

Managing Children: An Insight into Malay Parents' Involvement in Their Children's Learning

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ABSTRACT

Socio-economic status not only influences family beliefs about values of education, but may affect how academic expectations are communicated by parents and perceived by their children. This study examined (1) the level of parental involvement (achievement values, interest in homework, and discussion on school matters) among Malay parents, and (2) parental involvement and its relationship with academic achievement. Measures of parents' involvement were obtained from Malay boys (n=146) and girls (n=284), aged seventeen, living with both biological parents. Adolescents' perceptions of maternal and paternal involvement at home were measured using Paternal and Maternal Parental Involvement Scale (Paulson, 1994b). Results indicated that Malay parents tend to emphasize more on achievement values, less on interest in homework and discussion on school matters. In terms of gender differences, there were significant differences between mothers' and fathers' involvement and these differences were found to differ towards sons and daughters. Discussions and implications were outlined.

ABSTRAK

Tahap sosio-ekonomi bukan sekadar mempengaruhi kepercayaan ibu bapa tentang nilai-nilai pendidikan tetapi juga mempunyai pengaruh terhadap bagaimana ibu bapa menyampaikan hasrat mereka berhubung dengan pencapaian akademik anak. Nilai-nilai ini kemudiannya akan ditafsirkan oleh anak tersebut. Kajian ini menyelidik (1) tahap penglibatan ibu bapa dari kalangan orang Melayu (dari segi nilai pencapaian, minat terhadap tugas rumah dan perbincangan tentang sekolah), dan (2) penglibatan ibu bapa dan hubungannya dengan pencapaian akademik. Alat pengukuran yang digunakan untuk mengukur penglibatan ibu bapa ialah Paternal dan Maternal Involvement Scale (Paulson, 1994b). Hasil kajian ini menunjukkan bahawa ibu bapa memberi penekanan yang lebih terhadap nilai pencapaian manakala kurang penekanan diberi terhadap tugas rumah dan perbincangan tentang sekolah. Di samping itu, hasil dapatan kajian juga menunjukkan perbezaan yang signifikan antara penglibatan ibu dan bapa. Dalam pada itu, penglibatan ibu bapa terhadap anak lelaki dan anak perempuan turut menunjukkan perbezaan yang signifikan. Seterusnya, perbincangan dan implikasi kajian juga dikemukakan.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Recent statistics indicated (Kelemahan kualiti..., 2001; Prestasi rendah ..., 2001) that Malay students

performed poorly in English Language and Mathematics in the three national examinations (UPSR, PMR, and SPM). This is particularly so among students in the rural schools. In addition, 15 percent

of Malay undergraduates in private colleges within and outside the country were reported to have failed to complete their studies (Kurang factor, 2002) due to their inability to master the English Language. English Language is the medium of instruction in these private colleges.

The consistent poor results in the major examinations have caused much concern among policy makers, educationists and school administrators. As a result, this calls for diligent efforts among all parties involved to find ways and approaches to rectify the existing situation.

Studies on parental involvement on children's learning at home has clearly identified parents' involvement as a vital factor which has contributed to children performing well in school (e.g., Chavkin, 1993; Eccles & Harold, 1993; Epstein, 1994; U.S. Department of Education, 1994). Hence, this study examined Malay parents' involvement in their adolescents' learning at home and whether parents' involvement affects adolescents' academic performance.

Objectives

General: to examine parental involvement in children's learning at home. Specific objectives of the study are to:

1. determine the level of parental involvement (achievement values, interest in homework, and discussion on school matters).
2. compare mothers' and fathers' involvement level.
3. examine whether there is any difference between mothers' and fathers' involvement towards sons and daughters.
4. investigate whether there is any relationship between parental involvement and academic achievement.

Significance of Study

This study is considered important for a number of reasons. First, it was motivated by the low academic achievement of Malay students in the three national examination results (UPSR, PMR, and SPM) especially in English Language and Mathematics. Secondly, are parents partly to be responsible for the low academic performance of their children? Will parents' involvement enhance their young children's academic performance? The re-

sults of this study will be a guide to parents, teachers, and counselors to further understand the importance of parental involvement and to use the findings to initiate parenting programs in schools.

Limitation of the Study

Only three day schools were chosen from the Kubang Pasu District for this study. The respondents comprised Form Five Malay boys and girls living with both biological parents.

Operational Definition

Adolescent refers to Malay boys and girls, aged between sixteen and seventeen, currently studying in secondary schools in the Kubang Pasu District in Kedah.

