Reasons for Hong Kong Parents Sending

Their Children Abroad for Secondary Education

Casey Kwong Chun Leung

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Certificate of Authorship

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

Signature of candidate   Date

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Table of Contents

List of Tables

Abstract

The Hong Kong Government provides free secondary education for eligible local children. However, thousands of Hong Kong parents send their children abroad for their secondary education each year, despite the cost, which often includes expensive tuition fees and boarding fees. This study seeks to discover why parents make this choice. It uses a qualitative approach to explore their reasons. Data was collected through in-depth interviews with 15 individual parents, who expressed dissatisfaction with Hong Kong's educational policies, particularly those affecting academic structures and curriculum, medium of instruction, class size and provision of university places. They also expressed some concerns about their own ability to support their children's development.

The research findings indicated three themes that encompass the reasons for these parents' decision to send their children abroad for secondary education. The first theme was entitled 'Formal Learning Environment', and included subthemes such as Arts Subject Curriculum, English-medium Education, Small-class Teaching and Balanced Education. The second theme was entitled 'Informal Learning Environment', and included subthemes such as Self-care Skills and Independence, Peers and Social Skills and Exposure to Different Cultures. The third theme was entitled 'The Future of Their Children', and included subthemes such as Admission to Universities and Emigration.

The findings show that Hong Kong parents who can afford to send their children abroad for education are likely to belong to the middle class. The findings demonstrate the relationship between education and the social position of this middle class. The parents interviewed wanted their children to sustain their class advantage, and thus mobilised their economic resources to secure their children's educational success, using education as a positional good. The parents interviewed also appreciated overseas boarding schools because the extra-curricular activities and active social life these schools provide can nurture their children's character and social and emotional wellbeing.

This research identifies nine reasons that contribute to knowledge in the field of education and open up the possibility of future studies. These reasons could inform policy-makers and prompt further research into 'global school choice'.

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Starting Point for This Research

Each year, thousands of Hong Kong parents send their children abroad for secondary school education. In 2001, the Hong Kong Census and Statistics Department conducted a one-off survey on the topic of 'Hong Kong students studying outside Hong Kong'. The findings were published in the *Thematic Household Survey Report No. 9* (Census and Statistics Department 2002). The findings show that 22,900 students were studying at secondary schools outside Hong Kong at the time. This raises the question of why so many Hong Kong parents send their children abroad for secondary school education. The *Thematic Household Survey Report No. 9* provides an initial answer to this question. The survey used a quantitative approach to offer respondents a list of 15 pre-determined reasons from which to choose. The results are shown in Table 1.1. The reasons are ranked in order of prevalence. The percentages add to more than 100 per cent because respondents were allowed to choose more than one reason. As shown in Table 1.1, the benefits associated with studying overseas (such as improving English proficiency and learning to be independent) are viewed positively, while there is a negative view of Hong Kong education (such as inability to obtain a place in a good school or too much pressure) and future employment (such as paving the way for taking up work outside of Hong Kong).

The survey provides insights into the reasons why Hong Kong parents prefer to send their children overseas for their school education. However, the answers provided are limited. First, some reasons were vague and uninformative. For example, the reason 'to receive a different mode of education' is vague because the key word 'mode' can be interpreted in different ways. As a clear definition was not provided, respondents may have selected this reason according to their own understanding of the word 'mode'. Other instances of vague reasons include 'better learning atmosphere outside Hong Kong' and being 'dissatisfied with the quality of Hong Kong graduates'. These vague reasons undermined the reliability of the survey data. Second, none of the

pre-determined reasons addressed respondents' opinions about Hong Kong's education system and education reform. This could be a political consideration, as the education reform was launched in 2000—only two years before the survey was conducted. Reasons related to education reforms may include changing policies related to the medium of instruction (MOI, explained further in Section 1.2); for example, 'to improve English proficiency' and being 'unable to get a place at good schools in Hong Kong'. Finally, the survey did not allow respondents to express their views and opinions in their own words in connection with the reasons they had chosen.

The research reported in this thesis helps to fill this gap by using a qualitative approach. In-depth interviews were conducted, which allowed the participants to express their views and opinions. Thus, parents could clarify their own definitions of key terms (addressing the first limitation outlined above), raise issues related to education reforms and the MOI (second limitation), and offer their own reasons that could not be predicted using a survey (final limitation).

This thesis therefore builds on the *Thematic Household Survey Report No. 9* (Census and Statistics Department 2002) to provide more in-depth findings and insights that are more recent. It seeks to gather information in order to apprise the Hong Kong government's policy-makers of parents' reasons that should be considered when formulating school education policies. To provide a foundation for this thesis, this chapter provides background information, the purpose of the research and an overview of the thesis.

Table 1: Reasons for students studying outside Hong Kong

Reasons for studying outside Hong Kong (multiple answers were allowed)	No. of persons	Percentage %
To receive a different mode of education	34,900	47.1
To improve English proficiency	28,800	38.8
Better learning atmosphere outside Hong Kong	18,800	25.3
To gain experience of studying overseas	13,200	17.7
To learn to be independent	10,600	14.3
Unable to get a place in good schools in Hong Kong	10,300	13.9
Dissatisfied with the quality of Hong Kong graduates	8,100	10.9
To have a fresh start in a new educational and social environment	8,000	10.8
Easier to seek jobs in future	6,600	8.9
To pave the way for taking up work outside Hong Kong in future	5,600	7.6
Too much pressure / too many assignments	5,500	7.4
To live with family members there	3,400	4.6
Dissatisfied with the education system in Hong Kong	2,200	3.0
Lower school fees outside Hong Kong	1,800	2.4
Entitled to overseas education allowance	1,200	1.6
Others	2,400	3.2
Overall	74,100	

Source: *Thematic Household Survey Report No. 9*, Census and Statistics Department, Hong Kong. Table 2.2d, p. 17.

1.2 Background

Hong Kong, a former British colony, was handed over to the People's Republic of China (PRC) on 1 July 1997 after 150 years of colonial rule. Hong Kong has become the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) under the governance of the Chinese Communist Party. Under the policy of One Country, Two Systems, the PRC enacted the Basic Law of the HKSAR on 4 April 1990. The Basic Law is a mini-constitution for the HKSAR, which stipulates that the socialist system and policies should not be practised in the HKSAR and that Hong Kong's capitalist system and lifestyle should remain unchanged for 50 years until 2047. The British-styled government structure has been mainly maintained and the civil services have been transferred smoothly to the HKSAR Government where various departments continue to operate as usual. The Education Department (ED) is no exception.

The ED has been responsible for the school education since the early stage of the colonial administration. In 2003, the ED was merged with the Education and Manpower Bureau (EMB), and following the reorganisation of the HKSAR Government in 2007, the EMB was renamed the Education Bureau (EDB). The EDB is responsible for:

- formulating, developing and reviewing policies, programmes and legislation in respect of education from pre-primary to tertiary level; and
- overseeing the effective implementation of education programmes.

The HKSAR Government published a policy document, *Medium of Instruction Guidance for Secondary Schools* (Education Department 1997a), which emphasised that students learn better through their mother tongue and therefore introduced the policy of mother-tongue teaching,

- ordering secondary schools to use Chinese as the sole medium of instruction (MOI); and
- prohibiting the use of mixed mode, i.e., a mixture of Chinese and English in teaching and learning.

The majority of the Hong Kong population is Chinese with Cantonese their mother tongue. Cantonese is a major dialect in South China, but like most dialects in countries with national, standard language, it is an oral language just like all the other dialects spoken across China. The official spoken language of China is Putonghua, also referred

to as Mandarin (thus indicating its origins), but to linguists this is simply another dialect. All speakers of Chinese, whether a 'dialect' or Putonghua, use the one standard of written form of Chinese for writing. So, in Hong Kong, people speak Cantonese and write standard Chinese. In CMI (Chinese Medium of Instruction) schools, the MOI is Cantonese, and textbooks and examination papers are written in standardized Chinese. Before the change of sovereignty, English was the MOI for the majority of secondary schools. Bolton (2003) suggests that the British Colonial Government adopted a laissez-faire policy on the issue of MOI. In other words, the Colonial Government allowed school principals to decide the MOI in their schools. Under the new MOI policy, most secondary schools in Hong Kong adopted Chinese for teaching all academic subjects, starting from the 1998/99 school year. Schools wishing to use English as MOI must demonstrate to the ED that they have fulfilled the requirements such as student ability, teacher capability and support strategies and programmes. As a result, only 114 secondary schools out of 503 in the public sector are allowed to use English as a medium of instruction (EMI). The limited places at the EMI schools cannot meet the great demand of parents who are looking for schools that use English as MOI. EMI schools are perceived as being of higher quality. Mother-tongue teaching might thus be a consideration when parents choose overseas education in English-speaking countries for their children. However, the first Chief Executive of the Hong Kong Government, Mr. C.H. Tung, argued in his 1999 Policy Address that Chinese is 'an important tool for exploring our culture heritage' (Tung 1999, p. 24). Nevertheless, dissatisfaction with the current school situation is expressed by the business sector. Au (1998), the Chief Executive of one of the biggest banks in Hong Kong, commented:

> Schools should not, however, be compelled to adopt mother-tongue
> teaching. Some parents have voiced concern that mother-tongue
> teaching would put their children at a disadvantage when they go
> abroad for further studies. Businessmen too have expressed fears
> that it could affect Hong Kong's status as an international business
> centre. I believe that school principals, as experienced educators, are
> in the best position to determine the most suitable medium of
> instruction for their schools. They should be allowed the academic
> freedom to make their own choice (p. 181).

Au's (1998) comments reflected the view of the business community that the mandatory mother-tongue education policy was not welcome by schools, parents and the business sector in Hong Kong.

The HKSAR Government launched its education reform in 2000. The Education Commission (EC) is a consultative agency responsible for formulating education policy. The EC published the *Learning for Life Learning through Life: Reform Proposals for the Education System in Hong Kong*, which is regarded as a blueprint for the education system of the 21st century. This was followed by the HKSAR Government launching a curriculum reform in 2001. The Curriculum Development Council published the *Learning to Learn: Life-long Learning and Whole-person Development*, in connection with school curriculum reform. The EC published the *Report on Review of Medium of Instruction for Secondary Schools and Secondary School Place Allocation*, concerning the controversial policy of MOI. The secondary schools in Hong Kong are divided into two categories, i.e., public school and private school. In the school year 2007/08, there were 527 secondary schools, of which 503 were public schools and 24 were private (Education Bureau 2008). Among the 24 private schools, eight belonged to the English Schools Foundation (ESF), which adopted English as the MOI and students included 50 nationalities (English Schools Foundation 2008). The other 16 private schools were international, the majority of them being EMI schools. These private schools are open to local Hong Kong students. The public system accommodates the majority of the student population. A local student who wants to be allocated a subsidised Secondary One place at a public school must participate in the Secondary School Place Allocation (SSPA) System (Education Bureau 2008). The SSPA System is divided into two stages: Discretionary Places (DP) and Central Allocation (CA). A secondary school is allowed to reserve not more than 30% of its Secondary One (S1) places as DP for the admission of students. At the DP stage, a student may apply to the preferred school direct; the school sets the admission criteria. A student who has not secured a DP then goes to the CA stage. A student will be allocated according to his/her allocation band (assessment) and parental choice of schools (school net). The choices are quite limited at the CA stage. Since the 114 EMI schools are very popular and the places are in great demand, only the high achievers can be admitted. As a result, parents may look for EMI schools outside the public sector, or even go abroad.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to explore why Hong Kong parents send their children abroad for secondary school education, with a view to providing further insights to the findings of the *Thematic Household Survey Report No. 9*. This study is needed because there are no channels that allow parents to participate in the formulation of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) Government's education policies, even though they are natural stakeholders in the education system and the education policies significantly affect their children's education. Parents have a right to express their opinions on education policies, including school systems, curricula and examinations. The EC, which is a consultative body appointed by the HKSAR Government, is responsible for formulating education policies and making policy recommendations to the HKSAR Government. The government usually accepts the recommendations, and the EDB implements the policies. The government appoints the members of the EC, and there are no representative parents among its members. At present, no organisations in Hong Kong represent parents' rights. Parent–Teacher Associations (PTAs) are concerned with individual school matters rather than education policies. The Hong Kong Government's commissioning of the *Thematic Household Survey Report No. 9* showed that it was interested in understanding why some parents choose to send their children overseas for schooling.

The following research question guides the study:

What are the reasons for Hong Kong parents sending their children abroad for their secondary education?

This purposely open question enables the research to contribute insights based on confidential interviews with parents, in which they are able to freely express their opinions.

1.4 Overview of the Thesis

This thesis comprises five chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the background and outlines the purpose of the study. It also presents the research question. Chapter 2 reviews the literature. It begins with a discussion of global school choice in conjunction with international schools and boarding schools. It also reviews the recruitment and marketing strategies conducted by the schools which are interested in attracting international students. It defines the middle class in terms of personal wealth and uses the factors which identify the middle-class parents in Hong Kong. Education as a positional good has also been discussed. Finally, it explores the resources and strategies that middle-class parents draw on to maintain their class advantages. Chapter 3 discusses the methodology employed in the study, and explains the reasons for employing a qualitative approach. It describes the selection criteria used for enrolling participants in the study, and how they were identified. It then describes the process of conducting interviews, and discusses issues of validity and reliability. Lastly, it discusses any ethical issues of relevance to the study. Chapter 4 presents the analysis of the data, using content analysis. The analysis identified three major themes and nine subthemes. Chapter 5 presents conclusions and recommendations. It presents the conclusions drawn from the data, identifying nine reasons for Hong Kong parents sending their children abroad for their secondary education. The chapter notes two limitations of the study. Finally, it makes recommendations for future research.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

Many Hong Kong parents choose overseas schooling for their children's secondary education. The context for this is an issue about global school choice, which involves international schools and boarding schools. Education is now perceived as a global free market trade in services that develops marketing strategies and recruits overseas students. Globally, parents who can afford to send their children overseas to be educated belong to the middle class. Therefore, the social positioning of middle-class parents and the resources and strategies they use to maintain their social advantage are relevant to their choice of school. Drawing on relevant literature, this chapter discusses the following concepts in depth:

- global school choice
- marketing and recruitment
- middle-class parent positioning
- middle-class parent strategy.

2.2 Global School Choice

School choice is associated with the new era of Neo-Liberalism (Campbell et al. 2009). The concept develops into the school choice movement, which affects education (Hyslop-Margison & Sears 2006). There are substantial debates on the issue of school choice, as exemplified by literature from the United States (US). Advocates view school choice as a strategy to improve educational opportunities for all children. Friedman (1975) suggests replacing schools' direct public funding with a system of vouchers that parents could use for education from an approved institution of their choice, and the role of the government would be limited. Chubb and Moe (1990) see positive consequences of choice in education reform. They claim that private schools are more effectively organised, and more effective organisation in the private sector translates into higher student performance. Opponents of the concept of school choice (Elmore & Fuller 1996;

Jacob 2003; Wells 1991; Willms & Echols 1993) argue that the free-market theory does not work in the education setting and that school choice hurts more students than it helps (e.g. due to social inequality). This thesis will not take a position on the debate of school choice in the US; rather, it focuses on the considerations of Hong Kong parents when they choose overseas schools for their children.

Many countries implement domestic school choice policies (i.e. for parents to have a choice of schools within their own country). Forsey et al. (2008) report that school choice policy was not only implemented in the US, the UK, Australia and Canada, but also in Israel, Argentina, Tanzania, China, Singapore and Japan. The Hong Kong context highlights that school choice also has a global dimension. The Hong Kong Government does not implement domestic school choice programmes. Perhaps as an unintended consequence, some Hong Kong parents exercise school choice on a global scale instead, by choosing overseas schools for their children.

Global school choice is different to domestic school choice in some areas. First, there are implications in terms of differences in language and culture in overseas schools. Adapting to new cultures and environments is a challenge for students who study overseas. Yeo (2010) reports that Asian students prefer to isolate themselves collectively from the larger boarding community. The difficulty for international students to assimilate into the host culture is understandable. In addition to the cultural barrier, international students from Asian countries (including Hong Kong) encounter language barriers in the host country. English is the second language for most Hong Kong students, who learnt formal English at their previous Hong Kong schools. When they study in English-speaking countries, they may encounter language difficulties relating to accents and slang, which makes it hard for them to follow what their teachers and classmates say. Kell and Vogl (2007) report that many international students are deterred from speaking in class because they feel embarrassed for not understanding local students' accents.

Second, the education system and curricula are likely to be different in the host country. Education systems and curricula vary from country to country and state to state. Some international schools in the host country may adopt the International Baccalaureate (IB)

programmes (Hill 2007a) or the country's own national curriculum, while public secondary schools in Hong Kong follow the local curriculum. Differences may include the content taught, types of learning activities, co-curricular opportunities and the way in which students are grouped into classes.

Third, parents have to pay high tuition fees charged by overseas schools without the aid of reimbursement or a school voucher system. For example, while the Hong Kong Government provides free primary and secondary education to all eligible students, parents who choose overseas schools for their children are required to pay expensive tuition fees, boarding fees, travelling expenses and other costs of living. These constitute substantial differences between the practice of domestic versus global school choice.

The existing literature shows that domestic school choice is usually confined to the school district or zone in which the student lives. For example, Lubienski (2008) reports that the school choice programmes in the US allow parents to choose a public school within their district. In contrast, for global school choice, parents 'shop around' globally to choose a suitable school for their child; thus, district, state and national borders are of little relevance. Forsey et al. (2008) argue that school choice has become a global educational policy following the ascendancy of Neo-Liberalism. Appadurai (1996) suggests that we should view globalisation as a flow of policies. Under the concept of globalisation, school choice has gradually become globalised, thus creating a global market in education.

A specific element of global school choice is the use of overseas 'international schools', which mainly serve students whose parents are employees of international organisations and are required to work in many different countries (Murphy 1991). The demand for global workers is increasing because of the growth of multinational corporations and non-governmental organisations. International schools are growing rapidly to keep pace with the growing number of global workers (Lauder 2007), with one estimate indicating that there are over 5,000 such schools (Brummitt 2009). This means that there is now an international school industry (Bunnell 2007).

According to Bates (2011), two factors account for the rapid growth of international schools. First, globalisation has resulted in significant growth of the middle class in many developing countries. Second, as a global service industry, international education generates revenue that is worth billions of dollars. These expatriate parents send their children to international schools in the host country. As the students attending international schools come from different nations, they are exposed to many different cultures. Hill (2007b) points out that international education seeks to integrate students into an international system where differences in culture are the norm. Haydon and Thompson (1995) report that international students in the UK appreciated their exposure to Western education and many different cultures. Thompson's (1998) study reports that international students rate the highest in relation to their exposure to, and interaction with, students of different cultures within schools.

Although intended for the children of expatriate professional workers, international schools are also an option for Hong Kong parents. They may want their children to study at international schools with a view to receiving a Western education and exposure to different cultures. The curriculum may also be an attraction in international schools. Hayden (2006) reports that some programmes are widely offered by international schools. These programmes include the Advanced Placement International Diploma (APID), the International General Certificate of Secondary Education (IGCSE), the Advanced International Certificate of Education (AICE) and the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme (IBDP). The IBDP and the International Baccalaureate (IB) programme are rated highly by parents (MacKenzie et al. 2003) and recognised by many reputable universities around the world (Hill 2007a). For Hong Kong parents, the IB may be an ideal programme for their children because it enables them to pursue higher education overseas after leaving school. However, there are only a small number of international schools in Hong Kong, possibly leading some Hong Kong parents to choose overseas international schools that offer the IB and IBDP.

Another form of overseas schooling is boarding schools. These may be attractive because they solve the problem of accommodation for children moving away from home. In addition, many private boarding schools provide extra-curricular activities and social activities. Different types of settings use the term 'boarding school' in various

countries and during different times in history. Relative elite, private boarding schools are relevant to global school choice (Walford 2005). Extra-curricular activities in these schools include sports such as rugby, soccer, cricket and rowing. Cultural and artistic activities such as concerts and drama are also viewed as desirable. These activities are appreciated by parents, who expect these schools to educate their children in such a way that their class status can be maintained and they can pass on their advantageous position to their children (see Section 2.4). Finally, boarding schools offer a particular disciplinary regime with regulations that cover all activities from morning to night. Cookson and Persell (2001) report that in the US, demanding boarding school curricula require students to work hard. The academic skills that boarding school students acquire may help them get into a select university. Walford (2005) reports that in the UK, private boarding school students have a high rate of examination success in the Advanced levels, and more than 90 per cent go on to higher education. This makes boarding schools particularly attractive to Hong Kong parents who expect their children to get into a university.

