcare, parents often spent less time taking care of their children at home. Mother B reported: "She [Helper B] accompanies my children [Child B and his siblings] for about 10 hours a day...; I have to work every day, and I also need to rest...; I don't have much time to play with them at home." According to Mother B, FDHs were responsible for the majority of the children's daily activities. In particular, she reported that her helper even had to accompany Child B while the child was asleep. With the FDHs shouldering the bulk of the childcare responsibilities, the amount of time for parent-child interaction was considerably diminished.

However, all the parents in the interviews stated that they were aware of the irreplaceable role of parent-child interaction, and as a result, they tried to compensate for the lack of time they spent with their children. As Mother A noted, “I will mainly ask for the helper to do housework, like cooking and washing dishes, so that I can play with my children better.” The time and quality of parent-child interaction chiefly depended on the parent’s choices. If parents assigned other housework to FDHs so that they could interact with their children, such as in Family A, the quality of parent-child interaction could be enhanced compared to other families who did not have an FDH at home. On the contrary, if parents relied on the FDHs to do nearly all daily activities with children, the amount of parent-child interaction became severely limited, which was the case in Family B.

The interaction between the child and FDH

Through their interview responses, all three target children confirmed that they spent the majority of their time with their FDHs. Child C answered: “[I spent time with her] every day because she sleeps in my house, right below my bed [the lower bunk].” As all three FDHs described, in their daily interaction, they usually implemented various types of activities with children as expected from the parents (e.g., watching television with children, playing games with children, accompanying children to finish the homework).

FDHs encountered some challenges while interacting with the children. Since FDHs were not from Hong Kong, cultural and language barriers often prevented them from communicating easily with the children. As all three FDHs were forbidden from using their native language (e.g., Filipino or Tagalog) while caring for the children, English became the common language used by the FDHs and the children. FDHs who were not fluent in English therefore experienced difficulty in talking to children (e.g., Helper A), thus reducing the amount of verbal interaction with their charges. Likewise, according to Helper A’s response,

due to a lack of the cultural knowledge in the Hong Kong context, FDHs often struggled to understand the local norms and family expectations well enough to explain them to the children. For example, Mother A mentioned that Helper A did not discipline Child A's misbehavior in disrespecting others. When asked, Helper A explained that she did not realize that it was considered impolite in Hong Kong for children to point at and yell at the elders until she was told by Mother A.

The interaction between the parent and FDH

All three FDHs reported that they communicated with the parents regarding childcare responsibilities, even though they did not always do so every day, as "parents are too busy" (Helper B). Mother B confirmed Helper B's comment, noting that she thought communicating with FDHs about childcare on a daily basis was hard for her, as she typically preferred to relax after work. Some families—specifically, Family A—reported not only struggles in communication, but also problems in mutual trust. Mother A doubted the moral qualities and childcare abilities of FDHs in general, and worried that FDHs may misbehave and treat her children adversely: "To be honest, I don't trust helpers well. I don't know how she will treat my child without my presence. I worry that she will say something bad or do something bad to my child when I am absent." Consequently, she did not like to communicate with Helper A regularly on childcare and forbade Helper A from interacting intimately with her children, to prevent the children from becoming more attached to the FDH over the parents.

The interaction between the teacher and FDH

As FDHs were usually responsible for taking the children to school and picking them up after school, they met the children's teachers more frequently than the parents did. However, all three FDHs rarely took the initiative to communicate with the teachers about the children, nor

did the three interviewed teachers talk further with the FDHs on the children's school performance. According to Teacher A, if the teachers needed to communicate with the parents on specific tasks, they would normally send out written notices for the FDHs to take home.

All of the interviewed teachers showed distrust towards the ability of FDHs to care for the children. Teachers did not regard the FDHs as members of the children's families nor as critical players in at-home childcare. Teacher C even voiced doubts about the identities of some FDHs: "Anybody could create accounts nowadays; anybody could lie about stuff. I mean, you don't know why they are leaving their country. You don't know if anything happened."

