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Japanese elementary classroom teachers' experiences with parental involvement of immigrants regarding physical education

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to describe and explain in-service Japanese elementary classroom teachers' experiences with parental involvement of immigrant parents as it pertains to physical education (PE). The study was framed using the theory of teacher development. This study used a descriptive-qualitative methodology and an explanatory case study design. The participants were six elementary classroom teachers at urban schools in Japan. Data sources were a demographic questionnaire, semi-structured online interviews and follow-up e-mail communication. Three themes emerged from the data: (1) Lack of teamwork with the parents in relation to PE, (2) Minimising assumptions toward immigrant parents and (3) Transdisciplinary collaboration among the school personnel. To overcome the challenges, it is necessary to establish professional development resources inside and outside of schools to promote harmonious relationships between teachers and immigrant parents in order to offer a more effective and safer academic environment in PE.

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Parent involvement; physical education; urban school; immigrant parent; teacher development

Introduction

As an effect of increased internationalisation in Japanese public schools, Japanese elementary school teachers face the great challenge of involving immigrant parents in their children's learning. The Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications (2020) reported that the number of immigrants in Japan reached 2,870,000 in 2020, the highest ever, and many immigrant parents are involved in Japanese public schools. Many immigrant parents live permanently, build communities and raise children in Japan (Tsuneyoshi, Okano, and Bookcock 2011). Another population is immigrant workers (called *dekasegi* in Japanese, meaning those working away from home) who reside in Japan temporarily to learn knowledge and skills related to Japanese business practices and technology (mainly from Vietnam, China, the Philippines, Indonesia and Thailand) (Tokunaga 2018). These workers, in particular, are often in a difficult socioeconomic situation, as they work long hours for lower than the minimum wages for their industries (Gordon 2006). In public schools in Japan, there are many Japanese elementary school teachers who have been facing various challenges and struggling to handle difficulties and barriers in communicating with immigrant parents related to language and cultural differences (Furukawa 2017).

Educational research has been interested in teachers' efforts and challenges in promoting parental involvement. For example, teachers who interact with immigrant parents recognise the

unique challenges or obstacles that create physical, emotional, and social barriers between teachers and parents such as low family income (Watt 2016), low level of parental education (Kim 2009), family dissolution (Berkowitz, Astor, and Pineda 2021) and different child-rearing practices (Humphrey-Taylor 2015). More specifically, in urban schools, many teachers see themselves as culturally blind toward immigrant parents (i.e. they may see cultural differences but dismiss them) and so may be unable to meet parents' unique needs (Brion 2019). Treating all parents equally places them at either an advantage or disadvantage (Hodge, Lieberman, and Murata 2012). Unfortunately, many teachers lack the knowledge and communication skills to solve the cultural and social conflicts with immigrant parents. Zulauf-McCurdy and Zinsser (2020) argued that these conflicts between teachers and parents often result in educational disadvantages for children at schools.

Need for parental involvement in physical education

All teachers must secure a safe academic environment for all children during physical education (PE) class, including school events and activities (e.g. sports festivals) (Casa et al. 2013). However, teachers may struggle to explain the concept of child safety to immigrant parents regarding common injuries, disease prevention or other illnesses (e.g. heat strokes), which may lead to life-threatening or emergency situations in PE class. Japan's Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) (2012) reported that about 60% of incidents of death (e.g. heart attack, drowning, heatstroke) or severe injury at Japanese public elementary schools occurred during a PE class period, with most incidents of death of elementary school children during PE class being due to heart diseases. This is particularly relevant for teachers of children of immigrant parents because immigrant parents have been found to be more likely to delay or forgo needed medical care for their children, including for conditions that could pose an increased concern in PE class, such as asthma (Javier, Wise, and Mendoza 2007; Perreira and Ornelas 2011). Therefore, teachers must overcome language and communication barriers to share and exchange medical information with parents about their children (e.g. daily health check, medical history and results of heart examinations) in order to minimise and reduce health risks due to serious accidents or incidents in PE (National Agency for the Advancement of Sports and Health 2012).

Japanese elementary teachers must be responsible for responding to and solving cultural and social conflicts with parents to facilitate collaboration with immigrant parents in PE (McDavid, Cox, and Amorose 2012). Unfortunately, many teachers assume that immigrant parents often regard PE as a subject unnecessary for their children's social development and fail to consider the health benefits (Marconnot, Pérez-Corrales, and Cuenca-Zaldívar 2021). Therefore, teachers need to communicate with immigrant parents in order to develop a mutual understanding about the ultimate objective of PE in Japan, which is to develop children's attitudes and behaviour to live a happy and cheerful life by integrating physical activity and gaining knowledge of the value of health and safety (Nakai and Metzler 2005).

Japanese physical education system and relevant special activities

Japanese elementary teachers are responsible for teaching all academic subjects, including Japanese, social studies, mathematics, science, life studies, music, arts/handicrafts, homemaking, moral education and PE (health education and PE are combined and considered one subject area, hereafter referred to as *PE*) (Sato, Ellison, and Eckert 2020). In Japanese elementary schools, PE consists of the following five characteristics: (a) democratic PE, (b) culturally-oriented PE, (c) fitness-oriented PE, (d) lifelong sport participation and (e) PE for mind and body (Takahashi 2000). Hence, PE plays a primary role as an important academic subject to develop students' healthy and active lifestyles and to achieve overall educational goals (Nakai and Metzler 2005).