2.3 Marketing and Recruitment

The recruitment of Asian students has become the goal for schools in countries such as Australia, the UK, the US and Canada. In the wake of globalisation, education is perceived as a global free market trade in services, in which schools are service providers, and students and parents are consumers. For example, Luke (2005) reports that international education became Australia's third largest export industry in 2004. Asia is Australia's target customer base. Schools that are interested in attracting international students are required to conduct recruitment and marketing strategies. One common strategy is to participate in education exhibitions or fairs, with the school's staff promoting the services of the school. Kell and Vogl (2010) suggest that marketing and recruitment are sophisticated operations that utilise substantial resources to enable networks and connections that promote and sponsor international education. Some nations have retained a high profile in the international market through the activities of the organisations, such as the British Council and IDP Australia, who actively recruit, market and source students (Singh et al. 2002). For example, in 2005, the British Council organised an Education UK Exhibition in Hong Kong. Over just two days,

13,000 visitors attended the exhibition (British Council Hong Kong 2006). The Australian Consulate General in Hong Kong has set up an education centre to cater for Hong Kong students who want to study in Australia. The director told the media that the number of Hong Kong students going to Australia for education has been increasing (Singtao 2002). To illustrate, Yeo (2010) reports that a single boarding school in Perth, Western Australia, admitted 44 boarders from seven Asian countries, including Hong Kong. In Hong Kong, recruiting agents promote overseas schools to local students and parents. A common strategy is for senior school staff members to visit Hong Kong in July and August each year following the announcement of the local public examination results. Potential international students are tested and interviewed locally, and offers are granted to selected students on site in order to prevent the students from shopping around (British Council Hong Kong 2006).

2.4 Middle-Class Parent Positioning

Marx and Engels (1996, p. 3) raised the idea of 'class struggles' in their work *The Communist Manifesto*, which was published in 1848. The two classes (i.e. bourgeoisie and proletariat) stood in opposition to one another. The bourgeoisie centralised the means of production and concentrated property in a few hands. The bourgeoisie was the ruling class. The proletariat was the working class, who received wages and worked for the bourgeoisie. Marx mentioned the 'middle class' in *The Communist Manifesto* (p. 8), and included the small tradespeople, shopkeepers, handicraftsmen and peasants in the middle class. Marx provided the starting point for class analysis, which focused on the social relation of production in societies.

Weber (1996, p. 28) classified class types in terms of class situation, and he identified three types of class: property, commercial and social. In the commercial class, Weber put 'middle class' between entrepreneurs and labourers, which included self-employed farmers, craftsmen and officials (p. 30). These classic theories of Marx and Weber form the foundation of thought about class; however, the world has changed substantially since the theories were formulated. In modern societies, between the ruling class and the working class, there is the middle class, which has economic, social and cultural power (Eder 1995).

The discussion of classes is not necessarily focused on class struggle and the division of labour. Other perspectives should also be considered. King and Raynor (1981) suggest that personal wealth contributes to the understanding of class structure. Their study indicates that the distribution of personal wealth, (e.g. home ownership, cars and savings in banks), is uneven between the middle class and the working class. Therefore, the middle class can be identified in terms of personal wealth in contemporary societies.

In the Hong Kong context, ownership of the flat that the family lives in distinguishes the middle-class. The price of a flat is expensive in Hong Kong. Centaline Property (2012) reports that a typical middle-class flat was sold for HK$6,650,000 (about A$831,250) in September 2012. It had an area of 748 square feet and three bedrooms. Median household income can also be used as an indicator to identify the middle class. I argue that Hong Kong parents with incomes that are close to, or above, the median household income also belong to the middle class. The Hong Kong Census and Statistics Department regularly publishes statistics on income groups, including the median household income. It was reported that the median monthly household income in 1996 was $17,500 (Census and Statistics Department 2006), whereas in 2001, 2006 and 2011, it was $18,710, $17,250 and $20,500 respectively (Census and Statistics Department 2011). It is estimated that about 50–55 per cent of the Hong Kong population has an income that is close to, or above, the median household income. Hence, Hong Kong parents who own flats, or whose income is close to, or above, the median household income, belong to the middle class.

The concept of middle class is relevant to the thesis. The research did not purposely select middle-class parents. However, parents who can afford to send their children overseas for education fall into the middle-class category when the above criteria (i.e. flat and median household incomes) are applied. Therefore, it is necessary to review previous studies concerning middle-class parents in relation to their class advantages and economic resources towards their children's education.

Middle-class parents are concerned about maintaining their privilege or class advantage, and education is a positional good that they use for this purpose (Ball 2003; Campbell, Procter & Sherington 2009). This means that parents are concerned about getting their

children into the best schools. In the Hong Kong context, secondary schools with English as a medium of instruction (EMI) are the most prestigious. There are 503 public secondary schools in Hong Kong (Education Bureau 2009c); only 114 of those are EMI schools. The other secondary schools use Chinese as a medium of instruction (CMI).

EMI schools are valued more highly than CMI schools because the students at EMI schools are perceived to have better access to a university place. Lai (1999) asserts that although the Hong Kong Government tries hard to increase the status of Chinese in schools, English remains a gatekeeper to higher education, better jobs and social positions. The government report notes that '… it is very difficult to change parents' preference for sending their children to English-medium schools because they believe that such schools lead to a relatively more successful career than Chinese-medium schools' (Education Commission 1995, p. 21).

Pennycook (1995) suggests that English language education is used as a crucial distributor of social prestige and wealth. Postiglione (1997) examines the relationship between social stratification and schooling in Hong Kong, and asserts that language is the key element in the process of social reproduction; in particular, the English language is connected with cultural capital and reproduction. Johnson (1998) reports that many parents believe that greater proficiency in English will open up a brighter future for their children. For these reasons, EMI may be considered a positional good in Hong Kong. Kwok (1998) asserts that parents are concerned about the negative labelling effects of CMI schools on their children when some elite schools are still allowed to continue to use EMI. However, places at EMI schools are limited and are in great demand. When a middle-class child does not gain entry to an EMI school, parents may not be willing to accept a lower-status CMI; instead, they may consider global school choice as an option.

Education as a positional good has a global dimension because it has already been globalised in the notion of neo-liberalism and markets. Based on this international concept, there are global middle-class parents in connection with their children's education. This idea can be conceptualised from three perspectives. First, middle-class parents are not confined to one country but appear in different countries around the

world. They are in the same class and share the same views on education; thus, they have a global feature. Second, they value international education (e.g. International Baccalaureate curriculum) and choose it for their children. Such a curriculum has a global vision on education; thus, they have a global feature. Third, they send their children abroad for education and choose the schools globally; thus, the school choice has a global feature and their children become international students in host countries (Marshall 2007). Therefore, middle-class parents who fall into any of these categories are regarded as global.

2.5 Middle-Class Parent Strategy

The previous section has shown that positioning and status matter to middle-class parents, and that this positioning can take on a global dimension in terms of school choice. This section examines the resources and strategies that middle-class parents draw on to maintain their position. There are three types of resources—economic, cultural and social—in connection with the middle class's reproduction of advantage (Goldthorpe 1980). Parents mobilise their wealth and income to secure the best education for their children, with a view to increasing the probability of academic success (Devine 2004). For middle-class parents, the choice of school is a strategy to conserve or enhance their class ranking (Ball & Vincent 2001). These parents choose schools known for their academic reputation with good facilities. They would even mobilise their economic resources to pay for a private education strategically when circumstances demand it (Devine 2004). For example, in the context of Hong Kong, middle-class parents usually hire private tutors to supervise their children after school. It is not surprising that some critiques view the education market as a middle-class strategy designed to preserve middle-class advantages (Gewirtz et al. 1995).

The middle classes also use their cultural resources to maintain their social advantages. They mobilise their cultural capital as a strategy to achieve the aims. Bourdieu (2006) asserts that advanced groups use their education, linguistic competencies, dispositions and values to help their children do well in the school and beyond. Devine (2004) reports that middle-class parents—particularly those who are well educated—stress high levels of cultural capital in the family. They expect their children to be academically

able to go into high-level professions like themselves. These parents value reading highly and create a family environment to help their children enjoy reading when they are young. In Devine's study, an interviewee whose father was a lawyer and mother a university professor, received a full set of encyclopedia on his fourth birthday. This interviewee read the encyclopedia from A to Z, and that was the ethos of the family. For much of his childhood, there was no television, but all family members read voraciously. This shows that a family's educational dispositions can shape the children's family life.

Occupational inheritance is another strategy that middle-class parents use to maintain social advantages. Devine's (2004) study reports that an interviewee whose father and grandfather had both been doctors in India, recalled the environment in which he grew up when his father studied at home, with skeletons and medical books around the house. Cultural resources create an environment that can influence children's aspirations to get good grades at school and choose the subjects they study at university. Middle-class parents may expect their children to follow their example and inherit their occupations, particularly prestigious occupations such as doctors and lawyers.

Middle classes also use their social resources to preserve their social advantages by drawing on their social networks (e.g. family, friends, neighbours and colleagues) for information and advice about school choice (Devine 2004). The parents talk to their trusted friends about their experiences in educating their children and choosing schools. Another strategy these parents would use is personal contact with teachers at good schools, as they are important sources of reassurance and information, such as how the education system works and how to work the system. Their expert knowledge is highly valued. Another strategy that middle-class parents use is to avoid social mixing when choosing schools in the context of social capital. They seek to place their children with others from the middle class (Ball 1997) because they want their children to socialise with nice, well-behaved and bright children. The positive influence of peers on their children would help achieve education success.

Finally, 'proper behaviour' is essential to social reproduction and the maintenance of social advantage for the middle class. Some strategies in this area are used to achieve

educational success. Middle-class parents promote the virtues of discipline and hard work in their everyday lives. Some of these parents are strong on discipline and ask their children to complete homework before they play (Devine 2004). In the context of Hong Kong, many middle-class parents consider that completing homework is the first priority of their children after school. Therefore, children are required to return home as soon as possible after school and to spend most of their time on studies. This is viewed as proper behaviour for middle-class children, and this is particularly true in Hong Kong (Bray & Lykins 2012).

Social reproduction and maintenance of social advantage are not confined to formal learning; they can be extended to informal learning. Some studies assert that adolescence is a time of decision making (Jacobs & Klaczynski 2005), and some parents agree with these findings and want their children to learn self-care skills in order to look after themselves and solve problems independently. However, it is not easy for children to develop these behaviours because most middle-class families in Hong Kong hire foreign domestic helpers to take care of their children.

Parents are also concerned about the peer relationships of their children, as it often relates to romantic relationships (Aries 2001). Romantic involvement in adolescents is associated with depressive symptoms and behavioural problems (Chen et al. 2009). Thus, some parents do not want their adolescent children to have romantic relationships, and they try to control this improper behaviour as early as possible. Studies suggest that social skills are also important for adolescents (McLelland, Morrison & Holm 2000). A lack of social skills is another behavioural problem for middle-class children. Parents value social skills and expect their children to be well disciplined, polite, respectful to others and responsible. These proper behaviours are perceived to help children foster educational success, which is crucial for social reproduction and maintaining the social advantage for the middle class.

2.6 Summary

This chapter has outlined key concepts that inform this thesis. The concepts of global and domestic school choice were discussed. Overseas international schools and boarding schools, which provide Western education and extensive extra-curricular activities, are key components of the global educational market. In the wake of globalisation, education is perceived as a global free market trade in services, and schools that are interested in attracting international students carry out recruitment and marketing strategies.

Middle-class parents can be identified in terms of personal wealth in contemporary societies. Education is a positional good that middle-class parents use to maintain their class advantages. Parents are concerned about getting their children into the best schools. In the context of Hong Kong, this relates to secondary schools that use EMI. Middle-class parents draw on economic, cultural and social resources and strategies to maintain their class position. The next chapter will discuss the methodology used for the research reported in this thesis.

Chapter 3

Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodological framework employed in the study. Kaplan (1973, p. 73) sees the aim of methodology as to help understand the process of inquiry and to describe and analyse the methods, throwing light on their limitations and resources. Methodology focuses on the process and method. Cohen et al. (2000, p. 44) explain that methods refer to techniques and procedures used in the process of data gathering. Methods are tools or instruments for collecting data. Clough and Nutbrown (2002, p. 28) suggest that the choice of method depends on decision-making processes about the nature of knowledge itself. The choice of methods depends on the nature of the research. Different methods suit different purposes of inquiry. Cohen et al. (2000, p. 73) emphasise that the purposes of the research determine the methodology and design of the research. Below I discuss the purpose of the current study, beginning with the research question:

What are the reasons for Hong Kong parents sending their children abroad for their secondary education?

The purpose of the current study was to achieve a thorough understanding of the reasons for Hong Kong parents sending their children abroad for their secondary education. I wanted to know the meaning behind the reasons, the experience and views of the parents. Since the research was an exploratory study of human behaviour, qualitative and interpretive methods were adopted to ensure the depth and details of the exploration. This chapter starts with a discussion of the qualitative approach in Section 3.2, and then proceeds to discuss the interpretive paradigm in Section 3.3, the participants in Section 3.4, data collection in Section 3.5, ethical issues in Section 3.6, data analysis in Section 3.7, and validity and reliability in Section 3.8.

3.2 Qualitative Approach

Guba and Lincoln (1988), Merriam (1988), Patton (1990) and Miles and Huberman (1994) suggest the use of qualitative methods for studies that attempt to understand the reasons and beliefs of individuals that guide their behaviour. Merriam (1988, p. 17) claims that qualitative research assumes that there are multiple realities; that the world is not an objective thing out there but a function of personal interaction and perception. The openness of qualitative method tolerates multiple realities. As the current study was to explore the experiences and views of the parents, I believe that their realities could be multiple ones. Therefore, qualitative methods were required by the research. Miles and Huberman (1994, p. 10) explain that qualitative data, with their emphasis on people's lived experience, are well suited for locating meanings people place on the events, processes and structures of their lives and for connecting these meanings to the social world around them. The purpose of the study was to understand the experiences of the parents and the meanings their decisions had for them. Mariampolski (1984, p. 21) points out the strength of qualitative research and asserts it lies in the intense involvement between researcher and subject. It can yield a more in-depth analysis than that produced by formal quantitative methods because the researcher can challenge and probe for the most truthful responses. An in-depth analysis was required by the research in order to achieve a thorough understanding of the experiences of the parents. Therefore, in-depth interviews have been used, with myself as interviewer and the participants as interviewees. Miles and Huberman (1994, p. 1) argue that words have a meaningful flavour that often proves far more convincing than numbers. They suggest that another feature of qualitative data is their richness and holism, with strong potential for revealing complexity; such data provide thick descriptions that are vivid and nested in a real context. The goal of the research was to understand the complexity of the parents' views and experiences, thus requiring depth and details. The instruments and methods employed in a qualitative study such as in-depth interviews and open-ended questions suited an inquiry into people and situations. To sum up, a qualitative research method was required by the current inquiry to achieve the purpose of the research.

3.3 Interpretive Paradigm

Grix (2004, p. 82) explains that interpretivism is an umbrella term that covers a very wide range of perspectives in the human sciences. Denscombe (2002, p. 21) argues that interpretivism is concerned with subjectivity and understanding. Since the interpretive paradigm emphasises understanding, interpretivists try to understand social phenomena from within (Grix 2004, p. 83). Beck (1979) suggests that the purpose of social science is to understand social reality as different people see it and to demonstrate how their views shape the action which they take within that reality. The study gave parents an opportunity to express their views on the issue of choosing an overseas school for their children's education. School choice was deemed a social reality. The purpose of the research was to understand how the parents saw this social reality, and also to demonstrate how the parents' views shaped their action. Cohen et al. (2000, p. 23) explain that actions are only meaningful to us insofar as we are able to ascertain the intentions of actors to share their experiences. So, individuals and their experiences are the concern when social scientists conduct research in connection with human action. Cohen et al. (2000, p. 22) emphasise that the interpretive paradigm concerns individuals and understands the subjective world of human experience, and understands it from within the person. I agree with Dilthey's (1911/1977) argument that human activity is a text, a collection of symbols expressing layers of meanings. The concept of the interpretation of texts comes from an hermeneutical interpretation. Classical hermeneutics deals with the texts of literature, law and religion. Ricoeur (1971) extends this to the interpretation of the object of social sciences, particularly meaningful action. Radnitzky (1970, p. 22) suggests that hermeneutic human sciences study cultural activity as texts in order to identify the expressed meaning. The interpretation of meaning is represented by the hermeneutical circle, which is explained by Kvale (1996, p. 47) as follows:

> The understanding of a text takes place through a process in which the meaning of the separate parts is determined by the global meaning of the text, as it is anticipated. The closer determination of the meaning of the separate parts may eventually change the originally anticipated meaning of the totality, which again influences the meaning of the separate parts, and so on … the process ends in

practice when it has reached a sensible meaning.

Williams and May (2000, p. 59) also point out that interpretivists stress the meanings given to the world in which those studied live. Grix (2004, p. 84) argues that researchers working in the interpretive paradigm tend to place emphasis on meaning in the study of social life. Miles and Huberman (1994, p. 8) suggest that a study can interpret such a text by employing empathy with the subject of inquiry in order to get a thorough understanding. Grix (2004, p. 82) suggests that interpretivists believe there is a clear distinction to be made between the natural and the social world, and we need methodology and methods of gathering data that are more in tune with the subject we are studying.

There is a difference between qualitative and quantitative research, and each has advantages for different research purposes. In relation to exploring the topic of Hong Kong students studying at the secondary level in foreign countries, the *Thematic Household Survey Report No. 9* (Census and Statistics Department 2002) used a quantitative approach. The report was conducted on 22,900 students, and it provided some insights into the most common reasons given by parents. This provided a useful foundation for the current study; however, as observed in Chapter 1, the survey had several limitations.

In order to build on the knowledge provided by the survey, a qualitative approach is useful. The quantitative approach used for the survey enabled a large number of participants to contribute, but the information provided was superficial. In contrast, the qualitative approach used in this thesis analyses contributions from a relatively small number of participants, but the information provided is much richer. In this thesis, the participants could choose their own reasons instead of choosing pre-determined reasons from a list; thus, they could think 'outside of the box' and express their own ideas. In addition, participants could not only frame their own list of reasons, but they could also give examples to illustrate their point. The description of the example is the richness of the data, which can shed light on the rationale behind the reasons. This is helpful in understanding their reasons in depth. The interpretive approach was required by this research because its purpose was to explore the experiences and views of individual

parents. This qualitative research offers in-depth analysis that further contributes to the information provided by the *Thematic Household Survey Report No. 9*.

3.4 Participants

Morrison (1993, p. 112) points out that the suitability of the strategy for selecting participants can affect the quality of a study, meaning it stands or falls by such strategy. In general, there are two main methods of choosing participants (Cohen & Holliday 1996; Schofield 1996). The first is based on the probability of inclusion, also known as random sampling, and is very common in quantitative research. The second is based on the non-probability of inclusion, also known as purposive sampling, and is much more common in qualitative research. The current research employed the purposive sampling method. Various aspects of the selection of participants are discussed below.

3.4.1 Core Selection Criteria

Cohen et al. (2000, p. 98) suggest that a valid cohort set of participants represents the whole population in question. In the first place, the eligibility of potential participants must be defined. The purpose of the current study was to explore the reasons of individual parents for sending their children abroad for secondary school education, i.e., their experiences and views of doing so. The parents of these children were the potential participants and interviewees. In other words, to be an eligible interviewee, a parent had to meet one of the following criteria. When the interview took place:

- his or her child was studying at an overseas school;
- his or her child has completed secondary education at an overseas school, where the year of completion could be as long as 10 years before the interview;
- his or her child was preparing to go abroad for secondary education, where the departure time could be scheduled within one year after the interview.

The first criterion for inclusion above is self-evident, with reference to the research question. The second criterion addresses the fact that I wanted to recruit parents whose views and experiences covered a period of 10 years. I started interviewing parents in 2007. Ultimately, the data collected represented different views and experiences

covering more than a decade. Interviewing for this research included 1997, the year in which the United Kingdom handed Hong Kong back to China (National People's Congress of the People's Republic of China 1990). The change in sovereignty meant that any earlier experiences are unsuitable as data for the study, as the context changed dramatically from colonial rule to China's sovereignty. This affected every aspect of government. Of relevance to this thesis were the post-1997 education policies; for example, in relation to the MOI at the school level. The research also assumed that 10 years was a reasonable period for participants to be able to remember and reflect on their views at the time they chose to send their child abroad for schooling. The third criterion addressed the fact that I wanted to include parents who had the most experience of sending their children abroad for their schooling and so contribute to a wider range of participants in terms of their experience of the Hong Kong education system and the opportunities it offered, or did not offer, and in terms of what educational opportunities were available to them and their children overseas. Those parents were preparing to send their children abroad, and were thus in the process of applying to overseas schools or applying for student visas and thus were also able to reflect on their reasons for sending their children overseas.