Parents include both biological mother and father living with the adolescent.

Parental Involvement is referred to parents' involvement at home, in terms of parents' achievement values, interest in homework, discussion on school matters (pertaining to Mathematics, Science, Bahasa Malaysia and English Language).

Academic Achievement refers to the results of the four subjects taken at the 2002 SPM Trial Examination. The average score of all the subjects for each individual respondent was taken as the academic achievement.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Ecological Theory

Ecologists, in particular, Bronfenbrenner (1979, 1986, 1989) and Cecil (1994) stressed the importance of family influences on various developments in adolescents. According to the Ecological Theory, there are various influences that may affect the adolescent's life. These influences are shown as circles moving away from the center of the system where the adolescent is: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem (Fig. 1). The immediate circle away from the adolescent is the microsystem, which comprise parental influences. Thus, for the purpose of this study, the microsystem will be the conceptual framework.

Within the microsystem there exists values, regulations, and traditions practised by parents that act as a powerful agent in enhancing

change in the adolescent's life (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). It paves the way to conceptualize relationships between parents and adolescents. From this conceptualized framework it is possible to see how the relationship relates to adolescents' outcome. All the different factors that may have an influence on the adolescent's life are consistently interacting with the adolescent. Thus, there exist circles of influence around the adolescent.

The adolescent experiences various influences in the home within this circle of influence known as the microsystem. The structure of the microsystem is where family and adolescent interact to contribute to the child's psychological and emotional development. It is within this circle that parent-adolescent partnership can be cultivated. The existence of strong reciprocal links between parents and adolescents can have a positive influence on the adolescent's development where the relationship is seen as a partnership, with both working together towards the shared goal of the adolescent's success (Epstein, 1992). Lack of such a link will have a negative impact on the adolescent's learning and academic performance (Dauber & Epstein, 1993), while continuity between parent-adolescent interactions lead to higher achievement (Patrikakou, 1997).

Achievement Values

Among the parental involvement variables that were identified to have a great impact on adolescents' outcome is how much parents place achievement values or expectations in their adolescents' school performance. Adolescents with higher grades perceived their parents as having higher achievement values (Paulson, 1994a; Stevenson, Lee, Chen, Hsu, & Kitamura, 1990;). As such, parents who possess strong achievement values are better equipped to become positive role models to their child by imparting the appropriate values needed to succeed in school (Rumberger, Ghatak, Poulus, & Dornbusch, 1990). Hence, parents who are concerned over their child's education are also those who are aware of the values of education and will see that the child meets the values they have set. As most of these studies were conducted using western samples, the findings portray only western perceptions of achievement values. Studies on

achievement values should be carried out on other ethnic groups so as to examine whether these achievement values exist in all cultures. Thus, the purpose of this study is to answer specific questions: (1) Do mothers and fathers differ in their achievement values? (2) Are adolescent perceptions of parents' achievement values related to gender of adolescent? (3) Do parents' achievement values have an effect on adolescents' academic achievement?

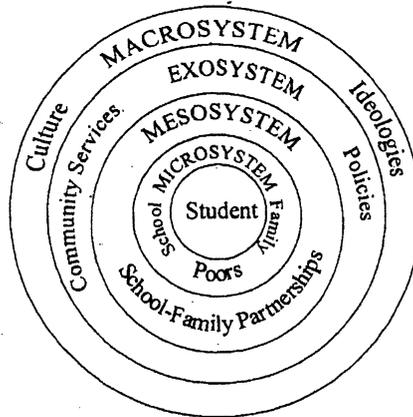
Interest in Homework

Homework offers an opportunity for parents to take a direct role in their child's learning. This could be done through explaining, examining, and checking the completeness and accuracy of homework. Students who completed their homework with either their teachers' or parents' co-operation experienced higher levels of academic achievement and possessed more positive learning attitudes compared to those who were unsupervised.

Lack of homework completion has been reported to be a major factor contributing to poor academic performance and school failure of youth at risk and youth with disabilities (Davies, 1984; Eagland & Flatley, 1985; Gujria & Salend, 1995; Quakenbush & Jastineau, 1989; Salend & Schliff, 1989). In addition, failure to complete homework assignments is often among the referral criteria for special school programs aimed at serving the growing number of children at risk of school failure within the U.S. (Bay & Bryan, 1992).

