Parental Involvement in School to Improve Academic Achievement: Primary Teachers’ Views

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Abstract: This is a preliminary study exploring primary school teachers’ perception and concerns on encouraging parents’ participation in school to improve primary school pupils’ academic achievement. Parents’ participation in Malaysian schools in improving academic achievement, especially in primary level is a new concept in Malaysia. Thus, this study aims to investigate the aspect of parental involvement favoured by primary school teachers and to identify the type of parental involvement favoured by parents from the teachers’ view. A model developed by Epstein containing six aspects of parental involvement in school is adapted in forming questionnaires for this study. The six areas based on the model are communication, parenting, volunteering, home involvement, school governance and decision making and also community service. Questionnaires consisting of 40 questions with 6 different areas were distributed to 60 respondents. Findings indicate that the respondents’ perception regarding parental involvement is at a satisfactory level. It was also discovered that the aspects of involvement preferred by teachers are parenting and communication. The type of parental involvement favoured by parents from the teachers’ point of view is parenting as well as communication.

Keywords: Parental Involvement, Types of Parental Involvement, Barriers to Parental Involvement, Improving Academic Achievement

Introduction

SERIOUS EMPHASIS HAS been given to parental involvement in children’s education in developed countries such as Japan, Britain and The United States of America. Various researches conducted in these countries provided evidence that schools with parental involvement programmes excel more academically. Constrains emerged between school and family can also be resolved through this partnership. Through each success of these partnerships, students will be benefited in feeling secure, save and happy coming to schools. Parents will end up giving more trust to teachers. Teachers meanwhile, feel more comfortable in educating the students (Chavkin & William, 1988).

There are also many other positive effects of parental involvement in school. Both direct and indirect effects are visible through this partnership. Parents play the role of the earliest teachers in educating their children, hence, their involvement is crucial in facilitating teachers since primary schools. At the age of 7 to 10 years old, children require more guidance, attention and motivation from parents (Carter & Wojtkiewicz, 2000). Parents are involve in their
children’s education in the form of participating in school activities, placing high value towards education and increases cognitive intellectuality (Hill & Craft, 2003). Increase in attendance, decrease in dropout rates, positive parent-child communication, improvement of parent-child communication, improvement of students’ attitudes and behaviour and more parent-community support of the school are visible through parental involvement (Rich & Sattes, 1985). Apart from that, parents who are incapable contributing in the aspect of knowledge, normally participate in activities that require physical and financial contribution.

Current education system focuses largely on teachers as the key players in the children’s education with little concentration being placed in having parents as co-partners in the children’s learning process (Wee, 2002). Parents placed a major responsibility on teachers in educating their children once they enter primary school. Perhaps, this derives from the perception that children are their parents’ responsibility while at home, but once they are in school, teachers will have to play their part. This is inadequate for it fosters a society of individuals unprepared to engage in cooperating together. (Fatin, 2006).

In developing children’s cognitive, emotional, social and physical growth and development, schools are not the only institutions responsible (Shartrand et al., 1997). Apart from addressing the needs of children, schools have to face the challenges of working with parents in providing education and supporting the children’s needs. Hence, parental involvement is crucial in ensuring the understanding of both parties towards each other’s responsibilities. The support and cooperation of families in improving the children’s education has also been highlighted in studies conducted by Jeynes (2005), Tan (2001), Gwen et al. (2000), Epstein & Dauber (1991).

Despite proven importance, parental involvement in school is very limited in Malaysia. It is also not extensively researched in Malaysia. Parental involvement in Malaysian school is limited only via sports day events, Parent-Teacher Association (PTA), as well as contributing financially and physically. Academic involvement is limited to ‘report-card day’ (a day where parents come to school to discuss with teachers their children’s academic achievement). Parental involvement should not be confined only in these areas but, should be developed further as active partners in the children learning activities at classroom and school levels.

**Statement of the Problem**

Home and school traditionally are viewed as two different systems with different roles and responsibilities in educating students (Marti, 2000). School as an institution involves various parties such as students, teachers, parents and society (Katz, 1978). Thus, both school and home as institutions must work together in giving the finest education for students.

