Attitude of Non-Chinese Parents Towards Parental Involvement in Chinese Primary Schools

Mariani Md Nor\textsuperscript{1}, Fonny Hutagalung\textsuperscript{2}, Low Lai Har\textsuperscript{3}, Zulkifli Md Isa\textsuperscript{4}

\textsuperscript{1,2,3,4}Department of Educational Psychology, Faculty of Education, University of Malaya, 50603, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

The purpose of this study was to examine the attitudes of parents and barriers to parental involvement as perceived by non-Chinese parents of students in standard one and standard two who are studying in Chinese primary schools in Ipoh, Perak. A total of 143 non-Chinese parents from nine selected Chinese primary school in Ipoh, Perak, participated in this survey. Quantitative research method was used in this study. Survey questionnaire was designed to gather data about the demographic information of the parents; the attitude of parents towards parental involvement and their perceptions of barriers to parent involvement. The two instruments used in this study were modified adaptations of two self-administered survey instruments originally designed by Epstein and Salinas (1993) and Gettinger and Guetschow (1998) The finding indicated positive attitude of non-Chinese parents towards parental involvement in targeted Chinese primary schools. The t-test results indicated that the two groups of parents were not statistically different in connection with the barriers to parental involvement. The finding of this study has offered a viable insight to improve the involvement of non-Chinese parents in Chinese primary schools.

Keywords: Parental Involvement, Chinese Primary Schools

1. INTRODUCTION

Parental involvement has been established as active partnerships between parents and teachers in which to gear towards better achievement of students. Both teachers and parents must be encouraged to provide greater support in helping children’s learning and development. Thus, the school administration and teachers should be made aware of the barriers facing by parents from different backgrounds so that the collaboration between parents and teacher can be more effective and positive.

The significance of parental involvement is further demonstrated in the role that Malaysia government has played in this matter. Family and community involvement in children education has been emphasized as one of the main focuses as outlined in the Malaysia Education Blueprint (PPPM) 2013-2015 which was launched by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak, the blueprint aims to strengthen the quality of Malaysia’s education system to greater heights, in the hope of enabling every child to reach their academic potential.

In view of the unique multi-racial environment in Malaysia, this research takes one notch up to explore specifically the parental involvement of non-Chinese parents who send their children to Chinese primary schools. The research aims to identify the attitudes and barriers that non-Chinese parents face in the process. Even though the Malaysian government has stepped in to increase parental involvement and engagement in their efforts to improve children academic achievements, the involvement ambiguity faced by non-Chinese parents who send their children to Chinese schools will remain until the barriers are addressed. This research seeks to ascertain the views and attitudes of non-Chinese parents who send their children to Chinese primary schools towards parental involvement. This research is focused
on non-Chinese parents of students in standard one and standard two who are studying in Chinese primary schools in Ipoh, Perak, Malaysia. This study aims to contribute to the identification of parents' attitude towards parental involvement, and to determine the parents' barriers as well as to uncover opportunities for the improvement of parental involvement.

2. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The general objective of this study is to identify parental involvement among non-Chinese parents in Chinese schools in Malaysia. The general objective is further narrowed to determine the specific objectives. Thus, the specific objectives are as follow:

1. To identify the demographic factor of non-Chinese parents towards parental involvement in Chinese primary schools.
2. To identify attitude of non-Chinese parents towards parental involvement in Chinese primary schools.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study is designed to examine the attitudes of non-Chinese parents and the barriers to parental involvement as perceived by those parents who enrolled their children in Chinese primary schools in Malaysia. The research utilized a quantitative research design, which includes descriptive data analysis methods. The population of this study included non-Chinese parents residing in Malaysia, who have a child in standard one or standard two in Chinese primary schools. From this population, the study involved 170 parents as participants. These participants were selected from parents with children in nine Chinese primary schools. Parents who decided voluntarily to participate responded to the survey.

A convenience sampling method was used to select the sample population. This sampling method was used for the following reasons: (a) non-random method of samplings, purposes of the study, and (b) samplings utilized people with knowledge regarding the purpose of this study. The parent sampling targeted non-Chinese parents of students at the selected Chinese primary schools with children in standard one and standard two.