It was noted that each generation brings home schoolwork with which parents are not familiar. However, the acts of asking children about the specifics of an assignment, examining completed work, and asking questions about it on a regular basis underscore the importance that parents attach to the acquisition of academic skills. Based on this belief, the present study examined Malay rural parents' interest in their adolescents' homework. Specifically, the following questions were addressed: (1) Do mothers and fathers differ in their level of interest in homework? (2) Are adolescent perceptions of parents' interest in homework related to gender of adolescent? (3) Are mothers' and fathers' interest in homework related to academic achievement?

Figure 1
Theoretical Framework of Parent-child Relationship



Discussion on School Matters

The communication-discussion dimension was identified as a source of stimulation in the home environment. A review of the literature revealed adolescents who perform better in school are consistently related to parents who converse regularly with their children about school matters (Astone & McLanahan, 1991; Desimone, 1999; Ho & Willms, 1996; Finn, 1993; Steinberg, 1996; Taylor, 1996). This parent-child interaction reflects an aspect of the home environment which according to Scott-Jones (1984) is termed "curriculum of the home." and is part of the educational achievement model.

Studies on parent-child communication have shown inconsistent findings. Some researchers found father-adolescent communication to be higher than mother-adolescent communication (Barnes & Olson, 1985; Noller & Bagi, 1985). Others reported that differences in parent-adolescent communication were moderated by the gender of the adolescent (Youniss & Ketterlinus, 1987; Noller & Callan, 1990). Still others found no differences (Masselam, Markus, & Stunkard, 1990). In addition, these findings were conducted in a western context. Few studies looked into other Asian ethnic groups. Shek (1998; 1999; 2000) examined parent-child communication among the Chinese in Hong Kong, Haryati (1998) studied parent-adolescent interactions among adolescents in West Malaysia and Zaiton, Mohd.Razali, & Dzulkarnain, (2000) focused on students in higher

institutions in East Malaysia. Thus, this study sought to shed light on this issue by examining parent-adolescent discussions specifically among Malay rural families. The following questions were addressed: (1) Do mothers and fathers differ in parent-adolescent school discussions? (2) Do adolescent males and females differ in their perceptions of parent-adolescent discussions? (3) Are parent-adolescent discussions affected by gender of adolescents? (4) Does discussion on school matters have an effect on academic performance?

Environment and its impact on Parental Involvement

Parental involvement appears not to depend on settings but more on the levels of involvement as indicated in previous findings. High achievers, irrespective of where they were, were able to perform well academically, provided they perceived their parents as communicating more frequently and having higher educational aspirations for them (Keith, Quirk, Cohen-Rosenthal & Franzese, 1996). This could be attributed to adolescents and parents associating educational attainment and application to studies as a career pursuit. This finding supports an earlier study on African adolescents in urban areas of South Africa. In spite of parents having low socioeconomic status coupled with constant disruption of school days due to internal political crises, these parents were able to produce high

achievers due to their high educational aspirations compared to parents of lower achievers (Moller, 1995). These findings also indicated that high levels of parental involvement may not necessarily translate into higher achievement if adolescents do not perceive the behavior as being achievement-oriented. Thus, the more they communicate to them clearly in various ways, the more accurate the adolescents' perception of them will be.

Profile of Respondents

The three schools were located in small towns in one district. A few of the parents worked in government departments and schools in the towns. However, the main occupation is farming, either working in the paddy fields or rubber estates.

The majority of the population in the three schools comprised Malay students with a small percentage of Chinese, Indians, and Siamese.

The medium of instruction in these schools is Bahasa Malaysia, with English being a second language. Form Five is the final year for secondary school students. It is the year where they have to sit for a national examination – the Malaysian Certificate of Education (SPM). This examination is the entrance examination into tertiary education in the country.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The independent variables in the study are parental involvement (achievement values, interest in homework, and discussion on school matters) and gender. The dependent variable is academic achievement.

Research Sample

146 Malay boys and 284 Malay girls (total= 430) responded to the questionnaire. The participants were Form Five students, aged between 17 and 18. In the first phase of the study, a descriptive study was carried out to identify the different levels of achievement values, interest in homework, and discussion on school matters among parents. Next, the gender of the parents was investigated to identify the difference in each parent's level of

involvement in the three parenting practices. Lastly, the gender of adolescents was examined to explain differences in female and male perceptions of their parents' involvement (Fig.3).

For the second phase of the study, achievement values, interest in homework, and discussion on school matters were investigated to identify whether there was any relationship between these variables and academic achievement.

The three schools in the study were selected to represent high, average, and low achievement in the SPM examination. School 1 represented high, school 2 represented average, and school 3 represented low academic achievement respectively.

