

Parental Involvement and Academic Achievement: A Conceptual Framework Based on Epstein's Theory in the Malaysian Context

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ABSTRACT

Parental involvement is widely acknowledged as a critical determinant of student academic success, yet its impact varies across cultural and socio-economic contexts. This conceptual paper explores the relationship between parental involvement and academic achievement within Malaysian primary education, drawing on Epstein's Theory of Overlapping Spheres of Influence as the theoretical foundation. The paper conceptualizes parental involvement through three dimensions; home-based activities, school-based participation, and parent-teacher communication and examines how socio-economic status and parental education level moderate these relationships. By integrating these contextual factors, the study proposes a framework that explains variability in parental engagement and its influence on learning outcomes. This work contributes to theory by extending Epstein's model to a non-Western setting and incorporating moderating variables that reflect socio-cultural realities. Practically, the proposed framework offers insights for educators and policymakers to design targeted parental engagement strategies that promote equity and reduce achievement gaps. The paper concludes by outlining implications for future research and policy development aimed at fostering effective family-school partnerships in diverse educational environments.

Keywords: Parental engagement, Student achievement, Family–school partnerships, Socioeconomic factors, Malaysian primary education

INTRODUCTION

Parental involvement is widely acknowledged as a cornerstone of student academic success [41][44][32]. Numerous studies have demonstrated that when parents actively engage in their children's education through home-based support, school communication, and participation in learning activities that students exhibit higher motivation, improved behaviour, and better academic outcomes [21][50][32]. However, the degree and nature of parental involvement differ significantly across cultural, socio-economic, and educational contexts [56][38][52]. In Malaysia, while parental engagement is encouraged, empirical evidence on its direct impact on academic achievement remains limited [35][1][39]. This study seeks to bridge this gap by examining the relationship between parental involvement and academic performance among primary school students.

Parental involvement is widely recognized as a key determinant of student academic success. However, in the Malaysian primary education context, there is limited empirical evidence on how different dimensions of parental involvement such as home-based support, school-based participation, and communication, impacting the academic achievement [38][51][33]. Existing studies often generalize findings from Western contexts, which may not accurately reflect cultural and socio-economic variations in Malaysia [57][59][27]. Furthermore, disparities in parental education levels and household income create unequal opportunities for engagement, potentially influencing the effectiveness of involvement strategies [44][28][27]. Without localized research, educators and policymakers lack clear guidance on which forms of parental involvement yield the greatest benefits for student performance. This study addresses this gap by investigating the relationship between parental involvement and academic achievement, while considering socio-economic and educational factors as moderating variables.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Underpinning Theory on Establishing the Knowledge of the Study

This study is anchored in Epstein's Theory of Overlapping Spheres of Influence, which posits that student learning and development are shaped by the interaction of three primary environments: family, school, and community [24][29]. The theory emphasizes that these spheres are not isolated; rather, they overlap and interact to create a supportive ecosystem for student success [13][44]. Within this framework, parental involvement is conceptualized as a critical mechanism through which the family sphere actively engages with the school sphere to enhance academic outcomes [29][2].

Epstein operationalizes parental involvement into six dimensions: parenting, communication, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and community collaboration [44][13]. These dimensions provide a structured foundation for defining the independent variable in this study, that is parental involvement and guide the identification of its sub-components (home-based involvement, school-based involvement, and communication). The theory also implicitly supports the inclusion of moderating variables such as socio-economic status and parental education level, as these contextual factors influence the degree and effectiveness of parental engagement within the overlapping spheres [56][48].

By adopting Epstein's framework, this research establishes a theoretical basis for examining how different forms of parental involvement (independent variable) affect academic achievement (dependent variable) and how socio-economic and educational factors moderate this relationship. This alignment ensures that the study is grounded in a well-established model that explains the dynamic interplay between family and school in promoting student success [29][3].

Academic Achievement

The dependent variable in this study is Academic Achievement, which represents the measurable learning outcomes of students. Academic achievement is commonly operationalized through indicators such as examination scores, grade point averages, and standardized test results [27][42]. Within the context of Epstein's Theory of Overlapping Spheres of Influence, academic achievement is the ultimate outcome of effective collaboration between the family and school spheres [31]. This theory suggests that when parents actively engage in their child's education through home-based learning support, school participation, and consistent communication, the student's academic performance improves [20][46]. Academic achievement is not only a reflection of cognitive ability but also of environmental factors such as parental support and socio-economic conditions [15][56][25]. Previous research confirms that students with higher levels of parental involvement tend to perform better academically [6][1][26].

