



FAMILY CONTEXT AND ITS RELATIONSHIP WITH PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN THE EDUCATION OF SECONDARY SCHOOL CHILDREN

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed at investigating the extent parents involvement in educating their secondary school children. The participants consisted of 950 Form Four students from government assisted secondary schools in Malaysia. The questionnaires were administered to the sample in the state of Selangor. The findings of the study revealed that interaction and communication, parenting practices, leisure, openness and acceptance were the predictive factors and had a positive relationship with parental involvement in education of secondary school children. Multiple regression analysis showed that the component of family context contributed 44.5 percent to the involvement of parents at home as compared to only 16.0 percent for involvement of parents in school. Overall, it was found that family context contributed 41.1 percent to the involvement (home and school). Of greater interest is that this study found that involvement of parents in education of their secondary school children was not the main factor for their children's achievement in learning. The children obtained high academic achievement even without the parents involvement. A conducive and harmonious family context was able to motivate the children to succeed in their studies. Hence it can be concluded that although family involvement is important in raising the academic achievement of children, the family context is the main factor in influencing the children's academic achievement. To conclude, it would be more meaningful if efforts aimed at children's academic success in school utilize a more holistic strategy by strengthening the family institution and creating healthy family relationships.

Keywords: Parental involvement, family context, children's education, secondary school



INTRODUCTION

Parental involvement in school activities and programs is declining which consequently affects student achievement (West *et al.*, 1998). It is argued that student excellence will not be achieved unless parents are more involved in school programs and activities (Henderson and Mapp, 2000). According to Shaverand and Walls (1998), and Epstein (2001), parental involvement is not only in school but parents should be involved in their children's education at home. Children do not focus on what is learned if the parents are less involved at home (Shaverand and Walls, 1998) and this leads to lower academic excellence (Hoover and Sandler, 1995; Lawson, 2003). Children need parental involvement to increase self-motivation and determination to meet their expectations. However, according to Lareau (2000) time constraints cause the parents to be less sensitive to their role in their children's education and thus they let their children learn without supervision. The constant involvement of parents in the home and at school has been linked with children's academic achievement (Christenson *et al.*, 1992; Keith and Lichtman, 1994; Shaverand and Walls, 1998; Izzo *et al.*, 1999; Miedel and Reynolds, 1999). Previous studies have focused more on parental involvement in schools, even if, as asserted by Bhanot and Jovahonic (2005), Cooper *et al.* (2006), Garg *et al.* (2002), DePlanty *et al.* (2007) and Van Voorhis (2003), parental involvement should be continued at home. The findings made it clear that there is a positive relationship between parental involvement at home with the students' academic achievement (Goldscheider *et al.*, 2001; Garg *et al.*, 2002; Deslandes and Bertrand, 2005). However, studies focusing on parental involvement are mostly on students in the early stages of schooling (Arnold *et al.*, 2008).

Not much is known about why parents are less involved in their children's education while the children are at secondary schools (Christenson and Sheridan, 2001; Christenson, 2004; James, 2008) in comparison to their involvement at the early stages of schooling (preschools) and elementary schools (Arnold *et al.*, 2008). However, previous studies clearly indicated that parents are more involved in their children's education at primary school and reduced their involvement when the children are in secondary school. Among the various reasons given by parents for the decreased involvement in children's education in secondary schools are due to more challenging curriculum and syllabus, the children in secondary school are self-reliant and parents want to focus more on their younger children (Coleman, 1988). However, the reasons given by parents are still disputed since parental involvement in children's education is not necessarily involved direct participation from the parents. Parental involvement could also occur indirectly and participation itself is not limited to the school but also at home (Goldscheider *et al.*, 2001; Garg *et al.*, 2002; Deslandes and Bertrand, 2005). Past research was less focused on the role of family context in children's academic achievement. This factor is very important and should be highlighted. This follows from the assumption that implementation of parental involvement can be forecast when the children are in secondary schools. In addition, previous studies tend to focus on parental involvement in education only from the perspectives of parents and teachers.



In Malaysia, the same situation occurs. Parents have been found to be less involved with their secondary school going children. Previous research had not tried to look at parental involvement from the perspective of the children who assess their own parents' involvement. Hence this study will focus on the assessment of children regarding their own parents' involvement while they are in secondary school. Children become the focus for data collection which then will be triangulated with previous findings involving parents and teachers who are the evaluators of parental involvement whether at home or in school. This study will also attempt to answer the question: Is the family context a predictor to lack of parental involvement in their children's secondary school education?