There are common requests Japanese teachers at public elementary schools nationwide make to parents in order to promote their involvement in their children's PE. First, for example, Japanese teachers invite all families to attend and participate in *Undokai* (sport festival), which is considered an

important educational opportunity through participating in physical activities (Nakai and Metzler 2005). Parents observe and cheer for their children and sometimes participate in the events and activities with their children (Akiyama 2020). Second, the teachers request parents to prepare necessary clothing items for PE such as *Taisoufuku* (designated PE clothes), *Akashirobou* (a red and white cap traditionally worn in PE class), a water bottle, towels and swim wear. Third, the classroom teachers send school letters (*otegami* in Japanese) to parents, which are written by classroom teachers and school principals and are a vital communication channel with parents to convey information about school events and children's academic and behavioural challenges and progress at school (Jabar 2010a). Moreover, parent–teacher conferences (*Kondankai* in Japanese) are a valuable chance to build a relationship with parents (Jabar 2010b). Fourth, teachers request parents to submit documents such as children's medical history and an agreement form to participate in PE activities (e.g. swimming, long-distance running). Overall, Japanese teachers use a family-centered model of communication with parents involving multiple communication channels (e.g. face-to-face meetings, telephone communication and school letters) to give parents requests regarding PE (Lassila et al. 2021). However, teachers may feel that traditional communication styles or approaches should be improved according to the diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds of immigrant parents (e.g. language barrier) (Chan 2011).

Theoretical framework and purpose

This study used Katz's (1972) theory of teacher development, which explains how teachers develop knowledge and skills and grow professionally. This theory of teacher development helps researcher (s) find clues to interoperate complex teacher development processes, including different perspectives, experiences and ideas in the parental involvement of immigrants (Gonzalez-DeHass and Willems 2003). For example, Sato, Ellison, and Eckert (2020) used this theory to look into Japanese teachers' development in teaching PE while identifying their challenges or struggles, professional learning and construction of new insights to accomplish their responsibilities. The present study provides novel insights by using Katz's theory of teacher development to explore teachers' growth in relation to the parental involvement of immigrant parents.

According to Katz (1972), there are four stages of teacher development: survival, consolidation, renewal and maturity. In the survival stage, teachers are not experienced enough to accomplish their daily responsibilities at school and are concerned with their personal and professional competence. In relation to parental involvement, teachers at this stage may, for example, believe that communication with an immigrant parent is not a simple task, and they may have various concerns (e.g. lack of trust relationships) (Hobson et al. 2009). In the consolidation stage, teachers begin to integrate knowledge and skills gained in former professional experiences in order to accomplish their tasks. In relation to parental involvement, the teachers may focus on identifying the individual behavioural patterns of immigrant parents and to execute an interactional plan that meets the unique needs of parents. In this stage, on-site learning through exchanging ideas and learning with other colleagues is beneficial for teachers to reduce their sense of personal inadequacy and frustration by strengthening their skills and knowledge (Epstein and Becker 1982). In the renewal stage, teachers begin to exhaust the same initiatives and develop a greater interest in finding new materials, techniques, approaches and ideas via professional development opportunities available through school districts and local organisations (Katz 1972). In relation to parental involvement, teachers at this stage are ready to look into the diverse practices of other teachers outside of their schools to renew and refresh their understanding and initiatives for parental involvement (Ladky and Peterson 2008). Finally, in the maturity stage, teachers become more competent and mature enough to apply their knowledge and skills to solve various problems in different settings (Katz 1972). In relation to parental involvement, the teachers may ask more profound and abstract questions representing a more meaningful search for insight, perspective and realism about facilitating parental involvement and its impact on the relationship with immigrant parents.

According to Lam and Yan (2011), teacher development is often influenced by complex factors, including teachers' past experiences, school-based support and teacher training experiences. This study used the theory of teacher development and the critical lens it provides to examine teachers' experiences with parental involvement and how new insights and perspectives are constructed regarding how to facilitate immigrant parents' learning about their child's PE. In this learning process, teachers develop their beliefs, ideas and parental involvement practices (Gonzalez-DeHass and Willems 2003).

The purpose of this study was to describe and explain in-service Japanese elementary classroom teachers' experiences with parental involvement of immigrant parents regarding PE. The research questions guiding this study were: (1) What were Japanese elementary classroom teachers' experiences in parental involvement of immigrant parents in relation to PE?, and (2) How did the experiences of parental involvement of immigrant parents influence Japanese elementary teachers' perceptions of engaging with immigrant parents in relation to PE?

Method

This study used a descriptive-qualitative methodology using an explanatory case study design (Yin 2003). The case study method is useful to understand complex educational and/or social phenomena while maintaining the meaningful uniqueness of real-life circumstances (Yin 2003). An explanatory case study design allows the researcher to seek in-depth answers to *how*, *why* or *what* questions for exploring in-service teachers' experiences and perceptions in relation to parental involvement of immigrant parents regarding PE (Schwandt 2015).

