

EFFECTS OF FAMILY SIZE ON PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN THEIR CHILDREN'S EDUCATION

Suresh Kumar N Vellymalay

School of Distance Education
Universiti Sains Malaysia

Email: suresh@usm.my

ABSTRACT

The present study focuses on the relationship between family size and parental involvement in their children's education at home. This study uses hundred and fifty students of Indian ethnic origin who are studying in National Schools in the state of Perak, Malaysia as sample. A questionnaire was used to obtain quantitative data from the students' parents related to number of children, number of school-going children and number of children who are already working in the family besides the parental involvement strategies in their children's education at home. The results indicated a negative correlation between the number of children in the family and the parental involvement strategies. The analysis between the number of school-going children in the family and the involvement strategies also shows a negative correlation for all the involvement strategies implemented by parents. Hence, there is evidence that parents with more children in the family and parents with more school-going children in the family are less involved in their education. In addition, a negative correlation also is seen between number of children who are already working in the family and the parental involvement strategies.

KEYWORDS: *parental involvement, number of children, education, National School.*

1.0 INTRODUCTION

It is becoming increasingly difficult to ignore the importance of parental involvement in their children's education. Parents play an important role in the development process of a child (Gordon and Browne, 1989; Weis, Caspe and Lopez, 2006) and have a great impact over the child's academic achievement (Sanders and Lewis, 2004). When parents have high aspirations and expectations of their children, they tend to have greater involvement in their children's education at home and at school. It can be said that parents with higher aspirations and

expectations project their strength of confidence onto various strategies of involvement to ensure the academic success of their children. Besides the aspirations and expectations, there are various factors that influence parental involvement and the academic achievement of a child.

Over the years, a large and growing body of literature has investigated and documented the topic of parental involvement in their children's education (Kaplan, Liu and Kaplan, 2001; Krieken, *et.al.*, 2001; Eitzen and Zinn, 2001; Ho Sui-chu and Willms, 1996; Ramsay, *et.al.*, 1992; Poston and Falbo, 1990; Katsilis and Rubinson, 1990; Fuller and Nyirogo, 1989; Lareau, 1987; Baker and Stevenson, 1986; Lockheed, *et.al.*, 1989; Sewell and Hauser, 1980; Lueptow, 1975). In recent years, there has been an increasing interest shown by many researchers in the theme of parental involvement and children's educational attainment (Cooper, *et.al.*, 2010; El Nokali, *et.al.*; 2010, Fan & Williams, 2010; Ryan, *et.al.*, 2010; Walsh, 2010; Cucchiara & Horvat, 2009; Hill & Tyson, 2009; Ji & Koblinsky, 2009; Tam & Chan, 2009; Zhao & Akiba, 2009; Berthelsen & Walker, 2008; Huang & Mason, 2008; Constantino, 2007; Green, *et.al.*, 2007 Green & Hoover-Dempsey, 2007; Jeynes, 2007; Craig, 2006; Dearing, *et.al.*, 2006; Marschall, 2006; Raty, 2006; Seginer, 2006; Smith, 2006; Smits & Hosgor, 2006; Tudge, *et.al.*, 2006; Davis-Kean, 2005; Driessen, *et.al.*, 2005; Halsey, 2005; Jacobs, 2005; Jeynes, 2005; Jeynes, 2005).

To date, many studies on parental involvement have been carried out to investigate the relationship between parents' background and their involvement in their children's education. In accordance with that, research shows that parents' education level, occupation, income and family income are viewed as the four most important variables related to parents' background, which influence parental involvement and educational success of a child. For instance, in the case of parents' education level, studies that have examined the impact of parents' education on parental involvement suggest that parents' education level is positively related to parental involvement in their children's education (Suizzo & Stapleton, 2007; Cooper, *et.al.*, 2010; Lockheed, *et.al.*, 1989; Hill *et.al.*, 2004; Bakker, Denessen, & Brus-Laeven, 2007). These studies suggest that educated parents have more knowledge and language skills than the less educated parents. In addition, Poston and Falbo's study (1990) suggests that highly educated parents often communicate and interact with their children and encourage the children to generate a positive learning attitude and behaviour towards their educational achievement. Studies also demonstrate that parents who have a low level of education lack high expectations of their children (Kaplan, *et.al.*, 2001), have low academic aspirations for them (Lockheed, *et.al.*, 1989) and they are unable to inculcate academic

values in their children which helps them to gain self confidence and promote participation towards educational success (Reay, 2004). Parents who have a low level of education represent a risk for their children to develop motivation and educational aspirations (Sewell and Hauser, 1980; Tudge, *et.al.*, 2006) and are less involved in their schoolwork (Spera, 2006).

