

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MALAY PARENTS' SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS AND THEIR INVOLVEMENT IN THEIR CHILDREN'S EDUCATION AT HOME

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ABSTRACT

The present study focuses on the relationship between parents' socioeconomic status and parental involvement in their children's education at home. This study uses eighty students of Malay ethnic origin who are studying in one of the best performance-based National Schools in the state of Kedah, Malaysia as a sample. A questionnaire was used to obtain quantitative data related to the parents' socio-economic background and their involvement strategies in their children's education at home. The results indicate that most Malay parents, regardless of their socioeconomic background show a high degree of involvement in most of the parental involvement strategies at home to ensure their children's educational outcomes. In addition, correlation analysis indicates that the relationship between Malay parents' socioeconomic status and parental involvement strategies at home is not significant in almost all the strategies adopted by the parents.

Keywords: Malay parents, parental involvement, socioeconomic, education, home

ABSTRAK

Kajian ini memfokuskan hubungan antara sosioekonomi ibu bapa dalam pendidikan anak di rumah. Kajian ini menggunakan 80 murid berbangsa Melayu yang belajar di salah sebuah Sekolah Kebangsaan yang berprestasi tinggi di Kedah, Malaysia sebagai sampel. Soal selidik digunakan untuk mendapatkan data kuantitatif daripada ibu bapa murid berkaitan latar belakang sosioekonomi ibu bapa dan strategi penglibatan mereka dalam pendidikan anak. Hasil kajian mendapati bahawa tanpa mengambil kira latar belakang sosioekonomi, kebanyakan ibu bapa Melayu menunjukkan darjah penglibatan yang tinggi dalam kebanyakan strategi penglibatan ibu bapa dalam pendidikan anak di rumah demi kecemerlangan pencapaian pendidikan anak mereka. Tambahan lagi, analisis korelasi menunjukkan bahawa hubungan antara sosioekonomi ibu bapa Melayu dan penglibatan ibu bapa dalam pendidikan anak di rumah adalah tidak signifikan dalam hampir semua strategi penglibatan ibu bapa.

Kata kunci: Ibu bapa Melayu, penglibatan ibu bapa, sosioekonomi, pendidikan, rumah

INTRODUCTION

In general, every parent obviously would want their children to perform well at school. However, children's educational achievement does not fully depend on the teachers' efforts at school to instil skills, attitudes and behaviours which could transform them to become successful students. Parents do play an important role in providing educational resources necessary for their academic success. Hence, parental involvement at home refers to the ways the children are managed by the parents in the home environment in order for them to improve their ability to succeed in school (Suresh Kumar, 2012).

A number of studies (Baker and Stevenson, 1986; Katsilis and Rubinson, 1990; Poston and Falbo, 1990; Ho Sui-Chu and Willms, 1996; Balli, et al., 1998; Shaver & Wall, 1998; Desimone, 1999; Fantuzzo, et al., 2000; McNeal Jr, 2001, Shuang Ji & Koblinsky, 2009; Sohail, et al., 2012) have demonstrated that parents from a higher socioeconomic level show higher involvement in their children's education than parents from a lower socioeconomic level. These studies point out that those parents from higher socioeconomic status have a stronger economic background and this helps the parents to provide their children with more educational opportunities and educational resources.

However, despite extensive research on parental involvement, very little attention has been given to the issue of parental involvement in education in the Malaysian context. Hence, there is a deficit of research on parental involvement of the Malay ethnic group in Malaysia as well as the Chinese and the Indian ethnic groups. Thus, to address current gaps in the literature, the present study examines the involvement of the Malay parents in the education of their primary school children in a best performance-based urban school. The present study examines the various strategies of parental involvement adopted by Malay parents at home in order to improve their children's academic achievement. In particular, the study also examines the relationship between Malay parents' socioeconomic status and parental involvement strategies used in their children's education.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A substantial body of evidence confirms that parents' socioeconomic status imposes a great impact on parental involvement and how it is translated into their child's educational success. For instance, Katsilis and Rubinson (1990) in their study reported that the parents' socioeconomic status influences the educational success of their children at school to a great extent. Ho Sui-Chu and Willms's (1996) study indicated that parents' socioeconomic status has significant and positive relationship on parental involvement in their children's education even though the relationship found was not strong. Desimone (1999) who examined the effects of the students' socioeconomic status on parental involvement also found that the students' socioeconomic status influences parental involvement and the students' achievement. McNeal Jr. (2001) in his study found that parents from higher socioeconomic status have better parental involvement which has greater effects on their children. Shaver & Wall (1998) in their study on the impact of parental involvement on Reading and Mathematics achievements also indicated that children from higher socioeconomic backgrounds achieved better educational success in Reading and Mathematics. The parents from higher socioeconomic status have a greater impact on reading and mathematics achievement due to effective parental involvement. In another study, Stylianides & Stylianides (2011) reported that parent-child interaction has a significant positive effect on children's academic achievement. Their findings also revealed that urban families with low socioeconomic status have low access to parent-child interaction. Suresh Kumar (2012) in his study on a best performance-based National Type Tamil School in Malaysia also suggested that Indian children from higher socioeconomic status experience better parental involvement in their education at home. Parents seem to be involved in various strategies of involvement at home to ensure their children's success.