Participants and setting

The research sites were public elementary schools located in Aichi prefecture in the Tokai region of Japan, in an urban area that is considered a low-income immigrant neighbourhood. The lead researcher used snowball sampling (Naderifar, Goli, and Ghaljaie 2017) to randomly recruit six Japanese elementary classroom teachers (male $n = 1$; female $n = 5$) from six different public elementary schools. In the process of snowball sampling, the researcher identified one prospective participant and asked him or her to recruit other potential participant(s). Teachers with fewer than six years of teaching experience were invited to participate because the study is using Katz's (1972) theory of teacher development, and different stages of development would be more observable in teachers with relatively less experience. All participants were in-service classroom teachers (Mr. Kitami, Ms. Shiraishi, Ms. Chihira, Ms. Miyachi, Ms. Kaitani and Ms. Imashita; all names are pseudonyms) who had experience with immigrant parents. The six participants' pseudonyms and demographic backgrounds are indicated in Table 1. The lead author received approval to conduct this study from the university's institutional review board and secured consent forms from all participants (approval

Table 1. Characteristics and professional experience with involvement of immigrant parents.

Pseudonym	Gender	Years of teaching experience	Years of experience interacting with immigrant parents	Nationality of immigrant parents	First language of immigrant parents
Ms. Shiraishi	F	1	1	Brazil, Philippines, Chinese	Portuguese, Tagalog, Chinese
Ms. Chihira	F	4	1	Brazil	Portuguese
Mr. Kitami	M	2	1	Brazil	Portuguese
Ms. Miyachi	F	3	3	Brazil, Philippines	Portuguese, Tagalog
Ms. Kaitani	F	4	4	Brazil, Chinese, British	Portuguese, Chinese, English
Ms. Imashita	F	6	6	Brazil, Vietnam, Philippines	Portuguese, Vietnamese, Tagalog

number: 021-7). As part of the ethical process of the study, the lead author sent an informed consent form and research explanation documents to all participants, and all participants sent back the informed consent form with their signatures to verify their agreement to participate in the study.

Data collection

The data collection used a participant demographic questionnaire and semi-structured online interviews (Patton 2002). In addition, follow-up communication was sent via e-mail messages (Meho 2006). The order of data collections was (1) the participant demographic questionnaire, (2) semi-structured online interviews and (3) follow-up communication.

Demographic questionnaire

The study used a demographic questionnaire created using a sample of items from the *Measure of School, Family, and Community Partnerships*. This questionnaire, originally developed by Epstein et al. (2009), was adapted to the Japanese school context by referring to the curriculum (*gakushu shi-doyoryo* in Japanese) released by the MEXT (2009). The modified questionnaire was used to examine Japanese elementary classroom teachers' practices and perceptions about parental involvement of immigrant parents regarding PE. The questionnaire included 15 items and used a Likert scale (1 = never; 2 = rarely; 3 = sometimes; 4 = often; 5 = always). All participants completed the demographic questionnaire before participating in the interviews. Example interview questions are:

1. How often do you explain to immigrant parents their children's academic achievement or progress in relation to PE?
2. How often do you hold a meeting (e.g. parent-teacher conference, home visit, telephone communication) with immigrant parents about their concerns or their children's individual needs in relation to PE?

Online semi-structured interviews

The lead researcher adopted online semi-structured interviews as the primary data source. Originally, we intended to do face-to-face, in-person interviews; however, the lead researcher determined that using online interviews to complete the data collection would provide a safer environment because of the COVID-19 pandemic. In each semi-structured interview, all participants were asked to answer 19 interview questions developed by the lead author using Katz's (1972) theory of teacher development and additional unstructured follow-up questions (based on participants' responses) in order to investigate their practices and perceptions of parental involvement regarding PE. The questions went through pilot testing, after which they were modified. The interviews lasted between 60 and 90 minutes. Example interview questions are:

1. What challenges did you have in collaborating with immigrant parents involving their child's PE experiences?
2. What kinds of techniques did you use to communicate with immigrant parents in relation to PE?
3. Have you ever received any advice, feedback or comments from your colleagues or school administrators about how to deal with and interact with immigrant parents?

Translation process

This study adopted the cross-cultural translation technique, which is an effort to take into consideration the uniqueness of two cultures in the collected data, developed by Banville, Desrosiers, and

Genet-Volet (2000) and Hodge et al. (2013) in order to prepare the data collected in Japanese for analysis and reporting in English. In this study, all translators could speak and write fluently in both Japanese and English. The translation process began with three translators (A [data collector], B and C), who individually translated the original Japanese version of the interview transcript data into English. Later, they gathered their translated versions to compare and discuss any differences and to arrive at an agreement. Revised translated data were sent to a bilingual faculty member (translator D) in the United States to evaluate the translated data to ensure that the meaning of the English and the original items was same. All translators reached an agreement on all items in the interview data.

