

**STUDENTS' PERCEPTION OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN THE  
DEVELOPMENT OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE COMPETENCY:  
A SURVEY OF ALL BOYS' SCHOOL**

by

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **STUDENTS' PERCEPTION OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE COMPETENCY: A SURVEY OF ALL BOYS' SCHOOL**

Lendl Tawie ak Tingga

This study aimed to find out the students' perception on parental involvement either formally and informally in the Form 4 students of all boys' school. This study also aim at finding the perception of the students on their parents on who help the most in developing the English language competency and finally to find out on how much the students want their parents to be involved. A total number of 185 students were involved in this study. This study was designed as a quantitative and qualitative survey whereby questionnaire was utilized as instrument of data collection. The data were analyzed using the frequency and percentage count to obtain the information based on the research questions. The findings from this study revealed that students want their parents to be involved informally in developing the English language competency. The findings also reveal that students want both of their parents to be involved and their role to be as a provider of reading materials and as a language learning facilitators for them. Most of the students want their parents to be language learning nurtures as to provide support, encouragement and motivation for them to learn English. The findings in this study also reveal how parents were involved with the students' development of English language competency and how this may affect the students as language learners.

## **ABSTRAK**

***PERSEPSI PELAJAR – PELAJAR TERHADAP PENGLIBATAN IBU BAPA  
DALAM PERKEMBANGAN BAHASA INGGERIS:  
SATU KAJIAN DALAM TINGKATAN 4 DI SEKOLAH PELAJAR LELAKI***

Lendl Tawie ak Tingga

*Kajian ini bertujuan meneroka persepsi pelajar – pelajar sekolah tentang penglibatan ibu bapa mereka dalam perkembangan Bahasa Inggeris sama ada secara formal dan tidak formal. Di samping itu, kajian ini juga ingin menyiasat persepsi para pelajar terhadap ibubapa mereka yang mana banyak menolong dalam perkembangan Bahasa Inggeris. Selain itu, kajian ini bertujuan juga untuk mengetahui sebanyak mana para pelajar mahu ibubapa mereka terlibat dalam Bahasa Inggeris mereka. Sejumlah 185 pelajar telah terlibat dalam kajian ini. Kajian ini berteraskan kuantitatif dan kualitatif di mana soal selidik telah digunakan untuk mengumpul maklumat – maklumat untuk kajian ini. Hasil kajian ini telah dianalisis dari segi frekuensi dan peratusan dalam mengumpul maklumat berdasarkan kepada objektif – objektif kajian ini. Hasil kajian ini menunjukkan bahawa pelajar mahu ibu bapa mereka terlibat secara tak formal dalam perkembangan Bahasa Inggeris mereka. Kajian ini juga menunjukkan yang pelajar mahu ibu bapa mereka memainkan peranan sebagai pembekal bahan – bahan bacaan atau sebagai fasilitator bahasa pembelajaran. Selain itu, kajian ini juga menunjukkan yang pelajar mahu ibu bapa mereka memberi sokongan, motivasi dalam pembelajaran Bahasa Inggeris. Kajian ini juga menunjukkan peranan yang dimainkan oleh ibu bapa yang mungkin dapat mempengaruhi pembelajaran pelajar dalam Bahasa Inggeris.*

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## TABLE OF CONTENT

<b>Abstract</b>	i
<i>Abstrak</i>	ii
<b>Acknowledgement</b>	iii
<b>List of Figures</b>	vii
<b>List of Tables</b>	viii

### CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

1.0	Chapter Overview	1
1.1	Background of the Study	1
1.2	Statement of Problem	3
1.3	Research Aims	4
1.4	Research Objectives	4
1.5	Significance of the Study	4
1.6	Operational Definition of Terms	5
	1.6.1 Parental Involvement	5
	1.6.2 Formal Involvements	6
	1.6.3 Informal Involvements	6
1.7	Scope of the Study	6
1.8	Chapter Review	7