In the line of research emphasizing the relationship between parents' socioeconomic status and parental involvement (e.g., Baker and Stevenson, 1986; Balli, et al., 1998; Poston and Falbo, 1990, Fantuzzo, et al., 2000; Suresh Kumar, 2010; Suresh Kumar, 2011), parents'

education level is seen as an important factor in fostering parental involvement in their children's education. Baker and Stevenson (1986) found that well-educated mothers have more knowledge of their children's schooling than the less educated mothers. These educated mothers seem to be more aware of their children's education and their achievement. Moreover, they take greater effort to use homework strategies and monitor their children's progress in education. Balli, et al. (1998) in their study found that parents with a low level of education encounter difficulties in helping their children with homework. They need help from the schools to assist their children. In addition, Poston and Falbo's study (1990) also found that parents who are highly educated often communicate and interact with their children. Fantuzzo, et al. (2000) found that better educated parents were more involved in their children's education at home, which includes initiating and participating in learning activities, and creating better learning experiences for the children. In addition, Suresh Kumar (2010) in his study on several National Type Tamil Schools in Malaysia found that the relationship between Indian parents' education level and parental involvement at home was significant in identifying academic problems faced by their children at home, in identifying their children's homework given by the school every day and in assisting their children with the school homework. In another study on several National Schools in Malaysia, Suresh Kumar (2011) also found that Indian parents' education level and their involvement in their children's education was significant. Thus, it can be said that parents' education level has effects on the academic aspirations the parents have for their children. This would certainly encourage the parents to be more involved in their children's education.

Besides parents' education level, parents' occupational status and income are also important in fostering parental involvement in their children's education. For example, Lueptow (1975) found that students who perform well at school are those who have educated parents with a higher occupational status and income. Desimone (1999) also found that the higher the family income, the greater would be the parental involvement; and this enables the students to achieve high scores in Mathematics and Reading. Sohail, et al. (2012) in their study indicated that parents' education level and occupation have a strong influence on students' learning. Lockheed, et al. (1989) also reported that children whose mothers are highly educated and fathers are professionals, obtain high scores in Mathematics. On the other hand, Shuang Ji and Koblinsky (2009) found that the majority of the parents who are from lower occupational status work long hours and have little time for their children. This affects the level of parental involvement at home. Thus, all these research suggest that the parents' socioeconomic status (e.g., parents' education level, parents' occupational status and income) imposes a great impact on parental involvement at home.

RESEARCH METHOD

Sample

For the purpose of this study, eighty Malay students aged 8-11 years from one of the best performance-based National Schools in the state of Kedah, Malaysia were chosen as the sample. This school was chosen for its familiarity, appropriateness and convenience. The sample was drawn based on purposive sampling and comprised 20 students from Year Two, 20 students from Year Three, 20 students from Year Four and 20 students from Year Five. Of the twenty students that were chosen from each Year, ten students were from the lowest achievement category and ten others were from the highest achievement category. The

categorization of the students into lowest achievement category and highest achievement category was done based on the previous final year school examination results. From all eighty students who were chosen, one parent of each student was selected as the respondent of this study based on the student's view about the individual who spent more time being involved in their education.

Instrument

A questionnaire was used by the researcher to obtain quantitative data from the selected students' parents. Questions were adapted from Walker, et al. (2005). However, the structure of the questions was modified by the researcher according to the objective of the current study. The researcher has made some changes in its response format. The questionnaire consists of: *parents' background* (13 items), *parental involvement at home* (10 items), *parental involvement at school* (10 items), *school's cooperation on parental involvement at home* (10 items), *school's cooperation on parental involvement at school* (10 items) and *parents' perception on school* (9 items). However, this paper only focuses on *parents' background* (specifically on the parents' socioeconomic status) and *parental involvement at home*.