Data analysis

A constant comparative method (Boeije 2010) was used to analyse the translated interview transcripts. In the process of this analytic method, the researcher codes each data sources inductively and then uses each segment of the data to (a) compare with one or more categories to identify its relevance and (b) compare with other, similarly categorised segments of data (Schwandt 2015). In this study, the lead author conducted the initial coding, which was then reviewed by three peer debriefers (the second, third and fourth authors) to avoid potential researcher bias. After peer debriefing, the researchers conducted a second round of coding key terms (e.g. social justice, assumptions and collaboration) that relate to the characteristics of Katz's (1972) theory of teacher development in all the data sources (see Table 2). In this process, some codes were combined (similar terms such as *cooperation* and *teamwork*). Moreover, coded data from the interview transcripts with each participant were compared to identify similarities and differences. After the peer debriefing process, the researchers grouped the codes into thematic categories, which were then refined into recurring themes (Boeije 2010) (see Table 3).

Table 2. Data analysis and theoretical category example.

Theoretical Category Examples	Individual Theme	Code Examples	Number of narrative phrases
Survival challenge	Mr. Kitami Immaturity for social justice	• Low-socioeconomic status	7
		• Culture and Ethnicity	4
		• Needs of role model teacher	4
Consolidated knowledge and skill	Beginning of focusing on the individual needs of immigrant parents	• Identifying the needs of parents	8
		• Teaching the concept of safety	4
		• Reflecting own professional experience	4
Matured services	Sophistication of translation services	• Collaboration with school translator	9
		• Digital translation tools	4
Survival challenge	Ms. Miyaichi Immaturity for social justice	• Demanding job schedule	12
		• Culture and Ethnicity	8
		• Low-socioeconomic status	7
		• Language barrier	4
Consolidated knowledge and skill	Minimising own assumptions	• Feeling anxiety about child's health risk	11
		• Learning about parent's backgrounds	7
		• Teaching the concept of safety	5
Matured services	Need for collaboration among school personnel to deal with an emergency problem	• Collaboration with the school translator	11
		• Collaboration with the school nurse	7
		• Emergency	5

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness was established by using member checking and peer-debriefing processes. Member checking and peer-debriefing are useful to seek the relative accuracy of the data as opposed to seeking universal truth (Merriam 1998). For example, member checking enables researchers to reduce the impact of subjective bias by assuring agreement between researcher and participants (Patton 2002). The researcher sent copies of the interview transcripts and analysed data to the respective participants. Trustworthiness in the transcripts and researcher's interpretations was established when the participants acknowledged their accuracy (Merriam 1998). Peer debriefing allows a qualified peer researcher to review and assess the transcribed data, emergent codes and categories and final themes in a given study to assure credibility (Janesick 2015). For this study, one graduate student and one professor who had expertise in qualitative research participated as peer debriefers. These debriefers agreed with the interpretations of the data.

Results

There are three major interrelated and complex themes that emerged from the analysis of the demographic questionnaire and interview data: (a) *Lack of teamwork with the parents in relation to PE*, (b) *Minimizing the assumptions toward immigrant parents* and (c) *Transdisciplinary collaboration among the school personnel*. These themes illustrate the challenges and teacher development of parental involvement of immigrant parents regarding PE at elementary schools.

Theme 1: Lack of collaboration with the parents in relation to PE

This theme captures Japanese elementary teachers' belief that immigrant parents may not understand the concept of collaboration between parent and teacher in the same way that the teachers did. Parents want their child to not be left behind or feel embarrassed by other (Japanese) children in PE; however, the participants shared that they had concerns that Japanese children viewed immigrant children differently (e.g. as marginalised children). This could be seen as a type of survival experience in Katz's (1972) framework because the teachers struggled to complete their daily responsibility of working with immigrant parents. For example, the teachers told parents repeatedly that parents are required to purchase school supplies (e.g. PE uniforms, skipping rope) for their child's PE class, but many immigrant parents declined the requests. Although immigrant parents behave appropriately based on their cultural norms and values, a teacher who has a different culture and ethnic background might interpret and respond to the parents' behavior as being inappropriate (Sato and Hodge 2017). In the study, the teachers did not ask the parents the reason for

Table 3. Themes and Subthemes.

	Theme	Subthemes	Number of participants:
1	Lack of collaboration with the parents in relation to PE	Assumed that immigrant parents suffer from low-socioeconomic status	5
		Felt immature collaboration with immigrant parents who had a demanding job schedule	5
		Perceived inadequacy to deal with cultural conflict with immigrant parents	6
2	Minimising the assumptions toward immigrant parents	Understood the individual needs of immigrant parents	6
		Assisted immigrant parents in understanding the concept of safety or health	6
3	Transdisciplinary collaboration among the school personnel	Promoted collaboration among school personnel to deal with an emergency	6
		Enhanced translation services for immigrant parents by collaborating with a school translator or Japanese language teacher	5

this, but the teachers explained their assumptions that the immigrant parents may face financial challenges related to their lower socioeconomic status. These teachers rarely considered socioeconomic issues and concerns of other (i.e. Japanese) children (even though some of them may also be at a similarly low socioeconomic status), because they felt that collaboration between teachers and parents is an important value of what is known as *wa*, or harmony, for children's academic success in PE classes in Japan. For example, Mr. Kitami explained:

One Brazilian child was transferred and began to attend my class last semester, but he didn't have any school supplies, such as Japanese calligraphy items, pencils and pens, or PE clothes [e.g., T-shirts, indoor shoes]. I was afraid that the child was marginalized by Japanese children in PE class due to not wearing PE clothes. So, I continued to request his parents to purchase those items, but they denied my request. Then, I felt that they suffer from poverty. [...] I believe that immigrant parents should purchase necessary items in PE even if they are suffering from poverty. However, I need to say that the teachers should accept the socioeconomic background of immigrant parents. (Mr. Kitami, Interview).