Teacher B mentioned that when family-oriented activities were held in the school, they strongly preferred that the parents or other members of the children's families would attend rather than the FDHs. The teachers in kindergartens believed that communication with the FDHs was far less effective than with the parents, as they thought the FDHs were not capable of understanding the teacher's words clearly and might not have the authority to implement the school suggestions with the children at home.

Modelling the interaction between children, parents, teachers, and FDHs

Figure 2 summarizes the interactions between the various stakeholders in Hong Kong non-parental childcare. As parents employed the FDHs and could terminate their contracts at any time, the hierarchy between FDHs and parents was clear, enforced by the parents' requests and commands to their FDHs and the FDHs' overall obedience to their employers. Children were largely aware of this hierarchy, both through their observations as well as through their interactions with their parents and FDHs. Teachers actively interacted with the children, and preferred to strengthen the education of their students through direct communication with the

parents. Even if the parents were unavailable, teachers were reluctant to communicate with the children's FDHs on educational matters, only providing information for FDHs to take home to the parents.

The influence of FDHs' involving childcare on child development

The influence on language development

Given the amount of time FDHs spent with the children and their tendency to speak with the children in English, the English language abilities of all three young children were stronger than their Chinese (either Cantonese or Mandarin) abilities. As a result, one of the parents, Mother B, even believed that her child's native language was different from his parents, explained as follows:

They [my children] can speak English best [among all the languages they speak] because they are native speakers of English. Yet English is not my mother tongue, nor my husband's. I think the reason is that they stay longer with the helpers. Also, I can only use English to talk to my helpers. I guess, when the children were very young, they may think my mother language should be English since they always saw me speaking English with *jie jie* [FDHs].

The consequences of FDH childcare on children's language development concerned both the teachers and the parents. Two of the mothers, Mother A and Mother B, reported their worry that the overwhelming usage of English at home would thwart the development of their children's Chinese abilities. They preferred their children to speak Chinese more fluently, since, as Mother B noted, the "children are living in Hong Kong" where Chinese is the "mainstream" language. In line with this opinion, Teacher A, who taught Chinese in kindergarten, conveyed her concerns as follows:

I think if children miss the critical period [of learning Chinese], it will be very difficult for them to make any compensation [in learning Chinese] afterward. I have experienced

one student in this case, who is three years old now and can only speak English. When her mother started to teach her Mandarin, the child didn't want to learn anymore. Because learning English is easier than learning Chinese; if you teach the child the easier language first, then he/she would not like to learn the hard one.

Mother A and Teacher C were concerned about children's English language development as well. Teacher C, who was an English teacher at her kindergarten, was doubtful about the children's ability to master English through conversing with the FDHs, because the FDHs were not native speakers of English:

I've seen this in the U.S. where a child couldn't speak either language [of English, the language used by the parents, or Arabic, the language used by the FDHs of their family] because they're picking up dialects from their helpers or the helpers who speak Arabic cannot speak English correctly. So then the child is not learning the correct pronunciation.... It would be [the] same here...; then such a student at such a young age will pick up the dialect and miss pronounce [the pronunciation of] the word, and then it's hard to break the habit.... If they [FDHs] speak broken English, then I don't know how that's helping our students.

Mother A also expressed her worry that children would pick up the accents from the FDH's countries when speaking English, which she thought was not ideal.

It's reluctant for me to let her [Helper A] talk to my daughter [Child A] in English, as she can only speak English [apart from Filipino, Helper A's mother language], and I don't allow her to speak Filipino to my daughter. However, I still hope my daughter can learn English with American or British accents in her kindergarten.... I'm really worried that my daughter will pick up the accent from her [Helper A] because I witness some [examples] here.... That's too terrible.

