

UNIVERSITY OF SZEGED
FACULTY OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES
DOCTORAL SCHOOL OF EDUCATION



**CONTEXTS OF SCHOOL AND PASTORALIST FAMILY
COMMUNICATION IN RURAL MONGOLIA:
AN ECOLOGICAL MODEL**

PhD dissertation by

BATDULAM SUKHBAATAR

SUPERVISOR: Dr. habil. KLÁRA TARKÓ

HUNGARY

2020

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Dedication	3
Acknowledgements	4
Grant information	5
List of abbreviations	6
List of definitions of Mongolian words	7
List of tables	8
List of figures	9
List of appendices	10
Chapter I. Introduction	11
1.1. Background	11
1.2. Problem statement	12
1.3. Purpose of the study	13
1.4. Organization of the dissertation	13
Chapter II. Literature review	15
2.1. Introduction	15
2.2. Theoretical framework	18
2.3. Proposed conceptual framework: Contexts of school and herder family communication in Mongolia	20
2.3.1. The microsystem	21
2.3.2. The mesosystem	30
2.3.3. Contextual factors in the exosystem	33
2.3.4. Contextual factors in the macrosystem	39
2.4. Conclusion	42
Chapter III. Methodology	44
3.1. Research objectives	44
3.2. Research questions	44
3.3. Research design	44
3.3.1. Phenomenology	45
3.3.2. Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA)	46
3.4. Research site	48
3.4.1. County School A	48
3.4.2. County School B	50
3.5. Participants	51
3.5.1. Classroom teachers	51
3.5.2. Herder parents	52
3.5.3. Samples used in sub-studies	55
3.6. Research instrument	56
3.7. Data collection procedure	57
3.8. Data analysis	58
3.9. Ethical considerations	60

Chapter IV. Findings	61
4.1. Sub-study 1. The Microsystem: Pastoralist parents’ response to educational policies and their impact on living arrangements for school age children	63
4.1.1. Introduction	63
4.1.2. Methodology	64
4.1.3. Findings	64
4.1.4. Conclusion	70
4.2. Sub-study 2. The mesosystem: Teachers’ experiences in communicating with pastoralist parents	72
4.2.1. Introduction	72
4.2.2. Methodology	73
4.2.3. Findings	74
4.2.4. Conclusion	81
4.3. Sub-study 3. The exosystem and the macrosystem: Contextual factors impacting school and pastoralist family communication	83
4.3.1. Introduction	83
4.3.2. Methodology	84
4.3.3. Findings	84
4.3.4. Conclusion	110
Chapter V. Discussion and Conclusion	112
5.1. Discussion	112
5.1.1. Political commitment and donor coordination	112
5.1.2. Rural school and school-related migration	117
5.1.3. Teacher education and the teaching profession	122
5.2. Conclusion	130
5.3. Limitations	134
5.4. Recommendations for future studies	135
5.5. Implications	136
5.5.1. Implications for teacher education	136
5.5.2. Methodological implications	139
5.5.3. Theoretical implications	140
Publications related to the dissertation	143
References	144
Appendices	156

Dedication

I would like to dedicate this work in memory of
my dear father, Sukhbaatar Luvsantseren, and
my dear mother, Densmaa Tseren.

>>

Acknowledgements

I gratefully acknowledge contributions made by a number of people and organizations to the completion of this dissertation. I would like to express my sincere gratitude and appreciation to the following:

The Stipendium Hungaricum Program which provided me a great opportunity to study at the University of Szeged.

My supervisor, Dr. habil. Klára Tarkó, for her time and effort she invested in the whole process of my doctoral study, and for her invaluable suggestions and advice.

My internal defense reviewers, Dr. Éva D. Molnár and Dr. Dóra Katalin Prievara, for their careful reviews and precious suggestions.

The Civil Society Scholar Award of the Open Society Foundation which supported my fieldwork. This award made my field visits to two remote counties in eastern Mongolia during snowy and extremely cold months less challenging and helped me collect rich data.

My academic friends who assisted me with their reviews and translations of my research instrument.

Classroom teachers and herder parents who voluntarily participated in the study and provided me with rich data.

The rural schools' staff who assisted me during my field visits.

My batchmates for their friendly relations and good company. The number of picnics we had together helped me take breaks from complicated academic workloads and made me feel refreshed enough to dig into the time-consuming work once again.

The doctoral school research seminar members for their helpful comments and inquiries, and staff members for their kind support.

And my family for their encouragement and praises.

Grant information

This study was supported by the Civil Society Scholar Award
(Grant Number IN2017-37074)
of the Open Society Foundation.

>>

List of abbreviations

ADB	Asian Development Bank
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
DANIDA	Danish International Development Agency
EU	European Union
EFA	Education for All
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GFSP	Government Food Stamp Program
HEI	Higher Education Institution
HW	Homework
IPA	Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis
IRB	Institutional Review Board
JICA	Japanese International Cooperation Agency
MECS	Ministry of Education, Culture and Science
MECSS	Ministry of Education, Culture, Science and Sport
MES	Ministry of Education and Science
MFOS	Mongolian Foundation for Open Society
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NSOM	National Statistical Office of Mongolia
P-T meeting	Parent-Teacher meeting
SCJ	Save the Children Japan
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Science and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USA	United States of America
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

List of definitions of Mongolian words

<i>Bagh</i>	A third-level or the smallest administrative division under a county of a province
<i>Dzud</i>	Extreme weather events in harsh winters that usually cause mass livestock mortality due to cold temperatures with excessive snowfall that restricts grazing (Groppo & Kraehnert, 2016)
<i>Ger</i>	A yurt or Mongolian traditional dwelling
<i>Tugrik</i>	The official currency of Mongolia

List of tables

Table 1. Changes in the structure of general education schools	22
Table 2. Growth in the number of kindergartens in the past five school years	23
Table 3. The number of schools and 3rd shift classes in the past five school years	24
Table 4. Teachers' demographic information	53
Table 5. Pastoralist parents' demographic information	54
Table 6. The samples of the sub-studies	55
Table 7. Initial and finalized findings of Sub-study 1	59
Table 8. The sample of Sub-study 1	64
Table 9. The sample of Sub-study 2	73
Table 10. The sample of Sub-study 3	84

List of figures

Figure 1. Nested model of ecological systems originally proposed by Bronfenbrenner	18
Figure 2. The contextual factors and home-school cooperation in Hong Kong	20
Figure 3. The conceptual framework: Ecological contexts of school and pastoralist family communication in rural Mongolia	21
Figure 4. An ecological model: Contexts of communication between school and pastoralist family in rural Mongolia	62

List of appendices

Appendix A. Interview protocol for classroom teachers	156
Appendix B. Interview protocol for herder parents	159
Appendix C. Informed consent form	161
Appendix D. Initial findings of Sub-study 1	162

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background

Rose and Dyer (2008, as cited in Lesorogol, Chowa, & Ansong, 2011) stated that pastoralists have some of the lowest rates of educational attainment worldwide. They argued this is because there have always been contradictions between formal schooling and traditions of pastoralism. For example, reindeer pastoralists in the Republic of Sakha in the Russian Federation believed that formal education would prevent the young from practicing and learning their original lifestyle of indigenous reindeer breeding if the children stayed in boarding schools for nine months during the school year (Belianskaia, 2016). Indigenous reindeer pastoralists' children brought to boarding schools in Yamal in the Russian Federation were not allowed to speak their native languages or to wear their traditional clothes and this could easily lead to a loss of their unique culture and language (Laptander, 2013). Moreover, young pastoralist children in Yamal were separated from their parents to start school at the age of six (Liarskaya, 2013). Samburu pastoralists in northern Kenya faced herding labor shortages when they sent their sons to school (Lesorogol et al., 2011). Pastoralists in Tibet were not able to get proper access to formal education (Stolpe, 2016). In India, pastoralists reduced their herd sizes in order to free up their children for school (Dyer, 2016). Like the pastoralists in the other parts of the world, Mongolian pastoralists have also been experiencing some of these challenges since the 1990s post-soviet market economy reforms.

Before the 1990s, Mongolian pastoralism and education policy were closely interconnected (Stolpe, 2016) and the government invested heavily in rural infrastructure that built schools with boarding facilities for the schooling of pastoralists' children (Ahearn, 2018) who entered school at the age of eight. Today, however, mandatory schooling has put more pressure on pastoralist (in this dissertation, the terms "pastoralist" and "herder" will be used interchangeably) families due to a lowered school entry age and a lack of "government spending to maintain the physical infrastructure and staff in rural dormitories" (Ahearn, 2018, p. 4). Starting in the 2008-2009 school year, changes in the structure of Mongolia's education system required six-year-old children to start school. At this age, pastoralist parents must carefully consider the living arrangements of their younger school children. Three major living arrangements Mongolian pastoralists use to solve this problem have been documented as follows: (a) staying in boarding school dormitories, (b) staying with extended family members or relatives, and (c) staying with mothers in split households (Ahearn, 2018; Ahearn & Bumochir, 2016).

1.2. Problem statement

Besides the challenges of school attendance and living arrangements faced by pastoralists' children, academic performance of the children is also an issue. According to the World Bank report on systematic county diagnostic (2018), the first- and second-graders from herder families performed significantly poorer at early grade Mongolian language reading and numeracy assessments conducted in 2017 than non-herder family children.

Parental involvement in children's learning has emerged as one important element of effective education over the last 40 years (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). Thus, "parent engagement is increasingly becoming an area of intense focus for politicians, public policymakers, schools/school leaders, teachers, higher education providers/pre-service teachers worldwide" (Guo & Wu, 2018, p. 10).

The current trends in the education policies of Mongolia require cooperation of school, family, and community to foster future citizens. Now schools and families are expected to work together more meaningfully. Teachers are expected to plan activities for promoting every child's success together with the pupil and his/her parents, and then provide parents with regular reports of progress and assessments of their pupils' learning and mastery of grade-level standards (Ministry of Education and Science [MES], 2014a). However, communicating and partnering with herder families is a big challenge for schools and teachers since these children and families are separated during the school year and herder parents usually come to school during quarter breaks only. A natural question then is how do teachers provide herder parents with regular reports of their children's performance?

Parental involvement in children's schooling overall is an area that has been insufficiently studied in Mongolia. While Sosorbaram (2010) discussed the importance of evaluating children's non-cognitive skills by involving parents, Sukhbaatar's studies (2014; 2018b) critiqued the primary education pre-service training at one of the three national teacher-training institutions for not adequately preparing teachers for parental involvement and discussed some institutional and social factors contributing to a lack of parental involvement. Factors discussed included heavy workloads, a limited understanding of family diversity, gender issues and the social status of the teaching profession. Findings of recent studies (Farrell & Collier, 2010; Pang, 2011; Sukhbaatar & Tarkó, 2018) suggest a need for a continuing and deeper examination of school-family communication involving a broader inclusion of various constituents and contextual factors at the systemic level.

1.3. Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is two-fold. The first aim is to gain greater insights into the contexts of school and herder family communication at the primary school level in rural Mongolia by developing a model based on Bronfenbrenner's ecological model. Unlike examining child development and the characteristics of individuals within ecological systems, this study investigates the microsystem where relationships between school and herder family exists, the mesosystem where herder family and school communication is experienced, and contextual factors at the exosystem and the macrosystem levels impacting communication between school and herder family.

The second aim of the study is to discuss implications for teacher education in Mongolia and in other settings. A series of studies conducted in Mongolia revealed that teacher education programs left teachers ill-prepared for parental involvement, and found that teachers lacked skills in partnering with parents from diverse families, including both herder and non-herder families (Sukhbaatar, 2014, 2018a, 2018b). The pre-service teacher education program currently includes some parental involvement topics; however, the content is mainly focused on traditional and limited communication activities (Sukhbaatar, 2018b). These studies also concluded that pre-service teachers learned more about working with parents from their supervising in-service teachers during their student teaching practice; however, the in-service teachers had dissimilar skills, experiences and attitudes towards parental involvement. Moreover, the most recent study (Gisewhite, Jeanfreau, & Holden, 2019) suggested a call for an ecologically-based teacher-parent communication skills training model in pre-service teacher education programs. Although Gisewhite and her colleagues (2019) have not designed a specific model for this communication training, they invited researchers to join them in their pursuit of the specific ecologically-based models for pre-service education.

1.4. Organization of the dissertation

This dissertation consists of five chapters. Chapter One provides the background of the study, problem statement, and purpose of the study. This chapter also introduces an overview of the remaining dissertation chapters.

Chapter Two introduces a theoretical framework and a conceptual framework for the present dissertation research. A conceptual framework for the contexts of school and herder family communication is proposed based on a relevant existing theoretical framework, literature, and studies in order to “define the concepts within the problem of the study”

(Adom, Hussein, & Agyem, 2018, p. 439). The conceptual framework model proposed is based on Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (1977) which consists of four layers of systems: (a) microsystem, (b) mesosystem, (c) exosystem, and (d) macrosystem. The proposed system layers are then respectively validated with the help of three empirical sub-studies and the findings of which are presented in Chapter Four of this dissertation.

Chapter Three introduces research objectives and questions along with the methodology applied in this research study. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis [IPA] was used in the three empirical sub-studies of this dissertation research. This chapter provides a theoretical overview of IPA. Moreover, the research sites, participants, research instruments, data collection procedures, and data analysis are also presented in Chapter Three. This chapter also discusses ethical considerations including an ethical approval obtained from the Institutional Review Board [IRB] of the Doctoral School of Education at the University of Szeged and the informed consent agreement for the participants.

Chapter Four presents the validated ecological model of communication between rural school and herder family. Three sub-studies were conducted in order to answer the research questions. The first sub-study demonstrates the relations between rural boarding schools and herder families at the microsystem level. An empirical study explored five herder parents' experiences in managing their children's living arrangements during the school year in response to educational policies implemented in the rural school. The communication experiences of five classroom teachers with herder parents is discussed in the second sub-study as an aspect of the mesosystem layer, which encompasses interactions among the microsystems of home and school. The contextual factors were validated with an empirical study which included 10 teachers and 10 herder parents from two different rural schools to participate. This sub-study demonstrates eight different contextual factors impacting communication between rural schools and herder families at the exosystem and microsystem levels of the ecological model.

Chapter Five, the last chapter, presents the discussion and conclusion of the dissertation research. Three important policy-related topics are discussed in order to explain and interpret the findings of the empirical sub-studies in this concluding chapter. This final chapter also provides limitations of the study, recommendations for future studies, and implications. There are implications for teacher education in Mongolia and in other settings, and methodological and theoretical implications presented.

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In this research Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (1977) was selected as a relevant theory that underpins "the knowledge base of the phenomenon to be investigated" (Adom et al., 2018, p. 438). The conceptual framework proposed in this dissertation research is an adaptation of the Bronfenbrenner's theory (1977) and Pang's analytical framework (2011) to suit the present research purpose (Adom et al., 2018). This conceptual framework presents a logical structure of connected concepts in order to help provide a vivid picture of relations between concepts in the study within the theoretical framework (Grant & Osanloo, 2014). Thus, the proposed conceptual framework consists of some interconnected concepts that help explain the relationships between rural school and herder family communication (Adom et al., 2018).

2.1. Introduction

Typically, the expressions "pastoralists", or "pastoral populations", refer to small and mobile human communities who raise and herd domestic animals as a means of livelihood (Fratkin & Meir, 2005). Many nations around the world are engaged in pastoralism, including cattle herding among the Maasai and Fulani groups in West and East African grasslands; desert camel herder groups in Arabia, North Africa, and South and Central Asia; goat and sheep herders in the Middle East; horse nomad Kazakhs in the Central Asian steppe; yak herder Tibetans in the Himalayas; and reindeer pastoralist Tungus and Chukchi groups in Northern Siberia and the Arctic Circle (Fratkin & Meir, 2005). Mongolia is one of these geographical locations in Central Asia which is extensively engaged in mobile pastoralism or nomadic herding. Mongolia's case could be special in at least two respects: Mongolian herders herd five types of mixed livestock (horses, cattle, sheep, goats, and Bactrian camels), and they own the largest number of livestock head in the world. In fact, "hardly any state is so heavily associated with nomadism as Mongolia" (Stolpe, 2016, p. 20).

When talking about herders, some common issues, such as marginalization, sedentarization, and boarding schools, have been discussed over time. "Pastoralists today are facing tremendous pressures on their former way of life" (Fratkin & Meir, 2005, p. 5). States take little care of and attention to pastoralists who, as a result, find themselves marginalized. While the pastoralists in Gujarat, India face difficulties of shrinking pastures, the pastoralists in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East are viewed as lawless, and hard to administer, tax, and control (Fratkin & Meir, 2005). On the other hand, it is also argued that

access to formal education has required nomadic families to sedentarize (Dyer, 2010), and boarding schools have introduced a sedentary lifestyle to nomadic children (Dyer, 2001). A study in a Tundra school in Yamal (Laptander, 2013), discussing one of the negative aspects of boarding schools, stated that nomadic Nenet children were away from home at boarding schools for nine months out of the year.

Mongolia's case, however, is exceptional in respect to schooling for herders (Stolpe, 2016). According to Finke, 2004 (as cited in Stolpe, 2016),

Pastoralism did not experience any economic, political or ideological marginalization in Mongolia because its importance in economic respects and its being a fundamental feature of traditional Mongolian culture was generally acknowledged. (p. 22)

Moreover, herder children actively attend schools as Mongolian herder parents value education (Ahearn & Bumochir, 2016). The school year schedule allows herder children to stay at home in remote areas during quarter breaks for a week to three weeks, and the summer holiday lasts for three months. This helps avoid the sedentary lifestyle, the de-skilling, and any cultural alienation (Stolpe, 2016). Herder children have traditionally been valuable assistants in animal husbandry, especially during the lambing season. The spring break is longer and coordinated with this peak-period (Stolpe, 2016). Boarding schools are flexible enough to cater to the needs of herders. For instance, schools tolerate herder pupils' late arrivals at the beginning of new quarters (Stolpe, 2016) and earlier holiday leave at the end of quarters due to heavy snowfall and overloaded herder parents is common. Although Mongolia is "an exceptional case" (Stolpe, 2016, p. 19), there are some recent challenges faced by herders in terms of access to education in general and school communication with herder parents in particular that will be discussed in the rest of this chapter.

The country context of this dissertation is Mongolia. Mongolia covers a geographical area of 1.5 million square kilometres and is the most sparsely populated country with only 3.2 million people. While 68% of Mongolians live in urban areas including 45% in the capital city Ulaanbaatar, 32% lives in rural areas (National Statistical Office of Mongolia [NSOM], 2017). Mongolia is divided into 21 provinces and a capital. Provinces are divided into counties and counties are further divided into administrative subunits, called *bagh*. Altogether there are 330 counties and 1613 *baghs* (NSOM, 2017).

Mongolia gained its independence from China with the help of the Soviet Red Army in 1921. Between 1921-1924, the country was "a constitutional monarchy until the death of Mongolia's first and only priest-king, the Bogd Khan" (Weidman & Yoder, 2010, p. 58).

Mongolia was renamed as the Mongolian People's Republic and formed a socialist government under the influence of the Soviet Union. Starting in 1924, "the nation developed a centrally planned economy following the principles of socialism" (Sukhbaatar & Sukhbaatar, 2019, p. 457) and the Soviet model of development (Weidman & Yoder, 2010). However, unlike the other Soviet Republics, Mongolia was not a part of the Soviet Union, but was closely aligned both politically and economically (Weidman & Yoder, 2010).

When the Soviet Union collapsed in 1990, a democratic revolution started and since then Mongolia has been progressing in a democratic direction. In 1992, Mongolia adopted the current democratic constitution and established the democratic system of government (Sukhbaatar & Sukhbaatar, 2019). A market economy replaced the centrally planned economy (Lkhagvadorj, Hauck, Dulamsuren, & Tsogtbaatar, 2013).

Mongolia has witnessed considerable changes in social institutions starting with the 1990's post-Soviet market economy reforms. These political and economic changes over the last 25 years have adversely affected herder families. Access to education for herder children has created additional difficulties for herders resulting in split households, fewer family members to help with herding, and financial challenges related to educating their children (Ahearn & Bumochir, 2016; Steiner-Khamsi & Gerelmaa, 2008; Stolpe, 2016). For teachers, this new situation has resulted in requiring more practical skills to reach out to these herders.

The ability to cooperate with parents is an important competency that teachers are required to have (de Bruïne et al., 2014; MES, 2014a). This requirement is explicitly stated in the Primary and Secondary Education Law of Mongolia stating that it is each teacher's responsibility to cooperate with parents and caretakers in order to identify and develop each child's talents and interests as well as to protect the child's rights and provide parents with child-related advice (Mongolian State Parliament, 2002, Article 22.1.6).

However, many teacher education programs do not prepare teachers and school administrators properly for school-family partnerships (Gisewhite et al., 2019; Sewell, 2012; Sukhbaatar, 2014, 2018a, 2018b; Sutterby, Rubin, & Abrego, 2007). Moreover, there are other external issues or contextual factors, such as social, political, historical, institutional, and policy contexts, that hinder schools and teachers from maintaining good communication and cooperation with families (Farrell & Collier, 2010; Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; Pang, 2011; Sukhbaatar, 2014, 2018b; Sukhbaatar & Tarkó, 2018). The next part of this chapter explores literature related to the contexts of school and herder family communication at the

primary school level in rural Mongolia, including contextual factors located at different levels of Bronfenbrenner's (1977) ecological systems theory.

2.2. Theoretical framework

Bronfenbrenner (1977) developed an ecological systems theory that consisted of multiple environmental systems, explicitly the microsystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem, and the macrosystem, to provide context for human development (see Figure 1). According to the ecological systems theory, human development occurs between a growing human organism and the changing immediate environments where the development process is affected by both these immediate settings and larger social contexts (Bronfenbrenner, 1977).

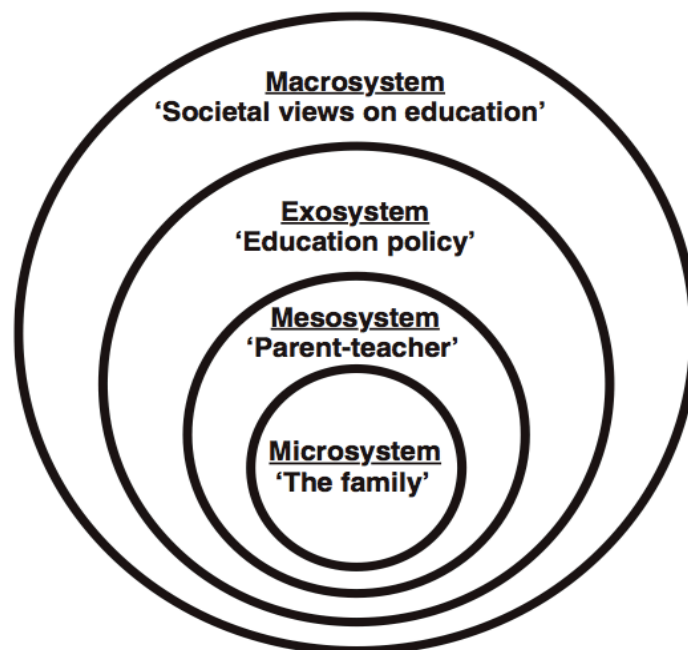


Figure 1. Nested model of ecological systems originally proposed by Bronfenbrenner
Source: Neal and Neal, 2013, p. 725

Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory is among the most widely used theoretical frameworks for studying human development in an ecological context (Neal & Neal, 2013). Bronfenbrenner's (1977) original four systems are described as follows:

1. the *microsystem* is the complex of relations between the child and the environment in an immediate setting containing that child, such as home and school;

2. the *mesosystem* comprises the interrelations among major settings containing the child at a particular point in his or her life. In other words, the mesosystem encompasses interactions among *microsystems* (home and school);
3. the *exosystem* is an extension of the mesosystem including major institutions of society that affect, but do not directly involve, the child, like parental workplace, the neighborhood, mass media, government agencies, distribution of goods and services, communication and transportation facilities, and informal social networks; and
4. the *macrosystem* is the overarching institutional patterns which include the economic, social, educational, legal, and political systems, of which micro-, meso-, and exosystems are the concrete manifestations.

Bronfenbrenner (1986) later introduced the chronosystem. The chronosystem is “the influence on the person’s development of changes (and continuities) over time in the environments in which the person is living” (Bronfenbrenner, 1986, p. 724). The chronosystem focuses on a life transition and it encompasses change or consistency over time in the characteristics of the person (Bronfenbrenner, 1993).

The ecological systems theory was originally developed to study the processes and settings of human development. However, the theory has been applied in home-school cooperation and communication studies beyond its original application in child development processes and settings. Relatively recent examples of researchers examining home-school cooperation or school-family communication at the system level utilizing the ecological systems theory include Farrell and Collier (2010) and Pang (2011).

Farrell and Collier (2010) conducted a qualitative study on school personnel’s perceptions of family-school communication at elementary schools serving a military population in the United States of America [USA] and found a number of ecological factors influencing family-school communication at the macrosystem level, namely military policy, national or state mandates, deployment, and reunification. Another study on home-school cooperation (Pang, 2011) adapted the ecological systems theory as the analytical framework and examined various contextual factors at the exosystem and the macrosystem levels reviewing both empirical and theoretical studies on home-school cooperation conducted in Hong Kong (see Figure 2). In Pang’s study (2011), the contextual factors at the exosystem level involved government policy in education, community involvement, and demands of the workplace. At the macrosystem level three factors, namely the marriage institution, increased accountability, and the economic environment, were proposed.

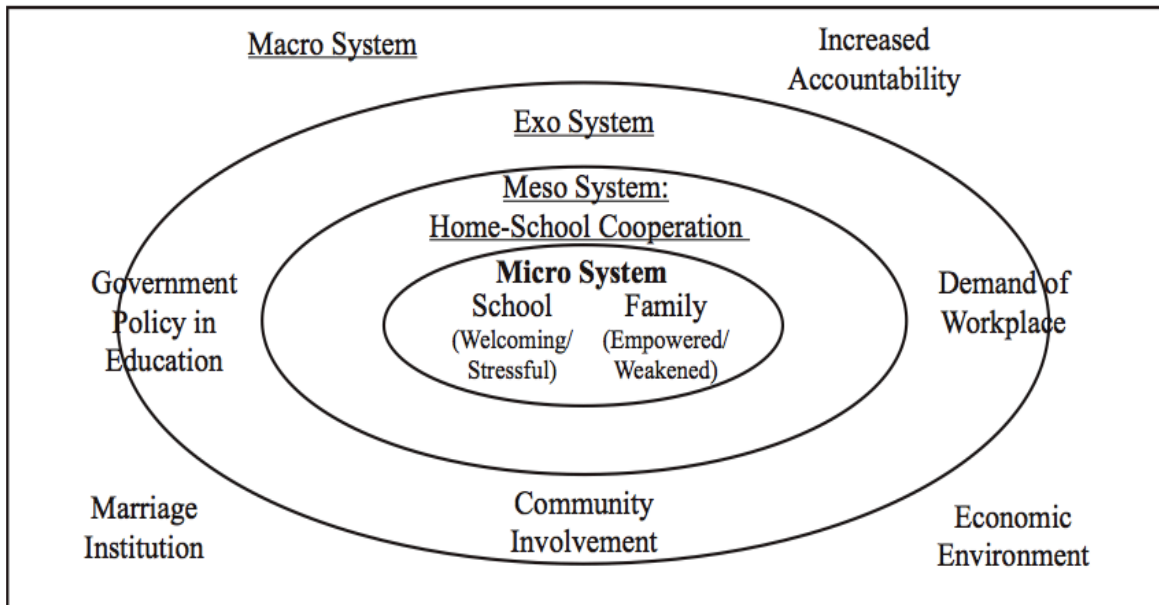


Figure 2. The contextual factors and home-school cooperation in Hong Kong
Source: Pang, 2011, p. 2

Pang (2011) argued that “in order to understand the development of home-school cooperation in a region, one has to consider the whole ecological system in which cooperation occurs” (p. 1). The application of the ecological systems theory can help researchers systematically examine the conditions of home-school cooperation. This approach helps to organize the contextual factors of home-school cooperation and clarify the interactions between the home and the school (Pang, 2011).

2.3. Proposed conceptual framework: Contexts of school and herder family communication in Mongolia

The ecological contexts of school and herder family communication in Mongolia, within the four microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem layers, are proposed here based on analyzing data from academic journal papers, technical reports, book chapters, and the statistics of various relevant government agencies (see Figure 3). The purpose of introducing this adaption of the Pang (2011) and Bronfenbrenner (1977) models is to create a context to organize the corresponding literature.

Since the chronosystem, one of the ecological systems, is intrinsically very personal, and is focused on changes in a person’s development, it is not included in the current study (Hwang, 2014). The chronosystem should be explored in an entirely new study that should be a longitudinal research exploring changes over time in teachers’ communication experiences with herder parents.

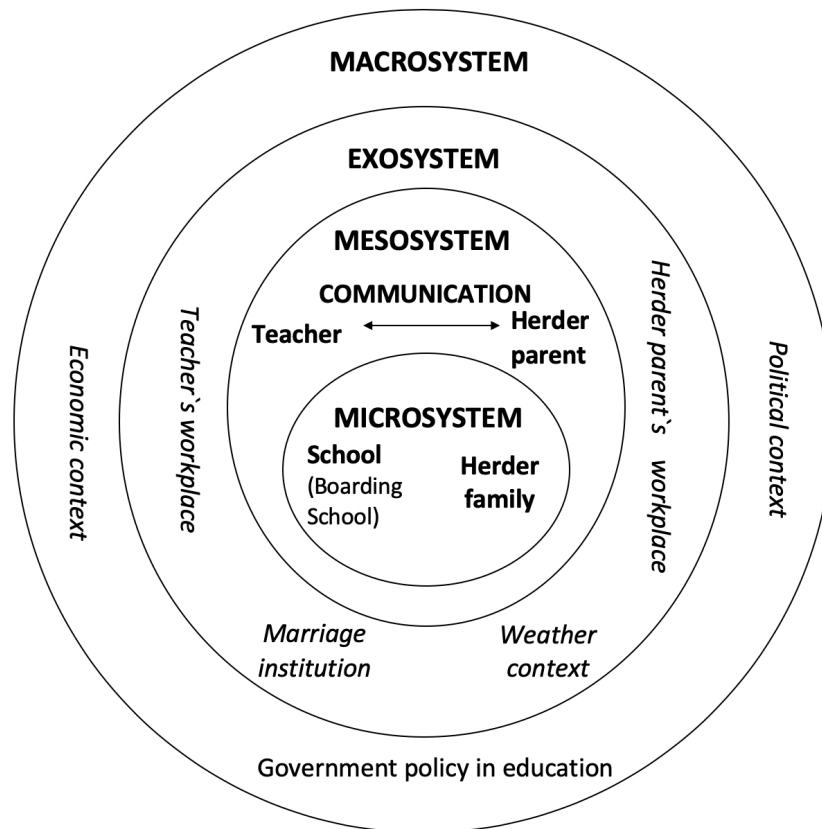


Figure 3. The conceptual framework: Ecological contexts of school and pastoralist family communication in rural Mongolia
 [Adapted from Pang’s (2011) contextual factors and home-school cooperation model, p. 2]

2.3.1. The microsystem

The microsystem refers to the home and the school. In Figure 3, the microsystem includes boarding schools mainly used by herder families. Likewise, the microsystem includes the cultural characteristics of nomadic herding in Mongolia.

The school system

Mongolia is a lower middle-income country with relatively high levels of education and human development indicators. It is above the average in this respect compared to other countries in the Central Asian region (Groppo & Kraehnert, 2016). Compulsory education is free and general secondary education is provided in the following alternative programs excluding its main provision in regular daily classes in fixed public and private schools: (a) evening classes, (b) corresponding classes, and (c) equivalency classes in lifelong learning centers under public schools. In the 2017-2018 school year, 98.5% of pupils went to regular

daily classes. While 1.4% took equivalency classes, the remaining 0.1% took evening and corresponding classes (Ministry of Education, Culture, Science and Sport [MECSS], 2018a).

The Mongolian education system has been widely acknowledged for providing universal education access to pastoralists until 1990 when the transition to a market economy began. However, the decrease in public education expenditure due to the dramatic drop in funding from the Soviet Union (Weidman & Yoder, 2010) had a big societal impact. As a result of the reduced spending on education, some small and boarding schools were considered not to be cost-effective and were shut down (Stolpe, 2016).

Post-Soviet education reforms started under the adoption of official documents including the Education Law of Mongolia and the Mongolia Education and Human Resource Master Plan (Weidman & Yoder, 2010). The first Education Law, passed in 1991, highlighted the decentralization of education, the establishment of private educational institutions, and the creation of legal conditions to renew the educational structure. The Master Plan, developed in 1994, identified some areas for immediate action including enhancing basic and general education, reforming higher education, rationalizing vocational education, and improving education management. A 2002 amendment to the Education Law initiated a change in the structure of general education schools and this change, beginning in the 2005-2006 school year, extended the previous 10-year system to an 11-year system (Sukhbaatar & Sukhbaatar, 2019). Three years later Mongolia adopted the current 12-year system with children starting school at the age of six (see Table 1).

Table 1. Changes in the structure of general education schools

School years	1940s	1965	1973	2000/2001	2005/2006	2008/2009-
Years of schooling	10	10	10	10	11	12
Grade level:						
<i>Primary</i>	4	4	3	4	5	5
<i>Lower secondary</i>	3	4	5	4	4	4
<i>Upper secondary</i>	3	2	2	2	2	3
Starting age	8	8	8	8	7	6

Source: Sukhbaatar and Sukhbaatar, 2019, p. 461

Before entering the first grade, some children, aged between two to five years old, attend preschool education in kindergartens, preschool education institutions. According to the 2018–2019 school year statistics (MECSS, 2019c), in Mongolia there were altogether 1435 kindergartens; among these, 889 were public and 546 were private. Furthermore, 47.5% of these kindergartens were located in the capital and the remaining 52.5% were in 21 provinces and their administrative subunits. Children attend public kindergartens free of charge in Mongolia.

Preschool enrollment rate has been a big issue as there is a shortage of kindergartens to involve all preschool age population. Even though there is a steady growth in public and private kindergartens in recent years (see Table 2), currently around 70-80% of children aged between three and five are provided with preschool services (World Bank, 2017). According to the MECSS statistics (2019d), only 70.5% of the first graders in the 2018–2019 school year attended preschool education.

Table 2. Growth in the number of kindergartens in the past five school years

School years	No of kindergartens	Public	Private
2014-2015	1171	777	394
2015-2016	1288	826	462
2016-2017	1354	854	500
2017-2018	1416	878	538
2018-2019	1435	889	546

Source: MECSS, 2019c

In Mongolia, there are alternative preschool programs provided for the preschool population who are not able to get enrolled in formal preschool services through fixed kindergartens. The alternative preschool programs include (a) shift classes, (b) mobile *ger*-kindergartens, and (c) travelling teachers. The shift classes are shortened day classes for those children who are from families residing in the outskirts of the capital or provincial centers. Mobile *ger*-kindergartens deliver preschool programs using *gers* (a yurt or Mongolian traditional dwelling) in remote rural areas by herder families who reside in a cluster nearby. Often children aged four and five attend the mobile *ger*-kindergartens in summer only. Travelling teachers pay individual home visits to herder families who reside in more remote areas alone without other herder families nearby. Herder parents play an

important role in this type of program by teaching their children at home with the guidance of the travelling teachers (MECSS, 2019c; World Bank, 2017).

In the 2018–2019 school year, altogether 21,590 preschool children participated in alternative preschool programs. This accounted for 8.3% of all children who attended preschool education (MECSS, 2019c). Among them, 71% attended mobile *ger-kindergartens* while 16% attended shift classes, and 13% were taught by travelling teachers. The preschool enrollment rate among herder children, however, remains significantly low. Only 11.8% of children who attended preschool programs were from herder families in the 2018-2019 school year (MECSS, 2019c).

Although alternative preschool programs help improve the number of herder children attending early childhood education and are favored by herder parents, mobile *ger-kindergartens* perform significantly lower than kindergartens in fixed building structures in terms of children’s cognitive and non-cognitive skills. The short duration of the *ger-kindergartens*, offered only in summer, reduces the chances of children to catch up children in kindergartens in fixed buildings in more developed areas (World Bank, 2017). Furthermore, the low access to quality early childhood education leads to low and uneven quality of basic education (World Bank, 2018).

