Parental involvement in students’ academic achievement: A preliminary study

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ABSTRACT: The objective of this research is to provide information on what teachers think regarding parents playing a role in educating their children, to find out the teachers’ perception and parents’ response on how much time is spent by the parents in helping their children academically and to finding out how the teachers of this school perceive parental help in assisting them (the teachers) improve the students academically. The research method used for this study is the quantitative method involving both parents and teachers. The quantitative method uses a questionnaire which will be distributed to 150 respondents in schools of similar academic performance. The questionnaire for this research was adapted by using this questionnaire from Teachers Involving Parents (TIP) in service program, as reported Hoover-Dempsey, Walker, Jones & Reed (2002) and Teacher Beliefs About Parental Involvement: reported in Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2002); adapted from Epstein, Salinas & Horsey, 1994.

Keywords: parental involvement; academic achievement

1 INTRODUCTION

In today’s world, education is very vital and almost every parent’s wish is to ensure their off-springs excel in their education. As early as the 1980s, parental involvement in schools has somehow become a core educational issue. Various concerned parties began to show concern about the quality of education received by their children. According to Cotton (2009), parents want their children to get adequate knowledge to lead successful future lives.

Parents, being the locus of a family, play an important role in the social and cognitive development of their child. Basically, by placing high expectations on their child, they try very much to meet their child’s needs and demands throughout the process of development. Needless to say, parents also place great importance on their child’s academic achievement as well and this phenomena is not something new (Miretzky, 2004).

Parental involvement in the lives of children is definitely not a new concept. For decades, there have been countless opinions regarding parental involvement and today in the 21st century, proactive parents are considered to be a vital component of education by all—meaning the teachers, administrators and society. The importance of parental involvement in schools is well documented with over 30 years of research which showed that one of the most effective approaches to enhance student achievement is for parents to be actively involved in the education of their children (Judith, 2004).

In short, it clearly shows that there are needs to study the relationship between the parental involvement in children’s school work and children’s academic success. The reason being the western countries such as America and Britain already have research that shows positive effect of parental involvement towards students’ academic achievement (Henderson & Berla, 1994). Based on this, studies on this issue need to be carried out in Malaysia, as Malaysia is a developing nation and parents are still unclear of their role in involving themselves in guiding their children academically. Majority of the Malaysian parents mostly have minimum level of involvement. A lot of parents in Malaysia place the responsibility to teach their children upon the teachers. On top of that, Malaysian parents feel that by sending their children to school and providing them with pocket money is enough to make them believe that they have fulfilled their duty and responsibility as parents (Kertas Kerja Kajian Sistem Pendidikan Kebangsaan, 2005).

The objective of this research is to provide information on what teachers think regarding parents playing a role in educating their children and also to find out the teacher’s perception and parents’ response on how much time is spent by the parents in helping their children academically. Besides that,
this research also to find out how the teachers perceive parental help in assisting them (the teachers) improve academically.

2 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Both school and home are traditionally seen as two differing systems with roles and responsibilities which are totally different in educating children (Marti & The Conjoint Behavioral Consultation (CBC) Research Group, 2000). It is a totally different scenario now as schools cannot exist independently because it involves many parties which include students, teachers, parents and last but not least society. Hence, both these two institutions should collaboratively work hand-in-hand in ensuring the students get the best deal in education.

Our former Education Minister, Dato’ Seri Hishamuddin Tun Hussein Onn (2004), has stated that there has to be cooperation between the three main parties that is parents, school and society in handling the discipline problem which is drastically on the rise. Apart from helping to curb discipline problem, parents can play an effective role in increasing the academic achievement of students (Rosenthal & Sawyers, 2006). They also found that by working together, both parents and teachers can achieve positive results rather than working alone.

Parental involvement should not only be confined to Parent/Teachers Association or also known as PTA activities but also be invited to involve themselves in classroom activities if they are able to do so. The school sector (Bahagian Sekolah) of the Ministry of Education in Malaysia (2008) reported that more than 95,000 primary school students had problems in reading, writing and counting which the basic skills a child should have. This problem might be able to be solved if the school allows parents to be involved. In the West, importance is given to children even in the kindergarten level where parents are much involved. Nord (2001) says children benefit a lot if parents are involved in their education from the beginning. This includes academic benefits where children are able to read, write and count fast if the parents are very active in school programs (Faires et al., 2000)

Razi (1998) in his study finds that parental involvement in Malaysian schools is given less emphasis as schools are regarded as exclusive domains which are solely under the teachers’ jurisdiction. Many Malaysian parents still entrust the responsibility of educating their children wholly to the school authorities without realizing the importance of their presence in aiding the school achieve their objectives, mainly academically. Hence, there is a large number of parents who are still in the dark about how they can be involved in school activities (Razak, 2002).