The influence on socioemotional development

For children under long-time care by their FDHs, their time with their helpers often impacted their bond with their biological parents. Indeed, according to their parents, all of the interviewed children in the study had already exhibited behaviors that suggested issues with

their socioemotional development.

For instance, Mother A reported that Child A often showed symptoms of anxiety and avoidant behaviors when she was separated with parents. Specifically, Mother A stated that “every time when we [Mother A and Father A] have to go out and leave her [Child A] with the helper alone, she just cried, screamed, and came to me asking for a hug.” On the other hand, Child C reported his preference to stay with his helper rather than his parents; when asked his preference to stay with parents or FDHs, he replied that “I like to stay with *jie jie* [Helper C] because I like her.”

Children’s anxieties over separation from their parents and their affection for their FDH over their parents could impact their later performance in school. Teacher A explained this view in detail:

You can see the influence [of FDH’s childcare] on children in PN (Pre-Nursery) classes [who then graduated to K1 class, the first year in kindergarten], because a lot of them are accompanied by FDHs rather than their parents when attending the admission interviews [to the kindergarten]. It is because parents do not have time to accompany children, while children will only feel comfortable and secure when staying with those who accompany them for the longest time.

Several of the interviewees—Teacher A, Mother B, and Mother C—reported that the children’s social skills were less developed compared to their peers. For instance, Child A and Child C were less able to self-regulate because of their reliance on their FDHs. Teacher A noted that the children with FDHs’ care performed worse than other children in following instructions in class, as they were “spoiled” by FDHs. Similarly, children cared for by FDHs tended to lack the self-care abilities as well. Mother C described this problem as follows:

I know a lot of Hong Kong children cannot do the basic things to take care of themselves, even in primary schools. They don’t even know how to tie their shoelaces. When the first child of mine went to primary school, I remember that the principal called

me to say, “Could you please teach your child to learn how to lace her shoes, how to peel the bananas, and eat the apples without the peel?”

Mother B shared the same view, reporting that her child was heavily dependent on his helper in their daily life. Notably, Child B himself expressed a desire to take care of himself rather than ask for help from his FDH when carrying out daily activities, such as showering, changing his clothes, and tidying up his toys. From the perspective of Child B, he disliked the care he received from his FDH, “because they don’t let me do things.” Child B’s responses indicate that while young children are eager to become more capable in self-regulation and self-care, they struggle to carry out tasks independently under the care of FDHs, even if their parents are supportive of their initiative.

Moreover, the childcare provided by FDHs could also influence children’s understanding and regulation of emotions. None of the FDHs reported teaching their children about feelings and appropriate emotional expression. According to Teacher A, some children in her class behaved like a “bully” to FDHs and consistently behaved in an unfriendly manner to their peers, which she thought was caused by the FDHs’ “improper care”. Consequently, teachers found that children who were raised by FDHs were more likely to have problems in expressing or regulating their emotions compared to other children who were not.

Discussion

Our findings showed that parents and FDHs were driven more by financial benefits and personal pursuits rather than educational considerations when involving full-time FDHs in childcare. However, parents and FDHs held divergent childcare beliefs in terms of caring for and educating children. These differences in attitudes towards childcare impacted the time and quality of interactions between children and their multiple caregivers, which in turn affected children’s language and socioemotional development.

A grounded theory about non-parental childcare at home

Our key research findings aligned with previous work showing that non-parental childcare may be less beneficial than parental childcare in terms of children's cognitive and socioemotional development (e.g., Downie et al., 2010; NICHD ECCRN 2004). To gain further insights into how home-based non-parental childcare can affect children's developmental outcomes, we propose a theoretical model (see Figure 3) as a salient product of grounded theory, organizing the interrelated components of non-parental childcare to clarify the dynamic process underlying our observations.