Family Context

Family context is often a major issue for discussion related to the functioning of a family or as a single entity to the public. Parents are the main artery in providing a healthy environment for the family. It is found that communication within the family and siblings are also affecting the participation of parents towards their children's education at home. Clear communication between parents and children has been found to provide an opportunity for parents to interact with and also to be involved in their children's education. Parents who adopt two-way communications allow the children to mingle and exchange views on knowledge and also provide space for them to express their opinions of parents in their studies (Hannon, 1999). Previous studies found that families characterized by healthy communication at home not only strengthen family ties but also help improve personal and emotional development of children and their academic achievement (Cooper *et al.*, 2006). Children are moulded according to the family. Parents as the main models in a family and are often the examples to their children in forming their own identity. Vicarious learning or learning through imitation normally has a healthy effect on children if they were in the context of healthy families and vice versa. Jones (2004) in studies related to behavioural patterns of parenting and psychological development of teenagers found that parental support was positively related to the psychological development of adolescents. He found that 90% of respondents who participated in the survey agreed and were happy when parents are always giving encouragement in addition to receiving ideas and views of the children when talking about a matter. In addition, parents who are sensitive to their children's feelings and understand their needs are also seen as having psychological impact on children to become successful humans. Survey findings related to parental control of children found that children want their freedom and room to grow in the world of adolescents (Kleiner, 2005). Children want to be appreciated and try to grow up in a situation that they want without being too shackled by their parents. However, as parents, the control required should concentrate more on taking care and being sensitive to the children's development.

Parental Involvement

The study by Epstein (2001) found that three major factors are believed to be the decision basis of parental involvement. First, the interpretation shaping the role of parents which identifies the beliefs of parents on what should be done with respect to children's education and multiplicity of



strong foundations and the existence of activities that are interpreted by parents as important and allow them to act on behalf of their children. Second, the capability of parents to feel the responsibility and need for helping their children succeed in school is focused on how far parents believe their involvement can inculcate positive influence toward academic achievement of children. Third, the need, general invitation and opportunity to get the mselves involved refer to the perception of parents regarding to what extent do their children and school need them to be involved. Grolnick *et al.* (1997) also found that parents who play the role of teachers at home and have a positive attitude towards their children will be more eager to get involved in children's cognitive activities. Green *et al.* (2007) also found that parental involvement at home should be a continuous one not just at the beginning of schooling but also in the middle when children need the strength to achieve independence. The help and support from parents in their children's education must be consistent (Epstein, 1989) (Holmes, 1989). The responsible attitude of parents toward their children's education can be seen in their involvement in the children's homework. The study by Thorkildsen and Stein (1998) found that parents who spend time with their children in doing school tasks are more successful and have the desire to do the best. Parents become the guidance to their children in their studies at home. Nevertheless, most parents pay more attention to the education of their preschool and elementary school children. For this reason, most studies in the past have been done based on parental and family involvement in children's early education (Miedel and Reynolds, 1999; Heymann and Earle, 2000; Kohl *et al.*, 2000; Barnard, 2006).

METHODOLOGY

Participants: Participants in this study were 950 government secondary school students in both urban and rural areas in Selangor, Malaysia. There were 421 male and 529 female students in Form Four who answered the survey questionnaires. In terms of ethnicity, the study involved 696 (73.3%) Malays, 148 (15.6%) Chinese, 98 (10.3%) Indians and eight students (8.0%) of "Other" races. As for siblings, the participants involved 145 students (15.3%) having 1 to 3 siblings, 471 (49.6%) who had 3 to 4 siblings, 239 (25.2%) having 5 to 6 siblings, 72 (7.6%) having 7 to 8 siblings and 23 (2.4%) who had more than eight siblings. 49.5% (470 participants) were from urban areas while 50.5 % (480) were from rural locations. The mother's education level was as follows: 137 people (14.4%) had completed primary school , 234 (24.6%) lower secondary school, 353 (37.2%) upper secondary, 180 (18.9%) had diploma/first degree and 46 (4.8%) had postgraduate education. The father's educational background was as follows: 110 (11.6%) completed primary education, 214 (22.6%) completed lower secondary, 318 (33.5%) completed upper secondary, 212 (22.3%) had a diploma/first degree and 96 (10.1%) had obtained postgraduate qualifications. 164 (17.3%) participants said that their mothers were self-employed, 160 (16.8%) were government employees, 156 (16.4%) in private sector employment and 470 (49.5%) said that their mothers were unemployed. 320 (33.7%) said that their fathers were self-employed, 232 (24.4%) were government employees, 341(35.9%) in the private sector and 57 (6.0%) said that their fathers were unemployed.