Cooperation between parents, school and community in curbing discipline problem is crucial. Apart from serving in the aspect of discipline, the outcome of cooperation between parents and school is the increasing of academic achievement (Rogers et al., 2009). Various studies have evidently proven that parental involvement contributes to several positive affects including a higher test result, and consistent long-term academic achievement (Rosenthal & Sawyers, 1996).

If in the western countries, the effort in developing a partnership with parents derives from school, it is a different case in Malaysia. Parental involvement is limited to Parents Teacher Association (PTA) and sports day. Parents were not given a chance to get involve
in classroom learning (Wee, 1996; Badaruzzaman, 1992). This probably happen because the Malaysian education system adopts a centralisation policy whereby the schools are controlled by one main body, that is the Ministry of Education that hardly emphasises the involvement of families, communities and other external environments.

Teachers in developed countries play a crucial role in finding opportunities to engage parents in academic activities in school. However it is a different case in Malaysia where parental involvement in school is very limited. Parental involvement should be expanded beyond PTA meetings, teaching children at home, financial and physical contribution. They should be involved directly as partners in classroom teaching and learning especially if they have expertise in the topics being taught (Hill & Chao, 2009).

The Ministry of Education, Malaysia (2007) reported that more than 60,000 primary school students are illiterate as well as weak in writing and counting. This problem could have been overcome if parents are involved in their children’s education since primary school. In the West, early emphasis on parental involvement is given since early childhood and primary school. Kim (2002) states that it is beneficial if parents would engage in students learning since primary and elementary level. Students whose parents are involved during this age are faster learners compared to non participative parents (Faires et al., 2000).

Razi (1998) found that parental involvement in Malaysian schools is given less emphasise for school is regarded as an exclusive territory for teachers. This is further supported by Wee (2002) who found that most parents would give full responsibility to the school without realizing the importance of their involvement in giving the best education for their children. Hence, schools have to play a crucial role in educating and promoting parental involvement academically by updating the parents of their child’s recent development in school. The idea of involving parents in teaching and learning unlike in co-curricular activities is still exploratory in Malaysia. Thus, the benefits of this cooperation are unseen by majority of teachers. Likewise, most parents are also unaware of the academic contribution that can be performed in school (Razak, 1998).

A survey conducted by Wee (1995) on the role of the primary schools in encouraging parental involvement in Hulu Langat district revealed that the schools played a moderate role. Lack of comprehensive school-based programmes, teachers’ reluctance to involve parents and parents’ obliviousness towards academic involvement in school are among the barriers identified. These findings are further supported by Englund (2004). Other reasons include the headmaster’s perception and comprehension of parental involvement in school to improve academic achievement.

Although few studies involving parental involvement such as the role of school and educators, types of parental involvement, the role of PTA and constrains to parental involvement have been conducted in Malaysia (Badaruzaman, 1992; Wee, 1996; Wee, 2002; and Naima, 2008), information on parental involvement practices in primary school is still lacking. Therefore, the focus of this paper is to examine the aspect of parental involvement favoured by primary school teachers and to identify the type of parental involvement favoured by parents from the teachers’ views. A model developed by Epstein containing six aspects of parental involvement in school is adapted in forming questionnaires for this study. The six areas based on the model are communication, parenting, volunteering, home involvement, school governance and decision making and also community service.
Review of Related Literature

Epstein’s Model of Parental Involvement in School

Schools need parents and families to join them in their crusade to improve the quality of education for all students. Earlier studies and reviews suggest that the key to parental involvement in school is via Epstein’s six-type parental involvement practices which extend from home-based involvement to school-based practices including school governance practice (Epstein et. Al 1997). Although this model is more suited in Western setting, it is used in this study for its comprehensiveness and focus on the types of parental involvement to enhance academic achievement both in school and at home. The six types of parental involvement developed by Epstein’s (1995;1992;1987) model as adapted from Wee (2002) includes:

Type 1 – Parenting: Basic Responsibilities of Families
This refers to the basic responsibilities of families: to ensure children’s health and safety; to provide parenting and child rearing skills needed to prepare children for school; to respond to the continual need to supervise, discipline, and guide children at each level; and to build positive home conditions that support school learning and behaviour appropriate for each grade level.

