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Topic Selection and Satisfaction in Communication between Taiwanese Senior High School Students and their Grandparents

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ABSTRACT

As Taiwan's population ages, intergenerational communication has become more prevalent in daily life. To gain insights into this form of communication, the researchers conducted a survey to explore topic selections and satisfaction levels in conversations between senior high school students and their grandparents in Taiwan. There is a lack of existing literature derived from Chinese-speaking communities regarding this research topic. The questionnaire comprised two parts: one focusing on actual and anticipated communication topics, and the other assessing participant satisfaction levels with the discussed topics during intergenerational talks. The differences between the answers given by grandparents and grandchildren were compared using SPSS. Significant differences might compromise the possibility of creating satisfying grandparent-grandchild relationships. Convenient sampling method was adopted, yielding 76 sets of samples providing corresponding views on intergenerational communication regarding topic selection and satisfaction levels. Findings revealed that senior high school students preferred discussing family, leisure, and health topics with their grandparents. Conversely, grandparents were inclined to discuss health, occupation, and family matters with their grandchildren. Notably, family emerged as the most popular topic, and this topic generated the highest satisfaction levels in both generations. However, the most significant disparity in topic selection between grandchildren and grandparents was observed in the area of occupation. Grandparents showed a preference for discussing occupation with their grandchildren, while the grandchildren tended to ignore this topic. The differences in age and generational perspectives could contribute to this gap and potentially lead to dissatisfaction in intergenerational conversations. The results of this study hold the potential for enhancing and promoting the quality of intergenerational communication within family contexts. By understanding the preferred topics and recognising potential sources of dissatisfaction, efforts can be made to bridge the intergenerational gaps and foster better communication between grandparents and grandchildren. Such improvements can strengthen family bonds and promote a positive and harmonious intergenerational dynamic.

Keywords: grandparent-grandchild communication, topic selection, satisfaction level, intergenerational communication, intergenerational dynamic

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Introduction

Ageing Population in Taiwan

Taiwan is experiencing a significant demographic shift towards an ageing society. According to National Statistics, R. O. C. (Taiwan), individuals aged 65 years and above now make up 16.2% of the total Taiwanese population. Furthermore, from 1993 to 2020, the average age of the Taiwanese population increased from 74 years to 81 years. According to Silverstein and Long (1998), grandparents now have an increasing opportunity to live long enough to witness their grandchildren's growth into adulthood and even into middle age. Given that Taiwan has a growing older population, young people could have long-lasting relationships with their grandparents and more time and opportunities to interact with them compared to previous generations. Hence, this study focuses on examining intergenerational communication within this social relationship.

Significance of Grandparent-grandchild Relationships

Maintaining good relationships between grandparents and grandchildren is important (Grosnoe & Elder, 2002; Soliz et al., 2006). Most people's contact with older individuals mainly derives from their interactions with their grandparents (Ng et al., 1997). Such interactions can become an important foundation for them to develop the communication competencies they need to maintain intergenerational relationships (Harwood, 2000b), and their attitudes towards older adults can be developed accordingly (Soliz & Harwood, 2006). However, it is also suggested that because of generation gaps (Harwood & Lin, 2000), grandchildren can feel a sense of distance from their grandparents. Furthermore, miscommunication and dissatisfaction can be evident in grandparent-grandchild interactions, particularly when there is no appropriate communicative accommodation to the conversational needs of both generations (Williams & Giles, 1996).

Maintaining positive relationships between grandparents and grandchildren can result in benefits for both. As noted by Harwood (2000b), older individuals may experience the loss of their peers due to death and may be less motivated to seek new friendships. Consequently, the presence of grandchildren can serve as an alternative focus in the social interactions of grandparents. Given that grandparents often exhibit more affection and care towards their grandchildren, they tend to place greater value on quality grandparent-grandchild communication compared to their grandchildren (Harwood, 2001). Furthermore, poor grandparent-grandchild relationships can have a more pronounced negative impact on the emotional well-being of grandparents than on grandchildren (Drew & Silverstein, 2007).

Neugarten and Weinstein (1964) stated that grandparents often find comfort, satisfaction, and pleasure in maintaining connections with their grandchildren. They can also experience a sense of pride in their own lives through their grandchildren's remarkable achievements (Harwood & Lin, 2000). Furthermore, the satisfaction that grandparents derive from their relationships with grandchildren can stem from leaving a legacy and providing guidance to grandchildren who value their opinions and put them into practice (Thiele & Whelan, 2008).

In summary, a positive intergenerational relationship can have the effect of keeping grandparents young (Harwood et al., 2000; McGee & Barker, 1982; Sharps et al., 1998) by contributing to the enhancement of older adults' psychological health (Harwood & Lin, 2000). Moreover, it is believed that grandchildren have the ability to bring vibrancy and joy into the later stages of older people's lives.

Having close relationships with grandparents is also beneficial to grandchildren. Grandparents serve as sources of values for grandchildren to learn from (Brussoni & Boon, 1998). They can provide mentorship to grandchildren by sharing their experiences and guiding them through transitions they have already undergone. Additionally, grandparents play a crucial role in helping grandchildren feel connected to their extended family. They possess the unique ability to offer a historical perspective on the kin network that other family members may not be able to provide (Lin et al., 2002). Besides, when adults perceive greater affection towards their grandparents, their health status can also become better (Salazar et al., 2022).