In addition, ample studies demonstrate parents' education level, occupation, income and family income as the indicators of the parents' social class and socioeconomic status which influence their involvement in their children's education. A number of studies in parental involvement have been carried out to investigate the relationship between social class and parental involvement (Cucchiara & Horvat, 2009; Horvat, *et.al.*, 2003; Lareau & Horvat, 1999; Ramsay *et.al.* 1992; Sewell and Hauser, 1980; Lareau, 1987). For example, Ramsay *et.al.* (1992) found that problems related to child care deter the working class parents from participating in various activities at their children's school. Sewell and Hauser (1980) believed that one of the main causes for the failure of most of the working class students to have high aspirations in education was the absence of motivation from their parents due to poor financial resources. Lareau (1987) in her study reported that working class parents have difficulties in helping their children due to time constraints and lack of skills. Many researchers also tend to focus on the relationship between parents' socioeconomic status and parental involvement (Lueptow, 1975; Katsilis and Rubinson, 1990; Ho Sui-chu and Willms, 1996). For instance, the study by Lueptow (1975) and that of Katsilis and Rubinson (1990) also revealed that children from higher socioeconomic status seem to perform better at school. Ho Sui-Chu and Willms' (1996) study also found a significant and positive relationship between parents' socioeconomic status and parental involvement in their children's education. These studies indicate that the socioeconomic background of parents serves as a catalyst in influencing the academic success of their children at school. Thus, parents' social class and their socioeconomic status as mentioned above are seen by many researchers as two important factors which influence parents' involvement in their children's education. These studies clearly indicate that parents' social class and their socioeconomic status greatly influence their strategies of involvement in their children's education.

To date, most of the studies on parental involvement in their children's education have tended to focus more on parents' social class and socioeconomic status. However, far too little attention has been paid to several other variables (i.e., age, gender, family structure, ethnicity, social location) and their impact on parental involvement in children's

education. There also has been little discussion on family size such as the number of children a parent has and its influence on parental involvement at home and at school.

As for Malaysia, although many studies have been conducted on education, issues of parental involvement in education especially among the minorities are far limited and need to be explored (Suresh Kumar, 2012). Little is known about the barriers encountered by minorities in projecting their strength on parental involvement to enhance the educational success of their children. Hence, there is still a gap for more studies to be conducted on the education of minorities; especially the Indian ethnic group. A line of research is much needed to explore not only the implications of social class and socioeconomic status of Indian parents on their children's education but also the other factors that greatly influence their strategies of involvement in their children's education. The influence of various factors such as age, gender, family structure, ethnicity, social location and family size will provide rich data for exploring the relationship between parents' background and parental involvement strategies practiced at home and at school to enhance the academic success of their children.

Thus, the purpose of this paper is to investigate the relationship between family size and its effect on parental involvement among Indian parents in Perak Darul Ridzuan, Malaysia. First, this paper will investigate the parents' family size concerning the number of children, the number of school-going children and the number of children who are already working. Next, this paper will examine the strategies used by the parents to be involved in their children's education. And finally, this paper will analyze the correlation between the number of children, the number of school-going children and the number of children who are already working and the strategies of parental involvement observed. By examining this, the analysis may provide a better understanding on the family size and the barriers faced by parents in projecting their strength on various strategies of involvement in their children's education at home and at school.

2.0 METHODOLOGY

Sample

In this study, 150 Indian students aged 9-11 years were chosen based on stratified random sampling from a total of 194 Indian students from National Schools in the Kerian district, Perak Darul Ridzuan, Malaysia. The sample comprised 50 students aged 9 years from Year Three, 50

students aged 10 years from Year Four and 50 students aged 11 years from Year Five. From the 150 students aged 9-11 years who were chosen, one parent for each student was selected (according to the students' views about the individual who spends the most time being involved in their education) to be the respondent for this study.

Method

Structured interviews were carried out by the researcher himself with the respondents using the questionnaire. The questions in the questionnaire along with the response format were translated verbally in Tamil during the interview. This had to be taken into consideration since it was easier and more convenient for the respondents to answer the questions in their mother tongue. Each interview with the respondent took approximately 20 minutes. Each respondent who was engaged in the structured interview was informed that all the information provided by the respondent during the interview session would be kept confidential.