The most accurate predictor of the students’ achievement in school is not the income or the social status, but the extent to which families are able to create a home environment that supports learning, communicates high and reasonable expectations for their children’s achievement and becomes involved in their children’s school (Henderson and Berla (1994). Thus, parental involvement is very essential in the children’s educational and academic success.

However, it is still a sad situation in Malaysia, as parental involvement in children’s education is still at the minimum level. A lot of parents almost fully trust and place the responsibility to teach their children and ensure their children’s education upon the teachers. Besides that, they think that by sending their children to school and providing money when needed is enough to make them believe that they have fulfilled their responsibilities as parents (Kertas Kerja Kajian Sistem Pendidikan Kebangsaan, 2005).

Furthermore, according to Faridah et al. (2005), in Malaysia, the reason why the students’ results are poor is because of their parents and families who give less support in their education, lack of supervision in the students’ improvement in schools, not checking the students’ homework and pass the hassle of assisting the children’s homework to the older siblings. Therefore, it is clearly showed that parental involvement plays an important role in the children’s education and Malaysian’s parental involvement in children’s education still needs to be improved.

Hence, parental involvement has become a core issue when we talk about education as a whole. In Malaysia, education is of utmost importance as it is a developing country which needs high caliber human capital to push forth the development of the country. This is where the parents’ role come in. Parents now besides being the breadwinners have to play the role of educators as well and this task cannot be pushed to other parties for example grandparents, uncles, aunties, babysitters or most importantly, the maids. Hence parental guidance is the crux of this matter as it is widely believed that with strong support from their parents, children will be heading in the right direction academically, socially and psychologically. Based on this fact, there is a crucial need for further research to be done to raise the awareness among the teachers, parents, students and community as a whole on the importance of the students’ outcome based on the role parents play.

However, far too little attention has been paid to the issue of parental involvement as major factor to student’s achievement especially in the lower secondary level in our country. To be more specific, there has been very little research on educa-
tional issues among the various ethnic groups. In fact, the emphasis on Malaysian students and their academic achievement can only be seen in small areas of research. Thus, more research on this aspect has to be conducted on the role parents play on the welfare of students and their achievement in education. This research is hoped to enlighten teachers and parents generally on the fact that they can work collaboratively in aiding the students to be the best academically, socially and emotionally. Teachers are still unaware that parents can play a positive role in aiding them to educate the students. On the other hand, parents are still in the dark as to how they can partake in helping their children do academically better (Razak, 2005).

This study aims to ascertain and highlight the limited parent related activities pertaining to their children’s achievement. In addition, it will also delve into teachers’ perception towards parental role in educating and grooming their children towards good academic achievement. Hence, this chapter reviews the literature revolving parental involvement. In accordance/sync with this, parental involvement’ concept will be defined and studies related to the effectiveness and varying ways of parental involvement will be examined.

This particular topic has received much attention in recent decades as numerous school-improvement efforts have sought to improve student learning. Many researches have reported that parental involvement, including involvement in student homework, is related to student achievement and personal attributes conducive to achievement (e.g., self-regulation, perceptions of academic competence Delgado-Gaitan, 1992; Grolnick & Slowiaczek, 1994; Xu & Corno, 1998).

Parent involvement at home is often more difficult to understand but is defined as “parents initiating learning activities at home to improve their children’s performance in school” (Tinkler, 2002, p.6). It includes parents helping with homework, discussing school with their child, playing games, reading with their child, going to the library, visiting a museum, and getting their child to help with cooking, sharing the day-to-day events, to name a few (Tinkler, 2002).

It is a known fact that parental involvement is a valuable component of any student’s education and it is a well-established phenomenon that parental involvement is linked to children’s success at school. When parents are involved in their children’s education at home, they do better in school. (Henderson and Berla, 1999). The level of parent–school involvement is a better predictor of grades than standardized test scores. (Desimone, 1999).

This study aims to find out what the teachers perceive of the parental involvement in students’ academic achievement in this particular school. It hopes to provide information about the role parents play in educating their children academically. Throughout this research, a lot of benefits had been figured out for the students of this school. Parental guidance does not only help the students emotionally, it also helps them perform better in their studies, thus enhancing their academic results. Academic achievement is of importance to students as their tertiary education depends on their school academic results “Students are more excellent in school when their parents get engaged in their education at home.” The children go further in school and the school they go to are better when parents get involved in school”. A New Generation of Evidence: The Family is Critical to Student Achievement (Henderson & Berla, 1994). The importance of parental involvement in schools is well documented with over 30 years of research which showed that one of the most effective approaches to enhance student achievement is for parents to be actively involved in the education of their children (Judith, 2004).