It is suggested that grandparents hold particular values for grandchildren whose parents' marriages are not successful, as they often play vital roles within the family when certain family functions are incomplete. For example, Ruiz and Silverstein (2007) indicated that close relationships with grandparents could help protect grandchildren who feel depressed due to being raised by a single parent or living with step-parents. In such scenarios, grandparents can dedicate more time to accompany their grandchildren, listen to their daily school experiences, and provide emotional support. As a result, grandparents significantly contribute to enhancing the self-esteem of these grandchildren and securing their emotional stability (Tomlin, 1998).

The preceding discussions clearly illustrate the importance of grandparent-grandchild relationships. It is therefore necessary to maintain a good connection between grandparents and grandchildren. One effective approach to achieving this goal is fostering smooth intergenerational communication within this social relationship.

Communication between Grandparents and Grandchildren

Previous studies on intergenerational communication have provided insights into the role it plays in perpetuating and transmitting stereotypes of older people (Henwood et al., 1993; Hummert & Shaner, 1994; Ryan et al., 1986), the structure of interactions involving older participants (Boden & Bielby, 1986), and the significance of age identity in conversations throughout the lifespan (Nussbaum & Coupland, 2004). The majority of academic research in this area has focused on interactions between older and younger individuals who are not familiar with each other (Williams & Giles, 1996). This study highlights that intergenerational communication can also be explored within the context of family dynamics (c.f. Gettings & McNallie, 2021).

Grandparent-grandchild communication is an evident domain that can potentially compensate for the communication deficits experienced by older individuals, particularly when they reside within extended and multigenerational family units (Presniakova, 2005, as cited in Romanov, 2009). Unfortunately, we often perceive conversing with grandparents as bothersome due to our tendency to interact with older individuals based on negative stereotypes associated with ageing (Giles et al., 2003; Lin et al., 2004). Therefore, it is essential to focus more on understanding the dynamics of grandparent-grandchild communication, including exploring the key factors that can transform negative impacts into positive ones.

As demonstrated by Harwood (2000a), communication between grandparents and grandchildren emerges as an influential factor in predicting the quality of their social relationship. Harwood (2000a) also argues that the level of relational solidarity between grandparents and grandchildren depends on their communicative accommodation to each other's conversational needs.

Nevertheless, as indicated by Young (1994), Taiwanese youngsters are often taught to talk less and listen more when talking with older people. This cultural norm prevents younger generations from squabbling or challenging the authority attributed to individuals of older age. Additionally, younger people might feel compelled to be polite and exhibit respect by biting their tongue when communicating with their grandparents (Giles et al., 2003).

It seems that older individuals are often perceived to have stronger face maintenance needs (Lin et al., 2008), implying that younger generations would be expected to show respect in grandparent-grandchild communication scenarios. However, modern young adults might prefer to have autonomy and desire a stronger voice when conversing with seniors rather than simply showing obedience (Young, 1994). This difference in expectations can create obstacles in communication between grandchildren and grandparents.

Other factors can also influence grandparent-grandchild communication, such as the prevailing stereotypes of older people held by the general public. Research (Giles et al., 2003; Lin et al., 2004) suggests that young Asian adults often maintain certain stereotypical impressions regarding the conversational styles of older individuals. For instance, older people can be commonly perceived as being nagging, or they may not receive interruptions from younger individuals during conversations

because of the cultural concept of "filial piety" that attributes greater authority and higher status to older people in societies influenced by Confucian values, such as Taiwan.

The factors mentioned earlier have the potential to hinder the achievement of a high-quality level of interaction and communication between grandparents and grandchildren, and to understand further the nature of grandparent-grandchild communication in Taiwan, this study aims to focus particularly on topic selection and the satisfaction within this communication context. To fulfil the aforementioned research purpose, the researchers will present a comprehensive literature review on intergenerational communication schemas and topic selection in relation to the satisfaction levels experienced by both grandparents and grandchildren. By exploring these key areas, the research questions addressed in this study will subsequently be formulated and listed.

Literature Review

Communication Schemas in Intergenerational Communication

According to Fiske and Taylor (1991, p. 98), a schema is "a cognitive structure that represents knowledge about a concept or type of stimulus, including attributes and the relations among those attributes". Schemas provide information for us to manage situations and constantly affect our judgments and memories of our experiences.

The relationship between our schemas and intergenerational communication is evident. Harwood and Williams (1998) explored this relationship from the perspectives of young people, utilising stereotype traits identified in Hummert and Shaner's (1994) study. The results indicated that distinct sets of stereotypical traits were linked to various evaluations of intergenerational communication, encompassing speech attunement, complaining, emotions, and communication satisfaction.

In Harwood's (1998) study on intergenerational communication schemas (ICSs), six distinct schemas were identified through open-ended descriptions. These schemas, namely helping, learning, gerontophobia, gerontophilia, pity, and politeness, represented different sets of expectations of conversations with an older lady whose character traits were manipulated. For example, the learning intergenerational communication schema involved references to the wisdom and experience of older adults, along with descriptions of what the young participants believed they could learn from them, including communication behaviours such as storytelling. This particular schema was associated with positive affection and high communication satisfaction levels.