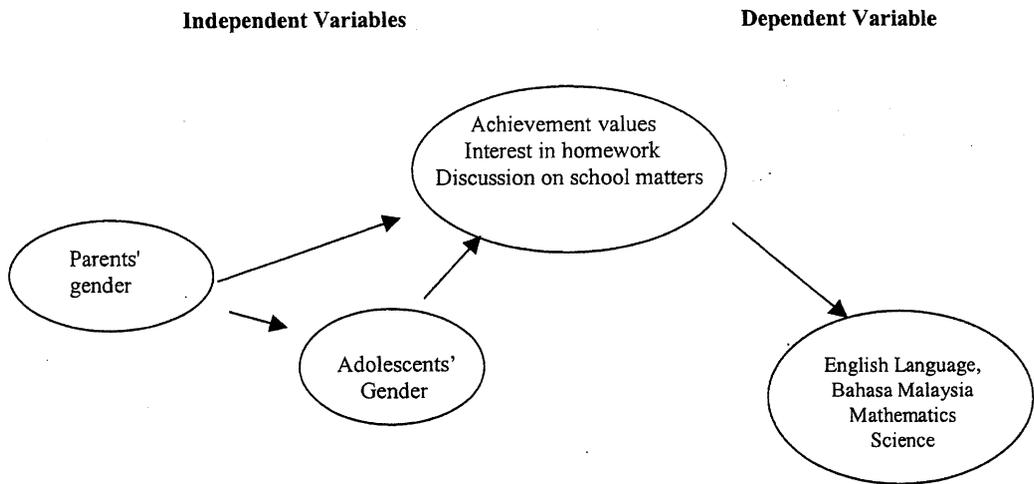
Research Instrument

The instrument used in this study was the Bahasa Malaysia version of The Paternal Involvement Scale (PIS) and Maternal Involvement Scale (MIS), developed by Paulson (1994b). The scale was divided into three subscales. Achievement Values had 7 items. Example of an item in this scale: "My mother/father has high aspirations for my future." The student is required to respond to a 5-point Likert scale 1= strongly disagree to 5= strongly agree. Example of an item in Interest in Homework (7 items): "My mother/father thinks homework is a very important part of school." Students respond to a 5-point Likert scale 1= strongly disagree to 5= strongly agree. The instrument for Discussion on School Matters was adapted from Paulson and Marchant, (1998). Example of an item in Discussion on School Matters (23 items) : "Since the beginning of this year how often does your mother/father discuss with you what you studied in the English Language class?" The student is required to respond to a 4-point Likert scale 1= never, 2= once or twice, 3= three or four times, 5= more than five times. The questions have similar items for mother and father. The items assessed adolescents' perceptions of specific parenting practices (based on the Ecological theory).

Research Technique

Descriptive statistics was used to perform frequency counts on achievement, values, interests

Figure 2
Framework of the Study



in homework, discussion on school matters, and parenting styles. This procedure will determine the level of involvement.

Cronbach's alpha for these scales: adolescents' report on mothers' and fathers' achievement values were .68 and .78, mothers' and fathers' interest in homework was .70 and .70, mothers' and fathers' discussion on school matters was .86 and .92 respectively. Due to the categorical nature of the data (Hair, Anderson, Tatham, & Black, 1998; Black, 2001) and normality, non-parametric techniques were used instead. The Wilcoxon signed-rank test was administered to examine whether there were any differences between mothers' and fathers' parental involvement. The Mann-Whitney U test was run to determine whether there was any difference between mothers' and fathers' parental involvement towards sons and daughters. Spearman's rank order correlation was administered to determine whether there was any relationship between parental involvement and academic achievement.

Research Procedure

The researcher administered the survey at the respective schools to ensure the reading level does not impede students' ability to reliably complete the items. The respondents responded to two sets of questionnaires with similar items. One set was for mothers and the other for fathers.

RESULTS

Table 1 indicated a higher percentage of mothers at every level of education compared to fathers. However, mothers were reported to occupy a lower percentage at the tertiary level than fathers. Overall mothers were again reported to have a lower level of education compared to fathers.

Table 2 displays the employment rate for both parents. There was a high percentage of mothers who were unemployed compared to fathers in this sample.