In addition to the shortage of kindergartens, there is also a lack of school buildings. The lack of school buildings in some urban areas and many capital schools requires to offer 3rd shift classes. In the 2018–2019 school year, there were 212 classes in 28 schools taught in these 3rd shifts nationwide (MECSS, 2019d). In other words, these 212 groups had classes in the evenings after the other two groups had classes in the mornings and afternoons in the same classroom they shared (See Table 3).

Table 3. The number of schools and 3rd shift classes in the past five school years

School years	No of schools	Public	Private	No of classes	1st shift	2nd shift	3rd shift
2014-2015	762	628	134	18521	11734	6630	157
2015-2016	768	636	132	19304	12058	7071	175
2016-2017	778	645	133	19677	12215	7238	224
2017-2018	798	652	146	20211	12705	7320	186
2018-2019	803	656	147	20574	13240	7122	212

Source: MECSS, 2019d

The Mongolian government has long been committed to provide increased access to schooling for children from herder families. Today, Mongolian boarding schools welcome pupils from the first to the twelfth grades free of charge. The new education system, adopted in the school year of 2008–2009, has resulted in sending six-year-old first graders, usually from herder families, to live in boarding school dormitories.

The government provides subsidized boarding schools for children from herder families (Grosso & Kraehnert, 2016) and boarding school dormitories have been a long-established best practice for the schooling of herder children (Ahearn & Bumochir, 2016). Mongolian boarding schools make a valuable contribution toward encouraging herder families to send their children to school. There were 798 public and private schools in Mongolia in the 2017–2018 school year; among these, 517 boarding school dormitories accommodated 35,196 pupils (MECSS, 2018a). Most of the herder children were placed in the boarding school dormitories and 73% of all pupils staying in dormitories were from herder families (MECSS, 2018a). Even though school dormitories accommodate most of the herders' children, and contribute greatly to the better educational access for herder families, dormitory conditions are not always very good. The statistics show that 78 out of 517 boarding school dormitories did not meet the required living condition standards (MECSS, 2018a). Another issue is the shortage of dormitories. In the 2017–2018 school year, altogether 38,444 pupils made a request for staying in school dormitories with 27,945 of those pupils from herder families. However, the school dormitories accommodated only 25,705 herder pupils (MECSS, 2018a).

Boarding school dormitories have been provided with government subsidies in order to improve access to formal schooling for herder family children. Even though boarding schools significantly contribute to expanding free access to education for the rural family, the system of boarding schools has always been very expensive. Steiner-Khamsi and Stolpe (2004) noted that public education in Mongolia was relatively expensive due to Mongolia's harsh weather conditions and dispersed population. They reported that a significant sum of government spending has been allocated to the education sector due largely to subsidizing boarding schools and paying for a long period of heating from October to May. In fact, more than 20% of the education budget was spent for heating and electricity and this resulted in very few financial resources for maintaining or rehabilitating school buildings. Efforts to secure funds to rehabilitate boarding schools in rural areas have not always been successful.

Although the boarding school system is very expensive, Steiner- Khamisi and Gerelmaa (2008) noted that the children of herder families staying in boarding school dormitories remain one of the underserved groups in the Mongolian education sector. They found that after the end of the first school year a sizeable number of herder families take their children out of school for the following reasons: poor performance of the child, bullying by other pupils, unhealthy dormitories, and the emotional distress caused by homesickness for a child in the dormitory.

Despite the questionable physical condition of boarding schools, there are some features that should make staying at school appealing for herder pupils. English and Guerin (2017) conducted a contextual analysis of four living arrangements of indigenous pupils from remote Aboriginal communities in urban schools in Australia. The researchers presented several interconnected features of boarding schools comparing with three other boarding options: hostels, family group homes, and residential colleges. The Aboriginal boarding schools had the following positive features: (a) they provided specialized programs for assisting pupils to cope with living at the residence, including transition programs and extended family visits, (b) they established social relationships with pupils, staff, family, and community members thereby lowering levels of loneliness, isolation, and homesickness, (c) they provided a safe, secure, supportive, and culturally relevant environment in order to facilitate bi-cultural awareness with curricular and co-curricular activities, (d) they helped maintain cultural identity by encouraging family and community involvement such as family members undertaking roles on the governing council or as temporary house parents, (e) they employed specialized staff to support the cultural identity of indigenous pupils including activities such as enabling staff to visit indigenous communities to help them deeply understand their Aboriginal pupils and their background, (f) they utilized modern technology such as teleconferences, emails, and digital photos to connect pupils and families to reduce the isolation felt by indigenous pupils, and (g) they ensured low staff-pupil ratios and the presence of long serving quality staff who fostered friendly relationships with indigenous pupils while including culturally appropriate rules and boundaries. How Mongolian boarding schools provide these positive features are discussed generally and sometimes specifically in the remaining parts of this dissertation.

The herder family

Livestock herding has always been important for Mongolians; in fact, the Mongolian Constitution states, “livestock are a national wealth and shall be protected by the state” (Mongolian State Parliament, 1992, Article 5.4, p. 2). Livestock herding is an important contributor to the country’s economy and labor force. Livestock husbandry contributed to 10.6% of the country’s Gross Domestic Product [GDP] in 2017 and made up 30% of the labor force (NSOM, 2018).

During the socialist period, the livestock production system was managed by government collectives which employed herders to herd a particular number of state livestock. These government-employed herders kept collectivized herds for a monthly salary and had to fulfill a planned production target for livestock products (Lkhagvadorj et al., 2013). The collectives started their operation in 1928. However, with the end of the Soviet Union, the system collapsed in the 1990s, and the entire livestock herds were privatized until 1992.

In a country with a population of 3.2 million, 25.9% of the total households herded livestock in 2017 (NSOM, 2018). However, full-time pastoralist households, or those who herded livestock all year around and whose livelihood depended on livestock herding, comprised 19.2% of the total households. Both full-time and part-time pastoralist households managed 66.2 million head of livestock in 2017 and the average number of livestock head owned by a full-time pastoralist household was 352 (NSOM, 2018).

One of the major aspects of nomadic pastoralism is seasonal migrations. Pastoralist families carry out these seasonal movements in order to feed their livestock herds on good grazing pastures and to fatten them up to increase their chance to survive the long and cold winters (Lkhagvadorj et al., 2013). It was found that most pastoralists or nomadic herders in western Mongolia made moves approximately 10 times per year, at a distance of about 100 kilometers between summer and winter pasture lands (Lkhagvadorj et al., 2013). Another study found that most herders move their herds two to 25 times per year (Groppo & Kraehnert, 2016).

Lkhagvadorj et al. (2013) reported that the livelihoods of herder households heavily relied on the income derived from livestock products. The monthly income of a herder household consisted of two parts: monetary and non-monetary income. Some 67% of the income was monetary, mainly coming from livestock herds as well as government grants, pensions, and salaries, while 33% was non-monetary income and resulted from the household’s own consumption of their livestock products. The biggest percentage (37%) out of the 67% of the monetary income derived from cash from the sale of livestock products.

Sending children, especially six-year-old ones, to school put pressure on herder households to balance their livestock herding needs and their children's schooling needs at the same time. Starting in the 2008-2009 school year, the school admission age was lowered from seven to six, but it has not been well implemented in practice. Some parents, especially pastoralist parents, make requests to send their children to school at the age of seven or eight for various reasons. Addressing this issue, the Mongolian Parliament added an amendment to the Education Law in 2016. The article (Mongolian State Parliament, 2016, Article 35.4.9) states that pastoralist parents may request to delay sending their children to school at the age of six under certain circumstances. In accordance with this amendment, the MECSS passed a regulation to address pastoralist parent's request when they are unable to send a child to school at the age of six (MECSS, 2016). This regulation states the following exceptional circumstances that can be considered when meeting pastoralist parents' requests: (a) when a child's poor health condition requires a longer time for treatment; (b) when a child is with a severe disability; (c) when a family member of a child is severely sick and the child's involvement is necessary in care of the family member; (d) when the pastoralist parents are herding in remote area (more than 150 kilometers away from school) and they are unable to come to visit the child in school; and (e) when the school dormitory cannot provide good living environment for the child.

Documents show that not all six-year-old children were able to enter school at their proper age among the herder population. According to the MECSS (2016), some 1,335 children could not go to school at the age of six in the 2016-2017 school year in rural Mongolia. The MECSS (2016) investigated the reasons and the main ones were as follows: (a) herder families resided and herded in remote areas and could not send their six-year-olds to school, and (b) the six-year-olds were not able to stay with relatives near a school and could not stay in the school dormitory because of its poor condition. While the first reason is related to family circumstances, the last one is related to the school circumstance. Considering the family and school circumstances, herder parents use three living arrangement options when they send their children to school.

First, boarding schools, provided free of charge in order to improve access to formal schooling, have been serving the nomadic herder families along with children from low-income families, children who are orphaned, and those children from families living in remote areas (Ministry of Education, Culture and Science [MECS], 2010). As a model, according to Krätli, (2000, as cited in Steiner-Khamsi & Stolpe, 2006), the Mongolian boarding school was found more appropriate for pastoralists' children than existing practices

in other countries and he proposed adopting it in other nomadic pastoralist societies after he examined several educational provisions. Mongolia was able to provide a well-functioning boarding school system before the 1990s, during the socialist period. However, after the collapse of the socialist system, rural development was neglected due to economic reasons, which resulted in inadequate infrastructure and a lack of healthy and well-maintained schools and school dormitories (Steiner-Khamsi & Gerelmaa, 2008). Researchers Steiner-Khamsi and Stolpe (2006) argued that families who lacked financial and social resources tended to place their children in school dormitories.

Second, sending their children to stay with extended family members or relatives who are living close to school is another common way of providing living arrangements for herder children (Ahearn & Bumochir, 2016; Steiner-Khamsi & Stolpe, 2006; Sukhbaatar, 2018a). In the Mongolian culture it is common for extended family members to let herder children stay with them and to take care of the children during the school year. These extended family members are usually grandparents, or aunts and uncles. Extended family members, however, are not always good caregivers. A study noted that relatives had a lower level of parental involvement and children living with relatives usually did not do homework and sometimes they were absent from classes (Sukhbaatar, 2018a).

Lastly, the new requirement to send six-year-olds to school has had a big impact on the herders' labor pool and family finances, especially when the household chooses to have some family members settle near the school with their younger children. Such herder families usually occupy an additional or second home as personal property or use a relative's property in county centers so the mothers can stay in these places with their children (Ahearn & Bumochir, 2016). This results in "household splitting" where households split residences between pasture locations and school locations during the school years. The consequence is that women and children move to county or provincial centers for schools and men are left alone in distant winter camps with a reduced labor force, which risk their own well-being and the well-being of their livestock (Ahearn & Bumochir, 2016; Steiner-Khamsi & Gerelmaa, 2008; Stolpe, 2016). In one *bagh*, nearly 50-60% of herder households split during the school year (Ahearn & Bumochir, 2016).

The literature contains some controversies related to the schooling of Mongolian children from herder households. While some research results show that schooling prevents some Mongolian children from learning the skills necessary for pastoralist livelihoods (Ahearn & Bumochir, 2016), other researchers (Lkhagvadorj et al., 2013) note that all the herder parents

taking part in their particular study hoped their children would not live as pastoralists like them.

2.3.2. The mesosystem

The mesosystem refers to interactions between microsystems, such as communication between teachers and herder parents. This section discusses goals and forms of communication between the school and the family in general.

Teacher-parent communication and pupil learning

An extensive research literature has documented the importance of school-family communication over the years (Epstein, 2010; Farrell & Collier, 2010; Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; Loudová, Havigerová, & Haviger, 2015; Ozmen, Akuzum, Zincirli, & Selcuk, 2016; Ratcliff & Hunt, 2009; Sukhbaatar, 2014, 2018b; Symeou, Roussounidou, & Michaelides, 2012). School and family share a common goal which is “a harmonious development of the child’s personality” (Loudová et al., 2015, p. 1245). When pursuing these common goals, teachers and parents use various forms of communication. Researchers described one-way communication and two-way communication (Graham-Clay, 2005); written or oral communication (Symeou et al., 2012) among teachers and families using letters, report cards, notices of special events, communication books, telephone calls; teacher home visits (Stetson, Stetson, Sinclair, & Nix, 2012; Wright, Shields, Black, & Waxman, 2018); one-to-one basis communication (Symeou et al., 2012); and parent-teacher conferences or meetings (Gastaldi, Longobardi, Quaglia, & Settanni, 2015; Kim & Chin, 2016). Efficient communication is necessary:

Especially communication between teachers and parents regarding students’ performance in the class bears vital importance in better understanding students’ problems, increasing parents’ support in education, performing effective counselling and guidance, and ultimately increasing students’ motivation and success. (Ozmen et al., 2016, p. 28)

Epstein (2010) identified six types of home, school, and community involvement. These are (a) parenting; (b) communicating; (c) volunteering; (d) learning at home; (e) decision-making; and (f) collaborating with the community. Recent studies conducted in Mongolia (Sukhbaatar, 2014, 2018b) identified three parental involvement dimensions: (a) home-

based involvement; (b) school-based involvement; and (c) the dimension of parental resourcing. These parental involvement dimensions were adapted from three indexes of parental involvement in Cambodia by Nguon (2012). Interestingly, the dimension of parental resourcing involved monetary contribution, labor contribution, and material contribution from parents. Sukhbaatar's studies (2014, 2018b) indicated that home-school communication forms the basis of the three parental involvement dimensions, and this communication appears to be vital to foster parental involvement. When parents and teachers communicate, understand each other, recognize each other's expectations for the child, and work together in order to pursue goals for the child, the child's learning outcomes are improved. Research shows that successful schools play the primary role in initiating communication and partnership with families (Farrell & Collier, 2010). However, there are challenges in communicating when both parents and teachers are too busy to discuss about pupils and their learning (Pang, 2011).

The Mongolian government emphasizes that teachers have the main duty of fostering and developing every child's talents and interests (MES, 2012). Teachers are expected to carefully examine problems they face during their teaching in order to develop the talents and interests of each child. Teachers also play a vital role in promoting the development of every child (MES, 2012).

There are a number of activities aimed at parental involvement practiced at schools in Mongolia that facilitate teacher and parent communication. A survey (Sosorbaram, 2010) including more than 500 teachers and school education managers from rural and urban areas in Mongolia found that current parental involvement practices include the following: (a) parents attending regular meetings; (b) parents watching classes; (c) parents helping decorate classrooms; (d) parents attending pedagogical workshops; (e) parents receiving regular reports on their children's performance; (f) parents competing in sports competitions or quiz contests with their children; and (g) parents attending graduation day. If parents miss these activities, the channel of communication usually shifts to telephone conversations between parents and teachers (Sukhbaatar, 2014).

Goals and forms of communication

Parents and teachers share the common goal of increasing the child's academic achievement and development. The parents' goals are more likely to be focused on improving their children's performance and learning more about school life. The teachers' goals for parental involvement focus on involving parents in homework; providing a nurturing environment;

raising money; and having parents attend school events and parent-teacher [P-T] meetings (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). The goals of communication for teachers also include discussing the child's progress and difficulties; learning from parents how the child is coping with school; discovering how parents can help their child at home; and learning about any potential conflicts with parents (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011).

One important responsibility of teachers is to provide all families with proper information about the child and the school, and communicate this information using the most appropriate method considering each parent's situation (Symeou et al., 2012). There are different forms of communication between teachers and parents. Graham-Clay (2005) defines two categories of interaction between teachers and families: one-way communication and two-way communication. One-way communication occurs when teachers inform parents about school or classroom events; communicate pupil's progress using letters; send home classroom or school newspapers, report cards, communication books; or create school Web sites. Two-way communication involves interactive conversations between teachers and parents. These conversations mainly mean telephone calls, home visits, and parent-teacher conferences.

Recent studies note that advancement in technology enhances frequency and forms of parent-teacher communication. Examples include weekly e-mail messages (Thompson & Mazer, 2012) and daily communication using the Internet, Wi-fi, and smart phone (Guo, Wu, & Liu, 2018). E-mail messages appear to work more effectively to communicate secure information about pupil's grades or homework completion (Thompson & Mazer, 2012). WeChat, a mobile app, is the most commonly used form of teacher-parent communication in China and it has replaced older communication forms such as phones, agenda books, face-to-face meetings, and home visits (Guo et al., 2018). WeChat provides opportunities to teachers and parents to share information both within a group and one-on-one private chat. However, this chatting tool does not work well for all parents. Parents in rural areas do not have access to WeChat and also some people, usually grandparents who take care of their left-behind grandchildren, often do not know how to use it.

Parent-teacher meetings are one common form of school-family communication found in many countries. In Italy, Gastaldi et al. (2015) report that it is stated in the Education Law that teachers are required to conduct parent-teacher meetings on a regular basis in order to discuss children's academic improvement and to inform parents about difficulties children have faced recently regarding their learning and their relationships with teachers and peers. In Korea, parent-teacher conferences and school briefing sessions are two main forms of

parent-school communication and they have different educational purposes (Kim & Chin, 2016). The school briefing sessions present issues at the school level to parents. The briefings include school policies and the principal's educational vision and principles in order to help parents better understand the school and establish home-school partnerships. The parent-teacher conferences are more personalized informal meetings where parents can freely consult with teachers about their child's difficulties.

The most common form of communication between teachers and parents in Mongolia has been collective parent-teacher meetings (Sosorbaram, 2010; Sukhbaatar, 2014, 2018a, 2018b). Even though parent-teacher meetings are a means of two-way communication, these meetings have been practiced as one-way communications where all parents sit together quietly and the teacher is in front of the parents providing information about the school and the class, and sometimes about the problems of some particular pupils (Sukhbaatar, 2014, 2018a, 2018b). As Symeou et al. (2012) states, "the aim should be for teachers to be able to talk *with* parents instead of only talking *to* parents in order to cooperate and be in true dialogue" (p. 82).

Herder parents, however, usually could not attend these meetings due to their remote location (Sukhbaatar, 2018a). The herder parents usually visit schools only once a quarter to pick up their children for quarter breaks or to take their children back to school after the breaks (Sukhbaatar, 2018a). Other forms of communication such as phone calls, however, may not be a practical form of communication with herder parents since pastoralists make seasonal migrations and stay in remote areas where there is limited cell phone reception (Ahearn, 2018).

2.3.3. Contextual factors in the exosystem

In this study, four contextual factors are proposed at the exosystem level that appear to influence school and herder family communication in Mongolia. These factors include teachers' workplace, herder parents' workplace, the marriage institution, and the weather context.

Teachers' workplace

Results show that Mongolian teachers in primary education complain about their workload more frequently than teachers at other levels. Studies by Sukhbaatar (2014, 2018b) have noted that the heavy workloads of teachers contribute to a lack of parental involvement. Primary education teachers perceive themselves as overloaded with more additional tasks

than teachers at other levels. These tasks include more regular checks of pupils' papers, more time to prepare teaching and learning materials, the Olympiad coaching of a whole class, after class work with slower learners, and so on (Sukhbaatar, 2014, 2018b). Teachers in Mongolian schools have also been found to convey a feeling of professional tragedy regarding their low salaries (Steiner-Khamsi & Stolpe, 2006).

There is also a gender issue: The majority of the teaching staff at all levels of the education system are women. According to 2017-2018 school year statistics, 81.6% of all teaching staff of primary and secondary schools nationwide were female (MECSS, 2018a). However, at the primary school level the percentage of female teaching staff was 96.2%. The female teaching staff have little time for extra training because they carry double work burdens by being mothers themselves (Asian Development Bank [ADB], 2005). Balancing the double work burdens of a teaching career and family duties seems to be challenging for these female teachers. The double work burdens may restrict their time and efforts to facilitate effective communication with parents and meaningful parental involvement (Sukhbaatar, 2014, 2018b).

Pang (2011) points out that one factor in the ecological system of education reforms introduced by governments that prevents teachers from investing in family communication is the need to complete a significantly increased amount of paperwork. These education reforms in Hong Kong have posed serious challenges to teachers since research shows that when paperwork has increased significantly in order to meet various administrative requirements this can detract from home-school cooperation (Pang, 2011).

Teachers play a vital role in implementing educational system reforms since the "teacher's main duty is to foster and develop every child's talents and interests" (MES, 2012). Teachers have to investigate problems faced in teaching when working with children with the goal of developing the talents and interests of each child. Social expectations and policies expect teachers to be able to promote the development of every child (MES, 2012). Further, the MECSS (2019e) has set a goal for preschool, primary, and secondary education for the 2019–2020 school year addressed to teachers, learners, and parents. The goal states that every teacher shall ensure the quality of their preparation to teach more effectively, shall expand partnerships between teachers and parents or caregivers, and shall improve learners' development and achievement. It is evident that teachers play an important role in pupils' learning, development and success; nevertheless, teachers alone cannot assure pupils' academic success and parental involvement cannot be achieved without enhancing family-school communication.

In order to achieve good parental involvement, school and family should work together and form two-way communication “having the child as the common object of interest” (Gastaldi et al., 2015, p.100). Parents can help their children’s studies in a more efficient way if they are well informed about what the school intends to achieve and how it is to be achieved (Loudová et al., 2015). In this regard, it is the school’s responsibility to establish stronger connections with families and develop a partnership with them (Symeou et al., 2012).

Unfortunately, it is common that teachers, especially new teachers, do not know the importance of promoting parental involvement, and its relationship with the child’s academic and behavioral achievement, because they missed how to communicate effectively with parents in their teacher education program (Stetson et al., 2012). Studies (de Bruïne et al., 2014; Farrell & Collier, 2010; Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; Saltmarsh, Barr, & Chapman, 2015; Stetson et al., 2012; Sukhbaatar, 2014, 2018a, 2018b; Symeou et al., 2012) have argued that teacher education programs pay little attention to equip the prospective teachers with competencies to work and communicate with parents. Teacher education seems to be one formidable barrier to school-family communication and “in particular, the lack of preparation of pre-service teachers has been highlighted as being problematic” (Willemse, Thompson, Vanderlinde, & Mutton, 2018). A study in Cyprus (Symeou et al., 2012) concluded that teachers seemed to learn little about school-family relations in their basic training. Moreover, an extensive joint research work on teacher candidates’ preparation for school-family partnerships (de Bruïne et al., 2014) conducted in three universities in Belgium, the Netherlands, and the USA found all respondents reporting they felt inadequately prepared to partner with families. The prospective teachers wanted more communication skills training, including establishing and maintaining contacts with parents, giving positive feedback to parents, and dealing with parents who are in problematic situations. Similarly, a series of studies conducted in Mongolia (Sukhbaatar, 2014, 2018a, 2018b) revealed that the coverage of parental involvement was a missing part in the teacher education program. The Mongolian studies determined that pre-service teachers considered the student teaching practice the most helpful training experience for learning about parental involvement, and especially about how to conduct collective P-T meetings as observed and learned from their supervising classroom teachers. However, the in-service teachers and the schools had dissimilar attitudes towards, and experiences with, working with parents.

Herder parents' workplace

The collectivization of livestock under communism let each herder family herd one kind of livestock species, and the livestock herds were kept on a common pasture. Wells, daily collection of milk, transport of livestock for sale, hay for winters, as well as seasonal movement of herder families and livestock were centrally planned and supported by the collectives (Lkhagvadorj et al., 2013). However, after the collapse of the communist system in 1990 the centrally planned economy was transformed into a market economy with the privatized livestock for herder families. Now herder families have to plan and carry out all of the activities on their own. A wealthier family may manage herds of over 2000 mixed livestock, while another family only has a herd of 208 mixed livestock, which is close to the minimum number to sustain a household (Ahearn & Bumochir, 2016).

Even though compulsory education is provided free of charge along with dormitories and meals, parents need to pay fees for school uniforms, learning materials, and extra classes. Moreover, transportation to school is often expensive for herder households residing in remote areas (Groppo & Kraehnert, 2016).

One historic example of an extra expense that herder households needed to meet in order to send their children to boarding schools during the harsh times at the beginning of the market economy reforms was a so-called “meat requirement” policy. Between 1996 and 2000, a herder family had to pay 70 kilograms of meat per child in a school year to send their child to school. The fairness of this requirement, however, was eventually challenged:

Through this requirement, mobile pastoralists became the only social group in Mongolia to pay for access to primary and secondary education, a payment that contravened article 16 of the 1992 Constitution, which declares the right to basic education free of charge. (Stolpe, 2016, p. 25)

When low-income families could not afford this meat requirement, many children were kept at home (Steiner-Khamsi & Stolpe, 2006). The policy was abolished in 2000 in order to prevent the serious consequences of an increasing number of dropouts.

Recent studies (Stolpe, 2016; Sukhbaatar, 2014, 2018a, 2018b) have documented higher illiteracy rates now among herder parents. The socialist system ended in 1990 and the state husbandry collective farms collapsed. Herder families got their own herds from the collapsed collectives and they needed more people to help with their herds. So, herders removed their children, especially boys, from schools because boys were greatly needed to cope with the workload of mixed livestock (Stolpe, 2016). In the 1992-1993 school year,

over 30,000 pupils dropped out of school. This peak national dropout rate accounted for nearly 9% of the total number of pupils nationwide. More than 70% of these dropouts were boys (Batchuluun & Khulan, 2006). However, later many of these dropouts were brought back to school under large-scale alternative education programs. They were offered classes on Saturdays and during school vacations (Steiner-Khamsi & Stople, 2006). Even today, there are equivalency programs for primary and lower secondary education being offered. In the 2017-2018 school year, 7,947 pupils attended these programs and 7,048 of them attended in rural schools (MECSS, 2018a).

The marriage institution

According to the 2010 population and housing census (NSOM, 2011a), there were 713,780 households in Mongolia. More than two-thirds of these households, that is, 67%, were registered in urban or semi-urban areas, while the remaining 33% lived in rural areas. Among the total number of households, there were four primary types: nuclear families, extended families, blended families, and solitary adults. Nuclear and extended families made up 87% of the total, nuclear families took up 62%, and extended families 25%.

In the Asian culture, it is normal for parents to receive support from their extended family network (Nguon, 2012; Steiner-Khamsi & Stolpe, 2006). It is also common in Mongolia that relatives help herder parents with the schooling of their children (Sukhbaatar, 2014, 2018a, 2018b). For instance, while the herder parents live in the countryside, children sometimes live with their grandparents or relatives in the county center where schools are located. This is one of the three major ways of arranging living for children of herder families during the school year.

Moreover, the significant changes over the past few decades in family structures, and the political, economic, and historical contexts challenge mothers' involvement in education: Now mothers face balancing issues of working with schools while having increased workload as direct participants in the labor market along with effects of societal changes in marital status (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). An increase in female-headed households has become an issue in Mongolia. In 2011, 21.5% of households were headed by females nationwide (NSOM, 2011b), and these households were found to be vulnerable. Such women were shown to have more household tasks (ADB, 2005) which limited their time spent on their own children's learning and development (Sukhbaatar, 2014, 2018b).

By sending six-year-olds to school, the new education system has further contributed to the changing workload and structures of herder families. It is especially visible in the

changes of the household organization where some members of the family decide to settle near the school with the younger children resulting in household splitting. The unintended consequences are that women and children move to centers where the schools are located and men are left alone with a shortage of labor (Ahearn & Bumochir, 2016).

The weather context

Mongolia has a severe continental climate with four distinct seasons that affects herds, herder families, the economy, and rural schools. The average temperature in winter is between -10°C and -30°C and in summer it is between 10°C and 27°C . In December 2009 and January 2010, extreme weather conditions occurred: The temperature dropped below -40°C , which was the coldest since 1945. By January 2010, 90% of the region was covered with snow and large numbers of herd animals died (Groppo & Kraehnert, 2016).

Extreme weather conditions are one of the greatest threats that Mongolian herders face. These conditions are called *dzud*, and they cause high mortality of livestock due to cold temperatures with excessive snowfall that restricts grazing. *Dzuds* can also be caused by insufficient rainfall during summer that limits grass growth (Groppo & Kraehnert, 2016). Groppo and Kraehnert (2016) studied the impacts of extreme weather conditions on education in Mongolia using household panel data along with livestock census data and climate data. In their study, the researchers studied severe winter conditions that occurred between 1999–2002, and 2009–2010, which resulted in the death of 11.2 million and 10.3 million livestock, respectively. These events threatened not only the livelihood of the herder population, but also the education of their children.

According to Groppo and Kraehnert (2016), *dzuds* impact education through a variety of channels. First, livestock mortality reduces the household income, which limits the household budget available for education. Secondly, extreme winters result in school closures for significant amounts of time in provincial areas due to the breakage of school heating systems. Furthermore, household income difficulties may contribute to the psychological distress of children, which can further affect their learning. Lastly, loss of horses in *dzuds* contributes to transportation limitations meaning that children from remote areas cannot reach schools.

Herder families who lose their herds in *dzuds* usually migrate to urban areas seeking employment. However, this mass migration from the rural areas has had serious consequences: It has resulted in an increase in the already overcrowded classes in urban areas. This mass migration, along with a shortage of school buildings in cities, has resulted

in three shifts of classes, which means three different class groups share one classroom: The first group uses the classroom in the morning, the next one uses it in the afternoon, and the last one uses it in the evening (Sukhbaatar & Sukhbaatar, 2019). This lack of school buildings in urban areas is recognized as one of the biggest problems the education sector is facing in recent years.

2.3.4. Contextual factors in the macrosystem

In the macrosystem realm, three contextual factors are identified in this study that appear to influence school and herder family communication in Mongolia. These include government policies concerning education, economic contexts, and political contexts.

Government policy in education

Education has been considered to be a leading sector in Mongolia for years. The State Education Policy for 2014–2024 (Mongolian State Parliament, 2015), passed by the Parliament in 2015, states that education is a key factor in ensuring the quality of every single citizen's life while also ensuring the social, economic, scientific and technological development of the nation.

Moreover, the Mongolian government has emphasized the significance of parental involvement in fostering future citizens and requires a close cooperation between school, family, and community to foster future citizens (Sukhbaatar, 2014, 2018b). Government policies state that parental involvement is to be promoted in order for parents to contribute to the improvement of their child's learning.

However, there is no specific legislation on parental involvement, and this leads to voluntary participation and uneven practice by schools. Moreover, government level decisions do not cover the issue of parental involvement in teacher training programs. In other words, there is no common requirement to include courses on working with families in teacher training programs (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). Studies (Sukhbaatar, 2014, 2018a, 2018b), carried out in one of the primary education pre-service institutions of Mongolia have revealed that there are no courses particularly dealing with parental involvement in teacher training.

One important issue related to rural education is the internal migration. The internal migration process can be easily seen from the census data of NSOM that families move from rural counties to province centers and from province centers to central provinces and the capital (Steiner-Khamsi & Stolpe, 2004). According to the Ulaanbaatar Statistical Office

(2019), approximately 426,000 people moved to the capital within 14 years or between 2003 and 2017. The highest peak of the migration was recorded in 2004 when around 69,000 people moved in the capital. This number is roughly equal to the whole population of an average province. Currently, almost the half of the country's population (45%) is living in Ulaanbaatar.

There have been several factors impacting the mass migration including the poor economy, poor standards of living, and poor infrastructure in rural areas. However, the unequal school provisions, is well worth noting, including a lack of funding for restoring rural schools, under-heated school buildings in winter months (Steiner-Khamsi & Stolpe, 2004), and a loss of professional teachers who prefer teaching in urban schools (Steiner-Khamsi & Stolpe, 2006). In Steiner-Khamsi and Stolpe's study (2004) they found that herder families increasingly remove their children from rural schools and move them to "healthier" schools in provinces (p. 39). Schools in urban areas are overcrowded, with the result that usually there are 40-50 pupils in a class and three shifts of classes.

Economic contexts

With the breakup of the Soviet Union, Mongolia, along with other former Soviet Republics of Central Asia, was forced to cope with economic challenges in the beginning of the 1990s. Before the breakup Mongolia's education, health, and social support services were provided at no cost by the state. Due to the economic burden, resulting from the collapse of the Soviet Union, Mongolia did not have the resources for investments in social services and rural infrastructure. Hence, the quality and access to social services were reduced, especially for people living in rural areas (Ahearn, 2018; Weidman & Yoder, 2010).

Recent developments in the mining sector have had an impact on nomadic herding. Since mining exports now account for more than half of the GDP, mining has transformed the nation's traditional dependence on husbandry and agriculture. This has serious consequences for pastures and the environment (Central Intelligence Agency [CIA], 2016). Since mining cannot ensure a long-term sustainable development for a nation, education has been a priority for government planners. However, the share of the GDP going to education was only 4.7% in 2012 (NSOM, 2013).

Overwork and underpayment of teachers seem to devalue the teaching profession. Secondary school teachers nationwide have tried striking for a salary increase several times since 1990 (Steiner-Khamsi & Stople, 2006; Sukhbaatar, 2014, 2018b). Low teacher salaries probably contribute to an overall decline in teachers' social status in Mongolia. According

to Fisher (2009), teachers are often not perceived as professionals by parents and are seen to be motivated only by long school vacations.

Political contexts

Wales, Magee and Nicolai (2016) conclude that education systems can be understood better when they are researched in light of their political context, rather than in isolation from it. Understanding political structures that underlie education systems has been shown to be important, because politics affects government investments in education, politics determine the government's responsibility for education, and politics shape the development and implementation of educational policies.

Political involvement in education is therefore one of the key factors to be considered when taking the ecological systems view of education. Researchers (Begz, 2015; Steiner-Khamsi & Stople, 2006; Weidman & Yoder, 2010) have pointed out that education is a highly politicized issue in Mongolia and the education reform process reflects the political situation of the country.

After each parliamentary election, the winning party has the power to establish government cabinets and new administrative officials are appointed regardless of their experience and specialization (Begz, 2015). This tends to prevent the smooth continuity of the policies and reforms adopted by the previous cabinet.

The government, as well as donor agencies, has played a significant role in the educational progress of Mongolia. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Mongolia distanced itself from Russia and instead started to seek donor support for educational reforms from the West (Weidman & Yoder, 2010). The education sector was decentralized and many external parties or donor agencies became involved in educational reforms such as the Mongolian Foundation for Open Society [MFOS], World Bank, ADB, Japanese International Cooperation Agency [JICA], Danish International Development Agency [DANIDA] and so on. However, sometimes this wholesale adoption from multiple sources has had serious consequences: Foreign educational concepts have been imported without proper or complete adaptation and without regard to the Mongolian national identity or the Mongolian culture (Steiner-Khamsi & Stople, 2006).

There, however, a five-year project titled "Improving primary education outcomes for the most vulnerable children in rural Mongolia" was seriously adapted and it aimed to meet learning and developing needs of herder children in rural areas. The Save the Children Japan [SCJ], a non-governmental organization [NGO], implemented this project between 2012

and 2017 in collaboration with the Mongolian government with additional financial support from the World Bank and the Japan Social Development Fund (SCJ, 2017a). The project aimed to improve the education outcomes of Mongolian pastoralists' children who were underperforming and were underserved in the rural education sector, which involved 30 counties in four provinces. Under the project, three programs were implemented in order to meet herder children's needs: (a) home-based school preparation program for the five-year-old children; (b) an extra-curricular after school program through Child Development Centers established in boarding school dormitories; and (c) a compensatory home-based education program for the dropouts aged six to ten years old.

Another initiative is the Education Quality Reform Project. The project, with the assistance of the World Bank, started to be implemented with the aim to improve the quality of education for primary school children in Mongolia. The new concept of promoting every child's development was supported by the core curriculum for each general education level starting in the 2014-2015 school year with the primary education national core curriculum and followed by lower secondary and preschool core curricula implementation in 2015-2016. The Education Quality Reform Project is closely aligned with this core curriculum reform of promoting every child's development (MECS, 2016). The project, running from 2015-2019, covers the four areas of (a) improving learning outcomes; (b) pre- and in-service professional development of teachers; (c) school support program; and (d) system management, monitoring and evaluation.

Since the importance of education is stressed by the Mongolian electorate, political incentives exist to improve access to education. The emphasis has been put on supporting rural access and highly visible school rehabilitation. However, Mongolia does not seem to have improved its learning outcomes alongside this expansion of educational access and assets. A lack of national consensus on educational outcomes results in short-term policy-making, which undermines the effectiveness of educational outcomes. Even so, external financial assistance may facilitate educational progress regardless of the nature of the political system (Wales et al., 2016).