In Lin et al.'s Taiwan-based study (2004), five intergenerational communication schemas (ICSs) were identified. First, the schema "Mutually satisfaction conversations" reveals that Taiwanese young people engage in intergenerational conversations to please and uplift their older partners. Similarly, in "Helping conversations", young individuals communicate with older adults in Taiwan out of sympathy and with a desire to make them happy. Therefore, they would adapt to the topics preferred by older individuals. This often results in a one-way communication pattern with older adults who might be perceived as demanding. The "Mixed feelings conversations" intergenerational communication schema reflects that young people's conversational engagement with older adults is an act of kindness and offers an opportunity to learn from their past experiences. However, younger people might also feel slightly shocked by the demanding, meddling, complaining, and painful disclosures of older adults. Two negative conversational schemas were identified, namely, "Small talk conversations", where young individuals perceive conversations with older people as routines and lack the willingness to prolong the interactions, and "Mutually unpleasant conversations", where young people feel afraid and fearful of communicating with older people due to constant criticism and nagging. These negative interactions reinforce Taiwanese young people's negative impressions of older individuals as old-fashioned, stubborn, and difficult to communicate with.

Although existing literature has addressed intergenerational communication schemas, which provide cognitive representations of intergenerational talks, there remains a lack of clarity regarding the specific topics discussed within these emerging types of conversations. For example, it is unclear which topics are raised in intergenerational communication that lead to mutual satisfaction or dissatisfaction.

Therefore, it is valuable to explore studies that have examined topic selection in intergenerational conversations, particularly those involving grandparents and grandchildren.

Topic Selection in Intergenerational Communication

Few studies have provided insights into the topic organisation or patterns observed in conversations involving older individuals. For example, Boden and Bielby (1986) suggested that older people tend to employ shared historical or social life experiences and time periods as units to organise their discussion topics. They often utilise their past experiences to establish a common ground and as a framework through which present meanings are shared and collaboratively constructed. They also emphasised that older individuals engaging in nostalgic conversations about their good old days serve a functional role in communication, with a present-oriented nature.

Another study conducted by Stuart et al. (1993) investigated topic patterns in the conversations of older women and observed that they frequently engaged in discussions pertaining to family life and social networks. These findings suggested that older individuals seem to possess specific topic preferences when engaging in daily conversations, including interactions with their family members and grandchildren.

Satisfaction in Intergenerational Communication

It would also be beneficial to provide a brief overview of the limited research available on the impact of the topics addressed in conversations between grandparents and grandchildren on the satisfaction levels experienced by the participants.

Existing literature has indicated that conversational topics influence the satisfaction levels of grandparent-grandchild communication (e.g., Lin et al., 2004; Romanov, 2009; Webb, 1985). For example, Webb (1985) discovered that the most frequently discussed topics in conversations between young adults and their grandparents were family, school or education, and health. Additionally, the study revealed a correlation between topic selection and the level of intimacy.

In Lin et al.'s (2002) study conducted with U.S. samples, college students reported family and education as the most commonly mentioned topics in conversations with their grandparents. Leisure and friendship were also identified as popular topics for discussions between grandchildren and grandparents. However, this study did not establish a significant association between the topics discussed and communication satisfaction.

As claimed by Romanov (2009), Russian college students reported family and education as important topics to discuss with their grandparents. Furthermore, the grandparent participants showed a greater preference for topics such as current events, health, occupation, and history. However, regarding the association with satisfaction, it is suggested that education and family-related topics could lead to greater satisfaction when raised in grandparent-grandchild conversations in Russia.

Given the aforementioned reviews, it is evident that studies examining the relationship between topic selection and satisfaction levels in grandparent-grandchild communication are relatively scarce, particularly within Chinese-speaking communities such as Taiwan. In order to expand the existing literature on this topic and fulfil the research objective of understanding how topic selection can enhance relationships between grandparents and grandchildren in Taiwan, the following research questions were formulated.

RQ1: What topics are raised and discussed in grandparent-grandchild conversations in Taiwan?

RQ2: How frequently are the topics mentioned in grandparent-grandchild conversations in Taiwan?

RQ3: What topics do Taiwanese grandchildren and grandparents wish the other party would raise in their conversations?

RQ4: How satisfied do grandparents and grandchildren feel with the topics raised in their conversations?

Methods

The Design of the Survey and the Rationales

This study, a survey research, employed two identical questionnaires to elicit the topic categories that both Taiwanese senior high school students and their grandparents discuss in their intergenerational talks. The topic categories included in the questionnaires were adopted from Lin et al.'s study (2002), which also examined the relative frequencies of topics raised in intergenerational conversations. Eight conversational topics were provided for the survey participants to select from in this study. These topics are related to family, education, occupation, leisure, current events, health, history, and friends.

The questionnaire for senior high school students comprised the following questions. The aforementioned eight topic categories were provided as answer options, with each category represented as a nominal variable. A value of 1 indicated that the category was chosen, while a value of 0 indicated that it was not applicable.

1. What topic categories would you consider raising when talking with your grandparents?
2. What topic categories would you wish your grandparents to raise when talking with you?