Instrument

Questionnaires were used by the researcher to obtain quantitative data from the selected parents. The questions were adapted from Walker, *et.al.*, (2005) based on the theoretical model of the parental involvement process by Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995, 1997). However, the researcher has modified the structure of the questions according to the objective of the current study and made some changes in its response format.

The first part of the questionnaire consisted of close-ended questions which were related to the parents' background such as gender, age, home, education status, occupation, income and household income, number of children, number of school-going children and number of children who are already working. This paper only focuses on three components related to the parents' background, that is, number of children, number of school-going children and number of children who are already working. In accordance with that, the number of children in the family in the questionnaire was classified into five categories, namely (1) 1-2 children; (2) 3-4 children; (3) 5-6 children; (4) 7-8 children; and (5) 9 children and above. The number of school-going children in the family in the questionnaire was classified into four categories, namely (1) 1-2 children; (2) 3-4 children; (3) 5-6 children; and (4) 7-8 children. In addition, the number of children who are already working in the family in the questionnaire was classified into four categories, namely (1) Not working; (2) 1-2 children; (3) 3-4 children; and (4) 5-6 children.

The second part of the questionnaire was related to the questions on parental involvement at home. This part of the questionnaire consisted of 14 close-ended questions which measured the strategies of involvement that were implemented by the parents in their children's education (i.e., discussion on future planning, discussion on school activities, identifying learning patterns, identifying academic problems at school). For each question on the parental involvement strategies implemented in their children's education, the respondents were asked to state whether they 'strongly agree', 'agree', 'agree /disagree', 'disagree' or 'strongly disagree'. The part on parental involvement strategies in the questionnaire has 14 items and the scale was internally consistent. The Cronbach's alpha measure was more than 0.93 which indicates that the measure of these items was reliable. All the information gathered by the researcher from the structured interview was analyzed using Statistical Package of Social Sciences (SPSS).

3.0 RESULTS

Table 1 presents the number of children in the family as per analysis in this study. The analysis shows that 55.3% of the parents had 3-4 children, 31.3% of the parents had 1-2 children and 8.7% of the parents had 5-6 children. Only one parent in this study had more than 9 children in the family. It is apparent from this table that 86.6% of the parents had 1-4 children in the family. It suggests that the majority of the parents do not prefer to have large number of children in the family. As can be observed from Table 1, 46.0% of the parents had 1-2 school-going children, 44.7% of the parents had 3-4 school-going children and 9.3% of the parents had 5-8 children who are going to school. As such, 90.7% of the parents had 1-4 school-going children in their family. In the case of the number of children who are already working, the analysis shows that the majority (86.7%) of the parents have either very young children or school-going children. It can be observed from Table 1 that 12.7% and 0.7% of the parents have 1-2 children and 3-4 children respectively who are already working.

Table 1: Number of Children in the Family

Number of Children		Percentage (%)
Number of children	1-2	31.3
	3-4	55.3
	5-6	8.7
	7-8	4.0
	9 and above	0.7
Number of school-going children	1-2	46.0
	3-4	44.7
	5-6	8.0
	7-8	1.3
Number of children who are already working	Not working	86.7
	1-2	12.7
	3-4	0.7
	5-6	0.0

n = 150

The following section examines the strategies used by the parents to be involved in their child's education. Table 2 presents the descriptive analysis for the strategies used by the parents to be involved in their child's education.

Table 2: Strategies of Parental Involvement in Child's Education

Strategies	Strongly Disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Disagree / Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Strongly Agree (%)	Mean	Sd.
Discussion on future planning	1.3	7.3	5.3	36.0	50.0	4.26	0.95
Discussion on school activities	0.7	7.3	5.3	46.0	40.7	4.19	0.89
Identifying learning patterns	1.3	10.0	16.0	42.0	30.7	3.91	0.99
Identifying academic problems at school	3.3	10.0	9.3	40.7	36.7	3.97	1.08
Identifying academic problems at home	0.7	6.7	10.0	35.3	47.3	4.22	0.93
Assisting with homework	4.0	15.3	9.3	34.0	37.3	3.85	1.19
Identifying homework	1.3	6.7	15.3	38.0	38.7	4.06	0.96
Guidance for examinations	1.3	10.0	18.7	36.7	33.3	3.91	1.02
Monitoring academic performance at school	1.3	8.0	15.3	36.7	38.7	4.03	0.99
Motivation	0.7	6.0	9.3	32.7	51.3	4.28	0.91
Time Limits	1.3	9.3	12.0	46.0	31.3	3.97	0.97
Getting reading materials	3.3	8.0	16.0	32.0	40.7	3.99	1.09
Tuition	8.7	15.3	9.3	26.0	40.7	3.75	1.36
Monitoring activities	2.0	10.7	6.7	38.7	42.0	4.08	1.05