Figure 3 illustrates our theoretical model of at-home non-parental childcare, specifically non-parental childcare involving FDHs. As suggested in the model, the most substantial conflict between the stakeholders lies with the expectations of responsibility between the parents and the FDHs. Specifically, parents attributed much of the childcare responsibilities to FDHs, which were readily accepted by the FDHs. Although teachers were critical of the way childcare responsibilities were attributed and distributed, they played a limited role in the children's home and their concerns had relatively little impact on the relationship between the caregivers at home.

Our findings revealed conflicts in the actual expectations of what the childcare responsibilities entailed and how they should be implemented. Parents expected the FDHs to understand their childcare beliefs and execute them accordingly, especially in disciplining and educating children. However, hindered by the culture barriers, FDHs held different childcare beliefs with parents and encountered problems when interacting with children; moreover, they also lacked the time and authority to discipline or educate children, and therefore, they were unable to fulfill their employers' expectations regarding childcare. Teachers shared the parents' high expectations for developmentally appropriate childcare, though they had little say in how these expectations were to be implemented at home. The

beliefs around responsibility attribution and expectations by the adult stakeholders impacted their interactions with one another and with the children, which subsequently affected the actual childcare and the children's language and socioemotional development.

Based on this theoretical model, we can see how the unevenness of responsibility attribution and the divergent expectations between the parents and the FDHs could lead to lower-quality childcare. In employing FDHs at home, parents often pushed the bulk of childcare responsibilities to the FDHs. But without training in early childhood development and education and without sufficient time to focus on the child, FDHs could not satisfy the parents' expectations on the childcare. Thus, while home-based non-parental childcare has been considered an essential part of childcare in Hong Kong to maintain the workforce (Cortés & Pan, 2013; Hong Kong Immigration Department of the Government, 2017; International Labour Office, 2013; Singapore Ministry of Manpower of the Government, 2018), this type of childcare is likely to be less optimal for young children's cognitive and socioemotional development.

Hong Kong parents perceived involving full-time FDHs as one of the most economical and efficient ways to take care of their children. Considering the relatively high workloads and salaries of Hong Kong citizens (Standard Working Hour Committee, 2016), many families could afford to hire helpers and reduce their household responsibilities, including childcare. The findings we obtained from our parents are partially consistent with previous studies in the fields of political science (Chan, 2006), economics (Chan, 2005; Cortés & Pan, 2013), and sociology (Tam, 2001), many of which suggest that parents in economically well-developed societies deem FDH-involved childcare to be one of the most economical choices when assisted by liberal policies on immigrant workers. However, from an educational perspective, the financial benefits may compromise the long-term development of children and affect their relationships with their parents.

The impact of non-parental childcare at home

FDH-involved childcare can have a substantial impact on the parents as well. For instance, Constable (2007) found that parents, especially mothers, were unwilling to accept the closeness between their children and FDHs; mothers often experienced maternal jealousy toward FDHs, as they shared the same gender with FDHs and felt threatened by the possibility of being replaced in their children's lives completely. Our interviews with Hong Kong mothers suggest that they were indeed worried about the strength of the bond between their children and the FDHs. Negative feelings and behavior towards FDHs, however, could harm not only the relationship between parents and FDHs but also the relationship between the children and the FDHs.

Past work has shown that the amount of parent-child interaction can be highly correlated with the children's later outcomes, such as their literacy skills (Masur & Gleason, 1980; Sénéchal & LeFevre, 2002), school readiness, and socioemotional development (Connell & Prinz, 2002). When examining the impact of parental time input on children's daily activities (e.g., having dinner, reading, playing, and watching television together), children with more parent-child interaction were less likely to have behavioral problems or academic difficulties (Zick, Bryant, & Österbacka, 2001). With children raised by FDHs, then, the extended amount of time they spent with their helpers typically equates with limited time with their parents and can lead to difficulties in language learning, school preparedness, emotion regulation, and other behavioral problems.