The questionnaire for the grandparents of student participants consisted of similar questions. Similarly, the eight topic categories were also included for the grandparent participants to select. Each category is represented as a nominal variable, with a value of 1 indicating that it was chosen, while a value of 0 suggesting that it was not applicable.

1. ■What topic categories would you consider raising when talking with your grandchildren?
2. ■What topic categories would you wish your grandchildren to raise when talking with you?

In both questionnaires, student and grandparent survey participants were asked to select the topic categories they wished the other party would raise or mention in their conversations. This part of the question aims to elicit information for RQ3: What topics do Taiwanese grandchildren and grandparents wish the other party would raise in their conversations?

In designing questions to elicit the participants' satisfaction with the intergenerational talks regarding topic selections, the questions for the student participants to answer are as follows. The agreement with the statements was ranked by means of 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 ('least likely to agree') to 5 ('most likely to agree').

- (1) I enjoy talking to my grandparents about family life.
- (2) I enjoy talking to my grandparents about my school life.
- (3) I enjoy talking to my grandparents about my future career plans.
- (4) I enjoy talking to my grandparents about the leisure activities I enjoy.
- (5) I enjoy talking to my grandparents about recent news events and sharing my views about them.
- (6) I enjoy actively inquiring about the health conditions of my grandparents in our conversations.
- (7) I enjoy listening to my grandparents sharing their personal experiences or discuss historical events that they are familiar with but unknown to me.
- (8) I enjoy talking to my grandparents about what is happening in my social networks, including information about my friends.
- (9) I generally enjoy talking with my grandparents.

Similarly, the questions used to elicit how satisfied the grandparents of student participants feel with their conversations are listed below. The agreement with the statements was also ranked into five levels, ranging from 1 ('least likely to agree') to 5 ('most likely to agree').

- (1) I enjoy talking to my grandchildren about our family.
- (2) I enjoy talking to my grandchildren about their school life.
- (3) I enjoy talking to my grandchildren about their plans for the future.
- (4) I enjoy talking to my grandchildren about leisure activities in which I am engaged.
- (5) I enjoy talking to my grandchildren about recent news events and sharing my views on them.
- (6) I enjoy inquiring about my grandchildren's health status.
- (7) I enjoy listening to my grandchildren sharing their own life experiences or historical events they are familiar with but unknown to me.
- (8) I generally enjoy talking with my grandchildren.

Data Collection and Recruitment of Participants

In terms of participant recruitment for this study, the target sample consisted of senior high school students and their grandparents. Convenient sampling method was adopted in this study. The second author personally distributed the questionnaires at a Pingtung-based private cram school, with the help of the cram school owner, who is an acquaintance of the second author. The second author provided a personal explanation of the research purpose to the students. During the questionnaire completion process, participants were instructed not to focus on specific conversations, but rather to recall how conversations generally occur with their grandparents or grandchildren. Consent was obtained from both the student participants and their grandparents, and assurance of data anonymity was given.

Only one hundred (100) senior high school students agreed to participate in the survey and answered their own part of the questionnaires directly at the site of the cram school where they went for extracurricular activities after school.

In order to obtain the answers from the students' grandparents who could not be approached by the researchers, the 100 participating students were then instructed to explain the research on behalf of the second author to their grandparents. To facilitate the participation of grandparents who needed to share their views on the same questions, the participating students were asked to take the questionnaires designed for grandparents to their homes and later return them to the cram school for collection by the second author. The participating grandparents returned their questionnaires by sealing them in the provided envelopes as instructed by the researchers.

The above sampling processes generated only a total of seventy-six (76) effective sets of samples for the analysis. The effectiveness of the received questionnaires was evaluated by observing whether both the students (as grandchildren) and their corresponding grandparents completed the pairs of questionnaires fully. Without corresponding answers from the student and the grandparents, the comparisons between the participating grandparents' and grandchildren's views on intergenerational communication would be less meaningful.

Data Analysis

Frequency analysis was conducted, using SPSS to report the extent to which the participants selected the eight topic categories as answers to RQ1, RQ2 and RQ3. The mean values of the satisfaction levels, as ranked by the participants, were calculated using SPSS and the comparisons of the mean values as reported by grandparents and grandchildren were provided as answers to RQ4 to reveal how satisfied the grandparent and grandchild participants in this study felt about the intergenerational talks in which they were engaged.