n = 150

As shown in Table 2, there are seven strategies used by the parents which have mean values above 4.0. The strategy of motivation recorded the highest mean value of 4.28 indicating that parents show high involvement in motivating their children followed by discussing their children's future plans with them (4.26), identifying academic problems faced by their children at home (4.22) and in discussing their children's activities at school (4.19). Parents also show high involvement in monitoring their children's activities besides the regular activities at home and at school (4.08), identifying their children's homework assigned at school (4.06) and monitoring their children's academic performance at school from time to time (4.03).

The other seven strategies recorded mean values below 4.00. As can be observed from Table 2, the results indicate that parents show high involvement in providing additional reading materials for their children to upgrade their academic performance (3.99), identifying the academic problems faced by their children at school (3.97) and in providing time limits to their children for studying, watching television and other personal activities (3.97). In addition, the results also indicate that parents show high involvement in identifying the learning patterns of their children at school through the teachers at school (3.91), guiding them in their preparation towards school examinations (3.91), assisting their children with the school homework (3.85) and in providing their children with tuition classes (3.75). Overall, the results suggest that parents are highly involved and use various strategies of involvement in their children’s education.

The next section examines the correlation between number of children, number of school-going children and number of children who are already working; and the fourteen strategies of parental involvement observed (see Table 3).

Table 3: Correlation between Number of children, Number of school-going children and Number of children who are already working; and Strategies of Parental Involvement

Strategies	Correlation Coefficient (r)		
	Number of children	Number of school-going children	Number of children who are already working
Discussion on future planning	-0.20*	-0.25**	-0.11
Discussion on school activities	-0.14	-0.10	-0.18*
Identifying learning patterns	-0.12	-0.15	-0.13
Identifying academic problems at school	-0.22**	-0.29**	-0.13
Identifying academic problems at home	-0.07	-0.01	-0.18*
Assisting with homework	-0.18*	-0.16*	-0.11
Identifying homework	-0.09	-0.05	-0.04
Guidance for examinations	-0.13	-0.19*	-0.06
Monitoring academic performance at school	-0.13	-0.15	0.04
Motivation	-0.18*	-0.19*	-0.20*
Time limits	-0.12	-0.09	0.01
Getting reading materials	-0.14	-0.08	-0.11
Tuition	-0.18*	-0.26**	-0.04
Monitoring activities	-0.19*	-0.22**	0.01

n = 150

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

As shown in Table 3, the bivariate analysis between number of children in the family and the involvement strategies shows a negative correlation for all the fourteen strategies implemented. Of the fourteen strategies, five strategies implemented are significant at the p = 0.05 level and one strategy is significant at the p = 0.01 level. Hence, there is evidence that parents with more children in the family are less involved

in their education. As can be seen from Table 3, parents with more children in the family are less involved in identifying the academic problems faced by their children at school ($r = -0.22$, $p < 0.01$). They are also less involved in discussing their children's future plans with them ($r = -0.20$, $p < 0.05$) and assisting their children to complete their homework ($r = -0.18$, $p < 0.05$). The parents with more children in the family are also less involved in motivating their children ($r = -0.18$, $p < 0.05$) and monitoring the activities in addition to home and school activities which their child is participating in ($r = -0.19$, $p < 0.05$).

The bivariate analysis between the number of school-going children in the family and the involvement strategies also shows a negative correlation for all the fourteen strategies implemented. However, of the fourteen strategies, four strategies implemented are significant at the $p = 0.01$ level and another three strategies are significant at the $p = 0.05$ level. The findings show that parents with more school-going children in the family are less involved in identifying the academic problems faced by the children at school ($r = -0.29$, $p < 0.01$) and monitoring the activities in which their children are involved, in addition to home and school activities ($r = -0.26$, $p < 0.01$). In addition, they are also less involved in discussing their children's future plans with them ($r = -0.25$, $p < 0.01$) and providing tuition classes for their children ($r = -0.22$, $p < 0.01$). The findings also show that parents with more school-going children in the family are less involved in guiding their children in their preparation for school examinations ($r = -0.19$, $p < 0.05$) and motivating their children ($r = -0.19$, $p < 0.05$).