### CHAPTER 2 REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.0	Chapter Overview	8
2.1	English Language in Malaysia	9
2.2	Parental Involvement	10
	2.2.1 The importance of parental involvement in education	11
	2.2.2 Factors that hinder parental involvement	12
	2.2.3 Parental involvement in English	13

2.2.4	Home environment	14
2.2.5	Epstein's six types of parental involvement	15
2.3	Perception of parental influence on language Learning	17
2.4	Summary	18

## **CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY**

3.0	Chapter Overview	19
3.1	Research Design	19
3.2	Sample	21
3.3	Research Instrument	22
3.4	Data Collection Procedures	24
3.5	Data Analysis Procedures	25
	3.5.1 Data analysis for section A	25
	3.5.2 Data analysis for section B	26
	3.5.3 Data analysis for section C	28
3.6	Limitations of the Study	30

## **CHAPTER 4 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS**

4.0	Chapter Overview	31
4.1	General information on students' background	32
4.2	Students' perception on parental involvement	32
	4.2.1 Formal involvement	32
	4.2.2 Informal involvement	36
4.3	Students' perception on who contribute the most	39
4.4	Students' perception on how they want their parent to be involved	41

4.5	Summary	48
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## **CHAPTER 5 SUMMARY, IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSION**

5.0	Chapter Overview	50
5.1	Summary of the study	50
5.2	Implications	52
5.3	Recommendations for Future Research	53
5.4	Conclusion	54
	<b>References</b>	55
	<b>Appendices</b>	58
	Appendix A	
	The questionnaire	59
	Appendix B	
	Letter from Kementerian Pelajaran Malaysia	64
	Appendix C	
	Letter from Jabatan Pelajaran Negeri Sarawak	66
	Appendix D	
	Letter of consent to Jabatan Pelajaran Negeri Sarawak	68
	Appendix E	
	Letter of consent from UNIMAS	69
	Appendix F	
	Letter of consent to the school	70

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure		Page
1	Extended Model of Contextual Parenting	14

## LIST OF TABLES

Table		Page
1	Distribution of the items according to categories	23
2	Question items for mother and father contribution	26
3	Question item for how much parents should be involved	28
4	Findings of formal involvement by parents	33
5	Findings of informal involvement by parent	36
6	Result of the findings for formal and informal involvement	38
7	Findings on who contribute the most in developing their children's English	39
8	Overall result of how much students want parents to be involved	41
9	Description of how students want their parent to involve a lot	41
10	Findings on students who want their parents to involve sometimes	44
11	Findings on students who want their parents to involve not at all	46

# **Chapter 1**

## **Introduction**

### **1.0 Chapter Overview**

This chapter discusses the background of the study; the statement of problem, research objective and research questions, significance and definitions of key terms, and finally it presents a chapter review.

### **1.1 Background of the Study**

Parents' involvement with the schools had become a major educational issue in the 1980s (Cotton & Wikelund, 1989). It was found that involvement was one of the many important ingredients in solving many problems in education (Fan & Chen, 2001). There were many researches done previously and it had been proven to have a positive effect in children's academic achievement (Epstein, 1991; Keith 1991; Gregory, 1998). Some models of parental involvement in reading in the UK had been developed and they proved to be beneficial (Gregory, 1998). Epstein (1991) found out that parental involvement in learning activities at home contributes to positive change in reading achievement.

In 2000, a special committee was established by the Ministry of Education of Malaysia to determine the reason behind the decline of the English

language. The findings from this committee revealed many weaknesses in the education system. The most pressing problem in teaching of English in Malaysian schools was the lack of professional development of the teacher, inadequate teaching aids and uncondusive environments. One of the effects was that many Malaysian students who enrolled into the tertiary level experienced difficulties in coping with English. This decline in the standard of English had been highlighted in many reports (Chok, 2001). Therefore, the commitment to improve the education of all students had become the national priority (Choy & Troudi, 2006). Discussions on how to improve the quality of education in Malaysia had focused on the roles of parents too and researches supported the belief that high quality education of primary and secondary level cannot be achieved successfully without the involvement of parents (Henderson & Berla, 1997). Studies had shown that parental involvement in student's learning had positive effect on student's achievement.