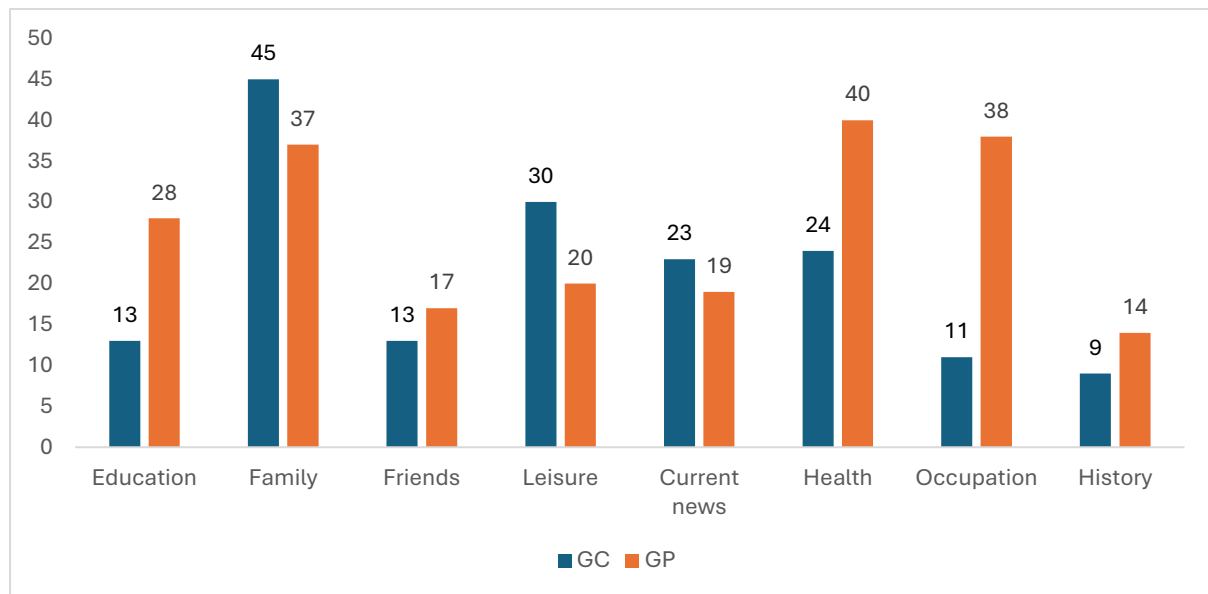
Results

Actual Topics Raised

The results suggested that all topic categories were raised by grandparent and grandchild participants in their actual intergenerational talks, indicating a wide range of topic selections in conversations between Taiwanese high school students and their grandparents. None of the provided topic categories was regarded as inappropriate by the participants in the survey. Figure 1 depicts the frequency details concerning the extent to which various topics were raised by grandparent participants (GP) and student participants (GC) in the survey.

Figure 1

Actual Topic Selection in Intergenerational Talks



The results suggested that the topics most likely raised by student participants were family ($n=45$), leisure ($n=30$), and health ($n=24$). The least likely topics raised by them were history ($n=9$), occupation ($n=11$), education ($n=13$), and friends ($n=13$).

Regarding the topics actually raised by participating grandparents while talking with their grandchildren, 40 of them chose health, 38 picked occupation, and 37 selected family. The least popular topics they raised were history ($n=14$), friends ($n=17$), and current news ($n=19$).

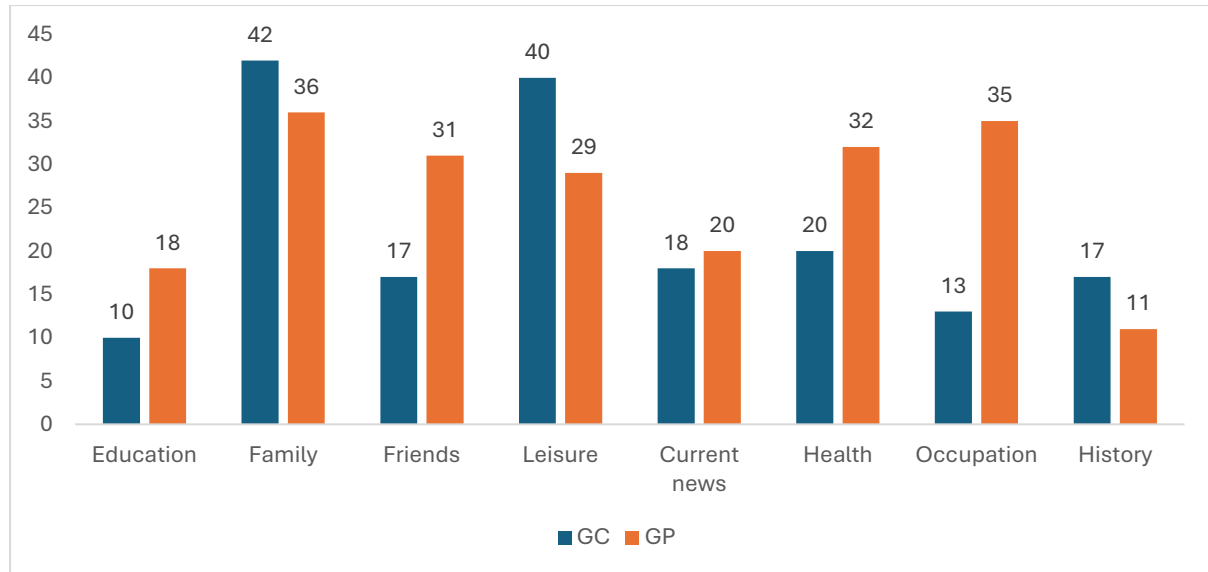
In terms of the differences in the degrees to which the two sets of participants actually raised these topics in their actual intergenerational talks, the most significant differences were observed in the topic categories of occupation, health, and education, with respective frequency differences of 27, 16, and 15. On the other hand, the smallest differences in the chosen topic categories were found in friends, current events, and history, with variations in frequencies of 4, 4, and 5, respectively.

