

**RURAL PARENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR INVOLVEMENT IN
THEIR CHILDREN'S EDUCATION: A STUDY AMONG THE SA'BAN
COMMUNITY WITHIN THE PUNANG KELAPANG REGION OF
ULU BARAM**

by

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Abstract

Rural parents' perceptions of their involvement in their children's education: A study among the Sa'ban community within the Punang Kelapang region of Ulu Baram

Expanding the involvement of parents in their children has been viewed as an important strategy to advance the effectiveness and improve the quality of education. The ultimate objective of increasing the involvement of parents in children's education is to expand the social and cognitive capabilities of children. Apparently, research carried out on parental involvement have indicated a distinct variation to occur mainly in the level of involvement and this variation seemed to be chiefly influenced by the socio-economic position and ethnic background of parents. Generally, parents from low socio-economic position and minority groups indicate low level of involvement in their children's education because they are faced with various obstacles such as lack of time, lack of financial support, lack of knowledge and skills, do not know how to become involved and underrepresented. This study investigated the perceptions of Sa'ban parents, a rural community of the Punang Kelapang, towards their involvement in their children's education. Twenty-four parents (twelve couples) with school-going children were selected and interviewed for this study. Qualitative analysis of the results indicated that the Sa'ban parents perceived the necessity of their involvement but their concern with making a living and lack of education prevented them from bringing their concerns about their children's education to the teachers. Their involvement took the form of parenting, learning at home, communicating, volunteering, collaborating with the community and making decision. Results are discussed in relation to the patterns of involvement activities reported by the parents and implications for intervention in enhancing parents' involvement process.

Abstrak

Persepsi ibubapa dari kawasan pedalaman tentang penglibatan mereka dalam pendidikan kanak-kanak: Sebuah kajian dikalangan kaum Sa'ban di kawasan Punang Kelapang, Ulu Baram

Meningkatkan penglibatan ibubapa dalam pendidikan kanak-kanak dianggap sebagai langkah penting untuk memperbaiki dan memajukan mutu pendidikan. Tujuan khas peningkatan penglibatan ibubapa dalam pendidikan kanak-kanak adalah untuk mengembangkan kemampuan sosial dan kognitif kanak-kanak. Hasil kajian didapati bahawa tahap penglibatan ibubapa dalam pendidikan kanak-kanak berbeza dan faktor utama yang mempengaruhi perbezaan ini adalah kedudukan sosio-ekonomi dan latarbelakang etnik ibubapa. Secara amnya, ibubapa dari kaum minoriti dan berlatarbelakangkan sosio-ekonomi yang rendah menunjukkan penglibatan yang kurang kerana mereka menghadapi pelbagai halangan seperti kekurangan masa, kemahiran dan ilmu pengetahuan, pengetahuan tentang cara untuk melibatkan diri, kemampuan untuk bersuara dan masalah kewangan. Kajian ini mengkaji persepsi ibubapa dari suku kaum Sa'ban di kawasan pedalaman Punang Kelapang, Ulu Baram, mengenai penglibatan mereka dalam pendidikan anak-anak. Dua belas pasangan ibubapa yang mempunyai anak yang sedang menuntut di sekolah telah dipilih dan ditemuduga dalam kajian ini. Hasil analisa kualitatif yang dibuat didapati bahawa ibubapa menyedari kepentingan penglibatan mereka dalam pendidikan kanak-kanak tetapi kerunsingan dalam mencari nafkah kehidupan dan kekurangan pendidikan telah menghalang penglibatan mereka. Penglibatan mereka dalam pendidikan kanak-kanak adalah seperti mendidik, berkomunikasi, bekerjasama dengan pihak sekolah, bekerjasama dalam komuniti dan membuat keputusan di sekolah. Kajian ini membincangkan corak penglibatan ibubapa dan mencadangkan beberapa alternatif bagi meningkatkan peranan ibubapa di dalam pendidikan anak-anak mereka.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
Abstract	V
Abstrak	VI
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	VII
LIST OF TABLES	XIV
LIST OF FIGURES	XVI
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	XVII

CHAPTER

ONE INTRODUCTION

OVERVIEW ..	1
INTRODUCTION	2
BACKGROUND OF STUDY	2
STATEMENT OF PROBLEM	9
OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY ...	11
RESEACH QUESTIONS	12
SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY	12
DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS	14
SCOPE OF THE STUDY	16
CHAPTER OVERVIEW	17

TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

PREVIEW	.....18
IMPORTANCE OF EDUCATION AND PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT	.....18
PARENTS' ROLES IN THEIR CHILDREN'S EDUCATION	.....21
FACTORS INFLUENCING PARENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR ROLES IN THEIR CHILDREN'S EDUCATION	.....23
EMPERICAL STUDIES RELATED TO FACTORS INFLUENCING PARENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR ROLES AND INVOLVEMENT IN THEIR CHILDREN'S EDUCATION	.....26
SCOPE AND VARIATION OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN THEIR CHILDREN'S EDUCATION	.....30
BARRIERS FACED BY PARENTS IN THEIR INVOLVEMENT IN SCHOOL	.....32
SUMMARY	.....34