The term 'secondary education level' is central to the selection criteria. This study focused on secondary education and excluded the primary education because secondary education is of greater importance in terms of the number of students studying abroad. *The Thematic Household Survey Report No. 9* (Census and Statistics Department 2002) reported that there were 22,900 local students studying at secondary education level outside Hong Kong in 2002 but only 4,700 students at primary education level. In the education system of Hong Kong, secondary education starts from Secondary 1 and finishes at Secondary 7, with the students' age ranging from 12 to 18 years (Education Bureau 2009a). The education system in the students' host country of course varies from country to country, and even within each country: for example in the UK, it varies between England and Scotland (British Council Hong Kong 2009). In view of the variety of education systems in different host countries, the current study defined secondary education level as pre-university education, including:

- from post-primary to pre-university education, at a student's age from 12 and 18 years; and

- foundation year courses preparing for entry to university.

Those parents whose children started overseas secondary education from pre-university foundation courses were included in the sample frame, while those parents whose children started overseas education in undergraduate programmes were excluded. As far as different education levels were concerned, a student could have been studying in the host country for several years when the interview took place; and was attending secondary education when he or she first arrived in the host country or university when the interview took place. However, the interview was focused on the parents' initial reasons for their child studying abroad at a secondary school in the host country.

3.4.2 Additional Selection Criteria

During the preparation stage of the research it became clear that some further selection criteria needed to be specified. These relate to students studying in Mainland China, the nationality of the child, families with more than one child studying abroad, and whether the presence of both parents as participants was necessary. These are discussed in turn below. Those parents who have sent their children to Mainland China for secondary education were excluded from the cohort of participants. This was done because of the adoption of the Basic Law of Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China on 4 April 1990 (National People's Congress of the People's Republic of China 1990). According to the Basic Law, 'the Government of the People's Republic of China has resumed the exercise of sovereignty over Hong Kong on 1 July 1997'. Article 1 of the Basic Law stipulates that the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region is an inalienable part of the People's Republic of China, and thus children who are sent to Mainland China for education should not be regarded as going abroad. Therefore, the study excluded those parents. The nationality of the child was not a matter that affected selection. Some parents in Hong Kong have dual nationality. In such cases it is considered that the parents sent their children back to their home countries for education. However, the purpose of the study was to find out the reasons, views and opinions of the parent on the issue of overseas education, not the nationality of the child. Therefore, the matter of nationality was not considered relevant in the study. When the family had more than one child studying abroad, the children were treated as

individual cases. For example, if the family had two children studying overseas, the interview questions focused on child A in the first stage. Then, the interview questions were repeated for child B in the second stage. The reason for splitting the interview into two parts was that the parent could give different reasons for the two children. This arrangement allowed the parent focus on one child in stage one and the second child in stage two.

The word 'parents' means father and mother. The study did not require both parents to be present during the interview; only the parent who had been contacted was interviewed. The other parent was also welcome if he or she was available and willing to take part in the interview but their participation was optional. Since the parents had usually reached a consensus on sending their son or daughter abroad for education, it was not necessary to get the views of both parents. A practical reason was that both of the parents could not be available at the time when the interview took place, for example, working a shift, being out of town, being too busy and not having the time, not wishing to be interviewed for some reason, etc. It was considered that certain characteristics of the participants would assist me in analysing the data, and these are discussed below. The core selection criteria assisted in helping to analyse the data because they distinguished two groups of participants. The first group comprised participants whose child was studying at an overseas school when the interview took place. The participants' views thus reflected current reasons for choosing an overseas secondary school. The second group comprised participants whose child had completed secondary education at an overseas school when the interview took place and therefore their views reflected reasons they would subscribe to in the past. Table 3a shows the number of participants falling into each of these two groups.

Table 3a: Core selection criteria

Core selection criteria	Participants (No.)
Participant's child was studying at an overseas school	4
Participant's child had completed secondary education at an overseas school	11
Total	15

Table 3b shows the participants in these two groups with regards to the year in which their child went abroad. These participants represent different stages of the development of education in Hong Kong. From 1997 to 2010, the Hong Kong Government announced various education policies that influenced parents to send their child abroad for secondary education.

Table 3b: Year in which the child went abroad for secondary education

Year	Participants (No.)
1997	3
2001	2
2002	1
2003	2
2004	1
2005	1
2006	1
2007	1
2008	2
2009	1
Total	15

The criteria for secondary education outlined above indicates that the age range for Secondary 1 to Secondary 7 in Hong Kong is 12–18 years (Education Bureau 2009a). The age of the children when they first went abroad for secondary education is shown in Table 3c.

Table 3c: Age of the child when going abroad for secondary education

Age (Years)	Participants (No.)
12	2
13	1
14	4
15	1
16	4
17	1
18	2
Total	15

As explained above, the structure of education systems varies between countries. Table 3d shows the year level that the children enrolled in for their first year overseas. The table includes information of how these levels or grades compare to the Hong Kong structure of Secondary 1–7.

Table 3d: Level or grade that the child enrolled in the first year

Level / Grade	Country	Equivalent to Hong Kong Education System	Participants (No.)
Grade 7	US	Secondary 1	1
Year 8, Form 2	Australia, UK	Secondary 2	2
Year 9, Form 3, Grade 9	Australia, UK, US	Secondary 3	5
Year 10, Grade 10 Form 4	Australia, Canada, UK	Secondary 4	3
Grade 12, Form 6	Canada, UK	Secondary 6	2
Foundation course	Australia, UK	Secondary 7	2
		Total	15

The host countries for the children of the Hong Kong parents are listed in Table 3e. Although a sample of only 15 parents cannot claim to be representative, the numbers largely reflect the popularity of host countries.

Table 3e: Host countries

Host countries	Participants (No.)
Australia	4
Canada	2
UK	7
US	2
Total	15

3.4.3 Background of Participants

Social class was not a selection criterion in this research. However, the majority of the parents who could afford to send their children abroad for education belong to the middle class, according to the definition discussed in Chapter 2. Overseas schooling requires significant amounts of money, which middle-class parents are able to pay. Of course, the upper class could also afford it, but nobody from that background volunteered for this research. As discussed in Chapter 2, I used two indicators to identify the participants as middle class: the ownership of a property and the median household income. I used wealth as the indicators because affordability is a prerequisite for overseas schooling. Economic resources were the considerations for identifying whether parents were middle class. Participants could be identified as middle class if they fulfilled one of the indicators, but not necessarily both. For example, Eric was a civil servant, and his income was above the median household income. He did not own any property because he lived in the departmental quarters provided by the Hong Kong Government as a fringe benefit. Based on his income, he belonged to the middle class. Fiona was a retired teacher without a recurrent income, but she owned a property and therefore belonged to the middle class. Leo was an engineer working for an international company. His income was above the median household income. He also owned a flat in Hong Kong. Leo fulfilled both of the indicators and thus belonged to the

middle class. The middle class is used as an umbrella term throughout this research, without distinguishing between subsets of the middle class, as that was not the focus of this project.

3.4.4 Locating Participants

I had to find suitable parents who could meet the criteria outlined above. It was not easy to locate the target parents because no agency or government bureau was responsible for compiling a list of parents who have sent their children abroad for education. Cohen et al. (2000, p. 104) suggest that snowball sampling is suitable for locating a population where access is difficult or where communication networks are undeveloped. The current study encountered similar difficulties. Mertens (1997) explains the method of snowball sampling:

> The researcher starts with key informants who are viewed as knowledgeable about the programmes or community. The researcher asks the key informants to recommend other people who should know a lot about the programme in question. Although the researcher starts with a relatively short list of informants, the list grows like a snowball as names are added through the referral of the informant (p. 236).

According to Mertens, the list grows like a snowball. However, snowball sampling was not effective enough to locate participants for the study. For example, I interviewed the first parent, and he identified another parent whom he introduced to me. However, when the second parent had completed the interview, he could not identify another parent. As a result, the chain of snowball sampling was broken, and so I had to identify another informant. Snowball sampling was useful to some extent but it could not be used as the sole sampling method. I had to employ other methods to find participants. I sought assistance from friends, colleagues and alumni and asked them to introduce me to parents who met the criteria as a potential interviewee. This method was also useful because the parents identified in this way trusted my friends and colleagues even though they did not know me and regarded me as a stranger. Some of the participants in the study were located through this method. This could be called a modified snowball

method since I did not include my friends as participants, only the people they referred me to in order to avoid bias. If the interviewees had been my friends or colleagues, they would have been under pressure to help me collect the necessary data. As such, they would not have been truly willing to participate in the interviews. The data so collected might not have reflected the genuine views and experience of the interviewees because they might have provided data that they thought I wanted to hear. This might undermine findings of the study.

3.4.5 Access to the Participants

Cohen et al. (2000, pp. 98-99) suggest that 'researchers need to ensure access is permitted … (and warn that) there are many reasons which prevent access to the sample'. As far as access was concerned, I first contacted the potential participant by mail, email or phone. This initial contact was crucial. I had to explain to the potential participant the purpose of the study, duration and recording of the interview, confidentiality, and the official consent form (see Appendix A). I had to answer the questions raised by the potential participant patiently. Whether I could gain access to the participant or not depended on the initial contact. If the potential participant understood the purpose of the interview and agreed to take part in the research, I had to arrange an interview in terms of date, time and venue that suited the interviewee. If the potential participant asked for the official consent form, I would send him or her a copy by email or fax. I collected the official consent form at the start of the interview. Cohen et al. (2000, p. 93) suggest that 'the correct sample size depends on the purpose of the study and the nature of the population under scrutiny'. Kvale (1996, p. 102) points out that 'the number of subjects necessarily depends on a study's purpose'. According to Cohen et al. and Kvale's suggestions, the number of participants required depended on the purpose of the current study, which has been described above. Cohen et al. (2000, p. 93) also suggest that sample size is also determined to some extent by the style of the research, with qualitative research more likely to require a smaller sample size.

Kvale (1996, pp. 101-102) argues that the number of interview participants needed should be guided by the following principle: 'interview as many subjects as necessary to find out what you need to know'. DeMarrais (2004) suggests that when a researcher

begins to see similar patterns in the responses from participants or when little new information is received from the interview process, it is probably time to stop the interview part of the study. I argue that 15 participants were enough to find out what I needed to know. In the first stage of data collection between July 2007 and April 2008, I interviewed seven parents. The initial analysis showed that these data were not enough. Therefore, I conducted a second round of interviews between November 2009 and July 2010. In total, 15 individuals were interviewed. During the second round, repetition of previously discussed reasons and experiences became increasingly frequent. The last two participants only gave reasons that had already been given by participants before them. This indicated that the number of participants was sufficient and that adding further interviews was potentially unethical, as they were unlikely to add new insights and thus could be seen to be wasting the time of the new participants. While the sample is too small to be representative in terms of the background of all parents who send their children overseas for secondary education, it was sufficient to provide the findings needed to answer the research question for this project.

3.5 Data Collection

The study employed the interview as the instrument for collecting data. Best and Kahn (2006, p. 267) suggest that interviews be used to gather information regarding an individual's experiences and knowledge, and his or her opinions, beliefs and feelings. This matches the purpose of the current study, which was to explore the experiences and views of individual parents. This section will outline why the interview was chosen as the data-gathering technique, and how the interviews were conducted.

3.5.1 Interviews

Information gathering is only a basic function of interview. Kvale (1996, p. 124) suggests that the purpose of a qualitative research interview is to obtain descriptions of the life world of the subject. Kvale regards the interview as a tool to understand the participant's meaning. Other researchers express a similar view. For example, Spradley (1979, p. 34) suggests a researcher should learn from the interviewees and understand the world from their point of view as well as the meaning of their experience. In general,

an interview allows interviewers to ask follow-up questions in order to probe further to obtain the meaning of his or her experience. Therefore, Patton (1990, p. 278) points out that the purpose of interviewing is to find out what is in someone else's mind. The current study used the interview as a tool to achieve this aim. Some scholars such as LeCompte and Preissle (1993), Bogdan and Biklen (1992), Lincoln and Guba (1985), and Patton (1980) describe different types of interview, for example, standardised interview, in-depth interview, ethnographic interview and exploratory interview. Lincoln and Guba (1985, p. 269) identify two opposing types of interview, i.e., structured and unstructured interview. Patton (1980, p. 206) suggests that the characteristics of the structured interview are standardised and closed. In general, quantitative research uses structured interviews. A structured interview cannot let participants express their views freely. Therefore, the structured interview was not suitable for the current study. On the other hand, the unstructured interview is non-standardised and informal. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest that if the purpose of the research is to acquire personal views, the research employs qualitative, open-ended and unstructured interviews. Patton (1980, p. 206) considers the informal interview as one where questions emerge from the immediate context and are asked in the natural course of events; there is no predetermination of question topics or wording. Since the current research design had prepared questions to ask the parents, an unstructured interview was also inappropriate. Instead, the semi-structured interview approach with guiding questions suited the purpose of the study. Patton (1980, p. 206) states the characteristics of semi-structured interview as one where topics and issues to be covered are specified in outline form in advance, and interviewers decide the sequence of questions and how to ask them in the course of the interview. The topic and issues were specified in advance, interview questions were written down in an outline form and, as the researcher, I was able to guide the interview. The semi-structured guide interview approach enabled data to be generated that was relevant to the research questions.

3.5.2 Guiding Questions for Interviews

The guiding questions for interview were based on the purpose of the research (see Appendix B). I wanted to know the views of the parents and to capture their perspectives. Therefore, the questions were open-ended and designed to get the parents

talking about their experiences and understandings and encouraged elaboration. As Bogdan and Biklen (1992) put it, 'the emphasis must be on understanding participants' points of view'. Some researchers such as Berg (1998) and Hatch (2002) suggest that background questions are to be asked at the beginning of an interview. Hatch (2002, p. 103) explains that background questions get the informants to talk about familiar information, get them used to the interview context and the recording equipment, and ease their concerns about what the interview might involve. I asked four background questions of the parent at the beginning of the interview. Berg (1998) suggests the idea of the 'essential question'. Berg explains that essential questions are those concerned with the central focus of the investigation. After asking the background questions, the essential questions focused on the reasons the parents had for sending their children abroad. Finally, prompts and probes were used. Hatch (2002, p. 103) points out that probing questions can add to the depth and richness of interview data and both Kvale (1996, p. 133) and Morrison (1993, p. 66) agree the questions need to be considered, especially for a semi-structured interview. Prompts enable the interviewer to clarify questions, whilst probes ask respondents to elaborate on their response, addressing richness and depth. In the course of the interview, I relied upon prompts and probes to clarify the meanings of the answers, especially those given in response to the essential questions. The interviews were conducted in Chinese because both the participants and the researcher were Chinese. In general, mother tongue is more effective in communication. As a researcher, I speak and write both Chinese and English, I am biliterate and bilingual. I did the translation and wrote the interview transcripts in English.

3.5.3 Procedure of Interviews

I relied on interviewing participants for collecting data. The procedure of interview consisted of four steps as follows:

Step 1. I contacted the potential interviewee by post, email or phone. I explained to him or her the purpose of the research, the issues of confidentiality and voluntary participation, and the likely duration of the interview. I also answered any questions related to the interview. When he or she agreed to participate in the study, he or she

became a research participant. Once the parent had agreed to participate, I confirmed his or her eligibility by checking the education level at which the child was enrolled in the overseas school. This was to ensure that the parent met all the research criteria (see Section 3.4). Then I made an appointment with the parent. I also told him or her that I would present a consent form at the scheduled interview, and that a copy of the consent form would be sent out by email or post in advance on request.

Step 2. On the day prior to the scheduled interview, I reminded the parent of the appointment. The day, time and venue of the interview were decided on mutual agreement. Usually, the venue was the potential interviewee's home or office, which was a secure and comfortable place for him or her. A coffee shop, with a quiet and comfortable environment, was also a good venue for the interview and was used occasionally if preferred by the research participant.

Step 3. On the day of the scheduled interview, I arrived at the venue on time. Kvale (1996, p. 125) suggests that it is crucial to keep uppermost in one's mind the fact that the interview is a social, interpersonal encounter, not merely a data collection exercise. When I met the interviewee, I took the lead to talk on social topics such as the weather and the traffic for a couple of minutes to make the interviewee feel at ease. At the beginning of the interview, I presented the consent form to the interviewee and explained the main points written on it: the purpose of the research, issues of confidentiality and anonymity, and the right of withdrawal. The interviewee and I signed it. Since I wished to audio-record the interview, I sought the interviewee's consent to do this. Cohen et al. (2000, p. 279) suggest that the interviewer will need to establish an appropriate atmosphere such that the participant can feel secure to talk freely. Tuckman (1972) asserts that it is important that the interviewer should not deviate from his format and interview schedule. The current study employed a semi-structured interview with open-ended questions, and used an interview schedule, i.e., a printed set of questions as interview guide (see Appendix B).

Step 4. Before I turned off the tape recorder, I summarised the interview by highlighting the main reasons given by the interviewee. The interview finished with me thanking the interviewee.

3.6 Ethical Issues

The interview procedures above already give some indication of the ethical dimensions of research involving other people. Sieber (1993, p. 14) defines ethics as having to do with the application of moral principles to prevent harming or wronging others, to promote good outcome, to be respectful and to be fair. This definition makes it clear why researchers need to be concerned with ethics. This is especially relevant when conducting interviews because 'an interview inquiry is a moral enterprise … some ethical issues may arise at the different stages of an interview project' (Kvale 1996, p. 109). Various professional bodies and institutions have their codes of ethics. For example, the American Psychological Association has a preamble stating its ethical principles:

> Psychologists respect the dignity and worth of the individual and strive for the preservation and protection of fundamental human rights. They are committed to increasing knowledge of human behaviour and of people's understanding of themselves and others and to the utilization of such knowledge for the promotion of human welfare (American Psychological Association 1981, p. 633).

Since the research was conducted under the auspices of an Australian university, and therefore I was bound to follow an Australian university's ethic protocols. The National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC), the Australian Research Council (ARC), and the Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee (AVCC) jointly publish the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research which states:

> The primary purpose of a statement of ethical principles and associated guidelines for research involving humans is the protection of the welfare and the rights of participants in research. There is an important secondary purpose of a statement of ethical principles and accompanying guidelines, and that is to facilitate research that is or will be of benefit to the researcher's community or to mankind. The purpose of this statement is to provide a national reference point

for ethical consideration relevant to all research involving humans (NHMRC, ARC & AVCC 1999, p. 1).

A later statement identifies the ethical values and principles as follows: 'Respect for human beings, research merit and integrity, justice, and beneficence' (NHMRC, ARC & AVCC 2007, p. 11). The current research was conducted in accordance with the ethical values and principles stipulated in the above statement. The University of Technology, Sydney (UTS) also has its codes of ethics applicable to research. The UTS Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) is responsible for the approval of research as far as ethical issues are concerned, based on the guidelines and principles as set out by the NHMRC, ARC & AVCC (2007). I submitted my application to HREC for approval on 6 August 2007, and full ethics clearance was granted on 19 September 2007. The HREC reference number was 2005 – 062P. Below I provide some detail to demonstrate how the current research was conducted in accordance with ethical values and principles.

Neuman (1994) asserts that one of the ethical principles the researcher must observe is to do whatever is necessary to protect the research participants. Johnson (2002, p. 103) interprets this to mean that the researcher is obligated to take whatever steps are necessary to protect the individuals who have cooperated in the research from any misuse of the information they have shared. In order to protect the research participants, informed consent is an issue to be discussed. Kvale (1996, p. 112) suggests that informed consent is to inform the research participants about the overall purpose of the investigation, and that they have a right to withdraw from the study at any time. I prepared a consent form (see Appendix A), which informed the research participants about the purpose of the study and the rights of withdrawal, and provided contact information of the UTS HREC, information about the ethics approval and the name and contact information of the research supervisor. The interviewee had to give consent at the beginning of the interview by signing the consent form.

A further widely recognised ethical issue is confidentiality (Eisner & Peshkin 1990; Kimmel 1988). Kvale (1996, p. 114) suggests that confidentiality implies that private data identifying research participants will not be reported. In the current study, all participants were given pseudonyms in order to protect their privacy. Kvale (1996, p.