The present study focused on students' perception on how much parents gave their support on developing the English language among their children. In Malaysia, English is taught as a second language. According to Klein (1994), the term second language is used to denote a language acquired in a milieu where it is normally used together with the first language and which, when acquired will be used by the learner in some situations.

However, to become competent in the English language involves intricate process. It involves intricate process because not only the students need to have positive attitudes, but also they need a great deal of interactions, practice, memorizations, and exposure to the English language.

Language course are different from other curriculum topics. They require that the individual incorporate elements from other culture. As consequences, reactions to the other culture become important considerations. Furthermore, because the material is not merely an extension of the students' own heritage, the dynamic of the classroom and the methodology assume greater importance than they do in other school topics.

(Gardner, 1985, p. 8)

If the students are exposed very little to the English language, then they will have difficult times after post school situations like enrolling into the tertiary level where English is widely used in lectures and where most references are in English or when they are in the working environment.

By looking into this scenario, there is a need for a strong collaboration between the schools and the home institutions. Parents must collaborate with the schools to help the students to be competent in English either formally or informally.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

This study intended to find out students' perception of parental involvement on learning English both formally and informally in developing their English language competency. Besides that, this study also intended to find out who contributes the most in developing the English language and the perception of the students' on the importance of parental involvement.

Distinctions can be made between formal and informal involvement. An example of parents' formal involvement is when parents are involved with Parent Teacher Association where the parents and teacher come together and discuss matters regarding on the students' performances. Another example would be the "*Hari Permuafakatan*" whereby parents meet the teacher and obtain the report book pertaining on the progress of their children. Attending workshop for example English Month, which meant to improve the learning of their children in English, can be considered as formal involvement by the parents. Examples of parents' informal involvement would be buying books, employing a private tutor, having a reading corner in the house and buying interactive English CDs for their children.

According to Cotton and Wikelund (2002), the more intensively parents are involved in their children's learning; the more beneficial are the achievement effects. Hence, when school and parents are able to work together hand in hand in developing the children English language competency it inevitably helps in improving the performance of the children conversing in the second language.

However, there are times when parents involvement in their children's learning are considered 'low' due to some reasons. These reasons could be due to personal circumstances affecting the family. For instances, parents feel that they do not have the knowledge that the school is interested in partly because they don't have a great deal of education (Dixon, 1992; Vandergrift & Greene, 1992).

### **1.3 Research Aims**

The objectives of this study are to find out:

- i. students' perceptions of their parental involvement in learning English;
- ii. who contribute the most in developing students' competency in English;  
and
- iii. students' perceptions on how much they want their parents to be involved in developing their English competency,

### **1.4 Research Objectives**

This study will be carried out based on the following research questions:

- i. To what extent are parents involved in their children's learning English formally and informally?
- ii. Who contribute the most in developing students' competency in English?
- iii. How much do students want their parents to be involved in developing their English competency?

### **1.5 Significance of the Study**

Evidence indicated that there were both a need and a demand for increased parental development in children learning English. Many studies (Chin, 2007; Desforges & Abouchar, 2003; Barge & Lorger, 2003) had focused on the parental involvement in overall achievement of the students.

However, the applicability of the findings cannot be applied to the Malaysian context because of the differences in terms of the settings and the school environment. Therefore, this study used the Malaysian students to find out the perception of the parental involvement in schools.

Parents and teachers are both responsible in helping learners to achieve higher level of competency. Schools should encourage more participation from the parents in developing English language competency and not just involve the parents in matters like school disciplines only.

It is hoped that through this research, it will give an insight to the perception of the student's about their parents' involvement in developing the English language. By knowing the perception of the students in their parents involvement, will give some documentation of how much students want their parents to be involved in developing the English language competency.

According to Gao (2006) parents who spend a much longer time with their children have a strong emotional attachment to them Thus, this study highlighted what were the supports needed by the children so that parents or school knows what major role that they can played to further develop the children competency in English.