The two instruments used in this study by Epstein and Salinas (1993) and Gettinger and Guetschow (1998). The survey questionnaire was divided into 3 sections and the questionnaire was bilingual that included English and Malay language (Appendix E). The first section of survey questions consisted of demographic factors and general information about parents. The demographics of the parent sample included: (a) race, (b) age, (c) education background, (d) proficiency in Chinese language, (e) students’ preschool Chinese learning experiences, (f) private tuition, (g) total number of children and (h) number of children in this school.

The second section of survey, entitled School and Family Partnerships: Parent Questionnaire. These surveys were designed to generate a synopsis of school and family relationships as perceived by parents (Epstein & Salinas, 1993). The survey was designed to obtain information about parent’ attitudes and perceptions of their involvement in their children’s education regarding parental involvement.

4. FINDINGS

Frequency and percentage distributions were used to analyze the demographic information. The demographics of the sample parents include: (a) race, (b) age, (c) education background, (d) proficiency in Chinese language, (e) students’ preschool Chinese learning experiences, (f) private tuition, (g) total number of children and (h) number of children in a particular school. The result of the data shows that 143 parents of standard one students and standard two who participated in the study, 51% of them were parents of standard one students and 49% of them were parents of standard two students. According to the data shown in Table 1, 63.6% of the mothers filled in the survey forms whereas only 36.4% of the fathers did so. In addition, 68.5% of the parents identified themselves as Malay. In relation to the highest level of education of parents’, the result indicates that 51.0% of the parents completed secondary school. Based on the data presented, 85.3% of the parents do not have proficiency in Chinese language. The data also shows that majority of the parents (87.4%) reported that their children learnt Chinese language in preschool. Table 1 indicates that majority of the parents (79.0%) sent their children for tuition. Participants were requested to indicate the number of children they have. It reflects that most participants have two children (35.7%).

Table 1. Experimental Results of Uniform Random-3-SAT Benchmark Instances.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grades of children</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard 1</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>51.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard 2</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>49.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>36.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>63.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malay</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>68.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>21.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The finding also revealed that positive attitudes towards the schools and beliefs in them were shown by 143 parents, with an average mean of 3.69. Majority of the parents (M=4.18, SD=.624) agreed that their children are attending good schools and such schools are considered the best schools for them as well as for their children. (M=4.06, SD=.753). In addition their children are learning as much as they could in the sample schools (M=4.06, SD=.603). Besides that, most of the parents perceived that the community supports the schools. (M=4.02, SD=.611). Most of the parents (M=4.01, SD=.639) agreed that teachers are caring and they are concerned about their child. The participants (M=3.97, SD=.654) also specified that the sample schools do have active and effective parent organizations (i.e., PTA Parent Teacher Association). Parents (M=3.93, SD=.738) perceived that they feel welcome at school and they (M=3.92, SD=.751) and their children talk about school at home, the schools consider parents as important partners (M=3.60, SD=.847). Apart from that, parents (M=3.57, SD=.818) also agreed that new programmers are known to be tried out by these schools. Interestingly, parents (M=3.48, SD=.956) consented to their children receiving more homework, and they (M=3.64, SD=.900) believed that they could help their children in Math. However, many of the parents (M=2.46, SD=1.221) disagreed with the statement that they could help their children with reading Chinese. Most of the parents (M=3.93, SD=.811) believed that they were able to assist their children more effectively if the teacher could share more ideas with them. Parents (M=3.23, SD=.845) slightly disagreed with the statement that many parents help out at schools and they (M=2.9, SD=1.118) slightly disagreed that schools and families have different goals for their charge. As reflected in the results, the perceptions of most of the non-Chinese parents towards parental involvement in Chinese primary schools were positive. They value the importance of parental involvement in their children’s education. What is noteworthy is that majority of the parents reported that they had not been able to help their child with reading Chinese.