Topics Wished to be Raised

This section discusses the results for RQ3, which addresses the difference in expectations of topic selections between grandparents and grandchildren. The frequency distributions of the topic categories in Figure 2 reveal the topic categories the two groups of survey participants wish the other party would raise in their intergenerational conversations.

Figure 2

Topics Wished to be Raised by the Other Party in Intergenerational Talks



The information provided in Figure 2 reveals that family ($n=42$), leisure ($n=40$), and health ($n=20$) were the top three topics that student participants wished their grandparents would raise in their conversations. The least desired topic categories by grandchildren were education ($n=10$), occupation ($n=13$), and friends ($n=17$).

As for the topic categories that the participating grandparents wished their grandchildren would raise in their conversations, the most desired ones included family ($n=36$), occupation ($n=35$), and health ($n=32$).

As shown in Figure 2, the most significant differences in expectations between the two sets of participants were primarily observed in the categories of occupation, friends, and health, with frequency differences of 22, 14, and 11, respectively.

As for the smallest differences in the expected topic categories, they are current news, family, and history, with respective frequency variations of 2, 6, and 6.

Satisfaction with Grandparent-grandchild Conversations

Even though the above research questions shed some light on the actual selection of topics and the expectations towards what can be chosen as topics in intergenerational talks between grandparents and grandchildren, it is not yet clear whether both parties feel satisfied with the actual discussion on the given topics, which could be raised by either the grandchildren or the grandparents.

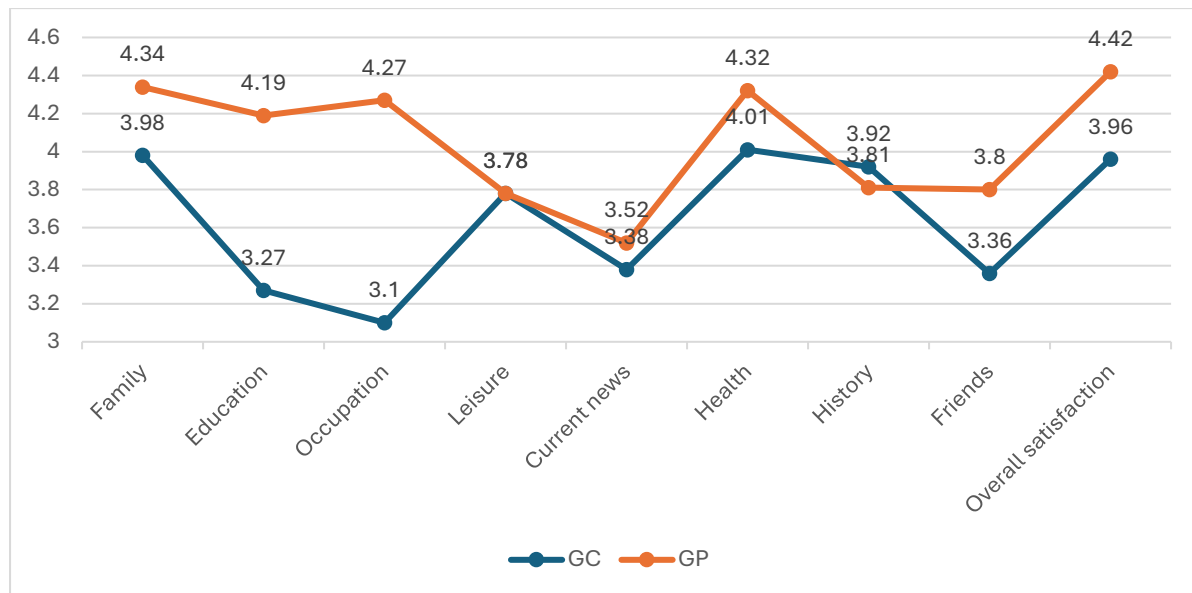
The mean values in Figure 3 indicate the extent to which the survey participants agreed with the given statements, illustrating their satisfaction with the talk about the eight topic categories in their intergenerational conversations. The results suggested that the topics that received the highest levels of satisfaction from the student participants were health ($M=4.01$), family ($M=3.98$), and history ($M=3.92$). However, the topics that were perceived as the least satisfying by grandchild participants were occupation ($M=3.1$), education ($M=3.27$), and friends ($M=3.36$).

As for the most satisfying topics from grandparents' perspectives, they were family ($M=4.34$), health ($M=4.32$) and occupation ($M=4.27$). The least satisfying topics were current news ($M=3.52$), leisure ($M=3.78$) and friends ($M=3.8$).

When examining the mean differences in satisfaction with the eight topics between the two groups of participants, the largest disparities were found in the categories of occupation, with a mean difference of 1.17 between grandchildren (M=3.1) and grandparents (M=4.27), followed by education, with a mean difference of 0.92 between grandchildren (M=3.27) and grandparents (M=4.19), and friends, with a mean difference of 0.44 between grandchildren (M=3.36) and grandparents (M=3.8).