Table 1
Profile of Parents' Education Level

Gender	don't know	very low	primary	secondary	tertiary	Total
High-achieving school						
Mothers	28 (16)	2 (1.1)	27 (15.4)	87 (49.7)	31 (17.7)	175
Fathers	25 (14.3)	2 (1.1)	15 (8.6)	79 (45.1)	54 (30.9)	175
Average-achieving school						
Mothers	24 (17.0)	7 (5.0)	61 (43.3)	45 (31.9)	4 (2.8)	141
Fathers	26 (18.4)	5 (3.5)	61 (43.3)	42 (29.8)	7 (5.0)	141
Low-achieving school						
Mothers	45 (39.5)	3 (2.6)	21 (18.4)	41 (36.0)	4 (3.5)	114
Fathers	42 (36.8)	2 (1.8)	15 (13.2)	44 (38.6)	11 (9.6)	114
Mothers	97 (22.6)	2.6 (11)	110 (25.6)	40.2 (40.2)	39 (9.1)	430
Fathers	93 (21.6)	9 (2.1)	91 (21.2)	165 (38.4)	72 (16.7)	430

Note: Figures in parentheses indicate valid percentages

Table 2
Profile of Parents' Employment

Gender	Employed	Unemployed	Total	Missing
High-achieving school				
Mothers	81 (46.6)	93 (53.4)	174	-
Fathers	159 (93.0)	12 (7.0)	171	3 (1.8)
Average-achieving school				
Mothers	43 (30.7)	97 (69.3)	140	1 (0.7)
Fathers	131 (93.6)	9 (6.4)	140	1 (0.7)

(continued)

Gender	Employed	Unemployed	Total	Missing
Low-achieving school				
Mothers	36 (31.6)	78 (68.4)	114	-
Fathers	106 (94.6)	6 (5.4)	112	2 (1.8)
Mothers	160 (37.4)	268 (62.6)	428	2 (0.5)
Fathers	396 (93.6)	27 (6.4)	423	7 (1.7)

Note: Figures in parentheses indicate valid percentages

Research question 1: What are the levels of achievement values, interest in homework, and discussion on school matters of parents?

Table 3 displays parents' level of involvement in terms of achievement values, interest in homework and discussion on school matters. Parents

were found to have more involvement in terms of achievement values (96%) compared to the other two dimensions. Between interest in homework and discussion on school matters, parents were more involved in interest in homework (38%) compared to discussion on school matters (22.9%). Mothers were reported to be more involved compared to fathers in all three practices.

Table 3
Frequency Distribution on Parent's Level of Involvement

Gender	gender	low	high	uncertain	total
Achievement values	Mothers	- (98.4)	423 (1.6)	7	430
	Fathers	3 (0.7)	404 (94.0)	23 (5.3)	430
	Parents	3 (0.3)	827 (96.2)	30 (3.5)	860
Interest in homework	Mothers	175 (40.7)	169 (39.3)	86 (20.0)	430
	Fathers	171 (39.8)	162 (37.7)	97 (22.6)	430
	Parents	346 (40.2)	331 (38.5)	183 (21.3)	860

(continued)

Gender	gender	low	high	uncertain	total
Discussion on school matters	Mothers	220 (51.2)	210 (48.8)		430
	Fathers	226 (52.6)	204 (47.4)		430
	Parents	563 (65.5)	197 (22.9)		860

Note: Figures in parentheses indicate valid percentages

Table 4 reports parents' level of involvement in their children's learning at home, in terms of achievement values, interest in homework, and discussion on individual schools. Both parents were more involved in terms of achievement values compared to the other two practices. However there were gender differences concerning this practice. Adolescents perceived fathers (100%) as displaying more of this value compared to mothers (98.9%) in high-achieving school.

Mothers were perceived to be more interested in homework (42.3%) compared to fathers in

the high-achieving school (33.1%). However, for the average and low-achieving schools fathers were perceived as being more interested in homework compared to mothers.

The scale that showed least involvement was discussion on school matters. Fathers (46.5%) were perceived as being more involved compared to mothers (42.3%) in the high-achieving school 1. Similarly, fathers (46.5%) too were found to conduct more discussion on school matters compared to mothers (37.7%) in the low-achieving school.