The complete 13-item scale on parent's background in the questionnaire consists of close-ended questions on the parents' background such as gender, age, home, education status, occupation, income and household income, number of children, number of school-going children and number of children who are already working. Another 10-item scale in the questionnaire consists of ten questions which measure the parental involvement shown by the parents at home (e.g., discussion on future planning, discussion on school activities, identifying academic problems at school, identifying academic problems at home, assisting with homework, identifying homework, guidance for examinations, motivation, time limits and identifying learning patterns). For each question on parental involvement, the respondents were asked to pick one of the following five responses: 'Never', 'Once every few months', 'Few times a month', 'Few times a week' or 'Daily' for each strategy regarding the parents' involvement in their children's education.

Procedures

As for the respondents, all of them were informed about the nature of this study through letters sent home through the students chosen through purposive sampling at school. A questionnaire was also distributed to the respondents at home through the students. Out of eighty questionnaires distributed to the respondents, fourteen were not returned. The questionnaire containing questions on parents' background and parental involvement in their children's education was used by the researcher to obtain quantitative data from the respondents. Each respondent who was engaged in the study was informed that all the information provided by the respondent would be kept confidential.

All the information gathered from the respondents from the questionnaire was analyzed using Statistical Package of Social Sciences (SPSS). The reliability analysis showed that all ten items in the category of '*parental involvement at home*' were consistent. The Cronbach's alpha measure was 0.89 which indicates that the measure of these items is reliable.

RESULTS

The parents' demographic characteristics of the sample of 66 parents reveal that 53.0% of the respondents are male. This is a clear indication that fathers are more involved with their children and spend more time helping them with their education compared to mothers (47.0%). Surprisingly, in this study, fathers appear to have greater responsibility in helping with their children's education than mothers. It can be said that fathers are becoming more aware of the importance of education for their children. Moreover, nowadays fathers and mothers seem to share equal responsibility in their children's education. The majority of the parents are aged between 41-50 years (53.0%). The analysis shows that 74.2% of the parents are from the urban area while 25.8% of the parents are from the rural area. It could be observed that only 6.1% of the parents are single parents; with either one of the parents dead, divorced or separated.

The socioeconomic status of the parents in this study is shown in Table 1. As presented in Table 1, 3.0% of the parents never went to school while 3.0% of the parents did not complete primary education. Moreover, 3.0% of the parents only completed primary education. Meanwhile, 1.5% of the parents in this study managed to go to secondary school but did not complete their secondary education. The figures also show that 39.4% of the parents completed secondary education which is a mandatory public examination in Malaysia for students aged 17 or 18 (if they have attended one year of remove class at the age of 13). In addition, 50.0% of the parents in this study completed their tertiary education and from this percentage, 21.2% of the parents had completed a course either at Certificate or Diploma level. About 13.6% of the parents completed their degree and another 15.2% respondents completed their education at postgraduate level.

Table 1: Parents' Socioeconomic Status

Socioeconomic Status		Percentage (%)
Level of education	No formal education	3.0
	Did not complete primary education	3.0
	Completed primary education	3.0
	Did not complete secondary education	1.5
	Completed secondary education	39.4
	Certificate/Diploma holders	21.2
	Degree	13.6
	Masters/PhD	15.2
	Occupation	Not working
Labour Business		28.8
Services		7.6
Administration		19.7
Technical		16.7
Professional		1.5
None		9.0
Income	None	
	RM1000 and below	16.7
	RM1001 - RM2000	18.2
	RM2001 – RM3000	15.2
	RM3001 – RM4000	15.2

Household income	RM4001 – RM5000	15.2
	RM5001 and above	6.1
		13.6
	RM1000 and below	
	RM1001 - RM2000	13.6
	RM2001 – RM3000	13.6
	RM3001 – RM4000	19.7
	RM4001 – RM5000	13.6
RM5001 and above	4.5	
	34.8	

n = 66

It can be seen from Table 1 that the majority of the parents (54.6%) work in a variety of fields, namely, professional, technical, administration as well as services and business. Parents, who possess a certificate, diploma, first degree or a higher degree, have stable jobs due to their high level of education. It can be observed that 28.8% of the parents in this study were labourers. The other 16.7% of the respondents studied are housewives. This includes some who possess a Certificate, Diploma and some who even have a degree.

As for their income, it is apparent from Table 1 that 33.4% of the parents' studied earn a total income of RM2000.00 and below a month. Table 1 also reveals that 30.4% of the parents earn a total income of between RM2001.00-RM4000.00 per month. In addition, 6.0% of the parents earn between RM4001.00-RM5000.00 a month. Meanwhile, another 13.6% of the parents in this study earn a total income of more than RM5000.00 a month. However, 16.7% of the parents in this study do not earn any income and all of them are housewives.