THREE RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

INTRODUCTION	.....	.....35
RESEARCH DESIGN	.....	.....36
SAMPLING	.....	.....40
SAMPLES AND THEIR PROFILES	.....	.....42
RESEARCH INSTRUMENT	.....	.....46
THE DEVELOPMENT AND DESCRIPTION OF		
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS	.....	.....47
PILOT STUDY	.....	.....51
DATA COLLECTING PROCEDURE	.....	.....56
DATA ANALYSIS	.....	.....62
LIMITATIONS	.....	.....64
SUMMARY	.....	.....64

FOUR ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

INTRODUCTION	.....	.....66
DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYZING PROCESS	...	...66
ANALYZING AND DISCUSSING THE FINDINGS	...	...67
OBJECTIVE 1	.....	.....68
Result analysis	.....	.....68
Discussion	.....	.....70
OBJECTIVE 2	.....	.....84

<i>Parents' perceptions of their specific involvements in</i>		
<i>parenting</i>	.....	84
Results analysis	.....	84
Discussion	.....	85
<i>Parents' perceptions of their specific involvements in</i>		
<i>learning at home</i>	.....	88
Results analysis	.....	88
Discussion	.....	89
<i>Parents' perceptions of their specific involvements in</i>		
<i>communicating</i>	.....	91
Results analysis	.....	91
Discussion	.....	93
<i>Parents' perceptions of their specific involvements in</i>		
<i>volunteering</i>	.....	98
Results analysis	.....	98
Discussion	.....	99
<i>Parents' perceptions of their specific involvements in</i>		
<i>collaborating with the community</i>	.....	101
Results analysis	.....	101
Discussion	.....	102
<i>Parents' perceptions of their specific involvements in</i>		
<i>making decision</i>	.....	104

Results analysis	.....	104
Discussion	.....	105
OBJECTIVE 3	.....	107
<i>Practical challenges parents perceived they face in their attempt to become involved in their children's education</i>		
Results analysis	.....	107
Discussion	.....	109
<i>Personal challenges parents perceived they face in their attempt to become involved in their children's education</i>		
Results analysis	.....	118
Discussion	.....	119
DISCUSSION OF THE OVERALL FINDINGS	.....	123
RELATIONSHIPS OF THE FINDINGS TO PREVIOUS STUDIES	.....	126
SUMMARY	.....	127

FIVE SUMMARY, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDIES

INTRODUCTION	.....	130
SUMMARY OF THE STUDY	.....	130
IMPLICATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS	.....	132
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDIES	...	135
CONCLUSIONS	.....	137

References	.....	.....	.....139
<i>Appendix 1</i>	.....	.....	.....146
<i>Appendix 2a</i>	.....	.....	.....151
<i>Appendix 2b</i>	.....	.....	.....154
<i>Appendix 3a</i>	.....	.....	.....162
<i>Appendix 3b</i>	.....	.....	.....164
<i>Appendix 4a</i>	.....	.....	.....165
<i>Appendix 4b</i>	.....	.....	.....179
<i>Appendix 5</i>	.....	.....	.....193
<i>Appendix 6</i>	.....	.....	.....194

LIST OF TABLES

	Page
Table 1: Demographic information of informants	43
Table 2: Parents' perceptions of the types of roles they play in their children's education	69
Table 3: Parents' perceptions of their specific involvements in parenting	85
Table 4: Parents' perception of their specific involvements in learning at home	88
Table 5: Parents' perceptions of their specific involvements in communicating to family	91
Table 6: Parents' perceptions of their specific involvements in communicating to the school	93
Table 7: Parents' perceptions of their specific involvements in volunteering for the school	98
Table 8: Parents' perceptions of their specific involvements in volunteering as audience	99
Table 9: Parents' perceptions of their specific involvements in collaborating with the community .	102
Table 10: Parents' perceptions of their specific involvements in making decision	104

Table 11: Parents' perceptions of practical challenges they face in their attempt to become involved in their children's education	108
Table 12: Parents' perceptions of personal challenges they face in their attempt to become involved in their children's education	118

LIST OF FIGURES

	Page
Figure 1: Levels 1 and 2 of Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's revised theoretical model of parental involvement process	24

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ESL English as Second Language

