

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN PRIMARY SCHOOL: UNDERSTANDING THE STRATEGIES THAT PROMOTE ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

Abdul Talib Hashim^{1,*}, Azli Ariffin¹, Zaini Abdullah¹, Abu Bakar Yusuf¹, Sharlini Maniam²

¹Faculty of Human Development, Sultan Idris Education University (UPSI), MALAYSIA

²National-Type Primary School (Tamil) of TunSambanthan, Bidor, MALAYSIA

*For correspondence; Tel. + (60) 15 481 7476, E-mail:abdul.talib@fpm.upsi.edu.my

ABSTRACT: *This study aims to identify the types and strategies of parental involvement and its implication on the students' academic performance. Parental involvement (PI) was based on three types, namely the involvement of parents with their children, involvement of parents with teachers and parents involved with the school's Parent-Teacher Association (PTA). This study was conducted in a National-Type (Tamil) primary school in Bidor, Malaysia with respondents of 180 students' parents or guardians of the high academic achievers. The study uses questionnaire and also supporting documents as research instrument. Findings from the descriptive analysis indicates that the involvement of parents with their children shows mean value of 3.33, the involvement of parents with teachers shows the value of 2.66 and parental involvement with the school's PTA shows the value of 2.56. The study also found that such parental involvement is likely to have positive impact on their children's educational achievement.*

Keywords: parental involvement, educational achievement, primary school, parenting.

1. INTRODUCTION

Parents play a very important role to ensure their children's excellent academic achievement. Socio-economic status is one of the aspects frequently associated with students' academic achievement in school [1]. Recently however, there are many successful students in academics coming from families with low economic status which is very much discussed in newspapers and social media. This success shows a clear picture that economic status or family background does not have strong relation to academic success of students [2]. In fact, this matter clearly shows the importance of parents being role models for their children in order to boost their academic success rather than material aspects' influence [3].

According to Morrison [4], the notion of comprehensive parent involvement (PI) is an actualization process of potential parents as an effort to assist parents to identify their weaknesses and strengths, and talents that are hidden in their children and in turn use this aspect effectively. Parental involvement in school life is very important to the performance of their children, especially in academic areas. Such parents [1-3] will be able to produce children with good moral, mental, physical and spiritual. In addition, a statement issued by Harper [5] stated that parental involvement is very important because these aspects provide a form of motivation with profound impact on social development aspect and the academic success of their children.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Parental involvement (PI) is a process where parents are able to connect with school personnel who are responsible in providing services to the children in education delivery, to involve children in activities and to encourage the role of parents in their children's education [1, 4]. Epstein [2] accords that parental involvement will create collaboration (partnership) between families and professionals (the teachers) and assistants (NGOs) in the community. Others refer to PI as a collaborative process that grows and built through a long-term planning and demands cooperation of

every member, in which parents and teachers collaborate, learn and engage in mutual decision-making [3, 5].

According to a study conducted by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) in 2008 stated [6] that there are two parties that serve as educators in the lives of children; parents and teachers. Parents play the prime source in educating their children in the early development before they set foot in school. Responsibility of the parents does not stop when the child enters the world of schooling but in fact increases as their involvement brings changes and certainly positive academic achievement in their children [5].

This clearly shows that parents play an important role and give major influence in their children. Plus, there are two branches in the concept of parental involvement in their children's academic achievement. The first is the involvement of parents in their child's learning at school while the second is the involvement of parents in their child's learning at home. DCSF [6] also discovered parents who are committed and involved in children's learning consist of young parents at the age of 21 and older, the parents who have young children and the parents involved in education directly or indirectly. Meanwhile, those who are not involved in their child's learning refers to a group of parents aged 35 and older, parents with children who are already working, single parents and those parents who are far behind in fundamental aspects of literacy and numeracy [2, 5, 6].

Among the forms of parental involvement which are specified in the DCSF [6], are the parents who complete the school projects together, produce things together, conduct sports and leisure activities together and read together with their children. Such forms of parental involvement ensure development of the children in terms of cognitive and positive social behaviors among their children [4]. Parental involvement in their children's learning are not limited from the beginning of 3 years old to 10 years old, but still continue regardless of their child's learning level. Among the most important parental involvements is to guide their child with their homework and reading. Such commitment can improve their children's academic achievement [3].