Mr. Kitami emphasised that the teachers need to understand and accept socioeconomic challenges that immigrant parents may have; however, his true feeling was that immigrant parents should cooperate with teachers' requests even though they may experience poverty. He did not express his true feelings to the immigrant parents in order to maintain harmonious collaboration, which was influenced by the Japanese concepts of *honne* (true feeling) and *tatemae* (opinions shown in public), a unique part of Japanese interactional culture (Ishii, Saravia Vargas, and Saravia Vargas 2011). Although differences in expectations between teachers and parents could be reconciled by teachers or schools adapting rather than parents, teachers in Japanese schools often have little leeway in negotiating parental expectations due to rigid cultural and social norms (Lassila et al. 2021).

Ms. Miyaichi also assumed that immigrant parents who have a demanding job schedule may struggle to secure time to help their child, develop morning routines (e.g. putting PE supplies in the school bag) or visit school events related to PE (e.g. sports festival). She said:

I assumed that immigrant parents prioritized their work more than supporting the learning of their children in PE at home and school. For example, they didn't teach their children to develop morning routines [e.g., putting PE supplies in the school bag] since they had to leave home earlier than the children. [...] Plus, some immigrant parents disregarded visiting school events such as *Undokai* [sports festival]. I was concerned that the immigrant child felt isolated due to less support from their parents. [...] I know that immigrant parents have a demanding job schedule. But I believe that immigrant parents should focus on supporting the learning of their children more than their work, because Japanese parents are cooperative even if they suffer from heavy work. (Ms. Miyai-chi, Interview)

Ms. Miyaichi expected that immigrant parents should cooperate similarly to Japanese parents because she valued the collectivist culture in Japan (Donnelly 2021). The participants in this study had the survival-stage challenge of accepting cultural and communication differences with immigrant parents, because of the lack of collaboration. Ms. Imashita agreed that she lacked some knowledge of the ethnicity and culture of the immigrant parents. She said:

I believe that the cultural and ethnic backgrounds of immigrant parents are related to their cooperation level. For example, I felt that the parents from Brazil and the Philippines had lower academic expectations for their child than the parents from Vietnam and Japan. I say this because they didn't read my written messages and memos through the weekly school hand-outs or parent-teacher notebooks, and forgot to prepare their PE equipment, such as a skipping rope. Then, I realized that common communication methods toward Japanese parents might not be suitable for those parents. [...] I believe that the teachers need to find appropriate interaction strategies based on the backgrounds of immigrant parents in order to promote their cooperation. However, in reality, few teachers have professional knowledge and skills to deal with uncooperative immigrant parents. (Ms. Imashita, Interview)

Ms. Imashita expected the immigrant parents to follow Japanese cultural, social, and parental norms and responsibilities at Japanese elementary schools. For example, there are many dedicated parents in Japan who provide services for children's learning outcomes, including PE (Holloway, Suzuki, and Yamamoto 2010). Therefore, she hoped to see Japanese teachers develop their professional knowledge and skills to find solutions to overcome the lack of teamwork with immigrant parents.

Theme 2: Minimising the assumptions toward immigrant parents

This theme captured the participants' perceptions that they should minimise their own assumptions toward immigrant parents when they encountered parental behaviour that was uncommon compared to Japanese parents in relation to PE (e.g. lack of support for children's homework). They were also afraid of having communication barriers with immigrant parents if their children were to have life-threatening incidents in PE class (e.g. suffering from heatstroke).

In Japan, teachers highly value children's sense of belonging because of the collectivist culture, and they value physical and psychological security and safety inside of their classes. There is a cultural norm of *uchi* (inside of the group) relationship in Japanese classrooms (Davies and Ikeno 2002). Due to this collectivist culture, Japanese teachers may easily face cultural conflict and treat immigrant parents as outsiders (*soto* or *yosomono*) (Davies and Ikeno 2002). The participants noted differences in the interaction and communication styles between Japanese parents and immigrant parents as they worked to meet parents' individual needs influenced by their culture, habits, customs and educational expectations. This could be seen as a type of consolidation experience because the participants began to focus on the specific needs of immigrant parents. For example, Ms. Chihira found that there was a gap between her assumptions and the actual supportive actions of immigrant parents in relation to PE. She said that:

It seems that I have my own assumption that immigrant parents should follow what the teachers say, because I believe that immigrant parents should accept and follow cultural norms in Japanese schools. For example, the school requested that all parents submit documents [e.g., daily health checkup, medical history] before the due dates, but actually many parents did not. I also found that their children did not complete their PE homework at home [e.g., rope jump drill]. [...] I think many teachers have stereotypes against immigrant parents and view them as different from Japanese parents. But I believe that the teachers should focus on identifying the individual needs of immigrant parents in the daily communication and distinguishing the interaction styles between Japanese parents and immigrant parents. (Ms. Chihira, follow-up e-mail)

Ms. Chihira had consolidation-stage experiences through minimising her assumptions against immigrant parents in order to identify their individual needs.