NCLB No Child Left Behind

PIBG Persatuan Ibubapa dan Guru

PTA Parent-Teacher Association

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 OVERVIEW

This chapter, sequentially, discusses the background of the study, statement of the problem, objectives and research questions, significance of the study, definitions of key terms, scope of the study and chapter review. The background of the study involves discussing the importance of parental involvement in children's education, parental roles and involvement in children's education and factors influencing parents' perceptions of their roles and involvement in their children's education. Section on the statement of the problem discusses factors leading to, and in the process highlights, the specific problem that this study is interested to explore. The objectives and research questions outline specific aspects related to the problem that this study sought to investigate in-depth. Subsequently, section on the significance of the study discusses issues that are anticipated to benefits people who are related to this study, particularly parents, teachers and children. Section on the keys terms involves defining keywords which are widely used in this study based on situational context of this study. The scope of the study discusses what this study covers and does not cover. This chapter will end up with a brief summary of what have been discussed and a mention of the proceeding chapter.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Expanding the involvement of parents in the education of their children's education is regarded as one of the most important strategies to advance the effectiveness and improve the quality of education, (Driessen, Smit & Slegers, 2005). The ultimate objective of increasing the involvement of parents in their children's education is to expand the social and cognitive capacities of children. However, many schools find that it is not always easy to get parents actively involved in their children's education whereas most parents claim that they do not know how to become involved in their children's education (Noraini & Naima, 2006). This is particular true for most low socio-economic status and minority groups of parents (Lee & Bowen, 2006), and this situation might be much more critical for rural parents due to the fact of being isolated and far from the center of development.

1.2 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

1.2.1 IMPORTANCE OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN CHILDREN'S EDUCATION

Bakri Musa (2006) in *An Education System Worthy of Malaysia* stated that parental involvement in the school is the best predictor of academic performance. This is to suggest that active involvement of parents in their children's education can increase the academic achievement of their children. Naturally, a child's life starts at home. Thus, basically home is where most learning begins (Noraini & Naima, 2006). As the first person in a child's life, parent is a child's first teacher and closest invaluable resource. Essentially, parents are looked upon as a role model, and thus, play a very influential role in moulding the child's life. The way parents bring up their children influence children's self-esteem and sense of belonging which consequently shape their attitudes and relationships with others (Developmental, 1999).

Parental involvement in children's education has long been associated with a range of enhanced student outcomes including academic achievement and motivation for schoolwork (Clark, 1983; Comer & Haynes, 1991; Grolnick & Slowiaczek, 1994; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Stenberg, Lamborn, Dornbush, & Darling, 1992, cited in Walker, Wilkins, Dallaire, Sandler & Hoover-Dempsey, 2005). Parents who are actively involved in their children's education indicate higher academic achievement and higher motivation in children pursuing their study. Correspondingly, Weiss, Caspe and Lopez (2006) suggest that families who are actively involved in their children's education indicate positive cognitive and social development such as social competence, cognitive development, communication skills, literacy development, vocabulary growth, expressive language, comprehensive skills and positive engagement with peers, adults and learning. In addition, Handerson (1989) argues that when parents are involved, children do better in school than children of similar aptitude and family background whose parents are not involved. This is a very significant finding as it suggests that level of parental involvement in their children can make great difference in terms of children school performance with regard to families of similar characteristics and background or socio-economic status.

As children grow up, parents spend less and less time with them. However, parental influence in the life of their children still remains very strong (Santrock, 1999). Joyce Epstein in her 1992 study conducted in USA found out that students at all grade levels do better in their academic work and have more positive school attitudes, higher aspirations, and other positive behaviors if they have parents who are aware, knowledgeable, encouraging and involved. This indicates that parental involvement, awareness, knowledge and support are very crucial to motivate children in developing positive personal values and in acquisition of academic knowledge regardless of what grade levels they are in. Correspondingly, Jordan, Orozco and Averett (2001) claim that increase parental involvement in children's education indicated improvement to be found for different aspects of the behavior

of pupils, motivation, social competence, relationships between teachers and pupils and relationships among pupils themselves.

1.2.2 PARENTAL ROLES AND INVOLVEMENT IN CHILDREN'S EDUCATION

According to Brito and Waller (1994), parental role is a concept that can mean many different things. It can range from an impersonal visit to the school once a year to frequent parent-teacher consultations to active parents' involvement in school governance. Kelly (1997, cited in Noraini & Naima 2006) suggests that parental involvement in children's schooling can mean reading to children, scheduling daily homework time and checking homework every night, discussing children's school progress with teachers, limiting TV viewing on school nights or, it can be as simple as asking the children, "How was school today?" but asking it every day. On the other hand, parental involvement is described by Epstein, Croates, Salinas, Sanders. and Simon (1997), in a way used by numerous researchers as parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, making decision and collaborating with the community. This description brings to light only the range of possible parental involvement in children's education because in real practice, the situation is quite complicated and influenced by various factors. For instance, Georgiou (1996) asserts that different educational systems and different cultures allow or tolerate different degrees of parental involvement in school. His study in Cyprus indicated that teachers worry about possible threats to their professional expertise on educational matters and they claim that the social respect that they used to enjoy is diminishing. In order to protect their professionalism, they need to keep their "trade secrets" (p. 39) from the parents! Trade secrets in his study refer to skills and knowledge on how parents can help their children's learning at home, particularly in helping their children with their homework. This is a very shocking finding as this does not only indicates the self-