2.4. Conclusion

This chapter examined the contexts of school and herder family communication, including contextual factors shown in the literature to influence the communication, in rural Mongolian primary schools at the system level. This is perhaps the first attempt to examine

ecological factors affecting school and herder family communication in the Mongolian context since there is a lack of Mongolian studies on parental involvement in general.

The conceptual framework was proposed using Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (1977) and adapting Pang's (2011) contextual factors and home-school cooperation to locate the influencing contextual factors at different levels of the ecological systems. This way the present research study incorporated theoretical and conceptual frameworks in order to "offer the foundation for establishing its credibility" (Adom et al., 2018, p. 438). The proposed conceptual framework provided my own constructed model, which explained the relationship among concepts in the study. The proposed conceptual framework consisted of four levels: the microsystem; the mesosystem; the exosystem; and the macrosystem.

Contextual factors were explored at the exosystem and macrosystem levels. The teacher's workplace, the herder parent's workplace, the marriage institution, and the weather context were discussed at the exosystem level. Unlike other research which had used Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory to examine home-school cooperation and communication, this study added the weather context as an important factor in the exosystem to understand communication between schools and herder families in Mongolia. The weather context was important because nomadic herding is heavily dependent on weather conditions, and it seems to impact education in many different ways, including school-family communication. Extreme winters and *dzuds* may prevent parent-teacher communication in several ways. At the same time, heavy snowfalls during *dzuds* can possibly restrict access to communication channels due to signal failure of local lines and limited transportation.

The government policy in education, the economic context, and the political context were discussed at the macrosystem level. The government policy on education and the political context were found to be related to each other.

The proposed conceptual framework should help to better understand communication between the school and herder families and, ultimately, to improve educational outcomes for herder children. The conceptual framework, including the contextual factors, was empirically validated using three sub-studies. The validating process and the validated ecological model are presented in the next two chapters of this dissertation.

CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Objectives of the study

This dissertation aims to explore the contexts of communication between rural school and herder family within the primary school level, based on Bronfenbrenner's ecological model. In order to explore the ecological contexts of rural school and herder family communication, objectives are developed for this study.

The specific objectives of the study are as follows:

1. to explore relations between school and herder family at the microsystem level of the ecological model in relation to herder parents' experiences in managing their children's living arrangements in response to educational policies;
2. to explore communication experiences of classroom teachers with herder parents at the mesosystem level in the ecological model; and
3. to empirically validate the contextual factors located at the exosystem and the macrosystem levels of the proposed ecological model.

3.2. Research questions

The following research questions are addressed in this study:

1. How do herder parents decide on their primary school children's living arrangement in response to Mongolian educational policies?
2. How do teachers communicate with herder parents during the school year?
3. What are the contextual factors impacting rural school and herder family communication?

3.3. Research design

Because this study aimed at exploring how herder parents interpreted their experiences of "being in" the condition requiring them to decide on different living arrangements for their schoolchildren and how teachers interpreted their experiences of "being in" the condition requiring them to communicate with herder parents, the interpretative phenomenological approach seemed to fit best with the purpose of the study. This study thus employed IPA in order to achieve the research goals as "IPA is a suitable approach when one is trying to find out how individuals are perceiving the particular situations they are facing, how they are making sense of their personal and social world" (Smith & Osborn, 2008, p. 55). Moreover, IPA was employed to find out the contextual factors impacting school and herder family

communication “as one of the strengths of IPA is its recognition that contextual factors influence how meaning is constructed by an individual” (Clarke, 2009, p. 39). In other words, IPA aims to understand people’s lived experiences and the meanings they attach to their experiences (Clarke, 2010).

3.3.1. Phenomenology

Because IPA’s central focus is to explore the lived experience of individuals, IPA’s fundamental principles are strongly connected to phenomenology and hermeneutics (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). Phenomenology is the study of experience (Henriksson & Friesen, 2012). Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), a German mathematician, founded phenomenology and it was developed as both a philosophy and a method of inquiry (Henriksson & Friesen, 2012). Husserl believed phenomenology was based on the meaning of individual’s experience and the critical question for Husserl was: What do we know as persons? (Reiners, 2012).

There are two main phenomenological approaches: a) descriptive, and b) interpretative. Husserl developed descriptive phenomenology. In descriptive phenomenology, a research question asks for participants’ descriptions of their experiences of what they know as persons.

However, Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), Husserl’s student, rejected Husserl’s epistemology or theory of knowledge (Reiners, 2012). Heidegger adopted ontology, the science of being, and developed interpretative phenomenology (Henriksson & Friesen, 2012; Reiners, 2012). He extended hermeneutics (the Greek word meaning ‘to interpret’), the philosophy of interpretation, “by studying the concept of being in the world rather than knowing the world” (Reiners, 2012, p. 1). Heidegger was interested in interpreting and describing human experience and the critical question for him was: What is being?

One of the important differences between descriptive and interpretative phenomenology is researcher’s biases in their research. In interpretative phenomenology, also known as hermeneutic phenomenology, researchers do not bracket their biases, but include themselves in the environment along with their prior engagements with the phenomenon being studied. However, in descriptive phenomenology researchers describe the phenomenon being studied by bracketing their biases (Reiners, 2012).

Interpretative phenomenological research studies have been more commonly conducted in the areas of health (Reiners, 2012), psychology (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014) and counselling (Clarke, 2010); hence, adopting them in the context of educational studies is

emergent (Holland, 2014). Over the last 30 years phenomenology in general has been developed as a method applied in the research fields of education, nursing, psychology, and social work (Henriksson & Friesen, 2012). More particularly, in the last few decades, educational researchers have shown an increasing interest in qualitative methods like hermeneutic phenomenology or interpretative phenomenology. Thus, interpretative phenomenology is a relevant approach for researchers in education, health and nursing because interpretative phenomenological approaches recommend that researchers “interpret the meanings found in relation to phenomena” (Sloan & Bowe, 2014, p. 9). Because of its strong focus on lived experiences, of ‘being in’ the world, interpretative or hermeneutic phenomenology “bridges the gap between what theory and educational documents say *should* take place in the classroom and what *actually* takes place in every-day pedagogical practice” (Henriksson & Friesen, 2012, p. 9).

3.3.2. IPA

Even though IPA is recently developed, it is a rapidly growing approach to qualitative inquiry (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). IPA was first introduced in Jonathan Smith’s paper in psychology and health in 1996 (Smith et al., 2009) and is one of the newest entries to the qualitative approaches of data analysis (Clarke, 2010).

Some recent studies in educational settings (Hall, Hornby, & Macfarlane, 2015; Holland, 2014) have adopted IPA. Holland (2014) explored the practice of teaching by including 13 lecturers in an English higher education institution through semi-structured interviews. Hall et al. (2015) explored the mechanisms involved for engaging the indigenous Maori families in their child’s education in New Zealand by inviting five Maori parents to semi-structured interviews. The current study thus contributes to extending the application of IPA to qualitative studies in the educational settings.

IPA relies on idiography in that it focuses on the particular rather than the universal (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). In other words, IPA’s idiographic method focuses on the detailed examination of the particular case (Smith et al., 2009) in order to explore participants’ personal lived experiences (Finlay, 2012). With this idiographic focus, IPA’s aim is to generate detailed and deeper descriptions of the participant’s experiences with quality information rather than generating large quantities of information (Clarke, 2009; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). In this regard, small sample sizes are often recommended in IPA studies. This smaller sample allows the researchers to conduct “a thorough and in-depth analysis of each individual case” (Noon, 2018, p. 76). There have been studies published

including one, four, nine, fifteen and more samples (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Smith & Osborn, 2008). It is important to note that small sample sizes are very common in IPA studies, but larger sample sizes are also possible (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). Student projects using IPA have been recommended including a sample size of five or six participants (Smith & Osborn, 2008). Clarke (2010) recommended a sample size between four and ten for doctoral level IPA studies. Thus, IPA studies use purposive sampling, which is as homogenous as possible, for “whom the research question will be significant” (Smith & Osborn, 2008, p. 56).

Like most qualitative research methodologies, IPA rejects formulating hypotheses prior to conducting research (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Smith & Osborn, 2008). In other words, IPA researchers do not test a predetermined hypothesis. Thus, usually broad and open research questions are developed and IPA studies aim to explore the phenomenon being studied in a way that is flexible and detailed (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Smith & Osborn, 2008). The primary goal of an IPA study is to explore how participants make sense of their experiences related to the phenomena being studied (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Smith & Osborn, 2008).

IPA is strongly connected to hermeneutics or theories of interpretation (Smith & Osborn, 2008). More importantly, by being strongly connected to hermeneutic traditions, IPA recognizes that the researchers play a central role in the data analysis and they do not advocate the use of bracketing (Finlay, 2012). The analytical process in IPA studies involves a double hermeneutic or two-stage interpretation process: First, participants make meaning of their world, and secondly, researchers try to make sense of the participants’ meaning making of their world (Smith & Osborn, 2008). This way

IPA synthesizes ideas from phenomenology and hermeneutics resulting in a method which is descriptive because it is connected with how things appear and letting things speak for themselves, and interpretative because it recognizes there is no such things as an uninterpreted phenomenon. (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014, p. 363)

The present dissertation study developed three broad and open research questions to explore how herder parents make sense of their relations with schools, how classroom teachers and herder parents make sense of their communication experiences, and what contextual factors impact their communication experiences. In this regard, first, herder parents and classroom teachers made meaning of their relations and communication experiences with the influence of contextual factors. Secondly, I tried to make sense of both

teachers' and herder parents' meaning making of their experiences. Considering the three research questions, three sub-studies were conducted using different sample sizes and different participant representatives.

The findings of the sub-studies included both the participants' account of their experiences in their own words and my interpretative comments (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). I did this by aggregating their comments and searching for communalities that resonated with my own lived experiences as a former secondary school teacher who had some experiences in communicating with herder parents and caregivers, and a researcher who has conducted a series of studies on parental involvement.

3.4. Research site

Dornod province was chosen to conduct this study as an extension of previous studies including one on pre-service training on parental involvement (Sukhbaatar, 2014, 2018b) and one on pre-service teachers' views on working with diverse families (Sukhbaatar, 2018a). These past studies discussed some institutional and social factors contributing to a lack of parental involvement in primary schools and suggested the need for further in-depth investigations into communication between herder families and school personnel.

Out of the 21 provinces of Mongolia, Dornod is the most eastern one. It is 650 kilometers away from the capital, Ulaanbaatar. The present dissertation research was conducted in two boarding schools in two counties which serve large numbers of herder children. The two boarding schools taking part in the study are located at distances of 150 and 195 kilometers from Choibalsan, the capital of Dornod province, respectively.

3.4.1. County School A

County school A serves only primary and lower secondary level pupils, which means those pupils who want to study further in upper secondary school need to go to the province center. During the school year when the data were collected, there were altogether 278 pupils aged between six and 15, and 125 out of them were from pastoralist families. The classrooms were shared by 11 classes of the 1st to 9th graders and there were two shifts of classes such that some classes were taught in the morning and some were taught in the afternoon. There were seven primary education classes of 1st to 5th grades and four lower secondary education classes of 6th to 9th grades.

In the five primary classes of the participating teachers, there were 143 pupils. The minimum number of pupils in a class was 23 and the maximum was 38. Altogether 74 pupils

out of 143 were from herder families. Some 23 of these pupils were placed in the school dormitory and there were six six-year-old pupils among them. Another 30 of the herder pupils lived in split households with their mothers and 21 herder pupils stayed with relatives or extended family members.

The school was established in 1924 and the current one-storey school building was built in 1978. The school dormitory had the capacity to accommodate 50 pupils but there were altogether 40 pupils with 23 of them in primary education classes residing in the dormitory at the time of the data collection. Four to eight children stayed in each of the eight dormitory rooms. Siblings or relatives of the same gender were allowed to stay in the same room.

The dormitory building was separate but close to the school building. The dormitory was built in 2012. Before 2012 the dormitory occupied three classrooms in the school building and the rooms could only accommodate 23 pupils maximum.

In the dormitory building there was a room for herder parents. When herder parents came to visit their children in the dormitory they were provided with the room and could sleep together with their children in the room. The school has provided the room since the building was completed in 2012.

In the dormitory building there were also another two rooms; one for the children to study and do their homework [HW] and the other one for the Child Development Center. The Child Development Center was developed by SCJ during the implementation of the project “Improving primary education outcomes for the most vulnerable children in rural Mongolia,” which ran between 2012 and 2017. The room was supplied with a TV set, books, and toys and served not only children who resided in the dormitory but also children who lived in their relative’s homes.

In March 2017, the SCJ also provided the dormitory with a landline phone as part of the scope of another project titled “Educational support and school-based disaster risk reduction strengthening for *dzud*”. The telephone was intended for the dormitory children, mainly herder children, to help them regularly communicate with their parents in remote areas free of charge. Initially the phone was provided with one-year pre-paid credit by the SCJ. However, during the field visit, after almost a year, the phone was not working because the school did not have a budget to pay for the credit.

The dormitory staff consisted of one dormitory teacher, four janitors, and two cooks: all were female. The cooks cooked three times a day for the dormitory residents. Four janitors worked night shifts looking after the children and the school dormitory building. Moreover, the four janitors were in charge of doing the laundry for the primary education class children.

Because the field visit was conducted in winter, there were also four stokers who worked night-shifts to keep the dormitory building warm by feeding coal into the dormitory stove. In the county there was no central heating system, so the school, the dormitory, and other organizations had their own stoves to heat their buildings during cold weather, starting from October until May. To heat the dormitory, the school bought coal from a nearby coal mine company located 40 kilometers from the county center. This school and dormitory did not have running water and they fetched water for washing from a well. Moreover, the school and dormitory had outside toilets.

3.4.2. County School B

County school B had 544 pupils aged between six and 18 in the primary, lower secondary, and upper secondary education classes. Of these pupils, 307 were from herder families. At the primary school level, there were 312 pupils with 46 who stayed in the school dormitory. The dormitory had the capacity of accommodating up to 120 pupils in 22 rooms. The dormitory, however, accommodated altogether 110 pupils at the time of data collection and there was only one dormitory teacher, who was in charge of the pupils' well-being, learning, and development. Some four to eight pupils resided in each dorm room.

The school was composed of six buildings: (a) a secondary school, (b) a primary school, (c) a sports hall, (d) the new or current dormitory, and (e) two old dormitory buildings which were now rented by eight families. During the winter eight stokers worked nightshifts to keep the six buildings warm by feeding coal into the stoves. The school bought coal from a coal mine company near the provincial center located 195 kilometers away. According to the principal, the school bought around 170 tons of coal monthly. The eight stokers were part-time workers who worked between October and May.

The school buildings were built in different times with different funding sources. The secondary school's current two-storey building was built in 1979. Pupils from the 6th to the 12th grades were taught in 10 groups in this building and they had only morning classes. However, there were also 10 groups of the 1st- to 5th-graders in the primary school and they had classes in two shifts. The primary school's two-storey building was built in 2013 with the funding from the county. The two-storey dormitory was built in 2016 with the MECSS funding. The dormitory staff consisted of one teacher, five cooks, four janitors, two cleaners, and four stokers. The MECSS also invested in building a sports hall in 2016.

While the other school buildings were close to each other, the sports hall was 300 meters away from the secondary school. Pupils between the 4th and 12th grades had physical

education classes in the sports hall. Besides physical education classes, the sports hall also served the community; in fact, the annual volleyball match among the *baghs* was held in there during the data collection. Among the eight families who rented rooms in two old dormitory buildings there were two families of school teachers.

The dormitory also had a Child Development Center funded by SCJ. The landline phone, however, was working in the dormitory and the school was able to pay for it. Unlike School A, this school had running water and a sanitation system and employed a worker who assisted younger children to take showers and who washed these children's laundry. However, this school did not provide a designated room for herder parents to stay for a night.

3.5. Participants

This study involved 10 classroom teachers and 10 pastoralist parents to participate in in-depth, semi-structured interviews designed to allow these teachers and pastoralist parents to “articulate their lived experiences” (Padilla-Diaz, 2015, p. 104). The participants were from two different rural schools in eastern Mongolian remote counties. I used purposive sampling to recruit the participants.

3.5.1. Classroom teachers

This study recruited a total of 10 teachers; five teachers from each school (see Table 4). All of the teachers were female and had 12-24 herder pupils in their classes, except for one who had only seven herder pupils. While eight of the teachers graduated from a local Higher Education Institution [HEI], the other two had graduated from a HEI in the capital. The participants' teaching experiences ranged from one to 30 years. The teacher who had only one year of teaching experience, however, had experience in communicating with herder parents for three quarters of the school year. This teacher moved to the county with her family from the capital at the start of the school year.

Among the 10 teachers four were single mothers. One of these teachers had one child and lived together with her parents in an extended family. Another teacher lived together with her two grandchildren as their parents were migrant workers. There was one teacher who lived in the county on her own while her daughter lived together with her grandfather in the provincial center. This teacher reported that she usually visited her daughter and father during weekends. The last teacher who was a single mother had two children and her family lived in a rental home.

The remaining six teachers lived with their children and husbands as nuclear families. These teachers had one to three children.

3.5.2. Herder parents

There were five herder parents from each school interviewed and two out of the ten parents were male (see Table 5). Most of the herder parents had two or three schoolchildren. Three parents had only one schoolchild and one parent had four schoolchildren. Regarding their educational background, two parents quit school when they were in their first grade and they were illiterate. One parent finished primary school and the rest finished secondary or vocational schools. These families generally resided in remote areas, 10-100 kilometers away. However, one family moved to the county center and they had three children in school. The husband herded someone else's horses 13 kilometers away from the center. Everyday he went to the countryside to herd allowing his wife to take care of their children at home near the school. The other families moved their camps three to ten times a year.

Three families were hired as herders and did not own any herds themselves. These families were poor and vulnerable, and they enrolled in the Government Food Stamp Program [GFSP]. In this program, the families are supported with the provision of basic food items on a monthly basis. There was one family who had their own 100 head of livestock, but also looked after someone else's herds at the same time. These four families were paid 200,000-300,000 tugrik (US\$83-US\$124) monthly. The rest of the families owned 230-1000 head of livestock.

One of the herder parents was a *bagh* governor. He had been working as a *bagh* governor for only six months; before that he was a herder. When he was a herder his schoolchildren stayed with their grandmother in the county center. During the school year when this study was conducted, his children stayed in the school dormitory. Having this parent in this study provided "an opportunity to examine similarities and differences between individuals" (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014, p. 364) and conduct "a thorough and in-depth analysis of each individual case" (Noon, 2018, p. 76). Except for the one family who moved to the county center, the living arrangement of schoolchildren chosen by these pastoralist parents included the school dormitories, relative's places, and split households.

Table 4. Teacher's demographic information

No.	Age	Gender	Teacher education institution graduated from	Teaching years	Grade level taught	No of pupils in class	No of herder pupils	Herder pupils' living arrangement		
								School dormitory	Split household	Relative's home
1	49	F	HEI in the capital	30	1st A	24	12	3	2	7
2	43	F	Local HEI	24	5th	28	15	11	1	3
3	25	F	HEI in the capital	1	3rd	30	14	5	3	6
4	29	F	Local HEI	5	1st B	23	18	3	13	2
5	41	F	Local HEI	4	4th	38	15	1	11	3
6	49	F	Local HEI	30	1st	36	18	1	14	3
7	29	F	Local HEI	6	5th	21	7	2	4	1
8	54	F	Local HEI	29	4th A	34	16	8	4	4
9	48	F	Local HEI	17	4th B	35	24	5	16	3
10	33	F	Local HEI	4	2nd	26	12	-	2	10

Table 5. Pastoralist parents' demographic information

No	Gender	Age	Education level	Spouse's education level	No of livestock head	Income source	Home location distance	Vehicle owned	No of moves a year	No of school children	Children's living arrangement
1	F	37	Quit 1st grade	Vocational school	Hired as a full-time herder	Wage & GFSP	70 km	Motor-cycle	NA	2 (1st & 3rd grades)	School dormitory
2	F	32	Quit 1st grade	Quit 4th grade	Hired as a part-time herder	Wage & GFSP	County center	NA	NA	3 (1st, 3rd, & 7th grades)	Home
3	F	35	Primary school	Lower secondary school	300	Livestock herds	20-57 km	Motor-cycle	4	3 (2nd, 3rd, & 7th grades)	-Split household -Relative's home
4	F	34	Lower secondary school	Lower secondary school	1000	Livestock herds	60-100 km	Car	4	1 (5th grade)	-Relative's home -Split household
5	M	55	Lower secondary school	Upper secondary school	Hired as a full-time herder	Wage & GFSP	12-40 km	NA	3	2 (1st & 4th grades)	School dormitory
6	F	32	Upper secondary school	Upper secondary school	230	Livestock herds	10 km	Motor-cycle & car	3	2 (3rd, & 4th grades)	Split household
7	F	31	Upper secondary school	Upper secondary school	300	Livestock herds	32 km	Car	10	1 (1st grade)	Relative's home
8	F	27	Upper secondary school	Upper secondary school	340	Livestock herds	40-70 km	Car	4	1 (2nd grade)	In a 2nd home with grandmother
9	F	32	Lower secondary school	Lower secondary school	100 & hired as a full-time herder	Livestock herds & wage	22 km	NA	7-8	2 (3rd & 6th grades)	School dormitory
10	M	43	Upper secondary school	Lower secondary school	300	Salary & livestock herds	30 km	Car	3-4	3 (3rd, 5th, & 10th grades)	School dormitory

3.5.3. Samples used in sub-studies

The present dissertation research involved altogether 20 herder parents and classroom teachers, with different samples sizes and different representatives of participants from two different school sites for the three sub-studies considering the three research questions (see Table 6). The first research question focuses on herder parents' experiences in managing their children's living arrangements, only herder parents participated in this sub-study. Because the second research question focuses on communicating experiences of classroom teachers with herder parents, only teachers were recruited for this sub-study. The last research question focuses on the contextual factors impacting communication between teachers and herder parents, so both herder parents and classroom teachers participated in this sub-study.

Table 6. The samples of the sub-studies

Research questions	Studies	Participant representatives	Sample	Schools	Instruments
RQ 1	Sub-study 1	Herder parents	N=5	School A	Interview protocol for herder parents
RQ 2	Sub-study 2	Classroom teachers	N=5	School A	Interview protocol for classroom teachers
RQ 3	Sub-study 3	Herder parents and classroom teachers	N=20	School A School B	Interview protocol for herder parent Interview protocol for classroom teachers

The first two sub-studies recruited five herder parents and five classroom teachers respectively out of this dissertation research's 20 participants. The 10 participants of these two sub-studies were from School A and this school was the primary source of the data. However, the last sub-study recruited five more herder parents and another five classroom teachers from School B in addition to the 10 participants from School A. This allowed the last sub-study to better explore contextual factors impacting communication between classroom teachers and herder parents at two different locations in order to examine similarities and differences between two remote schools.

3.4. Research instrument

Phenomenologists believe that interactions between researchers and participants create knowledge and help researchers understand the phenomenon being studied (Reiners, 2012). In this regard, semi-structured interviews are often employed in interpretative phenomenological research studies because this format gives the researcher enough space and flexibility for original and unexpected issues to arise. This way the researchers can explore the phenomenon being studied in more detail with further questions (Clarke, 2009; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014).

The interview protocols for teachers and herder parents were adapted from the previous work by Farrell and Collier (2010) for the purpose of the study. The original protocol was used to explore teacher educators' perceptions of family-school communication at elementary schools serving a military population in the USA where serving members are frequently away from home. The data for the three sub-studies were collected using two different interview protocols for herder parents and classroom teachers. The interview protocols were developed in English at first. The English was reviewed by two senior doctoral-level researchers, one a native English speaker and the other one who is a non-native English speaker, but is fluent in academic and professional English. After the review, the protocols were translated into Mongolian by the researcher and the Mongolian translation was examined by a bilingual peer researcher and a Mongolian linguist.

The interview protocol for teachers (see Appendix A) included 12 questions covering three main areas: (a) teachers' own experiences in communicating with pastoralist parents (e.g. *Compared to mainstream parents, what is the involvement level of herder parents generally like? How do you communicate with herder parents?*); (b) teacher-parent communication at the school level (e.g. *How is school and herder family communication viewed within your school as a whole?*); and (c) teacher education (e.g. *What experiences, if any, prepared you to engage in school and herder family communication? What strategies and skills are required to manage these challenges?*). The interviews were recorded with the permission of the participants.

The second interview protocol for pastoralist parents (see Appendix B) included 10 questions. This interview guide consisted of three parts: (a) herder parents' own experiences in managing their schoolchildren's living arrangement (e.g. *How do you decide on your primary school children's living arrangement?*); (b) challenges herder families face when they send their children to school (e.g. *What changes do you have in your family structure and roles in household/livestock chores?*); and (c) herder parents' own experiences in

communicating with teachers (e.g. *How do you communicate with your child's teacher? What, if any, difficulties do you have when you communicate with teachers? How often do you attend parent-teacher meetings?*).

Prior to the data collection in the two remote county schools, the semi-structured interview questions were piloted with classroom teachers and herder parents for content validity from a school in the provincial center. The school is one of the two that provides dormitory for pupils from herder families in the provincial center. The interview protocol for teachers was piloted with a focus group of five primary education classroom teachers who had three to nine herder pupils in their classes. The interview protocol for herder parents was piloted with three herder parents who had two to three schoolchildren.

3.5. Data collection procedure

The field visit was conducted in January and February in 2018 and the data were collected during the third quarter of the school year. During this time of the year temperatures reached -30 °C at night and -22 °C at the highest during the day. The data collection in School A was conducted in February and in School B in January. When the fieldwork was conducted in School A, they had a heavy snowfall in the county. There were some days of raging snowstorms in both counties.

During the fieldwork, I stayed in the school dormitories of the two schools. I stayed in the room for herder parents in School A dormitory and a spare residential room in School B dormitory.

The participants were recruited based on purposive sampling and with the help of school education managers and the participating classroom teachers. Before each interview the participants were provided with an informed consent agreement (see Appendix C) in Mongolian on one side and English on the other side. The participants signed the agreement if they decided to participate in the dissertation research.

The interviews were conducted in schools and in the dormitories. However, one interview was conducted in a herder family's campsite, which was located 12 kilometers away from the county center. The interviews with herder parents lasted for 25 to 45 minutes, but interviews with classroom teachers lasted for 45 to 65 minutes. I asked for permission from all participants and recorded the interviews in addition to taking notes.

3.6. Data analysis

The interviews were transcribed in Mongolian. The text was then analyzed to find and understand the meaning of teachers' and pastoralist parents' experiences in relation to the phenomenon being studied in order to allow interpretation (Sloan & Bowe, 2014).

I conducted the analysis following the three-step-guideline by Pietkiewicz and Smith (2014). The three steps are as follows:

1. multiple reading and making notes,
2. transforming notes into emergent themes, and
3. seeking relationships and clustering themes.

I conducted the initial IPA using the Mongolian transcriptions. In the first step of the analysis, I read the transcript a number of times and listened to the audio recording a few times. After reading and listening, I made notes of reflections about the interview experience, other thoughts, and comments focusing on content and context in English. In the second step, I tried to formulate concise phrases in order to transform the English notes into emergent themes. Finally, in the third step, I looked for connections between the emerging themes and grouped them together according to conceptual similarities. Each cluster was provided with a descriptive label and the IPA was ended up with a list of major themes and sub-themes with relevant extracts from interviews followed by my analytic comments (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014).

The data were analyzed depending on the research questions for each systems levels of the ecological model. First, the transcriptions of five herder parents from School A were used for the analysis of herder parents' experiences in managing their children's living arrangements. Second, the data from the five classroom teachers from School A were used for the analysis of the experiences of classroom teachers communicating with herder parents. Lastly, the data of 10 herder parents and 10 teachers from two county schools were analyzed to explore the contextual factors impacting communication between school and herder families.

There are numerous validity procedures used by researchers to establish the credibility of their qualitative works, including member checking, triangulation, thick description, peer reviews and so on. Researchers employ one or more of these procedures to report their research findings (Creswell & Miller, 2000). This study followed Creswell and Miller's (2000) recommendations of applying peer debriefing to establish validity. A reviewer is someone who is familiar with the area of interest being explored and reviews the research

process, and provides feedback to researchers (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Two reviewers, familiar with educational research in Mongolia, conducted the peer debriefing reviews. After I finalized the initial analysis, the reviewers reviewed the findings and themes and provided additional feedback. With the feedback provided by the reviewers, I further analyzed all findings in terms of analytical reduction of the data, and some sub-themes were dropped. For instance, during the initial data analysis of Sub-study 1, five themes and 11 sub-themes emerged (see Appendix D). However, after the feedback provided by the reviewers, a theme and three sub-themes were dropped. The 4th theme “Family relationships” was dropped as its three sub-themes were consolidated with other themes. For instance, “Sibling relationships” was consolidated with “Assuring a good start” in the “Starting school” theme and the remaining two sub-themes were consolidated with the “Family resources” theme as they fit better in these themes (see Table 7). The finalized four themes and eight sub-themes were more concisely labeled. With the credibility of this qualitative work, addressed themes and sub-themes are finalized and presented. The findings section of Sub-study 1 in the next chapter presents the final four themes and eight sub-themes.

Table 7. Initial and finalized findings of Sub-study 1

Initial findings	Finalized findings after peer debriefing
Theme 1. School for younger children <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. The 6-year-olds are quite young b. New beginning for the child 	Theme 1. Starting school <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Dealing with a six-year-old b. Assuring a good start
Theme 2. Education-minded herder parents <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. More educated children b. Parents’ schooling experiences 	Theme 2. Education-minded herder parents <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Better educated children b. Parents’ school experiences
Theme 3. Shared experiences <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Satisfaction with school b. Dissatisfaction with school 	Theme 3. Shared experiences <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Positive reports about the dormitory b. Negative experiences and observations
Theme 4. Family relationships <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Sibling relationships b. Extended family support c. Child involvement in decision making 	Theme 4. Family resources <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Financial resources b. Social resources
Theme 5. Resources <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Financial resources b. Social networks 	

In IPA studies, reflexivity is very important in the data analysis. The researcher's prior understandings and personal experiences influence the data analysis and the researcher acknowledges his or her use of relevant prior experiences for interpreting meanings (Clarke, 2009; Sloan & Bowe, 2014). In this regard, I used my relevant prior experiences in previous studies "as an aid to data analysis and/or interpretation of meanings" (Sloan & Bowe, 2014, p. 12). This study builds on my reflections based on my prior experience in previous studies on the contexts of school and herder family communication (Sukhbaatar & Tarkó, 2018), on pre-service teachers' views on working with diverse families (Sukhbaatar, 2018a), on institutional and social factors contributing to a lack of parental involvement (Sukhbaatar, 2018b), on pre-service teachers' preparation for parental involvement (Sukhbaatar, 2014), and on the history and challenges of teacher education in Mongolia (Sukhbaatar & Sukhbaatar, 2019).

3.7. Ethical consideration

The research was approved (ethical approval reference number: 4/2019) by the IRB of the Doctoral School of Education at the University of Szeged. Before the study was conducted in the remote counties in an Eastern Mongolian province, an educational specialist in charge of primary education in the Provincial Board of Education under the MECSS of Mongolia was officially informed about the study.

Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study. The participants understood and signed the informed consent agreement printed in both Mongolian and English before the interviews. To the two illiterate parents I read the informed consent in Mongolian and they signed the agreement. They could learn to write their names.

CHAPTER 4. FINDINGS

This chapter presents three empirical sub-studies focusing on the three research questions. Each sub-study is organized into four sections of introduction, methodology, findings, and conclusion. The introduction sections present the purposes of sub-studies. The methodology sections are focused on the number and characteristics of participants as these sub-studies used different sample sizes from different sites. The findings sections outline themes and sub-themes that emerged from IPA providing the thick rich descriptions and invaluable quotes from the participants. Finally, the conclusions are drawn from the findings.

The findings presented in this research are organized following the proposed ecological model of contexts of school and pastoralist family communication presented Chapter Two of this dissertation. An ecological model of contexts of communication between school and pastoralist family in rural Mongolia is developed based on the findings of the three sub-studies (see Figure 4). Unlike the proposed ecological model (see Figure 3) this validated model includes some new factors such as communication facility and social system.

While the first sub-study discusses the findings of herder parents' experiences in managing their children's living arrangements in response to educational policies at the microsystem level, the second sub-study discusses findings of classroom teachers' experiences in communicating with herder parents at the mesosystem level using data from five herder parents and five teachers respectively. These participants are from the same school. However, the last sub-study presents the contextual factors impacting school and herder family communication at the exosystem and macrosystem levels by adding data from five teachers and five herder parents from the second county school to the data from the 10 participants of the previous two sub-studies. In this last sub-study, the findings of the previous two sub-studies are presented more deeply and specifically in some themes and sub-themes in relation to the different contextual factors at the larger system level.

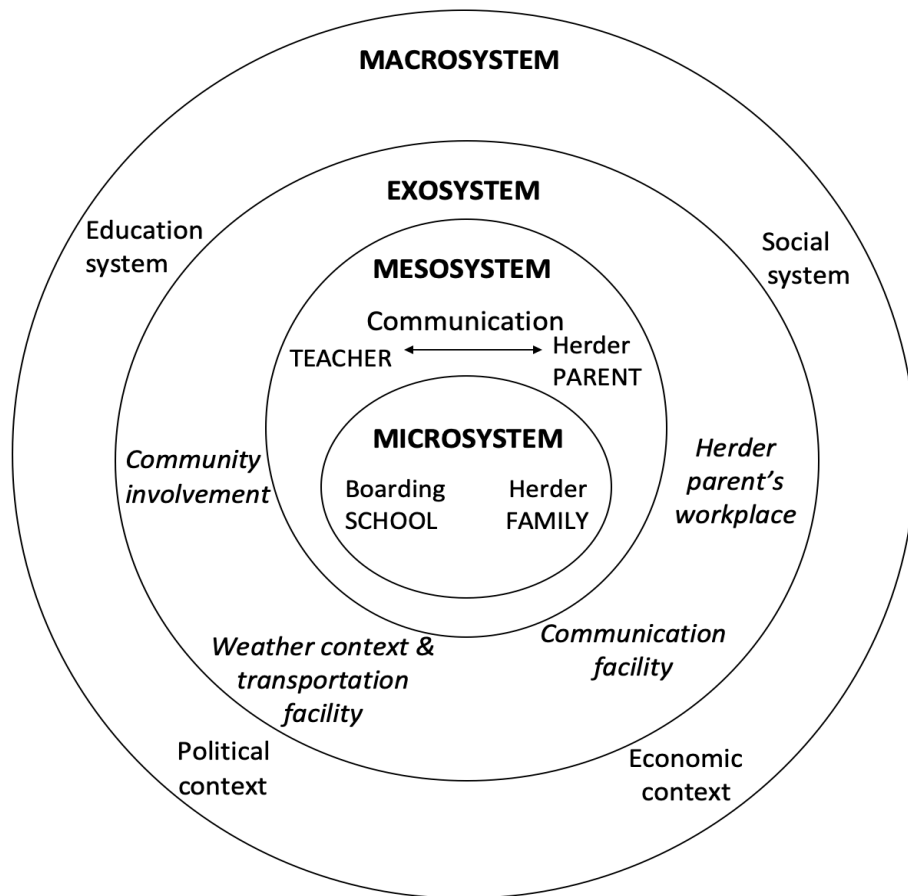


Figure 4. An ecological model: Contexts of communication between school and pastoralist family in rural Mongolia
 [Adapted from Pang's (2011) contextual factors and home-school cooperation model, p. 2]

4.1. Sub-study 1. The microsystem: Pastoralist parents' response to educational policies and their impact on living arrangements for school age children

4.1.1. Introduction

When the new education system of 12 years was adopted there were debates about placing six-year-old children from herder families in school dormitories. Later the President passed a decree in 2014, requiring schools to provide a pleasant learning and living environment for six-year-olds. In the decree, it was stated that local governments, based on their resources, should provide a specialized teacher who is able to support the six-year-olds' learning, development, and emotional needs, and to partner closely with the children's parents and caregivers. Besides the specialized teacher, it was also required that local agencies should provide an assistant teacher who would help the young pupils practice a healthy and hygienic lifestyle in the school dormitory. However, these teachers are generally not available because of a lack of economic resources in rural communities (Sanjaabadam, 2014).