172) suggests that in order to protect the confidentiality of participants, there is a need for secure storage of tapes and transcripts, and of erasing the tapes when they are no longer of use. The consent form (see Appendix A) informed the participants that the data gathered by this project might be published in a form that did not identify them in any way. In other words, publications would be written in such a way that no one other than myself could identify the participants from the findings. All participants were given pseudonyms. Data storage, tapes and transcripts were dealt with appropriately and in the strictest confidentiality. These actions were in compliance with the values and principles stipulated in the NHMRC statement and the UTS HREC documents. The study was carefully designed to protect participants from harm, embarrassment, stress and inconvenience by using the forms and guidelines provided by UTS HREC and adhering to the core principles of respect, integrity, justice and beneficence. No participants withdrew, asked that their answers not to be used or contacted the UTS ethics committee with a complaint.

3.7 Data Analysis

The study employed a 2-step method for data analysis, coding in Step 1, and identification of themes and subsequent interpretation in Step 2.

Step 1: Coding

Cohen et al. (2000, p. 282) suggest that once interview data has been collected, the next stage involves analysing it, often by some form of coding. The current study followed this suggestion and used coding as the first step in the process of data analysis. Kerlinger (1970) defines coding as 'the translation of question responses and respondent information to specific categories for the purpose of analysis'. The study defined coding as an initial process to analyse the data collected in the interviews for further analysis. Becker (1970), Charmaz (1995) and Miles and Huberman (1994) explain the nature of coding as conceptualising, reducing and elaborating. Strauss and Corbin (1998, p. 12) have a similar view and suggest that '… there are the procedures that researchers can use to interpret and organize the data. These procedures usually consist of conceptualizing and reducing data, elaborating categories … '.

Grounded theory provides a thorough understanding of the concept of coding. For example, Strauss and Corbin use grounded theory to do qualitative research, which they define as '… theory that was derived from data, systematically gathered and analysed through the research process' (1998, p. 12). Grounded theory is a research method that does not start with a theory, but seek to arrive at one on the basis of the research. However, the purpose of the current study was not to generate theory, but instead to understand the meaning and experience of the parents who sent their children abroad for secondary education. However, some of the coding techniques associated with grounded theory method are suitable for other types of qualitative analysis. As Strauss and Corbin (1998) stress, qualitative researchers who do not want to build theory can still use the coding techniques of grounded theory to analyse their data.

> We also believe that we have something to offer in the way of techniques and procedures to those researchers who want to do qualitative analysis but who do not wish to build theory. Building theory is not the only goal of doing research. High-level description and what we call conceptual ordering are also important in the generation of knowledge and can make a valuable contribution to a discipline (Preface, p. x).

Strauss and Corbin (1998) suggest three kinds of coding for analysing data: open coding, axial coding and selective coding. Since the purpose of the study was not to generate theory, but instead to identify concepts, categories and themes for interpretation, I employed open coding, and also modified the coding to some extent in order to suit the purpose of the research. Strauss and Corbin (1998, p. 101) define open coding as 'the analytic process through which concepts are identified and their properties and dimensions are discovered in data'. The current study regarded coding as the analytic process through which concepts are identified. Strauss and Corbin (1998, p. 102) suggest that in the process of coding, data is broken down into discrete parts for exposing the thoughts, ideas and meaning contained in them, closely examined and compared for similarities and differences in order to uncover, name and develop concepts. There are different formats of coding, as discussed in Bogdan and Biklen

(1992), Creswell (2002), and Arhar, Holly and Kasten (2000). Cohen et al. (2000, p. 283) explain that in coding any transcribed text the researcher systematically goes through the data, typically line by line, and writes a descriptive code next to each datum. Stringer (2008, p. 101) suggests dividing interview transcripts into units of meaning for coding. A unit of meaning could be a concept, which might be a word, a phrase or a sentence. The study used this kind of systematic coding. When the initial coding had been done, I grouped the concepts and identified the categories in order to have a thorough understanding of what the concepts stood for. Strauss and Corbin suggest that

> certain concepts can be grouped under a more abstract higher order concept, based on its ability to explain what is going on … grouping concepts into categories is important … categories have analytic power because they have the potential to explain and predict (1998, p. 113).

Strauss and Corbin (1998, p. 110) suggest researchers write memos, which are defined as 'the researcher's record of analysis, thoughts, interpretations, and questions'. Charmaz (2000, p. 517) suggests that memo writing is the intermediate step between coding and the first draft of the completed analysis. This step helps to spark the researcher's thinking and encourages him or her to look at the data and codes in new ways. Memo writing aids the researcher in linking analytic interpretation with empirical reality. During the course of the research some memos were written where necessary in order to keep a brief record of my thinking on the process of data analysis.

Step 2: Themes

Coding of the interview data initially generated six general themes for the study: MOI, balanced education, curricula diversity, self-care skills, learning English and admission to universities. More themes emerged after further data analysis, and I realised that the themes could be grouped into three major themes: formal learning environment, informal learning environment and children's future. This made the boundaries between the themes more distinct, without overlap. For example, balanced education provided information on formal learning, while self-care skills belonged to the informal learning environment.

As the analysis continued, more subthemes emerged (Miles & Huberman 1994), which could be combined with the existing ones to form new subthemes. For example, the original subthemes of 'diversity of curriculum' and 'learning of English' overlapped in some areas, so they were merged into the new subtheme of 'English-medium education', which could interpret the data more effectively under the major theme.

Moreover, the relationship between each major theme and its subthemes was more logical after the reorganisation of the themes. For example, the original theme 'admission to universities' was grouped with the newly emerged theme 'immigration' under the major theme 'the future of the children'. The new grouping clearly explained that middle-class Hong Kong parents wanted to maintain their class advantage into the next generation. Eventually, this study constructed three major themes and nine subthemes, which together answered the research question.

3.8 Validity and Reliability

The concepts of validity and reliability were developed in the natural sciences. The epistemological basis of qualitative research is different from that of quantitative study. Measures of validity and reliability in the mathematical or physical sciences are inappropriate for qualitative research (Ritchie & Lewis 2003, p. 270). Therefore, qualitative researchers have to discuss validity and reliability from the perspective of qualitative enquiries. Cohen et al. (2000, p. 106) suggest the researcher discuss validity and reliability within the research paradigm that has been used. Since the research employed a qualitative approach and used the interview as an instrument for data collection, the discussion of validity and reliability focused on these two areas.

3.8.1 Validity

Johnson and Christensen (2000, p. 207) suggest that discussions of the term validity have traditionally been attached to the quantitative research tradition. Wellington (2000, p. 201) suggests the definition that, 'Validity refers to the degree to which a method, a test or a research tool actually measures what it is supposed to measure'. Kerlinger

(1970, p. 138) points out that validity is often defined by asking the question: Are you measuring what you think you are measuring? This is a narrow definition of validity. If qualitative research does not result in numbers then it is regarded as invalid. Kvale (1996, p. 238) argues that more broadly, validity pertains to the degree that a method investigates what it intends to investigate and thus qualitative research can lead to valid scientific knowledge. Pervin (1984, p. 48) also holds this view of a wider conception of validity. The study adopted the definition suggested by Kvale and Pervin. Johnson and Christensen (2000, p. 207) mention the problem of researcher bias, i.e., that researchers find what they want to find, and then write up their results. Johnson and Christensen explain that the problem of researcher bias is frequently an issue in qualitative research because such research tends to be exploratory and is open-ended and less structured than quantitative research. Researcher bias tends to result from allowing one's personal views to affect how data is interpreted. This study addressed researcher bias in a number of ways. At the data analysis stage, I minimised research bias by using systematic coding, avoiding subjective interpretation of the data and avoiding selective use of the data. At the data reporting stage, I minimised research bias by presenting the data without misrepresenting the message, and by making claims that were sustainable by the data.

3.8.2 Reliability

Reliability concerns consistency and replicability of research findings (Ritchie & Lewis 2003, p. 270; Kvale 1996, p. 235). Since the study used interviews as an instrument for data collection, the discussion of reliability focuses on the interview, beginning with the choice of participant since the participant is a key issue in an interview. Hitchcock and Hughes (1989) observed that if the interviewees knew the researcher, they gave answers that they thought the researcher might want to hear. The current study took several precautions to maximise reliability by avoiding this bias resulting from researcher and interviewee knowing each other. Firstly, I did not recruit friends or colleagues as participants because if they had been my friends or colleagues, they might have felt under pressure to help me collect the necessary data. There is a risk that the data so collected would not reflect the genuine views and experiences of the interviewees. Secondly, I increased reliability by using only interviewees who had volunteered and

met the criteria, but who were not previously known to me. In other words, even if another researcher had conducted the interviews, the interviewees' answers are likely to have been very similar. Reliability was further improved by asking appropriate questions in interviews. Silverman (1993) asserts that it is important for each interviewee to understand the question in the same way, and suggests that interview schedules should be carefully planned. For this reason I employed an interview schedule (see Appendix B) in the interviews. This semi-structured approach ensured each interviewee understood the question in the same way. It was also important to avoid leading questions. Cohen et al. (2000, p. 122) define a leading question as 'one which makes assumptions about interviewees or puts words into their mouths'. As such, the question influences the answer. I did not ask leading questions so this maximised reliability.

3.9 Summary

A qualitative approach within an interpretive paradigm was chosen for the research because only a qualitative method would lead one to a thorough understanding of the reasons for parents sending their children abroad for their secondary education. The research participants were parents who had recently sent or would soon send their children abroad for their secondary education. A modified snowball technique was used to identify potential participants. In total 15 parents were interviewed. The interviews followed a semi-structured format. Data analysis focused on identifying concepts, categories and themes for interpretation. The study was designed to meet the ethical standards for research set by University of Technology, Sydney (UTS), the university to which I was to submit my thesis, especially in relation to informed consent and confidentiality, and to increase the validity and reliability of the findings. These findings will be outlined in the next chapter.

Chapter 4

Data Analysis

4.1　Introduction

This chapter presents the analysis of the interview data by using themes and interpretation. The analysis identified three major themes and nine subthemes and then interpreted these with a view to gaining a thorough understanding on the reasons for Hong Kong parents sending their children abroad for their secondary education. Before discussing the themes and subthemes, an overview of the participants is presented.

4.2　Overview of the Participants

Fifteen participants were interviewed, eight men and seven women. Each participant was given a pseudonym and therefore they could not be identified, except that their gender is indicated by their pseudonyms. Table 4a presents the key particulars of the participants.

For ease of reference, the table lists the participants in alphabetical order by their pseudonyms. Of the 15 participants, eight were fathers and seven were mothers of the children who studied secondary education overseas. The participants' professions indicate that they came from middle-class backgrounds. Three participants sent their children overseas in 1997—the year that China resumed sovereignty over Hong Kong. The others all sent their children overseas for secondary education after 2000.

Table 4a: Overview of the Participants

Pseudonyms	Year child went abroad	Age of child in that year	Level or grade child was enrolled in	Equivalent to Hong Kong system	Host countries	Profession
Allen	2005	16	Grade 12	Secondary 6	Canada	Administrator
Bill	2007	12	Year 8	Secondary 2	UK	Lecturer
Colin	2003	17	Foundation course	Secondary 7	Australia	Principal
Debby	2001	14	Form 3	Secondary 3	UK	Lecturer
Eric	2003	16	Form 4	Secondary 4	Australia	Civil servant
Fiona	1997	16	Form 4	Secondary 4	UK	Retired teacher
Grace	1997	16	Grade 10	Secondary 4	Canada	Retired teacher
Henry	1997	14	Year 9	Secondary 3	Australia	Accountant
Ian	2001	12	Year 7	Secondary 1	USA	Businessman
Jack	2004	14	Form 3	Secondary 3	UK	Civil servant
Karen	2009	18	Form 6	Secondary 6	UK	Civil servant
Leo	2008	14	Grade 9	Secondary 3	USA	Engineer
Mary	2002	13	Year 8	Secondary 2	Australia	Retired teacher
Nancy	2008	18	Foundation course	Secondary 7	UK	Housewife
Olivia	2009	14	Form 3	Secondary 3	UK	Housewife

4.3 Theme 1: Formal Learning Environment

Theme 1 includes the reasons given in relation to the formal learning environment. Formal learning is the learning that is structured in terms of learning objectives, curricula, learning time, and learning support. It is intentional and leads to a formal qualification, e.g. a school certificate. The environment related to this kind of learning is the formal learning environment. A major purpose of school level education is such formal learning (Bate & Lewis 2009, p. 32), so it is not surprising that parents regard the formal learning environment as an important factor in their choice of schooling. This theme comprises four subthemes: Arts Subjects, Medium of Instruction, Small Class Teaching and Balanced Education; these subthemes are discussed below in detail.

4.3.1 Arts Subjects

The findings show that several parents wanted schools to offer arts subjects, such as music, painting, visual art and dance. This wish, which is rarely met in Hong Kong schools, contributed to them choosing overseas schooling. Five of the 15 participants addressed themselves to this subtheme. Fiona sent her daughter to the UK for secondary education in 1997, and makes the following observations:

> When I selected a UK school for my daughter, I considered the provision of arts subjects at that school because she was interested in studying arts subjects, particularly music. Most Hong Kong schools did not provide arts subjects at senior secondary level. My daughter selected three arts subjects in the Advanced Level Examination in the UK. It was impossible for her to do so in Hong Kong… Hong Kong schools could not provide such a curriculum for my daughter for her to develop her interest in arts subjects. She had no choice but to go abroad to get an education in arts subjects.

In Fiona's opinion, arts education is important for the development of her daughter. Fiona is not alone in this regard. Debby also expresses her views on the importance of arts subjects in the school curriculum. Debby shares her daughter's experiences in

studying arts subjects:

> The curriculum of the UK school included drama so that my
> daughter had an opportunity to study it at school. Drama helped her
> perform better in public speech and presentation. At the same time,
> my daughter took painting as a subject at the UK school. Her
> teacher praised her artwork and put it up in the school gallery. She
> obtained a distinction in art in the GCSE in the UK. In Hong Kong,
> the school did not include arts subjects in the curriculum at senior
> secondary level. I think teenagers should be given the chance to
> study arts subjects at senior secondary level so that their talents can
> be discovered and nurtured.

In Debby's opinion, offering arts subjects enables students to discover whether they
have artistic talents. Some research findings support Fiona and Debby's views. Perrin
(1993) suggests that 'arts in the curriculum are necessary and the study of arts is one of
the best ways to educate a young person for college and work' (p.13). In addition, arts
subjects are to prepare students for participation in a rich cultural life that is essential
preparation for public life (Zakaras & Lowell 2008). In his interview, Jack emphasises
the need for arts subjects in the school curriculum:

> I was concerned about the growth and development of my daughter.
> Hong Kong schools could not provide the services that I wanted my
> daughter to receive, which made me send her abroad for education.
> Hong Kong schools could not provide a wide range of
> non-academic subjects. In the case of my daughter, she did not have
> a chance to study arts subjects at senior secondary level. The
> curriculum of the school focused on science subjects. My daughter
> was weak in science subjects but interested in arts. I had no choice
> but to send her abroad for her education. The curriculum of the UK
> school provided a wide range of non-academic subjects for my
> daughter to choose from. She took music and loved to play the
> organ. She planned to make it her major instrument when she

studied music at a university in the UK.

In Jack's opinion, arts subjects can nurture a student's interest in music and help them to discover their potential. Bill sent his daughter to the UK for secondary education in 2007. He is concerned about the education reform in Hong Kong:

> Under the education and curriculum reform, arts and cultural subjects will be marginalised at senior secondary level. The New Senior Secondary academic structure puts a limitation on elective subjects. In such a situation, my daughter does not have the opportunity to receive training in music and art. I am worried about this. It is regrettable if a student does not know how to appreciate arts.

Bill's worry is understandable. The Education and Manpower Bureau reformed the old academic structure and replaced it with the New Senior Secondary (NSS) academic structure. Under the new curriculum structure, Chinese Language, English Language, Mathematics and Liberal Studies are core subjects for all students. The students are required to take two or three elective subjects, which are chosen from a range of 20 elective subjects. At the end of the three-year senior secondary education, students are required to take the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education (HKDSE). The local universities will consider applicants who have achieved good results in the HKDSE for admission. Since the four core subjects are compulsory, schools are required to use 45-55% of time for these subjects while only 20-30% for the two or three elective subjects. Although music and visual arts are included in the elective subjects, the two arts subjects cannot be offered in most of the local schools. The reason is that the majority of parents and students choose the popular subjects as electives. Due to limited resources, the most popular subjects will be offered and the less popular subjects will be excluded from the school timetables. The number of candidates who take the arts subjects in the local public examinations reflects the unpopularity of these subjects. The Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority published statistics for the candidates sitting the subjects for a period of 12 years. Since the Use of English is a core subject in the Hong Kong Advanced Level Examination (HKALE), the number of

candidates who sat the subject in a certain year can reveal the total number of candidates in that year. Table 4b compares the number of candidates.

Table 4b: Number of HKALE candidates in Use of English and Visual Arts in 1996, 1998, 2000, 2002, 2004, 2006, 2007

Subject	1996	1998	2000	2002	2004	2006	2007
Use of English	28,899	30,711	33,925	35,302	34,158	33,129	34,527
Visual Arts	86	87	96	148	133	186	228

Source: Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority 2007, *HKALE Exam Report*, Table 7f

Table 4b shows that only a very small number of candidates took Visual Arts in the HKALE. The figures imply that the subject was unpopular and most of the local secondary schools could not offer it at senior level. Therefore, Bill's worry is understandable because arts subjects can be marginalised in the new curriculum. Moreover, this also validates the opinion of Fiona, Debby and Jack that Hong Kong schools do not tend to offer arts subjects. Despite the slight increase, this had barely changed between when Fiona sent her daughter overseas in 1997, and ten years later, when Bill's daughter also went to the UK for her education. Of 35 subjects offered by the Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority in the HKALE in 2007, only one subject was an arts subject, i.e., Visual Arts. This indicates that arts subjects are unpopular at school level. Music was not offered as a subject at all, confirming the concerns expressed by Fiona and Jack in the context of their daughters' particular musical talent and interest. Eric sent his daughter to Australia for secondary education in 2003. Eric shares his experiences in connection with the diversified curriculum in Australia:

> Australian high schools provided more subjects for students to choose from. My daughter's school included drama in the curriculum. Hong Kong secondary schools could not offer that kind of arts subject. Once an Australian student wanted to study a subject, there was a path for the student to get there. That was the beauty of

the flexible Australian education system, which my daughter benefited from. In the beginning, my daughter studied science subjects at an Australian high school. At a later stage, she had to leave the science stream because she could not cope with the subject, so she shifted to business subjects. But, she found that the business courses were also too difficult for her to complete. At last she took arts subjects and developed her interest in arts. She studied art at an Australian university.

The Hong Kong curriculum reform was introduced in 2001. Fiona sent her daughter to the UK in 1997, four years before the reform. Debby, Eric, Jack and Bill sent their children overseas in 2001, 2003, 2004 and 2007 respectively, after the reform was introduced. All these parents were dissatisfied with what they perceived as the narrow senior secondary curriculum. Both prior to and after the curriculum reform, arts subjects at senior secondary level were placed into the elective category. Although the Hong Kong Government lets parents choose subjects from the elective category, this choice is limited by the subjects available. For example, in 2007, the only arts subject available for the senior secondary examinations was Visual Arts. Moreover, Hong Kong schools are unable to offer all elective subjects, and since arts subjects are not very popular with parents, few schools offer them.

The unpopularity of arts subjects at senior secondary level shows that most Hong Kong parents take a pragmatic view towards the subjects that their children study at school. The parents interviewed for this study chose popular elective subjects such as chemistry, biology, economics and commerce, which gave their children a better chance of studying professional degree programmes at university. These programmes provide an opportunity for the lower-class children to climb up the social ladder and for the middle class to maintain their class advantages. Nevertheless, this research shows that some middle-class parents and their children have different (although equally high) ambitions, based on their children's interests and potential. For example, Fiona's daughter studied performing arts at a UK university, and pursued a drama career after her graduation. Jack's daughter planned to study music at a UK university and take the organ as her major instrument. As middle-class parents, Fiona and Jack used their economic

resources to fund the best education that suited the talents of their children, in the pursuit of valued education credentials.