To do so, she also implemented 'face-to-face interactions for immigrant parents' to promote mutual understanding with parents in order to offer effective learning experiences and maintain a safe learning environment for their child in PE class.

Another participant, Ms. Miyaichi, found a perceptual difference in the concept of physical and psychological safety between her ideas and those of immigrant parents. She said that:

It seems that I assume that all parents must understand about the risk of injury or illness during PE class, such as heatstroke. I felt that all immigrant parents must care and allow their child to bring a red-and-white cap and water bottle for heatstroke prevention. It was unfortunate that their children didn't bring them. Also, immigrant parents are required to read the school letters [e.g., event invitation] carefully, but they didn't check them. [...] From such experiences, I realized that I should minimize my own assumptions and pay attention to identify what immigrant parents understand or not. To do so, sharing information with my colleagues is helpful to reinforce my learning about what is common and uncommon for immigrant parents. (Ms. Miyaichi, follow-up e-mail)

Ms. Miyaichi found that her assumptions distracted her from looking into immigrant parent's actual sense of safety in relation to PE. Therefore, she emphasised the importance of collaboration with other classroom teachers (one of the teacher development resources in the consolidation stage) to reflect their assumptions. She also added that 'I believe that the teachers should learn how to minimise their assumption by finding the differences between Japanese parents and immigrant parents'.

Theme 3: Transdisciplinary collaboration among the school personnel

This theme captured the participants' belief that school personnel, including the classroom teachers, school principals, school nurses and school interpreters, should collaborate beyond their disciplines

to improve communication with immigrant parents in relation to PE. For example, the participants were anxious about communicating with immigrant parents when dealing with unexpected accidents and incidents during PE classes (e.g. sudden injury or illness). Therefore, they decided to use a transdisciplinary collaboration approach with their school personnel (e.g. school nurse, principals), which involves different academic disciplines working together in order to solve real problems in a school setting (Gillis et al. 2017). In Japan, collective decision-making is valued by teachers because they are motivated to maintain group harmony, group solidarity and unanimity in order to overcome challenges collaboratively (Marshall 1984). Ms. Shiraishi believed that she should collaborate with the school nurse and school administrators in order to find solutions for the problems (e.g. sudden injury) in PE with immigrant parents. She said:

I believe that providing collaborative services is vital to promote mutual understanding among school personnel to communicate with immigrant parents. One day, a boy in my class from the Philippines had an injury (broke his elbow) during recess when he fell off from the horizontal gymnastic bar. Then I was in a panic because I did not have much professional experience dealing with such a situation. However, the school nurse, senior teachers, and school administrators collaboratively guided and helped me to bring the child to the hospital and explain the surgery to the parent. I felt comfortable and learned how to communicate with immigrant parents in an emergency [...] Later, the parent of the child from the Philippines reported to me that she was satisfied with the support for her child from the school. Then, I felt that there was a trust relationship between the parent and the school. Therefore, I believe that solidarity among school personnel is essential. (Ms. Shiraishi, e-mail follow-up correspondence)

Ms. Shiraishi was anxious to make appropriate decisions independently because of potential miscommunication with immigrant parents. Therefore, through informal discussions (e.g. brief meeting, information exchange), she realised the transdisciplinary approach allowed her to gain meaningful knowledge from the other experts, including the principal and senior teachers. This type of experience can be seen in the mature-stage of teacher development because the teacher was ready to apply her knowledge and skills to solve the problems collaboratively with her school personnel.

Another participant, Ms. Kaitani, believed that collaborative professional services with the school interpreter and Japanese language teacher (JLT) are essential to improve communication quality with immigrant parents in relation to PE and overcome language barriers. She said:

I believe that collaboration with a school interpreter and Japanese language teacher (JLT) is essential to overcome the language barriers in communicating with immigrant parents concerning PE. When I taught the 1st-grade PE class, the immigrant parents were unfamiliar with the PE system in Japan such as purchasing PE clothes. So, the school interpreter, JLT, and I collaboratively provided special guidance for immigrant parents to explain about the Japanese PE system. [...] Also, I could develop my knowledge and skills to translate the written letters [e.g., classroom news] because the JLT taught me about subject terms in parents' native language [e.g., Portuguese]. I believe that the immigrant parents feel a welcoming atmosphere when we provide translated oral and written information about PE. (Ms. Kaitani, interview)

Ms. Kaitani believed that there were communication barriers (e.g. language and cultural differences) with immigrant parents. For example, the oral and written communication with immigrant parents in Japanese can be challenging because the parents should be capable to use a large amount of vocabulary (e.g. words with Japanese origin, Sino-Japanese words and loanwords) and multiple scripts (e.g. Hiragana, Katakana, Kanji and Roman alphabet) (Hatta, Kawakami, and Tamaoka 1998). Therefore, she decided to use collaborative professional services with her colleagues in order to develop her professional knowledge and skills (e.g. translation). It was important for her to engage in a collaborative learning community to learn cross-cultural communication to promote cooperation from immigrant parents.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to describe and explain how in-service Japanese elementary classroom teachers have experienced the parental involvement of immigrant parents in relation to PE. Applying Katz's (1972) theory of teacher development, Japanese teachers are expected to develop their

professionalism regarding parental involvement toward immigrant parents from survival to mature level through acquiring different perspectives, experiences and ideas in their real-life work. More specifically, teachers with less experience are more likely to struggle with multiple challenges (e.g. language barriers, unexpected parental behaviour) than those with more experience in order to offer an effective and safe learning environment in PE for their children through promoting parental involvement of immigrant parents.