Mongolian "herders value education and actively enroll their children in formal schools" (Ahearn & Bumochir, 2016, p. 91) and formal education has long been popularized among Mongolian herders (Stolpe, 2016). Homes located in remote areas, severe weather conditions, and poor infrastructure require children from herder families to settle near schools for the duration of the school year. Due to poor conditions and a lack of human resources in boarding school dormitories, herder families often decide on different living arrangements for their school children depending on their household size, number of school children, financial resources, social resources or networks, type of livestock, and other factors (Ahearn & Bumochir, 2016). Currently, herder parents use three main living arrangement options including (a) school dormitories, (b) relative's places, and (c) split households.

Researchers (Ahearn & Bumochir, 2016) argued that Mongolia's current school system posed challenges to nomadic herders' livelihoods and this system needed to be examined. The present sub-study aims to explore how herder parents' experiences influence their decision for making living arrangement for their primary school children during the school year in response to educational policies.

4.1.2. Methodology

This sub-study employed an IPA to explore experiences of herder families regarding the different living arrangements they used when they sent their children to primary school and to understand how these families interpreted their experiences with the resulting living conditions. IPA researchers “concentrate more on the depth, rather than breadth of the study” (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014, p. 364). In this regard, five participants were interviewed in this sub-study (see Table 8).

Table 8. The sample of the Sub-study 1

Research question	Study	Participant representatives	Sample	School	Instrument
RQ 1	Sub-study 1	Herder parents	N=5	School A	Interview protocol for herder parents

The research site consisted of seven primary classes from first to fifth grades with 143 pupils in County School A. The five parents (four female and one male) were from different backgrounds in terms of education, size of herds, and living arrangements for their children. Among the participants two were illiterate and had left school when they were in their first grade. One parent finished primary school and the other two finished lower secondary school. Four parents were in their 30s and one was in his 50s. Three parents were hired as herders and did not own any herds themselves. These families were poor and vulnerable, and they enrolled in the GFSP. The remaining two families owned around 300 and 1,000 livestock head respectively. One family moved to the county center and the husband herded for someone as a part-time herder. Two of the families had three school children and each pastoralist family had two children in the primary school, except for one who had one child. The pastoralist parents had chosen the school dormitory, a relative’s place, and split household for their school children’s living arrangement.

4.1.3. Findings

The current study explored how herder parents interpreted their experiences in dealing with living arrangements for their children during the school year. During the analysis four themes emerged and each theme was divided into two sub-themes. The four themes were: (a) children starting school; (b) education-minded herder parents; (c) shared experiences; and (d) family resources.

Theme 1. Starting School

The most common issue which made parents decide on their current living arrangements for their children was the child's age and age-related experiences.

Dealing with a six-year-old. Participants noted the requirement to send their six-year-olds to school was not easy, because the children were quite young. A mother, who had two children staying in the school dormitory and who waited to send her younger child to school a year later when he was seven, explained,

Two of us [my husband and I] were hired to herd someone's livestock herd and then neither of us were able to leave for the county center with the child to go to school. Instead, we sent him when he was seven, so he could stay in the dormitory with his older brother.

Another mother, who split the household, said:

If the child had gone to school at age seven, I would have never stayed with my child in the 1st year leaving behind my husband alone with livestock herding... always worrying about him [my husband] and herds when the weather was bad.

Assuring a good start. A mother who chose a split household for the school year when her child started school at age six felt, however, that it was better for her to stay together with the child in the first year so she could work with the child more closely and efficiently and the child could learn better.

This mother said,

The six-year-olds get tired very easily because they have lots of tasks to complete. So, I should better help the child with HW.

The mother added if the child learned better from the beginning, she would struggle less in subsequent school years in upper grades when the mother left her to stay in the school dormitory or at a relative's place.

Coming from the countryside and adjusting to a new place is not easy for the six-year-olds who have not gone to preschool and have not visited places in the county center before. A parent who chose split households in her child's first year also considered her child's safety saying,

Every time I had to follow my child because there are cars and dogs in the streets.

Parents tended to feel more comfortable when there were two or more children staying together in the same place. A parent's response showed that his two children, in the 1st and 4th grades, were doing well together in the dormitory:

My oldest daughter stayed at my relative's before and now she is together with her sister in the dormitory. The oldest did not go to preschool and she was shy. But now she gets along well with others while she is together with her sister in there.

Theme 2. Education-Minded Herder Parents

Herder parents valued education and they wished their children to be more educated than they were. Herder parents understood from their past school experiences that education was very important and their education experiences influenced their decision-making around arranging their children's living during the school year.

Better educated children. Those parents who quit school at early ages and could not complete their studies showed a strong desire to support their children so they would receive a good education. These parents preferred living with their children during the school year. A parent said the following:

Because I couldn't go to school, I am always willing to send my children to school. So, my family moved to the county center from the countryside. Our oldest child did not go to school. My husband really tries hard to keep three children going to school thinking that no school for me and him, and our oldest child is enough.

She also added she preferred living in the countryside herding. However, the family moved to the county center because of their children's schooling. These parents seemed to prioritize their children's schooling over other considerations such as a better living condition in the countryside as she recounted.

Another parent, who experienced a split household in her child's first year, explained,

My husband and I really want our children to be more educated. So, my husband let me stay in the county center with the children and he was alone herding. Otherwise, I would have stayed together with him herding.

Parents' school experience. The parents who quit their school in their early primary school years were more likely to consider their children's schooling and living arrangements carefully because of their past experiences. One mother said,

I am always with my children during the school year. We try hard to have our three children get educated. Being uneducated is tough, I am illiterate myself.

Another mother, who stayed with her children when the youngest one was in the first grade, cared deeply about her children's education because she was not able to continue her own studies after primary school. Thinking back about her schooling experience seemed to be a very sore subject for her. When she was asked about her drop-out experience, tears welled up in her eyes and her voice was lowered and she said:

I have six siblings and they also quit school in their 2nd and 3rd grades. Our living condition was poor and we had a small number of livestock. So, I quit school... Now my husband and I really try hard and split the household last year.

Most of the parents in this study were in their 30s, and three of them quit school with many others during the 1990s when the collective farms collapsed and livestock herds were privatized. A mother who quit school in her first grade remained illiterate. It was challenging for her to help the children with HW. She decided to place her children in the school dormitory, because the dormitory teacher helps younger children with their homework:

I quit school in 1990 ... I think. During this time, many children quit school in order to help their families with herding. ... Because my education is very poor, I cannot help my children with HW. But the dormitory teacher works very well with children in there. So, I have them stay in the dormitory.

Since none of the parents who participated in this study finished higher education, these herder parents, in addition, wished for their children to continue their studies and go to universities. A mother, who finished lower secondary school, said she was sure she would send her child to a university.

Theme 3. Shared Experiences

Parents learned about the school dormitory from their neighbors and their children, and this seemed to impact their satisfaction with the school dormitory. These feelings influenced their decision making.

Positive reports about the dormitory. Some of the participants said they learned about the dormitory usually from their neighbors and their children:

I learned from my children that food is good enough in the dormitory. It is good that they [janitors] wash the primary school children's clothes. And also, the dormitory teacher helps children complete their HW.

A mother of three, with the youngest child in the 2nd grade, who was thinking of putting her children in the school dormitory next school year, had the satisfaction of seeing the dormitory as a better living arrangement compared to split households and relative's places. She had already experienced both split households and relative's places, and now was thinking the following:

My neighbors had their children staying in the dormitory and they had never said about the dormitory was doing badly. I believe the dormitory is a good place. My three children can stay there since other children are doing so.

Negative experiences and observations. Parents, who decided not to place their children in the dormitory, seemed to have feelings of dissatisfaction with the school. Their feeling of dissatisfaction could be related either to their own experiences with school or to what they had learned from others about the school.

One illiterate parent went to literacy and life skills training in a lifelong center under the school some years ago, but she quit the training and remained illiterate. She felt embarrassed about going to the same school as her children and other children in her community went to since the county center was small. This mother stayed with her children in the county center at home after the family moved from the countryside. The husband left home every morning to herd someone's horses in 13 kilometers away. She added, her husband said the dormitory was not very comfortable and they decided to move in the county center. She also heard from others that parents of children staying in the dormitory came to visit them rarely and children were usually left behind.

Despite this, a parent dissatisfied with the school wished for a better education for her children and thought about sending her children to schools in the provincial center. The mother expressed her interest in sending her child to the provincial school thinking the quality of education was better there.

Another parent said that she did not know or even hadn't heard about the dormitory. This parent, of course, used other living arrangements. The parent whose child stayed with the grandmother expressed that she did not know what the dormitory was like and she was not

interested in placing her child in there. This mother, without enough positive information about the school dormitory concluded,

The school dormitory is not like a home.

Theme 4. Family Resources

Family resources refer to the herder family's financial resources and social resources or networks. Herder parents were more likely to make decisions about their children's living arrangements depending on their financial and social resources.

Financial resources. Three out of the five participants in this study reported that their families were enrolled in the GFSP, which meant these families were poor and vulnerable. It was found that sending two to three children to school was economically challenging for them. Two of the families who decided on the dormitory for their children said,

The school dormitory is free of charge. Once I asked the dormitory teacher if there was something necessary for my children that I should provide. But she said there was no need.

My 3rd grade son rides race horses. During his summer vacation, we sent him to someone's home to ride race horses. My son came back home in August and the horse owner gave us some money. We bought school materials and uniforms for our two children and left them in school dormitory free of charge.

In Mongolia, there are national and local festivals which include horse racing as a main part. These festivals are usually held in summer, but some are held in spring and autumn. Children, mainly boys, aged seven and above often ride race horses.

Social resources. Herders are often under a heavy workload and this may influence their decision about their children's living arrangement. A mother left her children with relatives so she could stay in the countryside with her husband herding. But when the children called saying they missed their mommy she often came to the county center for a couple of days. However, when it was time for the peak period of the lambing season, she could not leave her husband alone and come and visit her children. She said,

Before March I will put my three children in the school dormitory because very soon it is the lambing season. And also, we will move to our spring camp, which is 37 kilometers away from our current winter camp. Our current camp is 20 kilometers away from the county center.

As an alternative to the dormitory, parents usually had their children stay with their relatives, usually grandparents or aunts. A parent felt satisfied with her child's caregiver and this did not allow her to think of other types of living arrangements:

Because my child stays with his grandmother, I have no plans to put him in the school dormitory.

The transcripts show that herder parents and extended family members mutually support each other. A parent whose child stayed with the grandmother admitted the following:

When our child stays with his grandmother, we contribute to the household food.

However, there was a parent whose family was enrolled in the GFSP who thought relatives could not take good care of her children. She chose the school dormitory in order to prevent any misunderstanding with them.

The school dormitory is better than relatives because my boys may make them upset. Nowadays children are behaving differently and my relatives may not manage them. But the dormitory keeps good control over children.

4.1.4. Conclusion



The Mongolian herder parents' interpretations of their experiences of managing their children's living arrangements during the school year in response to the lowered age school attendance and insufficient conditions of boarding school settings were found to yield four themes. The four themes were mainly related to (a) having six-year-old school children; (b) pastoralist parents' own school experiences; (c) boarding school conditions; and (d) family resources. The findings of this study may help minimize livelihood challenges faced by herders by providing research-based evidence for educators and policy makers to better understand these important education policies and pastoralist' responses to them.

The participants in this study were from different backgrounds and they engaged in different herding positions including herding their own herds, getting hired as full-time herders, and getting hired as a part-time herder. Also, the participating parents chose different living arrangements for their school children including using the school dormitory, staying at a relative's place, and splitting households. However, this study also found that herder children had different living arrangements in different school years. For instance, especially when a child started school at age six, mothers more often moved to the county center and stayed with the child for a year. Herder mothers were more likely to leave the

child in the school dormitory or at a relative's place after the child finished the first grade. A similar observation was made in a previous study (Sukhbaatar, 2018a) finding that pre-service teachers reported parental involvement among herder parents was better when children were in the 1st grade because often mothers moved to the county or provincial centers and stayed with their children. Moreover, splitting households has been reported not only to make men in remote pastures face labor shortages (Ahearn & Bumochir, 2016), but was also an emotionally negative experience for the wife staying with her children and always worrying about her husband and herds in remote areas, especially when the weather was bad. Bad weather conditions may harm well-being of herders and also well-being of their livestock herds. Without splitting the household, children who were left behind in the school dormitory or at relative's places missed their parents.

Relatives were an important group of people who were involved in living arrangements for herder children. These relatives acted in place of parents when the herder children lived with them during the school year. It was found that herder parents were likely to contribute to the relative's household to some extent. Moreover, findings of the study suggested that relatives or extended family members were not always the preferable living arrangement option for some herder families.

Herder parents seemed to feel more comfortable when two or more children of a family stayed together in the dormitory. In this study's school dormitory, there were six six-year-old children staying with their siblings who were attending 3rd, 4th, and 6th grades. The dormitory attempts to provide a family-oriented atmosphere (Steiner-Khamsi & Stolpe, 2006) for herder children by allowing them to stay in the same room if siblings are the same gender.

Sending children to school, especially six-year-old children, has put a great pressure on herder families. To provide their children with proper schooling, herders need to overcome various challenges in terms of finance, social networks, emotional separation, and reduced labor force. Hence, the government tries to address the issue; for instance, the MECSS's regulation (2016) of addressing herder parent's request to delay sending a child to school at the age of six has been implemented since 2016. This exception helps this disadvantaged group feel more flexible in deciding when to send their children to school away from home. When a herder family faces one of the reasons stated in the regulation, herders make a request that formalizes the absence of the child from school. This may help prevent issues such as reporting absence from school and having pupils drop out while promoting a mutual

understanding between school and herder family leading to an increase in parental satisfaction with the school.

4.2. Sub-study 2. The mesosystem: Teachers' experiences in communicating with pastoralist parents

4.2.1. Introduction

Research shows that parental involvement or engagement is beneficial not only to children, but also to parents and teachers yielding results in improved school attendance, attitudes, behavior, and mental health of children; improved parent-teacher relationships, and increased parental confidence, satisfaction and interest in education; and improved teacher morale and school climate (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). Recent Mongolian education policy documents emphasize the importance of parental involvement and school-family communication in teaching and learning (Sukhbaatar, 2014, 2018a, 2018b). Mongolia adopted a new core curriculum for primary education in the 2014-2015 school year. In accordance with this core curriculum adoption, the Minister of Education and Science stated that one of the responsibilities of a teacher is to plan activities together with parents for promoting each pupil's success (MES, 2014a). Moreover, teachers are required to involve parents, local people, and local organizations in promoting pupils' learning and in establishing effective communication with each of these groups. It is also the teacher's responsibility to provide all families with proper information about the child and school and communicate this information using the most appropriate method considering each parent's situation (Symeou et al., 2012).

The international literature indicated that communication with families living in remote areas and involving these families has been challenging, but also supportive in some communities. Parental involvement in children's education among Australian Aboriginal groups and Torres Strait Islander families is barely visible in boarding schools (Benveniste, Guenther, Dawson, & Rainbird, 2014). Cao (2016) conducted a study in boarding schools in a Chinese county where Tibetan inhabitants lived as nomads or lived a semi-farming/semi-nomadic lifestyle. Cao reported that often less than half of the parents would visit the school on the parental visiting days due to long distances and travel expenses. But another study, involving Maori parents from two suburban schools in New Zealand, indicated parents appreciated the number of communication methods these schools used including emails, phone calls, and a website (Hall, Hornby, & Macfarlane, 2015).

One important example of diverse families in Mongolia is mobile pastoralists who live in remote areas and herd their livestock in open pastures. As one pre-service teacher reported in Sukhbaatar’s study (2018a), communicating with pastoralist parents, especially with those living far away from their school children, would be a big problem for her once she starts teaching. The present study aims to explore the experiences of classroom teachers communicating with pastoralist parents at the primary school level in Mongolia.

4.2.2. Methodology

The present sub-study explored how classroom teachers communicated with pastoralist parents living in open pastures in remote areas while their primary school children stayed in the county center to attend school. Because this study explored how classroom teachers made sense of their experiences related to communication with pastoralist parents, IPA was the chosen methodology. As Padilla-Diaz (2015) explains, these teachers were able to “articulate their lived experiences” (p. 104) in communicating with pastoralist parents during the school year.

County School A was chosen for the study as almost half of the pupils (45%) the school served were from pastoralist households. According to the acting principal of the school, the most remote herder households were situated 200 kilometers away from the county center and most of the families were situated 70-80 kilometers away (T. Dolgormaa, personal communication, February 5, 2018).

Participants in this study had “common meaningful and significant experience” (Yüksel & Yıldırım, 2015, p. 5) in communicating with pastoralist parents. Of the seven primary education teachers in the school year when the data were collected, five were recruited for the study (see Table 9).

Table 9. The sample of the Sub-study 2

Research question	Study	Participant representatives	Sample	School	Instrument
RQ 2	Sub-study 2	Classroom teachers	N=5	School A	Interview protocol for classroom teachers

As for the participants' teaching experiences, one was in her first-year teaching at primary school with three quarters of the school year experience communicating with pastoralist parents. The remaining four teachers had four to 30 years of teaching experiences. While three of the teachers graduated from a local HEI, the other two had graduated from a HEI in the capital. All teachers had 12 to 18 pupils from herder families in their classes. The herder pupils used all three main options of living arrangement: dormitory, relatives, and split households.

4.2.3. Findings

Four themes emerged from the data analysis: (a) the experience of teachers' communicating with pastoralist parents; (b) the challenges teachers face in communicating with the parents; (c) the needs of teachers when communicating with the parents; and (d) the desires teachers expressed for ideal communications with pastoralist parents. The resulting themes facilitated a deeper understanding of teachers' cumulative experiences in communicating with pastoralist parents at a primary school level in rural Mongolia.

Theme 1. Teachers' Communicating Experiences

Teachers' experiences in communicating with pastoralist parents were found in three sub-themes: goals, forms, and frequency.

Goals. A number of communication goals were found, including teachers informing parents about children's learning, needs, and problems; children's non-academic difficulties and needs; teachers informing parents of collective P-T meeting announcements; and teachers asking parents to facilitate pupils' learning at home. The most common goal of parental communication by teachers was to inform parents about a child's difficulties and needs:

Last time it was an urgent call to a herder parent of a child who lived in the school dormitory. I called the parent to inform them that the child did not have warm boots and coats when it was getting colder. The parent said that they [she and her husband] were not able to come to school soon because they were hired to herd someone's livestock.

This teacher recounted she resolved the issue by inviting other parents to donate some warm clothes to the child.

Herder parents' goals for communication were more likely to focus on asking teachers for a child's leave of absence from school for a couple of days before the quarter break starts

or just to inform teachers the child would come to school two or three days late when a new quarter starts. A teacher reported that this was common because parents worried their child was homesick and also because of a lack of transportation.

Forms. The participants indicated that the forms of communication between teachers and herder parents included phone calls, collective P-T meetings, and informal face-to-face meetings. Letters and home visits were reported as being less common. Classroom teachers tended to prefer in-person meetings to phone calls:

Face-to-face meeting is preferable. I cannot talk about all the issues on the phone. When I talk to them on phone, I ask them to come to school and meet me.

A teacher, who also preferred in-person meetings with herder parents, admitted that some parents were unable to visit school when there was a heavy snowfall, in fact she had a herder pupil in her class whose family was settled more than 200 kilometers away in their winter camp.

Teachers sometimes failed in their attempts to communicate with herder parents due to poor mobile signals in remote areas. A teacher reported that once she sent a letter to a herder family in an isolated rural area because she could not connect with phone calls. In her letter, she asked the parents to encourage the pupil to take school seriously. She asked a driver driving there to pass the letter to the herder parents. Letters, however, sometimes were not successful as one teacher said:

I used to send letters to parents explaining how to assist their children to do HW. It increased my work loads. [But most importantly,] one illiterate parent became distant from me when I sent her letters.

Most of the teachers mentioned that there were a couple of children in their classes whose parents were illiterate. One participant said it would be better to talk to them individually because those parents were shy in group settings.

One of the teachers believed that it was better to visit herder families. She previously worked for the project “Improving primary education outcomes for the most vulnerable children in rural Mongolia” by the SCJ during 2012-2017. As part of this project, she visited herder families as a member of a local team. She felt that those home visits were very effective because herder parents felt more comfortable and communicated more freely in

their homes. She added that the project was over now and the school did not have a budget for making visits to herder families in remote areas.

Making phone calls seemed to be a common form of communication, but phone calls were not preferred by some teachers. Teachers generally felt phone calls could not support meaningful communication. They preferred collective P-T meetings rather than phone calls.

Frequency. Teachers were more likely to make calls to the parents only when there was something urgent to communicate and such efforts were not frequent as one participant stated:

I rarely call herder parents. I call them when there is something urgent. For instance, I ask them to come to P-T meetings and inform them about children's grades for a quarter.

It appeared that herder parents were reported to initiate calls to the teachers more often than the teachers initiating calls to the parents. According to a teacher, parents called teachers more frequently when their children were in the 1st and 2nd grades. When children were in the 3rd, 4th, and 5th grades, parents rarely contacted the teachers. Those teachers who handled the 1st grades seemed to feel satisfied with their parents' involvement. According to one of the teachers, in her 1st grade class 13 herder pupils lived in split households, while three pupils lived in the school dormitory and two others lived in relative's homes. When herder families split their households, mothers stay with school children and fathers stay in remote areas herding alone; it seems to help improve parental involvement and communication.

As it was mentioned before, a classroom teacher wanted to communicate with the parents in-person saying,

Herder parents do not usually come to school even though I call them and ask them to come meet me on certain days. But sometimes they come to the county center when they need to deal with some business matters and they visit school afterwards.

Theme 2. Challenges Teachers Face

Requesting pastoralist parents to be present at collective P-T meetings and using these meetings to communicate with children's caregivers seemed to be an obstacle for teachers.

Collective P-T meetings. As previously mentioned, classroom teachers would prefer to communicate with the parents in-person. Most of the teachers interviewed seemed to believe

collective P-T meetings could help them bring the parents to school. However, interviews revealed that herder parents were usually unable to attend collective P-T meetings due to long distances, hard work, poor infrastructure, and heavy snowfall. Teachers, however, seemed to rely heavily on this traditional way of communicating. To encourage attendance at P-T meetings, a couple of teachers drew up their own strategies:

I conduct P-T meetings once a quarter. I plan carefully and inform parents 14 days or a month ahead about the meeting and ask every parent to show up even they are in remote areas.

Parents don't usually come to P-T meetings if it is just a meeting. I teach parents how to help their children to read at home and do P-T meetings at the same time.

It is important to look at the goals of collective P-T meetings to consider if they are a strictly necessary communication form for herder parents. The teachers reported that at P-T meetings they usually informed parents about pupils' learning progress, pupils' grades for quarters, HW guidelines, results of contests and competitions organized in the class and school, and pupils' performance on HW completion during quarter breaks. It was interesting to hear a teacher stating the following:

Conducting P-T meeting once a month is fine for me. If I conduct more meetings they will get fed up with meetings.

A teacher explained that being overloaded with paperwork restricted the forms of communication she used with parents and she found P-T meetings as the easiest way to communicate:

I do not have enough time to meet with herder parents one by one individually. For this reason, I organize collective P-T meetings.

Another teacher said paperwork diverted her attention away from teaching and other important tasks.

Caregivers. The interviews found that sometimes there were miscommunications and misunderstandings that occurred between herder parents and teachers when they communicated through other relatives:

A child, who lived with his aunt, was behind the rest of the class in dictation. I called the herder mother and she came. I showed the mother the child's dictation notebook with lots

of mistakes. When the mother reviewed the child's notebook and she said she did not know the child was performing poorly. After this meeting, the mother stayed with the child in the county center for a while and the child improved. Before the mother left, she rearranged her child's living arrangement and now the child lives with his grandparents.

Most of the teachers tended to avoid partnering with relatives; they preferred communicating with herder parents rather than caregivers saying,

I am not sure what relatives pass on regarding to what was communicated between us.

Besides the relatives, there is a dormitory teacher who takes care of the herder children living in the school dormitory. In the school studied, only one teacher worked with 40 pupils who resided in the dormitory. The teachers expected this dormitory teacher to communicate with herder parents on their behalf:

The dormitory teacher attends P-T meetings and I ask her to inform herder parents about the issues discussed in the meetings. Probably the dormitory teacher communicates the information.

However, a couple of teachers asserted that the dormitory teacher seldom attended P-T meetings. A teacher stated the dormitory teacher should always attend saying,

In fact, classroom teacher and dormitory teacher should frequently communicate, otherwise pupils do not do HW.

One participant reported that she asked the dormitory teacher to help her 1st grade pupils with reading and HW. Communicating about HW tended to be one major goal for classroom teachers.

A teacher, who had 11 herder pupils staying in the school dormitory out of 15 herder children in her class, said,

I always ask herder parents to place their children in the dormitory. Relatives are not good caregivers. I communicate with the dormitory teacher about my 11 pupils.

This teacher, however, also realized,

The dormitory teacher cannot always represent all 11 children's parents, so I ask herder parents to come to P-T meetings once a quarter.

Theme 3. Needs of Teachers

This theme is organized into two sub-themes: (a) teacher education, and (b) the importance given to herder parental communication within the school.

Teacher education. The teachers were found to have dissimilar experiences in, and strategies for, communicating with parents. Most of the teachers experienced difficulties in communicating with pastoralist parents and the caregivers of their children, especially when expecting high attendance at P-T meetings. Two teachers used the “schoolbag” strategy (Sukhbaatar, 2018a) where they asked their pupils to leave their schoolbags in the classroom after classes. They believed parents or caregivers would come to the P-T meetings in order to pick up the schoolbags as one teacher shared her experience:

If I do not ask my pupils to leave their schoolbags, parents or caregivers would not show up. ... sometimes there are [still] two or three schoolbags left after the meeting.

It was interesting to hear that none of the participants learned how to communicate with herder parents in their initial teacher education programs. A teacher who graduated from HEI in the capital said,

It would be helpful if teacher education offers this topic. We may teach anywhere, not only in urban areas.

Parental involvement and communicating with parents from diverse family patterns were a missing topic in Mongolian teacher education programs. Teachers deal with the topics through their hands-on experiences as they gain years teaching and all of the teachers reported that they wanted to learn more about the topic:

Some teachers, especially new teachers, lack skills to involve parents in school activities. They face difficulties in planning and conducting P-T meetings. Teacher education should offer topics of communicating and working with parents besides offering teaching methodologies.

I want to learn about how to work with herder parents, such as how to communicate with herder parents, how to involve them in school and classroom activities, and how to increase their involvement in their children’s learning.

The importance given to the communication within the school. The interviews uncovered that the school site for this research had no particular policy or strategy to encourage the classroom teachers to work with herder parents. A participant commented:

Herder parents are not emphasized, but we generally talk about parental involvement concerning all parents. But there is a need to emphasize herder parents.

A teacher wanted the school to organize some activities particularly for herder parents saying,

I suppose the school could organize herder P-T meetings once a year or once a quarter.

As one teacher explained, the school could allocate a budget for visiting herders' campsites as they did it once before:

We visited herders' campsites in spring 2004. Teachers gave a concert and also gave a presentation about teaching and learning. The aim for the visit was to raise donations for celebrating the 80th anniversary of the school. We received generous donations from herder parents. Since then we [the school] have not visited herders' campsites.

Theme 4. Ideal Communication

As some participants stated, the ideal communication would be face-to-face communication with herder parents once a month or a quarter. A participant stated:

It would be preferable if herder parents meet teachers once a month in-person.

It was also reported that one-to-one meetings would be ideal, as one teacher said herder parents were very shy. Moreover, a couple of teachers said phone calls would also be fine:

It would be good if herder parents call me at least once a month. If not, they will forget their children.

The goal of communication for teachers would be to report the pupils' learning process and progress at their grade levels. As it was mentioned, attending P-T meetings was not easy for herder parents and some teachers suggested visiting herder families would be an example of an ideal form of communication. However, visiting herder parents in their campsites in remote areas would not be easy if the school did not have a budget for it. A teacher proposed an idea of cooperating with the community saying,

There are four administrative subunits (*bags*) in our county. It is possible that when the county organizes *bagh* meetings they can ask us to join them and the school and the county administration can arrange our visits and we can visit herder parents.

4.2.4. Conclusion

This sub-study revealed how classroom teachers communicated with pastoralist parents at the rural primary school during the school year. The very special lifestyle of Mongolian pastoralists, which requires them to live far away in open pastures herding their livestock, presented challenges for teachers trying to communicate with them.

Unlike school-family communication in contexts of Australian Aboriginal families, Tibetan nomadic families, and indigenous Maori families, this study was situated within the broader communicating challenges of teachers who communicated with not only nomadic herder parents but also with their extended family members, boarding school dormitory staff, and herder mothers living in split households. All of these strategies are present in Mongolia, resulting in herder parents depending on different living arrangements for their children during the school year.

The findings suggested that sometimes it was helpful for teachers to regularly communicate with herder mothers when the families split their households. Herder mothers living in split households had all the same capabilities to communicate with teachers as non-herder families. However, not all herder households were able to split during the school year. In these cases, teachers faced challenges in partnering with relatives and with the dormitory teacher who were the main caregivers of the children during the school year. Sometimes communicating with relatives led to miscommunication and misunderstanding with pastoralist parents. Attempting to avoid further miscommunication and misunderstanding, teachers seemed to prefer pastoralist parents to attend collective P-T meetings or communicating with them in-person.

Moreover, this study suggests that herder parents mainly communicated with teachers in order to ask for a child's leave of absence from classes. This finding is similar to Cao's (2016) finding that in general, Tibetan parents rarely asked about their children's learning and living in boarding schools. The relationship between school and Tibetan families was passive and parents were given no opportunity to take part in school teaching and decision-making.

Consistent with the literature, the topic of parental involvement, including working with diverse families and teacher-parent communication, appeared to be a missing part in the

teacher education program. For this reason, teachers tended to use only a few traditional forms of communication and especially relied on collective P-T meetings. In other words, the school and the teachers often did not use the most appropriate method of communication considering the pastoralist parents' special situation (Symeou et al., 2012). The participants expressed the need for learning more about partnering with pastoralist parents. Consistent with the literature (Benveniste et al., 2014; de Bruïne et al., 2014; Farrell & Collier, 2010; Hall et al., 2015; Saltmarsh et al., 2015; Sukhbaatar, 2018a; Willemse et al., 2018), there is a need to consider parental involvement as an important component of teacher preparation and continuing professional development in the context of communicating and working with herder families. In-service education on school and herder family communication should be given more attention since the training is sidelined across countries (Willemse et al., 2018).

This sub-study suggests that collective P-T meetings would not be an appropriate form of communication for herder parents considering their special lifestyle and personal factors like illiteracy and shyness. This finding is inconsistent with a previous study in a different culture (Hall et al., 2015) indicating that Maori parents “repeatedly identified that conducting school and community meetings was a key strategy for connecting with families in a culturally appropriate and safe way” (p. 3044).

Teacher education seems to be one formidable factor that impacted teachers and school leaders as they tried to establish and maintain good communication with herder families. However, beyond teacher education, there could be other factors that impact good teacher-family communication. The findings of this study suggest that heavy snowfall, poor mobile signal, increased paperwork for teachers, and pastoralist family factors could prevent good teacher and pastoralist parent communication. As recommended in the international literature (e.g., Farrell & Collier, 2010; Saltmarsh et al., 2015), further studies should explore the external factors impacting teacher communication with Mongolian pastoralist parents in order to mediate communication and herder family communication and develop strategies for improved parental involvement for this unique group in their children's education.

4.3. Sub-study 3. The exosystem and the macrosystem: Contextual factors impacting school and pastoralist family communication

4.3.1. Introduction

Strong evidence (Ozmen et al., 2016) suggested that efficient communication was necessary in order to create school-parent cooperation and to increase parents' contributions to teaching and learning. As the importance of family-school communication has been recognized in the literature, factors impacting this communication also have been discussed. A recent study (Ozmen et al., 2016) determined several factors preventing good communication between teachers and parents. The factors varied considerably between parent-related issues to teacher-related ones, including physical distance, meeting with parents only when money is required, parents' lack of trust in teachers, parents' financial problems, inappropriate school activity schedules, teachers' misbehaviors, and parents' education level. Moreover, Hornby and Lafaele (2011) argued that family circumstances and parents' work situation can also be impacting factors. Generally, they state, parents are too overwhelmed by their responsibilities in their complicated daily lives, and they also feel negative about their educational backgrounds and feel intimidated communicating with school officials (Stetson et al., 2012). For these reasons, teachers should be aware of and understand different family patterns, parents' needs, and parental workload in order to establish and maintain contacts with parents and to form a true partnership with parents (Sukhbaatar, 2018a). However, schools and teachers face difficulties when they communicate and partner with parents. This is because teachers are not adequately prepared to partner with families (de Bruïne et al., 2014; Farrell & Collier, 2010; Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; Stetson et al., 2012; Sukhbaatar, 2014, 2018a, 2018b).

In addition to factors related to teachers and parents that are impacting school-family communication there are other external factors identified in a number of studies (Farrell & Collier, 2010; Pang, 2011; Sukhbaatar & Tarkó, 2018). These studies used Bronfenbrenner's (1977) ecological systems theory in order to gain greater insight into contextual factors impacting family-school communication and cooperation. The aim of this sub-study is to empirically validate the contextual factors impacting school and pastoralist family communication in the proposed ecological model presented in the second chapter of this dissertation. These factors are located at the exosystem and the macrosystem levels of the model and this sub-study explores contextual factors impacting communication between primary education teachers and pastoralist parents during the school year.

4.3.2. Methodology

The individual's point of the view of his or her lived experience is embedded within a sociocultural context and it cannot be separated from his or her environment (Clarke, 2009). In order to understand a phenomenon of communication between school and pastoralist family, it is necessary to interpret key stakeholders' point of the view of the phenomenon (Englander, 2012). This sub-study involved altogether 20 participants from the two county schools; 10 herder parents and 10 classroom teachers (see Table 10).

Table 10. The sample of the Sub-study 3

Research question	Study	Participant representatives	Sample	Schools	Instruments
RQ 3	Sub-study 3	Herder parents and classroom teachers	N=20	School A School B	Interview protocol for herder parent Interview protocol for classroom teachers

≈

4.3.3. Findings

In this sub-study, eight factors impacting school communication with pastoralist families emerged from data analysis at the exosystem and macrosystem levels. At the exosystem level, four factors were found during the analysis: the herder parent's workplace; communication facilities; the weather context and transportation facilities; and the community involvement. Four more factors emerged from the analysis at the macrosystem level: the social system; the education system; the economic context; and the political context.

Contextual factors in the exosystem

Herder parent's workplace. Most of the teachers admitted that in-person communication with herder parents does not often exist between them and herder parents because

Herder parents live in remote areas and they cannot come to school very often.

The parents reported that they lived 10–100 kilometers away from the schools in the two counties. However, the distance was not always the same all year around. The families

moved between three to 10 times a year and they had different camps for winter, spring, summer, and fall. One mother reported that their winter camp was located 32 kilometers away. They moved around 10 times between June and October, and the furthest distance was 70 kilometers away from the county center and around 40 kilometers away from their winter camp. She added the following:

While we are in our winter camp, we comb the cashmere wool of our goats in March. After that we move to our spring camp, which is located three kilometers away from the winter camp. In our spring camp, we have baby animals. After the lambing season ends, we move frequently starting from June till October. In October, when it starts snowing, we come back to our winter camp.

According to this parent, the family owned more than 300 mixed livestock of cows, horses, sheep, and goats. They manage their seasonal moves by themselves. They had a mobile home on wheels, and their own vehicles, which help them save time and effort during the moves.

Another mother, who participated in the study, herded someone else's livestock of more than 600 sheep and goats with her husband along in addition to their own 100 head of mixed livestock. This family resided 22 kilometers away in their winter camp and placed their two schoolchildren in the school dormitory. The mother said she and her husband had been herders for only two years. The family had got their own 100 head of livestock two years ago with their wages from being hired as herders looking after a herd of 2000-3000 livestock. The mother recounted,

Two years ago, my family stayed in the county center. I earned some money by sewing clothes at home and selling them. Now our living condition is much better as herders in the countryside.