The findings of this study also show that a large proportion (34.8%) of the parents' household income is more than RM5000.00 a month. About 27.2% of the parents' household income is RM2000.00 and below. Of the 27.2%, 13.6% of the parents' household income is RM1000.00 and below. Another, 13.6% of the parents' household income is between RM1001.00-RM2000.00 a month. A total of 33.3% of the parents' household income is between RM2001.00-RM4000.00 a month. Of this percentage, 19.7% of the parents' household income is between RM2001.00-RM3000.00 a month and 13.6% of the parents' household income is between RM3001.00-RM4000.00 a month. Only 4.5% of the parents have a household income of between RM4001-5000 a month.

Focusing on the descriptive analysis of parental involvement in their children's education at home, Table 2 presents ten strategies of parental involvement observed at home. Overall, the data indicate that parents are highly involved in their children's education at home. As shown in Table 2, there are five strategies (*e.g., motivation, identifying homework, identifying academic problems at home, identifying academic problems at school, identifying learning patterns*) adopted by the parents that have mean values of 4.0 and above. The strategy of motivation recorded the highest mean value of 4.17 indicating that parents show a high level of involvement in motivating their children to achieve academic success. The results also indicate that parents show a high level of involvement in identifying their children's homework given by the school every day (4.14) and in identifying academic problems faced by their children at home (4.05). In addition, the results also indicate that parents show high involvement in identifying the academic problems faced by their children at school (4.03) and in identifying the learning patterns of their children at home (4.00).

Table 2: Strategies of Parental Involvement in Child’s Education

Strategies	Never	Once every few months	Few times a month	Few times a week	Daily	Mean	Sd.
	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)		
Discussion of future planning	4.5	19.7	25.8	33.3	16.7	3.38	1.12
Discussion of school activities	1.5	10.6	16.7	40.9	30.3	3.88	1.02
Identifying academic problems at school	0.0	10.6	10.6	43.9	34.8	4.03	0.94
Identifying academic problems at home	1.5	7.6	15.2	36.4	39.4	4.05	1.00
Assisting with homework	6.1	0.0	24.2	33.3	36.4	3.99	1.08
Identifying homework	3.0	4.5	16.7	27.3	48.5	4.14	1.05
Guidance in examination preparation	3.0	7.6	19.7	28.8	40.9	3.97	1.10
Motivation	0.0	1.5	18.2	42.4	37.9	4.17	0.78
Time Limits	4.5	3.0	15.2	43.9	33.3	3.98	1.02
Identifying learning patterns	4.5	6.1	15.2	33.3	40.9	4.00	1.11

n = 66

The other five strategies (*e.g., assisting with homework, time limits, guidance in examination preparation, discussion of school activities, discussion of future planning*) recorded mean values below 4.00. The results indicate that parents show a high level of involvement in assisting their children with the school homework if the children encounter difficulties in completing it (3.99) and in providing time limitations to their children for studying, watching television and other personal activities (3.98). The findings also indicate that parents show a high level of involvement in guiding them in their preparation towards school examinations (3.97), in discussing their children’s activities at school (3.88) and in discussing their children’s future with them (3.38).

Table 3 examines the correlation between parents’ socioeconomic status and the ten strategies of parental involvement observed at home. The results indicate that the relationship between parents’ socioeconomic status and the ten strategies of parental involvement is not significant in almost all the strategies of parental involvement.

Table 3: Correlation between Parents’ Socioeconomic Status and Strategies of Parental Involvement

Parental Involvement Strategies	Parents’ Socioeconomic Status			
	Education (<i>r</i>)	Occupation (<i>r</i>)	Income (<i>r</i>)	Household Income (<i>r</i>)
Discussion of future planning	0.01	0.10	0.03	0.05
Discussion of school activities	0.11	-0.06	0.01	0.06
Identifying academic problems at school	-0.01	-0.17	0.03	0.06
Identifying academic problems at home	-0.04	-0.12	-0.04	0.03
Assisting with homework	-0.07	0.01	0.07	0.09
Identifying homework	-0.04	-0.07	0.02	0.04
Guidance in examination preparation	-0.08	-0.28*	-0.23	-0.12
Motivation	-0.12	-0.14	-0.07	-0.08
Time Limits	-0.08	-0.05	-0.09	0.03

Identifying learning patterns	-0.05	-0.04	-0.06	-0.01
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n = 66 respondents

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

As shown in Table 3, the bivariate relationship between parents' socioeconomic status and the parental involvement strategies at home shows that the relationship is negative and significant in only one strategy implemented. It is significant at the $p = 0.05$ level. Hence, there is only one piece of evidence to show that parents in better professions are less involved in their children's education especially in guiding their children in their preparations for school examinations ($r = -0.28, p < 0.05$).