## **1.6 Operational Definition of Terms**

### **1.6.1 Parental Involvement**

According to Epstein (1995), there are six categories of parental involvement which are parenting (helping families with child-rearing skills), communicating (developing effective home-school communication), volunteering (creating ways that families can become involved in activities at the school), learning at home (supporting learning activities in the home that reinforce school curricula), decision-making (including families as decision-makers through school-site councils), and collaborating with the community (matching community services with family needs and serving the community).

Each of these involvements encompasses a variety of practices taken by the teachers, parents and students and theoretically linked with variety distinct outcomes for students, teacher and parents.

### **1.6.2 Formal Involvement**

Formal involvement refers to the time parents involved in the school's activities such as the school meeting, Parents Teacher Association meeting, English Seminar, and other activities which are organized by the school for parents in order to involve them in their children learning. During these activities, parents have the chance to interact with the teachers regarding their children's performances and also discuss on how to help their children.

### **1.6.3 Informal Involvement**

Informal involvement refers to the time parents involved outside the school hours or vicinity. Normally, this involvement is confined to the children's home whereby the parents buy materials or sending their children to tuition centre in order to help them developing their English competency.

## **1.7 Scope of the Study**

The scope of this research was to find out the parental involvement in English. Previously other researchers had focused on the aspects of overall achievement of the students. Therefore in this study, it intended to find out students' perception on how much involvement from parents in developing their children English competency.

However, this study did not cover a full analysis of the students' perception on parental involvement as there were no interviews done on the students. Therefore, the data collected may not comprehensive as the information acquired was lacking some important details. In addition to that, the research was conducted in only one school. Therefore, the findings from this study cannot represent the whole of Malaysian students respectively.

## **1.8 Chapter Review**

This chapter has given an overview of the background of the study and why the study is worth addressing. It also mentions the objectives of the study and the research questions to be answered. Specific terms used in the study have been elaborated explicitly for readers' understanding. Basically, the following chapter of this study will focus on the literature review related to the topic.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.0 Chapter Overview**

In today's world, the importance of parental involvement cannot be denied. An understanding on parents' attitude towards students' learning various aspects can greatly enhance the process of students learning. Parental involvement or parental participation in children education had been proven to have positive effects in children's achievements (Epstein, 1991; Keith, 1991; Gregory, 1998).

According to Fan and Chen (2001), all types of parental involvement in children's learning will benefit students in their achievement. Researchers have found that more active involvement of the parents; the greater the achievement was as compared to the more passive involvement (Cotton & Wikelund, 1998; Fan & Chen 2001; Bartram, 2006). In language learning, studies on parental involvement found that these contribute positively to learners' language learning (Bartram, 2006; Gao 2006).

This chapter looks into the status of English language in Malaysia, parental involvement in developing the English language, parent-child communication, and home environment.

## **2.1 English Language in Malaysia**

In Malaysia, English language is considered as a second language as it is the language of mass media such as newspaper, radio and television (Pillay, 1998). Therefore, the aim of teaching English to the students is to prepare them to function appropriately in the outside world, for instances in business, workplace or in the commercial sectors. It is hoped that the English curriculum in primary schools would give a good basic knowledge in English language for the students. If students have strong foundation in the English language, they will not have much problems coping with the language at any higher level such as secondary or tertiary level.

Pillay (1995) found out that students who have good command in English comes from English speaking homes, have greater exposure to English outside the classroom and tend to come from higher status group. However, to many Malaysians English is a foreign language. Many do not speak English in their everyday communication. The government has changed its national education policy by trying to improve the English language competency among Malaysian especially the younger generation (Pillay, 1998).

Then, in 1997, the Ministry of Education set up two committees which aimed to plan programmes on how to improve the standard of English amongst the schools and university students. The Committee for Schools came up with broad strategies to improve English competency in school level. For examples, upgrading training and enhancing professional development, adopting progressive teaching and learning strategies, upgrading and diversifying learning resources, providing a more innovative and progressive assessment system and research and development at all level (Pillay, 1998).