Despite the importance of parental involvement in students' academic achievement are well acknowledged by parents, not all of the parents can involve in their children's academic process due to some obstacles [5]. Accordingly, this article will discuss the following research questions, i.e. what kind of parental involvements among high achiever students, teachers and PTA with regards to their relationships, commitment, engagement and trust?

3. METHODOLOGY

Study design

The researchers chose to use descriptive survey using quantitative data. Creswell et al. [7] and Fink [8] explained that the survey is a method to gather information that describes characteristics of various data sets that include views and attitudes. Therefore, this study design was chosen because it is one of the appropriate and most manageable measures to obtain information from large sample studies.

Population and selection of study samples

This study was conducted at a National-Type Primary School (Tamil) in Bidor, Malaysia. The population of this school consists of 450 pupils from 375 families. However, this study focused on parents of the students who are academically high achievers in the school. Through the School Examination Analysis System (SAPS) application, the researchers identify students who achieved the first top ten positions in 2016 End-of-Year exam results along with the achievement of their overall score. The total score counts only for core subjects; Bahasa Tamil, English, Mathematics and Science. After identifying the high achievers, the researchers then combined all students from Year 1 to Year 6. Next, the researchers compiled the ranking of students according to their total score in the final year examination. From that, a total of 180 parents are then selected to participate in this study.

Study instruments

The study used three instruments, namely the questionnaire, students' academic progress report card and supporting documents that present feedbacks from parents. The use of these three instruments can ensure data triangulation [7].

Questionnaires

The questionnaires consist of 30 items to identify the involvement of parents with children, teachers, and the school PTA. It was developed by the Inventory of Parental Influence -IPI [24]. Some adjustments were made on the questionnaires, necessarily to reflect Malaysian cultural contexts followed by school or location of the study itself [3, 8].

A final version of the questionnaires used by the researchers involves the Likert scale [7] from 1 to 5. The researchers categorize and interpret the score to 5 stages to facilitate the process of identifying the mean values for each variable of the study.

Data Analysis

In this study, methods of data collection involved two phases [7, 8]. The first phase is a pilot study to test the reliability of the modified questionnaires to suit the needs of the study. The second phase involves the actual phase of the study. In this phase, the instrument survey was conducted among samples of this research.

As mentioned above, questionnaires used in this study are questionnaires that have been tested in terms of reliability. It was approved by experts in this field. In this study, the reliability refers to Cronbach Alpha. The program used in analyzing and interpreting research data was the computerized statistical software, Statistical Package for the Social Science version 18 (SPSS). In fact, the mean and standard deviation to answer the research question is appropriate to analyze the quantitative data obtained in this study.

Descriptive statistics were used to describe the characteristics of the sample or a combination of variables [7]. The researchers use descriptive statistics to give an idea of the background of the respondents, the involvement of parents and children, teachers and the school PTA. The statistical analysis consisted of frequency, percentage, mean and standard deviation.

4. FINDINGS

Respondent Profile

Based on data collected through questionnaires, the researchers could summarize the respondents from the aspect of gender and their academic achievement. First, female respondents were found to be dominant with a total of 122 (68%) and the remaining 58 (32%) were male respondents.

Table 1: Gender

Gender	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Female	122	67.7
Male	58	32.2
TOTAL	180	100

The findings also show that a total of 35 respondents do not have any academic qualifications. A number of 40 respondents have Lower Secondary Education as their academic qualification. Meanwhile, the Malaysian Certificate of Education (SPM) holders were 49 respondents. Respondents with Malaysian Certificate of Higher Education (STPM) qualification are 27 people. As for Diploma, there were 8 respondents and there are 11 respondents have a bachelor's degree and above for their academic qualifications. It can be observed that there are 85 respondents with academic qualifications below the SPM level but the children still excel academically in school (see, Table 2).

Table 2: Academic Level of Respondents

Academic Level	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
No qualification	35	43.8
Primary School Education	10	5.5
Lower Secondary Education (PMR)	40	22.2
Malaysian Certificate of Education (SPM)	49	27.2
Malaysian Certificate of Higher Education (STPM)	27	15.0
Diploma level	8	4.4
Bachelor's degree and above	11	6.1
TOTAL	180	100

Involvement of Parents with High Achiever Children

In addition, the researchers also focus on some important aspects on the involvement of parents of high achievers with various groups such as children, teachers and the school PTA who also give implications on the students' academic performance.