DISCUSSION

The present study examines Malay parents' involvement in their children's education at home in a best performance-based National School in Kedah, Malaysia and the extent to which the parents' socioeconomic status affects parental involvement at home. One interesting finding of this study is that fathers are more involved with their children's education at home than the mothers. Thus, this study is not in agreement with many studies (Baker and Stevenson, 1986; Suresh Kumar, 2010; Suresh Kumar, 2011; Suresh Kumar, 2012) that identified mothers as the prominent person in terms of parental involvement that utilizes various strategies of involvement in their children's education.

The findings also indicate that regardless of the socioeconomic background, parents are highly involved in their children's education at home. This finding explains that the parents have high expectations of their children and these expectations are transformed into the action of involvement in various strategies at home in order for their children to improve in their abilities to succeed in school.

Another interesting finding of this study is that the Malay parents' socioeconomic status is not related significantly to parental involvement strategies at home. In other words, the parents with lower socioeconomic status are as involved in their children's education at home as parents with higher socioeconomic status. The present study does not support the research that indicate that parents' with higher socioeconomic status are more involved in their children's education at home (e.g., Baker and Stevenson, 1986; Katsilis and Rubinson, 1990; Poston and Falbo, 1990; Ho Sui-Chu and Willms, 1996; Balli, et al., 1998; Shaver & Wall, 1998; Desimone, 1999; Fantuzzo, et al., 2000; McNeal Jr, 2001, Shuang Ji & Koblinsky, 2009; Sohail, et al., 2012).

There are few possible reasons for these results. One possible explanation might be that due to the high expectations of the parents themselves on their children's education. When parents have high expectations of their children, they could possibly influence their children's educational outcomes through active participation in their children's learning at home. The encouragement, support and confidence gained by the children from their parents can enhance parent-child relationships. The bonds built in relation to learning increase the level of parental involvement in their children's education regardless of their socioeconomic status.

Another possible reason is related to the parents' living conditions. The living conditions of the parents of low socioeconomic status can influence the parents to have more expectations

on their children to perform well at school. Parents with a lower socioeconomic status could be more optimistic and may believe that their children are their assets for them to climb up the socioeconomic ladder for a better life in future. Thus, they might engage in various strategies of involvement at home to influence learning and achievement.

Perhaps the parents of lower socioeconomic status are also more aware of the importance of parental involvement in supporting their children's education at home. Being placed in the best performance-based school, the parents in this study understand the need for their children to be more competent at school in obtaining good academic outcomes. Hence, they initiate more involvement to instil a positive influence on academic and social competencies of their children, which is expected to result in better school achievement.

In addition, parents of lower socioeconomic status have limited resources and limited educational experience to be involved in their children's education. Thus, the school may have placed greater confidence in the parents to support their children at home. Since the school is a best performance-based school, the teachers or school personnel would have instilled more knowledge in parenting practices at home to provide better parental involvement that could transform their children to be successful students at school.

However, this study has several limitations that are important and have to be mentioned. First, the sample in this study is a small number of Malay parents. This study is conducted in only one school; thus, it may not be representative of other Malay parents who have children studying in other schools. The sample also may not be representative of Malays living in other districts and other states in Malaysia. Second, it may not be possible to generalize this study to an ethnically diverse population. It should also consider the multiethnic framework in comparing the relationship between parents' socioeconomic status and parental involvement strategies at home. Third, even though there is no significant relationship between parents' socioeconomic status and parental involvement at home, the quality of involvement of parents from the lower socioeconomic rung can still be questioned. Thus, a qualitative approach needs to be taken along with the quantitative method used in this study to provide more in-depth reasoning to explore the quality of involvement across the socioeconomic status. Further investigation which addresses the above-mentioned limitations is needed.

CONCLUSION

Regardless of the parents' socioeconomic status, the Malay parents in this study are highly involved in their children's education at home. In addition, analysis and interpretation of data indicate that parents with lower socioeconomic status are as committed as the parents with higher socioeconomic status in their children's education at home to enhance their children's educational success. This study is in sharp contrast with previous studies which indicated a significant relationship between parents' socioeconomic status and parental involvement at home. By understanding their role in parental involvement in their children's education at home, the parents (regardless of their socioeconomic status) need to take greater effort in developing skills and knowledge in providing more support for their children at home in a more positive direction.

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