Figure 3

Satisfactions with Intergenerational Talks by Grandparents (GP) and Grandchildren (GC)



Both groups of participants (grandchildren and grandparents) seemed to feel almost equally satisfied with two particular topics, namely leisure (with a mean difference of 0.03 between the mean value for grandchildren (M=3.75) and that for grandparents (M=3.78). It is worth noting that both mean values, although quite close, are not higher than 4, indicating mild satisfaction.

Generally speaking, the grandparent participants showed relatively higher satisfaction with various topics in the intergenerational talks, except for history. Regarding the satisfaction levels for "history," it was ranked 3.92 by grandparents and 3.81 by grandchildren. This suggests that grandchildren tend to enjoy discussing "history," possibly the stories that occurred in their grandparents' past, while their grandparents may not fully recognise the value of such stories as potential topics for conversation.

In the overall satisfaction levels towards intergenerational communication (see the "overall satisfaction" category in Figure 3), the results suggested that grandparent participants exhibited higher levels of communication satisfaction compared to their grandchildren (M=3.96 for grandchildren; M=4.42 for grandparents).

Discussion

Summary and Comparison with Previous Studies

To summarise the findings in this study, first, in terms of topic selection (RQ1), all the included categories were at least selected once by both groups of the participants in the survey (also evident in Romanov, 2009).

The popularity of topics that have the potential to facilitate intergenerational conversations between grandparents and grandchildren was examined in this study. It was found that topics such as family, leisure, and health were relatively popular among grandchildren, while health, occupation, and family were frequently selected by grandparents. Consistent with Romanov's study (2009), family was also

considered the most important topic for both groups in this research. However, contrary to Romanov's (2009) findings, this study did not support the notion that the topic of friends was relatively popular among grandchildren. Additionally, while health was regarded as a relatively important topic for grandparents in Romanov's study, this pattern could also be observed in this Taiwan-based research.

Regarding the differences in topics discussed in intergenerational communication, it can be summarised that there were some discrepancies in the preferred topics between the two groups of participants. Among the top three commonly preferred topics, family and health were overlapping choices. However, grandchildren expressed a preference for leisure and current news, whereas grandparents did not share the same preferences.

In terms of the least likely chosen topics in actual intergenerational conversations, grandparents tended to avoid discussing history, friends, and current news, whereas grandchildren did not show the same level of avoidance for these topics. On the other hand, while grandchildren made an effort to avoid talking about occupation, grandparents did not overlook it and actually ranked it as the second most popular topic in their intergenerational talks. This suggests that grandparents may be interested in learning about their grandchildren's career achievements or plans during these discussions, which could potentially create pressure for the grandchildren, leading them to try to avoid such conversations. It is also possible that grandchildren may not enjoy discussing occupational topics due to the perception that their grandparents tend to nag or offer unsolicited advice (Giles et al., 2003; Lin et al., 2004).

The existing Western literature suggests that education is often considered an obvious topic for family conversations, including intergenerational ones, for both grandparents and grandchildren (Williams & Giles, 1996). The topic of education also provides a suitable avenue for grandparents to express their feelings about their grandchildren's accomplishments (Harwood & Lin, 2000). However, in this current study involving Taiwanese senior high students, education does not appear to be frequently brought up in intergenerational conversations, and it is also considered a topic that fails to generate significant satisfaction. Similar to the reason why students do not prefer occupation-related topics, it is possible that discussions that centre on education can also create pressure for them. Taiwanese grandparents should take this into consideration when selecting appropriate topics for engaging in satisfactory conversations with their grandchildren.

Implications

This section provides a further summary of the results by comparing the findings on the actual topics that were raised, the expected or desired topics, and the satisfaction levels reported by the two groups of participants (see Table 1 and Table 2). The intention of presenting the information in this manner is to identify instances where certain topics were desired but not actually discussed, or where certain topics were extensively discussed but did not lead to high levels of satisfaction. The implications derived from the information in Table 1 and Table 2 are also discussed in this section.

As shown in Table 1, among the student participants in the study, "family" emerged as the topic they desired their grandparents to discuss, and it was also ranked as the most frequently raised topic in their actual intergenerational conversations. In Table 2, the grandparent participants expressed corresponding wishes of their grandchildren, although they did not raise family-related topics (ranked as the third) to the same extent as they desired their grandchildren to do so (ranked as the first) during their conversations. Nevertheless, both groups of participants reported the highest levels of satisfaction when discussing the topic of family.

Table 1

Results of Student Participants' Views

Ranking	Actually Raised	Expected/Wished	Satisfaction Level
1	family (n=45)	family (n=42)	health (M=4.01)
2	leisure (n=30)	leisure (n=40)	family (M=3.98)
3	health (n=24)	health (n=20)	history (M=3.92)
4	current news (n=23)	current news (n=18)	leisure (M=3.75)
5	education (n=13)	friends (n=17)	current news (M=3.38)
6	friends (n=13)	history (n=17)	friends (M=3.36)
7	occupation (n=11)	occupation (n=13)	education (M=3.27)
8	history (n=9)	education (n=10)	occupation (M=3.1)