Needless to say, parents are also viewed as occupying a central role in their children's education. But, due to the bureaucratization of the schools and also the rise of professionalism of school personnel, school and home life are viewed as separate spheres. Parents were expected to provide academic support and financial support to school, typically in the form of fund raising, acting as school chaperons for school

events while leaving such decisions as curriculum development to the professional staff and administrators. Therefore, the decline of English development among students is obvious as the school and home institution are separated in communication. It is imperative that parents or home institutions should not be sidelined as support and collaboration between the schools intuitions and family can contribute significantly in the developing the English language of the students.

## **2.2 Parental Involvement**

The South African Schools Act (1962) holds that learners, parents, and even educators promote the acceptance and responsibility for the organization, governance and funding of schools in partnership with the states. This showed that parent by law are compelled to participate in the school activities. It also implies the shifting of a traditional role parents used to play by merely being the members of the schools governing bodies or parent–teacher associations. They have the rights to determine what the best educational interest of their children is.

According to Beck and Earl (2000), schools do not conduct their work solely, isolated from ‘external’ influences like parent and community. They have identified five ways of mutual involvement between the schools and parents namely;

- parents having rights for information about various aspects of the schools;
- parents can consult with the schools on matters like policy and principles;
- that parents should corporate with the school in relation to matters like fundraising; and
- parents should be engaged in the shared decision making and implementation with the schools.

(p. 86–89)

Parental involvement is a process through which parents meaningfully participate in various educational activities of their children, ranging from attendance of the school functions or becoming educators of their own children at home (Dekker and Lemmer, 1994; Myko, 2000).

### **2.2.1 The Importance of Parental Involvement in Education**

Cooperation between the school and parents can lead to an improvement in the quality of education. Mutual involvement between schools and parents, and even the community is associated with greater educational effectiveness and efficiency (Beck & Earl, 2000). By improving the standard of education, it can benefit parents, learners and country as well. A study done by Collins (1982) which was done on 28 parents, regarding their involvements their children's schooling showed positive results. The result indicates improve achievement, reduced absenteeism and restore confidence among parents in their children's schooling.

According to Stouffer (1992), there are five reasons why parental involvement in education is important. Firstly, it improves the sense of pride in the community and school. Secondly, if parents give their support in education of their children, they will concentrate better. The third reason why parental involvement is important is that parent will no longer feel alienated when dealing with difficult students or situation. This is followed by the fourth reason where if parents work together with the schools, it can improve the educational opportunities for learners. Lastly, schools need the financial support of the parent community. This is supported by a study done by Herman (1983) who investigated the effects of parent involvement on the achievement of second and third graders in 250 California elementary. The study showed that children of involved parents have significantly got higher achievement than other students.

Dekker and Lemmer (1994) stated that when parents involved in the teaching of the school, they will more likely to make school a priority for their children and the children will likely to achieve better. Another research by Myko (2000) and Ooshulzen (1994) claimed that students were more positive and motivated when their parent accompany them to field trips, serve as volunteers in the school, participate on school governing and assists the school with fundraising and other activities.

According to Westhulzen (2002), establishing a good community relationship is the main thing in securing mutual participation of parents in decision making, school activities, problem solving assistance and offering services to a school.

### **2.2.2 Factors That Hinder Parental Involvement**

Past researches discovered that there were parents who are reluctant to be involved with the children's school activities. This can lead to numerous problems. The major problem of why parents did not involved was because parents have no idea of how to be involved and why they should be involved and therefore, they were unsure of what their responsibilities and how education at home serves as the basis for education in school (Dekker & Lemmer, 1994; Heystek & Louw, 1999).

Another reason was that the parents feel the educators are qualified enough to educate their children and the educators are responsible for their children while they at school (Smit & Lienberg, 2003). According to Graf and Henderson (as cited in Myeko, 2000, p. 15) claim otherwise. They said that parents were less involved due to the fact that schools are larger and less personal and parents take less active key role because their teenagers are becoming more independent.