Table-1. Sample Demographic Data (N = 950)

Parameter	n	%
Gender		
Male	421	44.3
Fmale	529	55.7
Ethnicity		
Malay	696	73.3
Chinese	148	15.6
Indian	98	10.3
Other	8	0.8
Status		
Living with parents	849	89.4
Living with mother	63	6.6
Living with father	14	1.5
Living with guardian	24	2.5
Number of Siblings		
1 – 2	145	15.3
3 – 4	471	49.6
5 – 6	239	25.1
7 – 8	72	7.6
More than 8	23	2.4
Domicile		
Urban	470	49.5
Rural	480	50.5
Mother's Education Level		
Comp. Primary School	137	14.4
Comp. Lower Secondary School	234	24.6
Comp. Upper Secondary School	353	37.2
Diploma/Basic Degree	180	19.0
Postgraduate Degree	46	4.8
Father's Education Level		
Comp. Primary School	110	11.6
Comp. Lower Secondary School	214	22.5
Comp. Upper Secondary School	318	33.5
Diploma/Basic Degree	212	22.3
Postgraduate Degree	96	10.1
Mother's Occupation		
Self Employed	164	17.3
Government Employee	160	16.8
Private Sector Employee	156	16.4
Unemployed	470	49.5
Father's Occupation		
Self Employed	320	33.7
Government Employee	232	24.4
Private Sector Employee	341	35.9
Unemployed	57	6.0

Measurement Tool: Considering that this is a correlation study, there were several series of tests suitable to be used in determining the relationship between variables. In this study, the researchers only had two types of measurement scales namely Nominal Scale and Ordinal Scale. Factor analysis was carried out initially to identify and rearrange a majority of items in the questionnaire

developed into constructs based on the variables found in the study. Besides that, factor analysis was able to identify the correlations between factors (items) and to see that all factors correlated with each other, the strength of item-item correlation and to see the communality value for each factor and proportionality of variance for each factor. The researchers needed to ensure the normality of data for each construct for the purpose of testing and to ensure the use of a particular test was suited to the data gathered. Only then did the researchers carry out a series of tests such as multiple regression, Chi-square and Pearson correlation test.

Family Context

This construct is measured based on five sub constructs namely: interaction & communication, parental practice, ease, openness and acceptance. Sub constructs were developed with reference to constructs put forward by Hoover and Sandler (1995) who stated that at the first level (decision on basic involvement of parents), parents shape the role of parenting, awareness of helping children and need to be involved in their children’s education . Based on Bronfenbrenner (1979), the family context is clearly stated as important because children develop according to the family context where they are raised. Under the construct of family context there are five sub constructs namely: interaction and communication (6 items), parental practice (6 items), leisure (7 items), openness (6 items) and acceptance (8 items). In the survey, students need to choose the answers based on the Likert scale given: (1) Never, (2) Sometimes, (3) Not Sure, (4) Often and (5) Very Often/Always.

Parental Involvement

Within this study, the main focus is on parental involvement at homes and in schools when their children are in their secondary education. Children will assess parental involvement in a number of constructs given. The construct of involvement are the Home Assignments (5 items), Learning Facilities (5 items) and Monitoring (5 items). Parental involvement in schools is examined through the construct of Parent-school Meeting (5 items), Open Day & Excellence Day (5 items) and School Programs and Activities (5 items). Items constructed for the two constructs based on the Likert scale. Students have to choose based on the Likert scale provided: (1) Never, (2) Sometimes, (3) Not Sure, (4) Often and (5) Very Often. A combined data for parental involvement at home and in school will be used as data for overall parental involvement in this study.

FINDINGS

Table-2. Correlation Matrix Chi-square between parental involvement and components of Family Context

	I&C	PP	Lsr	Opn	Accp
Home	.315**	.557**	.429**	.384**	.271**
	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
	861	746	840	865	896



	.066**	.184**	.197**	.167**	.267**
School	.059	.059	.059	.059	.059
	810	687	791	809	842
	.267**	.510**	.443**	.391**	.372**
Overall	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
	862	737	841	864	897

I&C: Interaction & Communication, **PP:** Parenting Practices, **Lsr:** Leisure, **Opn:** Openness, **Accep:** Acceptance

Analysis above is based on the relationship between parental involvement at home and the family context. The results illustrated that interaction & communication ($r = .32$), parental practices ($r = .56$), leisure ($r = .43$), openness ($r = .38$) and acceptance ($r = .27$) also a significant and positive relationship at the level of $p < .05$.

