THE EFFECTS OF PARENTAL RELATIONSHIP ON THE ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF CHILDREN

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Introduction

Parental relationships play a very important role in determining the academic performance of school going children. Family harmony can easily be affected due to parental conflicts. In reality, conflicts occur in most of the family. The degree of parental conflicts varies from mild to serious. However, if parents purposely ignore the existence of conflicts and refuse to take up initiatives to dissolve the problems, it will create bad consequence especially on the relationships of family members. At the same time, it will also affect the academic performance of their children.

Parents bring their own life history, their own personalities, and their relationship with each other into the family dynamics. Significant parental conflict has a profound effect on the entire family system. Children suffer from insecure attachment under such a family situation. According to Baumrind (Bronfenbrenner & Mahoney 1975), the parent's own internal working model of attachment seems to have a very strong effect on the family system and thus on the children. Adults who are themselves securely attached are much more likely to have a child who is also securely attached.

Bronfenbrenner (1979, 1989) in his area of study, emphasizes that each child grows up in a complex social environment with a distinct cast of character such as brothers, sisters, parents, teachers and friends. And this cast is itself embedded within a larger social system. Bronfenbrenner's argument is that researchers not only must include descriptions of these more extended
aspects of the environment but also consider the ways in which all the components of this complex systems interact with one another to affect the development of individual child.

Consequently, the same environment may have quite different effects on children who are born with different characteristics. One influential research approach exploring such an interaction is the study of vulnerable and resilient children. Theorists (Garmezy, 1993; Garmezy & Rutter, 1983) argue that each child is born with certain vulnerabilities, such as bad temperament. The child is also born with some protective factors, such as high intelligence, good coordination, which make her resilient in the face of stress. These vulnerabilities and protective factors then interact with the child’s environment, and thus the same environment can have quite different effects, depending on the qualities the child brings to the interaction.

The quality of parental relationship spills over into relationship with their children. Couples with satisfying marital relationships are more warm and supportive towards their children. However, for those whose marriage is full of discord will have more negative relationships with their children (Erel & Burman, 1995; Parke & Burriel, 1998). Their children show high level of anxiety, depression, and delinquent behaviour (Harold & Conger, 1997). Generally, father’s relationships with their children seem to be more strongly affected by the quality of their marital relationship than do mother’s relationships, but the spillover occurs for both parents.

Adult communication plays a key role in determining their performance. Children with a learned-helpless style tend to have parents who set unusually high standards while believing that their child is not very capable and at the same time must work very hard in order to succeed (Hokoda & Fincham, 1995). Some children are especially likely to have their performance undermined by adult feedback. Despite their higher achievement, girls more often than boys blame their ability for poor performance. Girls tend to receive from teachers and parents that their ability is at fault when they do not do well (Cole et al., 1999; Ruble & Martin, 1998).
Statement of Problems

Several publicized reviews of research have concluded that parents are only minor players in children’s academic performance. Their impact is overshadowed by the effects of children’s genetic makeup and the peer influence (Harris, 2002). These claims are largely based on evidence that siblings reared in the same family show little resemblance in temperament and personality. Many studies report weak parenting effect on children’s development. A related contention is that children and adolescents resemble their friends more strongly than their siblings. Therefore, peers are far more powerful in influencing children’s development. However, these assertions have been refuted by a host of researchers who give evidences that parents through not the sole influence, exert a profound impact (Berk, 2005; Collins et al., 2000; Newell & Olsen, 2003; Maccoby, 2000a; Steinberg, 2001).

Academic performance is much emphasized in our country. It has been used to measure the capability and achievement of a student. However, if we were to investigate the situation among students nowadays, we realized that there is significant decline in the interest of studying. Children and adolescents with learning disability are of normal intelligence or above and difficulties in at least one academic area and usually several, and their difficulty cannot be attributed to any other diagnosed problem or disorder, such as mental retardation. The global concept of learning disabilities includes problems in listening, concentrating, speaking, and thinking (Raymond, 2004). According to the research done by The National Union of Teaching Service, KPPK (Kesatuan Perguruan Perkhidmatan Kebangsaan) 2006, there were 2.66% secondary school students found to be disabled in learning and 4.87% among the primary school children facing the same problem. Statistical figures showed that among 73,858 students that had been chosen randomly from 70 secondary schools in Malaysia, there were 1964 students suffered from reading problem. As for the primary school children, among 75,699 students from 143 chosen primary schools, there were 3690 students couldn’t read at all.
This is indeed a serious problem that needs immediate action from parents and all walks of educators. Many children with serious learning disabilities also show an attention deficit disorder or conduct disorder.

Statistical figures showed that academic problems among teenagers in Malaysia are worsened. A great number of teenagers who do not have the interest to study involved in delinquency. According to the report given by National Anti-Crime Bureau YPJN (Yayasan Pencegahan Jenayah Negara) in May 2005, 605 students were arrested due to delinquency. Delinquency refers to breaking law intentionally. Many children who break laws show other forms of conduct disorder as well. It revealed that children were lack of concerns from parents and their parents were having bad relationships. This is one of the main factors why there is significant increase in the number of youngsters who display such delinquent behaviors as well as a rise in the seriousness of the behaviors.