Some herders hire herders and stay in the county center with their schoolchildren. A young parent in her early 30s, who had two children aged six and three, said their family was planning to move to the county center when their youngest child enters school in three years:

In the coming year, we will have more than 500 livestock heads including the newborn baby animals. After two or three years, we will hire herders.

As this family's herds grow, they will be able to afford to hire herders and stay in the county center with their schoolchildren. Alternatively, a parent said her oldest child was in

the first grade at school and she was living with her aunt. However, for the first two months, when the child was new at school, the mother stayed with her child in the county center leaving her husband behind to herd alone. She said this was tough for the husband working alone:

My husband started each day at six or seven o'clock in the morning. If he started at six, he could make a good breakfast. After breakfast the day was followed by continuous herding tasks such as removing cow dung, milking cows, watering cows, bringing back horses from the pasture where they stayed for the night, and grazing sheep in the pasture during the day. He could not get back home in the afternoon and skipped lunch. When I sometimes called him late in the evening, he said he was about to cook dinner at around 10 o'clock at night.

Most of the herder participants reported that they herded their livestock by themselves as a husband and wife team. The herders said their children assist them when they get back home during quarter breaks. Not surprisingly, most of the teachers in the study said one of the main reasons herder parents communicate with teachers, is to ask for a leave of absence for their children from school for a day or more:

Herder parents call me usually asking for a leave of absence from school or informing me the child would come to school two or three days later after the quarter starts.

A parent also reported the following:

When I communicate with teachers my goal is to ask for a leave of absence for my children from classes and also to ask how my children are doing at school.

It seems children are good assistants with herding for their parents:

During quarter breaks our 7th grade son grazes sheep in the pastures and the 3rd grade son collects cow dung. They are very helpful.

She added,

The third quarter break coincides with the lambing season. It is very good that our children are available to help collect newborn sheep and goats in the pastures during the busy lambing season. My husband, me, and our three schoolchildren [aged 13, 9, and 8] all ride horses and collect the newborn together.

The newborn baby animals should be collected and brought back to the warm stable as soon as possible because they might die in the cold and windy weather in open pastures.

During the breaks, herder children seem to be busy with assisting their parents with livestock herds but they are also expected to complete HW tasks. One teacher recounted,

When a quarter break starts, [some] herder parents come to pick up their children and I ask them to help their children with HW during the break. We give our pupils some tasks to complete during breaks.

However, after the quarter breaks teachers usually communicate with herder parents informing them that their children did not complete their homework during the breaks. A teacher, who had 15 herder pupils in her 4th grade class, said,

The 15 herder children did not complete HW assignments during the quarter break. I am planning to conduct a P-T meeting next week about it, but I haven't announced it yet. I am going to ask my pupils to leave their school bags in the classroom on the day of P-T meeting. Otherwise, the parents and caregivers won't show up.

Another teacher, who had one year of teaching experience, said that she conducted P-T meetings when the 3rd quarter started (just two weeks prior). One of the important issues she raised at the meetings was pupils' completion of HW during the break:

The quality of work my herder pupils completed was not good. Also, some of their works were incomplete. When I asked them what they did during the break they said they assisted their parents with herding chores. They said they usually stayed outside helping their parents.

Moreover, the teacher said she made calls to herder parents who did not show up at the P-T meeting in order to inform them that their children did not complete their HW during the break. She added, however, she was not able to contact some of the parents due to a poor mobile signal.

It was obvious why the children did not complete their HW tasks over the breaks. It was interesting that one teacher did not fully understand the special lifestyle situation of herders.

The teacher with 15 herder children in her class said:

I do not know - why herder parents have no control over their children for the break HW – whether the parents are too busy with herding chores or they are not capable of checking how well their children are doing in their HW. The parents' educational level also could be an issue.

However, some herder parents seem to be more responsible for their children's learning at home when they take their children from school earlier before quarter breaks start due to a lack of transportation and heavy snowfall. A mother from School A, who came from 60 kilometers away, asked the school education manager for a two-weeks-leave of absence for her 5th grade child. It had been only two weeks since the 3rd quarter had just started. But soon after two weeks there was a national holiday and the school was closing for the five-day holiday. In this case, the mother came to school earlier and explained she would like to take her child with her because there was a lack of transportation due to the heavy snowfall where the family resided. The school education manager allowed the mother to take her child home for two weeks until the holiday was over. The classroom teacher instructed the mother to facilitate her child's study at home by completing some particular assignments in his textbooks during his absence from classes.

Communication facilities. Teachers and parents in this study reported that they mainly communicated with each other by making phone calls. It seems teachers feel phone calling is an easier way to communicate with parents; as one teacher from School B articulated,

I do not think herder parents should always come to school to meet teachers. We can talk on the phone. If herder parents are asked to come to school immediately, like today or tomorrow, they are unavailable, especially those who are hired herders.

Besides making phone calls, some teachers at School B used group messaging with herder parents in their classes:

I use group messaging and I send messages to the group. It helps me save time.

However, she added, not all parents could receive the messages immediately:

Those parents who have good mobile signals get the information [I sent] using their cell phones.

Sometimes mobile signals are not good enough for parents to receive text messages and phone calls from teachers. In these cases, teachers' attempts to make calls to parents fail. A teacher who had taught for a year said,

I face difficulties partnering with herder parents. When I try to communicate with them using phone calls, their cell phones are out of service. It is very difficult.

When teachers fail in their attempts to make phone calls to herders, they sometimes communicate with the extended family members who take care of herder children. This communication, however, can lead to misunderstanding and miscommunication with herder parents. A teacher shared the following case of misunderstanding due to poor communication facility in a remote area:

A herder child, who was living with his 9th grade sister, did not do his homework. I asked the sister to come to my classroom and showed her the child's notebook. I told her that we need to work together to help the child with his learning. Since their parents were away herding, she was the main caregiver of the child. I do not know what the sister told their mother, but the mother came to me. She was upset and blamed me for calling the sister out of her classroom and making her embarrassed. What should I have done? When I called the parents, their phone was out of service and I could not communicate with the parents.

It was found in the analysis that herder parents usually called teachers:

It is impossible for teachers to make calls to us due to poor mobile signal in more remote areas we reside. So, it is only possible that we make calls to teachers when we find a place with good signals.

Usually herder parents try hard to make phone calls by finding particular spots where there would be better mobile signals; as one teacher asserted,

Herder parents give me calls if there are good mobile signals in remote areas where they live. Sometimes they say they are talking to me on the phone from the top of hills, where there is better mobile signal.

Sometimes herder parents put great effort into making phone calls to teachers. A herder parent shared a case that she and her husband rode a motorcycle to find a better mobile signal to make phone calls to their three school children's teachers:

The last time we [I and my husband] brought our three children to our countryside home during the weekend, but we couldn't take them back to school by Sunday night. We were busy cleaning our stable with the children all day. We needed to inform the teachers that our children were not able to come to classes on Monday, but we could not make phone calls from home because of a poor mobile signal. I and my husband rode a motorcycle at night for about two to three kilometers to find a place where we could call the three teachers. It was freezing cold, but all three teachers said OK.

In the two counties, they have two mobile operators: G-mobile and Unitel. However, herder families living in more remote areas face difficulties using them. A parent in County A said both of the operators recently would not work properly. Before, they were able to make calls staying on higher hills using their G-mobile phones in their winter and spring camps, which were 20 kilometers and 37 kilometers respectively away from the county center. She added Unitel was not working well either, so they need to find higher hills and check for a good mobile signal. Another mother in County B said,

In the county, we use Unitel cell phones. They say there would be another cell phone operator G-mobile, but it has not been started yet in our *bagh*. It had already been started in other *baghs*. Our *bagh* is the most remote. Sometimes the Unitel signal is not good. We make calls when we are on higher hills.

Besides phone calls and group messages, some classes use Facebook groups for communication. A mother from School B reported the following:

Parents and a teacher of my child's class use a Facebook group. Herder parents are also group members. However, in remote areas where the herders live, there is no access to Facebook. In my case, I check the Facebook group when I arrive and stay in the county center.

⋮

This indicates that some herder parents could not get access to information on time or they missed some information sent out using smart phones and Wi-Fi due to poor mobile signals in more remote areas. In these cases, herder parents could not fully participate in class activities and teachers usually had to communicate with such herder parents just once a quarter:

I communicate with herder parents when they come to school to pick up their children when a quarter break starts.

Weather context and transportation facilities. The participants reported that weather condition, such as heavy snowfall, restricted in-person communication due to poor infrastructure and transportation. The data for the present sub-study were collected during winter time and they had a heavy snowfall in the county where School A located. As one of the teachers reported,

I had lost contact with the family of my first grader since the third quarter started [two weeks ago]. The family herds someone's livestock and stays more than 100 kilometers away, where there is a lot of snow. But later the father came to school and met me. He said they did not

have a mobile phone and they could not contact me. The father came on horseback through the snow, but he could not bring the child on horseback.

This teacher added that the father promised to bring the child to school after the five-day national holiday. This meant the child missed classes for four weeks, but the teacher said she felt happy that the father took some of his child's textbooks and asked her for tasks the child could do at home.

Three weeks after the new quarter started there was the national holiday. The herder families brought back their children from dormitories to home for the holiday. However, for some herder families who do not have their own vehicles, it was challenging to take and bring back their children from and to school when there was a lot of snow. As one mother said,

When it is warm my husband drives his motorcycle and takes our children to school. But when it is winter and snowy, he cannot ride his motorcycle. Last time we had a difficulty bringing our children to school after the quarter break. We asked somebody else to drive our children to school in his car.

This mother added that her children would stay with her relatives in the county center during the national holiday. After the holiday the children would return to the school dormitory.

One of the School B parents, who participated in the study, was interviewed when she brought back her two children to the school dormitory after the quarter break. She said they did not have their own vehicle, so they took a taxi. They came from their winter camp located 22 kilometers away. The family herded someone else's livestock herds mixed with their small number of livestock. The mother said she and her husband got paid 200,000 tugrik (\$83) monthly. When she was asked how much she paid for the taxi, it was 25,000 tugrik (\$10.50).

Also, when there is a lot of snow, herder families use different routes covered with thinner snow; as one participant mother reported,

A surrounding area of our winter camp is covered with a lot of snow. Our winter camp is 20 kilometers away. But this time we drove 45 kilometers using different routes.

Coming to school from their winter camps seems to be tough both economically, if they do not have their own vehicles, as well as risky and time-consuming even when they drive

their own vehicles. However, when it is warmer herder parents who reside in less remote areas drive their own cars or motorcycles to school. A mother who lived in a split household said that she rode a motorcycle between her two homes when it was warm. The husband herded alone 10 kilometers away. She added the following:

On Fridays after school, my husband drives me and our schoolchildren to our countryside home. He drives us back on Sunday night for school.

Two mothers, whose children stayed with their extended family members during school days, also reported they frequently visited their children and sometimes they drove their children back to their camps 30-40 kilometers away for weekends. When herder parents are able to come to school from their remote camps, they communicate with teachers in-person, which is the more preferable form of communication for some teachers.

Community involvement. The interviews revealed that community involvement was one factor affecting school and herder family communication. One recent project, titled “Improving primary education outcomes for the most vulnerable children in rural Mongolia”, implemented with the SCJ support in School A, was found to have a good communication outcome.

One of the teachers interviewed in School A was a member of a community education council for the project. The council consisted of 11 stakeholders in the county including the kindergarten director, the school social worker, a primary education teacher, the county social worker, a kindergarten teacher, a *bagh* governor of the county, a parent, and the school librarian. This project helped raise the educational awareness of the local community. One of the remarkable results of the project is that now the *bagh* governors contribute greatly to improve educational access for herder children by providing information about children who are out of school and children who are not attending preschool. Providing the information to schools is now one of the responsibilities stated in the working contracts of *bagh* governors (SCJ, 2017b).

The teacher from School A who was a member of the community education council said that she visited herder families during the project implementation and herder parents were very happy to talk to them at their homes. Unfortunately, the project is over now and the community council no longer visits herder families any more due to a lack of budget to sustain the project. The three programs have been implemented by the school with limited resources since 2017. However, the teacher noted now that the *bagh* governors visit herder

households and inform the school about the number of children who should attend the school preparation and home-based school programs from their *bags*. The teacher suggested the *bagh* governors could help school and herder families communicate more frequently:

Bagh governors could be a bridge between herder families and the school. For example, before *bagh* governors leave to visit herder households in remote areas they could meet teachers and ask for any information teachers want them to pass on herder parents on behalf of teachers.

She continued,

Herders communicate more frequently and freely with their *bagh* governors, so *bagh* governors could encourage them to send their children to school. Some herder parents want their children to look after their herds and want to keep them out of school.

Another teacher also said that *bagh* governors could help strengthen school and community communication and cooperation. She added *bagh* governors could ask the school to join their *bagh* meetings.

The herder parent who was working as a *bagh* governor, reported he visited the herder families once a quarter when he was provided with a budget for transportation. When he visited the families, he took a doctor, the county social worker, a veterinarian, a social insurance officer, a social welfare officer, and some others with him. He said, however, he had not visited families with anyone from the school:

Perhaps I did not understand that school personnel could come with me or they did not ask me to join us [on site visits].

He added, he would include personnel from the school in his team the next time when he visits herder families if the school asks to join him. He admitted, however, that herder parents asked him about school when he visited them:

[On my] last visit, some herder parents asked me about the quarter break. They asked why the 2nd quarter break was so long.

In the 2017-2018 school year when the data were collected, the schedule for quarter breaks was not consistent and it was changed a few times due to a higher rate of flu among schoolchildren nationwide, especially in urban areas. The parent said herder parents were worried that the 3rd quarter break would be shorter because children had a longer break in the previous quarter. The 3rd quarter break is in spring and it is very important for herder

parents because herder children can come home during the break. During this peak period of the lambing season children greatly assist their parents with newborn baby animals.

Contextual factors in the macrosystem

Social system. This factor covers herder parents' education level, marriage institution of herders, and teacher's socioeconomic status.

Teachers face difficulties when they communicate with herder parents using some communication forms such as letters and text messages. Sending text messages using Latin letters instead of Cyrillic is challenging for some herder parents. One teacher said the following:

Some parents cannot read the group messages when they are written using Latin letters.

Two parents, who participated in this study, were found to be illiterate. This does not appear to be unusual: Teachers from both schools reported they had a few illiterate herder parents in their classes:

When I was teaching the 2nd grade I found out that one herder mother was illiterate. I did not realize that when the child was in the 1st grade. When the child finished her 1st grade she could not read well. If I had realized the mother was not able to teach her child reading at home, I could have asked a parent who lived closer to the family to help the child.

She added, she understood it was very important to learn about each parent's educational background, to know who could read and write and who could not, when she had the 1st graders. Without learning about the parents' educational background, she hadn't provided the pupil the extra help needed to compensate for no help at home.

The findings of marriage institution of herders are presented involving two different living arrangement options they use and how these options impact teacher communication with herder parents and also livelihoods of herder families. Teachers reported that after the 1st grade some herder mothers go back to their remote camps and place their children either in the school dormitories or with their extended family members. This results in creating communication issues between teachers and herder parents:

Herder parents whose children are staying in the dormitory are not able to come to P-T meetings.

When herder parents do not live with their children, they cannot facilitate their children's learning at home and this also contributes to the teachers' workload. Most of the teachers tended not to be happy communicating and cooperating with extended family members who take in herder children when herder parents are away herding. Some teachers say extended family members who take care of herder children do not feel the children's studies are as important as the herder parents living in remote areas. As one teacher stated,

Extended family members do not come to meet me. I call herder parents asking them to tell their extended family members to meet me.

Additionally, other teachers tended to avoid communicating with extended family members:

In my over 20 years of experience I always try [to tell] herder parents not to have their children stay with their extended family members. Those caregivers do not take a good care of children and they do not help the children to do their HW. When I meet herder parents at the beginning of a school year, I tell them I cannot communicate with their extended family members if their children stay with them. I always require parents to put their children in the school dormitory.

When herder families split their households, mothers communicate with teachers frequently and facilitate their children's study at home. A teacher, who taught the 1st grade pupils, said she met all her parents once a week and she informed parents about what their children learned each week. Sometimes the herder mothers leave their children behind with extended family members and go back to their second home in a remote area to help their herder husbands. A teacher said,

I found that one of my 1st graders had gotten worse at reading and writing. I talked to the mother and knew that the mother left the child with his grandmother and went home to the countryside for a week. The grandma could not help the child with HW. The mother came back and worked with her child and now the child is doing well.

However, each grandparent's case is different as one teacher said,

Some grandparents facilitate pupils' learning better than herder parents.

Teachers reported some herder parents try hard to stay with their 1st grade children in split households in the county centers and these parents are more concerned about their children's education:

Some parents who did not have a good education say that they do not want their children to be like themselves: barely literate.

There are also some parents who want their children to be better than the others:

Some parents compare their children with other children. These parents compete with others thinking their children could do whatever others' children could.

But, as one teacher said, splitting households is also not an ideal solution. Splitting households seem to have serious consequences for herders' livelihoods. A herder parent who was also a *bagh* governor shared a case:

Last summer in our *bagh* meeting we decided to enroll a young couple in a project for herders. The project aims to improve livelihoods of herders and the couple was given 100 sheep. It was decided after a year they would give back the 100 sheep but they would keep the baby sheep from the 100 with them. When their 5-year-old went to preschool the mother came to the county center. I thought the husband was herding their sheep in their remote camp. But recently I just learned he was not herding but he was in the county center and sometimes in the provincial center. The couple left their sheep with their parents and neither of them was herding.



Some teachers, especially young teachers, find it difficult to deal with some parents. Sometimes there are arguments between teachers and parents. A teacher said,

There was a parent who chided at me when I taught her left behind child after class. The parent chided at me saying I was pressuring the child into studying extra hours however, she did not facilitate her child's learning at home.

Another teacher said,

Some parents do not come to school, but when they come, they chide teachers for always asking parents to come to P-T meetings.

A parent, who was a member of the parent's council of her child's class, also said there were many incidents where parents yelled at her child's teacher:

The teacher is young and she is very quiet. Parents yell at her when their child is not included in the classroom concert. Also, parents complain to the teacher when their child's learning is not good.

A teacher raised concerns about the reasons why parents did not understand the teachers' role:

In my opinion the six-year-olds seem to think that going to school is a punishment for them. On the one hand, they are separated from their parents and on the other hand they study more after classes if they [are identified as] left behind. It is a great pressure for the children and parents.

Another teacher from the other school said,

I think the education system should be blamed for the low reputation of the teaching profession. Especially, in the primary education level, the curriculum is too much loaded.

In addition, she added, there are different activities besides teaching, related to project and programs, that teachers had to conduct. Further, they were not paid well enough,

The projects are good for pupils' development, but they make teachers more overloaded. Teachers are not paid for conducting project activities.

An older teacher said,

I work on the project activities and reports on Saturdays. I cannot find time on weekdays. It takes more time for me to complete project reports. We are asked to include photos as evidence in the reports typed on computer. Working on computer is not easy for me.

One of the teachers, who had taught for nearly 20 years, was a single mother. She had two children: a university student and a schoolchild. The family rented an accommodation which belonged to the school. This teacher earned over 600,000 tugrik monthly. Some 100,000 tugrik were deducted as taxes such as social insurance, health insurance, and income tax. She took out a salary loan to pay her son's tuition fees when he went to university. She repaid the loan which cost her about 400,000 tugrik monthly. The interest rate of the salary loan was 18% yearly. She also paid 30,000 tugrik for the rent every month. The family then lived on the remaining 100,000 tugrik monthly. She added, she bought five tons of coal from the coal mine close to the provincial center for the winter and paid 300,000 tugrik. But she needed to buy two more tons of coal to get through the long spring days. She said her salary loan lasted for three years, but during the three years she took out more loans and the amount of the loan she would repay continued to increase.

Teachers' salary has been an issue over the years. Teachers started protesting against their poor salary in August 2017 again after a lapse of some years. Public school teachers used a

Facebook group to get together and they established a Temporary Committee for Increasing Salary. Teachers wanted their monthly salary raised to 1.6 million tugrik, however, there has been no significant increase in their salary yet:

When there was negotiation between the teacher's committee and the ministry officials, they recommended teachers to earn some more money by teaching private lessons. This means they make parents to pay teachers and [that puts a] burden [on] parents.

One teacher who had taught for 29 years said she had a poor health condition and she said she really wanted to retire in a year. She had this health issue after being a teacher for 29 years. Last year she developed a problem where she could not lift her right hand. She went to doctors and they said it was a neurological problem. Now she had this problem with both her hands. She had to repay her salary loan, so she could not afford to be admitted to hospital: If she was admitted to hospital, she would not be able to repay her current salary loan. She repeatedly said,

Most importantly, they [the government] should pay more attention to teachers' health. For instance, the government should pay attention and have all teachers go for thorough check-ups.

△

Another teacher, who had taught for nearly 25 years, said teaching 1st graders was very tough when there were more than 30 pupils in a class. Teaching the six-year-olds how to read and how to solve math problems was not easy and it was a very stressful job. She said,

When I taught the 1st grade pupils I could not sleep well at night. I dreamt about teaching them and talked when I was asleep. The next morning my children laughed at me.

Education system. Most of the teachers shared their thoughts that herder children should stay in school dormitories, so there would be no more split households or miscommunication with extended family members. Teachers said when herder children are staying in school dormitories it is the dormitory teachers' responsibility to take care of the children. It was interesting to find that there were different practices between the two county schools regarding classroom teachers' communication with dormitory teachers. In School A, teachers communicated with the dormitory teacher more often:

I try to regularly communicate with the dormitory teacher. I inform the teacher when my pupils come to class without doing HW and I ask her to pay more attention to their HW completion.

In School B, however, the communication practice of classroom teachers and the dormitory teacher was more difficult. It was found in the analysis that the dormitory teacher did not attend P-T meetings:

Pupils living in the dormitory are left behind and excluded from activities. For example, no one shows up at P-T meetings.

Another teacher said:

The dormitory teacher does not attend P-T meetings. A new dormitory teacher has worked since last September. I haven't met her in person yet. I ask somebody else to inform her when my pupils staying in the dormitory do not do their HW.

Some teachers reported the pupils staying in the dormitories were not well cared for. A teacher reported,

Last year I had the 5th graders. I communicated with the dormitory teacher when the children who stayed in the dormitory had some problems. For instance, some pupils overslept and came to class late. So, I informed the dormitory teacher about this issue.

Moreover, a teacher, who felt unsatisfied with the dormitory conditions, said:

Pupils living in the dormitory are not kept under good control and they do not regularly do HW because they are away from their parents.

A teacher who had the 2nd grade pupils said that sometimes girls came to class without having their hair done. Besides this, another teacher said she often complained to the dormitory teacher about unwashed cups and bowls the younger pupils brought to classroom for lunch. Starting in 2006, the government implemented a school lunch program which provides lunch free of charge in primary schools. These primary school pupils bring their cups and bowls and have lunch in their classrooms.

One of the differing practices of the two schools was the investment and effort they made in the dormitory. School A seemed to encourage herder parents to come visit the school and communicate with teachers in-person. This school provided a particular room for herder parents to stay overnight with their children in the school dormitory. A herder parent was happy to share her experience:

I learned from my children that there is a room for parents. So, parents and children can stay together for nights when herder parents visit their children in the dormitory. I stayed in that room with my children when I visited them last quarter.

As discussed in the previous section, herder children are good assistants for their parents during their quarter breaks. At the same time, however, classroom teachers give pupils HW assignments during the holidays. For instance, one teacher said,

We give our pupils HW assignments of learning poems by heart in relation to the project being implemented at our school.

Teachers reported herder pupils usually did not complete their assignments during the breaks. The schools and teachers seemed to be more concerned about HW. The participants talked about different exams and it seemed HW could help pupils do better at these exams. A parent said,

Teachers give exams after every new lesson and inform us about our children's performance at P-T meetings.

Teachers said there were internal and external exams:

Internal exams are managed by the school education manager. Last quarter my 4th graders took mathematics and drawing exams. External exams are conducted by provincial education board.



As another teacher said there were also different types of exams:

I inform parents about pupils' placement and formative test results at P-T meetings.

Moreover, teachers tend to believe that parental involvement and communication in rural schools is not as good as it is compared to schools in semi-urban and urban areas. A teacher who had taught for over 20 years in a rural school said,

Those families, who are more concerned with their children's education transfer their children to schools in the provincial center or the capital. They transfer their children with their siblings when their older children go to upper secondary school in the provincial center. ... Or some parents buy additional or second homes in urban areas and put their schoolchildren there. These parents realize the education quality is different there.

The quality of education in rural schools was mentioned by herder parents in some interviews. A mother of two children in 3rd and 4th grades said that she communicated with her oldest child's classroom teacher asking if she could teach the child more math classes. The mother wanted her son to compete in the math Olympiads in the provincial center. But

the teacher said she could not. This mother added that teachers teach slow learners after classes but not talented or gifted pupils. Finally, the mother said,

My husband and I are discussing buying a second home and moving our children to the provincial center schools when they go to 6th and 7th grades. I am not satisfied with my children's learning outcomes.

A parent of four children also reported he was thinking of transferring his children to schools in the provincial center. He said he thought the quality of education in the rural school was not good. He shared the following case:

My oldest daughter is a pupil at a university in the capital now. But when she studied at upper-secondary school she moved to a provincial center school for a year. When she studied there, she told me that she was far behind the rest of her class. However, when she studied in this [the rural] school she was considered as a good learner.

The father added that the daughter advised him to transfer her siblings to schools in the provincial center.

However, another mother believed the education quality in the county school was good but she wished there could be more extracurricular activities for schoolchildren such as chess and dance clubs. She said,

My 1st grade daughter likes chess and dancing, but at our school there are no such clubs.

Economic context. The rural schools studied seemed to suffer from various financial crises. This section discusses three issues related to the economic context of the county schools which may restrict good communication with herder parents. First, the school dormitories seemed to lack human resources. It is worth noting that there was only one dormitory teacher who worked in each school, even though there were only 40 pupils who resided in School A dormitory, but 110 pupils in School B. A teacher participant said,

There should be specialized teachers or assistant teachers to facilitate herder children's learning and well-being [for those] staying in the dormitory.

If the county schools were able to provide these teachers, it would help classroom teachers deal with herder pupils' learning efforts and could improve teachers' communication with herder parents. Most teachers want to communicate with herder parents about their children's problems:

I call herder parents when the child does not do HW and is performing very poorly.

Second, the schools lacked a budget for organizing more varieties of parental involvement activities besides the few traditional ones. A budget for visiting herder families in remote areas would be very helpful allowing school administrators and teachers to visit the families in their remote camps. Currently teachers can only ask herder parents to visit them at schools. A teacher said,

It is better to meet herder parents in-person. If it was possible [if the school budget allowed] teachers could visit herder families in remote areas during a quarter informing them what we and children do at school and what parents should do.

This kind of visit could be very beneficial by allowing teachers to communicate relevant information with herder parents in a timely fashion. However, when herder parents usually visit schools once a quarter at the end of quarters, they receive information too late to help a pupil correct a learning problem.

Third, parents are expected to make monetary contributions to improve the physical conditions in classrooms. The interviews with both teachers and herder parents revealed that herder parents contribute some amount of money monthly:

We collect 1000 tugrik from each child's parents once a month for regular classroom maintenance and cleaning.

This monthly contribution is also one of the main goals of communication between teachers and herder parents. A teacher said,

When herder parents call me, they make sure if they already contributed to the monthly money contribution besides asking how their children are doing at school.

There are also other monetary contributions parents provide depending on school activities:

Besides the monthly cash contribution, we collect some money for the classroom painting and repair when the school year ends [in May or June]. Also, parents financially contribute to talent shows when there is need of special clothes for the shows.

A teacher who handled the 5th grade class said,

Two classes share one classroom. Each child's parents from the two classes contribute 5000 tugrik for the classroom painting and repair at the end of the school year.

Moreover, one teacher said her class's parents bought a color printer and TV set for her classroom.

It can be said that one of the reasons that teachers require herder parents' presence at P-T meetings is in order to discuss these monetary contributions at meetings and to make decisions altogether:

Parents discuss money contributions at P-T meetings and they make decisions on the amount altogether. Some parents, who missed the meetings, come later to meet me.

Teachers also inform the parents about the spending of the contribution at P-T meetings:

In the last P-T meeting, which I conducted in the beginning of the current quarter, I reminded herder parents to provide the monthly monetary contribution; I informed them about their children's performance on HW during the quarter break, I asked them to actively participate in the classroom cleaning, and I informed them about spending of the monthly monetary contribution for the last quarter.

In each class, there is a parent council, which usually consists of three parents, that helps classroom teachers collect money from parents. A teacher said,

There is a parent who is in charge of collecting money from parents. The parent collects 1000 tugrik from each child's parents once a month.

This teacher had handled a class for five years and she said it had been like this for five years. This seemed to be a main activity of parent councils; as another teacher said,

The parent council does not carry out special activities. The members just help me collect the monthly money contribution and other monetary contributions.

Some parents, however, found it was not easy to provide this kind of contribution. Two of the herder parents, whose family did not own their own livestock and got enrolled in the GFSP, said the following:

I provide monetary contributions for my three schoolchildren's classes when there is money available for my family. I contribute when their classrooms need curtains, linoleum, painting, and some other [needs]. I need to provide the contribution because teachers and parents make these decisions together at P-T meetings.

Another mother, who came from more than 70 kilometers to visit her two children in the school dormitory, said,

I and my husband provided a monthly monetary contribution for our two children's classrooms until the end of the school year when we visited the school in autumn [in the beginning of school year]. But now one of my children told me there was another monetary contribution [needed] for his classmate. The child was sick and classmates had been requested to contribute for his medical treatment. I remember I contributed to the child's treatment last year and now again this year... Parents like us find it difficult since we have limited resources. Those parents who are capable could contribute. I will meet the teacher tomorrow.

Most probably, this parent missed the decision-making P-T meeting and could not speak about her concerns at the meeting.

All of the six full-time herder families, who had their own livestock with herds ranging between 230-1000 head, reported that they did not have a regular family income, except for welfare money from the government for their children. (The government provides a monthly stipend of 20,000 tugrik for each child under 18 years old.)

The full-time herder families usually earn income three times a year. When it is winter, they sell meat and hides from their sheep, cows, and horses. In Mongolia, people buy more meat in the beginning of winter for the long winter ahead. Also, it is easier for them to keep meat cold in winter and so they buy more meat. Therefore, during this time of year, the meat price is usually higher and herders can make a better profit. In the spring, herders sell their goats' cashmere wool. And in the summer, they make a small income from selling their sheep's wool.

Full-time herders earn income by selling the raw materials produced from their livestock. One herder parent said their living condition is good:

Being a herder is good. Living conditions of herders have improved; we have electricity, a TV set, motorcycles, and cars. Also, we have additional houses in the county centers. Compared to civil servants who live on salary loans, we are richer.

When it is time for school to start in September, herder parents must sell meat from their livestock, but during this time the meat price is lower compared to winter. However, this is the only way they can earn money to send their children to school. One parent said the following:

Last August we sold meat from our livestock in the provincial center. We sold it to retail sellers at the wholesale price. If we want to earn more money, we needed to stay in there for some days and sell it by ourselves. But we did not have time; we needed to get back sooner

for our livestock. I remember we spent at least 300,000 for sending our six-year-old daughter to school for learning materials and uniforms.

Another mother said that they got a loan of 700,000 tugrik from a bank in August to send their three children to school. There is a special loan for herders. They covered their loan in December when they got money from selling some of their livestock for meat. She explained this way was better because they avoided selling meat in autumn when the price was lower. These full-time herder parents reported that providing a monthly monetary contribution was fine if, as one parents said, “the money was spent for the wellness of their children.”

Another parent asserted:

A monetary contribution is necessary to provide for a good learning environment for our children.

The interviews with herder parents revealed that a class’s parent council initiates a monetary contribution for classroom decoration or to improve the physical condition of the classrooms. A herder parent said,

During the last quarter break one of my children’s classroom was decorated. Parents of each child contributed 11,000 tugrik. The teacher said she had no right to require monetary contributions from parents and asked the parents to discuss and decide. So, the parent council members discussed with parents at a P-T meeting by writing down on the chalkboard what we need for that decoration. We bought paint and some boards.

Political context. The teachers who participated in the present study reported that there were some projects and programs with donor support being implemented in their schools. However, almost all teachers complained about their excessive workload due to the implementation of these projects and programs. A teacher said,

Different projects and programs contribute to teachers’ overloaded work.

The teachers, however, acknowledged the effectiveness of projects and programs, but felt they should be implemented more systematically:

Projects and programs yield effective results in investments in school and child development. However, they should be implemented more systematically. For example, there could be only one project or program in each academic year. When there are more than one of them it increases the teachers’ workloads.

One of the teachers voiced a concern about the inconsistency of the government saying, When there is a new minister s/he starts a new project for all school children and after a while another new project is started while the older one is not over yet. For now, at our school there are a number of different projects such as Educational Quality Reform 1 and 2, and STEM.

The year the data were collected was the third year of the government cabinet serving a four-year-term. During these three years there had been three ministers of education, culture, science, and sport. Since the last parliamentary election, held in 2016, some of the government cabinet members had been changed three times: The MECSS was one of them. In addition, the first prime minister appointed for the term resigned and so there was a second prime minister serving.

This same teacher also added that projects financed by donor agencies were sometimes not carefully adopted and failed to consider particular pupil contexts:

For instance, we have a STEM project this school year. It is said that the project is for all school children including the 1st graders who are not capable of reading and writing yet. If I look at the project objectives carefully there are some examples such as drawing, writing, and reading about scissors. How can the 1st graders write about scissors? I guess some projects come under upward pressure.

However, the five-year project titled “Improving primary education outcomes for the most vulnerable children in rural Mongolia” helped to improve school and herder family communication. A teacher from School A who was a core team member of the project said, one part of the project was a home-based school preparation program for five-year-old children. Herder parents read story books to their children at home. There were a number of story books and games in each box lent to herder children. The box was accompanied by an instructional guide for parents to facilitate their children’s efforts to learn the stories and games at home. Moreover, the program was well received by herder parents:

They liked this program because they could take the preschool program for their children and stay together at home while herding together. They did not need to live in split households or send their children to preschool programs or kindergarten in the county center.

During the project, this teacher visited herder families in their remote camps with her team members on a regular basis. This encouraged herder parents to frequently help with their children's learning at home:

When we visited the families, they showed us pictures their children drew after listening to stories the parents read out loud. They displayed the pictures on their *ger* walls and were very proud to show them to us.

During their visits they were able to check the learners' progress by having them retell the stories they learned to the team. Unfortunately, the project is now over and the team is no longer visiting herder families. The teacher involved added,

I am not sure if herder parents still keep on helping their children at home. But herder parents do come to the school librarian to give back the box lent to them and then borrow the next one.

The teachers appeared to recognize the importance of communicating with herder parents. One teacher said:

When teachers communicate with parents effectively, it helps teachers to finish their work on time (and manage their workload) and to reduce the risk of pupils failing in their learning and development.

However, teachers faced challenges when they used P-T meetings and phone calls for communication. Herder parents did not come to P-T meetings from their remote residences:

When my current pupils were in the 1st grade I used to use the "schoolbag" strategy, but I realized parents felt uncomfortable with it. Since then I haven't used that strategy. Now I conduct P-T meetings even there are only 15 parents [out of 34].

When herder parents cannot come to P-T meetings usually their extended family members or the child's caregivers attend P-T meetings. Sometimes, however, these caregivers do not show up either.

As noted previously, phone calls are sometimes unsuccessful due to poor communication facilities in remote areas. This often means that herder parents receive information about their children and school late:

When a quarter break starts, herder parents come to pick up their children and I inform them about all the whole quarter activities at once.

As discussed, collective P-T meetings and phone calls are the main modes of communication between teachers and herder parents, but they are not working well with all herder parents. Clearly teachers need to use different strategies to communicate effectively with herder parents who are living a special lifestyle and residing in isolated areas. Teachers do recognize the special lifestyle of herder families and admit that P-T meetings are not working well for this group:

Almost none of the herder parents come to P-T meetings, so P-T meetings are not a very appropriate form of communication.

Teachers used only a few traditional ways to communicate with herder parents. One of the reasons behind this could be the teacher's lack of skills in working with herder parents. As one teacher said,

I do not know how to encourage herder parents to partner with me.