Table 3: Involvement of Parents with High Achiever Children

No	Item	M	SD	Level
1	I make sure that my child acts in accordance with his/her study schedule and study at home.	2.83	1.03	Moderate
2	I make sure that my child has a comfortable space for learning.	2.90	1.14	Moderate
3	I always talk to my child about his/her daily activities.	3.52	0.89	High
4	I guide my child when performing household chores.	3.86	0.92	High
5	I examined my child's homework.	3.92	0.84	High
6	I make sure that my child has enough reference books, stationery, and other educational necessities.	3.16	1.07	Moderate
7	I make sure that a learning environment with less noise from the television/radio when my child revises his/her lessons.	2.99	0.84	Moderate
8	I send my children to extra classes held at school.	3.16	1.07	Moderate
9	I send my son to paid tuition.	2.99	0.84	Moderate
10	I always talk with my child about his/her problems.	3.60	0.92	High
Overall Parental Involvement With Children		3.33	0.60	Moderate

Table 3above shows the descriptive findings on parental involvement with their children. The finding shows that the overall mean value is 3.33. The mean values give a clear explanation that parental involvement with their children is at a moderate level.

When the parents are involved and also gave their commitment to their children, it is much easier for their children to be motivated and aspired to achieve their academic excellence. Elements of involvement and commitment act as a social control agent of the parents which indirectly provides adaptation that is inherent in their child. In conclusion, the involvement of parents with their children is at a moderate level.

Involvement of High Achievers' Parents with Teachers

The table below shows the descriptive findings on parental involvement with teachers. This part of the research consists of 10 items.

Table 4: Involvement of High Achievers' Parents with Teachers

No	Item	M	SD	Level
1	I introduced myself to every subject taught in my child's class.	3.05	1.07	Moderate
2	I share my views, expectations, and beliefs with the teachers on my child's learning.	2.55	1.16	Low
3	I shared my observation with the teachers on learning style and attitude of my child.	2.60	0.86	Low
4	I met with the teachers to get information on my child's academic performance.	2.35	0.97	Low
5	I asked for opinions and suggestions from the teachers to improve the academic performance of my child.	2.15	0.86	Low
6	I asked the teachers on examination formats to train my child.	2.65	1.16	Low
7	I discussed with the teachers on homework and assignments given to my child.	2.40	0.80	Low
8	I inform the teachers on problems faced by my child.	3.16	1.07	Moderate
9	I always read and communicate with the teachers on review given by the teachers or principal in my child's exercise book.	2.20	0.81	Low
10	I followed up with my child's progress carried out by the teachers via online.	2.25	0.94	Low
Overall Involvement of High Achievers' Parents with Teachers		2.66	0.77	Low

The overall mean for involvement between parents with teachers is 2.66. Hence, the involvement between parents and teachers are still at a low level.

Involvement of High Achievers' Parents with the School PTA

The table below presents descriptive findings on value, standard deviation and also the level of parental involvement with the school PTA. The findings showed that the mean value is 2.56 which is at a low level. The study also found that there is only one statement that reaches a moderate level in the questionnaires construct on parental involvement with the school PTA.

Table 5: Mean Value and Standard Deviation

No	Item	M	SD	Level
1	I submitted suggestions and comments via phone, school e-mail, the school social networking Frog-VLe site or meet up with the school.	2.40	0.86	Low
2	I attended any activities and programs organized by the school.	2.10	1.00	Low
3	I am actively involved in the school PTA.	2.25	0.94	Low
4	I contribute financially or manpower for the development of school infrastructure and school PDP.	2.55	1.07	Low
5	I know the PDP school target displayed on the school banner.	2.60	1.07	Low
6	I know the mission and vision of my child's school.	2.60	1.07	Low
7	I attended the PASS program (Parents Assuring Student Success) organized by the school PTA and NGOs for the purpose of educating my child.	2.65	1.06	Low
8	I know clearly about the school and my child's classroom.	2.85	1.02	Moderate
9	I participate actively in the Parents' Bureau at my child's school.	2.40	1.16	Low
10	I help my child's school with extra-curricular activities such as language carnivals and others by providing assistance such as clothing, tools, games and many others.	2.55	1.16	Low
Overall Involvement of High Achievers' Parents with the School PTA		2.56	0.77	Low

For this section, the researchers found a lot of questions related to the relationship and involvement of elements under this study. The findings indicate a lack of basic elements which is a close relationship and parental involvement with the school PTA. The absence of these elements creates a hardship for their children in school to achieve their goals.

5. DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study shows two forms of parental involvement (PI) to help improve the academic performance of the students, namely a) involvement that occur at home (home-based) such as ensuring their children have and act in accordance with study schedule to study at home, have a comfortable space to study, guide their children when performing household chores and b) involvement that occurs in the school (school-based) such as have clear idea about the vision, mission and school rules, attend events and programs organized by the school, actively involved in the school PTA. As reported in other previous studies [1, 2, 9], parental involvement was proven to bring many advantages to the students at all levels.

This includes improved parent-teacher relationships, teacher morale and school climate; improved school attendance, attitudes, behavior and mental health of children; and, increased parental confidence, satisfaction and interest in their own education [9].

However, the findings of this descriptive analysis showed the mean value for the low and moderate level of PI aspects under study, i.e. 3.33 for the involvement of parents with children, 2.66 for the involvement of parents with teachers and 2.56 for parental involvement with the school PTA. This proves that PI in this study are typical and as mentioned by Christenson and Sheridan [10], "... there is still more rhetoric than reality about PI (p.18)". The researchers supposed that this occurs because of several factors described in the following:

- The education level of parents influences the nature of their involvement to help improve the performance of their children. Only 36 respondents have a diploma and first degree for their academic qualification. The remaining others were found to have a low level of education, either having no academic qualification at all or having only SPM as their highest academic qualification. According to Desforges&Abouchaar [11] and Kiernan & Mensah [12], parents with low education levels were found to have low self-esteem and do not want to be actively involved in their children's education. This is because they personally do not know whether they have the appropriate knowledge and skills to guide their children.
- The task of educating has been left entirely to the teachers because the parents felt that teachers are more knowledgeable and qualified in educating their children. Accordingly, the PI with teachers and PI with school authorities found to be low (mean value respectively 2.66 and 2.56) and more traditional in nature, such as notifying the problems faced by their children to the teachers, attending meetings and events organized by the PTA. Although PI was low and relatively limited in their involvement, certainly there is an increase in the performance and academic achievement of their children. There is a close relation with the statement proposed by Hornby & Lafaele [13] that PI is indirectly beneficial to improve attitudes, behavior and mental health of the children.

Recognizing the advantages of PI, we suggest that teachers or schools take more proactive measures to increase the level of PI. Despite the low levels of PI, there are indications that the activities and actions of the parents are constructive, either at home or at school. This is because the determination and desire of parents in helping to improve the academic performance of their children does not require high education background among parents [3, 14]. In addition, a survey of parents in the UK found that 72% of parents have such high interest and willingness to participate and help the teachers and schools to improve the academic performance of their children [6, 15].

Accordingly, more space and opportunities to encourage PI should be considered by teachers and the schools [16]. Epstein [14, 17] accorded that when the teacher and the school are proactive thus PI will be more rigorous, and the

activity will be more focused and the level of PI, in general, will also be higher. Moreover, studies have also shown that when teachers and schools have a clear plan, provide suitable facilities and appreciate the PI, they will be able to implement the PI program more effectively rather than schools that did not show any interest to collaborate with the parents [1, 5, 9, 17].

6. CONCLUSION

This study found that there are two forms of PI. Despite this, most of the actions and activities of the parents involved are still traditional in nature and are deemed to have become a habit. However, the activities and actions listed in this review can still be a general guide for those who like to perform PI effectively and improve the academic performance of students. The study also found that an effective PI depends on the willingness of parents, teachers, and schools to discuss and cooperate with each other. The willingness of parents in PI [1, 3, 18] should not be put in doubt, but determination and positive interest among teachers and schools [11, 12, 19, 20] need to be further studied and improved in order to increase the level of PI in schools.

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*For correspondence; Tel. + (60) 15 481 7476, E-mail: abdul.talib@fpm.upsi.edu.my