In terms of the more specific impact on children's development, we noted that one of the most apparent influences of FDH-involved childcare was on children's language development, in that children's English language abilities improved more rapidly than their Chinese abilities because of the amount of time spent with the FDHs, leading to concerns among the parents and teachers about children's fluency in their native language. Even for

those parents who value high English language fluency in their children, the English their children learned from the FDHs was often considered subpar relative to the English they could learn from native English speakers. Even though Asian parents and educators expected their children to grasp English well from a young age (Kirkpatrick, 2012; Park, 2009), our research indicated that Hong Kong parents and educators valued English spoken with a British or American accent most of all. Thus, even though children raised by English-speaking FDHs typically outperformed their peers in English reading and listening (Leung, 2012; Tse et al., 2009), parents and teachers may not value this type of learning.

With regards to children's socioemotional development, we found that teachers appeared to be more aware of the issues the children faced compared to their parents. The mothers in our study only mentioned fairly obvious consequences of FDH-involved childcare, such as the impact on children's self-care ability. By contrast, the teachers indicated which specific aspects of the children's socioemotional development was impacted, pointing out potential problems with emotional regulation and peer socialization in the future. This difference may be due to the greater professional knowledge of child education and development teachers had, as well as increased opportunities to observe them with their classmates at school. These concerns teachers had about children's socioemotional development may have led to their criticisms of FDH-involved childcare in the interviews.

Conclusion

From this study, we have formed a grounded theory about the non-parental childcare. Our analyses show that home-based non-parental childcare, often a crucial type of childcare utilized in many developed societies such as Hong Kong, may have substantial effects on young children's development and early educational experiences. Our research also defines the crucial determinants of home-based childcare quality: the degree to which the attribution

of responsibility and expectations of responsibility are understood and endorsed by the various stakeholders. The theoretical model we propose—created by incorporating the voices of all stakeholders involved, including that of the children—can help frame previous research findings on at-home non-parental childcare and offer theoretical insights for future studies.

There are several limitations of the current study. First, two of the four stakeholders—the children and the FDHs—may not have been able to respond to all of the questions asked. As the preschoolers were too young to express themselves fully, it is possible that the interviews did not capture their complete perspective about their experiences with their FDHs, parents, and teachers. Likewise, since English is not the native language for the majority of the FDHs, the FDHs with less working experience in Hong Kong could not speak fluent English during the interviews. The FDHs may also have been cautious about responding to more sensitive questions about their employers' views on childcare, even though the employers were absent during the interviews. Second, as we only conducted interviews as the primary research method, the reliability of the data collected is highly dependent on the interviewees. For instance, although the parents in three families all reported their family socioeconomic background as middle-class families, the precise information of their family annual incomes were not provided, which may influence the accuracy of describing their family socioeconomic status. Moreover, the behaviors reported by interviewees are likely to be biased by their perceptions and may not be consistent with their actual behaviors. .

Nevertheless, the present study can make both theoretical and practical contributions to the field of early childhood education. As most of the existing studies on non-parental childcare focus on defining the quality of out-of-home childcare, the examination of home-based childcare quality has been relatively understudied. With our proposed model, we hope that parents can accordingly take appropriate strategies to communicate with their FDHs and

form a unified front in raising and educating their children. For instance, to avoid significant conflicts on childcare, parents can clarify their own responsibilities to all stakeholders (their own children, their FDHs, and their children's teachers), adjust their expectations regarding the FDHs' childcare responsibilities, and allocate appropriate time and tasks for FDHs to balance the housework and childcare. Additionally, we encourage kindergartens to include FDHs in home-school events, especially for those who shoulder the responsibilities of childcare on behalf of the parents. Finally, we anticipate that the model could be applied to other regions with a high employment of FDHs, such as Singapore and countries in the Arab states, as well as to those that are considering the employment of FDHs, such as mainland China (Siu & Zuo, 2017), assisting them with the policies over hiring FDHs and managing their workload in the home.