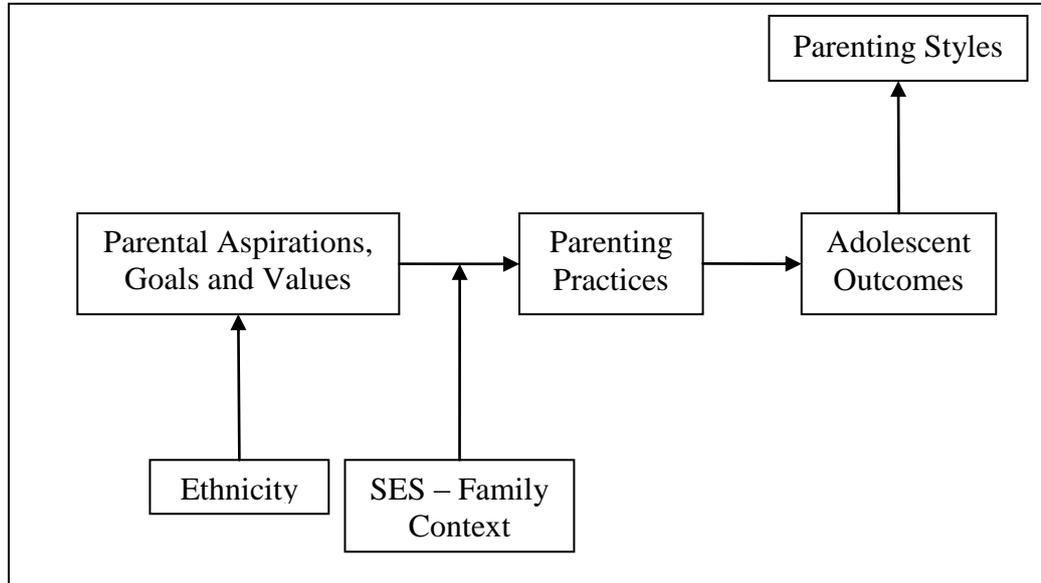
Besides that, another reason why parents were not involved actively is because of time, financial constraint, family problems, and illiteracy (Myeko, 1994, p. 21). However the most important reason why parents are not involved actively in schools activities is their negative perception towards the schools (Heystek & Louw, 1994, p. 21).

### **2.2.3 Parental Involvement in English**

Past researches (Dornbush 1988; Westhulzen 2002) showed how important parental involvement in improving the academic achievement but they did not report on any involvement in second language learning. There is an assumption that foreign language learner is the responsibility of the language teacher. Therefore, all the development of the language is discussed in the classroom settings (Wenden, 2002).

In this study, the researcher wish to find out how the perception of parental involvement in developing the English language. This is similar with the study conducted by Gao Xuseng from the University of Hong Kong which aim to find out parental involvement in Chinese students learning English. The study involved 20 students from the Chinese mainland who had just arrived in Hong Kong for their undergraduates' studies in 2004. The participants were interviewed about their past English experiences. 18 participants explicitly mentioned the family members' roles in their language learning. According to Gao (2006), the finding confirmed that Chinese parents were involved closely in their children language learning especially the children development as competent English learners. The findings from the study revealed that the parents indirectly involved helping their children to learn better English by involving their children development English as language learning advocates, language learning facilitators, and language teachers' collaborator. Besides that, the parents also involved directly that is by becoming language learning advisors, language learning coercers and language learning nurtures. The findings showed that language teacher should be more proactive in school–family and teacher–parent partnership in developing their children English competency.

Another study done by Spera (2006) look at how parents' goals and values are related to the students' learning. The research was based on Darling and Steinberg's contextual model of parenting.



**Figure 1 Extended Model of Contextual Parenting**

The research used a sample of 184 adolescents which showed adolescent perceptions of parental educational goals and values were related to the report of parental involvement and monitoring. The adolescents' perception of parental involvement in schoolwork was related positively and significantly to their interest in schoolwork's, internal academic self-regulation and goal pursuit. The findings from this research showed that the more parental goals emphasize on the adolescents, and then the children motivation and achievement will increased.

#### **2.2.4 Home Environment**

Krysan (1990) conducted a research on students achievement based home environment. Krysan (1990) define home environment as a successful family which is able to reproduce itself and raise children who goes on to establish a harmonious family themselves. The aim of the study is to