5. DISCUSSION

The results of the study showed, on average, parents showed positive attitude and they valued the importance of involvement in their children's education. According to Epstein (2008), students who succeeded in all school levels are always supported by their families. The finding from 143 non-Chinese parent participants revealed their positive attitude to schools and belief in them. Almost all the parents agreed that the schools are good ones and they are the best schools for their children as well as for them. Majority of the parents agreed that teachers cared about their children and they also believed that their children had learnt as much as they could at school. The finding from this study also showed that targeted parents were supportive and they agreed to most of the statements in the survey which showed a direct correlation between the school climate and their involvement. Previous research by Risko, Walker-Dalhous (2009), supported the finding that parents show higher rates of involvement in children’s education when they have perceptions that their children’s school provides high quality education and positive school climate.

Supported research believed that in a healthy learning environment, parents take the initiative in talking with their children about learning both at school and at home, promoting positive learning habits and encouraging effective verbal communication (Jeynes, 2010). Similarly, Khajehpour & Ghazvini (2011) found that children had performed better and had better grades, if parents involved in home-type involvement such as talking with children about school, lessons and activities. The present study indicated that majority of the parents agreed to the statement which said that their children talked about school at home. This finding also translated the positive attitude of parents as they took initiative and assumed responsibility to involve themselves in their children’s learning process.

Most of the parents were capable of helping their children in Math (M=3.64, SD=.900). On the other hand, parents (M=2.46, SD=.956) were quite lacking in helping their children in reading Chinese as they (85.3%) do not have the required Chinese language proficiency, hence most of them faced problems in their children’s schoolwork. This is in line with the previous research which claimed that parents might be facing difficulties to get involved in their children’s learning as they had
problems with targeted language proficiency (Van Velsor & Orozco, 2007). However, the demographic information of the parents (87.4%) showed their positive attitude towards parental involvement. An interesting point that worth to be noted is that the participants had already exposed their children to Chinese language before the children started their formal schooling.

A research finding from Tan et al. (2012), indicated that there is a lack of inputs from non-Chinese parents in their children’s learning. This is due to not many parents in the sample studied sent their children for private tuition though their children were having difficulties in learning Chinese language as a second language, the same language is also used as medium of instructions in schools. Similarly, Nazri (2013) reported that besides teachers, parents should undisputedly play more important role in their children’s multilingualism in Malaysia society. In contrast, the finding in the present study showed that 79% of the targeted parents sent their children for private tuition to support their children’s second language acquisition and most of them were aware of the fact that they do not have Chinese language proficiency to assist their children with their homework. Finding from this study shows that the non-Chinese parents are supportive in their child’s second language learning. This finding is similar to those of Hong (2006) who suggested that if a child is given full support and encouraged by the parents to learn the second language, then it will be easier for the child to master the second language or even third language.

Data gathered in this study reflected that 23.8% of the parents strongly agreed whereas 50.3% of the parents agreed that they were able to help their children more effectively if more ideas were given by teachers. This is in parallel with the work of Jeynes (2007) who claimed that schools and society always aim to foster effective parental involvement among parents but at the same time schools need to recognize that parents need guidance on how to support their children’s learning. The findings of the present study show that many parents do not know how to get involved in their children’s education. These parents need the school staff to show them how to help their children improve their academic performance. The findings are supported by Epstein and Jansorn (2004) who claimed that to encourage involvement, schools must provide family members with encouragement and direction. According to his theory, the development of children is affected by factors within the child and also by their family and surrounding world.

Findings also shared that the attitudes of non-Chinese parents were positive. The results reflected the fact that parents feel comfortable with the school climate and they do not have problem communicating with teachers or getting involved in school activities. These findings were similar to those of Henderson et al. (2007), who claimed that parents are most likely become actively involved in their child’s education if they feel welcome and respected by educators. However, the parents in this study perceived that they were not well-equipped to contribute to the learning of their children as Chinese language is the medium of instructions in schools. Nevertheless, they had taken initiative to expose their children to Chinese language in preschool before their children started formal schooling. Apart from that, many concerned parents chose to send their children for private tuition as an alternative to support their children’s learning.

**REFERENCES**