Type 2 – Communication: Basic Responsibilities of Schools
Type 2 refers to the communications from school to home about school programmes and children’s progress. In the light of the school’s responsibilities in this parental involvement practices, school should design effective forms of communication so that families could be informed of the school’s programmes and the children’s improvement.

Type 3 – Volunteer: Parent Involvement at School
This type refers to parent volunteers who assist teachers, headmasters, and children in classrooms or in other school-based activities. It also refers to parents who come to school to support students’ performances and sports activities; to attend workshops or other educational and training programmes, and to improve themselves so that they are able to assist their children in their learning.

Type 4 – Home involvement: Parent Involvement in Home Learning Activities
This refers to parent-initiated activities or child-initiated requests for help, and instructions from teachers for parents to monitor and assist their own children at home on learning activities that are coordinated with the children’s class work.

Type 5 – School Governance: Leadership and Participation
Type 5 refers to parents taking decision-making roles in the PTA, advisory councils, or other committees or groups at the school, district, or state level. It also refers to parent and community activists in independent advocacy groups that monitor the schools and work for school improvement.

Type 6 – Collaboration: Collaborating with the Community
Type 6 practice refers to school having connections with the agencies, businesses representatives, religious groups and other groups that share responsibility for the children’s education and future successes. Likewise, it refers to connections that schools, students and families contribute to the community.
Teacher’s Perception on Parental Involvement

Teacher’s perception on parental involvement affects the participation of parents in schools. If teachers have a negative perception on parental involvement in school, a stumbling block in enhancing student’s academic achievement therefore will be created (Christenson, 2001). Perhaps this issue emerged for the lack of interacting between parents and teachers. According to Christenson (2001) further, parents wish to contribute more to their children’s education. However, this is seen as unrealistic in the teacher’s point of view. Parents and teachers do not view themselves as being in the same side.

Likewise, if teachers have a positive view on parental involvement, the collaboration between parents and teachers can be successfully achieved. Barge & Loges (2003) found that primary school teacher’s perception on high Socio-economic Status (SES) parents is active the form of financial and academic contribution (such as volunteering as teachers in the classroom). High SES parents according to Barge & Loges (2003) are more concern on their children’s academic achievement by frequently enquiring teachers on their children’s progress in school.

In an interview conducted by Lawson (2003) on 12 primary school teachers and 13 parents regarding the perception towards parental involvement, it was found that both parents and teachers have different perceptions. The study reveals that parents are unaware of their functions in school and teachers are autonomous in deciding. Teachers on the other hand seem to think that parents refuse to get involve academically in school.

Parental involvement in school to improve academic achievement is slowly introduced in Malaysia. Various studies in this country revealed that teachers are aware of the importance of involving parents in education. Most teachers agree that involving parents is crucial to enhance the students’ academic achievement (Che Noraini and Naima, 2006).

Most parents in Malaysia play the role of educating their children only at home. Wee (2002) found that teacher’s perception on parental involvement in school is limited to home learning activities (Type 4) and school governance (Type 5). It was also found that the practices of parental involvement in primary schools in the district of Petaling are in the form of informal teaching at home and communication with school. Majority of teachers in Malaysia however, agree less on the idea of parents volunteering to teach in the classroom and to share equal responsibility in decision making and school governance (Fatin, 2006).

Methodology

This is a quantitative study that employed a survey methodology to gather data and information pertaining to parental involvement in primary schools. Samples consist of 60 respondents from a high achieving school in Malaysia. The school was chosen for its active effort in encouraging parents to participate in school activities. Non-random convenient sampling is used in selecting the respondents.