Home-Based Involvement, School-Based Involvement, and Parent-Teacher Communication

The primary independent variable in this study is Parental Involvement, conceptualized through three dimensions derived from Epstein's Framework of Parental Involvement. First and foremost, Home-Based Involvement [38][21]. This refers to parental activities that occur within the home environment, such as assisting with homework, providing learning resources, and creating a supportive atmosphere [49][22] for study. According to Epstein's theory, these practices strengthen the family-school connection by reinforcing academic expectations at home [23][44]. In addition, School-Based Involvement. This dimension includes parents' participation in school-related activities, such as attending parent-teacher meetings, volunteering for school events, and engaging in decision-making processes [26][31][36][59]. These actions reflect the overlapping spheres of family and school, promoting collaborative efforts to enhance student learning [26][47][36][59]. Additional to Communication. Effective communication between parents and teachers is essential for monitoring student progress and addressing academic challenges [20][25][26]. Epstein's model emphasizes communication as a core mechanism for maintaining alignment between home and school expectations [17][54]. These dimensions collectively operationalize parental involvement as a multifaceted construct that influences academic achievement [34][51]. By examining these components, the study aims to identify which forms of involvement exert the strongest impact on student performance within the Malaysian primary education context.

Moderating Relationships

1) The relationship between parental involvement and academic achievement is influenced by contextual factors that act as moderators. Two key moderating variables in this study are socio-economic status (SES) and parental education level. SES affects the resources and opportunities available for parental engagement [11][48]. Families with higher SES often have greater access to educational materials, time flexibility, and technological tools, enabling more effective involvement [14][56]. Conversely, lower SES may limit these opportunities, weakening the impact of parental engagement on academic [26][28][15][59]. Meanwhile, parental education level. Parents with higher educational attainment are generally better equipped to assist with academic tasks and communicate effectively with teachers. This enhances the quality of involvement and its influence on student achievement [26][42][45]. In contrast, parents with limited education may struggle to provide adequate academic support, reducing the effectiveness of their engagement [48][40]. These moderators are critical for understanding the variability in the parental involvement–academic achievement relationship and for designing interventions that address equity in educational outcomes.

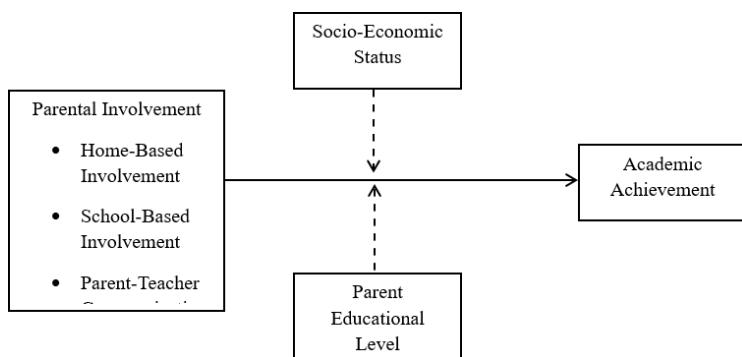


Fig. 1 Proposed Conceptual Framework

Hypotheses Development

Parental involvement is widely recognized as a multidimensional construct that influences student academic achievement [29][11]. Epstein's Theory of Overlapping Spheres of Influence provides the theoretical foundation for this study, suggesting that family and school collaboration enhances learning outcomes [29][19]. Prior research indicates that different forms of parental involvement, mainly home-based, school-based, and parent-teacher communication, contributing uniquely to academic success [39][9]. However, these effects are not uniform across all contexts; socio-economic status (SES) and parental education level often moderate the strength of these relationships [59][47]. The following hypotheses are developed based on these theoretical and empirical insights.

H1: Home-based parental involvement is positively influenced the students' academic achievement.

Home-based involvement includes activities such as assisting with homework, providing learning resources, and creating a conducive learning environment [22][60][64]. Studies show that these practices reinforce classroom learning and foster self-regulation skills [21][7]. In contexts where parents actively support learning at home, students tend to exhibit higher motivation and better academic performance [44][7]. This hypothesis is grounded in the assumption that consistent home-based engagement directly enhances cognitive development and achievement.

H2: School-based parental involvement is positively influenced the students' academic achievement.