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In general, parental involvement is defined by two categories that is parental involvement at home and parental involvement at school (Sheldon, 2002). Parent involvement at school is defined as activities done at school or for school such as parent teacher conferences, communicating with the teacher, attending PTA meetings and volunteering at school (Hill & Taylor, 2004).

Why do parents need to be involved in children’s homework? The three major reasons are they believe that their involvement will make a positive difference, and they perceive invitations to involvement (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995, 1997). Parents appear to become involved in their children’s homework also because they believe their activities will make a positive difference for the child (e.g., Bandura, 1997; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). Self-efficacy theory suggests that parents’ behavioral choices are guided in part by the outcomes they expect to follow their actions; the stronger the perceived self-efficacy for a task (e.g., helping with homework), the higher the goals they are likely to achieve and the greater the persistence they are likely to exhibit in reaching those goals (Bandura, 1997).
Parental involvement in their child's education has been linked to increased levels of academic performance in the classroom (Angelides, Theophanous, & Leigh, 2006; Bobetsky, 2003; Christenson & Hurley, 1997; Epstein, 1995; Fantuzzo, McWayne, & Perry, 2004; Watkins, 1997; Parker, Boak, Griffin, Ripple, & Peay, 1999; Patrikakou, 1997, 2004). According to Patrikakou (2004), increased levels of parental expectations for high academic achievement led to increased student achievement, as well as an increase in the amount of time spent completing homework outside of the classroom.

Monitoring children's homework has been shown to enhance academic achievement (Ballen & Moles, 1994). It is unnecessary for the parents to know all of the answers. Instead, it is far more essential for them to express their interest by providing a quiet and comfortable place for their children to do the homework, by encouraging children's efforts, by being available for questions, and by willing to discuss material the child is learning (Ballen & Moles, 1994). Furthermore, according to Reinsch and Wambgsanss (1994) in Patel (2006), current research indicates that homework completion has a positive effect on students' progress in class. Looking more closely at this research, there are strong indications that portray the most effective forms of parents' involvement as those which engage the parents to work directly with their children in learning activities in the home. Programs which involve parents in readings with their children, supporting their work on homework assignments, or guiding them using materials and instructions provided by teachers, resulted in noticeable and impressive results.

According to Beavers and Dewberry (2002), most students believe that their parents are at least somewhat involved, but do not want them to become more involved. However, according to Bargheto and Ronald (2001) in Beavers and Dewberry (2002), stated “students do not want parents that are ‘always around’ but take comfort in the fact that their parents are ‘always around’ is but one paradoxical and often tumultuous landscape that is middle school.” For students that are in this confusing and difficult stage in their development, parents are needed more than ever.

Studies find that children do better in school when their parents set aside time each day for their children to study. High but realistic standards set for the children positively lead them in the right direction. Parents of good learners also place importance on verbal interaction; they question their children to prompt further thought and expression, they challenge them to use new words, and they expect them to speak with precision. Families with high expectations for their children's school academic performance also provide consistent guidance and support for schooling. They are aware of their children's progress and interested in the academic route their children need to follow. Also researchers find that a strong work ethic contributes to success in school. Also important is a family attitude that accomplishments result from effort rather than innate ability or 'playing the system'. Further, on the social level, children benefit when their parents are attentive to their whereabouts, know their friends, monitor their tele viewing, and maintain contact with their teachers. It has been increasingly recognized in the fields of education and psychology that parents have significant impacts on students' learning and developmental processes.

3 RESEARCH METHODS

The research design used for this study is the quantitative method involving both parents and teachers. The quantitative method uses a questionnaire which will be distributed to 150 respondents in schools of similar academic performance. The respondents will be given a grace period of two weeks to give their response. Triangulation, on the other hand, will include interviewing parents and students respectively. In this study, the manipulated variable is parental involvement and the dependent variable is the achievement of the students.

4 PILOT STUDY

This pilot study was carried out in September 2014 and the sample of the study were teachers of one school in Subang Jaya District, Kuala Lumpur. The samples were 30 teachers inclusive of both genders, ranging from the age group of 25 to 60 years old. They were also a mix of different ethnic groups mainly Malay, Chinese and Indians. These subjects were selected as they are from the same school and the retrieving of the questionnaires will be easily handled.

The group of teachers selected also in Subang Jaya District, Kuala Lumpur where the researcher is attached to as an English teacher and has been there for the past twelve years. This group of teachers consists of 6 males and 24 females. Besides teachers, the respondents also include parents and guardians of Form 2 students of this particular school.

5 SUMMARY

Parents, being the locus of a family, play an important role in the social and cognitive development of their child. Basically, by placing high expectations on their child, they try very much to meet their child's needs and demands throughout the process of development.
REFERENCES