The instrument used in this study was constructed based on Epstein’s Parental Involvement Model (1995; 1992; 1987) and was pilot tested for validity achieving the alpha value of .9444. There are 3 sections in the questionnaire with the total of 50 questions. Section A consists of 10 questions on demography of the respondents. Section B consists of 20 questions examining the aspect of parental involvement favoured by primary school teachers while...
section C consists of 20 questions to identify the type of parental involvement favoured by parents from the teachers’ view.

The independent variables used are the six parental involvements listed by Epstein (1995; 1992; 1987) in the Parental Involvement Model. The independent variable is the teacher’s perception on parental involvement in enhancing student’s academic achievement.

![Diagram 1: Theoretical Framework](image)

Data received were processed using SPSS for Windows version 13.0. As this study is descriptive in nature, descriptive statistics using indices like frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations are used to analyse the data.

**Findings and Discussion**

**Parental Involvement Favoured by Primary School Teachers**

The findings in Table 1 showed that only few types of parental involvement favoured by primary school teachers. Findings also indicate that the school did not organise many activities to involve parents directly in school academically for the activities favoured by teachers are activities that can be conducted at home and in the aspect of communication.

1. Type 4 home involvement practice, which is parental involvement in the children’s home learning activities, dominates high as the involvement favoured by primary school teachers. The findings indicated that the teachers are more comfortable if parents are involved in their children’s education via home-based learning activities.

2. Type 2 communication practice is also another popular type of involvement favoured by teachers in the school. A variety of communication tools, such as telephones, letters and newsletters were used by the school to communicate with parents. The schools contact with parents were mostly pertaining to the difficulty faced by children in their studies and classroom disruptions, rather than informing parents of their children’s success or soliciting parents to be involved in the children’s learning activities.
However, the other four types of school practices, which are School Governance (Type 5), Collaboration (Type 6), Volunteering (Type 3) and Parenting (Type 1), were least favoured by the teachers. Type 3 volunteering was limited to school support activities such as sports day, PTA meetings but not in classroom instructional activities. Most respondents stated that it would be time constraining to involve parents in classroom teaching especially in trying to cover the syllabus on time. However, the least favoured activity identified is type 1, parenting.

Overall, Type 4 home involvement was the most favoured parental activity carried out in the school. Type 3 volunteering; type 5 school governance and Type 1 parenting practice were less popularly favoured by respondents.

Parents restrained from parental involvement in Type 5 school governance and Type 3 volunteering supported Seeley’s (1989) and Swap’s (1990) findings. Both Seeley and Swap found that most teachers refused to encourage direct parental involvement in school for the reason that school especially classroom is the teachers’ territory. The involvement of parents in instructional learning may result to obstruction of lesson being taught. Malaysia practices a centralised education system where the governance is top-down. Perhaps, this may be one of the indicators for the minimal support and low involvement of parents in the children’s learning activities in the school examined. Teachers would be putting more effort if there is a black and white instruction from the Ministry of Education (MOE).

Table 1: Types of Parental Involvement Favoured by Primary School Teachers Type of parental Involvement Favoured by Parents from the Teachers’ View

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>S.D.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Type 1: Parenting</td>
<td>1.76</td>
<td>.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type 2: Communication</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type 3: Volunteering</td>
<td>2.07</td>
<td>.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type 4: Home Involvement</td>
<td>3.25</td>
<td>.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type 5: School governance</td>
<td>2.60</td>
<td>.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type 6: Community Collaboration</td>
<td>2.41</td>
<td>.74</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Teacher’s Perception on the Type of Parental Involvement Favoured by Parents

Majority of respondents view that parents favoured direct involvement with their children. Among the six types of parental involvement, teachers view parenting as the type of involvement most favoured by parents (mean = 3.69, s.d. = .75); followed by type 2 communication (mean = 3.55, s.d.= .79); type 4 home involvement activities (mean = 3.47, s.d.= .74), type 3 volunteering (mean = 3.33, s.d.= .75) and type 6 community collaboration (mean = 3.39, s.d.=.81). The lowest perception is at the aspect of school governance (mean = 3.10, s.d.= .79).
Table 2: Teacher’s Perception on the Type of Parental Involvement Favoured by Parents