4.3.2   English-Medium Education

The findings show that parents want English-medium education for their children. This contributes to them choosing overseas education for their children. As mentioned in Section 1.2, the study defines English-medium education according to two dimensions. The first dimension concerns the medium of instruction (MOI) at schools, i.e., the language used in the classrooms, while the second dimension concerns the environment for learning English outside the classrooms but under the school's guidance. The formal learning environment is not confined to the classroom. For example, students may conduct a survey using English by interviewing subjects in the street or visiting a heritage museum for collecting data. These formal learning activities require an English-speaking environment outside the classroom. Seven participants addressed themselves to this subtheme. Since there are two dimensions to English-medium education, the first one, i.e., MOI, will be analysed in the first part of this section.

A nation's language policy influences the MOI in schools. Tsui (2004) asserts that 'the decision on language policy is the choice of the medium of instruction' (p. 113). This is of particular relevance in Hong Kong. As outlined in Chapter 1, Hong Kong was under British colonial rule for more than 150 years. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, parental demand for English-medium schools was strong. Johnson (1994) reports that over 90 per cent of all secondary schools were English-medium schools in 1994. In 1997, China resumed its sovereignty over Hong Kong. The most important change in language policy was the implementation of mandatory mother-tongue education in Hong Kong (see Section 1.2). Tsui (2004) argues that 'a change in sovereignty is often accompanied by a change in language policy' (p. 101). In 1997, the Hong Kong Education Department issued the *Medium of Instruction Guidance for Secondary Schools*. Under this policy, the majority of secondary schools were required to adopt Chinese as the sole MOI, thus became CMI (Chinese Medium of Instruction) schools. Tsui (2004) reports that only 114 public secondary schools were permitted to use English as the MOI, thus being EMI (English Medium of Instruction) schools. Mary sent her son to Australia for

secondary education in 2002. She is aware of the changes in MOI in Hong Kong schools and expresses her opinions on the subject of mother-tongue education:

> Most Hong Kong schools used English as the medium of instruction before 1997. However, after the sovereignty change in 1997, most of the schools were required to implement mother-tongue education. The policy made schools switch the medium of instruction from English to Chinese. I worried about students' proficiency in English. Students used Chinese textbooks and materials to learn all subjects. They had very little chance to use English at school. The English standard of students was good before the sovereignty change because most of the secondary schools used English as the medium of instruction. Students were exposed to English. Now, the Hong Kong Government places too much emphasis on mother-tongue education and schools are required to follow this policy. As a result, students are poor in English.

In Mary's opinion, the implementation of mother-tongue education undermines students' English proficiency. Since Mary was dissatisfied with the language policy and had no confidence in it, she sent her son to Australia for his education. Mary was not alone in her concern relating to the mother-tongue education policy. In his interview, Bill worries about the language policy:

> I want to choose the suitable medium of instruction for my daughter, according to her wish and ability. The present mechanism does not allow parents to choose the medium of instruction for their children. My daughter will complete primary education and participate in the central places allocation system in order to get a place at a public secondary school. She might not be allocated to a school which uses English as its medium of instruction. I want to have the right to choose a school. I expect my daughter to have more exposure to the English language. After all, English is an international language.

In Bill's opinion, the education authorities deny parents the right to choose the MOI for their children. Bill's dissatisfaction is understandable. The Education Bureau set up a system for allocating public Secondary 1 places to Primary 6 students called the Secondary School Places Allocation (SSPA) System. The SSPA System is still effective, and it is divided into two stages: Discretionary Places (DP) and Central Allocation (CA). At the DP stage, students apply to the preferred secondary school direct. Public secondary schools are not allowed to reserve more than 30% of the Secondary 1 places for the admission of students. At the CA stage, the Education Bureau allocates students based on their internal assessment results at Primary 5 and 6. The problem is that the demand for EMI schools is greater than the supply. As mentioned above, there are only 114 EMI schools, or 27% of the total public secondary schools in Hong Kong. Tsui (2004) reports that only 12.9% of parents intended to send their children to CMI schools whereas 53.5% preferred EMI schools. But, the majority of the local secondary schools are required to use Chinese as the MOI and the competition for places in EMI schools is fierce. According to the findings of Tsui (2004), parents who could not get their children into EMI schools saw the policy as jeopardising their children's future. Many parents, just like Bill and Mary, were dissatisfied with the policy. As a middle-class professional, Bill was able to act on this dissatisfaction by finding English-medium education for his daughter in an English-speaking country. Some parents who send their children abroad want English-medium education for their children. The reasons for this are explored below. Henry explains why proficiency in English is so important:

> Proficiency in English is an advantage for jobs and employment.
> Large companies and organisations recruit employees who are good
> in English. It is the reality in employment. A person who is better in
> English can have more chances of finding good jobs.

Henry's view of the importance of being highly proficient in English is shared by other parents, for example, by Grace:

> In Hong Kong, employees in high positions and well-paid jobs are
> required to be proficient in English. I have come across some local
> university graduates and found that they were not all that proficient

in English. Overseas graduates were better than their local

counterparts in terms of English proficiency. My son returned from

Canada after graduation. He has got a job in Hong Kong. My son's

employer hired him because his English was good. My son had an

advantage in employment because he had studied in Canada and his

English was good. The employment of my son reflected the

advantage of being highly proficient in English. Now I receive the

'reward' for sending my son to Canada for his education.

Li (2002) reports that Hong Kong parents, such as Henry and Grace, tend to favour English-medium schools because they are pragmatically minded. Henry and Grace are concerned about jobs and the employment prospects of their children after graduation. As far as employment is concerned, Grace is proud of her decision, made in 1997, to send her son to Canada for his education. Grace uses the word 'reward' to describe her experience because her son can get a job in Hong Kong. The competitiveness of her son is due to his proficiency in English. Grace's views are at odds with the argument put forward by Lee (1998), from the Education Department, that 'the use of mother-tongue as medium of instruction will have a positive impact on the standard of English in Hong Kong' (p. 113). The parents place emphasis on proficiency in English and associate the language with jobs and employment prospects. Hong Kong is a global financial and parents perceive that employers require their staff to have good language skills, particularly in English. This is confirmed by Au (1998), who was the Chief Executive of one of the biggest banks in Hong Kong:

After the handover, the necessity for good English standards must

not be neglected in Hong Kong. English, which some have wrongly

associated with colonialism, is today the most widely used language

in the world of business. It is the common link and the language of

trade in the global village. If Hong Kong is to remain the great

economic success that it is in the competitive global economy, it is

vital for its voice to be heard and its products to be promoted. A

good command of English is essential for that, especially among the

territory's leaders (p. 180).

Au (1998) asserts that a good command of English is essential for business persons and leaders as well. Similarly, it may be argued, English is also important for professionals, such as lawyers, doctors and accountants, in an international city like Hong Kong. The middle-class parents interviewed for the study, most of them professionals and business persons, expect their children to maintain their class position. Ball et al.'s (1995) findings report that middle-class parents place great emphasis on school choice because they want their children to maintain the advantages of their class. In Hong Kong context this means parents, such as Henry and Grace, stress the importance of proficiency in English. As far as the international language for business is concerned, Au (1998) is not alone. Tsui (2004) also suggests that most people in Hong Kong see English not as the language of colonisation but as the language of international commerce.

Moreover, due to the high demand for the few schools with English as the medium of instruction (EMI), English-medium education has become a positional good in Hong Kong. Secondary schools with EMI are the most prestigious, and students who attend EMI schools are regarded as elite. These students are expected to have a better chance of attending university and of attaining highly paid jobs after graduation. Students have a bright future once they study at EMI schools, and have a good chance of maintaining their middle-class status. Conversely, secondary schools with Chinese as medium of instruction (CMI) are regarded as lower-status schools. Middle-class parents who are sensitive to school status are unlikely to consider CMI schools for their children. If a place in an EMI school is not available for their child, overseas schooling may be an option.

In relation to the second aspect, English as an international language, some parents add different views. These parents do not emphasise jobs and employment. Instead, they focus on the importance of English for obtaining knowledge in a globalised world. Ian sent his daughter to the US for her education in 2001. He also emphasises the importance of English:

> Many famous and knowledgeable people have read a lot of books.
> Many good books are published in English. Being highly proficient

in English helps you access good books and articles and you can obtain knowledge from reading. Let me give you an example. In 1997, while I was traveling on a plane to Canada, I read an article that forecasted the financial turmoil in Asia. The turmoil did happen in that year. The article was written in English only.

Mary sent her son to Australia for his secondary education in 2002. She agrees with Ian's opinion:

If a student can master the English language, he or she can absorb new knowledge and obtain information in this era of the Internet.

Ian and Mary do not entirely take an instrumental view of the English language. They focus on getting knowledge and information, which is quite different from the views put forward by Henry and Grace. Their views also question a central argument for the mother-tongue education policy of the Hong Kong Government. The Principal Education Officer from the Education Department, Mr. K.S. Lee, explained the reasons for the implementation of the policy:

Educational research studies world-wide show that most students learn more effectively through their mother-tongue. With their everyday language as medium of instruction, students are learning through the most effortless means. They are able to understand what is taught, express views, make inquiry, and absorb knowledge without any language barriers. Mother-tongue teaching thus minimizes possible obstacles to communication in the classroom, and facilitates students' development of intellectual and analytical powers. Such effect of mother-tongue teaching has been borne out by the Education Department's preliminary findings in an evaluation study on the implementation of medium of instruction in secondary schools. In the language-loaded subjects of History, Geography and Science, students studying in Chinese-medium schools perform much better than their counterparts in

English-medium or two-medium schools (Lee 1998, pp. 113-114).

Lee (1998) emphasised the effectiveness of learning and teaching through the mother tongue. However, parents such as Henry and Grace are not convinced by this, as they consider effective learning to require the ability to understand sources that are published only in English, such as on the Internet. Pennycook (2002) suggests that language policy is never simply an education issue; it must be understood in the broader social and political context. There is a claim that the Hong Kong Government uses mother-tongue education to replace English-medium education as part of the decolonisation after the sovereignty change. Tsui (2004) reports that the use of a national language as a MOI is an important means of nation building as a national language is a symbol of national identity. Tsui (2004) argues that medium-of-instruction policies are shaped by interaction between political, social and economic forces. Among these agenda, it is always the political agenda that takes priority. If the education agenda converges with the political agenda, it will be used as public justification for policy making. Some Hong Kong parents recognise the political agenda behind the policy of mother-tongue education. Matthews (2001) reports that many parents see mother-tongue education as a sign of narrow nationalism. These parents take an international perspective and regard English as an international language and want English-medium education for their children. Some studies report broader changes in Hong Kong after 1997. Ching (1998) reports that within just one year of the 1997 change in sovereignty, Hong Kong had already become much less international because the Hong Kong Government asks people to identify with China and forces parents to accept Chinese as the MOI in school for their children.

To conclude, the change of language policy accompanied the change of sovereignty in Hong Kong. The parents who prefer English as MOI are dissatisfied with the policy change towards Chinese as MOI at schools. Some parents take an instrumental view of English-medium education for future career options, while others see English as a tool for obtaining knowledge and information. The Education Department cannot convince these parents that students can maintain a high standard of English after the implementation of mother-tongue education policy. In addition, parents have no say in choosing EMI schools, and therefore send their children overseas for English-medium

education.

4.3.3 Small Class Teaching

The findings indicate that parents want small class teaching (SCT). This contributes to their choosing overseas schooling for their children. Five participants addressed themselves to this subtheme. The implementation of small class teaching had not been government policy in Hong Kong until it was included as a policy initiative in the 2007-08 Policy Address by the Chief Executive, Mr. Donald Tsang:

> I have pledged to implement small class teaching in my Election
> Platform. Starting from the 2009-10 school year, small class
> teaching will be implemented in Primary One of suitable public
> primary schools by phases. By the 2014-2015 school year, this
> initiative will be extended to all classes from Primary One to
> Primary Six. (Tsang 2007, paragraph 91)

Tsang not only announced the implementation of small class teaching in primary schools, but also mentioned the advantage of this policy as 'one of the means to enhance the quality of teaching and learning' (Tsang 2007). In addition, the Secretary for Education, Mr. Michael Suen, suggests the benefit of small class teaching:

> The Government has responded positively to the aspiration of the
> community for small class teaching. Small class teaching will
> facilitate interaction between students and teachers, and amongst
> students, and will provide the platform for a more diversified
> teaching and learning culture (Suen 2008, p. 1).

Since the Government agrees that small class teaching can enhance the quality of education, the argument can be made that this policy should be extended to the secondary sector. Some members of the Legislative Council urged the Government to implement small class teaching in secondary schools. For example, the legislator Mrs. Audrey EU said:

The implementation of small class teaching, not reduction in the number of classes, was the way to enhance the quality of secondary education, hence the call of the education sector for gradual implementation of small class teaching with a class of twenty-five students starting from Secondary One. (Legislative Council 2010, p. 12)

However, the Government has no intention of implementing small class teaching in secondary schools. The Secretary for Education rejected the legislators' request, pointing out that due to resource constraints 'the implementation of small class teaching in secondary schools was not a policy at the present stage' (Legislative Council 2010, p. 12). It is not surprising that the Government does not consider small class teaching in secondary schools. The implementation of small class teaching in primary schools is regarded as a measure to resolve the problem of teacher unemployment. The problem has been created by the low birth rate starting from the mid-1990s. Student enrolment in public primary schools peaked at 491,851 students in 1999, and has been decreasing significantly since then to 334,748 in 2009 (Census and Statistics Department 2010, p. 286 & p. 291). As a result of the decrease in student enrolment, hundreds of public primary schools have had to close. The Education Bureau sets a minimum number of Primary One students for each public primary school to recruit as new students each year. If a public school cannot meet the minimum requirement, it has to close within three years, or change its status from a public school to a private one. As a private school, it receives no more funding from the Government and becomes self-financing. The closure of public primary schools resulting from lower student enrolment is shown in Table 4c.

Table 4c: Number of public primary and secondary schools in 1999, 2004 to 2009

	1999	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Primary	721	635	609	553	518	490	473
Secondary	394	408	412	411	407	402	398

Source: Census and Statistics Department 2010, p. 284

The wave of public primary schools closure continues, although the peak is over. A large number of primary teachers have been forced to leave the profession. The Chief Executive addressed the problem by announcing the policy of implementing small class teaching in public primary schools. That is why the implementation of small class teaching in primary schools is regarded mainly as a political agenda. The Hong Kong Government has no intention of implementing small class teaching in secondary schools, although the wave of low student enrolment has already been reached at the lower secondary levels, i.e., Secondary One, Two, and Three in public secondary schools. Some study participants expressed their views on class size in secondary schools in Hong Kong and overseas. Table 4d shows the class size in local public schools.

Table 4d: Average class size in public primary and secondary schools in 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009

	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Primary	32.5	32.4	32.2	31.7	30.9	29.8
Secondary	36.9	36.8	36.7	36.6	36.0	35.2

Note: Average class size = Student enrolment / Operating classes

Source: Education Bureau 2009c

The class size of Secondary One was reduced to 38 students in the 2009-10 school year and 36 students in 2010-11. However, the class sizes are still large in comparison with the English-speaking countries that Hong Kong parents send their children to. For example, average class sizes in secondary schools are reported as 20.5 students in the UK (Department for Education 2010, p. 4) and 23.4 students in the US (National Centre for Education Statistics 2007-08, Table 71). The remainder of this section will present and discuss the views of the participants on the issue of small class teaching and class size in Hong Kong. Fiona sent her daughter to the UK for secondary education in 1997. She expresses her views on the matter of class size as follows:

> I am dissatisfied with the class size in the local schools. There are
> forty students in a class and the popular schools even have forty-two.

In such a large class, students neither have enough chance to ask questions nor have any interaction with the teacher. In addition, discipline is also a problem in some of the classes with low academic achievers. Overseas schools have small class sizes, with about fifteen students in a class. I would like to tell you my experience. I visited my daughter when she was studying at a boarding school in the UK. I saw students studying in a small group under apple trees. That was the desirable class size and environment I expected. When I received my daughter's assessment report from the boarding school, I found that it went into some detail. The teacher of each subject had written detailed comments on the performance of my daughter. Teachers in Hong Kong schools cannot afford to assess students' performance in that manner because the class size is so large.

Fiona points out some benefits of small class size, i.e., teacher-student interaction and discipline. Some studies suggest that one of the key components of effective teaching is ongoing feedback by the teacher to the pupil, both through face-to-face interaction and teacher response to students' homework (Jacobson 2001). Fiona's daughter studied in a small group under apple trees. Many Hong Kong parents can only dream of this class size and beautiful setting. In Hong Kong, class sizes are large, classrooms are small and school premises are compact without many open spaces or trees. Mary sent her son to Australia for his secondary education in 2002. She supports Fiona's views on the matter of discipline:

The class size in the schools is large in Hong Kong, with about forty students in a class. Teachers are concerned with students' discipline in the classrooms. Therefore, students are required to sit properly in their seats and keep quiet. They are not allowed to speak in class until the teacher gives permission. I am dissatisfied with the large class size in schools.

In Mary's opinion, discipline has compromised interaction in classrooms, which is why she showed disapproval of large class size. Some studies report that the larger the class, the less time teachers spend on instruction, and the more time they spend on discipline or keeping order (Grissmer 1999; Zahorik 1999). Small-class teaching is seen as a positional good, available only to some students in some schools (even overseas) and enhancing the quality of the schooling experience. Middle-class parents mobilise their wealth and income to secure the best education for their children.

Debby sent her daughter to the UK for her secondary education in 2001. She introduces the notion of teaching modes in Western countries:

> Teachers cannot apply various teaching and learning modes due to large class size with as many as forty students. The modes in the Western countries, which focus on real life experience, are lively. The teaching and learning activities are more interactive. Western culture encourages students to express their ideas and opinions.

Debby connects class size with modes of teaching and learning. In Debby's opinion, interaction in the classroom is crucial. The size of the class has an impact on teaching and learning. Bourke (1986) suggests that the smaller the class, the more the teacher uses probes to elicit a response to a question posed. In addition, teachers in small classes are more likely to use oral tests, homework and assignments for assessment. Pate-Bain et al. (1992) report that teachers in small classes use more hands-on activities and supplemental materials than do teachers in large classes. Allen sent his son to Canada for his secondary education in 2005. He prefers small class teaching. He compares the Canadian and Hong Kong systems:

> Small class teaching in schools is the strength of the Canadian education system. In Hong Kong, the public schools cannot provide small class teaching.

In Allen's opinion, small class teaching is crucial in an education system. He is disappointed because schools in Hong Kong cannot provide students with this kind of

teaching. Similarly, Bill recounts the story of his daughter:

> I am glad that my daughter enjoys the new learning environment. I
> am aware that she has made good progress. When my daughter was
> studying in Hong Kong, her teacher commented that she was not
> diligent in class. As a matter of fact, my daughter completed her
> classwork quickly, and without paying attention to her handwriting.
> Now, my daughter is studying in the UK and the learning
> environment has changed. When my daughter has completed her
> classwork, she asks relevant questions instead of sitting in the
> classroom with nothing to do. I am aware that the class sizes in the
> UK schools are small, with about twenty or so students in a class.
> The students can receive more attention.

Bill appreciates the small class teaching in the school. His daughter becomes an
engaged student, who pays attention to what is going on in class and actively
participates. Bourke (1986) suggests that the smaller the class, the more the teacher
responds positively to an answer a student gives to a question. Gursky (1998) and
Johnston (1989) report that in small classes teachers get to know students better,
understand their strengths and weaknesses better and are able to match their
instructional style to what the student needs.

To conclude, parents prefer small class teaching because they consider this benefits
students. Their perception is backed up by research. As Deutsch (2003) puts it, small
classes promote student engagement and positive teacher-student interaction, and
increase the time spent on instruction rather than on discipline. The participants are
aware of such advantages of small class teaching. The Hong Kong Government has not
implemented small class teaching in the public secondary schools and has no intention
of doing so. Therefore, these parents seize the opportunity to buy what they consider a
better education for their children overseas.

4.3.4 Balanced Education: A balance between academic subjects and extra-curricular activities

The findings show that parents' wishing for a balanced education, that is, a balance between academic subjects and extra-curricular activities, contributes to them choosing overseas schooling for their children. The majority of the 15 participants expressed concerns about balanced education, with 11 participants making comments pertaining this subtheme. Most participants do not want their children just to focus on academic subjects, without participating in extra-curricular activities. The learning culture in Hong Kong schools is regarded as examination-oriented (Pong & Chow 2002; Cheng 1999; Cheung 1999), with an overemphasis on academic learning. Leo elaborates some aspects of this culture:

> If you read the yearbooks of local schools, you can find that the schools emphasise the students' good results in the public examinations. The schools highly praise the students who have achieved distinctions in nine or even 10 subjects in the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination. Very few schools, perhaps none, emphasise that their students enjoy the process of learning.