Table 4
Frequency Distribution on Parents' Level of Involvement According to School

Variable	Parent	low	high	uncertain	total
High-achieving school	Achievement values				
	Mothers	-	173 (98.9)	2 (1.1)	175
	Fathers	-	175 (100)	-	175
Interest in homework	Mothers	66 (37.7)	74 (42.3)	35 (20.0)	175
	Fathers	79 (45.1)	58 (33.1)	38 (21.7)	175
Discussion on school matters	Mothers	101 (57.7)	74 (42.3)	-	175
	Fathers	61 (53.5)	53 (46.5)		

(continued)

Variable	Parent	low	high	uncertain	total
Average-achieving school					
Achievement values	Mothers	-	112 (98.2)	2 (1.8)	141
	Fathers	1 (0.9)	103 (90.4)	10 (8.8)	141
Interest in homework	Mothers	46 (40.4)	45 (39.5)	23 (20.0)	141
	Fathers	41 (36.0)	50 (43.9)	23 (20.2)	141
Discussion on school matters	Mothers	74 (52.5)	67 (47.5)	-	141
	Fathers	75 (53.2)	66 (46.8)	-	141
Low-achieving school					
Achievement values	Mothers	-	138 (97.2)	3 (2.1)	144
	Fathers	2 (1.4)	126 (89.4)	13 (9.2)	144
Interest in homework	Mothers	63 (44.7)	50 (35.5)	28 (19.9)	144
	Fathers	51 (36.2)	54 (38.3)	36 (25.5)	144
Discussion on school matters	Mothers	71 (63.3)	43 (37.7)	-	114
	Fathers	61 (53.5)	53 (46.5)	-	114

Note: Figures in parentheses indicate valid percentages

Research question 2: Is there any significant difference between mothers' and fathers' achievement values, interest in homework, and discussion on school matters?

The Wilcoxon signed-rank test was used to measure the significant difference for mothers' and fathers' parental involvement (Table 5).

Achievement values: There is a significant difference between mothers' and fathers' achieve-

ment values when computed overall ($z = -3.56, p = .000$). However, for individual schools, it was only significant for the average school ($z = -2.97, p = .003$) and the low achieving schools ($z = -2.67, p = .008$). Mothers were rated higher in all these schools compared to fathers.

Interest in homework: There is significance difference only between mothers' and fathers' interest in homework in the high-achieving school ($z = -2.13, p = .033$). Mothers were rated higher compared to fathers on this scale.

Discussion on school matters: It is only significant for the low-achieving school ($z = -2.04, p = .041$). Fathers were rated higher than mothers for this dimension.

Table 5
Mothers' and Fathers' Parental Involvement

	Dimension	Z	Sig. (p)	Mean
High-achieving school	Achievement values	-1.44	.157	
Average-achieving school	Achievement values	-2.97	.003**	
Low-achieving school	Achievement values	-2.67	.008	
	Achievement values	-3.56	.001**	
High-achieving school	Interest in homework	-2.13	.033**	
Average-achieving school	Interest in Homework	-1.55	.120	
Low-achieving school	Interest in homework	-.943	.346	
	Interest in homework	-.078	.938	
High-achieving school	Discussion on school matters	-.577	.564	
Average-achieving school	Discussion on school matters	-.180	.857	
Low-achieving school	Discussion on school matters	-2.04	.041**	37.7 43(M others)
				46.5 53(Fathers)
	Discussion on school matters		-.825	.409

** $p < .05$

Research Question 3: Do mothers and fathers differ in their parental involvement towards sons and daughters?

The Mann-Whitney U test was run to determine whether there was a significant difference between mothers' and fathers' parental involvement towards sons and daughters (Tables 6, 7, & 8). Mothers were found to have a difference in achievement values towards sons and daughters in the

low-achieving school. Mothers in this school tend to display higher achievement values towards daughters.

No differences were found between mothers' and fathers' interest in homework towards sons and daughters (Table 7).

In Table 8 mothers and fathers were found to have differences in their discussion towards sons and daughters. Both mothers and fathers were inclined to display a higher discussion rate on school matters with daughters compared to sons.

Table 6
Achievement Values towards Sons and Daughters

	Gender	Z	P
High-achieving school	Mothers	-1.158	.247
	Fathers	.000	1.000
Average-achieving school	Mothers	-.221	.825
	Fathers	-1.138	.255
Low-achieving school	Mothers	-2.049	.040**
	Fathers	-.934	.350
	Mothers	-.501	.346
	Fathers	-.920	.358

** p < .05

Table 7
Interest in Homework towards Sons and Daughters

	Gender	Z	P value
High-achieving school	Mothers	-.067	.946
	Fathers	-.921	.357
Average-achieving school	Mothers	-.388	.698
	Fathers	.457	.648
Low-achieving school	Mothers	-.552	.581
	Fathers	-.096	.924
	Mothers	-.583	.560
	Fathers	-.493	.622

Table 8
Discussion on School Matters towards Sons and Daughters

	Gender	Z	P value
High-achieving school	Mothers	-.747	.455
	Fathers	-.554	.580
Average-achieving school	Mothers	-.552	.581
	Fathers	-.096	.924
Low-achieving school	Mothers	3.269	.001**
	Fathers	3.275	.00
	Mothers	-1.689	.091
	Fathers	-2.0091	.037

** p < .05

Research question 4: Is there any relationship between mothers' and fathers' parental involvement and academic achievement?