<table>
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<th>Variable</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Type 1: Parenting</td>
<td>3.69</td>
<td>.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type 2: Communication</td>
<td>3.55</td>
<td>.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type 3: Volunteering</td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td>.75</td>
</tr>
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<td>.74</td>
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<tr>
<td>Type 6: Community Collaboration</td>
<td>3.39</td>
<td>.81</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Type 1 parenting is viewed by teachers as the most favourable type of involvement for it relates to moral, discipline and material support provided by parents in their children’s learning. Perhaps the willingness of parents to attend sports day, donate money for school activities, attend PTA meetings affects the teachers’ choice. Teachers frequently meet parents during these events thus forming their mindset that parents are willing to cooperate in these aspects of involvement.

Findings also indicated teachers agree that communication aspects are one of the elements emphasised by parents. This shows that communication occurs between teachers and school administrators. It also suggests that parents require frequent feedback from teachers regarding their children’s performance while teachers have realised the importance of forming a positive relationship with the school. The lowest perception on parental involvement favoured by parents according to teachers is school governance. Perhaps this occurs because teachers feel that having parents to share decision with will only contribute to more problems than giving benefits. Teachers view the school as their territory with freedom to decide on what is best for their students (Lee & Bowen, 2006).

This findings contradict with the research conducted by Sharifah Zuraimah (2001) and Wee (2002). Sharifah Zuraimah (2001) in her study found that teachers chose communication as the type of involvement favoured by parents (mean = 3.17). Findings differs where in this study, communication is viewed as the second favoured involvement. Home involvement according to teachers is the most preferred type of parental involvement in the research conducted by Wee (2002). However, it can be concluded that teachers in most studies regards communication as among the highest type of parental involvement favoured by parents (highest in Sharifah Zuraimah (2001); second highest in Wee (2002), second highest in this study).

**Implications and Recommendations**

Based on the findings, the following suggestions are recommended to encourage the involvement of parents in improving pupils’ academic achievement.

**For Schools**

- Schools need to actively initiate activities to encourage and solicit parents to get involved in academic activities in schools. Parental involvement should not be restricted only in
home-based, financial and physical activities. Initiatives should be taken by headmasters and teachers in finding the suitable activities for parents to participate actively.

- Parents should be recognized as partners to the teachers. This will provide an advantage for both parents and teachers because teachers do not have access of what is happening at home while parents have limited access in school. Collaboration between both parties would result to various benefits. This collaboration can be done by improving the networking systems between both parties via technologies such as e-mails and websites. Besides that, school can also organize community outreach programmes to encourage more parental participation. Community outreach programmes are also an excellent way to get families, communities, corporate agencies and NGOs to get involve.

**For Teacher Education Programmes**

- The absence of family involvement training in Malaysian teacher training curriculum has resulted in teachers being unaware of such partnership with parents and ignorant to the idea of enhancing students’ academic performance through parental involvement in school. Thus a curricular that trained teachers and beginning teachers is needed to introduce, expose and provide information, knowledge, skills, and technologies on how to tap parents’ potentials and involve them in the children’s learning process (Wee, 2002)

**For Ministry of Education**

- Parental involvements in Malaysian schools are only seen financially and physically. Perhaps the Ministry of Education could develop a policy framework to support primary schools in their efforts to reach out to families and communities in the Malaysian education system. More academic partnership should be encouraged in schools especially in primary schools.

**Conclusion**

The education system should encourage all schools to promote and adopt the idea of parental involvement in their school for the purpose of improving academic achievement. A successful involvement would not be possible if schools in particularly headmasters are not open to the idea, and teachers being territorial. Ministry of Education needs to develop new curriculum to instil awareness that the school operates as an open system that influenced by the external environments and its interrelatedness with the environments.

Any efforts to include parents and families in the children’s education require a paradigm shift in the educators’ and parents’ mindsets and attitudes pertaining to the importance of children’s learning. Families need to be more involved in improving the children’s learning not only at homes but also in the schools’ environments. Parents, teachers, students and communities need to collaborate and committed to enhance the children’s education.
References


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