Leo perceives this as the dominant learning culture in Hong Kong schools. He argues that his son does not fit into the Hong Kong education system because it is result-oriented:

> Most of the local schools emphasise the result, not the process. The education system reflects the fact that Hong Kong is a business city. The system produces people who are fit for such an environment. My son is not an aggressive boy and he enjoys the process; the local education system is hard for him. Many other result-oriented students will surpass him, and he will be very upset.

Leo sent his son to the US for education after he had completed Secondary Two at a local public school. When such an examination-oriented culture drives teaching and

learning in schools, parents may feel that their child's education lacks the necessary balance. Jack agrees with Leo and comments further:

> The main reason my daughter cannot adapt to the Hong Kong education system is because it is academically-driven. My daughter finds it very difficult to learn in such an environment.

Both Jack and Leo perceive a mismatch between the dominant academically-driven system and the needs and personality of their own child. Researchers have studied this mismatch. Cheng (1999) points out that Hong Kong schools claim to provide all-round education of pupils, but the real situation is not satisfactory because the curriculum focuses on the academic development of pupils. Morris (1995, p. 138) states, 'By focusing on academic achievement, the curriculum stresses the pursuit of the acquisition of knowledge and places less emphasis on the development of skills, attitudes, aesthetics, personal, social and moral development.' Debby goes further. She not only wants a better balance for her own child, but also argues this would be beneficial for all Hong Kong children:

> My daughter has to work very hard in order to perform well in academic subjects. She studies all day and only squeezes in a little bit of time to practise swimming, which is her favourite sport. She does not have time to develop in areas other than academic subjects because she has to prepare for tests and examinations. I think Hong Kong schools have gone too far in this regard. Schools should not give students so much homework to do in order to push them to perform well in examinations. The examination-oriented mode is inappropriate.

Debby sent her daughter to the UK for her education after the child completed Secondary Three at a local public school. Debby shares her view of balanced education in the UK:

> My daughter was required to pick up a sport in the UK school. She

chose swimming, and became a member of the school team. At the same time, she could cope with the academic subjects. Furthermore, she had spare time to practise playing the piano. My daughter was required to strike a balance between academic subjects and extra-curricular activities. I think schools should provide teenagers with such a balanced education.

According to Debby, the learning environment in the UK encourages students to divide their time equally between academic subjects and extra-curricular activities. Pitts (2007) points out that the provision of extra-curricular activities is well-established in secondary schools in the UK. These activities include sport, drama, music, debate and other interests. Pitts' study supports Debby's opinions. Debby's daughter was required to pick up a sport at the school. The girl even had spare time to practise the piano as her hobby. She enjoyed a balanced education in the UK. Debby reveals that her daughter has achieved distinctions in two subjects in the GCSE in the UK. In Debby's opinion, a balanced education not only encourages the student to take part in extra-curricular activities, but also helps her achieve good results in examinations. This suggests that there need not be any conflict between academic achievement and extra-curricular activities.

Debby's daughter was required to strike a balance between academic subjects and extra-curricular activities. A balanced education is a strength of private boarding schools in the UK. Schools place emphasis on all-round development of students, incorporating sport and an active social life, including cultural and artistic activities such as concerts and drama. Debby expected these activities to educate her daughter in a way that would maintain her class status. However, these boarding schools and their activities are expensive. Debby used her available economic resources to fund this enhanced educational experience for her daughter in order to benefit her daughter's overall development.

Like Debby, Grace suggests all children would benefit from a more balanced education, and that this would especially benefit their health and wellbeing:

My son spends much of his time studying academic subjects, and has no time to participate in extra-curricular activities. I regard this kind of study mode as a hindrance to my son's physical and psychological development. The health of a person is important. I am aware that some Hong Kong students' health is poor because they spend too much time on their studies and have no time to participate in extra-curricular activities. The students may do pretty well in academic subjects, but they do not have good health. I don't think this is good for my son's development.

Grace is concerned about the physical and psychological health of her son because the child does not have time to participate in extra-curricular activities. Biddle et al. (1998) suggest that doing sports and engaging in physical activities is important for good physical and psychological health. For this reason, Grace sent her son to Canada for his secondary education. Grace explains how her son enjoyed a balanced education in Canada:

He participated in sporting activities, like basketball, for example. He learned communications skills and knew how to make a decision.

As a result, Grace was happy with her decision to send her son to Canada. Regular physical activities might have psychological benefits, which can support the holistic development of children. In contrast to Leo, Jack, Debby and Grace, two other participants point to the problem of too little focus on academic learning. Olivia highlights that there are two sides to the issue of lack of balance:

Hong Kong students are at the two extremes. The students who are high achievers in academic subjects do not participate in extra-curricular activities. On the other hand, the students who are good at extra-curricular activities are low achievers in academic subjects. The students cannot effect a balance between academic subjects and extra-curricular activities. Take my son as an example; he is good at swimming but weak in academic subjects. In my

opinion, Hong Kong schools should provide students with a

balanced education so that they can cope with academic subjects

and can also participate in extra-curricular activities.

Another parent, Nancy, is dissatisfied with her son because she considers academic subjects are more important than extra-curricular activities:

In 2008, my son was a good swimmer and he wanted to be a

member of the Hong Kong team because Hong Kong will hold the

East Asian Games next year. He spent too much time on training

and did not work hard on his academic subjects. Ah! At that time he

was studying at the Advanced Level (equivalent to Sixth Form in

the UK). The class teacher talked seriously to me that I should not

allow my son just to focus on swimming. The class teacher

definitely told me that my son would not get any offer from local

universities on account of his poor examination results in the first

year of the Advanced Level course. Therefore, I made up my mind

to send my son abroad for his education. However, my son refused

to leave Hong Kong. As a mother, I worried about the future of my

son. The life span of an athlete is very short. In my opinion,

swimming should not be the first priority of my son. He should

study hard in order to get an offer from a university. I forced my son

to go with me to visit the agents in preparation for studying abroad.

Some studies discuss the career of athletes and agree with Nancy's view. Athletes may be required to leave sport for reasons such as injury and age. But, they are still too young to retire. Therefore, they have to face career transition and find new jobs. The transition is not easy. Petitpas et al. (1992) assert that many elite athletes express their fears, insecurities, and sadness about leaving sport and starting a new career. They are in a vulnerable position when they disengage from sport. Nancy was concerned about her son's future occupation. Occupational inheritance is another strategy that middle-class parents use to maintain their social advantages. Neither Nancy nor her husband were athletes, or knew much about the lifestyle and prospects of a professional swimmer. In

Nancy's mind, her son should not have considered athletics as his occupation because it was not secure; he should study hard to obtain an offer from a university and become a professional swimmer at a later stage. Nancy tried to convince and influence her son to drop the idea of swimming as an occupation. She mobilised her cultural and economic capital as a strategy to maintain her son's social advantages. Nancy made a decision against her son's wishes and forced him to study in the UK:

> My son studies in the UK and has stopped training in swimming. He
> focuses on academic subjects and balances studies and swimming. I
> am glad that he has been admitted to a university in the UK.

Nancy did not blame the school for her son's focus on swimming to the detriment of his academic achievement. She appreciated the teacher's warning but did not seem to trust that a local school could help address the imbalance. Nancy's case is different from those of the others mentioned above because she is the only participant dissatisfied with her own child's extreme attitude while the other participants criticise the schools, in particular the examination-oriented culture.

The above participants prefer a balanced education for their children. They suggest that Hong Kong schools cannot provide students with a balanced education mainly due to an overemphasis on academic subjects and examinations. As a result, they choose schools globally, and send their children abroad for their education in order to let them study in what they see as a better environment. These Hong Kong middle-class parents are able to choose overseas schools and opt out of the local public school system. The existing literature supports the findings. As Divine (2004) points out, they use their financial resources to buy the education they want for their children. For many participants, a balanced education was an important factor in perceiving overseas education to be better than schooling in Hong Kong.

4.4   Theme 2: Informal Learning Environment

Theme 2 includes the reasons given in relation to an informal learning environment. Informal learning is the learning that is not structured in terms of learning objectives, curricula, learning time, and learning support. It is unintentional and does not lead to a formal qualification. The environment related to this kind of learning is an informal learning environment. Hager and Halliday (2006) suggest that there should be a balance between formal and informal learning. The emphasis on formal learning may distort the concept of learning. Some parents agree with this view, and regard the informal learning environment as one of the factors in their choice of schooling. This theme comprises three subthemes: Skills of Self-Care and Independence, Peers and Social Skills, and Exposure to Different Cultures; these subthemes will be discussed in detail below.

4.4.1   Skills of Self-Care and Independence

The findings indicate that parents would like their children to acquire the skills of self-care and independence. This contributes to their choosing overseas schooling for their children. Erikson (1950) studied lifespan development from a psychosocial perspective and suggested eight stages of human development, one of which is adolescence. Erikson (1959) explains that adolescence is a period between childhood and adulthood, during which the individual must establish a sense of personal identity. Some of the parents interviewed for the current study agree with Erikson's view and perceive that their adolescent children should learn the necessary skills of self-care with a view to leaving the childhood stage and preparing for adulthood. Some studies assert that adolescence is a time of decision making (Jacobs & Klaczynski 2005), and some parents agree with these findings and want their children to learn to make decisions during adolescence. The current study defines skills along two dimensions. First, there are the skills that adolescents should learn in order to look after themselves in their daily lives. Second, there are the skills that teenagers should learn in order to solve problems independently. Nine participants addressed themselves to this subtheme. Olivia sent her son to the UK for his secondary education in 2009. She recounts her story and the experience of her son:

I wanted my son to be independent because he was the youngest
child in our family. My husband and I cared for him very much. My
son relied on me to make a decision, even a minor one. Let me tell
you a story. One day, my son could not make a decision on buying a
pair of athletic shoes and asked me to make a decision for him. At
that moment I realised that he relied on me too much. I sent him
abroad for education in order to train him to be independent. I tell
you another story. Last year when my son was still in Hong Kong,
he got lost in our suburb while he was traveling alone on public
transport. We had a family car and my son was not required to travel
on public transport. It was unacceptable that a 14-year-old boy got
lost in his own suburb. This incident had showed that he was
overprotected. My son has become independent after he studied
abroad. Two months ago, it was the term break of the UK school.
My son had to leave the boarding school and stay with his guardian.
He had to travel two hours and transit between the Metro and the
train systems in order to get to the destination. He could make it by
himself. Afterwards, my son travelled alone on a three-hour trip to
visit his brother who is studying at a university in the UK. I am glad
that my son has become independent and can make a decision. I can
say that I have achieved the goal.

Olivia perceives her son as overprotected. As a result, the child could not make a minor
decision. In Olivia's opinion, overprotection compromises the learning of self-care
skills. She is not alone in this view. Ornstein et al. (2011) report that some parents
indulge their children. The parents provide their children with too many material goods
or protect them from challenges. Marano (2008) reports that overindulgence is a
growing tendency, particularly among young middle-class parents and these
overindulged children may find it hard to endure frustration. In agreement with Olivia,
Bill says:

Overseas education has trained my daughter to be independent. I am aware
that she has learned how to look after herself.

Bill's daughter missed her flight in London and solved the problem by herself. In the cases above, the overseas environment provided the children with opportunities to learn survival skills in an informal way. This was the informal learning environment for the teenagers to learn to be independent and to solve problems in daily life. The teenage boy showed that he could improve his skills of self-care if given the opportunity. Borbye (2010) claims that challenge and adaptation help build character. In his interview Eric explains the difficulty in training his daughter in the skills of self-care:

> My daughter lived with my wife and me when she was in Hong
> Kong. She depended on her mother and me. She did not do
> housework because we hired a foreign domestic helper at home. My
> daughter had to be independent when she studied abroad. She had to
> look after herself. For example, she had to wash her clothes and
> cook her meals. She learned the necessary skills of self-care.

Eric brings up the issue of foreign domestic helpers. In Eric's opinion, the hiring of a foreign domestic helper at home compromised his daughter's skills of self-care. It is very common for middle-class families in Hong Kong to hire foreign domestic helpers. As of 31 March 2010, there were 273,609 foreign domestic helpers in Hong Kong (Immigration Department 2009). There is an overlap between the cohort who send their children abroad for education and the people who employ foreign domestic helpers, since both choices require a degree of wealth. As a mother, Karen agrees with Eric's views, adding her own:

> Now, my son can prepare a schedule for traveling, and can look after himself
> and tidy up his belongings.

Karen is aware that overseas education has provided her son with the opportunities to learn the skills of self-care in terms of planning and tidying things up. She is satisfied with the change in her son. Another mother, Fiona, points out the skills, saying:

When my daughter was abroad, she had to operate the washing machine, to dry and iron her clothes.

Debby states her views as follows:

My daughter should not stay in her comfort zone. She did not learn those skills until she studied in the UK. I want my daughter to be independent.

Debby sees the comfort zone as compromising skills of self-care. In general, people resist getting away from their comfort zone. But, changes are unavoidable in our lives. Moving away from the comfort zone means having to adapt to new things, facing challenges and making decisions or choices. Debby is not alone in her views. Borbye (2010) suggests that 'being out of the comfort zone creates a demand to cope with the new elements and learn new skills' (p. 4).

Middle-class parents want their children to learn self-care skills and solve problems independently, with a view to maintaining their social advantages. Olivia, Debby and Karen saw the importance of 'proper' behaviour. They believed that their children should be independent in daily life and learn how to make their own decisions. They saw that comfort and indulgence compromised self-care skills.

However, in Hong Kong, many children might not have the chance to learn such skills because most middle-class families hire foreign domestic helpers at home. Children are not required to do the housework. They do not know how to vacuum the carpet, cook meals or do laundry. Children are overprotected, and their parents prepare everything for them. It is not surprising that many children do not know how to make major decisions or look after themselves. The parents interviewed for this study claimed that overseas education could provide their children with better opportunities for learning these skills; therefore, they sent their children abroad for secondary education.

4.4.2   Peers and Social Skills

The findings show that parents want their children to interact with their peers and to have good social skills. This contributes to them choosing overseas schooling for their children. Aries (2001) suggests that 'peer groups and peer relationships play a large role in the lives of adolescents and make an important contribution to their social and psychological development' (p. 372). Some participants highlight peer relationships in connection with overseas schooling whereas others place more emphasis on social skills. The former will be discussed in the first part of this section and the latter in the second part. Seven participants addressed themselves to this subtheme. In her interview Fiona tells the story of her daughter:

> My daughter is the only child in the family. She does not have
> siblings whom she can talk to and share with. She asked me to have
> more babies so that she might have brothers and sisters. But I
> refused because I regarded another child as one too many. She was
> very disappointed. I put her in a girls' boarding school so that she
> had peers to live and play with. The peers were important to her and
> the relationship of the boarders was as close as sisters away from
> home. She got on well with other boarders. She had a couple of
> close friends at the boarding school. I gather that she shared issues
> with her peers that she would not like me to know about.

In Fiona's opinion, a peer relationship is crucial for her only child. The literature supports Fiona's views. It is commonly believed that an only child will be spoiled, selfish, lonely and maladjusted (Roberts & Blanton 2001). Bill shares his experience:

> I am sure my daughter has become accustomed to the new
> environment at the UK boarding school. She has a lot of friends and
> they play and study together. When she was in Hong Kong, I could
> not provide her with such a learning environment. My wife and I
> had to work till evening. After dinner, we did not have time to talk
> with our daughter. She was young and we did not allow her to go

out to make friends with her peers. When she logged onto the
Internet, I was worried that she might visit the bad websites and
make friends with the bad guys.

In Bill's opinion, peer influence matters. His worry is understandable. Bill's daughter is the only child in the family. She needs peers and good peer relationships in her adolescence. Bill cannot monitor his daughter's relationship due to his heavy workload. The boarding school can provide an environment that meets Bill's expectations. In effect, Bill is paying the boarding school to act as a good parent for his daughter.

Fiona and Bill both have an only child in their families. Initially, they were worried about their daughters' ability to develop peer relationships at their new schools. However, when the two girls studied at UK private boarding schools, they interacted well with their peers and developed good relationships.

Boarding schools provide extra-curricular activities and an active social life for their students; through these activities, students develop strong peer relationships. Parents such as Fiona and Bill mobilised their wealth and income to fund the best education for their children, not just because they were dissatisfied with their local schools, but to improve their own capacity as providers for their children.

Leo expresses his concerns about his son falling in with the wrong kind of peers:

In general, peer influence exists in peer groups. The personality of
my son is sociable and easy-going, and he indulges in computer
games. I am worried that my son may be influenced by his peers
and become a bad boy. The environment in Hong Kong is
complicated and has too many attractions for teenagers whereas the
US environment is pure and simple. My wife lives with my son in a
good suburb in the US. The peers of my son are of good quality. My
son goes to church and visits libraries and bookstores after school.

Leo places emphasis on peer influence, which is one of the reasons he sent his son to the US for education. His view of the US as having a 'pure and simple' environment may seem surprising given the levels of crime and economic upheaval in the US. However, the 'good suburb' where his wife and son live may well be relatively quiet, similar to the Canadian town where Grace sent her son. She recounts her son's story:

> Peer influence was another reason for sending my son to Canada for his education. My son was influenced by his peers. In 1997, the ethos in Hong Kong society was not good. I was concerned about the behaviour of adolescents at that time. I did not want my son to go wild with his peers. But, my husband and I were busy at work. We had little time and limited energy to look into the matter of my son's peer group. The heavy workload made me exhausted and damaged my health. I was aware of a small town in Canada where I had relatives. The town was far away from big cities. The life was simple and quiet there. So I sent my son there and let him live with my relatives. He went to the local high school. This arrangement meant that there was no longer any of the negative influence of my son's peers on him in Hong Kong. The arrangement relieved my pressure.

Leo and Grace are concerned about negative peer influence. Berndt (1996) reports that peer influence is a common source of negative behaviour in children. Peer relationships can also mean romantic relationships (Aries 2001). Eric tells the story of his daughter:

> I discovered my daughter had fallen in love with a boy when she was sixteen. The romance affected her concentration in her studies and so her academic performance was poor. I was afraid that my daughter might be hurt when the romance ended. I did not want my daughter to fall in love when she was only a teenager. Therefore, I sent her abroad in order to separate her from the boy.

Parents are worried about the romantic relationships of their adolescent children. Eric places emphasis on the negative effects arising from the romance of his daughter. These negative effects include emotion and behaviour. Chen et al. (2009) assert that 'romantic involvement in adolescents was associated with more depressive symptoms and behavioural problems. Breakups in romantic relationships were an important factor in producing negative emotional and behavioural consequences' (p. 1282).

Adolescents are required to have social skills to deal with peers as well as parents, teachers and others. Some parents perceive social skills as important for their children. The literature supports the view of these parents. Research suggests that social skills are important for adolescents, particularly in relation to academic performance and behaviour problems (McLelland, Morrison & Holm 2000; Segrin & Flora 2000), and peer relationships (Wentzel 1991). Some parents regard overseas education as a good environment for their children to learn social skills, particularly at boarding schools. Most boarding schools offer extra-curricular activities and pastoral care for students, which provide good opportunities for learning social skills. Bill shares his experiences of the behavioural change of his daughter:

> Last October, my daughter returned to Hong Kong for holidays
> during the term break of her UK boarding school. I found that she
> had become more considerate and sophisticated. When my wife and
> I talked to her on the subject of moral standards, she was willing to
> listen patiently. In the past, when I talked to her on the same subject,
> she did not listen and went back to her bedroom and shut the door. I
> am aware of her change in social skills. I gather that she had been
> taught these at the boarding school. As far as I know, the
> headmistress of the boarding house briefs the students every
> evening. Students are required to listen carefully and patiently. This
> is training in discipline. I have paid a lot of money to support my
> daughter to study in the UK. Now I think it is value for money.

Bill explicitly states here that he has bought not just formal learning but also informal social skill development from the boarding school. Castle (1996) claims that pastoral

care is one of the major areas that make boarding schools attractive. Olivia similarly acknowledges the behavioural change in her son:

> When my son talks with me in long-distance calls, I find that he talks in a logical way. He can analyse the situation of an issue and give explanations. In the past, when he was in Hong Kong, he only gave me very short responses such as 'yes' or 'no'.