The elementary teachers believed that it was important that both teachers and parents develop collaboration strategies in order to prevent their children from encountering situations where they are left behind and/or marginalised. Takeuchi, Vaala, and Ahn (2019) emphasised the significance of collaboration between teachers and parents in order to promote planning and implementing educational services to meet children's diverse needs because of culture, language, race, religion, gender, socioeconomic status, gifts and talents and disabilities.

Conger, Conger, and Martin (2010) explain that teachers struggle to develop high quality social relationships with parents when the parents face material hardship and have associated stressors and challenges that come with family poverty. Teachers in the survival stage feel a sense of inadequacy or unpreparedness when they face the gap between anticipated success and real cooperation from the immigrant parents (Katz 1972). More specifically, the teachers in this study had feelings of *honne* and *tatemae* when they communicated with the parents of immigrants. In Japanese, the term *honne* means the true feeling of a person and is interpreted as the utterance that the teacher wants to convey (Ishii, Saravia Vargas, and Saravia Vargas 2011). The term *tatemae* is when the conversation or communication has been adjusted so that the actual conversation is different from what the teacher wants to convey (Melansyah and Haristiani 2020). For example, the teachers believed that they should modify the rules of bringing PE clothes or preparing documents, but they had peer or institutional pressures that made them feel they needed to hide their true feeling (*honne*) when they communicated with the parents regarding the policies regarding PE class.

During the survival stage in Katz's (1972) theory of teacher development, teachers are likely to need support, understanding, encouragement, reassurance, comfort and guidance. Therefore, in order to enhance the quality of collaboration between teachers and parents, principals and senior staff members must invite local parenting counsellor(s) (who are experts on poverty and immigrants) and run on-site training on how to develop positive relationships with parents from diverse backgrounds (Willemse et al. 2018). Exchanging information and ideas with counsellors, principals and senior staff may help teachers to master the developmental tasks in collaboration with parents from diverse backgrounds and reduce their sense of personal inadequacy and frustration (Knight-McKenna, Esposito, and Clement 2017).

The teachers in the study believed that teachers should minimise their assumptions toward the immigrant parents in order to develop mutual understanding with the parents about the concepts of safety and security in Japanese PE class. According to Chafota (2020), assumptions are pervasive among teachers and not restricted to cultural stereotypes, socioeconomic status or any other background of immigrant parents. Moreover, teachers' assumptions impact their decision-making, affecting the communication and cooperative behaviour toward the immigrant parents (Howell 2018). More specifically, in Japan, the teachers unconsciously and psychologically distinguish Japanese parents and immigrant parents as *uchi* (in-group) and *soto/yosomono* (out-group), which potentially leads to exclusion, segregation, and cultural conflict with immigrant parents (Davies and Ikeno 2002). The term *soto/yosomono* is defined as the distance of relationships between teachers and immigrant parents due to the differences of language, cultural norms, customs, habits and educational expectations in relation to PE (Tsunematsu 2016). For example, the teachers were concerned that immigrant parents often had a lack of knowledge about concepts of safety in PE (e.g. risk of heatstroke in Japan). In this study, the teachers recognised that they had assumptions toward immigrant parents (e.g. they expected immigrant parents act like Japanese parents) and realised that they should focus on identifying parents' individual needs by minimising their assumptions. The teachers experienced three types of professional learning as (1) stereotype replacement, (2) individuation and

(3) perspective-taking, when they increased opportunities for contact through daily communication (Devine et al. 2012), and sharing and exchanging ideas and feedback with their colleagues (Knight-McKenna, Esposito, and Clement 2017).

During the consolidation stage in the theory of teacher development, the teachers begin to focus on individual immigrant parents and problem situations (Katz 1972). In this stage, teachers make procedural and productive changes based on immigrant parents' unexpected and unpredicted actions and behaviours. Therefore, they need to minimise their assumptions. It is better that the teachers share feelings, resources and demographic and background information of immigrant parents with other teachers in the same developmental stage, which may help them reflect on their assumptions and master the critical lens to look into the individual needs of immigrant parents (Stroot et al. 1998).