The present study is the first multiple case study to examine the impact of FDHs' involvement in childcare through an educational perspective, revealing the advantages and challenges of such at-home non-parental childcare. We anticipate that our work can lead to further research on the impact FDHs have on young children, especially with regards to early childhood development and education; offer practical insights for parents and educators about including the FDHs at home and school; and provide some perspectives for policymakers. Despite the concerns stakeholders may have about the influence FDHs have on the children they raise, FDHs continue to play a key role in the lives of many young children. Understanding their role further, therefore, and investigating ways to truly integrate FDHs into the childcare system, is crucial for the well-being of children, especially at an early age.

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Table 1.

Background Information of the Participating Families

	Family A	Family B	Family C
Target Child's Age	42 months	48 months	66 months
Target Child's Grade	K1	K2	K3
Target Child's Gender	Girl	Boy	Boy
Type of the Kindergarten Program for the Target Child	Whole-day program (6-hour class per weekday)	Half-day program (3-hour morning class per weekday)	Whole-day program (6-hour class per weekday)
Languages Used in Teaching in the Target Child's Kindergarten	English, Chinese (Mandarin and Cantonese)	English, Chinese (Mandarin)	English, Chinese (Mandarin and Cantonese)
Quality of the Curriculum in the Target Child's Kindergarten	Qualified IB world school (authorized by IBO)	Qualified IB world school (authorized by IBO)	Qualified IB world school (authorized by IBO)
Number of Children in the Family	2	5	2
Number of FDHs in the Family	1	4	1
FDH's Working Hours per week	48	72	72
Education Backgrounds of Two Parents	University graduate	University graduate	University graduate
Working Status of Parents	One working parent (father)	Two working parents	Two working parents

Note. IB = International Baccalaureate; IBO = International Baccalaureate Organization; FDHs = Foreign Domestic Helpers

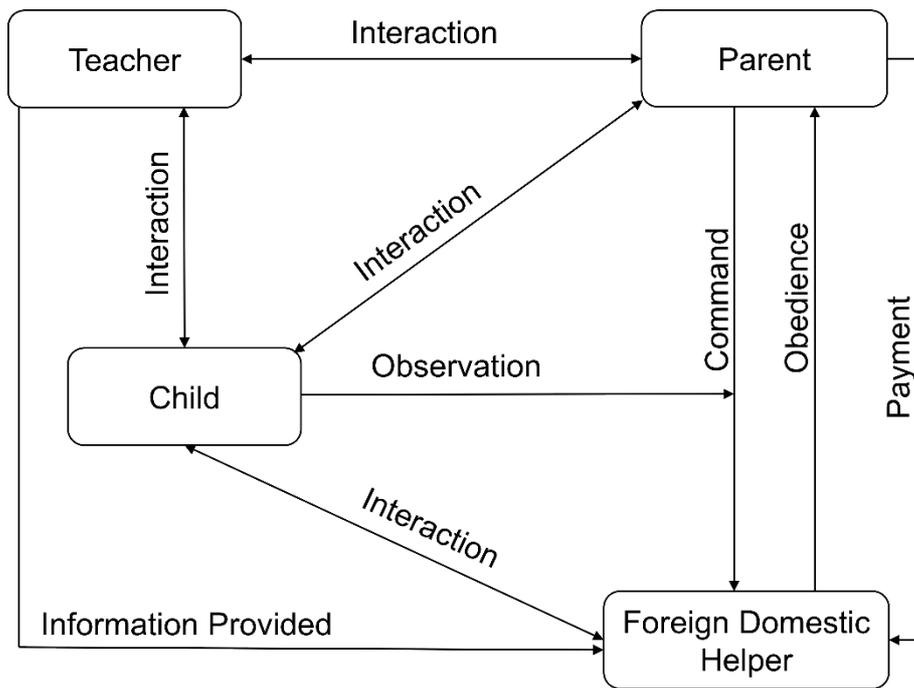


Figure 2. The interaction model among children, parents, teachers, and FDHs.