This concern leads to an important issue in Mongolian teacher education. Government policy on teacher education seems to disregard the significance of equipping teachers with skills and strategies for working with diverse families. The participant teachers reported they missed having any related parental involvement topics in their pre-service teacher education saying,

There was no topic related to school and herder family communication in my pre-service teacher education program.

Besides pre-service teacher education, ongoing professional development programs also seem to ignore the topic:

I do not remember if I learned about partnering with herder parents in my pre-service teacher education and professional development courses.

Another example of missing government policy on partnering with herder parents is the minister's regulation of evaluating teacher's performance passed in 2013 (MES, 2013a). Following this regulation, teachers reported that school education managers evaluate their performance every other quarter. However, there is no requirement for teachers to work with herder parents, an important special group of people rural schools serve:

When the education manager evaluates teachers' performance for a quarter there is criteria called educational service and parents' satisfaction, but there are no specific criteria related to working with herder parents.

School education managers evaluate their teachers' performance of working with parents generally every quarter using another particular criterion:

There is the criterion of the parents' satisfaction survey for assessing teachers' performance for a quarterly bonus. In each quarter, we ask parents to fill in the survey considering teacher's activities with parents. For example, I could invite a guest to teach a class and ask parents to give me feedback on that activity. The aim is to have parents assess my activities. I need this evidence to be assessed by the education manager.

To meet this criterion, teachers develop their own surveys and ask parents to fill them in when they show up at P-T meetings.

Because the present government policies do not cover the area of partnering with families and parents in both pre-service and in-service teacher education programs, schools and school leaders tend to pay little attention to the topic. One of the novice teachers said she lacked skills and did not know better ways to involve herder parents and encourage them. She added,

The education manager has not given any advice to me about effective herder parent involvement and communication.

△

In this regard, partnering and communicating with herder parents is more likely to be seen as not an important part of teachers' everyday activities and they seem not to put much effort in communicating with herder parents. One of the experienced teachers said:

Generally speaking, it has been a long tradition that herder parents are not really expected to come to P-T meetings. If they [government policies] do not require herder parents [to attend P-T meetings] we cannot ask herder parents residing in remote areas to come to the meetings today or tomorrow.

Therefore, the teachers added, herder parents were left isolated from their schoolchildren.

There seems to be other areas, however, where the government intends to pursue its policies. Almost all teachers participating in this study said,

Paperwork now has increased. Teachers always need to provide papers as evidence of what we have carried out.

More experienced teachers reported they were more overloaded now with paper works compared to the past:

Related to the new core curriculum, teachers' workload has been increased. Compared to the 1990s, my workload was not as excessive as it is now.

The new core curriculum also requires increased paperwork. Before, we designed only thematic plans and used those for teaching, but now we need to design thematic plans, lesson plans, and some other plans.

4.3.4. Conclusion

This sub-study explored the communicating experiences of primary education teachers and pastoralist parents in order to empirically validate a proposed model of key contextual factors impacting school and pastoralist family communication from the second chapter of this dissertation. The empirically validated contextual factors included four factors at the exosystem level and four more factors at the macrosystem level. Building on the proposed contextual factors within the conceptual framework, the present sub-study added community involvement, communication facility, social system, and educational system to the model. However, most of these factors interacted with the factors in the proposed model. For instance, the government policies in education and teacher's workplace are grouped as part of the education system factor. The marriage institution, which was proposed as a single factor at the exosystem level is included as part of the social system at the macrosystem level. These factors are rearranged and added in the current model in order to provide a greater insight into the communicating experiences of school and pastoralist family within these larger social systems. Unlike other studies on home-school cooperation and communication (Farrell & Collier, 2010; Pang, 2011) which used the Bronfenbrenner's model (1977), the proposed conceptual framework included weather as an important contextual factor. The IPA results appeared to validate weather as an impacting factor in connection with transportation facilities.

The results indicate that the education system, including educational policy, is closely related to the political context in terms of donor agencies, and to the economic context in terms of a lack of money for the school system. These contexts impact communication between school and pastoralist family. The tight education budget, along with an absence of particular policies on school-family communication, discourages schools and teachers to initiate effective communication strategies with pastoralist families. Moreover, with overloaded paperwork and the education system, which is heavily reliant on exams and HW, teacher and pastoralist parent communication is hindered. This results in differences in

communication goals between teachers and herder parents such that the parents' goals are more focused on asking for a leave of absence for their children and the teachers' goals are more focused on HW completion. However, there are some project activities implemented by at least one donor agency that actually encouraged community involvement in education and pastoralist parents' involvement in their children's study at home. But consistency of this project's activities was found to be critical. Finally, the boarding school system, which cannot attract herder parents of the six-year-olds due to a lack of resources, makes livelihoods of pastoralists more challenging. In addition, having assistant teachers work in dormitories could help classroom teachers avoid unhealthy communication with dormitory teachers. These assistant teachers could help dormitory teachers get prepared younger pupils for school days with clean cups and bowls for school lunch, and younger girls coming to class with their hair done.

CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

5.1. Discussion

This section of the last chapter discusses some important issues raised in the findings of the empirical studies of the present research more deeply and broadly in order to provide an explanation and an interpretation of these findings. These policy-relevant issues are: (a) political commitment and donor coordination; (b) rural school and school-related migration; and (c) teacher education and the teaching profession. These issues are strongly connected to the contexts of rural school and herder family relationships.

5.1.1. Political commitment and donor coordination

Previously, the Soviet Union provided one third of the country's GDP (Ahearn, 2018; Weidman & Yoder, 2010) but since the breakup Mongolia had been progressing in a democratic, market-oriented direction (Weidman & Yoder, 2010) with a large reduction in Soviet economic activity. Mongolia established and developed relations with the western countries in order to implement educational reforms. Mongolia distanced itself from Russia and aligned with the West to attract donor support resulting in funds from bilateral sources including the USA, Germany, Canada, Japan, Korea, and others along with multi-lateral sources such as the European Union [EU], the World Bank and the ADB (Weidman & Yoder, 2010).

Interestingly, "most educational reforms in Mongolia are modeled after reforms from high-income countries with sedentary populations" (Steiner-Khamsi & Stolpe, 2006, p.1), whereas livelihoods of more than one-fourth of Mongolian households are dependent on nomadic pastoralism and another one-third of the total population lives in poor or very poor conditions (Steiner-Khamsi & Stolpe, 2006). One example of western reforms is the alignment of the Mongolian education system to the Cambridge international education standards under the Mongolia-Cambridge initiative agreement (Sukhbaatar & Sukhbaatar, 2019). The Mongolia-Cambridge initiative was founded in 2009, after the 2008 parliamentary election won by the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party. It was decided to pilot the Cambridge standards bilingually in both English and Mongolian in 30 schools: a school from each province and a school from each district in the capital. The decision received a lot of criticism of directly copying foreign standards. Reformers, though, expected that by 2017 every primary and secondary school could adopt the standards.

However, the policy was dropped when the opposition Democratic Party won in the 2012 election. When the new core curricula for primary, lower secondary, and upper secondary were adopted respectively in the school years of 2014-2015, 2015-2016, and 2016-2017 those 30 schools piloted these curricula instead and were considered laboratory schools (Sukhbaatar & Sukhbaatar, 2019).

Researchers (Steiner-Khamsi & Stolpe, 2006) argued that “[t]he decision of what to support in the Mongolian educational sector is more driven by what the lender has to offer than what the borrower actually needs” (Steiner-Khamsi & Stolpe, 2006, p. 77). For instance, when Americans launched the Millennium Development Fund their specialists would emphasize English language and information and communication technology reform in the Mongolian education sector (Steiner-Khamsi & Stolpe, 2006).

This is, however, not to downplay the importance of donor coordination in educational development in Mongolia. The Danish government, for example, invested in rural schools with two large grants amounting to approximately USD 9 million starting in 1992 through its DANIDA projects. The DANIDA project reforms, in rural primary and secondary schools, helped them greatly to survive during the hard times of the 1990s and the 2000s (Steiner-Khamsi & Stolpe, 2006).

Since 2000, educating nomadic groups has been paid increasing attention in policy documentation focusing on policy priorities and programming strategies supported by agencies such as United Nations Children’s Fund [UNICEF], United States Agency for International Development [USAID], and civil society organizations (Dyer, 2016). There are some best contemporary models of practice in individual residential schools from nomadic communities in Oman and Gujarat in India. These schools are established with state support and run by community members in close consultation with users. Moreover, the teachers are from nomadic communities. These special features of the residential schools enable formal education to be embedded within these nomadic communities and make formal education accessible and acceptable (Dyer, 2016).

One important example of good practices of donor coordination in educational development in rural Mongolia, and also an example of accessible and acceptable formal education for nomadic pastoralists, is the project titled “Improving primary education outcomes for the most vulnerable children in rural Mongolia” by SCJ. The project helped improve primary education outcomes for herder children. The project addressed problems faced by pastoralists including a home-based school preparation program, Child Development Centers in dormitories, and a home-based education program for dropouts.

Firstly, the early childhood education enrollment rate among herder children has been significantly low. According to the statistics (NSOM, 2018), only 25.8% of all herder children aged under six were able to attend early childhood education in 2017. As a result of the home-based preschool preparation program, implemented in four provinces, over 4,000 five-year-old herder children completed the preschool program with the support of their herder parents at home and they performed better in school than those who did not attend such preschool programs (SCJ, 2017a). The community education council, which consisted of 11 stakeholders in the county including a *bagh* governor of the county and a parent, helped raise the educational awareness of the local community and also community involvement in herder children's education. Besides higher outcomes in numeracy and language skills of participating herder children as a result of parental involvement on activities at home in the home-based preschool preparation program, this project program was far more effective than alternative preschool programs (World Bank, 2017).

Secondly, researchers (Steiner-Khamsi & Gerelmaa, 2008) argued that herders' children living in boarding school dormitories were one group that was educationally underserved due to unhealthy conditions of dormitories, emotional distress caused by the child's homesickness, poor educational performance of the child, and bullying by other pupils. The project also included extra-curricular after-school programs and provided children's opportunities to improve their personal development, reading, writing, and creative thinking skills by effectively spending their free time in the Child Development Centers. Besides the children living in dormitories, those children who lived with their relatives were also allowed to spend their after-school time in the centers. Another study found that, compared to the children who lived with their parents at home, children staying with their relatives had lower level of parental and caregiver involvement (Sukhbaatar, 2018a). Thus, the Child Development Centers helped children, living together with their relatives, develop during extra-curricular activities.

Lastly, sending their children, especially six-year-old children, to school put pressure on herder households to balance their livestock herding needs and children's schooling needs at the same time. Documents show that not all six-year-old children were able to attend school at their proper age among the herder population (MECSS, 2016). Hence, the compensatory home-based education program of the project allowed 164 out-of-school children to obtain their primary education in four provinces.

During the five-year education project, pastoralist parents assisted their children, aged six to 10, to study the Mongolian language and Math programs at home in cooperation with

community educational teams (SCJ, 2017a). This home-based program provided a flexible system allowing herder children and herder families to remain engaged in pastoral herding while accessing education that is formal, but not school-based (Dyer, 2016). Generally speaking, the project helped to improve herder parent involvement in children's learning and curriculum development; helped to improve community involvement in herder children's education, helped to develop good practices in dormitory life, and nurtured those herder children's development for when they were living away from home and parents. More importantly, the project helped to improve communication between rural school and herder family with regular visits of the community education teams to herder households in their campsites. This pilot project introduced compensatory home-based education program for out-of-school children from pastoralist families (SCJ, 2017a). It is one example of "illustrat[ing] policy and practices on the ground" (Dyer, 2016, p. 39).

Another initiative, however, the Education Quality Reform Project funded by World Bank, was criticized by the participating teachers of the present research. The school support program, one of the areas of the project, had been mentioned by the participants in this research. Most of the participants reported that the school support program had been beneficial to pupils' development with after class activities on the one hand, but on the other hand, it raised teachers' workloads with reports and paperwork. According to the report by MECSS (2019a), 656 primary schools implemented 1100 school support program projects in the three years between 2015 and 2018. Each project was funded with 2000-3000 USD. The Ministry reported that 327,019 pupils, and 10,518 teachers and school education managers benefited from the projects.

The two county schools which participated in the present research implemented two of these projects titled "Source of wisdom" and "Journey around words of wisdom" respectively during the school year of the data collection under the school support program of the Education Quality Reform Project. While the first project aimed to develop pupils' creative thinking skills with domino-type games, the latter one aimed to develop pupils' creative reading skills. A team of primary education teachers from each school proposed the projects and the projects were implemented with budgets of 4.8 million and 7.3 million tugrik respectively (MECSS, 2017).

Moreover, it was reported that the last stage of the school support program would be implemented with 351 projects in the 2019-2020 school year in the following five areas: (a) supporting the 1st graders adaptation in school; (b) supporting teacher's professional development at school based on their learning needs and their learning from others; (c)

adopting teaching strategies to teach diverse pupils; (d) promoting development of pupils residing in school dormitory with out of school activities; and (e) strengthening school education managers. Each of the accepted 351 projects would receive 5,000-10,000 USD (MECSS, 2019a).

The interconnection of the pastoralist lifestyle and education policy, which was successfully managed during socialism, now has been harmed by the education policies that are dominantly formulated by donor agencies (Stolpe, 2016). During the socialist period, education policy was closely coordinated with the requirements of nomadic livestock herding (Steiner-Khamsi & Stolpe, 2006). The state-financed boarding schools for all levels of education was the most important priority. Moreover, “[t]he relatively late age of school enrollment (eight years) was not only a concession to the difficulty of providing room and board, but it was also a concession to the harsh climate” (Steiner-Khamsi & Stolpe, 2006, p. 45). During this time, school vacation was organized according to the seasonal peaks of livestock herding (Steiner-Khamsi & Stolpe, 2006).

The condition today is significantly different: Boarding schools are faced with limited budgets resulting in poor physical condition and insufficient professional staff; the earlier age of school enrollment (six years) results in challenges to herder family structures, finances, work patterns, well-being of herders, and well-being of their livestock head; and poor infrastructure including transportation and telecommunication facilities hampers pupil progress and school communication with herder families. The earlier age of starting school also contributes to an increasing number of out-of-school-children due to factors discussed previously resulting in families who cannot send their six-year-olds to school (MECSS, 2016). School vacation, however, is an exception and educational policies try to keep on with this tradition. It is stated in the Minister’s regulation of an academic year structure for general secondary schools in province, county, village, and *bagh* (MECSS, 2018c) that the schedule of the third quarter break can be changed due to geographical location, climate, and livestock lambing season. This way, the academic year structure and quarter break schedules are different in rural and urban areas. However, a parent participant in this research study raised an issue that herder pupils may not be able to assist their parents during the high-peak lambing season in the spring due to the unexpectedly changed schedule of quarter breaks in winter. In the school year when the data were collected, the quarter break schedule for winter was changed due to higher rate of flu in urban areas. That change resulted in shorter vacation during the lambing season and a later school year ending in June. These periods are very important for herders. During the third quarter break, herder children

assist with collecting and feeding newborn animals, and in May at the end of school year, with shearing the wool of sheep.

5.1.2. Rural school and school-related migration

Mongolian boarding school dormitories are subsidized by the government and serve rural families free of charge. The boarding school system itself, however, is very expensive. The system is expensive because of subsidies for food and the long period of heating from October to May (Steiner-Khamsi & Stolpe, 2006). Even though the government has invested a lot in the school dormitories, herder children staying in these dormitories remain one of the groups that are underserved in the Mongolian education sector. It is important to note that nationwide around 14% of school dormitories housed children in the 2017-2018 school year even though they were assessed as not meeting the government dormitory standards (MECSS, 2018a). In response to this issue, the pastoralists “pursue a variety of strategies to combine mobile livestock husbandry in remote areas with accessing needed resources in settled areas” (Ahearn, 2018, p. 14). However, the strategies of split households and staying with relatives seem to be more likely to put pressure on herder parents in terms of finance due to purchasing a second home or to contributing to the relative’s household expenses. Cao (2016) discussed that parental mobility influences the traditional family structure and increases divorce rate. The participants of this study, however, did not report any family divorce cases due to households splitting. But, one herder participant mentioned that they jokingly said they got “divorced” when they split their households for school years.

A school for pastoralists typically requires changes to patterns of work, mobility, and the situated learning on which their nomadic livelihoods depend (Dyer, 2016). Splitting households, one major phenomenon related to schooling among the Mongolian pastoralists, is an example of Dyer’s argument. More and more herder families split their households when they send their six-year-olds to school in settled areas. When herder mothers leave for settled areas with young learners for school, herder fathers stay alone in remote campsites during the school year. A number of herder parent participants in the current research reported they had experienced or had been experiencing this practice. Surprisingly, “these risks and opportunity costs are invisible in policy discourses of their ‘education deprivation’ - an assertion that fails spectacularly to recognize situated livelihood learning as a legitimate form of education, essential to sustaining livelihoods” (Dyer, 2016, p. 40). It is important to avoid conflating formal education with school, which is the dominant model of education

provision with a school building. Thus, once again recall that basic human right is to education, not to schooling (Dyer, 2016).

School dormitories need more investments in provision of specialized and assistant teachers for the six-year-olds, human resource development, dormitory capacity expansion, and better living conditions. This dissertation research found that currently more resource-poor and financially vulnerable families tend to accept the current dormitory conditions while other groups of herders seek better living arrangements for their children, even at the risk of their livelihoods. This finding is in line with a previous study (Steiner-Khamsi & Stolpe, 2006). Improving the living conditions and utilities in school dormitories is under debate among researchers and educators. They argue that some share of food cost could be covered by parents in order to reduce subsidies for food and increase subsidies for better living conditions (Zayadelger, 2011).

The poor condition of school dormitories has been a significant barrier discouraging young learners to attend formal education when they reached the school admission age. In the 2016–2017 school year, 1,335 children did not attend school at the age of six and they accounted for 2.2% of the total six-year-olds who entered school (MECSS, 2019d). The Ministry collected data of these 1,335 children from all 21 provinces in Mongolia and investigated the reasons for non-attendance (MECSS, 2016). The reasons were described including (a) 15 children's herder families resided and herded in remote areas; (b) 40 children who would not reach their full six years of age until after the school year started in September; (c) 64 children who were not able to stay with relatives near a school and could not stay in the school dormitory because of its poor condition; (d) 93 children had a disability; (e) 104 children were from families who could not afford study materials and uniforms; (f) 128 children had a poor health condition; (g) 810 children's parents made requests to send them at the age of seven, but they did not give any reasons; and (h) 81 children did not attend with no attempt to request an exception.

Depending on different circumstances, six-year-old children, especially children from herder families, sometimes cannot attend school when they reach the official admission age. This, as a result, contributes to an increase of out of school children. A strong argument for lowering school entry age to six years, in accordance with adopting 12-years education system, was because it was the system most countries in the world required. Moreover, a biological and sociological rationale for starting school at a younger age had been proven in research (Begz, 2009). However, currently there are still many countries with an official primary school entry age of seven. Most of them are post-Soviet countries, while those

countries which require five- or six-year-olds to attend primary school are from North America and Western Europe, excluding Finland (United Nations Educational, Science and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2015). This could be an example of a reform which was modeled after reforms from high-income countries with sedentary populations as Steiner-Khamsi and Stolpe (2016) argued.

One important issue for schools is related to strictly fixed school budgets. The school budgets provided by the Mongolian government restricts school managers' ability to plan and budget, not allowing them to adjust to the circumstances of their schools (World Bank, 2018). The school budgets consist of three components: (a) a normative amount based on a per pupil allocation, (b) a fixed amount to cover utility costs, and (c) funding for targeted social assistance to support children of low-income families. Considering these school budget components, the two county schools participating in this dissertation research had different amount of budgets in their fiscal year depending on the number of pupils they served and depending on the supply of coal they used to warm up the school buildings between October and May. While one school had only 278 pupils, the other one had 544 pupils. While one school heated only two buildings with the coal brought from the nearby coal mine located only 40 kilometers away, the other one had to heat six buildings with coal from 195 kilometers away.

During the fieldwork in one of the county schools, I was able to take a look at the 2017 school budget as it was displayed on a school announcement board in the school hallway. Looking closely at the budget the biggest shares went to (a) salary, (b) utilities (heating, electricity, and water), (c) food for dormitory pupils, and (d) social insurance payment for the school personnel. In order to provide formal education a widely dispersed and nomadic pastoralist pupil population, an expensive system of boarding schools has to be maintained (Steiner-Khamsi & Stolpe, 2006). Even though only 6.3% of the total pupil population resided in 513 dormitories nationwide in 2017, high public expenditures go to boarding schools due to the harsh climate which requires a long seven months heating period each school year. Because of this, the researchers Steiner-Khamsi and Stolpe (2006) did not suggest that boarding school budgets are necessarily spent unwisely or inefficiently. They argued that comparing the Mongolian boarding school system with other systems would be a fallacy due to different environmental conditions, dissimilar pupil populations, and lower levels of public commitment to education. I, however, argue that a more wisely planned school complex could more efficiently utilize available school budgets. In other words, in the case of this study's one participant school, putting the primary school, secondary school,

and sports hall in one building (as is a common school structure in provincial centers and the capital) could be more efficient in terms of budget expenditure in terms of recruiting the required labor force and school building heating and maintenance.

Among the categories of this study's participant school budget for 2017, one of the lowest shares went to renovation and maintenance of school buildings. As shown in this current research study, one of the major reasons for communication between classroom teacher and herder parent was requesting monetary contribution from parents.

Low school autonomy along with limited government subsidies to schools force schools and teachers to request monetary contribution from parents. In addition to classroom teachers informing or reminding herder parents about monthly cash contribution for classroom maintenance, one teacher participant reported her pupils' parents financially supported her classroom by providing teaching materials, including a TV set and a color printer. Requesting monetary contribution from parents for classroom decoration or improving the physical condition of the classrooms has been found a long-lasting tradition among Mongolian schools. This supports the findings of earlier studies (Sukhbaatar 2014, 2018b) that suggested monetary contribution was a part of the parental resourcing, which was one of the three parental involvement dimensions in Mongolia. Moreover, this is rather similar to Nguon's (2012) finding in Cambodia where, as a resource-poor country, they have strategies for cost-sharing between the government and parents. In Cambodia, parents respond to teachers' requests for meetings regarding monetary contribution and parents contribute cash for capital improvement, school supplies, and teacher salaries. However, the current study did not find any monetary requests related to parents' contribution to teacher salaries in the rural Mongolian schools.

In addition, the current study revealed what was noted in a previous study (Steiner-Khamsi & Stolpe, 2006): school-related migration. Removing children from rural schools and sending them to better province-center schools is becoming another common phenomenon among herder families. This finding is rather similar to the situation of Tibetan nomadic and semi-nomadic lifestyle families who send their children to faraway boarding schools because the schools in their hometown and villages do not offer adequate educational opportunities (Cao, 2016). Also, the same phenomenon is reported in English and Guerin's study (2017) that quality secondary education is often not accessible to Indigenous Australian pupils in remote communities and they usually move to a metropolitan city or rural town to pursue a quality education.

Besides the quality of education, there are two more possible reasons for Mongolian herder migration. First, a lack of transport infrastructure affects school-related migration. The incomplete road network and low-quality roads restrict the rural population from accessing basic services such as healthcare and education (World Bank, 2018). Thus, some rural populations move to more easily accessible services in urban areas. According to the Rural Accessibility Index, the percentage of rural population who lived within two kilometers of an all-season road in Mongolia was only 36% in 2003, which ranked among the lowest in East Asia Pacific countries (World Bank, 2018). Second, poor herder families, who lost their livestock head in a *dzud*, have been moving to urban centers seeking jobs. This migration from rural to urban has caused the problem of a shortage of school buildings and has resulted in overcrowded and 3rd shift classes in urban areas (Sukhbaatar & Sukhbaatar, 2019).

Clearly, reducing and eliminating inequalities in urban-rural and socioeconomic differences in the quality of early childhood, primary, and secondary education would be a complex effort. The average mathematics score at the end of grade five at primary school was 64% in Ulaanbaatar, the capital and 50% in rural county schools in 2013 (UNESCO, 2018).

To address this difference, government agencies should pay more attention to the quality of rural education and monitor the education system in order to open up better educational opportunities for herders and herder children. It is also important for schools to initiate more meaningful parental involvement programs by inviting herder parents to improve their understanding about, and satisfaction with, rural schools.

Providing well-functioning school dormitories can also help ensure a balanced distribution of educational services between urban and rural areas. School-related migration of herder families with good resources seeking a better-quality education contributes to making overcrowded classes in urban areas. For instance, in the capital it is common to have classes with 50 and more pupils, but in remote rural areas sometimes there are classes with less than 20 pupils. Moreover, in the 2017-2018 school year 1% of all the classes nationwide was taught in the 3rd shifts (MECSS, 2018a). Although it is a small number, it puts an unfair strain on the facilities, teachers, staff, pupils, and parents of these urban schools.

Krätli's 2001 study (as cited in Ahearn & Bumochir, 2016) suggested that the Mongolian boarding school system for pastoralist societies, even today, has been seen as a "best practice." Therefore, the Mongolian government, local governments, local communities, schools, and potential herder parents should invest more in boarding schools in order to

make them healthier and more child-friendly, and more attractive for herders. Living and learning conditions for herder children in school dormitories are not ideal but they can be improved by providing better facilities, by preparing more professional teaching staff, by providing more quality education, by launching more meaningful parental involvement activities, and by creating a safer and more family-oriented atmosphere. This way school dormitories can serve more herder families and help meet the challenges imposed on herders' livelihoods. Schooling of pastoralists' children is very important but "how formal education intersects with and supports livelihood security" (Dyer, 2016, p. 40) of pastoralist families is also important at the same time.

5.1.3. Teacher education and the teaching profession

Communicating and working with indigenous and cultural minority families should be an important part of teacher education. Benveniste et al. (2014) discussed that studies showing many teachers in Australia felt they wanted improvement in both initial teacher education and continuing professional development programs in order to equip them for working with Aboriginal families. A recent study (Saltmarsh et al., 2015), involving Australian initial teacher education programs from 15 universities, revealed that the formal inclusion of parent engagement was found across a number of subjects, however overlaps and discontinuities related to this topic could not ensure the prospective teachers were well prepared for their work with families after graduation. It is worth noting that school-family relationship was addressed in indigenous education classes where pre-service teachers were taught the history, cultural values, traditions of indigenous people, the impacts of government policies and practices, and the family and community contexts of indigenous pupils (Saltmarsh et al., 2015). Sukhbaatar's study (2018a) noted that pre-service teachers felt working with Mongolian herder parents would be more challenging than working with other parents and respondents suggested teacher education should consider herder families as an important group to deal with.

Teacher education programs should provide specific topics addressing effective communication skills and strategies for communicating with parents, along with topics addressing the importance of and barriers to teacher-parent communication (Gisewhite, et al., 2019) including external factors impacting this communication beyond teacher and parent factors. Without this specific training and educating teachers for partnering with parents or caregivers, along with a mechanism for feedback to policymakers, effective government policies and school practices might not be possible. It would be interesting to

see how the Mongolian government can achieve its goal for the 2019-2020 school year (MECSS, 2019e) targeting expansion of partnership of teachers and parents or caretakers. One of the 11 objectives to achieve the goal is to sign contracts with parents or caregivers and increase their responsibilities for their children's academic performance, formation, development, and protection (MECSS, 2019e). It is doubtful that just signing contracts with parents or caregivers could increase parental responsibilities and expand teacher and parent partnership.

During the 1990s, state-run in-service trainings heavily focused on the content of what was being taught, with little regard for pedagogical issues (Steiner-Khamsi & Stolpe, 2006). However, efforts in advancing in-service training have made. For instance, in the mid-1990s international organizations such as the MFOS, Save the Children UK, and DANIDA funded in-service training courses on critical thinking, developmentally appropriate teaching methods, debate, student-centered learning, cooperative learning, and interactive teaching methods (Steiner-Khamsi & Stolpe, 2006). The changes, however, have not been achieved yet. A researcher (Begz, 2015) criticized the recent reforms of the last 25 years as putting too much emphasis on scientific knowledge and skills and lacking in the formation of good citizens of the future.

Teacher education has been a central government policy focus and the state invests in the development of teacher training institutions by providing support in all areas of teacher education (Mongolian State Parliament, 2015). Thus, teacher education has been considered an important part of the overall government policy. In 2014 MECS passed the Teacher Education Policy, as part of the Education Sector Reform Project funded by ADB, which emphasized initial teacher education and teachers' continuous professional development as leading priorities for the educational sector. The policy (MECS, 2014) also highlighted admission of talented and male students to teacher education institutions and included a provision advocating pleasant working environments for teachers. In accordance with the provision of ongoing teacher education, the Teacher Education Policy stated that in-service teachers should be offered the following based on their teaching years:

1. Training courses for those who have 1-5 years of teaching experience should be emphasized in order to improve their skills, methodology, and technology in working with learners;

2. Courses for teachers with 6-10 years of teaching experience should focus on enhancing their teaching capacity and learning ways to continuously develop themselves;
3. Teachers with 11-20 years of teaching experience should be supported to conduct research studies and to publish their works; and
4. Those teachers who have more than 21 years of teaching experience should participate in mentoring young teachers and support them to share their experiences and methodologies.

One important part of this policy is to increase the number of teachers who earn master's degree with the goal of reaching 70% by 2022.

The Ministry passed a regulation on professional development for preschool, primary, and secondary school teachers and personnel in 2013 in accordance with the new core curricula (MES, 2013b). There are three different types of ongoing professional development programs: a) basic, b) specific, and c) school-based, depending on the teaching years. The basic professional development program is for improving teacher's particular subject matter knowledge and teaching skills and is organized by the National Institute of Teachers Professional Development and the provincial and district Educational Boards, but the specific program is for introducing educational policies and implementing methodologies related to learning specific subject matter didactics. Such professional development programs can be organized by governmental organizations, NGOs, and international organizations. The school-based program, however, is for continuous development for everyday teaching and is organized by the school principal, education managers, and leaders of professional teams at each school. Moreover, the school-based program encourages teachers to conduct action research and learn from each other (MES, 2013b). The professional development courses tend to focus more on content and teaching methodology. The participant teachers in the present dissertation study, however, expressed their interest in learning more about working with herder parents. This finding is in line with other studies conducted in Australia that suggested many teachers wanted improved pre-service and in-service education programs to assist their work with Aboriginal pupils and families (Benveniste et al., 2014).

This dissertation research revealed that the participant teachers faced many challenges in their everyday teaching related to involving parents in collective P-T meetings, communicating with caretakers including dormitory teachers, having pupils complete HW,

and so on. However, no attempt was made by these teachers to study the reasons behind these challenges and no effort to solve the problems was reported during the data collection. Therefore, this suggests that conducting action research was very rare among the teachers in these schools. Research skills should be one important part of the teaching profession and research skills should be developed during undergraduate and graduate programs. Graduate programs, however, can maximize opportunities for in-service teachers to develop their skills by completing their theses in accordance with the actual problems they face during their everyday teaching at school. Unfortunately, graduate programs (MES, 2014b) limit this opportunity. According to a common regulation of organizing graduate programs (MES, 2014b), master's program learners are allowed to complete the program and earn their degrees without writing a thesis or conducting a research study if they want. The argument here is that there might be teachers who have a master's degree but who lack skills in conducting research especially since the Teacher Education Policy (MECS, 2014) states that by 2022, 70% of the teacher population will have a master's degree.

The professional development programs are also related to granting a teaching license. Those who graduated from their initial teacher education have to take the examination and get the teaching license for one year in order to enter the teaching profession. After successfully passing the exam in their first year of teaching these new teachers attend professional development basic programs and then their license is extended for another four years. Later on, in their 5th and 10th years of teaching, teachers need to attend additional basic programs and also submit their self-evaluation and an evaluation from their school administration in order to extend their teaching license in August of every year. The criteria for these evaluations include research skills, English language skills, and information and technology skills besides teaching skills (MES, 2013d).

One of the actions taken to ensure the quality of teacher education could be the examination for the teaching license. The examination consists of general pedagogical, educational, child psychological, and education law and regulation test items and also essay writing. The examination is computer-based so it is conducted at the same day and time nationwide organized by provincial and district Education Boards. Examination results of candidates or graduates of a particular teacher education institution can be seen as one of the main indications of how well the institution operates.

In order to provide well-trained teachers, teacher education institutions revise their curricula based on educational policies and regulations. The mass migration from rural to urban also influences the revision of the teacher education curricula. There are now fewer

pupils left in rural classes and few teachers stay and teach in some more remote rural areas. Considering this condition, teachers are required to be able to teach several subjects. To address this problem, the teacher education curricula are revised to train teachers who can teach one particular subject matter in addition to other subjects in general secondary schools. In this way teachers are able to keep teaching full-time in shrinking school systems and this strategy saves the budget in rural areas (Enkhee, 2009).

As mentioned earlier, the biggest part of school budgets goes to teachers' salaries and bonuses. Teachers get quarterly bonuses based on their performance. The following are the five major measures of teacher performance (MES, 2013a):

1. Formation of pupils (worth 20 points). The criteria for this measure include if the teacher encourages pupils and provides opportunities for them to participate and get involved in learning, and voluntary and public activities.
2. Pupils' attainment (worth 20 points). This includes each pupil's progress and attainment in learning and quarterly formative assessment results.
3. Developing pupils' talents (worth 20 points). Teachers should report how they investigated and developed pupils' talents, and report what pupils have learned and can do.
4. Satisfaction of educational services (worth 20 points). This criterion includes satisfaction survey results of pupils, parents or caretakers, and other stakeholders based on the teacher's support for each pupil's development and the teacher's professional ethics.
5. Pupils' health condition (worth 20 points). Teachers should report here how they contribute to help pupils improve and maintain their health, contribute to maintain healthy relationships with pupils, and contribute to provide a safe and healthy environment.

Based on every quarter's teacher performance assessment results, teachers are paid bonuses, in addition to their base salary, if they get more than 70 points overall out of 100. In the first and third quarters, teachers conduct self-assessment following the criteria and report the results to their professional team members. In the alternating second and fourth quarters, teachers' self-assessments are reviewed by a team of different stakeholders including a peer teacher, a parent, a school worker, a leader of professional team, and an education manager. The team is decided on by the school principal.

As the participant teachers reported, only one primary criteria for teacher-parent partnership at the schools was satisfaction with educational services, the fourth measure of teacher performance. The teachers said they design satisfaction surveys, by themselves, every quarter and had parents or caretakers fill in the surveys. Teachers analyze the data and include the results in their quarterly reports. However, the criteria of satisfaction with educational services seem very vague and the schools tended to use the criteria as only one effort to encourage their teachers to work with parents and caretakers. Moreover, one possible reason that teachers rely on collective P-T meetings could be the satisfaction survey. Teachers might prefer all parents and caretakers attend P-T meetings at the same time and have them fill in the surveys. In this case, herder parents are not able to fill in the surveys as they do not come to P-T meetings but need to stay in remote areas. Therefore, herder parents' voices may not reach the school administration.

As a part of their performance assessment teachers assess their pupils' attainment, one of the five major measures used for assessing teacher performance. Teachers and schools used a regulation of assessing general secondary school learners and educational quality passed by the minister of education in 2013 (MES, 2013c) during the data collection. Later the regulation was updated in 2018 (MECSS, 2018b). According to the old regulation, there were four different grading systems used depending on pupils' grade levels. In 1st-3rd grades teachers used oral evaluations with four levels: excellent, satisfactory, improving, and attention needed. In the 4th and 5th grades they used six grading levels from 'Excellent' for 85-100% to 'Unsatisfactory' for 0-25%. However, in the 6th-9th grades they used letters A, B, C, D, and F for five grading levels. Surprisingly, in the 10th-12th grades, there were five grading levels with letters, percentages, and four-point scores in 13 sub-levels. For instance, the highest evaluation mark was 'High' with letter marks and percentages of three sub-levels accompanied with scores, for example an 'A+' for 97-100% yielded a 4.0 grade point, an 'A' for 93-96% yielded a 3.67 grade point, and an 'A-' for 90-92% meant a 3.33 grade point score. Teachers were requested to assess pupils every quarter and write down pupils' evaluation marks in their grade books. Afterwards, teachers informed parents and caretakers about their children's evaluation with the grade books. In this regard, herder children's caretakers, who are dormitory teachers and relatives or extended family members, would be informed of the grades unless the herder mother stayed with her children. However, this research study revealed there was a classroom teacher who had not met with the dormitory teacher and some other teachers who avoided communicating with relatives. Moreover, the findings of this research suggested that teachers informing pupils' grades for

each quarter to parents or caretakers was one major reason for conducting collective P-T meetings.