Spearman' rank order correlation was run to examine the relationship between parental involvement and academic achievement. Tables 9, 10, and 11 report on these variables.

Table 9 shows there exists a statistically significant relationship between fathers' achievement values and academic achievement.

Table 10 reports a relationship between

mothers' interest in homework and academic achievement (low-achieving school). However, this is of no significance as the p value is below 0.2 (Chen, Manion & Morrison, 2000).

Table 11 examined the relationship between discussion on school matters and academic achievement. A relationship exists between mothers' discussion on school matters and academic achievement. However, it is of no significance. There is only a very slight relationship between mothers' discussion on school matters and academic achievement in the low-achieving school (Cohen et al., 2000).

Table 9

The Correlation Coefficient between Achievement Values and Academic Achievement

	Gender	Spearman' rho	Sig.
High-achieving school	Mothers	-.077	.314
	Fathers	no measures of association	
Average-achieving school	Mothers	.072	.399
	Fathers	.096	.257
Low-achieving school	Mothers	-.069	.417
	Fathers	-.113	.182
	Mothers	.025	.602
	Fathers	.216	.001**

correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

Table 10

The Correlation Coefficient between Interest in Homework and Academic Achievement

	Gender	Spearman' rho	Sig.
High-achieving school	Mothers	-.034	.493
	Fathers	-.044	.370
Average-achieving school	Mothers	.069	.417
	Fathers	-.113	.182
Low-achieving school	Mothers	.186	.047**
	Fathers	-.094	.320
	Mothers	-.034	.493
	Fathers	-.044	.370

correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

Table 11
The Correlation Coefficient between Discussion on School Matters and Academic Achievement

	Gender	Spearman' rho	Sig.
High-achieving school	Mothers	-.020	.799
	Fathers	.049	.523
Average-achieving school	Mothers	.012	.886
	Fathers	-.141	.096
Low-achieving school	Mothers	-.246	.008**
	Fathers	-.150	.111
	Mothers	.121	.013**
	Fathers	.076	.121

correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

DISCUSSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

This study examined the microsystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1989) which emphasized the various parental influences in the home that may affect the adolescents' perception of them. How adolescents perceived them may have an impact on their academic achievement.

The findings in this study, however, provided limited evidence to support the hypothesis that parental involvement has an effect on adolescents' academic achievement. Efforts were made to predict three forms of parental involvement, indicated by three dimensions: achievement values, interest in homework, and discussion on school matters. Standardized examinations on English Language, Bahasa Malaysia, Science, and Mathematics were used as measures of academic achievement. Each of the three independent variables was a home context variable.

Achievement values was rated higher than the other two parental practices in all the schools, indicating that Malay parents were aware of the importance of instilling in their adolescents the importance of academic achievement. This was particularly obvious among mothers who were found to have a higher awareness level of achievement values compared to fathers. Thus, this supports the belief that high achievement values can still be found among parents irrespective of their

settings (in this case, rural) and their educational level (low) (Keith et al., 1996).

Mothers' high achievement values could have been attributed to the fact that most of them were unemployed (Table 2). Thus, it is assumed that they were at home most of the day and this allows them to have more time to interact with the adolescent. It could be through the daily interactions that their achievement values were conveyed.

Fathers' lower involvement in this study could be due to their work schedule that limits the time for interaction with the adolescent. As noted (Table 2) most of the fathers were employed and living in a rural area where most of them were engaged in agricultural activities requiring them to be away most of the day. This is particularly so during the planting and harvesting season which involved time and energy. As a result, fathers have less time or are too tired to be involved with family matters. This may lead to adolescents' low perceptions of their involvement. The findings in this study, however, do not support previous studies on parental involvement where achievement values were associated with academic performance (Paulson, 1994a; Stevenson et al., 1990). Parental involvement was not associated with academic achievement.

Parents can hold high achievement values but if they are not conveyed clearly and consistently, this may result in adolescents having a

lower perception of their parents' involvement or adolescents tend to be uncertain in their perceptions of these values. Similarly, high achievement values need not always mean direct verbalization. Hieshima and Schneider (1994) found that Asian-American parents communicated their expectations in various child-centered activities where the child was able to perceive direct experience of their parents' expectations and feelings concerning education and learning. This had contributed to their academic achievement. What is clear in this study is that the parents had high achievement values but were poor in communicating these values in their daily interactions, in this case, showing interest in homework and discussing school matters. As such, adolescents were unable to perceive these values clearly.