centeredness and uncooperative attitudes of these teachers but restraining parents from involving in their children's education, which consequently depriving children of better chance to succeed in their education. In addition, in a study conducted in the United States by Cotton and Wikelund in 2001 claimed that although schools agree that parents should take more active roles in their children's education, they disapprove of parents' involvement in certain aspects, particularly in administrative areas because they feel that parents do not have enough training to make school decisions.

According to a study carried out in two Malaysian primary schools by Noraini and Naima in 2006, some parents say that they do not know what to do and they suggest that schools should provide them with specific guidelines on how they can help their children. This indicates that these parents are in fact interested to get involved in their children's education but they are confused regarding what they should do. Thus, their lack of knowledge of specific guidelines on how to help their children has limited their involvement in their children's education. Besides, this statement also suggests that parents recognize the school as having the knowledge and authority in determining their specific involvements in their children's education.

Doubtlessly, it is well-recognized that formal education is directly linked with schools, and thus, naturally schools have the upper hand in determining the involvement of others, such as parents, in children's education, particularly in school-level activities. However, school decisions regarding the extent of parental involvement in children's education in the school-level activities should be based on the academic and social interests of the children rather than based on personal interests. Besides, considering the importance of parental involvement towards children's academic and social performance, school should be more opened in dealing with parental involvement in children's education in all aspects. By presenting opportunity for parents to get involved in children's education at all levels, only then can parents have the opportunity to develop their skills and

knowledge in areas they are assumed to be less knowledgeable in, and gradually establish a mutual parent-school partnership in the education of children.

1.2.3 FACTORS INFLUENCING PARENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR ROLES IN THEIR CHILDREN'S EDUCATION

Seemingly, without specific guidelines on how to be involved in their children's education, it is left to individual parents' perceptions and initiatives. This gives rise to the question of how do parents' perceptions develop and what factors influence their perceptions? Walker, Wilkins, Dallaire, Sandler and Hoover-Dempsey (2005) in their revision of Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's theoretical model of parental involvement process suggest that parents' perceptions of their roles and specific involvements in their children's education are influenced by parents' motivational beliefs regarding their involvement, parents' perceptions of invitations for involvement from others and parents' perceived life context. This model suggests that parents' motivational beliefs regarding their involvement is influenced by what parents believe they should and can do in the context of their children's education. On the other hand, parents' perceptions of invitations for involvement are influenced by the extent of their involvement sought, welcomed and valued by the child, the child's teacher and the child's school. Likewise, parents' perceived life context is influenced by their perceptions of their available time and energy and their knowledge and skills for involvement.

Empirical studies suggest various factors to influence parents' perceptions of their roles and involvement in their children's education. For example, Lee and Bowen (2006) assert that parental roles and specific involvements are determined by parents' characteristics such as socio-economic status and ethnic backgrounds. In their study conducted in 2006 among 415 students in elementary schools in a major urban center in the southeastern United States, Lee and Bowen declared that

less educated and economically disadvantaged parents are less optimistic in their involvement in their children's education. These parents declare that they are lack of confidence in their interactions with the education system. Similarly, in another study conducted in the United States by Kathleen and Wiklund in 2001, they discovered that minority or low income parents are often underrepresented among the ranks of parents involved with the schools. Among the main reasons for this are lack time and energy, embarrass or shy about their own educational level or linguistic abilities, lack of understanding or information about the structure of the school and accepted communication channels and perceived lack of welcome by teachers and administrators.

Besides, Stevenson and Baker (1987) claim parents' perceptions of their roles and involvement are influenced by their children's age and education levels. They argued that as children grow older, parents' involvement begins to decrease at home and in school. This is because some parents believe that involvement in their children's education is not as important as in the elementary school years. In supporting this view, Eccles and Harold (1993, cited in Deplanty, Coulter-Kern & Duchane, 2007) maintain that the decreased involvement of parents in their children's schooling as the children move from elementary to junior high school may be because parents think that adolescents desire and need independence. Besides, they also suggested that less educated parents may decrease their involvement in their children's education as their children move from elementary school to junior high school because parents are less knowledgeable in some of the academic areas.

Various studies have also labeled the schools as a major factor in influencing parents' perceptions of their roles and involvement in their children's education. According to a 1987 study conducted in the United States by Joyce Epstein (cited in Deplanty, Coulter-Kern & Duchane, 2007), many parents want to become involved in their children's education but they are not encouraged or do not have the open communication or support from the school to do so. She claimed