Table 2

Results of Grandparent Participants' Views

Ranking	Actually Raised	Expected/Wished	Satisfaction Level
1	health (n=40)	family (n=36)	family (M=4.34)
2	occupation (n=38)	occupation (n=35)	health (M=4.32)
3	family (n=37)	health (n=32)	occupation (M=4.27)
4	education (n=28)	friends (n=31)	education (M=4.19)
5	leisure (n=20)	leisure (n=29)	history (M=3.81)
6	current news (n=19)	current news (n=20)	friends (M=3.8)
7	friends (n=17)	education (n=18)	leisure (M=3.78)
8	history (n=14)	history (n=11)	current news (M=3.52)

One potential explanation for this result could be that the topic of family serves as a shared and familiar ground for intergenerational conversations within families. Discussing such topics can foster a sense of closeness among family members, irrespective of their age differences. Additionally, when engaging in conversations about family matters, participants can develop a shared in-group identity, enabling both grandparents and grandchildren to cultivate a stronger sense of belonging and solidarity (Lin et al., 2002; Soliz & Harwood, 2003).

According to the findings presented in Table 1, leisure emerged as the second most popular topic among student participants in the research. It was also ranked as their second most desired topic. However, in actual conversations with their grandparents, discussing leisure did not result in satisfaction levels as high as its suggested popularity. One possible explanation for this could be that grandparents did not express an equal level of interest in this leisure-related topic. As shown in Table 2, among the grandparent participants, leisure was only ranked fifth in terms of actual discussions and on their wish list. They also reported significantly lower satisfaction levels when discussing this topic, which was ranked seventh.

However, the discrepancy observed in the topic category of leisure suggests that the senior high school students participating in the study led lives rich in engagement with leisure activities and possibly demonstrated socially active lifestyles. They may have a wealth of experiences related to leisure activities that they wished to share with their grandparents. However, their grandparents may not actively broach such topic during intergenerational communication. As a result, grandchildren may experience diminished satisfaction in their communication processes when their communication partners did not demonstrate support for leisure-oriented discussions. Thus, it is advisable for grandparents to adjust their communication approach by expressing a willingness to listen to their grandchildren's experiences and interests in leisure activities. Additionally, it may be beneficial for grandparents to reciprocally share aspects of their own social lives or engage in activities that appeal to older individuals during intergenerational conversations.

It is worth noting that the topic category of history was ranked as the third highest in terms of generating satisfaction among the student participants in the survey. This finding suggests that Taiwanese high school students appear to enjoy listening to their grandparents' life stories and experiences from their younger years. In Taiwan, it is common for grandparents to take care of their grandchildren while the parents are at work, providing more time and opportunities for grandchildren to develop a bond with their grandparents. When grandchildren listen to their grandparents' recollections and reminiscences, they may feel inspired and, as a result, experience a sense of satisfaction.

However, interestingly, history was ranked as less satisfying by grandparents, in contrast to the ranking provided by student participants in the survey. It is unfortunate that the perceptions of the benefits of discussing life history did not align between the two groups of participants. Engaging in this kind of conversation benefits grandchildren, who gain wisdom and insights from their beloved grandparents' past experiences, and also grandparents themselves as older individuals, whose lives can be enriched through reminiscing (Beaver, 1991).

According to this research, health was ranked among the top three topics both raised and expected or wished to be discussed in intergenerational conversations by both grandparents and grandchildren. Both groups expressed relative satisfaction when discussing each other's health. These findings align with a study conducted by Nussbaum and Bettini (1994), which also emphasised health as a common topic in grandparent-grandchild conversations.

A widely recognised Taiwanese proverb states that "being healthy is a blessing"; thus, it is easy to understand that health holds the utmost importance in Taiwanese culture. When both grandparents and grandchildren share a mutual desire for the good health of their beloved family members, both physically and mentally, engaging in conversations about health allows them to express care and concern for each other. Such conversations could foster a sense of closeness among them. In Taiwan, discussing health can also serve as a way for grandchildren to demonstrate filial piety to their grandparents.

Conclusion

Contributions, Limitations and Suggestions

The main contribution of this study is being the first to explore topic selections and satisfaction levels in intergenerational communication based in Taiwan. Previous studies on the same research topic were mainly based in Western countries. The significance of this present study is to provide insights from Taiwan as a non-western country and a Chinese-speaking community. The implications discussed in the previous section show a valuable cultural comparison on how to improve intergenerational communication within family contexts.

It is important to acknowledge that the questionnaire used in this study was based on a Western conceptualisation of grandparent-grandchild communication processes (Lin et al., 2002). As a result, some survey items may not fully capture the culturally specific characteristics of Taiwanese grandparent-grandchild communication. For future research, it is recommended to develop topic categories that are more aligned with the unique aspects of Taiwanese culture to a greater extent.

The current study had certain limitations due to the use of convenience sampling, which involved recruiting survey participants through the cram school owner, who was an acquaintance of the second author. This resulted in a limited number of participants and a smaller number of questionnaires received. For future research, employing a more random sampling approach is recommended to obtain a larger and more diverse sample, which can enhance the validity and generalisability of the results.

Furthermore, the findings were based on how the participants perceived their natural conversations within family intergenerational communication processes. It is also noted that technology advances might enhance online intergenerational communication other than face-to-face encounters. This scenario was not taken into account in this study; therefore, future research might turn more attention to satisfaction with online intergenerational communication.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

Author Contribution Statement

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