Results of analysis between parental involvement in school and component of family context showed a non-significant relationship. Analysis showed that interaction & communication ($r = .07$), parental practices ($r = .18$), leisure ($r = .20$), openness ($r = .17$) and acceptance ($r = .27$) were not significant ($p > .05$). Analysis of the relationship between overall parental involvement and components of family context showed that interaction & communication ($r = .27$), parenting practices ($r = .51$), leisure ($r = .44$), openness ($r = .39$) and acceptance ($r = .77$) were at a significant level ($p < .05$).

Do components in family context predict parental involvement at home?

Table-3. Model Summary According To Contribution of Predictive Factors on Dependent Variable Parental Involvement in Schools

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of The Estimate
1	.598 ^a	.357	.356	8.179
2	.656 ^b	.430	.429	7.705
3	.664 ^c	.441	.438	7.641
4	.667 ^d	.445	.441	7.619

Results of this analysis also showed that parenting practices were significant ($\beta = .60$, $p < .05$) in contributing 35.7% ($r = .60$) to the change in variance in parental involvement at home [$F(1,73) = 407.809$, $p < .05$]. Combination of predictive variables parenting practices ($\beta = .52$, $p < .05$) and leisure ($\beta = .28$, $p < .05$) had contributed up to 43.0% ($r = .66$) to the change in variance in parental involvement at home [$F(2,733) = 276.930$, $p < .05$]. The combination of predictive variables parenting practices ($\beta = .47$, $p < .05$), leisure ($\beta = .27$, $p < .05$) and openness ($\beta = .11$, $p < .05$) had contributed up to 44.1% ($r = .66$) change in variance in involvement of parents at home [$F(3,732) = 192.152$, $p < .05$]. A combination of predictive variables parental practices ($\beta = .46$, $p < .05$), leisure ($\beta = .26$, $p < .05$), openness ($\beta = .11$, $p < .05$) and acceptance ($\beta = .07$, $p < .05$) had

contributed a total of 44.5% ($r = .67$) change in variance in parental involvement at home [$F(4,731) = 146.239, p < .05$]. Based on the results of multiple regression analysis, the researchers report that parenting practices, leisure, openness and acceptance form the factors of parental involvement at home in the education of secondary school children.

Components in Family Context Predicting Parental Involvement in School

Table-4. Model Summary According to Contribution of Predictive Factors towards Dependent Variable Parental Involvement in Schools

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of The Estimate
1	.310 ^a	.096	.095	6.625
2	.365 ^b	.134	.131	6.490
3	.394 ^c	.155	.151	6.414
4	.400 ^d	.160	.155	6.400

The results of analysis also showed that in a significant manner acceptance ($\beta = .31, p < .05$) had contributed up to 9.6% ($r = .31$) to the change in variance in parental involvement in school [$F(1,728) = 77.218, p < .05$]. The combination between predictive variables acceptance ($\beta = .27, p < .05$) and leisure ($\beta = .20, p < .05$) had contributed a total of 13.4% ($r = .37$) to the change in variance in parental involvement in schools [$F(2,727) = 56.022, p < .05$]. A combination of the three predictive variables acceptance ($\beta = .23, p < .05$), leisure ($\beta = .16, p < .05$) and parenting practices ($\beta = .16, p < .05$) had contributed up to 15.5% ($r = .39$) change in variance in involvement of parents in schools [$F(3,726) = 44.371, p < .05$]... A combination of the predictive variables acceptance ($\beta = .23, p < .05$), leisure ($\beta = .15, p < .05$), parenting practices ($\beta = .13, p < .05$) and openness ($\beta = .08, p < .05$) had contributed up to 16.0% ($r = .40$) to the change in variance in involvement of parents in schools [$F(4,725) = 34.455, p < .05$]. Based on the results of multiple regression analysis, the researchers report that acceptance, leisure, parenting practices and openness are the factors in parental involvement in schools in the education of their secondary school going children.