In Olivia's opinions, her son has learned some social skills, particularly in making conversation and expressing feelings. Olivia continues the story:

> The housemaster imposes strict regulations and schedules for students to follow. The school finishes at 4 p.m. My son goes back to the boarding house and participates in extra-curricular activities. At 5 p.m. my son starts to do his prep until 6 p.m. for dinner. After dinner, my son resumes his homework till 8:30 p.m. Then the housemaster briefs the students. At 9:30 p.m. students are required to hand their mobile phones to the housemaster and prepare to go to bed. At 10 p.m. all students are required to be in bed. I appreciate this kind of discipline training. My son is not allowed to waste his time watching TV, playing computer games or chatting on his mobile phone at bedtime.

Oliver's son has learned responsible behaviour, such as regular attendance, arrival on time, following house rules and accepting authority. Bill and Olivia chose to send their children to UK private boarding schools; these schools took on parental roles that Bill and Olivia had found difficult to adopt in their home environments. Strict regulations at home can create conflict between parents and children; thus, parents who send their children to a boarding school can pay the school to take on the role of the strict parent. For this reason, Bill believed a UK boarding school education was worth the financial cost. Therefore, economic resources can compensate for middle-class parents' perceived failures in their own parenting styles.

To conclude, some parents think that an only child needs peers to play and work with during adolescence. At the same time these parents usually have time-consuming jobs which make it difficult to give their only child the day-to-day support that they need. Boarding education is a solution. Boarding schools can provide an environment for students to build up peer relationships. Some parents use overseas education as a way of preventing their children from coming under negative peer influence and from engaging in a romantic relationship. Some parents place emphasis on social skills. They see overseas education, particularly boarding schools, as a place for acquiring social skills. Since most Hong Kong public secondary schools do not offer boarding facilities, these parents have to send their children abroad for education.

4.4.3   Exposure to Different Cultures

The findings show that parents want their children to be exposed to different cultures. This contributes to them choosing an overseas education for their children. Some countries, such as the US, offer multicultural education in their schools because these countries' populations are comprised of various ethnic groups with different cultures. In the context of globalisation, it is important to let citizens understand the cultures of other ethnic groups. In Hong Kong, the majority of the population is Chinese. Hong Kong is an international financial centre. The people of Hong Kong, particular young people, should understand the cultures of others. This section investigates the participants' views on exposure to different cultures. Their children were exposed to such cultures in the informal learning environment. Nine participants addressed themselves to this subtheme. Allen sent his son to Canada for his secondary education in 2005. He expresses his opinion as follows:

> My son benefits from exposure to different countries and cultures,
> which expands his vision. In Hong Kong, local people naturally
> adopt a Chinese perspective on things whereas in foreign countries
> one may see things from a broader perspective. My son studies at a
> secondary school in Canada. The school enrols students from
> Eastern Europe and Asia, which creates a good international
> environment for the exchange of ideas and views among students.

My son's schoolmates are from different cultures.

In Allen's opinion, exposure to different cultures can broaden his son's views. Allen appreciates the international environment of the school. Jack agrees with Allen, and adds:

> Half of the student population in my daughter's school is local whereas the other half consists of overseas students with different nationalities.

Allen and Jack perceive exposure to different cultures as important for their children. Allen and Jack made a global school choice and sent their children to international schools, with students from different nations. International students receive both the Western education and exposure to different cultures. A multicultural student population creates an environment for students to learn and understand different cultures. At the same time, educational activities also have a role to play on the issue of culture. Bill shares his daughter's experience:

> One of my daughter's topics was canal. The UK school organised a 4-day tour for the students to visit Amsterdam, Holland. My daughter told me that she and her classmates interviewed local people beside the canals and on the ferries. The students learned about real canals on site and came to understand Dutch culture through this activity.

The purpose of this formal study tour was to learn the topic of canals. However, Bill valued this excursion for the informal learning opportunity it offered in relation to different cultures. Bill tells another story:

> When I was in London, I discussed the punk culture with my daughter. I took her to Trafalgar Square and we observed the punk culture there. When she was on the study tour to Amsterdam, she also visited the Van Gogh Museum. I told her that it was a good opportunity to see the masterpieces of Van Gogh, which she could

not see in Hong Kong.

Bill was happy because his daughter had been exposed to the rich cultures in Europe, from the punks in London to the canals and the paintings of Van Gogh in Amsterdam. The informal learning environment was great for students to understand different cultures. Bill claims that overseas education can broaden his daughter's worldview. However, Bill used his economic resources to help his daughter learn the cultures of different nations. School excursions are expensive, and not all parents can afford the fees. This study tour illustrates the difference in resources between the UK private boarding schools and Hong Kong public schools, and leads to an understanding of why middle-class parents buy the best education for their children.

Karen supports Bill's views and she recounts her son's story:

> My son is exposed to the rich European culture and he experiences it through daily life. If he studies in Hong Kong, he does not have that kind of exposure. For example, he told me that he was not aware of a channel dividing England and France until he travelled to France by ferry. This is exposure.

For Karen, riding on a ferry is not only transportation but also an informal environment for getting to know other cultures. Karen takes this further:

> When my son first arrived in the UK, he stayed with a local family as a home-stay overseas student. One year later, my son moved out. The grandmother of the family hugged my son; she was going to miss him. My son was deeply moved because we do not hug each other in Chinese culture when we depart. Understanding the culture of the UK is a bonus when studying abroad. Let me tell you another story. One day, my son decided to visit a town by train. He arrived at the railway station and asked the staff for information about the journey: the fare, the duration of the journey and the timetable. The staff answered my son's questions patiently. This has changed his

perception of UK people. In the past, my son thought that UK
people were racists. But, when he studied in the UK, he found that
the people were helpful and provided assistance to him whenever he
asked for it. My son has experienced the culture of the UK by
himself.

Karen's story demonstrates that overseas students can learn about different cultures in
daily life, pointing to the value of experiential learning. Fiona also shares her daughter's
experience:

My daughter's school offers many activities for students to
participate in. Each year my daughter has a chance to visit cities in
the UK and other European countries and take part in music and
drama festivals and workshops. She has the chance to meet people
from different cultures. She benefits from the exposure because she
experiences new things. My daughter cannot have such exposure if
she studies in Hong Kong.

In the case of Fiona's daughter, meeting people from different countries is an informal
environment in which to understand different cultures. Bill, Karen and Fiona place
emphasis on tours while Leo focuses on lifestyle. Leo tells the story of his son:

After class, my son has time to practise his musical instrument, to
browse the bookstores, to visit the local libraries, to chat with his
friends at the café, to go to church on Sunday. My son is more
relaxed in the US.

Leo's son has learned and experienced American culture through daily life. Leo
describes his own experience:

Hong Kong is only a financial city whereas the US is a big country
with different ethnic groups and cultures. US society allows people
to choose from different life styles. Let me give you an example.

When I was studying at the University of California, one of my
classmates had achieved excellent academic results. In general, he
might have joined the big companies after his graduation. But, he
chose to go back to his small hometown to work at his father's gas
station. I think my classmate enjoyed the process of studying more
than the academic results. In my opinion, American students are
relaxed at school because they do not regard the aim of schooling as
job-seeking. American students can do whatever they want to do
after graduation.

Leo claims that US society allows people to choose their way of life. That is part of
American culture. Both Leo and his son have experienced the American culture through
an informal learning environment. Debby recounts her daughter's story:

The culture of the UK is more open in terms of sexuality. My
daughter told me that her classmates would accept a one-night stand
whereas she would not because she was proud of her Chinese
culture.

Debby's daughter has come to understand the culture of the UK in daily life. She could
make a comparison between the cultures of East and West. Getting to know other
cultures can also help confirm the values from one's own culture. The English language
is part of English culture. The language can be learned and practised in an informal
environment, particularly in daily life. Overseas students learn English language in their
community, from ordering meals at McDonald's to buying tickets on buses. The venue
for learning English is not just the classrooms or the language laboratory. Overseas
students' proficiency in English will be assessed by international tests like IELTS. These
tests include papers related to listening and oral skills. The materials for testing are
taken from authentic situations in daily life, such as conversations in a café, a fast-food
restaurant or on a bus. Henry sent his son to Australia for secondary education in 1997.
He expresses his opinion:

Australia is a good place for learning English because Australia is an English-speaking country where overseas students can use and practise English. I am sure Hong Kong cannot provide such a learning environment for my son.

In Henry's opinion, an English-speaking environment is important for students to learn English. Australia is an ideal country for this purpose because Australians use English at school and in the community. Colin supports Henry's views and compares Hong Kong with some English-speaking countries:

I was educated in Hong Kong and learned English at school. I know that Hong Kong is not an ideal place for students to learn good English because our mother tongue is Chinese. In English-speaking countries, overseas students are required to use English at schools and in daily life. These countries provide overseas students with a good environment for learning English.

In general, a student uses his or her mother tongue in daily life. Since the Chinese language is the mother tongue for the majority of Hong Kong citizens, students use Chinese at schools and in communities. But, when the students study abroad in English-speaking countries, they are required to use English everywhere. In this situation, English becomes the principal language for learning and in the daily life of overseas students. In this environment, students from Hong Kong are widely exposed to English. Parents expect an overseas education to provide a good environment for their children to learn English. Exposure to different cultures is related to the notion of globalisation. Turner (2010) points out that defining globalisation is not easy and that 'there is no accepted definition of globalisation' (p. 9). There are various dimensions of globalisation, and this study focuses on its cultural and economic dimensions. Debby expresses her opinion:

I want my daughter to be a competent person in the 21st century. With an overseas education, she can extend her vision to other parts of the world.

Allen explains his views on globalisation:

> The majority of the student population in Hong Kong schools is
> ethnic Chinese. Nowadays, globalisation is important. My son
> should be exposed to different cultures.

Colin agrees with Allen:

> I think globalisation is important. My son is studying engineering
> and will graduate from university next year. Job opportunities for
> him are few because many local jobs have already been shifted
> elsewhere. The chance of career development in Hong Kong is slim.
> The year before last, my son told me that he did not like the boring
> life in Australia, and wanted to return to Hong Kong after his
> studies. But, last year, when I discussed with him his future job
> opportunities, he said that he would consider staying in Australia to
> look for a job. At last, he understood globalisation in terms of
> employment.

Colin connects employment with globalisation. He foresees that his son will leave Hong
Kong to seek jobs abroad. Friedman (2007) suggests that globalisation in the 21st
century empowers individuals to collaborate and compete globally. Therefore, people
have more opportunities to work with other individuals, not just compete with them.

To conclude, the participants mentioned in this section are concerned about exposure to
different cultures. Some parents, like Allen and Jack, expect their children to broaden
their worldview and to expand their vision. Most of the parents place emphasis on
knowing and understanding different cultures. An overseas education helps students
learn these cultures through an informal environment, particularly in daily life. Some
parents see the importance of globalisation and link it with culture and employment.
Since the schooling in Hong Kong cannot offer such an informal learning environment,
the parents sent their children abroad for their education.

4.5   Theme 3: The Future of Their Children

Theme 3 includes the reasons that are related to the future these middle-class participants wish for their children. The findings of the study define 'future' as the credentials the middle-class parents want their children to possess, the professions they expect their children to hold, and the nationality they desire for their children to acquire. Ball et al. (1995) suggest that middle-class parents are concerned about the future of their children with a view to sustaining the advantages of their class. This theme is comprised of two subthemes: Admission to Universities (addressing future credentials and professions) and Emigration (addressing future nationality).

4.5.1   Admission to Universities

The findings demonstrate that admission to university contributes to parents choosing an overseas education for their children. Middle-class parents perceive that education, particularly higher education, is important for their children to climb up the social ladder. Power (2000) asserts that members of the middle class largely depend upon the credentials bestowed by the education system to acquire or hold on to their positions. Four participants addressed themselves to this subtheme. In her interview, Nancy says:

> There are not enough places in undergraduate courses at local universities. There are too many candidates competing for places. The competition is fierce. For example, my son's chance of getting an offer is slim because he has failed Chinese Language. The local universities do not offer a place to a candidate who cannot get a pass in both Chinese and English Language. If my son could get a place at a local university, I would not send him abroad for his education.

In Nancy's opinion, the provision of government-funded first-degree places cannot satisfy the demand for higher education. In addition, her son cannot meet the specific entry requirements in relation to a core subject. Maloutas (2007) reports that middle-class parents expect their children to have access to higher education. If the

children fail to get a place at university, the parents may consider sending their children abroad for a university education. Hong Kong middle-class parents are no exception. In the context of Hong Kong, university education is a positional good because only about 41% of the Six Form HKALE students can get a place at the local public universities each year. Most, if not all, of the middle-class parents want their children to get a degree in order to maintain their social status. Hong Kong parents may send their children abroad for school education in the first place, and to get them into an overseas university at a later stage. Nancy, Karen and Eric first sent their children overseas for their school education. Karen agrees with Nancy and recounts her son's story:

> My son took the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination (HKCEE) in 2008. Unfortunately, he failed in the core subjects. He retook the HKCEE in 2009, and failed again. My son asked me to let him study in the UK because he did not believe he would be admitted to a local university. In addition, his friends who were studying in the UK had already got good results in the Advanced Level Examination and were prepared to study at a university there. Since my son's academic results were not good enough to be admitted to a local university, I sent him to the UK for his senior secondary education with a view to getting a place at a university there at a later stage.

This is evidence of the effort both Karen and her son were willing to make to increase his chances for entry into university. Eric explains why his daughter must go overseas for her education:

> My daughter's academic performance was poor. I judged that she would only have a slim chance of getting a place at a local university.

The children of Nancy, Karen and Eric could not gain a place at a local university since they did not meet the academic achievement requirements for entry. The disappointment of these parents is understandable. The crux of the problem is that the Hong Kong

Government cannot provide sufficient government-funded first-degree places.
Table 4e shows the number and percentage of the government-funded first-degree
places in recent years.

Table 4e: Number and percentage of the government-funded first-degree places in 1998, 2000, 2002, 2004, 2006, 2008, 2010

Year	1998	2000	2002	2004	2006	2008	2010
Government-funded first-degree places (No.)	14,029	14,184	14,607	14,584	15,490	15,818	16,094
HKALE Candidates admitted (%)	43.6	39.9	39.4	40.5	41.8	41.3	40.4

Source: University Grant Committee 2010

Table 4e demonstrates that only about 41% of the Sixth Form HKALE students can get
a government-funded first-degree place each year. The demand for an education
resulting in a first degree from a university is strong among middle-class parents and
students. Against this background of fierce competition, the local universities reject
applicants who do not get the grades they need to take up a place. In other words, the
problem is one of supply and demand, rather than actual lack of ability for university
study of students like Nancy's, Karen's and Eric's children. Based on the data in Table
4e, about six of ten Sixth Form students cannot be admitted to a local university each
year, even though, in general, those who take the HKALE have a strong desire for a
place at a local public university. In the Hong Kong system, Secondary Five (S.5)
students are required to take the public examination, i.e., the Hong Kong Certificate of
Education Examination (HKCEE), at the end of the school year. The students who do
not want to go to university after the completion of S.5 education would not enrol in a
Sixth Form course. These students may enter the job market directly or enrol in
vocational training courses offered by vocational institutions. The competition for Sixth
Form places is fierce. Those who are admitted to Sixth Form courses with good results

in the HKCEE have a strong aspiration to get a place at a local university, or else they would not invest two years in the Sixth Form programmes. Table 4f illustrates the competition for Sixth Form places.

Table 4f: Number of S.5 and S.6 students in the years 2004 to 2009

Year	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
S.5 students (No.)	68,224	68,043	67,287	69,131	69,806	70,678
S.6 students (No.)	25,328	25,649	25,845	25,998	25,799	25,624
S.5 students admitted to Sixth Form courses (%)	37.1	37.6	38.4	37.6	36.9	36.2

Source: Census and Statistics Department 2010, p. 291

According to Table 4f, on average about 37% of S.5 students are admitted to Sixth Form courses. Local universities only admit those applicants with good results in the HKALE to government-funded first-degree places. Therefore, the HKALE is widely recognised as the pathway to a local university. Grace reveals the reasons for wishing that her son get a university degree. She said,

> A university degree is the basic qualification for young people. That is the reason why I want my son to receive a higher education.

As far as the child's future is concerned, Grace wants her son to get a degree. Grace perceives a degree as the basic qualification for young people. Research asserts the importance of credentials because 'employers formalize their recruitment practices, where certified knowledge is used as a basic screening device' (Brown 2003, p. 153). Research findings support the claim that university qualification is an advantage in employment. The University of Hong Kong conducted a survey on fresh graduate employment in 2009; the findings reported that the unemployment rate for graduates was as low as 0.2% (Centre of Development and Resources for Students 2009). It is no wonder then that middle-class parents wish to use higher education to secure their children's future (Power 2000) and avoid downward social mobility. Grace's views can be taken further. Most middle-class parents are professionals; they want their children to

follow suit and become professionals in the future. Most professions require at least a bachelor's degree as an entry-level qualification. Take the profession of forecasting economics as an example. Research findings report that 'most of the forecasters have a Bachelor's (52%) or a Master's degree (41%)' (Jain 2006, p. 33). This example illustrates that a first degree is needed, as Grace puts it, only as 'the basic qualification' for professionals. While employment in a trade or in services does not require a university degree, those are not the kind of jobs middle-class parents wish for their children (Ball 1993).

To conclude, the participants are concerned about the future of their children. Some of the participants perceive a degree as essential for the future of young people. The desire for their child to get a government-funded first degree from a university is strong but the provision of university places is insufficient to meet the demand. The middle-class parents, particularly those whose children are relatively low-achieving students, prepare well in advance. They send their children abroad for their secondary education in order to secure a place at an overseas university at a later stage.

4.5.2 Emigration

The findings show that some parents wish to have access to emigration. This contributes to them choosing an overseas education. Migration is a social issue concerning the geographic mobility of people. The change in Hong Kong's status in 1997 has made parents consider their children's future under Chinese sovereignty. Henry sent his son to Australia for his secondary education in 1997. He recounts his own experience in China:

> I lived in China when I was young, during the 1960s, and
> experienced difficulties in my daily life. I also witnessed the June 4
> Incident in 1989, which occurred in Beijing. The incident frightened
> me very much.

Henry had miserable experiences in China. He highlights the impact of the June 4 Incident in 1989 which has given him a scare. His fright is understandable. Brook (1992)

describes the incident as follows:

> On the night of June 3, 1989, tens of thousands of soldiers armed
> with assault rifles forced their way into the city of Beijing and drove
> unarmed student protesters from the central square at Tiananmen.
> On the morning of June 4, thousands lay dead and dying in the
> streets, the hospitals, and the homes of Beijing (Preface p. i).

The incident was shocking to all who witnessed it at that time. Hong Kong citizens were the most frightened because of the impending change of sovereignty in 1997. Emigration was the best way to get away from the rule of the Chinese Government. Cheng (2011) reports that after the crackdown, 'one-third of Hong Kong's 1.55 million households were planning to emigrate' (p. 182). Eric expresses his views on the sovereignty change in 1997:

> I was worried about the handover of Hong Kong in 1997. When I
> was 11 years old, I heard of the severe political movements in China
> in the 1960s. The most influential one was the Cultural Revolution
> that occurred between 1966 and 1976. I have had a phobia about the
> Chinese Communist Party since I was young. My application for an
> immigration visa was approved in April 1989, two months before
> the June 4 Incident in Beijing. When the incident took place, I
> emigrated to Australia without delay.

Henry and Eric had a negative perception of the Chinese Government. Thus, they were worried about the change of sovereignty in 1997. Eric emigrated to Australia in 1989, but he returned to Hong Kong for employment in 2001. However, he sent his daughter to Australia for her secondary education in 2003. Henry continues his story:

> The Chinese Communist Party regained sovereignty over Hong
> Kong in 1997. For the sake of my son's future, I sent him to
> Australia for his secondary education. At that time he was only 14
> years old. I was planning to emigrate. My strategy was that I would

send my son to Australia as an overseas student in the first instance. After his graduation from an Australian university he could find a job and stay behind. The next step would be the application for citizenship. Finally, all members of my family would emigrate to Australia through the category of family reunion.