Interest in homework was reported to be rather low for all schools. This could be due to the difficulty in the subjects taught in Form 5. Parents may feel they are not adequately equipped to handle these subjects, for example, the English Language subject. Parents in this study were at a disadvantage living in rural areas where the daily medium of communication would be Bahasa Melayu or colloquial Malay, the native language spoken by most Malays. Thus, there is little exposure to English, except through the media. In addition, it is common these days to find parents sending their adolescents for tuition classes to handle their academic matters. These tuition classes are looked upon as answers to adolescents' with learning problems. Thus, there tends to be low involvement among parents on matters pertaining to academic matters.

Another possible reason for the low involvement in interest in homework could be that parents' interest in homework is more age-specific in its effects. Parents tend to be more involved in their children's homework at primary school level compared to secondary. As such, parents who monitor their children's school work do make a difference in the achievements of primary school children, but perhaps the same parenting makes less difference, or no difference for children in the secondary schools. These issues may need close study.

In addition, parents of younger children

tend to be more involved in their children's learning compared to parents with older children. It could be speculated that parents understand the importance of early schooling and value their involvement. But once children are on the "right track" parents might disengage themselves from academic involvement as they may feel less competent with helping older children.

Why parents may be slightly more involved with daughters compared to sons is not obvious. It may be that the nature of parental involvement in all aspects of the adolescent's life is different across the genders. Parents may choose how they want to be involved in the adolescent's life based on the gender roles they perceive. The data in this study cannot address this issue, but it is one that needs more attention in order to unravel these types of gender differences.

All parental involvement measures did not predict adolescents' achievement. The measures examined how much the adolescents believed they perceived their parents' achievement values and interest in homework, and how much they discussed school matters with their parents. This relationship may suggest that it was not parental time available, but more of parental involvement that matters.

Another aspect that has been overlooked in most parenting studies is the group of respondents who are uncertain in their perceptions of their parents' involvement. Most previous studies analyzed data on a continuous scale thereby eliminating the uncertainty in respondents' answers (e.g.; Keith, Keith, Quirk, Cohen-Rosenthal & Franzese, 1996; Paulson, 1994b; Patrikakou, 1997) However, this study categorized the data into "low", "uncertain", and "high". As most of the parents in this study were found to be less educated, there is a tendency that parents of lower socioeconomic status have lower parental involvement levels (Benbow & Arjmand, 1990; Bogenschneider, 1997; Kim, Hong, & Rowe, 2000; Patrikakou, 1997). As such they may not be sensitive to the importance of parental involvement. The existence of a large group of parents in the "uncertain" category clearly indicates that parents need guidance and knowledge on how to

improve their parenting skill in order to cater for the needs of adolescents. This study would be a groundwork in initiating parenting programs in these schools.

There is good reason to expand the inquiry to include attention to issues of race, gender, rural/urban differences, and developmental stages of studied respondents. These may bring light to certain positive cultural influences that exist within the various races in Malaysia that may have contributed to why certain ethnic groups perform better than others (Prestasi rendah ..., 2001). Chinese students in Malaysia were reported to outperform Malay students in the national examinations. Similarly, studies have shown that African-American parents are more involved across a number of issues related to children's academic performance and experience than are White parents (U.S. Department of Education, 1994), yet African-American children do not excel in most achievement measures. These children go to the same school, have the same teachers to teach and yet they differ in terms of achievement. Therefore, there is a need to study in-depth the parental involvement aspects as this could be the contributing factor to the difference in academic performance.

Lastly, parental involvement studies should be conducted in schools to identify the level of involvement of parents. This will then be the guide in planning appropriate parenting programs to cater for the various levels of involvement. Findings on parenting studies should not be generalized as each school has its own group of students who may have parents with different levels of parenting. The findings in this study have shown a clear indication of the complexity of the matter. Therefore, it would be more appropriate to study each individual school, form, and location before embarking on a parenting program.

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This study was sponsored in part by a UUM grant. I am grateful to Dr Ang Chooi Leng for her advice and constructive suggestions. I also wish to thank participants of the 3rd International Symposium on Graduate Management Research, 22 - 23 September, 2002, Universiti Utara Malaysia for their comments on an earlier version of this paper.