

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**

Summary of the PhD dissertation

BATDULAM SUKHBAATAR

SUPERVISOR: Dr. habil. KLÁRA TARKÓ

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INTRODUCTION

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). Livestock herding is an important contributor to the country’s economy and labor force. Livestock husbandry contributed to 10.6% of the country’s GDP in 2017 and made up 30% of the labor force (National Statistical Office of Mongolia [NSOM], 2018).

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).

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 families due to a lowered school entry age and a lack of the “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 seriously and 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).

Sending children, especially six-year-old ones, to school put pressure on herder (in this dissertation, the terms “pastoralist” and “herder” will be used interchangeably) households to balance their livestock herding needs and their children’s schooling needs at the same time. 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 Ministry of Education, Culture, Science and Sport [MECSS] (2016), some 1,335 children could not go to school at the age of six in the 2016-2017 school year. The MECSS 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; (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; and (c) some families could not afford learning materials and uniforms for the six-year-olds. The MECSS statistics showed that out-of-school children among the herder population is still an issue.

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 (2018) report on systematic county diagnostic, 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 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, 2014). 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?

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 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, 2018a, 2018b). 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.

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?

ORGANIZATION OF THE DISSERTATION

The dissertation consists of five chapters. Chapter 1 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 2 introduces a theoretical framework and a conceptual framework for the present dissertation research. The conceptual framework is proposed 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 results of which are presented in Chapter 4 of the dissertation.

Chapter 3 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 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.

Chapter 4 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 5, 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.

THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORKS

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. 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).

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).

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.

The conceptual framework proposed in this research is an adaptation of the Bronfenbrenner’s theory and Pang’s analytical framework (2011). 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). 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 1).

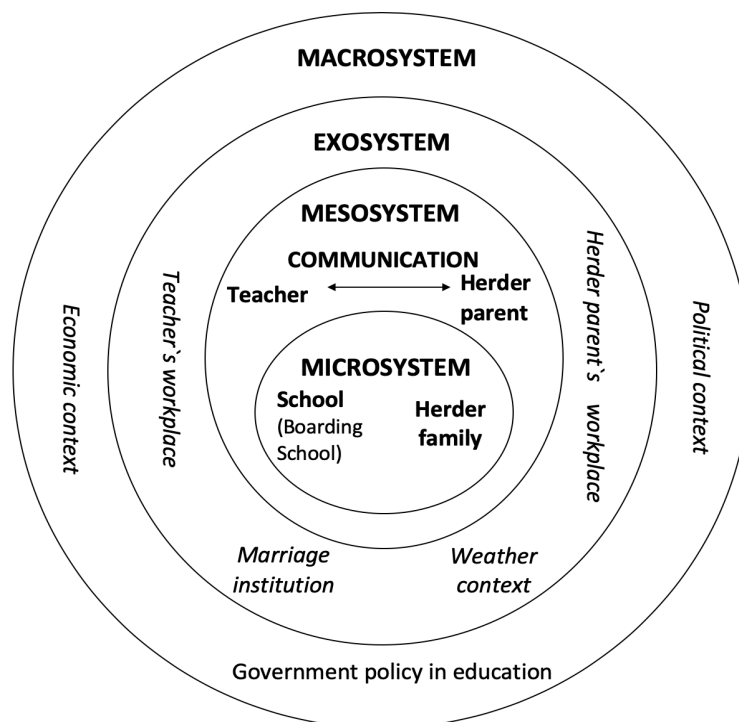


Figure 1. The conceptual framework: Ecological contexts of school and pastoralist family communication in rural Mongolia
 [Adapted from Pang’s (2011) contextual factors and home-school cooperation model, p. 2]

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, 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. The government policy in education, the economic context, and the political context were discussed at the macrosystem level.

METHODOLOGY

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).

This study involved 10 classroom teachers and 10 pastoralist parents to participate in in-depth, semi-structured interviews. The participants were from two different rural schools in eastern Mongolian remote counties. Even though the present dissertation research involved altogether 20 herder parents and classroom teachers, different samples sizes and different representatives of participants from two different school sites were used in the three sub-studies considering the three research questions (see Table 1).

Table 1. 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

As 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.

The researcher 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.

The data were analyzed depending on the research questions for each system 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 of five classroom teachers from School A were used for the analysis of communication experiences of classroom teachers with herder parents. Lastly, the data of 10 herder parents and 10 teachers from two county schools were analyzed to empirically validate the contextual factors impacting communication between school and herder families.

This study followed Creswell and Miller's (2000) recommendations of applying peer debriefing to establish validity. Two reviewers, familiar with educational research in Mongolia, conducted the peer debriefing reviews.