In the interest of his son's future, Henry considered emigration to Australia. Henry's case shows that overseas schooling could be used as a vehicle for emigration. Henry was not the only one to use this strategy. Cheng (2011) reports that some Hong Kong citizens 'had family members residing abroad to secure the right of permanent residence in a foreign country' (p. 182). Henry uses his economic resources as a strategy for emigration to Australia. The aim is to maintain the position and status of his entire family. The data show that of the 15 research participants only Henry and Eric had no confidence in the change of sovereignty in 1997. My interpretation of this is that Henry and Eric were older than the other participants and had witnessed both the Cultural Revolution of 1966-1976 and the June 4 Incident in 1989. Henry and Eric experienced the political and economic turmoil of the 1960s and 1970s in China. They came to Hong Kong as refugees. Eric used the word 'phobia' to describe his perception of the Chinese Communist Party. Their unhappy experience made them emigrate for the sake of their children, as Eric stated. However, the movements and incidents that prompted their emigration happened years ago. In recent years, the present Chinese government has focused on economic development. This may mean that Eric and Henry's perceptions of life in China were worse than they should be, but that did not make them any less real. Having experienced upward mobility into the middle class, they were keen to maintain their newly acquired social position. They believed that using their children's education as a potential tool for emigration could ensure this position for their children and for themselves. To conclude, some of the participants are concerned about the future of their children in terms of educational credentials and a future profession while others make use of overseas schooling as part of their plan to emigrate to the country of their choice.

4.6 Summary

This chapter has analysed the data and identified three themes and nine subthemes. Theme 1 was entitled 'Formal Learning Environment', under which four subthemes were identified: Arts Subjects, English-Medium Education, Small-Class Teaching and Balanced Education. The analysis found that some Hong Kong middle-class parents used their economic resources to fund the best education for their children in order to maintain their class status. The subthemes could also be seen as a positional good for the middle class. Theme 2 was entitled 'Informal Learning Environment', under which three subthemes were identified: Self-Care Skills and Independence, Peers and Social Skills and Exposure to Different Cultures. The analysis found that some Hong Kong middle-class parents used their economic resources to fund informal learning opportunities for their children. The parents paid boarding schools to act as good parents for their children, since these parents believed that they could not look after their children properly and effectively. Theme 3 was entitled 'The Future of Their Children', under which two subthemes were identified: Admission to Universities and Emigration. The analysis found that some Hong Kong middle-class parents were concerned about the future of their children, particularly their future credentials, professions and nationality, with a view to sustaining their class advantage.

Chapter 5

Conclusions and Recommendations

In this chapter, I summarise my major research findings by answering the research question introduced in Chapter 1:

What are the reasons for Hong Kong parents sending their children abroad for their secondary education?

I then draw out the significance of the research and also discuss its limitations. Finally, recommendations will be made for further studies. The research found three themes and nine subthemes, which have been analysed and discussed in Chapter 4. Theme 1 focused on the formal learning environment and identified the following subthemes: Art Subjects, Medium of Instruction, Small Class Teaching, and Balanced Education. Theme 2 focused on the informal learning environment and identified the following subthemes: Skills of Self-Care and Independence, Peers and Social Skills, and Exposure to Different Cultures. Theme 3 focused on the future of the participants' children and identified the following subthemes: Admission to Universities (addressing future credentials and professions), and Emigration (addressing future nationality).

5.1　Answering the Research Question

In this section, I draw out overall conclusions in connection with the broader context of Hong Kong education. I will outline nine reasons, which answer the research question.

Reason 1: Parents choose to send their children overseas for their secondary education because:

The policy on curriculum and academic structure marginalises arts subjects at the senior secondary level.

The research findings indicate that the participants expect a desirable learning environment for their children. The parents' stories demonstrate that they look for quality in education, with arts subjects perceived as one essential component of this. In the views of these parents, arts subjects are essential for whole-person development. They highlight the importance of aesthetic development and emphasise that students should be given the chance to study arts subjects with a view to discovering and nurturing their talents. These parents call for a diversified curriculum, in which arts subjects are included. The parents interviewed as part of the study are dissatisfied with the relatively narrow curriculum of the senior secondary years in Hong Kong. Education and Manpower Bureau introduced the New Senior Secondary (NSS) academic structure in 2004. The four core subjects (Chinese Language, English Language, Mathematics and Liberal Studies) occupy 45-55% of school time while only 20-30% is reserved for the two or three elective subjects. The remaining 15-35% of time is for Other Learning Experiences (Moral and Civic Education, Community Service, Aesthetic and Physical Activities, and Career-related Experiences). Although music and visual arts are included in the list of elective subjects, the two arts subjects cannot be offered by most of the local schools. Parents' values influence the Hong Kong school curriculum. Most of the parents in Hong Kong take a pragmatic view of arts subjects and do not regard them to be as useful as other elective subjects, such as science, technology and commerce subjects. As a result, arts subjects are unpopular and excluded from timetables. Parents' pragmatic choice shapes the narrow curriculum at senior secondary level. The parents who prefer an arts education for their children are in the minority, yet some participants valued arts subjects so highly that they chose to send their children abroad for their secondary education.

Reason 2: Parents choose to send their children overseas for their secondary education because:

The policy regarding MOI at secondary schools cannot satisfy the parents' desire for an English-medium education.

A desire for an English-medium education is another reason why parents send their children overseas for their secondary education. The participants perceive that the

implementation of mother-tongue education undermines students' English proficiency. These parents were dissatisfied with the language policy and therefore sent their children overseas for their secondary education. Some of the participants are concerned about jobs and employment opportunities for their children after graduation. Hong Kong parents tend to favour English-medium schools because they are pragmatically minded. The parents, who place strong emphasis on proficiency in English, perceive that employers require their staff to have good language skills in English because Hong Kong is an important global financial and services centre. Most people in Hong Kong see English as the language of international commerce.

Reason 3: Parents choose to send their children overseas for their secondary education because:

The policy on class size at secondary school level cannot satisfy the parents' desire for small class teaching.

A desire for small class teaching is another reason why parents send their children abroad for their secondary education. The average class size in public secondary schools in 2009 was 35.2 students (Education Bureau 2009c). The class size is large in comparison with the English-speaking countries where Hong Kong parents send their children. Parents prefer small class teaching because they consider this can benefit students. Small classes promote student engagement, positive teacher-student interaction, and increase time spent on instruction rather than on discipline. Parents also thought smaller class sizes meant teachers were able to get to know their students and to implement more interactive pedagogical approaches, thus enhancing the quality of education. The Hong Kong Government has no intention of implementing small class teaching in public secondary schools. Therefore, the participants sent their children overseas for their secondary education.

Reason 4: Parents choose to send their children overseas for their secondary education because:

**The examination-oriented culture compromises the all-round
development of students.**

The findings show that parents' desire for a balanced education, that is, one that strikes a balance between academic subjects and extra-curricular activities, contributes to their choosing overseas schooling for their children. The learning culture at Hong Kong schools is regarded as examination-oriented, with an overemphasis on academic learning. The participants perceive this as the dominant learning culture at Hong Kong schools. Some of these parents argue that their children do not fit into the Hong Kong education system because it is results-oriented. These parents express the view that their children find it very difficult to learn in such an environment. Their children have to work very hard all day and do not have time to develop in areas other than academic subjects. These parents are concerned about the physical and psychological health of their children because they do not have time to participate in extra-curricular activities. The parents suggest that Hong Kong schools cannot provide students with a balanced education mainly due to an overemphasis on academic subjects and examinations. As a result, they send their children abroad for their secondary education. Hong Kong schools claim to provide an all-round education, but the real situation is not satisfactory because the curriculum focuses on the academic development of pupils.

Reason 5: Parents choose to send their children overseas for their secondary education
because:

> **Parents are aware that their overprotection and overindulgence
> compromise their children's learning of the skills of self-care and
> independence. These parents perceive that overseas schooling is a better
> environment for learning these skills.**

The parents' desire for their children to acquire the skills of self-care and independence is another reason for parents sending their children overseas for their secondary education. These parents are critical of their own overprotection because they perceive this compromises the acquisition of self-care skills. They realise that they provide their children with too many material goods or protect them from challenges. Overindulgence

- 99 -

is a growing tendency, particularly among young middle-class parents, and overindulged children may find it hard to endure frustration. The findings suggest that parents prefer to use an overseas environment, especially boarding schools, to provide their children with opportunities to learn those skills in an informal way. Some participants perceive a comfort zone (see Section 4.4.1) as compromising the skills of self-care. These parents argue that their children should be independent in daily life, and learn how to make a decision. They claim that an overseas environment can provide their children with better opportunities for learning these skills, in effect using the overseas experience to make up for deficits in their own parenting.

Reason 6: Parents choose to send their children overseas for their secondary education because:

> **Some parents regard an overseas education as a good environment for imparting social skills to their children, particularly in boarding schools.**

The issue of peers and social skills are interconnected as a reason for parents to send their children abroad for their education. Some participants highlight peer relationships in connection with overseas schooling whereas others place more emphasis on social skills. It is commonly believed that an only child is likely to be spoiled, selfish, lonely and / or maladjusted. Some parents perceive that an only child needs peers to play with during adolescence. Usually, these parents have time-consuming jobs which make it difficult to give their children the day-to-day support they need. Overseas boarding education is a solution, as above, to take on parenting roles that these Hong Kong parents feel unable to fulfill. Adolescents need to have the social skills to deal with peers as well as parents, teachers, and others. Social skills are important for adolescents, particularly in relation to academic performance and behaviour. In overseas boarding schools, peers can provide support for the development of such skills. At the same time, other parents use overseas education as a measure to prevent their children from negative peer influence and romantic relationships at home.

Reason 7: Parents choose to send their children overseas for their secondary education because:

The parents perceive that overseas schooling can provide their children with exposure to different cultures, which may strengthen their competiveness in the context of globalisation.

Exposure to different cultures is another reason for parents sending their children abroad for their secondary education. Some parents expect their children to broaden their worldview and to expand their vision. Most of the parents place emphasis on knowing and understanding different cultures. International competitiveness goes hand in hand with globalisation. Overseas schooling helps students learn these cultures in an informal environment, particularly in daily life. Some parents see the importance of globalisation and link it with culture and employment. However, the majority of Hong Kong's population is Chinese, and the public schools accept only local students. Thus, the exposure to different cultures is limited in society generally as well as in schools. Since the schooling in Hong Kong cannot offer exposure to different cultures, the parents send their children abroad for their secondary education.

Reason 8: Parents choose to send their children overseas for their secondary education because:

The number of government-funded first-degree places is not adequate to satisfy high school students' strong desire for a higher education.

Admission to university is yet another reason why parents send their children abroad for their secondary education. Members of the middle class largely depend upon the credentials bestowed by the education system to acquire or hold on to their positions. Some parents are concerned about the future of their children and perceive a degree as essential. In Hong Kong, the demand for government-funded first-degree places is strong, but the number of places provided is insufficient. Some parents estimate that their children have a very slim chance of receiving an offer from a local university. At the same time, some countries, such as Australia, Canada, the UK, the US and New

Zealand, welcome overseas students. These middle-class parents prepare well in advance. Initially, they send their children abroad for their secondary education, and secure a place at a university in the host country at a later stage.

Reason 9: Parents choose to send their children overseas for their secondary education because:

> **Some parents use overseas schooling as a vehicle for emigrating to their preferred country.**

There was a change in Hong Kong's sovereignty in 1997. Some parents who had had miserable experiences in China expressed a strong desire to emigrate to a Western country. These parents, who had witnessed both the Cultural Revolution of 1966-1976 and the June 4 Incident in 1989, considered another nationality for their children in the future and therefore sent them overseas for their secondary education as a first step towards emigration.

5.2   Significance of This Research

The current study found nine reasons for Hong Kong parents sending their children abroad for their secondary education. These reasons can be interpreted further in order to draw out their full significance. Table 5a classifies these reasons into two sets, i.e., Instrumental reasons and Social and Emotional reasons. Instrumental Reasons are concerned with the future of the children while Social and Emotional Reasons are related to the present.

The Instrumental Reasons include four reasons which show that some parents place emphasis on the future of their children. These parents are concerned about jobs and the employment prospects of their children after graduation. Therefore, they want for their children an English-medium education (Reason 2), exposure to different cultures (Reason 7), government-funded first-degree places (Reason 8), emigration (Reason 9).

Table 5a: Instrumental Reasons and Social and Emotional Reasons

Instrumental Reasons (future)	Social and Emotional Reasons (now)
Theme 1	Theme 1
• Reason 2: MOI	• Reason 1: Arts Subjects
Bill, Henry, Grace, Ian, Mary	*Bill, Debby, Eric, Fiona, Jack*
Theme 2	• Reason 3: Small Class Teaching
• Reason 7: Exposure to Different	*Allen, Bill, Debby, Fiona, Mary*
Cultures	
Allen, Bill, Colin, Debby,	• Reason 4: Balanced Education
Fiona, Henry, Karen, Leo	*Debby, Grace, Jack, Leo,*
	Nancy, Olivia
Theme 3	
• Reason 8: Admission to	Theme 2
Universities	• Reason 5: Skills of Self-care and
Eric, Karen, Grace, Nancy	Independence
	Bill, Debby, Eric, Karen, Olivia
• Reason 9: Emigration	
Eric, Henry	• Reason 6: Peer and Social Skills
	Bill, Eric, Fiona, Grace, Karen,
	Leo, Olivia

The Social and Emotional Reasons include five reasons which demonstrate that some parents place greater emphasis on the current circumstances of their children. These parents are concerned about the present learning environment of their children. Therefore, they want their children to be able to study arts subjects (Reason 1), to receive small class teaching (Reason 3), to have a balanced education (Reason 4), to learn the skills of self-care and independence (Reason 5), and to interact with their peers and to develop social skills (Reason 6). Table 5b indicates that there are two groups of parents. The first group comprises ten parents who provide *both* Instrumental *and* Social and Emotional Reasons. The second group comprises five parents who provide *either* Instrumental *or* Social and Emotional Reasons.

Table 5b: Grouping of parents in terms of reasons

Instrumental Reasons *and* Social and Emotional Reasons	Instrumental Reasons *or* Social and Emotional Reasons
Allen, Bill, Debby, Eric, Fiona, Grace, Karen, Leo, Mary, Nancy	*Colin, Henry, Ian, Jack, Olivia*

The current study identified nine reasons for Hong Kong parents sending their children abroad for their secondary education. These findings contribute to the information publicly available to the Hong Kong Government in its framing of school education policy in the future. The choice of overseas schooling is a concern for Hong Kong Government because it has been implementing education reforms since 2000. The large number of parents choosing overseas schooling for their children reflects the weaknesses of the reforms to a certain extent. The current research has analysed the views of a small sample of parents regarding overseas schooling for their children and identified a number of reasons given. I strongly recommend that the Hong Kong Government consider the reasons identified in the research in any review of its current education policy. The current study sought to add to the information gathered in a 2002 survey on the topic of 'Hong Kong students studying outside Hong Kong', published in the *Thematic Household Survey Report No. 9* (Census and Statistics Department 2002) (see Section 1.1). The current study sought to fill the gap left by that survey by employing a qualitative approach to exploring the reasons for Hong Kong parents sending their children abroad for their secondary education. The study interviewed parents in depth and let them express their views freely. It identified nine reasons, which were different from those suggested by the survey because this research used rich data for its analysis and a thick description for its interpretation.

This research explored the relationship between education and social position in the Hong Kong middle class. This relationship has not been studied previously, and the research presented in this thesis fills that gap. This research found that EMI schools were considered the most prestigious schools in Hong Kong. Many Hong Kong middle-class parents regard EMI schools as a positional good. These parents might not accept the possibility of sending their children to CMI schools, which are labelled as

lower status. They would search for an overseas school if their children could not obtain a place at an EMI school. The results of this research indicated the significant relationship between EMI schools and the social position of Hong Kong middle-class parents.

Another significant aspect of this research was its examination of the strategies and resources used by Hong Kong middle-class parents to maintain their class advantages. This research found that the parents interviewed for this study used their economic resources to fund the best education for their children in order to help them achieve academic success. These parents also used cultural and social resources to improve their children's educational prospects.

In addition, this research found that the interviewed parents placed emphasis on the proper behaviour of their children, which was perceived as helping children achieve greater educational success. This research also found that the interviewed parents appreciated private boarding schools, which provided extra-curricular activities and an active social life for students. These research findings will be helpful for future studies.

5.3   Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

The research has two limitations. First, it interviewed only a small number of parents. This is a common limitation of qualitative studies. Second, it did not include the participants who had sent their children abroad before 1997. The research drew a boundary by using the year 1997 when China resumed its sovereignty over Hong Kong. In general, the change in sovereignty accompanied a change in policy which affected education. Before 1997, the British Government had ruled Hong Kong for 150 years, and the local education system followed the UK's without significant changes. The cut-off year 1997 was meaningful and significant due to the change in sovereignty. However, before 1997, there were also parents who sent their children abroad for their secondary education. Since the current study did not include such parents, a limitation emerged. Finally, only the parents were interviewed, not their children who went overseas.

In the light of the findings and conclusions of this research, as well as the limitations discussed in this section, recommendations have been formulated for future research. This research involved interviews with a small number of parents, which might not be representative of the views of others. It is thus recommended that future qualitative research should include more participants. In particular, future research could focus on specific groups of parents to discern any possible differences between them—for example, differences between mothers and fathers, or between parents from different occupational backgrounds.

This research did not include interviews with parents who had sent their children abroad before 1997. The researcher recommends that future research focus on those pre-1997 parents in order to fill this knowledge gap. These findings could be compared with the findings of this research.

This research also did not include interviews with the children of the participants, as these children's views could not be obtained. Thus, it is recommended that future research include interviews with the children of Hong Kong middle-class parents, and that these children be interviewed independently. In particular, it may be worthwhile to explore whether and how these children influence their parents' decisions to pursue overseas education.

This concluding paragraph reviews the achievements made. First, the research identified nine reasons why Hong Kong parents send their children abroad for their secondary education. These reasons fill a gap in the existing literature and contribute to knowledge in the field. Second, the research for the first time ascertains the views of parents on this matter in a systematic and scientific way who do not have any channels available to them express them, and which are thus available to the Hong Kong Government. Policy-makers should consider these reasons when formulating or reviewing education policies in the future. Last but not least, the research explored the topic from different perspectives, providing research communities with new ideas and making recommendations for future studies. The research has made a contribution to research communities as a whole and to Hong Kong education in particular.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Consent Form

Faculty of Arts & Social Science

P. O. Box 222

Lindfield NSW 2070

Australia

Consent Form

University of Technology, Sydney

I _____ agree to participate in the research project "Why do Hong Kong parents send their children abroad for secondary education?" UTS HREC approval reference number is: 2005 – 062P, being conducted by Casey Leung, Building 10, 235 Jones Street, Ultimo, Sydney, Australia, phone number (Hong Kong) ▮▮▮▮ of the University of Technology, Sydney for his Doctor of Education degree.

I understand that the purpose of this study is to investigate the reasons and rationales for Hong Kong parents to send their children abroad for secondary education. I understand that my participation in this research will involve an interview that will last for about one hour, and will provide some personal data for analysis.

I am aware that I can contact Casey Leung or his supervisor Dr Kitty te Riele at (612) 95415269 or email: kitty.teriele@uts.edu.au if I have any concerns about the research. I also understand that I am free to withdraw my participation from this research project at any time I wish, without consequences, and without giving a reason.

I agree that Casey Leung has answered all my questions fully and clearly. I agree that the research data gathered from this project may be published in a form that does not identify me in any way.

_____   Date

Signature (participant)

_____   Date

Signature (researcher)

Note:

This study has been approved by the University of Technology, Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee. If you have any complaints or reservations about any aspect of your participations in this research which you cannot resolve with the researcher, you may contact the Ethics Officer (ph:02 9514 9615, Research.Ethics@uts.edu.au) and quote the UTS HREC reference number. Any complaint you make will be treated in confidence and investigated fully and you will be informed of the outcome.

HKMA, the local EdD secretariat, is the individual contact person in Hong Kong

Appendix B: Interview Questions

Guiding Questions for Interview

The following questions will be asked during the interview.

- In which year does your child go abroad for secondary education?
- Which country does your child go?
- At which level or grade does your child enrol?
- How old was your child at that time?
- Why do you send your child abroad for secondary education? Can you tell me one main reason?
- (Probing question 1) You have just mentioned the term XXXX. What do you mean? Can you clarify it?
- (Probing question 2) You have expressed the idea of YYYY. Can you tell me more about it?
- (Probing question 3) You have mentioned ZZZZ. Can you explain it? Can you give me examples?
- You have told me one main reason. Can you tell me another reason?
- (Ask probing questions when there is a need).
- You have told me two reasons. Can you tell me the third reason?
- (Ask probing questions when there is a need. If the parent could not tell the third reason, I change the subject and ask the optional questions below.)
- (Optional) Let us change the subject. What criteria would you use when you choose a school for your child?
- (Optional) Let us change the subject. What advice would you give to the Hong Kong Government for improving the education of Hong Kong?
- Before I turn off the recorder, do you want to add anything?