The old grading system looks very complicated and one teacher complained it was a waste of time to have grade books when her class was in 1st to 3rd grades. During these years she put letters but no scores in the grade books, and parents did not get used to that kind of grading system and they did not understand the system well. So, she found it was not very important and stopped using grade books for a while when she found out the other peer teachers did not use them. For her it was a waste of time writing the oral grades in her 34 pupils' grade books and also it increased her workloads. However, when she had the 4th grade pupils she decided to reuse grade books since there were percentages used in assessment and parents could understand them better. Fortunately, the regulation was updated after five years in 2018 and has been used starting with the 2018–2019 school year (MECSS, 2018b). Compared to the old system of assessment, the new system made the assessment types clearer and also more importantly, the same eight-level of percentages scores is used throughout 1st to 12th grades. The assessment types used in 1st and 2nd grades are diagnostic and formative, but in 3rd to 12th grades they are diagnostic, formative, and summative. Moreover, at the end of the 5th grade or primary education, pupils take three different state exams on Mongolian language, Mathematics, and Science.

Teachers conducted different types of exams and good exam results would undoubtedly help them get good scores for their performance assessment. Good results from a teacher's performance assessment would ensure good bonuses in each quarter in addition to their base salary. This mechanism, along with the core curriculum, however, might emphasize exams and HW.

One issue to be discussed in this section is the new core curricula. The participant teachers reported that the new core curriculum for primary education, which was adopted in the 2014-2015 school year, raised teachers' workloads in terms of producing papers and teaching content.

The newly adopted core curricula for primary-, lower secondary-, and upper secondary education have always been in the center of education policy discussion. They have been criticized for not taking into account differences in urban and rural school conditions, for overloading both teachers' and pupils' loads, for increasing the number of subject matters and lessons, and for introducing some content which is not suitable for particular grade levels (MECSS, 2019b). By increasing the number of subject matters, teachers have less time per topic for teaching lessons in classes and this makes teachers give more HW to

pupils. When the new Minister of MECSS was appointed in February 2019, as the fourth in the current four-year government term, he paid a closer attention to the core curricula. The MECSS established a team which consisted of 72 teachers from rural and urban schools in order to start a national discussion on the curricula by investigating challenges faced by teachers during the core curricula implementation, and proposing recommendations for improvements. As a result of the discussion, the core curricula would be improved and teacher's and pupil's workload would become more normal. Based on these discussions, the upgraded core curricula will be implemented starting in the 2019–2020 school year. The current research study found HW was one major communication goal for teachers with herder parents. For teachers, one important reason to communicate with herder parents was informing herder parents about their children's HW completion failure during quarter breaks. There was a contradiction between the great bulk of HW given during quarter breaks and the busy schedule associated with livestock herding for herder pupils. This usually led to incomplete HW assignments when a new quarter started. Hopefully, when the implementation of the upgraded core curricula would be started, the HW loads should be reasonable for herder pupils to be completed during their quarter breaks.

In the current research study, most of the participant teachers reported they had excessive workloads due to the new core curriculum, projects, and paperwork for which they were not paid sufficiently. In one case, a participant teacher was coping with the financial burden of being a single mother and at the same time also a head of a household which required her to take out loans. This situation seems to be in line with results of an earlier study conducted in Mongolia (Steiner-Khamsi & Stolpe, 2006) which concluded that teachers were heavily indebted from salary loans. Sukhbaatar (2018b) argued that low salary of teachers seemed to be one possible contributor to overall decline in teachers' status in Mongolia.

Teachers were respected and well paid before however, in the last 60 years a good reputation of the teaching profession has been gradually lost. Less promising candidates are accepted, with low scores in their university entrance exams, and they join the teaching profession (Sukhbaatar, 2018b) and the amount of salary that teachers receive being much lower than the workload they manage (Tsanjid, 2011).

The State education policy (Mongolian State Parliament, 2015), Teacher education policy (MECS, 2014), and Teacher development program (MES, 2012) aim to establish a good reputation for the teaching profession by providing a concrete evaluation system of teaching; by increasing teaching skills, ethics, requirements, and responsibilities; and by improving the quality of entrants to teacher education programs (Sukhbaatar, 2018b; Sukhbaatar &

Sukhbaatar, 2019). However, the strategies have not succeeded yet as, for instance, less promising general education graduates are still being accepted into teacher education programs. The following actions should be done in order to raise the teaching profession's reputation in Mongolia: (a) increase teacher's salaries to attract top candidates; (b) change admission policies so that top candidates on the university entrance exam list are admitted to teacher education; and (c) continue improving the quality of teacher education.

Recently the Mongolian State Parliament (2018) passed a law in June 2018 supporting teacher development. The law has been implemented since January, 2019. The aim of the law is to ensure issues covering teacher education, teacher's professional development, professional ethics for teachers, reputation of the teaching profession, and social welfare of teachers. The law stated that the system of supporting teacher development consists of pre-service teacher education, in-service teacher education, and continuing professional development of teachers at their schools. Moreover, it is stated that every educational institution shall have a teacher development center which provides required materials and equipment to facilitate teachers' continuous development at their schools. An educational institution shall spend up to 2% of its total expenditure on activities in its teacher development center.

This law addressed one of the biggest issues faced by teachers who teach overcrowded classes in urban areas. It is stated that schools can have assistant teachers if there are more than 44 pupils in the first and second grade classes. One important statement regarding social welfare of teachers is to support them to enroll in the government's rental house program and to take out bank loans with low interest rates when they buy their own accommodation. Addressing the salary issues, the law stated that bonus payments based on teacher's performance shall be paid and more specific regulation on this statement will be passed by the government. Finally, the law stated that research studies on teacher development should be conducted more frequently.

5.2. Conclusion

This study aimed to develop an ecological model of contexts of school and herder family communication at the primary school level in rural Mongolia. In order to achieve the goal, three objectives were established.

First, the relations between school and herder family at the microsystem level of the ecological model in relation to herder parents' experiences in managing their children's living arrangements was explored using the data collected from the semi-structured

interviews with five pastoralist parents from a remote county school in eastern Mongolia. Herder pupils' living arrangement options included staying in a boarding school dormitory, staying at a relative's place, and living with a mother in a split household. The pastoralist parents' own school experiences, the presence of six-year-old school children, boarding school conditions, and family resources were found to be important factors for deciding the best living arrangement.

Second, communicating experiences of classroom teachers with herder parents at the mesosystem level in the ecological model was explored. This level of analysis used data collected through semi-structured interviews with five classroom teachers who had experiences in communicating with pastoralist parents. The participants were from a rural primary school in eastern Mongolia. The findings indicated that classroom teachers had difficulties in communicating with pastoralist parents. The school and teachers heavily relied on a very few traditional forms of communication which was not appropriate for the pastoralist parents' special lifestyle. Moreover, teachers were found to face challenges when they communicated with pastoralist families' relatives or extended members. Some teachers also had trouble communicating with the dormitory teacher who took care of the herder children during the school year.

Finally, the contextual factors located at the exosystem and the macrosystem levels of the proposed ecological model were empirically validated using data collected from 10 classroom teachers and 10 herder parents from two remote county schools. The empirically validated contextual factors located at the exosystem and the macrosystem levels each included four factors. The four contextual factors impacting rural school and herder family communication at the exosystem level were: (a) herder parent's workplace; (b) communication facility; (c) weather context and transportation facility; and (d) community involvement. The four contextual factors at the macrosystem level were: (a) social system; (b) education system; (c) economic context; and (d) political context. Some contextual factors were rearranged and a few added to the current model in combination with the factors proposed in the earlier model. For instance, the weather context was validated and presented in connection with transportation facilities.

The ecological model of contexts of school and herder family communication in rural Mongolia developed in this dissertation can be used in Mongolian teacher education, in both initial and ongoing programs, providing a greater insight into the contexts of school and herder family communication along with the factors impacting this communication for pre-service and in-service teachers and also for teacher educators and policy makers. Studying

this expanded model, more effective communication strategies could be developed by teachers and schools considering the special lifestyle of mobile pastoralists.

Government policy on education in relation to the political context were found to be of critical importance as they impact communication between school and pastoralist family. Policymakers have to consider “learning needs within nomads’ contemporary livelihoods and cultural values” (Dyer, 2016, p. 39), so that policy and practices can be illustrated together on the ground.

By developing the ecological model some Mongolian education problems were presented and discussed in relation to the contextual factors impacting rural school and herder family communication in order to inform policy makers and other educational researchers. Three main points, including some novel ideas and pedagogical relevance, to address the quality of Mongolian rural education in relation to my study’s purpose are highlighted as follows:

1. First, it is important to train pre-service and in-service teachers more effectively to work with herder parents and equip them with more appropriate and effective strategies that consider herder parents’ special lifestyle. For example, requiring teachers and schools to conduct one-to-one meetings for 15-20 minutes with herder parents once or twice a quarter should help improve school and herder family communication. These meetings could allow herder parents to visit schools on a more flexible schedule rather than collective P-T meetings which are always held on a fixed date and time. This strategy could greatly encourage herder parents to talk to teachers more openly about their children’s and family’s needs and potentialities in order to improve the learning outcomes of herder children. Moreover, suggesting HW which is more relevant to herder pupils could help improve communication between school and herder family, and also help improve herder parents’ satisfaction with the school. For instance, having new class lessons in rural primary schools during lambing season where all students celebrate the work that herder pupils have done during their spring break could help better understand Mongolian traditional lifestyles and improve school and rural family relationships. Giving the herder pupils such HW showing how they assist their parents during the quarter break in the lambing season, instead of requesting them to complete regular HW that the family really cannot prioritize or complete as easily as families who are not herding, may support and recognize herder households’ realities. The HW loads should also be reasonable for herder children during quarter breaks. Herder children should be

given opportunities to practice their herding lifestyle and special culture to allow formal education to intersect with their special culture and lifestyle (Dyer, 2016).

2. Second, the government should invest heavily in rural school dormitories in order to help reduce challenges (e.g. splitting households, financial burdens, etc.) posed to herders' livelihoods in relation to educating their children and in order to improve herder children's learning outcomes by providing professional staff and better utilities.
3. Third, there is a need to interrelate educational policies to each other and adopt them carefully considering the effectiveness for teachers, students, and diverse families. For instance, HW loads, different exams, curriculum loads, teacher's workloads, assessment measures of teacher's performance, amount of teacher's salaries, social welfare of teachers and family diversity should be carefully considered when educational policies are adopted. Moreover, ensuring the sustainability of successful projects by donors should be an important part of the education system. For instance, the project titled "Improving primary education outcomes for the most vulnerable children in rural Mongolia" by SCJ was successful. However, the sustainability of the project was found critically lacking. It would be good to look at the results of this project as long-term local goals for rural schools. Future studies may thus focus on preserving the still existing project materials and making sure they circulate to herders' homes including 30 counties in four provinces, where the project was implemented between 2012-2017. The Mongolian Government should plan to implement this successful project in all other provinces in order to address some of the major problems faced by herder families regarding access to education. One part of the project was the home-based school preparation program for 5-year-old herder children. This program not only helped improve rural school and herder family communication as a result of home visits of the community education council, but also helped 5-year-old herder children get prepared better in terms of numeracy and language skills for existing primary education as a result of involving herder parents in their children's learning at home. This program also helped improve herder parents' involvement in their children's learning at home. In summary, this successful project demonstrates an example of good communication and parental involvement to help improve learning outcomes of herder children.

The current dissertation research could be also a good addition to Ahearn and Bumochir's recommendations (2016) and Gisewhite and her colleague's proposal (2019). Ahearn and Bumochir (2016) recommended examining Mongolia's current school system, which they felt posed challenges to the livelihoods of pastoralist parents. Mongolia's current school system was examined at multiple levels within the scope of boarding school and herder family communication and yielded new and greater insight into the educational inclusion of herders' children and the well-being of herders. Gisewhite et al. (2019) proposed that a human ecological model for teacher education for effective communication with parents "has the potential to encourage healthy and advantageous exchanges of information between teachers and parents to promote educational success for each student" (p. 15). The ecological model of contexts of communication between school and pastoralist family in rural Mongolia, developed in the current study, could be an exemplary foundational model for communication training in future teacher education courses. In these respects, the current study may help inform researchers and education policy makers not only in Mongolia but also in other settings.

5.3. Limitations

This research study is limited in that it only invited classroom teachers and herder parents whereas extended family members of pastoralist families and dormitory teachers also communicated with classroom teachers on behalf of pastoralist parents. The sample of different stakeholders including the caretakers could help confirm issues raised in the study and possibly uncover other barriers to teacher-parent communication.

The gender of the herder parents was another limitation of the study. Only two out of ten parent participants were male parents as, in most cases, herder fathers stay busy herding the family livestock in their remote campsites while herder mothers move to county centers and stay with their children and also herder mothers come to the school more often compared to the fathers. One of the herder fathers was interviewed at his campsite, which was located at 12 kilometers away from the school, as it was one reachable destination. Excessive snowfall restricted me from visiting more herder families' campsites and thus invite more male parents into this study.

Finally, this doctoral research only allowed to conduct a cross-sectional study due to the limited period of time of the doctoral program. A longitudinal study focusing on the development of and changes in classroom teachers' communication experiences with herder parents could help explore some more relevant factors impacting teacher-parent

communication over the years reacting to changes in Mongolian educational, social, and political contexts. Such longitudinal study certainly would require a longer period of time and more funding.

5.4. Recommendations for future studies

The findings of the current study provide some possible directions for future research studies. Further in-depth exploration could be conducted in the area of teacher communication with caregivers, including herder children and extended family members of pastoralist families and dormitory teachers, with whom teachers communicate on behalf of pastoralist parents. Future studies could also be considered in the areas of herder parents' involvement in their children's learning and development as well as herder children's academic outcomes and emotional issues in relative's home or school dormitory settings. The role of school dormitories and the conditions of these dormitories are another obvious area to explore.

The contextual factors in this study were found to be both hindering and helping. Further studies could be undertaken to explore these hindering and helping factors more systematically.

Another suggestion for future research could be a longitudinal study which explores changes over time in teachers' communication experiences with herder parents including the chronosystem level of the ecological systems theory. Such a study would require more time and funding which is far beyond the time and funding typically available for this doctoral research.

The application of the ecological model presented in the current research to explore complex matters of home and school issues in different socio-cultural contexts could be another recommendation. Such studies might include school and family partnership when children live and study under the care of their relatives due to the economic and social changes in family patterns, the schooling of pastoralist children and their contribution towards meeting the learning needs of all children within the scope of Education for All [EFA], and the educational attainment of hard to reach or minority groups.

The call for ecologically-based teacher-parent communication skills training in pre-service teacher education programs (Gisewhite et al., 2019) aligns quite well with the ecological argument presented in the current research. It seems to be an encouraging indicator that the ecological model is considered a viable way to approach a deeper understanding of how to involve parents and to understand barriers to children's learning. A

major recommendation, therefore, should be developing a detailed ecologically-based model for teacher training for effective communication with parents and caregivers to be incorporated into various roles of teachers throughout their workday.

5.5. Implications

The present research has some implications. These implications are as follows: (a) implications specifically for teacher education in Mongolia and in other cultural settings; (b) methodological implications; and (c) theoretical implications.

5.5.1. Implications for teacher education

The current research explored the contexts of rural school and herder family communication at the systemic level including contextual factors impacting this communication and a through a fully developed ecological model. The findings of the present research can be used in teacher education in Mongolia to provide a greater insight for pre-service and in-service teachers and also for teacher educators and policy makers by delving into factors affecting communication between the school and the herder family beyond the obvious teacher and family factors. With a revised teacher education program, more effective communication strategies could be developed by teachers and schools taking into account the special lifestyle of mobile pastoralists. More effective communication between school and herder family can ultimately help improve the well-being and educational outcomes for herder children living in remote rural schools. With improved communication, the aspirations of the herder families could be made clearer to teachers along with a better understanding of herder family challenges and a better sense of shared goals between the school and the herder family.

As an important group in Mongolia, pastoralist parents' special backgrounds and situations should be considered in teacher education. Teachers were found to have dissimilar practice and skills in contacting and communicating with herder parents, and relatives and dormitory teachers acting as caretakers. Teachers developed their own strategies to deal with the challenges faced when communicating with pastoralist parents. Some of the strategies tended to be unsuccessful, for instance, the schoolbag strategy. This finding supports the results of a previous study (Farrell & Collier, 2010) that concluded elementary educators "lacked formal preparation for family-school communication and constructed their skills based on experience" (p. 4). Initial teacher education could equip teachers with more meaningful communication strategies. With proper teacher education, new teachers would

be able to use various communication forms respecting the special conditions of pastoralist families. Partnering effectively with extended family members of herder families and dormitory teachers should be an important component of a revised teacher education program. Under such a program, new novice teachers could be change agents who may be able to change the school's and teachers' long traditions of ineffective communication (Sukhbaatar, 2018a). Moreover, ongoing professional development could equip teachers and school leaders with strategies for healthy school-family communication. One more important component of both initial teacher education and ongoing professional development should be research skills development. For instance, if teachers always struggle with lower attendance at collective P-T meetings they might study the problem by conducting simple action research and also more professional level research including hypothesis testing and statistical analysis to solve the problem. It is also important to teach pre-service teachers about the special lifestyle of herders, the family and community contexts of herder pupils, and the impacts of educational policies on herder families and pupils in order to prepare the prospective teachers for better partnerships with herder families (Saltmarsh et al., 2015).

With better prepared school leaders ready to work with pastoralist families, the school could emphasize school and pastoralist family communication by recognizing them as an important group living a special lifestyle. In this regard, the school could establish school-wide policies in order to achieve good parental involvement and communication with pastoralist families including some different strategies for one-to-one basis communication with the parents, for home visit programs with a budget allocation for these visits, for cooperation with the local community, and for a better balance between teacher paperwork and practical teaching activities. Collective P-T meetings, which has been mainly used to date and are oriented more to one-way communication, could be replaced with one-to-one communication. As an example, teachers in the Greek-Cypriot educational system are required to assign one weekly period for 10- to 15-minutes conferences or briefings with each parent or caregiver to provide them with information about their children's academic progress, behavior, and school activities, and to discuss how families can cooperate with the school (Symeou et al., 2012). Ideally such meetings can let pastoralist parents come and meet teachers based on a flexible schedule and encourage two-way communication. This can also lead to more open and meaningful communication.

The international literature also suggests schools should allocate time and space for conducting regular home visits in remote communities (Benveniste et al., 2014; Hall et al.,

2015) and planned visits from parents to school (Benveniste et al., 2014) could also be effective strategies to foster a bidirectional relationship between the school and the indigenous families living in remote areas. Schools could also allocate a budget for home visits or could cooperate with the local administration and community when they meet with herder families. Such efforts to visit rural herders could be combined with activities for working around the literacy issue since illiteracy among herder parents was reported to restrict some forms of communication. Furthermore, one of the important strategies that schools could use to encourage improved herder parental involvement, as recommended by Cao (2016), could be the participation of herder parents in the decision-making and administration activities of the school.

Moreover, the school could launch teacher home visit programs, which could help teachers build better relationships with pastoralist families. Teacher home visits are another form of communication between teachers and parents (Stetson et al., 2012; Wright et al., 2018). Such visits result in increased parental communication: “Teacher home visit programs are used by many school systems as a way to build relationships with parents to increase in-school parent involvement and, in turn, increase student achievement” (Wright et al., 2018, pp. 67-68). The school could allocate a budget for home visits or could cooperate with the local administration and community. The school should also help teachers balance their workload. For instance, the school may arrange teachers to work in groups when they implement projects and programs, and submit their reports. This way, teachers might have less individual paperwork and more time for teaching and communicating with pastoralist parents.

Policymakers should make sure of a smooth implementation of recent education policies perhaps by generating fewer top-down policy mandates in each political cycle. There should be common requirements for including courses on parental involvement, working with diverse families, and communicating with parents in teacher education programs (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). Parental involvement and communication should not be restricted to individual teacher competencies, but it should be an essential component of the school organization and development (Willemse et al., 2018).

The ecological model of contexts of school and pastoralist family communication, developed in the present dissertation research, could be used not only in teacher education in Mongolia, but also teacher education in different cultural settings. For instance, Gisewhite et al. (2019) suggested a need for the ecologically-based teacher-parent communication in teacher education after reviewing literature on communication between teachers and parents

or guardians in the USA and Canada. These researchers argued that with a central focus on instructional best practices, assessment, and classroom management, teacher preparation programs in the USA ill-prepared pre-service teachers for some other roles. Roles which are sometimes dependent on the teaching environment and on students' needs, which new teachers need to manage throughout their workday should be offered during their pre-service training. In this regard, Gisewhite et al. (2019) suggested an ecological model of communication training stating,

[I]t is possible and preferable that teacher education programmes use the human ecological model as a guiding framework for the entire programme, in which pre-service teachers are trained throughout to consider the various levels and relationships of the ecosystem when writing lesson plans, understanding and implementing effective classroom management strategies, choosing technology for the classroom, garnering and utilizing outside support for the teaching of their content and students, and so forth. In this way, pre-service teachers would learn from the beginning of their career to consider their students as whole people that come from various backgrounds and situations. (Gisewhite et al., 2019, pp. 14-15)

The authors argued that “an ecologically framed communication training at the pre-service level is the most effective model for teacher-parent relationship building and maintenance” (Gisewhite et al., 2019, p. 4).

5.5.2. Methodological implications

This study attempted to maximize opportunities to apply IPA, a rapidly growing qualitative approach, in educational settings in order to gain a deeper understanding of the contexts of school and herder family communication in rural Mongolia. Extending the application of this qualitative approach, the contexts of communication between rural school and pastoralist parents are explored along with contextual factors impacting this communication. Key stakeholders of teachers and herder parents participated in this research and the lived experiences of these individuals were explored as one of the strengths of IPA is that these individuals constructed their views on the influence of selected contextual factors in their sociocultural context (Clarke, 2009).

5.5.3. Theoretical implications

The current study applied the ecological systems theory developed by Bronfenbrenner (1977) to develop an ecological model of contexts of rural school and pastoralist family communication in Mongolia. Although, the Bronfenbrenner theory initially introduced to study human development in an ecological context, it has been adapted in a relatively few studies on school-family cooperation and communication in Hong Kong (Pang, 2011) and the USA (Farrell & Collier, 2010) in order to gain a greater insight into the phenomena. Therefore, this study contributes to the international literature on contexts of school-family communication within the ecological systems by adapting the previous model by Pang (2011).

Even though the present research focused on school and pastoralist family relations in the Mongolian context, the idea would be also applicable to many other educational researchers in different cultural contexts and educational settings. The possible applications are as follows:

Recent changes in family patterns and family structures are one vivid example of impacts of social and economic changes that people all of the world have been witnessing since the past century (Ratcliff & Hunt, 2009; Sukhbaatar, 2014). One example of the changes in family pattern, due to the rapidly changing economies, is migrant worker parents. For instance, Chinese schools and teachers now need to deal with children of domestic migrant workers living in rural areas under the care of their relatives (Wang, 2016) like Mongolian migrant workers in urban areas, or overseas who leave behind their children with their extended family members in rural areas (Sukhbaatar, 2018a). These parents face special challenges in working with schools at a distance. To explore these challenges, the ecological model presented in the current dissertation research could be adapted by schools and teachers to develop more meaningful and appropriate strategies to partner with caregivers of schoolchildren.

Secondly, in regards of progress towards EFA, pastoralists have been left far behind facing extreme educational disadvantages (Dyer, 2010). For instance, in India, pastoralist children accompany their parents to seasonal migration of their herds and they are absent from school during this period of time. When they return to school, they face difficulties in re-enrolling (Dyer, 2010). Reindeer pastoralists, living a nomadic life in the Republic of Sakha, worry that education will separate their children from their traditional reindeer herding life and they worry about preserving their unique culture (Belianskaia, 2016). In Kenya, mobile schools for pastoralist children, run by a wide range of donor and NGO

partnerships, and local civil society organizations, face difficulties in recruiting and retaining teachers (Dyer, 2016). These difficulties and challenges seem to be associated with political commitment and educational policies supporting minority or hard to reach families. The ecological systems theory reminds us that education for children involves complex contextual factors, not only home and school factors (Pang, 2011). By adapting the ecological model in this study and collecting the various factors together in the model researchers could provide a greater insight into the education of pastoralist children within different cultures along with the range of helping and hindering factors (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). By identifying helping and hindering factors at the systemic level, strategies should be able to be identified in order to increase the helping forces and decrease the hindering forces in the systems (Pang, 2011).

Finally, besides its application in the area of school-family partnership, the presented ecological model can be adapted by researchers who study educational attainment of minority or hard to reach groups. For instance, a minority group of Roma people, living in the EU, still face social and educational problems which lead them to poverty (O'Hanlon, 2016). Only a tiny number of Roma children ever complete school and they often experience difficulties at school due to, for example, devaluation of their cultural practices in the school context and low teacher expectations (O'Hanlon, 2016; Rosário et al., 2015). Researchers (Rosário et al., 2015) discussed some factors impacting educational attainment of these Roma children. For instance, in Hungary where the Roma group accounts for 5-10% of the total population, the lack of governmental support for the educational needs of Roma communities, inadequate access to educational facilities associated with overcrowded classes in nearby schools and inaccessibly distant schools, and transportation expenses all impact Roma educational attainment (O'Hanlon, 2016). These challenges faced by Roma people living in Hungary contribute to up to 90% of illiterate Roma adults across the EU (Rosário et al., 2015). The application of the ecological model presented in the current research could also make possible a systematic examination of minority education attainment and the contextual factors impacting education attainment at the systemic level including the social system, the education system, the economic context, and the political context.

These potential research directions could encourage educational researchers to apply the presented ecological model in this study to reach out to other marginalized people and explore their problems in real life contexts. Conditions for home and school cooperation vary among families (Pang, 2011) and across cultures. Findings from ecological model

studies could contribute to the construction of a theory of the development of school and family partnership (Pang, 2011).

Moreover, as discussed in the previous section, the presented ecological model in this study could be used as a guiding framework in teacher education programs (Gisewhite et al., 2019) in different settings. The bulk of literature (de Bruïne et al., 2014; Farrell & Collier, 2010; Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; Saltmarsh et al., 2015; Stetson et al., 2012; Sukhbaatar, 2014, 2018a, 2018b; Symeou et al., 2012) discusses teacher education programs lack in equipping prospective teachers with competencies to partner with parents. The current ecological model of contextual factors impacting school and pastoralist family communication, therefore, could contribute to the development of a detailed ecological model for organizing teacher education curricula for effective communication with parents or caregivers.

PUBLICATIONS RELATED TO THE DISSERTATION

- Sukhbaatar, B. (2019). *Schooling of Mongolian herders' children: Where to stay during the school year?* Paper presented at the 23rd Conference of the Junior Researchers of EARLI (JURE), 10–11 August, 2019, Aachen, Germany.
- Sukhbaatar, B. (2019). *Barriers to teacher communication with pastoralist parents in rural Mongolia.* Paper presented at the 17th Conference on Educational Assessment (CEA), 11–13 April, 2019, Szeged, Hungary.
- Sukhbaatar, B., & Sukhbaatar, B. (2019). Teacher education in Mongolia: History and Reforms. In K. G. Karras & C. C. Wolhuter (Eds.), *International handbook of teacher education worldwide* (2nd ed., Vol. 2, pp. 455–472). Nicosia: HM Studies.
- Sukhbaatar, B., & Tarkó, K. (2018). Contexts of school and herder family communication in Mongolia: A conceptual framework. *Magyar Pedagogia* [Hungarian Pedagogy], 2(118), 157–174. doi: [10.17670/MPed.2018.2.157](https://doi.org/10.17670/MPed.2018.2.157)
- Sukhbaatar, B., & Tarkó, K. (2018). *Teacher communication with herder parents: Goals, forms, and frequency.* Paper presented at XVIII. National Conference on Education, 8–10 November, 2018, Budapest, Hungary.
- Sukhbaatar, B. (2018). Teacher education in Mongolia: Institutional and social factors contributing to a lack of parental involvement. In Y. Guo (Ed.), *Home-school relations: International perspectives* (pp. 227–244). Singapore: Springer. doi: [10.1007/978-981-13-0324-1_13](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-13-0324-1_13)
- Sukhbaatar, B. (2018). Preservice teachers' views on working with diverse families in Mongolia. *School Community Journal*, 28(1), 295–318.
- Sukhbaatar, B., & Tarkó, K. (2018). *Contexts of school and nomadic herder family communication in Mongolia: A conceptual framework.* Paper presented at the 22nd Conference of the Junior Researchers of EARLI (JURE), 2–6 July, 2018, Antwerp, Belgium.
- Sukhbaatar, B. (2017). *Preservice teachers' views on working with diverse families in Mongolia.* Paper presented at the 21st Conference of the Junior Researchers of EARLI (JURE), 27–28 August, 2017, Tampere, Finland.
- Sukhbaatar, B. (2014). Study on parental involvement preparation at a preservice institution in Mongolia. *School Community Journal*, 24(2), 189–218.

REFERENCES

- Adom, D., Hussein, E., & Agyem, J. (2018). Theoretical and conceptual framework: Mandatory ingredients of a quality research. *International Journal of Scientific Research*, 7(1), 438–441.
- Ahearn, A. (2018). Winters without women: social change, split households and gendered labour in rural Mongolia. *Gender, Place & Culture*, 25(3), 399–415.
- Ahearn, A., & Bumochir, D. (2016). Contradictions in schooling children among Mongolian pastoralists. *Human organization*, 75(1), 87–95.
- Asian Development Bank. (2005). *Mongolia: Country gender assessment*. Retrieved from <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/institutional-document/32236/cga-mongolia.pdf>
- Batchuluun, Y & Khulan, M. (2006). *Literacy country study: Mongolia. Background paper prepared for Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2006*. Retrieved from <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0014/001462/146207e.pdf>
- Begz, N. (2009). 12 жилийн сургуулийн тогтолцоо ба агуулгын шинэчлэлийн бодлого [Twelve years of school system and policy on content reform]. In Ch. Tsedenbal & D. Enkhee (Eds.), *Багшийн зөвлөмж: Бага боловсролын багш бэлтгэх сургуулийн багш нарт зориулав* [Guidance for teachers: For teacher trainers of primary education teacher training schools] (pp.32–34). Ulaanbaatar: Toonot print.
- Begz, N. (2015). Монгол улсад боловсролын талаар ойрын жилд баримтлах бодлогын чиглэл [Mongolian educational policy trends near future]. *Боловсрол судлал* [Educational Studies], 10(118), 3–6.
- Belianskaia, M. K. (2016). Modern nomadic schools for small-numbered indigenous peoples in the North of the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia). *Journal of Siberian Federal University. Humanities & Social Sciences*, 10 (9), 2342–2350.
- Benveniste, T., Guenther, J., Dawson, D., & Rainbird, S. (2014). Out of sight, out of mind? Bringing indigenous parent-boarding school communication to light. Paper presented at 2014 AARE-NZARE Conference: *Speaking back through research*, Brisbane, Queensland University of Technology.
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1977). Toward an experimental ecology of human development. *American Psychologist*, 32, 513–531.

- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1986). Ecology of the family as a context for human development: Research perspectives. *Developmental Psychology*, 22(6), 723–742.
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1993). Ecological models of human development. In M. Gauvain & M. Cole (Eds.), *Readings on the development of children* (2nd ed., pp. 37–43). New York: Freeman.
- de Bruïne, E. J., Willemse, T. M., D’Haem, J., Griswold, P., Vloeberghs, L., & Van Eynde, S. (2014). Preparing teacher candidates for family–school partnerships. *European Journal of Teacher Education*, 37(4), 409–425.
- Cao, G. (2016). Alienation of Tibetan adolescents in rural boarding schools. *Frontiers of Education in China*, 11(4), 503–518.
- Central Intelligence Agency. (2016). *World Factbook: Mongolia*. Retrieved from <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/resources/the-world-factbook/geos/mg.html>
- Clarke, C. (2009). An introduction to interpretative phenomenological analysis: A useful approach for occupational therapy research. *British Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 72(1), 37–39.
- Clarke, V. (2010). Review of the book “Interpretative phenomenological analysis: Theory, method and research”. *Psychology Learning and Teaching*, 9, 56–57.
- Creswell, J. W., & Miller, D. L. (2000). Determining validity in qualitative inquiry. *Theory into Practice*, 39(3), 124–130.
- Dyer, C. (2001). Nomads and education for all: Education for development or domestication? *Comparative Education*, 37(3), 315–327.
- Dyer, C. (2010). Education and social (in) justice for mobile groups: re-framing rights and educational inclusion for Indian pastoralist children. *Educational Review*, 62(3), 301–313.
- Dyer, C. (2016). Evolving approaches to educating children from nomadic communities. *Prospects*, 46(1), 39–54.
- Englander, M. (2012). The interview: Data collection in descriptive phenomenological human scientific research. *Journal of Phenomenological Psychology*, 43(1), 13–35.
- English, S., & Guerin, B. (2017). Boarding for Indigenous Australian secondary students: A contextual analysis of four options and their best features. *Journal of Australian Indigenous Issues*, 20(4), 31–53.

- Enkhee, D. (2009). Бага боловсролын багш бэлтгэх бодлогын асуудалд [Issues on primary education teacher education policy]. In Ch. Tsedenbal & D. Enkhee (eds.), *Багшийн зөвлөмж: Бага боловсролын багш бэлтгэх сургуулийн багш нарм зориулав* [Guidance for teachers: For primary education teacher trainers]. (pp. 43–47). Ulaanbaatar: Toonot print.
- Epstein, J. L. (2010). School/family/community partnerships: Caring for the children we share. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 92(3), 81–96.
- Farrell, A. F., & Collier, M. A. (2010). School personnel’s perceptions of family-school communication: A qualitative study. *Improving Schools*, 13(1), 4–20.
- Finlay, L. (2012). Debating phenomenological research methods. In N. Friesen, C. Henriksson, & T. Saevi (Eds.), *Hermeneutic phenomenology in education* (pp. 17–37). Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.
- Fisher, Y. (2009). Defining parental involvement: The Israeli case. *US-China Education Review*, 6(11), 33–45.
- Fratkin, E., & Meir, A. (2005). Pastoralists and the state: an editorial introduction. *Geography Research Forum*, 25, 1–13.
- Gastaldi, F., Longobardi, C., Quaglia, R., & Settanni, M. (2015). Parent–teacher meetings as a unit of analysis for parent–teacher interactions. *Culture & Psychology*, 21(1), 95–110.
- Gisewhite, R. A., Jeanfreau, M. M., & Holden, C. L. (2019). A call for ecologically-based teacher-parent communication skills training in pre-service teacher education programmes. *Educational Review*, 1–20.
- Graham-Clay, S. (2005). Communicating with parents: Strategies for teachers. *The School Community Journal*, 15(1), 117–129.
- Grant, C., & Osanloo, A. (2014). Understanding, selecting, and integrating a theoretical framework in dissertation research: Creating the blueprint for your “house”. *Administrative Issues Journal: Connecting Education, Practice, and Research*, 12–26.
- Groppo, V., & Kraehnert, K. (2016). The impact of extreme weather events on education. *Journal of Population Economics*, 30(2), 433–472.
- Guo Y., & Wu X. (2018). Home-school relations: An introduction. In Y. Guo (Ed.), *Home-school relations* (pp. 1–12). Singapore: Springer.