Parental relationships play a very important role in determining the success of academic performance of students. Students who are excellent in study spend more time on home work. They pay more attention in class and seldom cheat. They are likely to have authoritative parents who expect them to get good grades and who are involved with them (Brooks-Gunn et al., 1993; Steinberg, 1996).

Method of Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate the effects of parental relationship on the academic performance of school going children. Four hundred Form four and Form five students of age 16-18 years old from three different schools in Selangor were randomly selected. Questionnaires were designed to measure the level of parental relationship, family cohesion, academic performance, social isolation and resiliency of the students. These comprise ‘Children Report of Parental Behaviour Inventory’, ‘Family Functioning Scale’ and ‘Resiliency Attitude Scale’. The statistical instruments used to analyze the data are the Pearson Correlation and MANOVA. Hypotheses on factors that influence parental relationships were formulated.
Information regarding parents’ information such as age, level of education, status of temperament can be obtained from the distributed questionnaires. Besides, interview has been conducted with the selected respondents as to get better and more accurate information. The relevant instruments used in the research are:

i. Academic performance of respondents
ii. Family relationship
   a) Mother’s temperament
   b) Father’s temperament
   c) Parents’ treatment to children

Academic performance of respondents are measured based on seven chosen subjects in PMR (Penerikanan Penilaian Menengah Rendah). The seven main subjects are Bahasa Melayu, Bahasa Inggeris, Matematik, Sains, Geografi, Sejarah and Kemahiran Hidup.

   Bahasa Melayu: A=4, B=3, C=2, D=1, E=0
   Bahasa Inggeris: A=4, B=3, C=2, D=1, E=0
   Matematik: A=4, B=3, C=2, D=1, E=0
   Sains: A=4, B=3, C=2, D=1, E=0
   Geografi: A=4, B=3, C=2, D=1, E=0
   Sejarah: A=4, B=3, C=2, D=1, E=0
   Kemahiran Hidup: A=4, B=3, C=2, D=1, E=0

Results and Discussion

The research is based on two important theories: The Ecological theory by Bronfenbrenner and the Resiliency theory by Bickart and Wolin. The ecological theory expounds the impacts of parental relationship on children’s educational development. In fact, Bronfenbrenner’s study demonstrates the important role of the environment on human development. The Resiliency theory, which emphasizes on the victim of the parental conflict, proposes some measures in helping victims to gain back confidence and reduce their pains when facing with serious parental relationship.
Analysis of study revealed that there is a significant difference between academic performance and parental conflicts. F (5,194) = 8.189, p<0.05. The result supports family system theory and Bronfenbrenner’s ecology approach and explains the effects of families on children’s development. There is a strong relationship between parenting style and developmental outcomes such as academic performance. It is in fact extremely important for parents to have good relationship and concern about emotional climate, methods of control and communication patterns among family members. Results of study also revealed that at the other end of the continuum from parental warmth, parental relationship is linked to declining school performance and high risk of delinquency. When such relationship is expressed as physical abuse or neglect, the consequences for the child may be even more severe. Recent, well-designed research reveals that the relation between parenting and children’s development is substantial. In one large scale study, the correlation between authoritative parenting and children’s social responsibility was 0.76 for mothers and 0.49 for fathers (Hetherington et al., 1999). Similarly, when parents engage in problem solving with their children, establish firm, consistent control, and monitor the children’s whereabouts, research shows strong negative relationships with antisocial behaviors (Patterson & Conger, 1995).

The result of study revealed a significant relationship between low school achievement and frequent conflict between parents. Thus, family factors mediate scholastic achievement. The atmosphere within the home influences the occurrence of parental conflicts. Conflict of all types is more frequent in authoritarian homes than in authoritative homes. Conflict between parents affects the home atmosphere and has a detrimental effect on children academic performance. The level of conflict is determined partially by family context. A family atmosphere of warmth and supportiveness promotes successfully negotiation of disagreements and thereby helps to keep conflict at a low or moderate level. Under hostile, coercive conditions, parents and children will be unlikely to resolve disagreements and conflicts will escalate to dysfunctional levels (Rueter & Conger, 1995).
Study revealed that serious parental conflicts affect family cohesion and have an adverse effect on development. Children in family with bad relationships are more likely to evidence antisocial behavior, immaturity and low self-esteem than those in family with good relationships. Students who do well in school believe that they can succeed academically. Students who have faith in their academic ability are willing to expend the effort needed to do well, persist even when learning is difficult, are resilient and bounce back from failure, and get better grades than students who feel incapable (Patrick, Hicks, & Ryan, 1997). This sense of competence stems from feedback from parents, encouragement by teachers, sense of fitting in, and history of prior school success (Bornholt & Goodnow, 1999).