Components in Family Context Predicting Parental Involvement (Overall)

Table-5. Model Summary According to Contribution of Predictive Factors to Dependent Variable Parental Involvement (Overall)

Model	R	Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of The Estimate
1	.48 ^a	.300	.299	11.669
2	.09 ^b	.371	.369	11.070
3	.32 ^c	.400	.397	10.822
4	.41 ^d	.411	.408	10.723

The results of analysis showed that parental practices contributed significantly ($\beta = .55$, $p < .05$) up to 30.0% ($r = .55$) in the change of variance in parental involvement [$F(1, 720) = 308.489$, $p < .05$]. A combination between predictive variables of parental practices ($\beta = .47$, $p < .05$) and leisure ($\beta = .28$, $p < .05$) had contributed up to 37.1% ($r = .61$) change in variance in parental involvement [$F(2, 719) = 211.921$, $p < .05$]. The combination of predictive variables parental practices ($\beta = .42$, $p < .05$), leisure ($\beta = .26$, $p < .05$) and acceptance ($\beta = .18$, $p < .05$) had contributed up to 40.0% ($r = .63$) change in variance in parental involvement [$F(3, 718) = 159.225$, $p < .05$]. The combination of four variables predictive of parental practices ($\beta = .38$, $p < .05$), leisure ($\beta = .24$, $p < .05$), acceptance ($\beta = .17$, $p < .05$) and openness ($\beta = .12$, $p < .05$) had contributed up to 41.1% ($r = .64$) to change in variance in parental involvement [$F(4, 717) = 125.201$, $p < .05$]. Based on the results of multivariate regression analysis, the researchers report that parental practices, leisure, openness and acceptance are the factors in parental involvement in the education of their secondary school children.

DISCUSSION

The results clearly show that parental involvement at home or in school is important when they have school going children. Components in the context of the family have been found to be significantly correlated with parental involvement. This study supports a research done by [Huntsinger and Jose \(2009\)](#) which stated that parental involvement is important in generating excellence in children. Parental involvement should not stop after the children are already in secondary school. Instead, parental involvement should be continued until the children finish schooling.

Components of the family context play a role in the efforts to engage parents in their children's education. All components in the context of family are important and enable parents to be more involved in their children's education, especially at home. Involvement at home is more likely to be agreed by the children compared with parents who get themselves involved in the school programmes. Children feel that parents should pay attention to their education at home because the teacher has given them attention in school. However, parents cannot escape from their responsibility to engage themselves in the children's education, especially when the children are in secondary school. Some parents abdicate responsibility as individuals who should be responsible for the education of their children to teachers using the excuse that their children are self-reliant. Parents should understand their responsibilities and requirements in terms of their involvement and how much they should get themselves involved in the education of their secondary school children. The study also explains that the components of the family context contribute to 44.5% of parental involvement at home, 16.0% parental involvement in schools and 41.1% to overall parental involvement. This clearly shows that parental involvement at home provides greater contribution to parental involvement than participation in school. Parents should be aware that their responsibility in playing a role at home will give a greater impact on their children's excellence. The findings



support previous findings (Garg *et al.*, 2002; Van Voorhis, 2003; Bhanot and Jovahonic, 2005; Cooper *et al.*, 2006; DePlanty *et al.*, 2007) that parental involvement should be at home to ensure excellence among children. The involvement of parents in their children's education at home was more influential on children's academic improvement.

Thus, this study indicates the need for a high level of parental involvement in their children's education, especially in their secondary school education. If previous studies (Jeynes, 2005; Fletcher and Silberberg, 2006) were only focused on the need to place emphasis on parental involvement when the children are in preschool and primary school, our findings highlight the need to continue to involve parents until the children finish schooling. This study was found consistent with previous findings indicating the importance of family context and the factors of the predictors of parental involvement. Parents need to take the needs of family context seriously in the efforts to increase parental involvement in the education of their secondary school children.

CONCLUSION

The main objective of this study was to examine the extent to which components in the context of family were related to parental involvement in education when the children are in secondary school. Instruments were constructed according to the construct of interaction and communication, parenting practices, leisure, openness and acceptance and were measured as a key predictor of parental involvement. Based on the constructed items, it was found that the instrument had high validity for research purposes.

The findings showed that components of family context have a positive and significant correlation with parental involvement in the education of children while they are in secondary school. As obtained, parental involvement at home was found to have a significant relationship with the five components of the family context. However, parental involvement in schools does not directly correlate significantly with the components of the family context. Therefore, overall parental involvement at home or in school was found to correlate positively and significantly with the components of the family context. Multiple Regression Results showed that combined parenting practices, leisure, openness and acceptance contributed up to 44.1% of parental involvement at home while the combination of parenting practices, leisure, openness and acceptance accounted for only 16.0% of parental involvement in school.

The combination of parenting practices, leisure, openness and acceptance contributed up to 41.1% of parental involvement when the children are in school. The study also found that the component of family context is important and significantly related to the involvement and interaction where communication component should be given serious attention in further research on parental involvement, especially when children are in secondary school because these components were eliminated from the regression model. Thus, further studies should take into account the prevailing



shortcomings to see why interaction and communication do not have an impact on parental involvement in their children's education while they are in secondary school.

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