Based on the analysis shown in Table 3, a negative correlation also is seen between the number of children who are already working in the family and the parental involvement strategies for eleven of the fourteen strategies implemented. Of the eleven strategies, only three strategies implemented are significant at the $p = 0.05$ level and the rest are not significant at any level. Thus, it can be said that parents with more children who are already working are less involved in their children's education. The findings show that parents with more children who are already working are less involved in motivating their children ($r = -0.20$, $p < 0.05$), identifying the academic problems faced by their children at home ($r = -0.18$, $p < 0.05$) and discussing their children's activities at school ($r = -0.18$, $p < 0.05$).

4.0 DISCUSSION

Prior studies that have noted the importance of parental involvement validate the fact that family background is an important factor in encouraging parental involvement in their children's education. There is a large volume of published studies describing the role of social class and socioeconomic status of the parents and their impact on parental involvement in their children's education. The higher the parents' social class (Cucchiara & Horvat, 2009; Horvart, *et.al.*, 2003; Lareau & Horvart, 1999; Ramsay *et.al.* 1992; Sewell and Hauser, 1980; Lareau, 1987) and the socioeconomic status (Lueptow, 1975; Katsilis and Rubinson, 1990; Ho Sui-chu and Willms, 1996;), the higher the involvement of the parents in their children's education. However, too little attention has been paid to other variables such as age, gender, family structure, ethnicity, social location and family size and, its impact on parental involvement in children's education. Thus, the present study was carried out with the aim to determine the effect of family size on parental involvement.

The results of the present study did not show a strong relationship between the number of children, the number of school-going children and the number of children who are already working; and the fourteen strategies of parental involvement observed. However, the extent to which the parents are involved in their children's education obviously accounts for some advantages related to the number of children in the family, the number of school-going children and the number of children who are already working. In addition, it is interesting to note that the number of children in the family, the number of school-going children and the number of children who are already working and the parental involvement strategies shows a negative correlation for most of the strategies implemented. Of this, the number of children in the family has a significant and negative relationship with parental involvement in six strategies. The number of school-going children and the number of children who are already working also has a significant and negative relationship with parental involvement in seven strategies and three strategies respectively. The correlation analysis shows that parents with more school-going children in the family are less involved in their children's education.

There are two possible explanations for these results. First, the parents with more children in the family have insufficient time to be involved in their children's education. The higher number of children in the family accounts for more time required for the parents to facilitate their children. Children in different age groups need different modes of attention, parenting and supervision. As for the children who

are schooling, parents have to manage their children who could be studying in different schools (i.e., National School, National Type Tamil School or National Type Chinese School), different levels (i.e., primary or secondary education) and in different classes (in primary or secondary school). The differences in their children's gender, age and education levels may cause difficulties for the parents to manage their time well and to be involved in their children's education accordingly. In addition, the parents also need to juggle their time between housework, parenting and other family commitments as well as other personal activities.

Another possible explanation for the results is related to the parents' current occupation. Long working hours may result in less time for the parents' to be involved in their children's education at home and at school. Long working hours also could cause tiredness and stress among working parents which deter their involvement in their children's education. The long working hours along with insufficient time for housework, parenting and other family commitments as well as other personal activities affect the strength of parental involvement in their children's education.

The findings of this study suggest that parental involvement programmes be conducted by schools and to reach parents. Schools can promote parental involvement programmes to provide parents with more information to enrich the home learning environment. Creating meaningful partnerships through home-school communication is important for parents to evaluate and adopt effective time management and right practices concerning parents' involvement in their education; especially for the larger families in terms of number of children in the family. The findings also suggest that more teachers be trained to work with families.

The study is subject to a few limitations. First, this paper only focused on family size and its impact on parental involvement. The other demographic factors such as age, gender, family structure and social location were not examined. Second, the data collected for this study apply only to children of Indian descent; excluding the Malays and the Chinese ethnic groups. A study exploring the relationship between family size and parental involvement which cuts across ethnic groups in Malaysia needs to be undertaken. Third, the study only focused on National Schools in the Kerian district, Perak Darul Ridzuan, Malaysia. It excluded the vernacular schools i.e. The National Type Tamil and National Type Chinese Schools. A comparative study on these schools needs to be considered. Fourth, since the study was done in the district

of Kerian, Perak Darul Ridzuan, Malaysia, other states and many other districts in each state were not taken into consideration. Research on a larger scale is recommended to generalize the findings across the country. Finally, the data for this study were collected from primary schools in the district of Kerian which is located in the state of Perak Darul Ridzuan, Malaysia and no secondary schools in the other districts or states were considered. It is recommended that additional lines of research are needed for further investigation which addresses the above-mentioned limitations.

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