The elementary teachers believed that transdisciplinary collaboration among the school personnel effectively enhances the quality of communication with immigrant parents because they were afraid that they may miscommunicate with immigrant parents about the child's physical, psychological or physiological information in relation to PE due to the language barrier. According to McGregor (2017), the transdisciplinary approach is defined as the cooperation and collaboration of diverse school personnel beyond their disciplines for problem-solving in their school settings. In this study, the teachers felt that transdisciplinary collaboration allowed the school personnel to contribute their own knowledge and expertise in order to determine the best ideas or approaches for improving communications with immigrant parents (Kokemuller 2021). More specifically, according to de Jong, Meirink, and Admiraal (2019), the process of transdisciplinary collaboration among the school personnel can be achieved through (1) storytelling and scanning for ideas, (2) aid and assistance, (3) sharing methods and materials and (4) joint work. For example, the classroom teachers, other teachers, principals and school nurses engaged in joint work to deal with the medical emergency of an immigrant child in PE class (e.g. bringing a child to the hospital, counselling immigrant parents). Therefore, the teachers believed that transdisciplinary collaboration among the school personnel is vital to solve the children's health issues such as injury and illness caused in PE classes.

In relation to the theory of teacher development, the teachers in the maturity stage find it rewarding to work collaboratively with school personnel on both formal and informal occasions in order to relearn skills, techniques and methods for facilitating communication with immigrant parents (Katz 1972). Therefore, in order for the teachers to develop into the maturity stage, they need to accept leadership positions (e.g. new teacher mentor, health director and research headteacher) in their school to mentor novice teachers to help them move through the developmental stages (Stroot et al. 1998).

Study limitations

This study has three major limitations. First, the participants were selected from Japanese elementary schools located in a specific area in Japan. Having more diverse regions may enable us to implement cross-case analysis. By using cross-case analysis, researchers can gather critical evidence through learning from different cases (Eckstein 2002). Second, the sample size was small. Obtaining more participants with diverse backgrounds would enable us to gain a better understanding of teachers' unique experiences. Nevertheless, qualitative inquires, including case studies, typically use small samples to uncover the unknown themes from transcript data to explain social/educational phenomena (Patton 2002). The purpose of this research was to identify the common themes in Japanese elementary classroom teachers regarding the parental involvement of immigrant parents in relation to PE.

Recommendations and conclusions

The following recommendations are intended to help teachers develop a harmonious and collaborative relationship with immigrant parents in order to promote their children's academic learning in PE.

First, school administrators and school districts need to establish continuous professional development programmes to improve teachers' knowledge, beliefs and practical skills to develop a

trustful relationship between teachers and immigrant parents. Typically, professional development programmes regarding parental involvement include multiple topics, such as collaborative planning and problem-solving, communication strategies, cultural awareness and strategies for working with parents of diverse backgrounds and developing parent–teacher relationships (Smith and Sheridan 2019). This study emphasises that professional development regarding parental involvement for Japanese elementary teachers should focus on more specific needs of teachers, such as culturally relevant interaction with immigrant parents who have diverse backgrounds (e.g. socioeconomic hardship, demanding job schedules) in order to mature teachers’ developmental stages. In order to provide learning opportunities that meet teachers’ needs, on-site training from a trainer who has enough time, flexibility and ample understanding about the teachers and their collaboration status with immigrant parents is most effective to master the development (Katz 1972).

Second, it is recommended that classroom teachers obtain learning resources from specialists such as psychologists, social workers and healthcare providers (Katz 1972). Experience exchanging ideas and strategies with local workers in diverse fields will help classroom teachers minimise their assumptions and reflect on their stereotypical thoughts about immigrant parents with diverse backgrounds. The teachers should be careful when they justify their actions in thinking and working with immigrant parents (Bartolomé and Trueba 2000). Developing a portfolio may be helpful for the teachers to assess and reflect on their practices in their communication with immigrant parents and demonstrate what they have learned and how they can apply their knowledge for future preparedness (Stolle, Goerss, and Watkins 2005). Therefore, self-reflection is important to improve teachers’ knowledge, beliefs and skills for communicating with immigrant parents. Furthermore, it is essential to look into the phenomena of teachers’ experiential learning in the process of minimising their assumptions by using specific theories such as Andragogy theory (Adult learning theory; Knowles 1989) to enrich the professional development resources meeting teachers’ needs in the future.

Finally, the school district may need to enrich the school system and school personnel (e.g. school translator, school nurses) in order to promote teachers’ transdisciplinary collaborations. For example, the school district can hire extra school translators and/or experts in cross-cultural communication to assist and help the school personnel to organise orientations or family workshops for linguistically diverse immigrant parents to provide information about the educational system in PE and parents’ responsibilities (Araujo 2009). Moreover, school administrators may be able to encourage transdisciplinary collaboration among the school personnel by establishing emergency action plans (EAP) with immigrant parents in order to address sudden accidents or incidents (e.g. life-threatening situations) of immigrant children (Tanis and Hebel 2016). EAP should include plans for during a crisis (e.g. who contacts the parents), after the crisis (e.g. how to collaborate with parents to care for the child) and following the incident (e.g. how to assess the cooperation with parents).

This study investigated Japanese classroom teachers’ experiences and perceptions regarding parental involvement of immigrant parents in elementary school settings. In order to accelerate the professional growth of teachers, it is necessary to enrich the professional development resources for meeting teachers’ individual needs in the field and promote school solidarity to develop a harmonious relationship with immigrant parents. Due to the lack of research in this area, scholars need to explore this phenomenon further.

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