Analysis of research revealed that quality of interaction among family members play an important role on his or her school success. Studies of the family relationships of bright, high-achieving versus underachieving high school students show that the high achievers more often than the underachievers describe their parents as typically sharing recreation and ideas, as understanding, approving, trusting, affectionate, and encouraging (but not pressuring) with respect to achievement, and as not overly restrictive or severe in discipline. Parents of high achievers provide their children with learning opportunities at home, monitor their children's homework and achievement, and take time to volunteer at their children's school (Paulson, 1994). Parents can best help their children to do well in academic performance by being enthusiastic, providing encouragement, and taking an active interest in their education. Apparently, excessive pressure, criticism, indifference, and conflict will contribute to academic underachievement. Authoritative parents are most likely to have children who value school and achieve good performance. Authoritative parents are somewhat more likely than authoritarian parents and much more likely than permissive parents to be engaged in their children's education. They also have more contact with their children's teacher, spend more time helping their children to do homework, and spend more time talking to them.
Researchers have found that family management practices are positively related to grades and self-responsibility, and negatively to school-related problems (Taylor, 1996). Among the family management practices important in this regard is maintaining a structured and organized family environment, such as establishing routines for homework, chores and so on. Creating a family environment in which, high expectations for achievement is equally important (Jeynes, 2003). Parenting interventions show that when child rearing improves, children’s development changes accordingly. The most powerful evidence that parents matter comes from intervention experiments. In one study, recently divorced single mothers of school age sons were randomly assigned to a year of parent training and support. Compared to no-intervention controls, the mothers reduced their use of coercive discipline over time; at the conclusion of the intervention, their sons showed fewer behavior problems and better academic performance (Forgatch & DeGarmo, 1999).

As a whole, this study supports the findings of Ecological theory and the Resiliency theory. However, it also shows that parental relationship is not the only contributory factor of the academic performance of the child; in fact there are other contributory factors as well. In view of current evidence, what can parents do as to ensure the best outcomes for children? Craig Hart (1999) offers several recommendations. From time to time, parents should teach moral values, to help children making wise choices of their genetic inclinations and pressures from peers. Using coercive control instead of rational firmness with an impulsive child, or overprotection instead of encouragement with an inhibited youngster, worsens maladaptive behavior. Parents should foster children’s positive capacities through rich, varied experiences in academic, social, athletic, musical, and spiritual.

Implication to Parents, Teachers and Counselors

As teachers and counselors in school, they should always concern about the decline in academic performance among students. Parents should be invited to discuss with teachers and counselors on such problems. Parents should emphasized their roles in “moulding” their children, as if children were a lump of clay.
Parents' task was to shape the children's behavior to fit the expectations and rules of the society. Research has found that open communications are seen as more emotionally or socially matured.

Teachers' messages also affect children's attributions. When teachers are caring and helpful and emphasize learning over performance goal, they tend to have mastery-oriented students (Anderman et al., 2001; Daniels, Kalkman & McCombs, 2001). Parents must realize the importance of parental relationship in order to avoid children's withdrawal from learning activities and declining achievement. Besides, parents must monitor schoolwork, provide scaffold assistance that promotes knowledge of effective strategies and self-regulation. As for teachers, it is important for them to communicate often with parents, suggesting ways to foster children's effort and progress. Both parents and teachers should make academic evaluations private. They must avoid publicizing success or failure. However, create an atmosphere that values academics, mastering stress individual progress and self-improvement are important in the process of learning. Parents who are in frequent contact with the school send a message to their child about the value of education, model constructive solutions to academic problems. Teachers and parents are more likely to give students consistent message about academic and behavioral expectations.

Families living in bad relationships, high-risk neighborhoods face daily stresses that reduce the energy they have for school involvement (Bowen, Bowen & Ware, 2002). Yet stronger home-school links could relieve some of this problem. Schools can build parent-teacher partnerships in fostering personal relationships between parents and teachers, showing parents how to support their child's education at home, building bridges between home cultures and school cultures. In fact, they can even develop assignments that give parents a meaning role to play, such as having students find out about parents experiences while growing up.

Conclusion

Contemporary researchers view the family from a social systems perspective, as a complex set of interacting relationships affected
by the larger social context. Bidirectional influences exist whereby the behaviors of each family member affect those of others, interplay of forces that must constantly adapt to the development of individual family members. Connections to the community through formal organizations and informal social networks grant parents and children social support, thereby promoting effective family interaction and children's development.

Children that are brought up by good parents typically show higher self-esteem. They are more independent but at the same time are more likely to comply with parental requests, and they may show more altruistic behavior as well. Parental relationships play an important role in determining self-confidence and achievement oriented in school. Among the ways that parents can positively contribute to children's academic success are through effective family arrangement practices and being involved in children's schooling. In sum, parenting effects combine in complex ways with many other factors, including heredity and peers. Indeed, the contribution of each factor cannot be partitioned neatly from the others, just as nature and nurture are interwoven throughout development.

References