School-based involvement refers to parents' participation in school activities, volunteering, and engagement in decision-making processes [34][36][25]. Such involvement strengthens the family-school partnership, enabling better communication and alignment of educational goals [34][26]. Research suggests that when parents are visible in school settings, students perceive education as a shared responsibility, which can improve attendance

and engagement [13][32]. However, the impact may vary depending on cultural norms and school policies, making this relationship worth investigating [31][30].

H3: Parent-teacher communication is positively influenced the students' academic achievement.

Effective communication between parents and teachers ensures timely feedback on student progress and facilitates early intervention when academic challenges arise [20][8]. Prior studies highlight that frequent and constructive communication correlates with improved student outcomes, as it helps parents reinforce school expectations at home [8][21][25][26]. This hypothesis assumes that communication acts as a bridge between home and school, promoting consistency in academic support.

H4: Socio-economic status moderates the relationship between parental involvement and academic achievement.

SES influences the resources available for parental engagement, including time, educational materials, and access to technology [11][10]. Families with higher SES can provide enriched learning environments, amplifying the benefits of involvement [44][15]. Conversely, lower SES may limit these opportunities, reducing the effectiveness of engagement strategies [16][27]. This moderating effect is supported by evidence that socio-economic disparities contribute to achievement gaps [59][53][46].

H5: Parental education level moderates the relationship between parental involvement and academic achievement.

Parents with higher education levels are better equipped to assist with academic tasks and communicate effectively with teachers [58][26][5]. They often possess greater knowledge of curriculum expectations and strategies for supporting learning [22][18]. This enhances the quality of involvement and its impact on student achievement [18][58]. Conversely, parents with limited education may struggle to provide adequate academic guidance, weakening the relationship between involvement and achievement [63][61].

PROPOSED METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a quantitative correlational research design to examine the relationship between parental involvement and academic achievement, as well as the moderating effects of socio-economic status and parental education level. This design is appropriate because it allows for statistical analysis of associations among variables without manipulating them [16][56][37].

The target population comprises parents who have their children at secondary schools in Petaling Jaya, Selangor, Malaysia. A stratified random sampling technique will be employed to ensure representation across different socio-economic strata [59][45]. The sample size will be determined using G-power analysis to achieve adequate statistical power for hypothesis testing [12][43].

A structured questionnaire adapted from Epstein's parental involvement framework will measure three dimensions: home-based involvement, school-based involvement, and communication. A Five-point Likert scale will be used to determine the answers from the respondents. The questionnaire will undergo pilot testing to ensure reliability and validity. Cronbach's alpha will be used to assess internal consistency [5][54]. SmartPLS will be used to analyse the collected data for direct and indirect relationships [5][54][55].

Expected Contributions

This study is expected to make significant contributions to both practice and theory. From a practical perspective, it will provide empirical evidence on the most effective dimensions of parental involvement, mainly home-based activities, school-based participation, and parent-teacher communication in enhancing academic achievement among Malaysian primary school students. By identifying which forms of involvement yield the greatest impact, the findings will offer actionable insights for educators and school administrators to design targeted parental engagement programs. These recommendations will be particularly valuable for addressing disparities caused by socio-economic and educational differences among families. Furthermore, the study will inform policy

development by highlighting strategies that promote equitable parental involvement, thereby reducing achievement gaps and improving overall educational outcomes.

From a theoretical standpoint, the research will validate Epstein's Theory of Overlapping Spheres of Influence within the Malaysian cultural and educational context, extending its applicability beyond Western settings. It will also refine the conceptual understanding of parental involvement by examining the moderating effects of socio-economic status and parental education level, contributing to the literature on contextual influences in educational achievement. By integrating these factors into the analysis, the study will provide a nuanced framework for future research on parental engagement in diverse socio-cultural environments.

CONCLUSION

This conceptual paper highlights the critical role of parental involvement in shaping academic achievement among Malaysian primary school students. Drawing on Epstein's Theory of Overlapping Spheres of Influence, the study establishes a theoretical foundation for examining how home-based involvement, school-based participation, and parent-teacher communication contribute to student success. The proposed framework also incorporates socio-economic status and parental education level as moderating variables, recognizing the contextual factors that influence the effectiveness of parental engagement.

This study addresses gaps in localized research by offering evidence to guide educational policy and practice. The findings underscore the need for parental involvement strategies that reflect socio-economic and educational differences among families. Parents with higher education levels generally provide more effective academic support and communication with teachers, while those with limited education may face challenges that reduce the impact of their engagement. Policies should therefore prioritize differentiated approaches that promote equitable opportunities for all families to contribute to student success.

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