- Guo Y., Wu X., & Liu X. (2018). Changes in parent–teacher relationships under China’s market economy. In Y. Guo (Ed.), *Home-school relations* (pp. 115–135). Singapore: Springer.
- Hall, N., Hornby, G., & Macfarlane, S. (2015). Enabling school engagement for Māori families in New Zealand. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 24(10), 3038–3046.
- Henriksson, C., & Friesen, N. (2012). Introduction. In N. Friesen, C. Henriksson, & T. Saevi (Eds.), *Hermeneutic phenomenology in education* (pp. 1–14). Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.
- Holland, F. (2014). *Teaching in higher education: An interpretive phenomenological analysis*. SAGE Research Methods Cases.
- Hornby, G., & Lafaele, R. (2011). Barriers to parental involvement in education: an explanatory model. *Educational Review*, 63(1), 37–52.
- Hwang, H. (2014). The influence of the ecological contexts of teacher education on South Korean teacher educators' professional development. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 43, 1–14.
- Kim, S., & Chin, M. (2016). Gender differences in factors associated with how parents communicate with school in Korea. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 109(5), 464–477.
- Laptander, R. I. (2013). Model for the Tundra school in Yamal: A new education system for children from nomadic and semi-nomadic Nenets families. In E. Kasten & T. de Graaf (Eds.), *Sustaining indigenous knowledge. Learning tools and community initiatives for preserving endangered languages and local cultural heritage* (pp. 181–194). Norderstedt: SEC Publications.
- Lesorogol, C., Chowa, G., & Ansong, D. (2011). Livestock inheritance and education: Attitudes and decision making among Samburu pastoralists. *Nomadic Peoples*, 82–103.
- Liarskaya, E. (2013). Boarding school on Yamal: History of development and current situation. In E. Kasten & T. de Graaf (Eds.), *Sustaining indigenous knowledge. Learning tools and community initiatives for preserving endangered languages and local cultural heritage* (pp. 159–180). Norderstedt: SEC Publications.
- Lkhagvadorj, D., Hauck, M., Dulamsuren, Ch., & Tsogtbaatar, J. (2013). Pastoral nomadism in the forest-steppe of the Mongolian Altai under a changing economy and a warming climate. *Journal of Arid Environments*, 88, 82–89.

- Loudová, I., Havigerová, J. M., & Haviger, J. (2015). The communication between schools and families from the perspective of parents of high school students. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 174, 1242–1246.
- Ministry of Education, Culture, and Science. (2010). *Ерөнхий боловсролын сургуулийн үлгэрчилсэн дүрэм* [Comprehensive regulation on general education schools]. Retrieved from <http://www.legalinfo.mn/annex/details/5459?lawid=7723>
- Ministry of Education, Culture and Science. (2014). *Багш боловсролын талаар баримтлах бодлого* [Teacher education policy]. Ulaanbaatar: Author.
- Ministry of Education, Culture and Science. (2016). Monitoring over the national core curriculum implementation in Mongolia. Retrieved from <http://www.meds.gov.mn/post1602053>
- Ministry of Education, Culture, Science and Sport. (2016). *Ерөнхий боловсролын сургуулийн зөвлөлөөс 1-р ангид хүүхдээ 6 настайд нь элсүүлэх боломжгүй малчин эцэг эхийн хүсэлтийг шийдвэрлэх чиглэл* [Regulation of addressing herder parent's request to delay sending their children to school at six years old]. Ulaanbaatar: Author.
- Ministry of Education, Culture, Science and Sport. (2017). *Сургуулийн тэтгэлэгт хөтөлбөр хэрэгжүүлэх тухай тушаал* [Regulation of implementing school support program]. Retrieved from <https://shilendans.gov.mn>
- Ministry of Education, Culture, Science and Sport. (2018a). *Ерөнхий боловсролын сургуулийн 2017–2018 оны хичээлийн жилийн статистик мэдээ* [Statistics for primary and secondary schools for the 2017–2018 school year]. Retrieved from <https://mecss.gov.mn/media/uploads/4667d4ae-37e0-443c-9cd3-02ab323da156.pdf>
- Ministry of Education, Culture, Science and Sport. (2018b). *Ерөнхий боловсролын сургуулийн суралцагчийн болон боловсролын чанарын үнэлгээний журам А/425* [Regulation of assessing general secondary school learners and educational quality А/425]. Retrieved from http://itpd.mn/u/A-425%20assessment%20juram_1.pdf
- Ministry of Education, Culture, Science and Sport. (2018c). *Аймаг, сум, тосгон, багийн ерөнхий боловсролын сургуулийн хичээлийн жилийн бүтэц No А/381* [Regulation of an academic year structure of general secondary schools in province, county, village, and bagh No А/381]. Retrieved from <https://mecss.gov.mn/media/uploads/905f4364-147a-460a-8dbd-7af933ba582e.pdf>

- Ministry of Education, Culture, Science and Sport. (2019a). *Сургуулийн тэтгэлэгт хөтөлбөрийн IV шат хэрэгжиж эхэллээ* [The 4th stage of the school support program has been started]. Retrieved from <https://mecss.gov.mn/news/1738/>
- Ministry of Education, Culture, Science and Sport. (2019b). *Бага, суурь, бүрэн дунд боловсролын цөм хөтөлбөрийн Үндэсний хэлэлцүүлэг эхэллээ* [Primary, lower secondary, and upper secondary education curricula under national level discussion]. Retrieved from <https://mecss.gov.mn/news/1380/>
- Ministry of Education, Culture, Science and Sport. (2019c) *Сургуулийн өмнөх боловсролын салбарын 2018–2019 оны хичээлийн жилийн статистикийн мэдээллийн товч танилцуулга* [Overview of statistics for preschool education for the 2018–2019 school year]. Retrieved from <https://mecss.gov.mn/news/1386/>
- Ministry of Education, Culture, Science and Sport. (2019d) *Бага, дунд боловсролын салбарын 2018–2019 оны хичээлийн жилийн статистикийн мэдээллийн товч танилцуулга* [Overview of statistics for primary and secondary education for the 2018–2019 school year]. Retrieved from <https://mecss.gov.mn/news/1387/>
- Ministry of Education, Culture, Science and Sport. (2019e) *Сургуулийн өмнөх болон бага, дунд боловсролын салбарын 2019–2020 оны хичээлийн жилийн зорилго, зорилт* [Goal and objectives of preschool, primary, and secondary education for the 2019–2020 school year]. Retrieved from https://mecss.gov.mn/news/1917/?fbclid=IwAR0uOSA61gS9_zE48TcCYhQVE5yYOzVanx3cyblPbZeFG25L2HRE-eekHLc
- Ministry of Education and Science. (2012). *Багшийн хөгжил хөтөлбөр* [Teacher development program]. Retrieved from <https://mecss.gov.mn/media/uploads/69420279-3426-4725-87d1a0eab1cd8e6a.pdf>
- Ministry of Education and Science. (2013a). *Ерөнхий боловсролын багшийн ажлыг үнэлэх, дүгнэх журам No 293* [Regulation of assessing general education teacher performance No 293]. Retrieved from <http://www.itpd.mn/u/2013%20%D0%BE%D0%BD%D1%8B%20A-293%20%20%D1%82%D1%83%D1%88%D0%B0%D0%B0%D0%BB.pdf>
- Ministry of Education and Science. (2013b). *Сургуулийн өмнөх болон бага, дунд боловсролын сургалтын байгууллагын багш, ажилтны мэргэжил дээшлүүлэх журам No 287* [Regulation of professional development of preschool, primary, and

- secondary school teachers and personnel No 287]. Retrieved from <http://www.itpd.mn/u/A-287%20.pdf>
- Ministry of Education and Science. (2013c). *Ерөнхий боловсролын сургуулийн суралцагчийн болон боловсролын чанарын үнэлгээний журам No A/309* [Regulation of assessing general secondary school learners and educational quality No A/309] . In *Бага боловсролын сургалтын цөм хөтөлбөр* [National core curriculum for primary education]. (pp. 219–225). Ulaanbaatar: Author.
- Ministry of Education and Science. (2013d). *Багшлах эрх, мэргэжлийн зэрэг олгох, хасах журам No A/305* [Regulation of granting and withdrawing teaching license and teaching ranks No A/305]. Retrieved from <https://www.legalinfo.mn/annex/details/6168?lawid=9745>
- Ministry of Education and Science. (2014a). *Бага боловсролын сургалтын цөм хөтөлбөр* [National core curriculum for primary education]. Ulaanbaatar: Author.
- Ministry of Education and Science. (2014b). *Магистр, докторын сургалт эрхлэх нийтлэг журам No A/370* [Common regulation of conducting graduate programs No A/370]. Ulaanbaatar: Author.
- Mongolian State Parliament. (1992). *The constitution of Mongolia*. Retrieved from <http://www.unesco.org/education/edurights/media/docs/6a6a23469e136afaa4860bf5869f6f8f659c6688.pdf>
- Mongolian State Parliament. (2002). *Бага, дунд боловсролын тухай хууль* [Primary and secondary education law of Mongolia]. Retrieved from www.legalinfo.mn/law/details/72?lawid=72
- Mongolian State Parliament. (2015). *Төрөөс боловсролын талаар баримтлах бодлого 2014–2024* [State education policy 2014–2024]. Retrieved from <http://www.legalinfo.mn/annex/details/6661?lawid=10935>
- Mongolian State Parliament. (2016). *Боловсролын тухай хуульд нэмэлт өөрчлөлт оруулах тухай* [Amendment to education law of Mongolia]. *Төрийн мэдээлэл* [State Bulletin], 20(929), 1418–1430.
- Mongolian State Parliament. (2018) *Багшийн хөгжлийг дэмжих тухай хууль* [A law supporting teacher development]. Retrieved from <http://www.legalinfo.mn/law/details/13532>
- National Statistical Office of Mongolia. (2011a). *Хүн ам, орон сууцны 2010 оны улсын тооллогын үр дүн* [The 2010 population and housing census of Mongolia]. Retrieved from <http://www.tuv.nso.mn/uploads/users/4/files/XAOCT%20uls.pdf>

- National Statistical Office of Mongolia. (2011b). *Хүн ам, орон сууцны 2010 оны улсын тооллогын үр дүн: Өрх, гэр бүлийн байдал* [The 2010 population and housing census of Mongolia: Household, family, and marriage]. Retrieved from <https://www.eri.mn/download/j9au5tdy>
- National Statistical Office of Mongolia. (2013). *Монгол улсын статистикийн эмхэтгэл 2012* [Mongolian statistical yearbook 2012]. Ulaanbaatar: Author.
- National Statistical Office of Mongolia. (2017). *Mongolian statistical yearbook 2016*. Ulaanbaatar: Author.
- National Statistical Office of Mongolia. (2018). *Хөдөө аж ахуйн салбарын танилцуулга 2017* [Bulletin of Agriculture 2017]. Ulaanbaatar: Author.
- Neal, J. W., & Neal, Z. P. (2013). Nested or networked? Future directions for ecological systems theory. *Social Development, 22*(4), 722–737.
- Nguon, S. (2012). Parental involvement and students' achievement in Cambodia: Focusing on parental resourcing of public schooling. *International Journal of Educational Research, 53*, 213–224.
- Noon, E. J. (2018). Interpretive phenomenological analysis: An appropriate methodology for educational research? *Journal of Perspectives in Applied Academic Practice, 6*(1), 75–83.
- O'Hanlon, C. (2016). The European struggle to educate and include Roma people: A critique of differences in policy and practice in Western and Eastern EU countries. *Social Inclusion, 4*(1), 1–10.
- Ozmen, F., Akuzum, C., Zincirli, M., & Selcuk, G. (2016). The communication barriers between teachers and parents in primary schools. *Eurasian Journal of Educational Research, 16*(66) 1–30.
- Padilla-Díaz, M. (2015). Phenomenology in educational qualitative research: Philosophy as science or philosophical science. *International Journal of Educational Excellence, 1*(2), 101–110.
- Pang, I. W. (2011). Home-school cooperation in the changing context – An ecological approach. *The Asia-Pacific Education Researcher, 20*(1), 1–16.
- Pietkiewicz, I., & Smith, J. A. (2014). A practical guide to using interpretive phenomenological analysis in qualitative research psychology. *Psychological Journal, 20*(1), 7–14.
- Ratcliff, N., & Hunt, G. (2009). Building teacher-family partnerships: The role of teacher preparation programs. *Education, 129*(3), 495–505.

- Reiners, G. M. (2012). Understanding the differences between Husserl's (descriptive) and Heidegger's (interpretive) phenomenological research. *Journal of Nursing Care, 1*(5), 1–3.
- Rosário, P., Núñez, J. C., Vallejo, G., Cunha, J., Azevedo, R., Pereira, R., Nunes, A. R., Fuentes, S., & Moreira, T. (2016). Promoting Gypsy children school engagement: a story-tool project to enhance self-regulated learning. *Contemporary Educational Psychology, 47*, 84–94.
- Sanjaabadam, S. (2014). Монгол улсын ерөнхий боловсролын сургуулийн дотуур байрны хөгжил, эрхзүйн байдал [Development and legal system of Mongolian school dormitories]. *Боловсрол судлал [Educational Studies], 9*(107), 7–11.
- Saltmarsh, S., Barr, J., & Chapman, A. (2015). Preparing for parents: How Australian teacher education is addressing the question of parent-school engagement. *Asia Pacific Journal of Education, 35*(1), 69–84.
- Save the children Japan. (2017a). *Survive, learn and be protected. Annual report 2017 Mongolia*. Ulaanbaatar: Author.
- Save the children Japan. (2017b). *Боловсрол бидний ирээдүй Дорнод аймагт [Education-our future Dornod province]*. Ulaanbaatar: Author.
- Sewell, T. (2012). Are we adequately preparing teachers to partner with families? *Early Childhood Education Journal, 40*, 259–263.
- Sloan, A., & Bowe, B. (2014). Phenomenology and hermeneutic phenomenology: The philosophy, the methodologies, and using hermeneutic phenomenology to investigate lecturers' experiences of curriculum design. *Quality & Quantity, 48*(3), 1291–1303.
- Smith, J. A., & Osborn, M. (2008). Interpretative phenomenological analysis. In J. A. Smith (Ed.), *Qualitative psychology: A practical guide to research methods* (pp. 53–80). London: Sage.
- Smith, J. A., Flowers, P., & Larkin, M. (2009). *Interpretative phenomenological analysis: Theory, method and research*. London: Sage.
- Sosorbaram, L. (2010). Сурагчийн хүмүүжил төлөвшлийн үнэлгээ ба эцэг эхийн оролцоо [Evaluation of students' educational performance and development and parental involvement]. *Боловсрол судлал [Educational Studies], 2*(60), 49–55.
- Steiner-Khamsi, G., & Gerelmaa, A. (2008). Quality and equity in the Mongolian education sector. *Prospects, 38*(3), 409–414.

- Steiner-Khamsi, G., & Stolpe, I. (2004). Decentralization and recentralization reform in Mongolia: tracing the swing of the pendulum. *Comparative Education*, 40(1), 29–53.
- Steiner-Khamsi, G., & Stolpe, I. (2006). *Educational import: Local encounters with global forces in Mongolia*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Stetson, R., Stetson, E., Sinclair, B., & Nix, K. (2012). Home visits: Teacher reflections about relationships, student behavior, and achievement. *Issues in Teacher Education*, 21(1), 21–37.
- Stolpe, I. (2016). Social versus spatial mobility? Mongolia's pastoralists in the educational development discourse. *Social Inclusion*, 4(1), 19–31.
- Sukhbaatar, B. (2014). Study on parental involvement preparation at a preservice institution in Mongolia. *School Community Journal*, 24(2), 189–218.
- Sukhbaatar, B. (2018a). Preservice teachers' views on working with diverse families in Mongolia. *School Community Journal*, 28(1), 295–318.
- Sukhbaatar, B. (2018b). Teacher education in Mongolia: Institutional and social factors contributing to a lack of parental involvement. In Y. Guo (Ed.), *Home-school relations* (pp. 227–244). Singapore: Springer.
- Sukhbaatar, B., & Sukhbaatar, B. (2019). Teacher education in Mongolia: History and Reforms. In K. G. Karras & C. C. Wolhuter (Eds.), *International handbook of teacher education worldwide* (2nd ed., Vol. 2, pp. 455–472). Nicosia: HM Studies.
- Sukhbaatar, B., & Tarkó, K. (2018). Contexts of school and herder family communication in Mongolia: A conceptual framework. *Magyar Pedagogia* [Hungarian Pedagogy], 2(118), 157–174.
- Sutterby, J., Rubin, R., & Abrego, M. (2007). Amistades: The development of relationships between preservice teachers and Latino families. *School Community Journal*, 17(1), 77–94.
- Symeou, L., Roussounidou, E., & Michaelides, M. (2012). I feel much more confident now to talk with parents: An evaluation of in-service training on teacher-parent communication. *School Community Journal*, 22(1), 65–87.
- Tsanjid, A. (2011). Монгол улсын боловсролын удирдлагын шинэчлэл [Reforms in educational administration in Mongolia]. *Боловсрол судлал* [Educational Studies], 09(77), 6–16.

- Thompson, B., & Mazer, J. P. (2012). Development of the parental academic support scale: Frequency, importance, and modes of communication. *Communication Education, 61*(2), 131–160.
- Ulaanbaatar Statistical Office. (2019). Шилжин ирсэн хүний тоо 2003–2017 [Number of people moved in between 2003–2017]. Retrieved from <http://ubstat.mn/StatTable=379>
- UNESCO. (2015). *Education for all 2000-2015: Achievements and challenges*. Paris: Author.
- UNESCO. (2018). *Global education monitoring report 2019. Migration, displacement and education: Building bridges, not walls*. Paris: Author.
- Wales, J., Magee, A., & Nicolai, S. (2016). *How does political context shape education reforms and their success? Lessons from the development progress project*. Dimension paper 06. London: Overseas Development Institute.
- Wang, L. (2016). Local adaptation of central policies: the policymaking and implementation of compulsory education for migrant children in China. *Asia Pacific Education Review, 17*(1), 25–39.
- Weidman, J. S. & Yoder, B. (2010). Policy and practice in education reform in Mongolia and Uzbekistan during the first two decades of the Post-Soviet Era. *Excellence in Higher Education, 1*(1&2), 57–68.
- Willemse, T. M., Thompson, I., Vanderlinde, R., & Mutton, T. (2018). Family-school partnerships: a challenge for teacher education. *Journal of Education for Teaching, 44*(3), 252–257.
- World Bank (2017). *Pre-primary education in Mongolia. Access, quality of service delivery, and child development outcomes*. Retrieved from <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/481101490364915103/pdf/113752-WP-PUBLIC-P152905-QualityJanWithExecMarchclean.pdf>
- World Bank. (2018). *Mongolia: Systematic country diagnostic*. Retrieved from <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/576101543874150141/Mongolia-Systematic-Country-Diagnostic>
- Wright, K. B., Shields, S. M., Black, K., & Waxman, H. C. (2018). Thee of teacher home visits on student behavior, student academic achievement, and parent involvement. *School Community Journal, 28*(1), 67–90.

- Yüksel, P., & Yıldırım, S. (2015). Theoretical frameworks, methods, and procedures for conducting phenomenological studies in educational settings. *Turkish Online Journal of Qualitative Inquiry*, 6(1), 1–20.
- Zayadelger, A. (2011). *Боловсролын эдийн засаг* [Economics of education]. Ulaanbaatar: Munkhiin useg.

APPENDIX A

“Teacher communication with herder parents” Interview Protocol for TEACHER

1. Do you consider teacher-parent communication to be supportive of your pupils’ learning and development?
Probes:
If yes, how?
If no, why?
What is special about teacher-parent communication in the primary education level?

2. How do you communicate with herder parents?
Probes:
What is the main reason that you contact herder parents?
What forms of communication (e.g. parent-teacher meeting; telephone call; letter) do you usually use when communicate with herder parents?
Does this communication form work best for herder parents?
How often do you communicate with herder parents?

3. How do herder parents contact you?
Probes:
What is the main reason for herder parents getting in contact with you?
What forms of communication do herder parents usually use when they communicate with you?
What forms of communication work best for you?
How often do herder parents communicate with you?
Does that amount of communication work best for you?

4. Does communicating with herder parents seem different from communicating with mainstream parents for you? If yes, what is/are the main difference(s)?

5. Compared to mainstream parents, what is the involvement level of herder parents generally like?
Probes:
What kinds of activities do you organize to promote parental involvement?
What kinds of activities do herder parents mainly get involved in?
Are there any herder parents who actively get involved in classroom and school activities?
If yes, please describe how (e.g. in what ways; how often) they get involved?
What do you think affects those herder parents to actively get involved?
What do you think prevents herder parents from active involvement?

6. How often do herder parents attend parent-teacher meetings?
Probes:
What are the objectives of parent-teacher meetings for you (as a teacher)?
How often do you conduct parent-teacher meetings within a school year?
Compared to mainstream parents, what is the attendance level of herder parents in parent-teacher meetings?
Do you think a parent-teacher meeting is an effective form of teacher communication with herder parents? Why?
7. How do you communicate with caregivers who take care of pupils from herder families during a school year?
Probes:
What kinds of relatives take care of the pupils?
What is the main reason that you contact the relatives?
What forms of communication (e.g. parent-teacher meeting; telephone call; letter) do you usually use when you communicate with the relatives?
How often do you communicate with the relatives?
What effects do you see (on pupils) when you frequently communicate with the relatives?
What is the main reason that you contact the dormitory teacher?
What forms of communication do you usually use when you communicate with the dormitory teacher?
How often do you communicate with the dormitory teacher?
What are the effects (on pupils) when you communicate with the dormitory teacher?
8. In your view, how is school-herder family communication viewed within your school as a whole?
Probes:
Is it seen as important?
Is it important in your classroom?
How is this manifested?
9. Serving this special group, a herder population in particular, what unique school-family communication issues do you encounter?
Probes:
How could you be better supported by the school for this unique situation?
How could you be better supported by herder families for this unique situation?
How could you be better supported by the community for this unique situation?
What activities/regulations/policies (by governmental agencies) do you think are important to address the communication issues?
What strategies and skills are required to manage these challenges?

10. What experiences, if any, prepared you to engage in school-herder family communication?

Probes:

Was school-herder family communication a part of your pre-service and in-service teacher education?

Do you know any of your colleagues who are particularly effective at communicating with herder parents?

What makes them effective?

Do you know any of your colleagues who are particularly ineffective at communicating with herder parents?

What makes them ineffective?

Do you want to learn more about effective communication with herder parents? If yes, what?

11. How do you think teacher communication with herder parents could be more effective?

Probes:

What is/are the ideal communication form(s)?

What is/are the ideal communication goal/reason(s)?

What is the ideal frequency of communication?

12. Is there anything else you would like to share about teacher communication with herder parents?

APPENDIX B

“Teacher communication with herder parents” Interview Protocol for PARENT

1. How do you decide on your primary school children’s living arrangement during the school year?
Probes:
Where does your child currently live?
Why did you decide the current living arrangement?

2. What, if any, challenges does your family face when you send your child to school?
Probes:
What changes do you have in your family structure and roles in household/livestock chores?
What difficulties do children have?

3. How do you communicate with caregivers who take care of your child during a school year?
Probes:
What kinds of relatives take care of your child?
What is the main reason that you contact the relatives?
What forms of communication (e.g. parent-teacher meeting; telephone call; letter) do you usually use when you communicate with the relatives?
How often do you communicate with the relatives?
What effects do you see (on your child) when you frequently communicate with the relatives?
What is the main reason that you contact the dormitory teacher?
What forms of communication do you usually use when you communicate with the dormitory teacher?
How often do you communicate with the dormitory teacher?
What are the effects (on your child) when you communicate with the dormitory teacher?

4. How do you communicate with your child’s teacher?
Probes:
What is the main reason that you contact the teacher?
What forms of communication (e.g. parent-teacher meeting; telephone call; letter) do you usually use when you communicate with the teacher?
How often do you communicate with the teacher?

5. How does your child's teacher contact you?
Probes:
What is the main reason for the teacher getting in contact with you?
What forms of communication does the teacher usually use when he/she communicates with you?
What forms of communication work best for you?
How often does the teacher communicate with you?

6. What kinds of activities do you mainly get involved in at school?
Probes:
Are there any herder parents who actively get involved in classroom and school activities?
If yes, please describe how (e.g. in what ways; how often) they get involved?
What do you think affects those herder parents to actively get involved?
What do you think prevents herder parents from active involvement?

7. How often do you attend parent-teacher meetings?
Probes:
What do you usually hear and talk about at parent-teacher meetings?
How often do you attend parent-teacher meetings within a school year?
Do you think a parent-teacher meeting is an effective form of teacher communication with herder parents? Why?

8. What, if any, challenges do you face when you communicate with teachers?
Probes:
How could you be better supported by the teacher to overcome the challenges?
How could you be better supported by the school to overcome the challenges?
How could you be better supported by the community to overcome the challenges?
What activities/regulations/policies (by governmental agencies) do you think are important to address the communication challenges?

9. How do you think teacher communication with herder parents could be more effective?
Probes:
What is/are the ideal communication form(s)?
What is/are the ideal communication goal/reason(s)?
What is the ideal frequency of communication?

10. Is there anything else you would like to share about teacher communication with herder parents?

APPENDIX C

Informed Consent Form

Before agreeing to participate in this research study, it is important that you read and understand the purpose and benefits of this doctoral study and how it will be conducted.

Student Researcher: Batdulam Sukhbaatar

Affiliation: Doctoral School of Educational Sciences, University of Szeged

Title of research: Contexts of school and pastoralist family communication in rural Mongolia

Purpose of the research: You are invited to participate in my doctoral research study which involves collection of data that will be correlated to herder parents' experiences in sending their children to primary school, teachers'/herder parents' communication experiences with herder parents/classroom teachers, and also external factors impacting this communication.

Risks: No risks are involved in the study.

Benefits: Contribution to a greater understanding of teacher and herder parent communication practices, contextual factors impacting this communication, improvement of primary education pre-service training, and professional development courses for education professionals, and furthermore, of parental involvement practices at primary schools.

If you participate, you will be asked to: participate in semi-structured interviews

Time required for participation: up to an hour for semi-structured interviews

How confidentiality will be maintained: All the information will be kept anonymous and used only for this research.

If you have any questions about this study, feel free to contact:

Adult Sponsor: Prof. Klara Tarko (tarko@jgypk.szte.hu)

Voluntary Participation: Participation in this study is completely voluntary. If you decide not to participate there will not be any negative consequences. Please be aware that if you decide to participate, you may stop participating at any time and you may decide not to answer any specific question.

If you would like to participate, please sign in the appropriate box below.

Adult Informed Consent or Minor Assent:

Date reviewed & signed: _____

Printed name of research subject: _____

Signature: _____

APPENDIX D

Initial findings of Sub-study 1

The initial five themes and 11 sub-themes:

Theme 1. School for younger children

For parents the most common issue, which makes them to decide the living arrangements for their children is the child's age and experiences:

The 6-year-olds are quite young. Two participants expressed sending the 6-year-olds to school was not easy. A mother, who has two children staying in the school dormitory sent the younger child to school a year after the official admission age when he was seven, explained why she decided so as follows:

Two of us [my husband and I] were hired to herd someone's livestock herd and then neither of us was able to leave for the center with the child to school. Instead, we sent him when he was 7, so he could stay in the dormitory with his older brother.

Another mother said,

If the child had gone to school at age seven, I would have never stayed with my child in the 1st year leaving behind my husband alone with livestock herding... always worrying about him and herds when weather is bad.

New beginning for the child. A mother who experienced split household for a school year when her child started school at the age of six felt that it was better for parents to stay together with the child in the first year. So, parents can work with the child more closely and efficiently, and the child learns better. If the child learns better from the beginning, he/she will struggle less next years in upper grades saying,

The six-year-olds get tired very easily because they have lots of tasks to complete. So, I should better help the child with HW.

If the child learned better from the beginning, she would struggle less in subsequent school years in upper grades when the mother left her to stay in the dormitory or at a relative's place.

A mother whose family moved from the countryside when the child started school admitted that in the beginning the child showed disinterest in school because of loads of tasks at home. But now after six months it seems the child got used to school life,

Sometimes my son used to avoid doing his homework and complained about hand pain. But now he is interested in school, because the loads have decreased.

Coming from the countryside and adjusting to a new place is not easy for the six-year-olds who have not gone to preschool and have not visited places in the county center before. A mother who experienced split households in her child's first year considered the child's safety, too,

Every time I had to follow my child because there are cars and dogs in the streets.

Theme 2. Education-minded herder parents

Herder parents value education and they wish their children to be more educated than they are. Herder parents understand from their past school experiences that education is important and their experiences influence their decision making around arranging their children's living during the school year:

More educated children. Those parents who quit school at early ages and could not complete their studies showed a strong desire to support their children to receive good education. So, they prefer living with their children during the school year,

Because I couldn't go to school, I am always willing to send my children to school. So, my family moved to the center from the countryside. Our oldest child did not go to school. My husband really tries hard to keep three children going to school thinking no school for me and him, and our oldest child is enough.

She also added,

I prefer living in the countryside. However, my family moved to the county center because of children's schooling. I think splitting household is quite difficult.

This mother seems to prioritize her children's schooling, but not their living conditions.

Another mother who experienced split household in her child's first year explained,

My husband and I really want our children to be more educated. Then my husband let me stay in the county center with children and he was alone herding. Otherwise, I would have stayed together with him herding.

Parents' schooling experiences. The three mothers who quit their school in their early primary school years are more likely to carefully consider their children's schooling and living arrangements because of their past experiences,

I am always with my children during school year. We try hard to have our three children get educated. Being uneducated is tough, I am illiterate myself.

A mother, who stayed with children when the youngest one was in the first grade, cares deeply about the children's education because she was not able to continue her study after primary school. Thinking back about her schooling experience seems a very sore subject for her. When I asked a mother about her drop out experience, tears welled up in her eyes and her voice was lowered and said,

I have six siblings and they also quit school in their 2nd and 3rd grades. Our living condition was poor and we had small number of livestock. So, I quit school... Now my husband and I really try hard and split the household last year.

Most of the parents in this study were in their 30s, and they quit school with many others during the 1990s when the collective farms were collapsed and livestock herds were privatized. A mother who quit school in her first grade stayed illiterate. It is challenging for her to help the children with homework. She decided to place her children in school dormitory, because the dormitory teacher helps younger children with homework,

I quit school in 1989. During this time, many children quit school in order to help their families with herding... Because my education is very poor, I cannot help my children with homework. But dormitory teacher works very well with children in there. So, I send them to stay in the dormitory.

Herder parents, in addition, wish their children to continue their studies and go to universities, since none of the parents who participated in this study finished higher education. A mother, whose child stayed with the grandmother, felt the child would feel more comfortable at the grandmother's home. She was the only one who finished secondary school among the participant parents and said,

I am sure I will send my children to university.

Theme 3. Shared experiences

Parents learned about the living arrangements from their neighbors and children, and this impacts their satisfaction in seeing school, and their feeling of satisfaction leads them to the decision making.

Satisfaction with school. It is getting more and more common among herder families to send their children to school dormitory. They learn about dormitory usually from their neighbors and children:

I heard that dormitory is pretty comfortable from my neighbors. So, I will send my children to school dormitory in the next school year. They said to me that dormitory is better than relatives.

I learned from my children that food is good enough in dormitory. It is good that they [janitors] wash primary children's clothes. And also, a dormitory teacher helps children complete their homework.

I learned from my children that there is a room for parents and children stay together for nights when herder parents visit their children in dormitory. I stayed in that room with my children when I visited them in last quarter.

A mother of three, with the youngest child in the 2nd grade was thinking of placing their children in school dormitory next school year had the satisfaction of seeing the dormitory a better living arrangement compared to split households and relative's places. She had already experienced both split households and relative's places, and now is thinking,

My neighbors had their children staying in dormitory and they had never talked about dormitory was doing badly. I believe the dormitory is a good place. My three children can stay there since other children are doing so.

Dissatisfaction with school. Parents, who decided not to place their children in the dormitory, seemed to have feelings of dissatisfaction with school. Their feeling of dissatisfaction can be related to either their own experiences with school or what they have learned from others about school.

A mother went to literacy and life skills training some years ago in the county school. But she quit the training and was left illiterate. She felt embarrassed at going to the same school her children went and the other children in her community since the county center is only populated with 263 households (Dornod statistics, 2017). She shared her experience,

First, I was mainly taught letters. Then there were more about cooking with fruits and vegetables. I did not go very often I went once or twice a week. I think it would be better if I did not miss classes. ... [T]here were 5 or 6 adults, mainly mothers, with me in the class.

It was difficult for me, it was embarrassing. I went there for two years and quit. I did not learn how to read. I was bad at learning and I could not understand well enough.

This mother stayed with her children in the county center at home after the family moved from the countryside. Since then the husband had left home every day and herded someone's horses in 13 kilometers away. The mother heard from others that,

Parents of children staying in dormitory come visit them rarely and children are usually left behind.

Besides this, parents' wishes better education for their children lead them to think about sending them to schools in the provincial center. A mother expressed her interest in sending her child to the provincial school says,

I am thinking of sending my child to the provincial center after he finishes the 5th grade here. I think quality of education is better there.

Another mother shared her thoughts that

I want to send my child to the provincial center for paid summer math classes this year. We do not have such classes here.



Even though more and more children stay in dormitory year after year some parents do not know or even haven't heard about the dormitory. Then those parents use the other living arrangements. A parent whose child stays with grandmother in the center expressed she does not know what the dormitory is like and she is not interested in staying her child in there saying,

I haven't heard about school dormitory. I am not interested in it.

This mother has not got enough information about school dormitory and she assumes,

The school dormitory is not like a home.

Theme 4. Family relationships

Family relations is an important point when it is time to decide where to place children during the school year for herders. Considering placing siblings together and getting support from extended family seem to be very common in the decision making.

Sibling relationships. Parents tend to feel more comfortable when there are two or more children staying in school dormitory. A father's talk shows that his two children, in the 1st and 4th grades, are doing well together in the dormitory,

My oldest daughter stayed at my relative's before and now she is together with her sister in the dormitory. The oldest did not go to preschool and she was shy. But now she gets along well with others while she is together with her sister in there.

Extended family support. Parents usually place their children with their grandparents and aunts. Parents feel satisfied with the caregivers and this does not let them think of other types living arrangements,

Because my child stays with his grandmother, I have no idea to place him in the school dormitory. When our child stays with his grandmother, we contribute to the household food.

I leave my 3 children with my relatives sometimes. My relatives are very helpful and I trust them. They take good care of my children. Their 3 children also go to school and the biggest one helps others with homework.

Child involvement in decision making. Parents listen to their children and give them an opportunity to choose between their options and decide on their living arrangement on their own. Two participants shared their experience when they decided on their children's living arrangements as follows,

My children do not want to stay with our relatives. Once I asked them to stay in dormitory. But then my husband said dormitory is not very comfortable and we decided to move our home to the center.

We asked our children where to stay. Then they decided to stay with their aunt. They said the aunt always gets up very early and cook breakfast for them before school.

Theme 5. Resources

Resources refer to herder family's financial resources and social networks (Steiner-Khamsi & Stolpe, 2006).

Financial resources. Three out of five participants in this study reported that their families were enrolled in the government food stamp program that means those families are poor and

vulnerable. It is found that sending two to three children to school is economically challenging for them. Then two of the families decided on dormitory for their children saying,

School dormitory never asked me for payment.

School dormitory is free of charge. Once I asked the dormitory teacher if there was something necessary for my children what I should provide. But she said there was no need.

My 3rd grade son rides race horses. During his summer vacation, we sent him to someone's home to ride race horses. My son came back home in August and the horse owner gave us some money. We bought school materials and uniforms for our 2 children and left them in school dormitory free of charge.

Social networks. Herders are often heavily loaded with work and this may impact their decision about their children's living arrangement. A mother left their children with relatives and could stay in the countryside with her husband herding 300 livestock. But when the children called saying they missed mommy she often came to the county center for a couple of days. However, when it is time for the peak period of lambing season, she cannot leave her husband alone and come visit their children. She said,

Before March I will put my three children in the school dormitory, because very soon it is the lambing season. And also, we will move to our spring camp, which is 37 kilometers away from our current winter camp. Our current camp is 20 kilometers away from the county center.

Also, relatives who take care of children become busier during spring. They get a temporary job of combing goat cashmere in the countryside. So, then the above-mentioned mother decided to place their children in school dormitory.

Another parent said that

We have relatives in the county center. But they are busy working and my children are staying at the dormitory.

A parent thought their relatives could not take good care of her children. She chose school dormitory in order to prevent from misunderstanding with them said,

The school dormitory is better than relatives because my boys may make them upset. Nowadays children are behaving differently and my relatives may not manage them. But the dormitory keeps good control over children.

<< 1/1