FINDINGS

The findings presented in this dissertation are organized following the proposed ecological model of contexts of school and pastoralist family communication (see Figure 1). An ecological model of contexts of communication between school and pastoralist family in rural Mongolia is developed based on the results of the three sub-studies (see Figure 2). Unlike the proposed ecological model this validated model includes some new factors such as communication facility and social system.

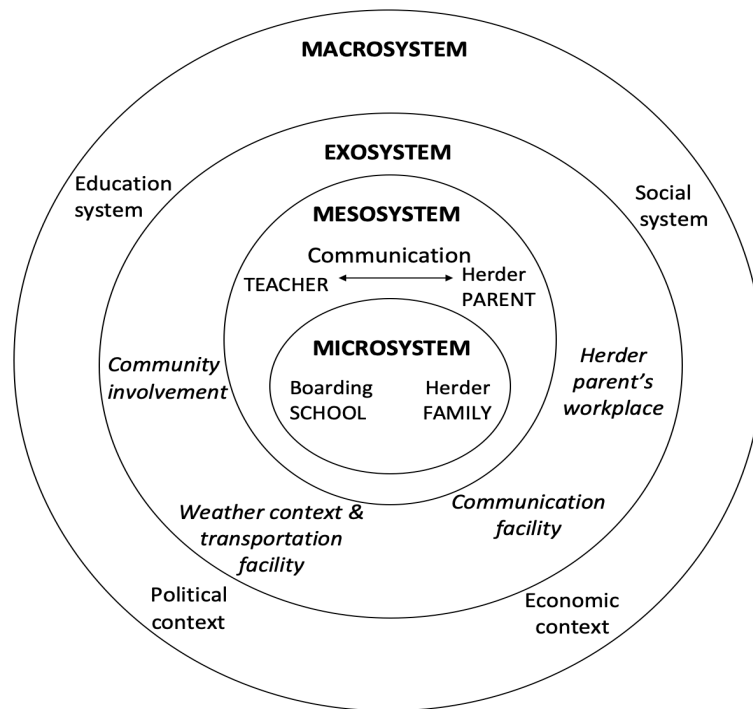


Figure 2. An ecological model: Contexts of communication between school and pastoralist family in rural Mongolia

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

The Mongolian herder parents’ interpretations of their experiences in 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 main themes. The four themes were: (a) children starting school; (b) education-minded herder parents; (c) shared experiences; and (d) family resources.

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.

Moreover, splitting households has been reported to not only 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.

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

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. 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 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 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 push pastoralist parents into attending collective parent-teacher 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 parent-teacher 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, Roussounidou, & Michaelides, 2012). This sub-study suggests that a collective parent-teacher meeting would not be an appropriate form of communication for herder parents considering their special lifestyle and personal factors like illiteracy and shyness.

The participants expressed the need for learning more about partnering with pastoralist parents. Consistent with the literature (de Bruïne et al., 2014; Farrell & Collier, 2010; Hall, Hornby, & Macfarlane, 2015; Saltmarch, Barr, & Chaoman, 2015; Sukhbaatar, 2018a; Willemse, Thompson, Vanderlinde, & Mutton, 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 paid more attention since in-service education on working with parents is sidelined across countries (Willemse et al., 2018).

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

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. 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.

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 findings 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 homework, teacher and pastoralist parent communication is hindered. This findings 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 homework completion. However, there are some project activities implemented by at least one donor agency of Save the Children Japan 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.

Government policy on education and 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.

CONCLUSION AND LIMITATIONS

This study developed an ecological model of contexts of school and herder family communication at the primary school level in rural Mongolia. In order to develop the ecological model, three sub-studies were conducted. Some important issues raised in the findings of the empirical studies are discussed more deeply and broadly in order to provide an explanation and an interpretation of these findings. These policy-relevant issues were: (a) political commitment and donor coordination, (b) rural school and school-related migration, and (c) teacher education and the teaching profession.

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 parent-teacher 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 homework 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 celebrate Mongolian traditional lifestyles and improve school and rural family relationships. Giving the herder pupils such homework showing how they assist their parents during the quarter break in the lambing season, instead of requesting them to complete regular homework that the family really cannot prioritize or complete as easily as families who are not herding, may support and recognize herder households' realities. The homework loads should also be reasonable for herder children during quarter breaks. Herder children should be given opportunities to practise 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, homework 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. Further, 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 Save the Children Japan 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 ecological model of contexts of school and herder family communication 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.

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 school and pastoralist family communication 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.

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 or caregivers to be incorporated into various roles of teachers throughout their workday.

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. 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.

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